GOING OUT OF BOUNDS, FROM CRITICAL SPECTATORSHIP TO EMBODIED PERFORMANCE:

PUTTING QUEER FEMINIST PERFORMANCE METHODOLOGIES TO WORK IN QUEER AND MARGINAL CULTURAL AND ENVIRONMENTAL LANDSCAPES

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Abstract

An investigation into the possibilities of performance art for affecting social change, this thesis explores the ways in which categories and theories often fail in the realities of human experiences. Beginning with an investigation into the version of a fantasy queer utopia that Lady Gaga's presents in her pop-performance art, it finds that, when not rooted in realities of social structures and human limitations, fantasy worlds fall apart in the spaces of real life. Next, it explores the implications of Dempsey and Millan's performance piece *Lesbian National Parks and Services,* which takes place outdoors and interacts with audiences in "wilderness" spaces of National Parks. After exploring the ways in which this work succeeds and fails at revealing gaps in dominant narratives of identity, it moves into an exploration of a personal practice of performance art as a research methodology that seeks to further investigate implications of gender, sexuality, and race in wilderness spaces.

Keywords: Anne Macmillan, art history, Banff, Canadian national identity, Canadian studies, canoes, D'Arcy Wilson, de-colonial theory, Lady Gaga, Lesbian National Parks and Services, nationalism, national parks, nature, performance art, performance research, performativity, queer ecologies, queer theory, Shawna Dempsey and Lorri Millan, wilderness

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Table of Contents

List of Figures

Figure 1.31: Lady Gaga in Peru, 2012. LittleMonsters.com

Figure 1.32: Lady Gaga in Peru, 2012. CapitalFM.com.

Figure 1.33: Princess Diana with child victims of landmines in Angola, 1997. Jose Manuel Ribeiro/Reuters.

Figure 1.34: Angelina Jolie with school girls in Afghanistan. Tanner, 2012. UNHCR/J.

Figure 1.35: Madonna with children in Malawi, 2013. Nathan Rissman/Reuters.

Figure 1.36: Lady Gaga during Born This Way Ball tour. Dmitry Fefelov/ LittleMonsters.com, 2013.

Figure 1.37: Lady Gaga crying after Monster Ball tour performance. Terry Richardson, 2011.

Figure 1.38: Lady Gaga with mannequin head. Terry Richardson 2011.

Figure 1.39: Lady Gaga crowd-surfing, 2010. Bollywood Sargam. <http:// www.bollywoodsargam.com/talkingphoto.php?poster=7272234687>.

Figure 1.40: Lady Gaga in wheelchair after hip surgery, 2013. JustJared.com

Figure 1.41: Gaga with crutches. Video Still from "Paparazzi." Haus of Gaga, 2009.

Figure 1.42: Video Still from "Lady Gaga is Over." Haus of Gaga 2013.

Figure 1.43: Lady Gaga's makeup for "Applause" release, 2013. <http:// www.newnownext.com/while-you-were-sleeping-lady-gaga-steps-out-in-applause-makeup-jennifer-aniston-avoids-angelina-jolie-and-more/08/2013/>.

Figure 2.1: Shawna Dempsey and Lorri Millan, *Forest Guards*, 1997, Photo taken as part of the performance *Lesbian National Parks and Services*, Photo by Donald Lee. <http://performancecanada.com/events/publication-in-canadian-theatre-review/>.

Figure 2.2: Dempsey and Millan. in *Private Investigators: Undercover in Public Space* Eds. Kathryn Walter and Kyo Maclear. Banff: The Banff Centre for the Arts, 1999. 53.

Figure 2.3: Shawna Dempsey and Lorri Millan with "Eager Beaver" junior lesbian ranger recruits. Dempsey and Millan. <http://www.fingerinthedyke.ca/index.html>.

Figure 2.4: "Junior Lesbian Ranger" patch from Dempsey and Millan's "Handbook of the Junior Lesbian Ranger." Wyndi Palmer, 2008. <http://stompin-about.blogspot.ca/2008/06/lesbian-national-parks-and-services.html>.

Figure 4.9: N 44° 37.898 W 063° 39.123. Graffiti in Long Lake Provincial Park, Nova Scotia. Jennifer MacLatchy, 2013.

Figure 4.10. N48° 36.353 W124° 43.763. Found fishnet and driftwood hammock, West Coast Trail, BC. Jennifer MacLatchy, 2013.

Figure 4.11: N48° 36.383 W124° 43.813. Found buoy bowling alley, West Coast Trail, BC. Jennifer MacLatchy, 2013.

Figure 4.12: N 44° 39.589 W 063° 40.613. Plastic garbage and cloudy water in the stream flowing from the culvert under the corner of Lacewood Drive and Highway 102. Jennifer MacLatchy, 2013.

Figure 4.13: N 44° 41.368 W 063° 43.982. Found "proposed 4-lane highway" sign and added "moose crossing" sign along the trail to the peak of Blue Mountain. Halifax, NS. Jennifer MacLatchy, 2014.

Figure 4.14: N 44° 41.368 W 063° 43.982. "Moose in the Middle of a 4-Lane Highway." Jennifer MacLatchy with Emily Davidson, 2014.

Figure 4.15: N 44° 39.513 W 063° 41.387. Computer reflections of sunset and lake. Susie's Lake. Jennifer MacLatchy, 2013.

Figure 4.16: N 49° 07.247 W 125° 53.727. Handstand at Long Beach, Pacific Rim National Park, BC. Jennifer MacLatchy, 2012.

Figure 4.17: N 45° 18.943 W 064° 26.413. Handstand on a low tide mud flat at Cape Split. Jennifer MacLatchy, 2013.

Figure 4.18: N 45° 39.228 W 062° 29.649. Handstand at sunset at Melmerby Beach, Nova Scotia. Jennifer MacLatchy, 2013.

Figure 4.19: Handstand at Martinique Beach, Nova Scotia. Amber Moon Graveline, 2013.

Figure 4.20: Map of sight lines from Blue Mountain summit: green areas are visible. "Focus Report for the Proposed Highway 113." HRM, 2006. <https://www.novascotia.ca/nse/ea/highway113/Hwy113_app_b1.pdf>.

Figure 4.21: Map of sight lines from some of the lakes in the Birch Cove Lakes wilderness area: green areas are visible. "Focus Report for the Proposed Highway 113." HRM, 2006. <https://www.novascotia.ca/nse/ea/highway113/Hwy113_app_b1.pdf>.

Figure 4.22: N 45° 25.619 W 075° 41.926. Beaver-chewed tree on the shore of the Ottawa River, suitably located just below Parliament Hill. Jennifer MacLatchy. Ottawa, 2013.

Figure 4.23: N44°39.767 W063°40.883. Ice on grasses, Susie's Lake. Jennifer MacLatchy, 2013.

Figure 4.24: N 44° 39.613 W 063° 41.742. Sunset on Susie's Lake. Jennifer MacLatchy, 2013.

Introduction

This thesis charts my research interest in the potential for performance art, rooted in queer theory, to be a site for re-imagining and re-creating gender and sexuality, as it travels an unlikely trajectory from urban stages to wilderness engagement and mapping projects. Beginning with an examination of some of Lady Gaga's performances, I move outdoors to the performance art of Shawna Dempsey and Lorri Millan, who formed the *Lesbian National Parks and Services* in 1997. In exploring their work, I found myself asking questions about the implications of a lesbian imaginary in the wilderness for the construction of landscape and nation. Both Lady Gaga and the LNPS performers make strong use of props to make their points about gender and sexuality. Thanks to LNPS, I became aware of the canoe as something perhaps more than a prop in an effort to think about certain ways that certain narratives of landscape serve to naturalize some identities while erasing others.

By exploring narratives about sex and gender embedded in narratives of nature through the symbolism of the canoe, I found that it was perhaps an exploration of the ways that nature resists easy definition and renders us confused that brings me closer to that which I was trying to investigate all along. In addition, when I took Dempsey and Millan's invitation to develop my own performance strategies as a "junior lesbian ranger," I began my own projects wherein I explored performance art as a participant, rather than as a removed and detached observer and theorist. The value of participatory research is firmly embedded within the domain of feminist research methodologies, and in taking on the task of developing my own performance art projects, I engage with this

research strategy in order to move beyond the limits of theory-based research and to find where theory works, or doesn't work, in the domain of real life.

I begin this thesis with an investigation of Lady Gaga's performance art, which initially appears to offer the promise of novel shape-shifting ideas about gender and sexuality. Lady Gaga uses the language of youth empowerment, is relentlessly committed to her art, and encourages her fans (whom she calls "little monsters") to embrace their unique creative impulses and express themselves in the ways they feel inspired. Indeed I came to this work because I was a fan—admittedly an unlikely "little monster" who finds most pop music to be irritating—and I saw her perform on both her Monster Ball tour and her Born This Way Ball tour in Montreal in 2011 and 2013. I was disappointed after the Monster Ball show because she was an hour and a half late starting the show, offered no apology for wasting our time, and was belligerent and abrasive throughout the performance. There were, however, enough good parts, and it seemed that she might just have been having an off-day. I was struck by the strange antics that seemed to set her aside from other pop stars, thanks in part to what appeared to be a resistance to standards of feminine beauty.

Figure 0.1: Lady Gaga on the screen at the Monster Ball show. Jennifer MacLatchy. Montreal, 2011.

In 2013, I was much more impressed with her performance at the Born This Way Ball show, and delighted in the unusual feats that she performed, such as giving birth to herself on stage. She sang a ballad to a framed photo of Jo Calderone, her male drag alterego, and she appeared to interact with her fans more than she had in the earlier performance. This was to be, although no one knew it, the last performance of the Born This Way Ball, and Gaga's last public appearance for over six months. Although it wasn't evident at the time, a repetitive strain injury in her right hip finally became debilitating near the end of the show. At one point she fell to the floor and let out an anguished scream; however, since this seemed fairly normal within the context of her never-predictable dance moves, it was easy for audience members to fail to notice that anything was wrong. Gaga successfully hid the pain and finished the show, only later announcing via Twitter that she was now unable to walk and would have to cancel upcoming performances.

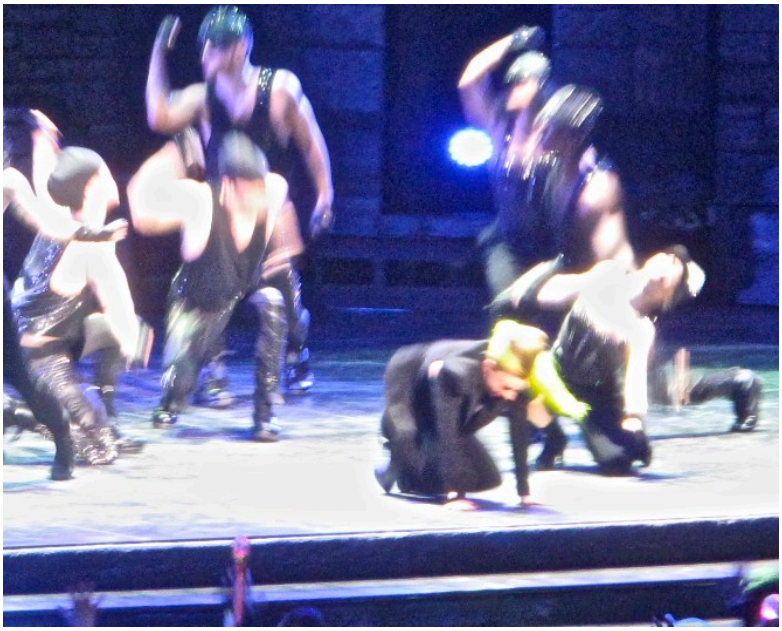

Figure 0.2: Lady Gaga falling down near the end of the Born This Way Ball show. Jennifer MacLatchy. Montreal, 2013.

In the pages that follow, I track the vast and sophisticated online world of Gaga criticism and investigate many aspects of Gaga's work. Eventually, and perhaps predictably, along with the coming-undone of Gaga's right hip and the rest of the Born This Way Ball tour, I find that Lady Gaga does not do what I had hoped she would do. The seductive, glittery hypothesis that one energetic and resource-rich pop star can simply perform fantasy into reality, and thus undo of all sorts of oppressive categorizations of identity and thereby empower others, falls flat. Lady Gaga's imagined and performed worlds are indeed fantastic, but they are not adequately engaged with nor grounded in the realities and varieties of lived experiences of social oppression and human limits. Thanks to Lady Gaga's theoretical and real failure to be what I wanted her to be, I decided to take my interest in gender critique as performance out into the woods. Would changing the venue change the nature or power of the critique, and would it change my understanding of performance?

In my investigation into the work of Shawna Dempsey and Lorri Millan's project called *Lesbian National Parks and Services,* I explore the ways that their performance, like Gaga's, (and so many other critical performances), aimed to affect social change by blurring the boundaries between truth and fiction, art and life. By bringing their art into everyday spaces and enacting their own queer versions of nature, they use humour and parody to point to the biases in dominant narratives of nature that inscribe heteronormativity into the landscape. Dempsey and Millan are quite successful at passing as real park rangers, and their parody received surprisingly little negative backlash. This is due, in no small part it seems, to their whiteness, which allowed them a sort of unquestioned status of "belonging" to Canadian national identity. Thus, while Dempsey and Millan's critique opens up some key questions and offers us a humourous method of engagement with public "wilderness" spaces, it does not go far enough towards examining the founding narratives of race, belonging, exclusion, expulsion, and colonialism that marks the Canadian context.

Here I look to the canoe, a vehicle and symbol by which Canadian national identity is repeatedly secured and performed. By examining the history of the canoe as an Indigenous invention, its appropriation by European explorers and settlers as a tool for colonization, and its recent history and current use for recreation, I aim to uncover the ways that canoes have been used to naturalize narratives of Canadian colonialism, patriarchy, and heterosexuality. The history of the canoe's use as a symbol reveals the complex ways that narratives of landscape have been structured in order to naturalize social assumptions about sexuality, race, and gender in Canada.

Fortunately, canoes, landscape, and nature resist being structured by the tidy confines of such dominant narratives. Dempsey and Millan's performance includes an effort at recruiting "junior lesbian rangers," and my own performance began when I took up their invitation to join as a performer. I begin my own performance art project of playing park ranger in the context of a threatened wilderness area and potential future regional park close to my home in Halifax. As I was shaping this work, I also looked to the work of two other contemporary female performance artists—Anne Macmillan and D'Arcy Wilson—who are also working with issues of landscape and wilderness in the Halifax region, in order to look for ways in which our strategies or projects may overlap.

I use my own performance work (an attempt at embodying the persona of the park ranger) to try to complicate the relationship between the park ranger and a wilderness that refuses to be easily structured and understood. The particular place that I engage with is important because of its status as a marginal space, located on the edge of developed areas, where its borders are constantly contested. My performance work in this marginal sort-of-wilderness space leads me to ask questions about the supposed divisions between humans and nature, as well as the failure of narratives about nature being pure and morally good in contrast with human tendencies for destruction, to hold up in the real spaces of a particular wilderness/urban landscape. I ask questions about what it is that humans desire from nature, and how it is that this idealized version of nature falls apart in the real spaces of the landscape. I explore how human ideals about gender often fail to line up with the reality of nature.

Figure 0.3: N 44° 39.513 W 063° 41.387. Performing Birch Cove Ranger with found and re-appropriated sign. Jennifer MacLatchy. Susie's Lake, 2014.

I conclude by suggesting that such endless questioning is an important part of complicating the stories we tell about who we are, where we are, where we've been, and where we're going. These questions end up leading us outside, beyond the borders of tidy narratives about the naturalness of certain human identities and social structures, and reveal our borders to be messy and permeable and anything but abstract. In the "wilderness," theory and the "facts on the ground" almost never neatly coincide. In nature, human constructs of gender, sexuality, and race tend to fall apart.

Chapter 1— Lady Gaga's Creative Chaos: Performing Utopia and Failure

Lady Gaga first caught my interest in 2008 with her lyrics "Just dance, it'll be ok," which I appreciated for the encouragement and reassurance that they offered a socially awkward person on the dance-floor. Upon catching wind of the rumours that she might be a "hermaphrodite" (the term most commonly used in the media), I decided to investigate the American pop singer "Lady Gaga" online. I hoped that this rumour might be true, and that there might be a promising new transgender or intersex pop star. Unfortunately, this seemed to be merely a rumour; but fortunately, I began to notice the strange performances that seemed to set Lady Gaga apart from other pop stars. Given her odd outfits and bizarre antics and campy aesthetic, it seemed that she might be able to offer some alternative to mainstream ideals of gender and sexuality. Although she might not have an intentionally feminist or political agenda, she is nevertheless quite adept at creating a disturbance of social norms surrounding gender and sexuality. Instead of allowing herself to be shaped by media criticism of her gender presentation, body size, or conformity to beauty standards, she often resists such pressures, and even exaggerates her nonconformity as material for further art. In doing so, she makes chaos of many sex and gender norms and remixes them into something new. Her habit of refusing to accommodate expectations, as well as her penchant for the nonsensical and obscure, appear as if they might just make space for imagining entirely different possibilities for embodied sex and gender.

I am not the first person to be so persuaded. In *Gaga Feminism: Sex, Gender, and the End of Normal*, J. Jack Halberstam uses Lady Gaga as a symbol for a feminism where norms of sex and gender are replaced by a sort of stardust or creative chaos that makes

space for imagining entirely differently marked or gendered futures (xii-xiii). This is a feminist politics that—much like Dadaism, the art movement that began in the early 20th century as a reaction against the First World War—breaks away from categories, constructions of identity, modes of desire, and all previously known forms of social order. Rather than proposing alternative structures of social order, gaga feminism, Halberstam argues, like dadaism, only seeks to take apart the existing structures, leaving a chaos in its place that can be used as the raw material for creatively imagined futures. In this chapter, I look at several examples of Lady Gaga's performances to find out how she responds to her critics and fans in order to create a disturbance in norms of sex and gender. Using the examples of mimicry and reflection that she offers in her outfits and performances, I explore how the distortion, reflection, and deflection of criticism and expectations can be made to reveal something about the viewer, rather than about Gaga herself. In many instances, Lady Gaga reveals some of the problems and contradictions in social norms of sex, gender, and beauty. However, Lady Gaga doesn't always do what I want her to do – sometimes her performances are questionable, seeming to perpetuate and uphold, rather than trouble and dismantle oppressive social structures. At times, her camp aesthetics fail to be clearly legible as camp. Often she appropriates symbols and images from cultures that are not her own, and while claiming to do this in an act of appreciation and inclusivity, without an awareness of or sensitivity to the histories behind the images, all the while claiming to do this as an act of appreciation and inclusivity. Such appropriation can only amount to a perpetuation of often racist stereotypes. While it would be a seductive hypothesis to suppose that Lady Gaga could be a queer and feminist symbol in all that she does, this is not what Halberstam argues in *Gaga Feminism*, and it is not what

I argue here. I draw on and expand Halberstam's discussion of success and failure in order to problematize these notions, and look at failure itself as a queer art, another topic that Halberstam has written about in *The Queer Art of Failure*. In what follows I aim to carry the hypothesis of Lady Gaga as a queer and feminist icon as far as possible; in the end, however, despite her many effective gender-troubling performances, I argue that Lady Gaga is perhaps more of a lesson in failure. Happily, she demonstrates a failure to uphold norms of sex and gender and beauty, but also, sometimes, she fails to be a symbol for queer or feminist or anti-oppressive activism. Instead, all Gaga may be able to offer is a confusing chaos, which at times may be useful for dismantling sex and gender norms, and at other times, she fails to disrupt and simply re-establishes such gender and sex constructions. In the following sections, I explore these themes by looking at Lady Gaga's performance art within the context of art history, contemporary feminist performance art, pop culture and critical feminist theory.

Dada and Gaga

Dada was an art (or anti-art) movement that arose during the First World War as a reaction against the crisis of war, and the social structures of capitalism and class inequality that precipitated it. Dadaists challenged the established methods and norms of the art academy; they invented and used various forms of collage and pastiche to dismantle and re-mix images, and developed "readymades" to challenge the meaning of "art" (Bigsby 11). Dadaism was closely linked to Surrealism, which continued an artistic interest in the underside of culture, and took unusual perspectives and unusual approaches to use of materials (Bigsby 13).

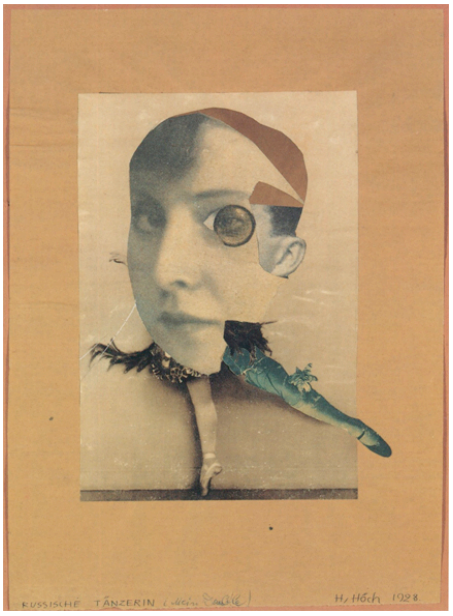

Figure 1.1: Hannah Höch. Russian Dancer/ My Double, 1928. Photomontage, 12 x 8 7/8 inches. Herzog Anton Ulrich-Museum, Brunswick, Germany.

Figure 1.2: Lady Gaga with prosthetic arm. 2013. www.JustJared.com

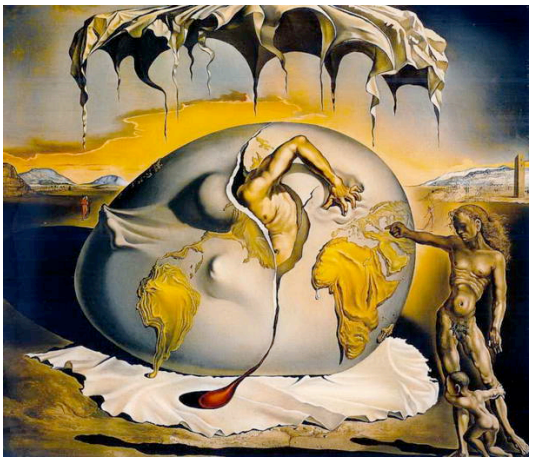

Figure 1.3: Salvador Dali, 1943. Geopoliticus Child Watching the Birth of the New Man. <http://thedali.org/exhibits/highlights/geopoliticus_ child _watching_the_birth_ of_the_new_ man.php>.

Figure 1.4: Lady Gaga hatching from an egg while singing "Born This Way," 2011. Getty Images. <http://www.dailymail.co.uk/ tvshowbiz/article-1356695/Grammys-2011-Lady-Gaga-bursts-egg-stage-red-carpet-entrance.html>.

Lady Gaga does something quite similar in her performance by dismantling, and parodying, ideals of femininity and beauty. She collages, remixes, and appropriates beauty ideals into something new that isn't always aesthetically pleasing, and copies the

work of others to make her own statement (Halle). In doing so, it could be argued that Gaga, like Dadaists, is reacting to a social crisis—but to a crisis of gender and sexuality, as well as other issues affecting American youth such as mental health and bullying (Halle). By delivering something that could potentially elicit disgust or moral offense rather than striving to appeal to the senses, Gaga both resists being framed by ideals of feminized beauty, and uses an element of shock to break apart these ideals. That excess and exaggeration of the mechanics of pop culture serve to point out the absurdity behind its ideals and tropes. As Beth Goodney explains with regards to Gaga's music video for her song "Telephone," "giving in to the allure of the pointless has a point: it is excess, and excessive reactions [...] hold the possibility for undermining, deforming, and transforming normative ways of being and relating" (Goodney). Excess is a definitive element of Lady Gaga's performance art – she uses the excesses of capitalist pop culture as material for creating an exaggerated parody of that excess. The music video for "Telephone" is over-saturated with product placement, to the point of being a parody of product placement and American overindulgence of consumerism. The scene of a classic American diner as the backdrop for a peppy mass-murder dance number also amounts to a parody of consumerism. The use of the symbols and settings of capitalist consumer culture, remixed into a garish and chaotic spectacle of overabundance and waste, exemplifies a Dadaist method of dismantling popular culture, and making art, or anti-art, from the broken pieces. The "Telephone" video is a particular example that has strong links to Dada because it appears to share the Dadaist goals of parodying the deadliness of capitalism, and in Gaga's case, the consumerism and capitalism entangled in American national identity. In other instances, Gaga's parodies focus on other social structures—

primarily gendered constructs of femininity and sexuality—but she still uses the same methods of parody and pastiche.

Camp

It could be said that Gaga's collaging of these broken pieces of popular culture into garish displays of monstrous beauty and non-normative gender in a neo-Dadaist use of camp is "a decidedly queer and countercultural strategy" (Horn 26). With her endless costume changes, Gaga puts on and takes off various expressions of gender identity with as much ease as a change of clothing (although, it could be argued that there is rarely anything "easy" about Gaga's clothing). Even within the duration of the performance of one song, she may perform a variety of femininities, hyper-femininities, or masculinities. What Gaga's costume changes highlights is that, if gender and beauty can be put on and taken off with as much ease as changing outfits, then there must not be anything inherent or natural about these constructs to begin with. Even when performing femininity, as *Lady* Gaga is expected to do, she often does so as drag, or with such "a vengeance [that] suggests the power of taking it off"(MacCannell, in Horn 28).

"Eh Eh (Nothing Else I Can Say)," on Lady Gaga's first album *The Fame*, is a terrible song. However, it seems quite intentionally so, because the exaggerated white femininity that it portrays is taken to a sickening level of wide-eyed girlishness; evidence that is topped off with the ridiculously giant hair-bow on Gaga's head. She sings this song in a high-pitched baby voice, which starkly contrasts the great range and depth of her voice in other songs. In a garishly colourful, cheesy and excessive display of passive, coy, heterosexual girlishness, this video appears to be a parody of the sort of American 1950s

era feminine roles that seem to lend themselves so well to images of objectified pin-up girls. By existing in this video in a persona that so starkly contrasts many of her other personas, Gaga manages to be, as Katrin Horn says, a "parodic subject and sexy object at the same time, further unsettling ideas about presumed naturalness of gender and desire" (Horn 29). With this campy, garish performance, Gaga might both attract and repulse the heterosexual male gaze at the same time, and perhaps point out the absurdity of the fabricated artifice that it desires. At the same time, she makes a commentary on an impossible version of femininity that women so frequently aspire to achieve.

"The Gaze"

Both Dadaists and Gaga make art out of refusal: refusal to accommodate expectations, and refusal to be defined by limiting gender norms, instead dismantling them and collaging them into something different. These social norms and expectations are often embedded in the way one person looks at another, thus, the act of looking can be a way of re-enforcing those expectations. Laura Mulvey, a feminist film theorist, has conceptualized such looks, and referred to them as "the male gaze" (Mulvey). Lacan's theory of "the gaze" suggests that there are power dynamics embedded in the act of looking, such that when someone realizes that they may be viewed as an object by others, their actions can be affected by the perceived expectations of the other (Ragland-Sullivan 13). Mulvey's conceptualization of the "male gaze" adds a gendered component such that the viewer is understood to be a heterosexual male, thus constructing the viewed object as female. Mulvey's first articulation of the theory arose within the context of films wherein the directors and anticipated viewers were male, and female characters were therefore

depicted as objects shaped by the desires of heterosexual male viewers (Mulvey). Later versions of the theory complicate this stance slightly; we might more generally understand looking and being looked at as two nodes in a variably gendered power dynamic. In Gaga's case, the effects of the gaze come from all angles of the media. When she toys with or subverts audience expectations, she is, in some ways, resisting the power of this "gaze" to shape her performances, actions, and identities. However, Gaga, like Dada, doesn't simply reject or ignore the gaze—she breaks it down, uses its elements as material for re-assembly into monstrous forms, and sometimes reflects it, redirecting its effects back to where it came from. As Thea Lim explains:

> "Gaga often subverts viewer expectation, enticing us with views of perfect white beauty, but then ensconcing that beauty in the disturbing. She presents her 'perfect body,' but covers it in fake blood. She dresses up in sparkly dresses and matching heels, but her shoes are creepily curved into scary bird feet. Juxtaposing images that are comfortable or normative with images that are unsettling or bizarre, Gaga turns the tables on us. Instead of simply refusing to allow voyeurism, she harnesses it, tricking and punishing the heteronormative in us, while rewarding our inner pervert" (Lim).

Figure 1.5: Lady Gaga performing "Paparazzi" at the 2009 MTV Music Awards. New York: Reuters/ Gary Hershorn, 2009.

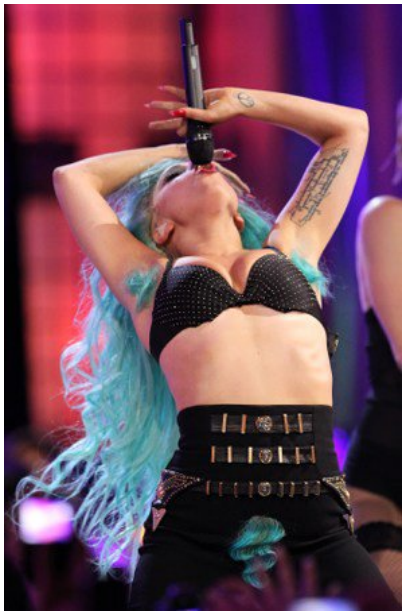

Figure 1.6: Lady Gaga with special wigs, 2011. Gawker.com.

This juxtaposition of normative and unsettling is one of the main ways that Lady Gaga subverts "the gaze," even as she allows it to shape her every manifestation. Being a pop star, followed around by spotlights and cameras every moment of every day, she lives in "the gaze" in a way that the rest of us do not. She lives nearly every moment of her life in the spotlight – or in "the gaze" of the media: her fans, critics, and curious onlookers – this is the nature of pop stardom. She seems to need this spotlight, or "the gaze" that comes with fame—she frequently addresses her need for fame—because it is the raw material with which she makes her art; with which she creates, and becomes, Lady Gaga. She even, as one critic comments, performs the "parts of pop stardom that are usually left out of or hidden in such performances - the nuts and bolts, the commercialism, the desire for fame - Gaga removes the critical distance between consumers of her work and that work" (harq-al-ada). In bringing all of these pieces into the performance, Gaga invites "the gaze," welcomes the spotlight to follow her every move, and even encourages that spotlight to participate in the performance.

Subject/Object

In a way then, Gaga allows the gaze of fans and critics to shape her identity— but she undermines exactly how it shapes her, thus rearranging the power dynamics embedded in "the gaze," as Mulvey understood it. Gaga models the ideals of female beauty, but at same time, perverts them by exaggerating them and exposing their artifice and ugliness. She makes herself appear sexually available with revealing outfits, but then turns violence against an objectifying gaze by wearing such things as a flame-shooting bra and dildo, or a machine-gun bra. In this performance, she knows she is being

objectified, and so she performs objectification, and enacts a violent revenge upon those whose gaze objectifies her.

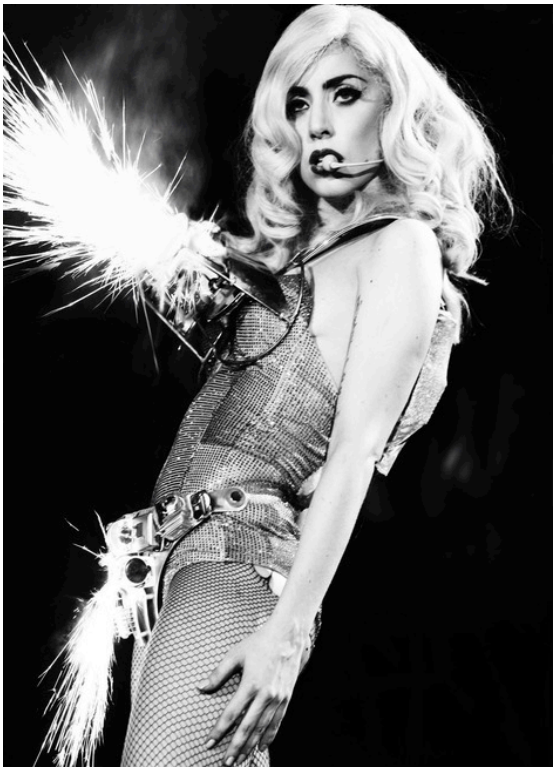

Figure 1.7: Lady Gaga with fire-shooting bra and underwear. 2009. Glogster.com

In the music video for "Bad Romance," Gaga is forced into a brothel and sold to the highest bidder. However, what this highest bidder had desired and objectified in her body turned out to be what would kill him: the final scene of the video depicts a bored-looking Gaga smoking a cigarette, smeared with soot and reclining next to the charred corpse of her buyer, her flame-bra still sputtering a few errant sparks. Gaga is made into a highly desirable commodity available for purchase – but what was initially so desirable about that object turned out to be violent, and quite dangerous. In the video for "Bad Romance" and elsewhere, Gaga allows herself to be made into a sex object—even participates in making herself a sex object—but then occupies that object position with subjectivity and agency, making her body at the same time both an object of desire and a

potentially lethal agent of resistance. She has allowed herself to be shaped by "the gaze," but at the same time refashioned it in a sort of ecstatic failure at being disciplined by its judgment and at being a proper pop star.

Figure 1.8: Video Still from "Bad Romance." Haus of Gaga, 2009.

This flame-bra performance, as well as her later gun-bra performances, did indeed garner negative feedback and criticism. One notable criticism came from pop singer Katy Perry, who deemed Gaga's bra featuring plastic assault rifles to be distasteful—a critique that might seem strange coming from a woman who has herself sported cupcake, spinning peppermint candy, and lactating-whipped-cream bras. Perhaps Perry's criticism was related merely to the image of guns – a prop that may indeed have been distasteful for Gaga to have continued using in the wake of recent high-profile mass-shootings in the United States (Breslaw). However, in the context of objects used to represent female body parts, Perry's object choices might seem more offensive for their reinforcement of sexual objectification. Perhaps it could be argued that Perry's garish outlandishness is meant to be a campy and exaggerated parody of "the gaze" and its construction of female bodies as objects for consumption. Camp and parody are indeed methods that Gaga uses as well, however, Gaga's are usually more easily read as such, whereas Perry doesn't

appear to offer any sort of resistance to feminine beauty ideals, irony, or snarl to disrupt the bubblegummy pop-niceness of her colourful objectifications. By contrast, Gaga's flame and gun bras offer an unavoidable glimpse of stark resistance, or a sort of confrontation that disrupts the sugar-coated objectified niceness of female body parts available for consumption. The flames and guns appear to allow an objectified body part to talk back, thus occupying both positions of object and subject at the same time. Despite the campy aesthetics, however, the use of guns could be read as anti-Dada, in contrast with Dada's anti-war message – then again, perhaps Gaga's gun-bra is an attempt at undermining a system that commits violence through the act of objectification. One of the tricks of Gaga is that it is hard to know.

By understanding her own objectification, we might say that Gaga claims some power to shape it. Eddie McCaffray addresses the blurring between subject and object in many of Gaga's performances in his article "Grammar Trouble and Lady Gaga's Lyrical 'I.'" He argues that "the power of the viewed's performance should not be forgotten: the ability to become what(ever) others want is still an ability, an action, an agency, and undoubtedly a creative and powerful one" (McCaffray). Thus, Gaga is embracing her positioning as an object, and at the same time showing that an object, too, can be a subject. McCaffray argues that subject and object, used as such, are thus irrelevant as nouns – rather, as verbs, these words take on active meanings that allow for movement between them, and for the elimination of the subject's privileged position (McCaffray). McCaffray's argument potentially clarifies Gaga's ambiguity: perhaps she is not attempting to completely obliterate subject and object categories; rather, this sort of

shifting between them confuses membership in either, making their boundaries permeable and fluid, overlapping.

Gaga also blurs the subject and object positions in the shifting narrative voice in many of her songs. McCaffray looks at the lyrics of "Government Hooker" and argues that Gaga's voicing has the effect of collapsing dualities – such as the duality of power and exploitation, which is illustrated in this song that perhaps draws links between prostitution and politics. Gaga's voice and a "metallic male voice [...] comprise a single, coherent, interwoven narrative: one of desire mutating and multiplying to satisfy itself" (McCaffray). The narrator of this song has two voices, or alternatively, the two narrators of this song switch places, both occupying positions of hooker and client, empowered and exploited, subject and object. McCaffray argues that "Government Hooker" "is more a critique of Cartesian dualism [...] than it is a statement on the social reality of prostitution." The object is acted upon and the subject acts; but these actions are just actions – temporary, ephemeral positions that shift easily and are not inherent to defining the self. McCaffray then underscores why this concept of fluidity between subject and object is so vital to queer projects of dismantling oppressive binaries:

> "[T]his work – her persona that encompasses such contradictions of power and exploitation – undermines discrimination at its most basic level, by accepting the other as other, by ascribing agency to the object *as the object*. It does *not* seek that agency by demonstrating that the object is really a subject or demanding that it become one, not by unifying all people under a single theoretical concept of 'human' that remains at bottom a straight white man, but by ascribing rights, ascribing *agency and creativity* to the object *without demanding that the object becomes something different* [...]" (McCaffray). (Emphasis in original.)

This project of performing a fluidity between subject and object and ascribing agency to objects could be vital to a queer project of undermining the oppression perpetuated by restrictive categories and norms. McCaffray argues that "the grammatical troubling of

this voice expresses the theme of performative identity and the radical agency to which it leads" (McCaffray). What McCaffray seems to be saying here is that the grammatical shifts represent identity shifts, thus making the performance of a different identity potentially as simple as shifting words. In taking apart the expected coherent relationship between the narrating "I" and the sung-to "you," between the viewer and viewed, Gaga breaks down the boundaries between social positions and their attending power dynamics. Gaga's performance thus both embraces the power of the gaze, and her own power as an object of the gaze, in shaping her actions and identity.

Ugliness and Disgust

In fact, Gaga makes a habit of failing to be "properly" shaped by the gaze. Her outfits don't always commit violence like the fire and gun bras, but sometimes she resists being shaped by "the gaze" by making herself both conventionally attractive and ugly at the same time. She strategically adheres to the aesthetics of stereotypical codes of female beauty, but then perverts them, making herself both alluring and repulsive in order to create a push-pull with the viewer, thanks to such antics as wearing meat dresses and slime dresses, and writhing in goo. She reveals the pain and torture behind performing the feminine beauty ideal by showing her bloodied and contorted feet strapped into high platform sandals, which no longer look sexy at all.

Figure 1.9: Video Still from "You and I." Haus of Gaga, 2011.

In 2010, Gaga wore a dress made of raw beef to the MTV Video Music Awards. The dress was a riff on artist Jana Sterbak's 1987 piece, *Vanitas: Flesh Dress for an Albino Anorexic*. Sterbak's *Vanitas,* displayed in the National Art Gallery of Canada in 1991, evoked national outrage from those who were angry about what many perceived to be a waste of taxpayers money and a waste of expensive food, while so many people were living in poverty. Others declared that the dress was a public health and safety risk, revealing a potential translation of visceral disgust at the rotting meat to moral disgust at an apparent affront to those living in poverty. Controversies aside, *Vanitas: Flesh Dress for an Albino Anorexic* might suggest something about decay and death, or the objectification of female bodies (Murray 220). Its presentation, hanging in the gallery in front of a photograph of a model posing in the dress, evokes the way that fashionable clothes might be displayed in stores, suggesting something about the objectification of women's bodies (Murray 228). The title of the piece highlights ideals of feminine beauty that lead to anorexia – instead of being consumed, food can be used for other things, such as fashion. The use of raw flesh as clothing might be an image of the body lacking skin, uncovered, rather than covered. The dress's emptiness, displayed on a hanger in front of a

photo on the wall of the dress being worn, could almost be like a set of instructions for the viewer to put it on, or at least to imagine putting it on. Alternatively, the empty dress on a hanger could suggest the emptiness of a body that wears food, rather than consumes it.

Like Sterbak's *Vanitas,* Gaga's meat dress also evoked visceral reactions of disgust from many who were squeamish about her body being in so much contact with slimy, raw, dead flesh, as well as those who took moral issue with what was perceived as a waste of food. Despite the squick of raw meat on skin, Gaga performed dignified feminine mannerisms—her tongue was not hanging out, nor was there a snarl or a monster-claw; instead she smiled prettily for the camera, and sat up straight with her legs crossed. She was, after all, at a big, fancy music awards event full of celebrities where the expectation was to wear something fashionable and flattering that potentially makes some sort of statement without going too far, all whilst photographers urgently snap pictures and critics relentlessly dispense their judgments on the display. A dress made of raw meat, in this context, could be read as a statement about the state of affairs of fashion, or about the endless parade of flesh, adorned and revealed in various degrees, offered up for consumption and judgement. Such a display of femininity combined with the disgust-evoking meat dress might create a push-pull between desire and disgust, perhaps pointing out the potential disgust in a "male gaze" that views female bodies as pieces of meat.

With Sterbak's *Vanitas,* the viewer is presented with an image of an uncomfortable-looking model sitting on a floor that is smeared with blood or juices from the raw meat; the meat appears to hang heavily in the way it droops around her neck. Gaga appears much more comfortable and at-ease in her meat dress, which is more tied

up in the trappings of fashion, including the revealing cut of the dress, and the meat heels and a meat hairpiece and meat handbag. While it was known that Gaga was wearing raw meat and this fact was able to elicit reactions of disgust among some, Gaga's meat dress lacks the visual weight and wetness of Sterbak's, which droops and hangs on its wearer and leaves bloody smears on the floor. So, it seems that, while Gaga sort of continues Sterbak's effect of disrupting, or revealing, an objectifying gaze that would position the body as an unchallenging or simple object of desire, Gaga's presentation makes the impact much less confrontational or complex. Gaga's meat dress doesn't make suggestions about body image or anorexia, and it appears to have only to inspired a fraction of the amount of controversy that Sterbak's piece created.

Figure 1.10: Jana Sterbak. "Vanitas: Flesh Dress for an Albino Anorexic." Montreal: Galerie Rene Blouin, 1987.

Figure 1.11: Lady Gaga wearing meat dress. MTV Music Awards, 2010. Steve Granitz, 2010. WireImage.com

In another performance, when Gaga appeared writhing in a pile of slime and other people in the music video for "Born This Way," she appeared to channel images of Carolee Schneemann's *Meat Joy,* from 1964. *Meat Joy* was a filmed performance that involved eight nearly-naked people writhing on the floor with each other in sausages, raw chicken, raw fish, and wet paint. This work was described by Schneemann as an "exuberant sensory celebration of the flesh," and interpreted by one critic as "metamorphosis from animal to human and transgressive femininity" (Kauffman 54). Indeed, the performers appeared to cast off learned ideas about cleanliness in order revel ecstatically in the raw physical experience of being flesh and writhing in flesh. In Lady Gaga's "Born This Way" version, the goo does not involve raw meat, and appears somewhat otherworldly in its black and purple viscousness. As such, Gaga's slime is less identifiable than Schneemann's meat goo, and as a result, might elicit less disgust. However, even lacking the direct reference to raw meat, this black and purple slime still somehow manages to be read as bodily because of the presence of so many bodies squirming, touching, and embracing together in it. Thus, it may at the same time elicit

both alluring orgiastic images as well as evoke reactions of disgust and repulsion. In this way, Gaga's slime has a similar effect to Schneemann's *Meat Joy* in its ability to elicit visceral reactions of disgust at the same time as ecstatic joy of embodiment, though Gaga's synthetic slime creates more of an image of some sort of cosmic goop from which the universe is born (assisted by the theme of cosmic origins in the video).

Gaga also appeared in photos for the "Born This Way" album wearing the same sort of slime; here, it appears to ooze over her body to form some sort of sticky dress. This slime dress has an effect similar to the meat dress—the poses, colours, and the composition of these images are visually appealing, yet the viscous appearance of the slime may elicit repulsion. Is this her representation of some sort of primordial goo from which she is "born this way?" Is it just another instance of gaga-resistance to being constructed as a stereotypically attractive female pop star, or is it an indication of the fluidity of bodies, identities, and creativity? Perhaps it is all of these. As Gaga slips and slides, she occupies the position of the abject, resists being pinned down or defined. First of all, there is no way to get a firm grip on her; and secondly, if you do try to grasp her, you will get covered in her slime and become just as slippery and fluid and abject as Gaga is herself. Gaga resists easy, logical definition by making space for regularly contradicting herself. She fails to contain herself and keep herself put together, as she overflows the boundaries of self, making a mess of the stage, the theatre seat that she sits in, and anyone who happens to get too close to her. She fails at being a palatable and unthreatening display of commodified femininity, because while she resists being sexy and pretty in the conventional sense, at the same time she is still visible, nearly naked, and sexualized.

Figure 1.12: Carolee Schneemann. “Meat Joy.” New York: Judson Church, 1964. Group performance with raw fish, chickens, sausages, wet paint, plastic, rope, shredded scrap paper.

Figure 1.13: Lady Gaga writhing in a pile of purple goo and other people. Video Still from “Born This Way.” Haus of Gaga, 2011.

Figure 1.14: Lady Gaga in slime dress. Album art for *Born This Way*. Haus of Gaga, 2011.

Despite often presenting herself in these disgust-inducing substances, Gaga still maintains enough conventional sexiness to appeal to the stereotypical pop heterosexual male gaze, and thus maintains her position in the spotlight. In the above image where Gaga writhes with others in a pile of purple and black slime, she seems to lie on top of the mess, while the others, mostly women of colour, are actually submerged in the goo. These others, mostly women of colour, are portrayed as though they are somehow more earthly than Gaga, the white celebrity who has risen to the top of the pile, her position quite literally supported by the bodies of the Black women beneath her. Gaga is only slightly contaminated, her bare limbs still visible and extended for viewing pleasure. As much as she seems to aim to disrupt the heterosexual male gaze by resisting such palatable configurations of her image, she ultimately fails at this.

Monsters

The perceived monstrosity of her oozing, contorting, and breaking codes of feminine beauty is something that Lady Gaga embraces by referring to herself as "Mother Monster" and to her fans as "little monsters." Celebration of monsters is ever-present in Gaga's aesthetic, especially as she plays with and queers themes of sexuality and idealized feminine beauty. What is it about monsters that is so appealing to Gaga and her fans, to the persona of the misfit, freak, outcast, queer? The idea of the monster, as Kristin Beeler explains in her article "Beauty and Other Monsters," "has its roots in Latin *monstrum,* meaning portent, and from *monere*, to warn" (Beeler 49). Perhaps, then, a monster is a warning of something unknown or frightening that finds its expression in the

grotesque, or in the exposure of the twistedness or suffering behind the guise of idealized beauty.

This "grotesque," or abject other, is a part of the self that has been rejected, pushed away into a realm of identities that do not count as lives. Judith Butler explains this concept in the introduction to her *Bodies that Matter: On the Discursive Limits of 'Sex"*:

> "This exclusionary matrix by which subjects are formed thus requires the simultaneous production of a domain of abject beings, those who are not yet 'subjects,' but who form the constitutive outside to the domain of the subject. The abject designates here precisely those 'unlivable' and 'uninhabitable' zones of social life which are nevertheless densely populated by those who do not enjoy the status of the subject, but whose living under the sign of the 'unlivable' is required to circumscribe the domain of the subject. This zone of uninhabitability will constitute the defining limit of the subject's domain; it will constitute that site of dreaded identification against which—and by virtue of which—the domain of the subject will circumscribe its own claim to autonomy and to life. In this sense, then, the subject is constituted through the force of exclusion and abjection, one which produces a constitutive outside to the subject, an abjected outside, which is, after all, 'inside' the subject as its own founding repudiation" (Butler 3).

So the abject is constructed as the monstrous other in order to draw a line between it and the normative, socially legible subject. The subject needs something that it is not in order to define what it is. The abjected outside, the "zone of uninhabitability" and unlivable lives is feared, and those who inhabit it are labelled monstrous—thereby constructed as lives that do not matter. Though abjection is always about a push and pull between the rejected and welcomed parts of self or society, perhaps by intentionally embracing abjected parts of the self, the abject can move towards being a subject. Perhaps by inhabiting these zones of uninhabitability, lives and bodies that have been constructed not to matter can resist being tossed aside and assert that they do matter, thus making the unlivable livable. Perhaps Gaga's embrace of the "monster" label for herself and her fans

is about trying to make space for the abjected parts of self and society that haven't had space to surface in life as a subject. Perhaps for Gaga and her fans, espousing the aspects of themselves that have been made abject with labels such as freak, outcast, misfit, deformed, degenerate, or queer is a way of making the abject less fearsome, finding beauty in monstrousness.

The idea of making lives more inhabitable by discovering beauty in the monstrous or grotesque is not something new in Western history. Beauty has forever been equated with morality, just as ugliness has been associated with immorality and degeneracy. In Plato's *Symposium*, Socrates endlessly questions others' musing about the nature of love, beauty, and goodness, in order to expose the cracks in their definitions. It is suggested that love desires what it lacks, and that, since love desires beauty, love must therefore lack beauty. In saying this, Socrates seems to be pointing to the flaws in an argument that would insists upon the existence of a false binary between beauty and ugliness, or beauty and love (Cobb 39-40). Instead, love seems to be somewhere in the middle, constantly pulled and pulling between opposite poles. Kristin Beeler makes a similar argument when she quotes Alain de Botton to argue that "we call a thing beautiful when it contains in a concentrated form those qualities, which we personally or as a society lack. We respect a style that can move us away from what we fear and towards what we crave: a style which carries the correct dosage of our missing virtues" (Beeler 49). Perhaps this missing piece *is* the monsters, or the abjected parts of ourselves. The appeal of Gaga's monster aesthetic may be in its way of exposing what is behind the facade of beauty: where we feel we are lacking, or broken.

Monsters live in our fears, so perhaps if we allow ourselves to become the monstrous, we can be on par with them—fight back; or perhaps we could make friends with them—talk, sit together, and listen for what it is that they need, over tea. Maybe the monsters are not so frightening after all—perhaps, as Beeler says "I recognize the monsters because they are me" (Beeler 49). Instead of the garish facade of idealized feminine beauty, Gaga's sometimes-gnarly monster aesthetic might be an embrace of the abject, or the grotesque—which is actually the beautiful—because it is what we yearn for, to fill what we lack, having banished it. Perhaps then, the monstrous and grotesque are not contrary to the beautiful, but rather, parts of the same thing. As Beeler explains, "beauty comes through our vulnerabilities, hitting us in soft, unexpected places. It strikes a sympathetic chord... I am reflecting back some part of myself which is bent or broken and knows what it is to be ill-formed" (Beeler 49). Perhaps Gaga and her fans' identification with monsters is a performance, an embodiment, of this: the self, scarred and misshapen, growing new and imperfect forms from struggle and debris. Perhaps, in a way, these redefinitions of beauty are a way of queering beauty.

What Beeler seems to be saying is that our fears are figured as monsters, or as the grotesque other, but that the grotesque is distanced because it is what we fear in ourselves. Likewise, beauty is what we are drawn to, to fill what we feel we lack in ourselves. So, what we fear in ourselves and what we yearn for are actually the same thing: beauty and the monstrous are the same thing. What is beautiful is what is real, what touches "vulnerabilities, hitting us in soft, unexpected places," what "feels less like a discovery and more like a remembering" (Beeler 49). Nothing is beautiful that is so-

called perfect. Beauty today is in the cracks, the scars, the way that the weeds grow up around the ruins, the misshapen healing.

Figure 1.15: Video still from "Vomit Interlude (Gaga Eats Her Heart)." Haus of Gaga, 2011.

Much of Gaga's aesthetic pivots on the idea of her being in the spotlight at all times – and every part of life, including the mundane and base, is possible subject for her art. She has many photos taken of her from a behind the scenes aesthetic, mainly by Terry Richardson, photographer and member of Gaga's creative team "Haus of Gaga." Richardson is a celebrity photographer famous for countless allegations of sexual assault and harassment against him from models who have worked with him. His aesthetic features young women in often passive, overtly sexualized positions. Since Richardson is a regular part of her creative team, it seems that Gaga likes this aesthetic and has incorporated it into her own. Many of his images of Gaga appear not to emanate from an organized photo shoot, but rather, appear to be produced as he follows her around her daily life of backstage and between performances, capturing her crying, having about a dozen sets of hands fix her hair, makeup, and clothes all at once, inhaling from what looks like an oxygen bag between songs, eating pasta in heels and underwear, sitting on

the toilet, in the shower, sleeping, doing yoga naked, and making all variety of crude gestures. These photographs appear to be a part of her project of living her entire life in the spotlight – regardless of how many of these images are staged. Terry Richardson seems to be a fitting person to fulfill this role of the "peeping tom," capturing Gaga in her "most private" moments to share with the world.

Unfortunately, by continuing to work with him despite the countless allegations against him, Lady Gaga perpetuates a culture that silences victims of sexual assault. Richardson continues to get ample work photographing the biggest celebrities for the leading fashion magazines, while many claim that the allegations are a part of his personal life and have no bearing on the quality of his professional life. This attempt at separation is dubious in the best of cases, but for Richardson, it is completely nonsensical, as he regularly assaults models who pose for him and coerces barely-legal young women into compromising positions. By continuing publicly to claim Richardson as her friend and to promote her work with him, Gaga is choosing to ignore these allegations, thus reinforcing a culture of silencing victims of sexual assault. This repeated ignoring of young women's voices in favour of protecting the reputation of a perpetrator of sexual violence has the harmful effect of undermining her many messages about "youth empowerment" that encourage young people to find their voice and take on roles of leadership in their communities. On one hand, Gaga uses Richardson's behind-the-scenes aesthetic to attempt to capture the beauty in the mundane and the ugly, and in her displays of resistance to being shaped by the gaze. On the other hand, Richardson's camera is tuned to capture images that cater to a certain version of the heterosexual male gaze that finds resistance sexy, and so her apparent resistance isn't so subversive after all.

We must also ask how it is that Gaga can get away with sometimes performing as an abject monstrous other, and still remain in the spotlight – still attract and hold so much mainstream attention. Perhaps there is enough about her that is not socially abjected – after all, she is white, young, thin, and conventionally attractive. She has firm enough footing in the realm of the subject in order to be able to safely dabble in the abject while maintaining subjectivity and her place in the spotlight. Gaga is not the only contemporary pop star to return the gaze by performing such levels of absurdity, camp, and monstrosity – British Sri Lankan M.I.A., for example, is one pop performing artist with many similarities, but who doesn't have as much media attention as Lady Gaga, and is rarely held up as an icon for queering femininity (if ever), or for queering the "male gaze." When M.I.A. does something weird, it gets chalked up to the eccentricity presumed to be inherent in her race or culture, rather than considered for what it is. Because she is already cast as other, non-normative, and an outsider, her potentially subversive actions seem less notable to mainstream American media. As Robin James argues, "Gaga has license to queer femininity—to make her body monstrous, either through monster-drag or king-drag—*because she is white*" (James) (emphasis in original). Because of her whiteness, and her initially palatable all-American blond seeming-niceness, she is able to elicit shock when she dons the trappings of abject otherness. Someone like M.I.A. doesn't have the privilege of making such shocking impressions, because, being racialized, she is already perceived to be other, and so anything strange that she does is likely to be attributed to her essential otherness. Or as Thea Lim and Andrea Plaid argue, "as a small young blonde woman [Gaga] appears to be transgressive in a way that artists like M.I.A. or even Trina cannot be transgressive, because to begin with they are already

seen as non-normative, simply because they aren't white" (Lim and Plaid). Gaga's non-normativity, then, is able to elicit shock and grab the necessary attention to do her work of queering gendered beauty norms *because* it is in contrast with her initial seemingly normative small blond whiteness. When M.I.A. does something similarly outrageous, she is more likely to be seen as "exotic," or as re-inscribing her unknown otherness, while Gaga is more likely to be considered subversive. And despite this, or perhaps because of it, it seems that, lyrically, M.I.A. is much more subversive than Gaga (Lim and Plaid). Gaga's lyrics alone, without her costumes and theatrics, seem quite normative. In contrast, M.I.A's "bonkers rhymes and bold call-outs to volatile political conflicts" seem much more progressive. (Lim and Plaid) Her politics are not discreet in her music, with her lyrics clearly showing her criticism of the Sri Lankan government and her opposition to colonization (Yates). Examples of such lyrics with more progressive messages talk about class issues, racism, and globalization. In "Paper Planes," she seems to reference bio-chemical warfare (Yates) when she sings: "*bird flu gonna get you / made it in my stable / from the crap you drop / on my crop when they pay you*" (M.I.A. 2007). She brings up issues of class inequality in "Bring Up the People" when she sings: "*Pull up the People, Pull up the Poor / Yeah, me got God and me got you / Every day thinking bout how me get through*" (M.I.A. 2005). As Ayesha A. Siddiqi argues, in her article "The Pop Diaspora of M.I.A.":

> "By lifting imagery associated with the global south and restyling it with an unapologetically gaudy insistence on its "otherness," M.I.A empowers both herself and brown kids worldwide who had previously only been the subjects of Otherization, not the agents. Her reappropriation of the exotic kitsch brands subaltern struggle with dance-pop cool, while triumphantly avoiding privileging white consumption" (Siddiqi).

M.I.A., then, doesn't fall into the same problem of appropriation that Gaga falls into. Gaga appropriates cultures other than her own American Western whiteness without seeming to add any element of critique of her own privilege or of the racial power dynamics embedded in the images that she uses. She regularly makes blanket statements about acceptance and youth empowerment, and is open about having herself dealt with body image issues and bullying, but doesn't deconstruct the mechanisms of privilege that locate her in such a position of power. Her messages of empowerment, then, cannot be as universal as she seems to hope. What Gaga succeeds at in terms of gender and sexuality, it seems, she similarly fails in terms of race.

By choosing to call herself Monster, Gaga enacts her white privilege of having this choice: without it, she would already be othered, and wouldn't have the option of taking on an already-othered identity. Nevertheless, by choosing to identify with a term that might have been used against her as a criticism, she does manage to dare those who fear something in her particular expression of gender-monstrosity to confront her. She reflects back the ugliness of a culture obsessed with impossible ideals of feminine beauty. Thus, in Gaga's pastiche, standards of beauty are sometimes overthrown, and criticisms about her expressions of gender and sexuality that are meant to tear her down serve instead as inspiration. The criticism is re-shaped, the spotlight is reflected back to where it came from, and looking outward at Gaga can sometimes become looking inward at oneself. What does she tell us about ourselves when she holds up this mirror? If we are white and Western, she may be able to tell us a lot. If we are not white and Western, then, she likely has less relevance.

Mirroring and Mimicry

Many of Lady Gaga's costumes and performances involve mirrors—both by incorporating fragments of mirrors into her costumes, and metaphorically, in the form of mimicry. In some of her earlier performances, Gaga wore a dress made out of mirror fragments, becoming herself a sort of living, performing, disco ball. A disco ball isn't appealing in its own form, rather, its appeal is in its ability to scatter light in all directions. Gaga, too, does this — she scatters the spotlight over her audience, in a way making everyone a part of the performance. In the video for her song "Poker Face," she wears a mask made out of mirror fragments. The mirrors serve not only to scatter the spotlight, but also to reflect back the gaze — when the observer looks at Gaga, rather than seeing someone else, they finds themselves faced with distorted and fragmented images of themselves.

Figure 1.16: Lady Gaga on the big screen at the Monster Ball show. Jennifer MacLatchy. Montreal, 2011.

In many instances, Lady Gaga metaphorically mirrors "the gaze" by dressing and performing in a way that mimics those around her. As Homi K. Bhabha writes in "Of Mimicry and Man: The ambivalence of colonial discourse," mimicry is a tool of colonialism that takes its power from copying the other while maintaining a distance.

Imperfect mimicry keeps a distance from the original, and this distance serves to maintain difference and gain power from the ability to control the image and its meaning. Bhabha argues that it is this difference performed in mimicry that is used as a tool of colonialism – by appropriating the image of the other, the colonizers shift the image and its meaning in order to remove its power (Bhabha 122-123). Gaga might be using mimicry in a similar way in those instances when she imitates others who are interviewing her. In these instances, her imitation seems to be an assertion of her own power over shaping her image, while at the same time turning around the gaze and its efforts at defining back towards the viewer. When Lady Gaga met Queen Elizabeth II in 2009, she wore a red latex gown with a 20-foot train and elaborate collar that was fashioned to resemble the style of Queen Elizabeth I. When being interviewed on Larry King Live, Gaga wore the black and white reverse of his signature outfit, complete with dark glasses to counter his clear ones, and she even mimicked his mannerisms and gestures (Lady Gaga 2010). For an interview with Barbara Walters, Gaga shocked audiences by appearing in a gown much more tame than her usual getups, which was because she was dressed like Barbara Walters (Lady Gaga 2010). Perhaps the point here is not that we see Lady Gaga as being just like the queen, Larry King, or Barbara Walters, but rather that there is something performative about their particular identities that can be put on and altered by someone else. By presenting herself beside these celebrities as an altered reflection of both their outfits and mannerisms, Gaga emphasizes the performativity not only of her own appearance, but of the person whom she mimics. By mimicking the other person's persona, Gaga thus shows that identity is performative.

Figure 1.17: Lady Gaga meets Queen Elizabeth II of England. 2009. CNN.

Figure 1.18: Lady Gaga on Larry King Live. Huffington Post 2010

Figure 1.19: Lady Gaga with Barbara Walters. 2009. Rap-Up.com.

While being endlessly photographed by the paparazzi, she has on multiple occasions involved cameras in her outfits. She once had what looked somewhat like a surveillance camera installed on her shoulder, and another time she held a camera and repeatedly posed with it as though taking pictures of those who were taking pictures of

her (Leedom). On yet other occasions, she has appeared wearing camera-glasses, glasses which were capable of capturing whatever she was seeing. These glasses also had lit-up screens over the eyes, which could project various images back out to the world, including an image of what she is looking at.

Figure 1.20: Lady Gaga with shoulder camera. 2010. Rex Features. <http://www.marieclaire.co.uk/news/fashion/444639/introducing-super-gaga.html>.

Figure 1.21: Lady Gaga mimicking paparazzi. 2010. www.hc-blackmilk.xf.cz.

Figure 1.22: Lady Gaga wearing Polaroid glasses. 2011. <http://www.elle.co.za/lady-gaga-and-her-glasses/ >.

By so easily taking on other personas and so frequently shifting between them, it becomes clear that Gaga's presentation of identity is performative, rather than something simply inherent to the self. By mimicking other people, she makes evident those chosen, performative aspects of that persona. By doing this with an added touch of absurdity, she turns the spotlight back toward the other, forcing some sort of sometimes-uncomfortable self-reflection. In all of these instances, Gaga reflects what we look like while we're looking at her, in an often exaggerated and grotesque way. In doing this, Gaga confronts her audience with monstrous self-imagery, and challenges the relationship between the viewer and the viewed, subject and object. She fails to occupy her expected role as the viewed object, instead taking on the role of the viewing subject. The platform of celebrity is no longer a clearly defined place, and we're no longer sure who we're looking at when we look outside of ourselves. In this way, we could say, she fails at being a proper superstar.

However, Gaga's mimicry of others is not always so productive or un-problematic. When Gaga mimics others in the above examples, she is able to do so because she also, partly, embodies the position or persona that she mimics and critiques (celebrity, royalty, fan, white Westerner, user of technology and social media, etc.). In other instances, Gaga takes on images, personas, and identities that she does not, and cannot, occupy, and thus, her mimicry can only amount to cultural appropriation and the perpetuation of racist stereotypes. Most notably, Gaga appears to have a recent fascination with the burqa and niqab, and has appeared wearing a couple varieties of her interpretations of these. These accompany a song on her upcoming album ARTPOP, formerly titled "Burqa," now changed to "Aura." The change in title and lyrics is merely superficial, however, since the rest of the lyrics are the same and she continues to wear her interpretation of a burqa or niqab while performing it. Some claim that Gaga is demonstrating her appreciation for the fashions of other cultures, and that by wearing a "burqa," Gaga can "reclaim" it, making it popular or sexy. However, since it is not hers to reclaim—she never had a claim on it to begin with—her performance of it can only amount to a perpetuation of the racist stereotypes of "oppressed" racialized women who supposedly need to be empowered by white Western feminist celebrities. Her white privilege is evident in her ability to merely wear a "burqa" and be perceived as somehow subversive, in stark contrast with those who wear burqas unironically. As Tumblr user "Maarnayeri" says, quoting her friend Khadijah:

> "If I wear a burqa, nijab.. or hell even a fucking hijab, I'm a stupid, brown savage who has no capacity to think for herself. But when Gaga wears it, its revolutionary and fashionable. People love to scream equality and colorblindedness when such an event arises, but such a world is completely theoretical until we fix these the caricatured perceptions about Islam" (Maarnayeri, quoting Khadijah).

Being white, Gaga has the privilege of being able to don a burqa or niqab and have it be seen as a choice, rather than as a result of being oppressed and disempowered. She has the privilege of donning a burqa or hijab without the fear of experiencing racist backlash (Harris).

Furthermore, Gaga has the choice to interpret the burqa as something that can be turned fashionable and sexualized: hers is hot pink and see-through, under which she wears skimpy bedazzled underwear and tall platform shoes. In the lyrics of the song, she says "Do you wanna see me naked, lover? Do you wanna peek underneath the cover? Do you wanna see the girl who lives behind the aura?" (Lady Gaga). She uses the burqa as a sexual prop, a coy game of come-hither, disregarding the cultural histories and complexities behind it and the points of view of those who wear it for other reasons (Beusman). Gaga's position of privilege and appropriative use of this image is made loud and clear when she sings "Enigma popstar is fun/She wear burqa for fashion/It's not a statement as much as just a move of passion" (Lady Gaga). She has the privilege of wearing a burqa "for fashion," and of sexualizing and bedazzling it to suit her own fashionable tastes. She can claim not to be making a political statement, attempting to cast off her responsibility to consider the cultural complexities of what she's doing by simply calling herself an enigma (Jones). Being enigmatic and obscure may be effective when using mimicry to problematize a persona or stereotype that one actually has a claim to, but when applied to the use of cultural images and symbols that are not one's own, this same sort of invoking of an enigmatic artist's license can only amount to a shirking of responsibility to consider how one is complicit in perpetuating the power dynamics embedded in racist stereotypes. Gaga is much more effective at subverting problematic

cultural norms when she doesn't attempt to divert or erase the privilege inherent to her own standpoint as a white, Western celebrity.

Responding to Rumours

Some of Gaga's more effective performances present an act of resistance to the ways that the media attempts to enforce norms of gendered beauty, sex, and sexuality. In 2009 when Lady Gaga was first becoming well-known, it was widely speculated that she might be a "hermaphrodite." She responded to these rumours by appearing on the cover of Q Magazine, gripping a bulge in her pants with gloves that were reminiscent of Edward Scissorhands. Then, in a radio interview where she was asked to address the rumours, she refused to act embarrassed or to validate the questions by giving the expected sort of answer; instead she turned the conversation to a discussion of why it is that society responds to a strong woman by theorizing that she must have male genitalia (Nova FM).

Figure 1.23: Lady Gaga on the cover of Q Magazine. John Wright, 2010.

Jen Hutton addresses Gaga's presentation of androgyny and shifting gender identity in her article "God and the 'Gaze': A Visual Reading of Lady Gaga." She repeats what has become the usual line:

> "Gaga's performances are not only camp but a type of genderfuck, a position that can be tied to the concept of the monster. By no means is it meant to be a pejorative comparison: it's just that her performance destabilizes what we perceive as "normal" and, more importantly, works against it, thus opening up a frank discussion about (sexual) transgression. Gaga is queer because she's anything but straight—which is to say that she is dissolving the sexual binary and maintaining a "slightly uncomfortable" space that is in direct opposition to heteronormative behaviour" (Hutton).

Gaga's simple troubling of heteronormative gender expression is certainly nothing new, nor is her positioning in the world of mainstream pop celebrity. We could say that by refusing to act embarrassed and rushing to quash the "hermaphrodite" rumours, she both denied the rumour any power over her gender presentation, and refused to participate in reinforcing the trans-phobic sex and gender binary. Instead, she expressed her delight

that, despite this rumour, thousands of fans still came out to see her every performance, because, as she explained to Huffington Post, "they don't care if I'm a man, a woman, a hermaphrodite, gay, straight, transgendered, or transsexual" (Lady Gaga). We could say that instead of reinforcing the power of the rumour to shape her sex and gender presentation, Gaga used the rumour as an opportunity to point out the sexism inherent in such an inquiry, as well as the absurdity of such an interest in, and anxiety over, the nature of someone else's genitalia; she also took the opportunity to poke fun at the potential castration anxieties of her critics.

Figure 1.24: Lady Gaga in "blob dress." 2012. inffr-01/INFphoto.com

Despite this rumour and her claims to certain kinds of masculinities, *Lady* Gaga also clearly occupies the role of the female celebrity, so, like everybody else in that category, she is subject to the inevitable media scrutiny over any fluctuations in her weight. After last year's breaking news that Gaga had put on a few pounds, the expected response from her (were she like other celebrities) might have been to make appearances wearing something slimming, or to cover up and hide while strictly dieting. Instead, Gaga

made an appearance wearing an outfit that was described on one website as a "blob dress that looked like what would happen if Patrick from *Spongebob SquarePants* fucked the Michelin Man" (Breslaw). By appearing this way, Gaga effectively posed the question of why it is that people should always be striving to look smaller rather than bigger. On another occasion, she posted a picture of herself in her underwear on her social media website LittleMonsters.com, in which she posed in side-by-side shots with front and profile views that evoked the feeling of a mug shot. She called this offering up of her body for scrutiny her "Body Revolution," which prompted hundreds of fans to post pictures of themselves on LittleMonsters.com mimicking her pose, also in their underwear, purportedly to show the world that they have nothing to hide and are accepting of their bodies, regardless of size and shape (Lady Gaga). We could say that rather than the expected response of a celebrity taking efforts to cover up or wear something slimming, Gaga put herself on display in a pose that seemed offer the gossip what it was looking for, while giving no apologies. This had the effect of silencing the critique because it had been addressed directly. Without the shame and fear to give the rumour power, it no longer had something to fight against or any secrets to uncover. (However, the efficacy of such a "revolution" may be questionable, given that the "little monsters" posting these images appeared to be mostly thin young white women posing in their underwear. We might also ask how it is somehow revolutionary for Lady Gaga do this, when she regularly makes appearances in outfits much more revealing than her underwear. Was it the pose, and the title? And do people really have to expose themselves to be empowered and freed from body shaming?)

Figure 1.25: Lady Gaga's "Body Revolution." Lady Gaga, 2012. LittleMonsters.com

Jo Calderone

Lady Gaga stirred up the question of her sex and gender again in 2011, when her drag alter ego Jo Calderone made his first appearance on the cover of *Vogue Hommes Japan*. Jo talked about his relationship with Gaga, prompting the internet to make connections and notice similarities and thus freak out and start comparing profile shots of Jo and Gaga, wondering incredulously if they could really be the same person. By not publicly admitting that she was in drag and allowing this hilarious mass confusion to ensue, Gaga presented a challenge to ideas of gender and fixed identity (Cavaluzzo). Then, at the 2011 MTV Video Music Awards, it was Jo, rather than Gaga, who performed the song "You and I," leaving many celebrities in the audience visibly bewildered. Prior to this performance, Lady Gaga had told MTV News that her inspiration for the upcoming performance was her interest in "all the different people we can become or have become in the past [...], our potential for the future and how [...] we, in our minds, [...] compartmentalize our different personalities" (Lady Gaga). We could say that by

acknowledging the possibility of a variety of personalities within one person, Gaga shows the creative and subversive possibilities of shifting identity and contradictions.

Figure 1.26: Lady Gaga as Jo Calderone on the cover of Vogue Hommes Japan. 2010.

The lyrics of "You and I," the song that Jo performed at the 2011 VMAs, confuse the narrator's voice, switching back and forth between the "You" and the "I," so that it is never quite clear who is narrating, and to whom. As such, it makes sense for either Jo or Gaga to perform "You and I"—as they do in the music video for the song— since the gender of the narrating "I" and the gender of the sung-to "you" are both irrelevant (McCaffray). Both Jo and Gaga can perform this song—they both do perform it, in every performance—because the fluid narrative voice renders the "You" and the "I" indistinguishable. Jo's performance wasn't just that of a woman simply toying with the signifiers of masculinity, while still performing femininity—it was a performance of hypermasculinity. Gaga explains, in her "Memorandum No. 4: Remodeling the Model" in V Magazine, that:

> "In a culture that attempts to quantify beauty with a visual paradigm and almost mathematical standard, how can we fuck with the malleable minds of onlookers and shift the world's perspective on what's beautiful? I asked myself this question. And the answer? Drag" (Lady Gaga).

Figure 1.27: Lady Gaga as Jo Calderone. Video Still from "Haus of U ft. Jo." Haus of Gaga. 2011

Her intention is to shift the beauty standard by performing gender in an unexpected way, thus challenging her audience to think about how beauty is gendered. Reactions of moral outrage could also give rise to questioning how morality is also tied up with beauty and gender (Eco 12). Thus, her performance is not just Lady Gaga playing at masculinity and taking on a more masculine name while remaining unambiguously feminine; rather, it seems to be a performance of masculinity as legitimate, convincing, and as over-the-top as any other gendered performance.

In his performance, Jo emphasizes his separateness from Lady Gaga by talking about her in relation to himself. He identifies himself as Gaga's former partner, and proceeds to talk about their relationship. Lady Gaga writes about this aspect of the performance in "Memorandum No. 4: Remodeling the Model":

"[...] in the fantasy of performance I imagined (or hoped) the world would weigh both individuals against one another as real people, not as one person playing two. Lady Gaga versus Jo Calderone, not Lady Gaga "as." That would be the intention of the process, to co-exist with an alternate version of myself — in the same universe" (Lady Gaga).

Figure 1.28: Lady Gaga as Jo Calderone. 2011 MTV Music Awards. Kevin Winter/Getty Images North America, 2011.

Figure 1.29: Lady Gaga as Jo Calderone. 2011 MTV Music Awards. Kevin Winter/Getty Images North America, 2011.

The level of apparent shock and confusion displayed on the faces of other celebrities in the audience, as well as the incredulous reaction of the internet to Jo's appearance on the cover of *Vogue Hommes Japan*, shows how challenging it may be for the world to consider Jo and Gaga either as two separate individuals or as the same person. Identity is fluid so it shifts and changes over time, and it only makes sense that one person would have multiple and contrasting personas, coexisting at the same time, in the same universe. Lady Gaga regularly insists upon this, endlessly contradicting herself, changing her appearance and character according to her current creative urges, all the while maintaining that she was "Born This Way." Jo Calderone, however, is somewhat different from Gaga's plethora of other manifestations, because she gave him a different name, and he asserts himself as an individual separate from Gaga and in relation to Gaga. When Gaga wears a lobster on her head, an explosion of tiny mirrors, or pointy bones protruding from her shoulders, she still identifies as Lady Gaga and interacts with the world as Lady Gaga. Jo, however, does not respond to the name "Lady Gaga." When asked "what are you able to convey as Jo that you couldn't as Gaga tonight?" Jo replied "I don't understand the question" (Lady Gaga). Jo and Gaga are only effectively performed as separate entities, yet people seem resistant to considering Jo as any more separate from Gaga than any of her other manifestations. By challenging this resistance, then, we might argue that Jo's performance of separateness demonstrates at once the stability and instability of identity, and the creative possibilities for performing new realities (McCaffray).

Blurring Truth and Fiction; Fluidity of Identity

At the same time, we might also argue that Jo's VMA performance troubles the distinction between reality and fiction, and challenges critics who accuse Lady Gaga of being overly artificial, as though her performativity were unlike what any other pop star does, or as though artificiality were directly opposed to honesty or realness. Gaga also addresses this notion in Memorandum No. 4, when she writes: "The line between fantasy and reality is blurred in my life [...] I refuse to draw a distinction between what's real and what is artifice." Likewise, she had previously explained her blurring of performance and reality to MTV News. She said, "My approach to music and performance is not just about what happens on the stage. My whole life is a performance, and it's about pushing the boundaries [...] and deciding where the stage begins and ends, not allowing anyone else [to tell] me when or how I can perform." While on stage at the 2011 VMA performance, Jo takes performance beyond the stage when he talks about his relationship with Lady Gaga. He confesses that part of the problem with his relationship with Gaga was that he wanted her honesty, while she was only capable of being real for the spotlight. He explains that the spotlight follows her everywhere she goes, even when she goes home, eliminating the possibility of some other Gaga, some more authentic, less performative Stefani Germanotta who lives behind the mask of Lady Gaga. In talking about her and revealing some of her secrets, as an angry and jealous ex might do, Jo has the opportunity to be critical of her actions in a way that would not read the same way if they had been delivered by Lady Gaga herself. Jo finishes his monologue before the song by quoting Gaga, who says "Jo, I'm not real—I'm theatre. And You, and I: this is just rehearsal" (Lady Gaga). So, anything outside of the spotlight is rehearsal, not the real

thing. In Jo's account, ironically, what is real and honest about Gaga is the creative urge for the performative, the expressive art-ifice with which she self-creates.

And this piece is indeed performative – it is saturated with masculinity, almost to the point of becoming a parody of hypermasculinity. But this is what is "real" for Jo, and Jo wants what is real and honest, it seems. He knows that with Gaga, nothing real can ever happen out of the spotlight—only in performance. So, he proceeds in his performance of hypermasculinity, exaggerating both the artifice and the "honesty," such as it is.

Perhaps this is why performance art is such a conducive medium for the project of dismantling social norms: by blurring truth and fiction through performance, the fluidity of identity appears to be translated from theory into "being." By performing new and fluctuating identities, genders and sexualities every day, Gaga performs all of these alternatives into "being" – it is not just artifice, playing make-believe – it becomes her everyday reality. In 2010 in *The Lesbian News,* John Esther asks Gaga "What is the biggest misconception people have about you?" and she replies, "they think Lady Gaga is a character... It's kind of like someone you've never met asking you if you are full of shit. I usually say, 'What you are really asking me, is whether or not I'm full of shit and no, I'm not. Are you?'" (Esther). Asking Gaga these sorts of questions seems to stem from a sort of searching for, or wanting to find cracks in the performance where we can see through into all of her secrets and private life. But Gaga reveals no cracks – she puts everything out there in performance, leaving no secrets to be uncovered (or, she keeps them hidden very well). Further complicating this, also in 2010, in an interview with *Rolling Stone*, Gaga says "When I wake up in the morning I feel just like any other

insecure twenty-four-year-old girl. Then I say, 'Bitch, you're Lady Gaga, you get up and walk the walk today'" (Straus 70). Here, she indicates that "Lady Gaga" is indeed a persona that she puts on in the morning; a character that she performs. But she also reveals that she is "just like any other insecure twenty-four-year-old girl." Perhaps, then, this means that "any other insecure twenty-four-year-old girl" can be a "Lady Gaga" of sorts; anyone can "go gaga" with the infinite possibilities of a creative and shifting identity, every day. In making this statement, Blair McDonald explains that

> "Gaga is making a claim about the creative fiction that she herself *is* and *lives by – that which she affirms daily on and off the stage* [...] She makes the everyday her playground for the fantastic; the way she undoes the belief that the great lie of art is a bad thing, and that the artificial is any less authentic or real because is it fabricated" (Blair) (emphasis in original).

If art can be a lie that tells the truth, and Gaga is art, then Gaga is both entirely true and entirely fiction at the same time (Blair). This echoes Gaga's statement in "I'm a Lie," the short poem that she recited before singing "Pokerface" in her Fame Ball tour. In it, she says "Some say that Lady Gaga is a lie - and they are right. I am a lie and everyday I kill to make it true" (Lady Gaga). McDonald cites Charles Baudelaire in *The Painter of Modern Life* when he says, "we live in and through our artifices. *We make them as much as they come to make us who we are*" (Baudelaire in MacDonald) (emphasis in original). Perhaps there are some similarities between Lady Gaga's lavish lifestyle of excessive artifice and unrelenting commitment to performance, and Baudelaire's extravagance and unfaltering commitment to his art. As Baudelaire lived a decadent life of unwavering dedication to his poetry even through illness and madness, so too Gaga seems to lead a life of feverish commitment to her creative pop project, even to the detriment of her health (Jones, P. Mansell. 7, 12). As Baudelaire wrote that one creates art and artifice at

the same time as that art/ifice constitutes the self, so too this seems to be the case with Gaga. Since she is an excessively art/ificial and fabricated performance, it is this art/ificial performance that defines who she is. Perhaps the truth of self that is revealed, here, then, is something about the inherent creativity and urgency of expression that comes with being human (or non-human, as the case may be).

In an interview with *Bazaar*, Gaga discusses her pointy shoulder, forehead, and cheek bones from her "Born This Way" performances, which appear to be inspired by French performance and body-modification artist Orlan (though Gaga doesn't offer her any credit) ("Body Artist Orlan Sues Lady Gaga"). When asked about these prosthetic "bones," Gaga says "they're not prosthetics. They're my bones... they've always been inside me, but I have been waiting for the right time to reveal to the universe who I truly am" (Lady Gaga). In claiming such realness to an ever-changing creative depiction of self, as Eddie McCaffray explains, Gaga points to the fact that "the true self is a kind of creative, transformative principle. [...] Essence is self-overcoming. Continual transformation, despite and even for the sake of fear and danger, is what the self ideally is" (McCaffray). But in Gaga's fantasy of self-creation, the only limit is the imagination, while in actuality, time is linear, human bodies age and get injured, and not everything can be reversed.

Indeed, it is true that the self is not static – to be alive is to be endlessly changing. McCaffray would argue that Gaga's willingness to contradict herself and so radically change herself daily is a sort of ecstatic rebellion against the categories and labels that we use to define people. In shedding labels and transgressing categories, in a perpetual process of "becoming," she rejects and tries chaotically to disrupt established ways of

knowing and structuring identity. She may use her abundance of economic resources and the time and energy that this can afford her to briefly convince herself and her audiences that she is beyond the regular human restrictions of time, strength, and energy. In so using these resources, she may be somewhat successful at rejecting and shedding labels. But ultimately, she cannot shed the limits of living as a human body. So there is an endpoint to this incessant creating – although she does often accomplish surprising feats of theatrics due to the extensive amount of resources at her disposal, Lady Gaga is still governed by physical and social limits, as all humans are. It turns out, as she discovers when she injures her hip in 2013 and is forced to stop performing, that her self-created fantasy life, unhinged from reality, isn't entirely livable.

Figure 1.30: Lady Gaga with pointy shoulders and cheekbones. Splash 2011. <http://www.dailymail.co.uk>.

White Saviour Complex

Though Gaga can't escape being a physically embodied being, she does make efforts at altering her shape. Part of the message contained in Gaga's pointy bones on her

shoulders and face seems to be one of inclusion – no matter how freakish or different, we're all "born this way," and all "on the right track, baby" – even though neither Lady Gaga nor Orlan was born with horns on their faces, they were born with creative potential (Lady Gaga). But instead, the lyrics of "Born This Way," in an attempt at a queer and inclusive anthem for all "little monsters" to celebrate, managed to alienate people with its poor choice of words. In the song, Gaga uses the terms "chola" and "Orient" in an attempt at a rhyming and inclusive list of racial identities. "No matter Black white or beige/ Chola or Orient-made/ I'm on the right track baby/ I was born to be brave" (Lady Gaga). However, these terms both have a loaded history of power. Tumblr user Aria "daughterofmulan" explains that Gaga's use of these words "reflects a level of indifference to the history of the oppression of people of color and ignorance of her own white privilege" (Aria). Rather than being an inclusive list, then, this choice of lyrics ends up alienating and excluding. Likewise, in the video for the song "Judas," Gaga appears to appropriate Latino gang culture through her costumes and dance moves, which resonates especially poorly right after having used the term "Chola" in "Born This Way" (Grey).

"Born This Way" attempts to create an inclusive community of "little monsters" who celebrate their experiences and identities as outcasts, misfits, freaks, or "monsters." While on one hand, embracing all of these othered identities in a big celebration of weird difference can be empowering and validating for some, for others it may only serve to reinforce the stereotypes of weirdness or otherness that keep them on the margins of society. Carmen Rios is an author on Autostraddle who writes about this. She explains, "I didn't want to fly my freak flag. I didn't want to make everyone else on Earth weird. I just wanted to talk to my mom about my girlfriend" (Rios). While it may often be effective to

celebrate the weird and freakish precisely for the ways that they do not adhere to norms, there are yet many other ways in which marginalized identities are indeed quite mundane, "normal," and not all that freakish at all. Living as a "freak" – that is, a misfit, outsider, or outcast – may often be quite unlivable. Thus, trying to force all marginalized identities into a celebration of their supposed freakishness is, for some, yet another form of oppression - being labeled a freak, forced into a category with which they do not identify. Rather than pit the outlandishly freakish against the understated "normal" and say that one is more effective at challenging norms, a combination of these would allow everyone to identify as they choose, and revel and celebrate in both the strange and outlandish, and the less outrageous, quieter and more understated aspects of their identity.

Another aspect of Gaga's attempts at inclusivity and philanthropy is her formation of the Born This Way Foundation, as well as her involvement with UNICEF. Gaga has appeared in photos visiting a "child friendly" school in Peru, talking about a vague mission to improve school cultures and empower youth worldwide (Cure). The images from these appearances depict Gaga, a Western, white, long blond(pink)-haired woman smiling benevolently down upon laughing brown children and adults, in what resonates strongly with the racist ideal of Western white women as empowered saviors for "oppressed" people of colour in the third world (Cole). These images of Gaga reflect similar images of other white women celebrities visiting developing countries purportedly for the purposes of humanitarian aid (Meldrum). Princess Diana visited child victims of landmines in Angola in 1997, Angelina Jolie visited a school for girls in 2012, and Madonna has visited Malawi multiple times for the purposes of humanitarian aid and to adopt her son. The benevolent intentions of famous white people who try to use their

celebrity platform to “help” people in the developing world are indicative of a trend amongst white westerners that has been called the white saviour complex (Carr). These celebrities usually end up speaking for and over those who they claim to be trying to bring into the international spotlight. Rather than doing anything to change the global power dynamics of racism and capitalism that lead to war and poverty, white celebrities posing with Black children only amount to a positioning of the racialized other as a prop, further erasing their agency. In the images below the white celebrities all wear white or light colours, which, in addition to the composition of the images, makes the white woman the focal point of the image. They all appear to have their gaze directed, adding to their elevated positioning. In one image, Gaga’s billowing pink-blond hair obscures the view of a smiling woman in the background, making it even clearer that these brown faces are not meant to be the subjects of the image. Internet news on Gaga’s appearance in Peru all seems to be positive, revealing nothing about how the community received her visit, aside from what can be assumed from the smiling faces of children in the images selected for dissemination. If there are any less-than-glowing commentaries on Gaga’s drop-ins, they have not made it to the more visible or accessible corners of the internet.

Figure 1.31: Lady Gaga in Peru, 2012. LittleMonsters.com

Figure 1.32: Lady Gaga in Peru, 2012. CapitalFM.com.

Figure 1.33: Princess Diana with child victims of landmines in Angola, 1997. Jose Manuel Ribeiro/Reuters.

Figure 1.34: Angelina Jolie with school girls in Afghanistan. Tanner, 2012. UNHCR/J.

Figure 1.35: Madonna with children in Malawi, 2013. Nathan Rissman/Reuters.

While further essentializing race in her attempts at humanitarian work in developing countries, Lady Gaga also manages to objectify people of colour at home in her performances. She surrounds herself with many Black male backup dancers, whose positioning is often such that their "naked strength" is used to assist the petite blonde white female celebrity. At other times, their wild dance moves appear to bring excitement to an otherwise bland, white scene. They carry Lady Gaga, hold her, assist her movements in her sometimes mobility-restricting or vision-reducing outfits, catch her discarded costume items and props and bring her new ones. Though they dance exuberantly and clearly possess incredible skill, their movements are always arranged in such a way as to redirect the viewer's attention back toward Gaga. By mirroring her movements, they amplify Gaga's dance moves beyond what she could do herself. Though it is often the others on stage who perform the most grandiose dance moves, this gesturing towards Gaga serves to amplify her presence and power, rather than their own. The consequences of this racial positioning are the reinforcement of systemic racism that has places Black bodies in servitude of white bodies. It assumes a colonial gaze and

maintains the invisibility of oppressive systems that attempt to arrange contributions of racialized people in order to bolster white power.

Figure 1.36: Lady Gaga during Born This Way Ball tour. Dmitry Fefelov/LittleMonsters.com, 2013.

Holy Fool

Many of Gaga's performances achieve a level of absurdity that seems to defy any sort of coherent interpretation. Perhaps, though, there is some usefulness in the absence of meaning, and in the open-ended possibilities that this presents. Gaga's music video for "Edge of Glory" is almost absurd in its lack of Gaga's signature absurdity – there are no costume changes, no backup dancers, no choreographed dance moves, and no narrative storyline. The video features Lady Gaga alone, spontaneously dancing and swinging in a window, on a fire escape, and on the facade of a vacant steamy purple nighttime New York streetscape. In an article titled "Refusing to Atone for Atonality: Gaga's Rupture of Affective Mirroring," Amanda Montei uses the lack of narrative in this video to explore a sense of the meaninglessness of life and the accompanying "unfeltness," and feelings of

"stuckness" that result from such a disconnect. Montei argues that being "left only with questions [...] points radically toward a vacuous space of unfeltness. [...] Gaga takes pleasure in this space, and [...] actually transforms the feeling of stuckness [...] into a fuck-you moment of proudly debauched and decorated joy in resisting absolutist tonality. In turn, we *feel* this" (Montei) (sic, emphasis in original). In other words, in Gaga's garish excess of imagery, what resonates is not some sort of coherent meaning, but rather, a feeling of the "vacuous unfeltness" in the space where we feel that we *should* be gleaning some sort of meaningful message. Perhaps this vacuous space *is* the feeling, the only meaning, that we can understand or identify with. On the other hand, perhaps all of this theorizing, spinning in circles, and performing feats of intellectual acrobatics are merely a way of finding something to feel in the centre of that "vacuous unfeltness" that results from the excesses of late-capitalism. Or, perhaps this missing message is Gaga's failure, and what points to our own failure as Gaga-theorists trying to take too seriously something so underdeveloped and lowbrow (Vicks). Or, yet another possibility is that the failure of the missing message is itself the message – collaging the torn-up pieces of culture into a mix that doesn't read straight, or that might read queerly as a rejection of established structures of legibility, and might just be a joke on all of us when we think we're full of great meaning, or finding meaningfulness in her work.

Figure 1.37: Lady Gaga crying after Monster Ball tour performance. Terry Richardson, 2011.

Kate Durbin and Meghan Vicks are co-creators and editors of Gaga Stigmata, an online journal dedicated to a "critical-creativ[e] participat[ion] in the cultural project of shock pop phenomenon Lady Gaga" (Durbin and Vicks). On its Blogger website, Gaga Stigmata publishes articles and essays, poems and art "about any current pop-cultural phenomenon that disturbs boundaries and shifts culture in new and visionary ways" and "strongly encourage[s] analytical pieces that take a performative or creative approach to scholarship" (Durbin and Vicks). Gaga Stigmata receives a lot of submissions, but also a lot of negative feedback from those who think that this is all just reading too much into a simple, vapid, pop star. Perhaps this criticism is not untrue – perhaps Gaga theorists are, like Gaga, just "holy fools." Meghan Vicks addresses this problem in an article about Lady Gaga's song "Judas."

In "Judas," Gaga sings the lyrics "I'm just a holy fool," which places her again in the role of the jester as she performs a blending of sacred and profane. But this blending of sacred and profane, this absurd fool-ishness, offends some people and appears to discredit Gaga, as well as her fans, her theorists and semioticians. It threatens to expose

all of her failures– and all of ours. In her article "Holy Fool • Holy Scheiße," Meghan Vicks also threatens to expose our critical failures:

> "Stones are thrown from both sides of the line: by those who think we're reading 'too much' into Lady Gaga, who think we should just enjoy her project for what it is (meaningless but fun! pop music, they say); and by those who think we're misappropriating theory, sullying the sacred thought by applying it to Lady Gaga's hairbow or her video for 'Born This Way.' These are the ones who advise us to use our talents for something that 'matters,' or who tell us how disappointed they are that all this energy is being spent on a figure like Lady Gaga. How many times have we been offered the philosopher's straightjacket? We're writing our way to Bedlam, sullying with glitter the Ivory Tower, or spoiling the lighthearted pop party with our persnickety analyses that unearth much more in 'Just Dance' than a simple party song" (Vicks).

Perhaps we are failures then, and all of this academic Gaga-theory is an ecstatic, glittery, garish, and fire-shooting example of Halberstam's "queer art of failure." Feminist and gender theorists might initially dismiss Gaga as another irrelevant pop star with nothing to say about feminism: just because Gaga is a "free bitch" who can do whatever she pleases and "make millions singing pop music and trotting her bare ass all over creation" doesn't mean that doing so is necessarily a feminist or liberatory statement (Vicks). Art historians and critics might consider attention-grabbing antics that accompany catchy pop tunes for dance parties to be lowbrow pop culture, low art, not worthy of consideration in the context of visual art. But this should be no deterrent for Gaga-Stigmataists or practitioners of the queer art of failure. On the contrary, Halberstam's concept of "low theory" demonstrates just how important this project might be. "Low theory," a term that Halberstam adopts from Stuart Hall and uses in "Queer Art of Failure, "makes its peace with the possibility that alternatives dwell in the murky waters of a counterintuitive, often impossibly dark and negative realm of critique and refusal" (Vicks). Low theory aims to dwell in this counterintuitive space and "think about ways of being and knowing that

stand outside of conventional understandings of success" (Vicks). Likewise, it would seem that Lady Gaga's art project and academic research on Gaga both resist conventional understandings of success by failing to keep the sacred and the profane separated. The low theory of "both Lady Gaga and Gaga Stigmata make us uncomfortable precisely because they dare our epistemologies to uphold themselves," Vicks claims. She continues: "they threaten our precious borders, forcing us to encounter the *abject* – that impossible and unthinkable ambiguity that resides on the outside, in 'the place where meaning collapses'" (Vicks) (emphasis in original). Perhaps, then, this collapsed meaning, or sometimes missing message, this failure at ever making perfect sense, is itself the point of Gaga's project.

In "GAGAPOLYPSE: Criticism," Devin O'Neill explores the almost religious significance that Gaga holds for him, and explains this from the position of his own subjective experience. In Gaga's commercial for Google Chrome, "little monsters" are shown connecting with Gaga and each other across the globe through their own singing and dancing in videos set against the backdrops of everyday life. These videos are transmitted through the mundane interface of computer screens (and of course, Google Chrome), and form the connections of a pulsing community that dances together on the "Edge of Glory," which plays in the background. O'Neill explains his reaction of being moved to tears at the amount of humanity shown in the commercial. He explains that Gaga is tied up in capitalism just like the rest of us—we're all buying and selling ourselves, and Gaga manages to inject some extra bit of humanity or realness in there (O'Neill). Does it matter that it's still, essentially, a capitalist grab at your wallet? Perhaps it does, but perhaps it also does not – this is one of capitalism's tricks. Perhaps experience

matters over meaning; perhaps experience creates meaning. Perhaps Gaga shows that performance art can offer us different types of experience through physically interacting with and becoming our art, and a unique way to address and create our own truths. Perhaps, then, success and failure become meaningless terms. In an online comment on O'Neill's article, commenter Chris Hershey-Van Horn says:

> "What are we left with? Where will all of this discourse lead us? All I can say is that there's something to be said for looking deeply into all of the glitter, the latex, the prosthetics. The mechanisms of her profundity. At least, I certainly want there to be something there. I think I hope that I'll have found that after all my efforts, bits of that glitter/prosthetic/whatever will have stuck onto me. And maybe, just maybe, a bit of that significance as well" (Hershey-Van Horn).

This points to some sort of hope, or hope for hope, for a sticking power of Gaga's value that might be found in her use of the mundane and profane as materials for creating images of sacred significance (and vice versa). This blurring of sacred and profane, this insistence upon finding grandeur in the ordinary and banal, is directly related to the collapse of the distinction between success and failure. Finding great meaning in the banal or making absurd perversions of highly esteemed structures is another method of pastiche, collage, remixing. Gaga fails to maintain tidy borders, and as we've shown, this is where much of her appeal lies.

Indeed, despite her limits, Gaga is a sometimes-powerful catalyst from an unexpected place. Sometimes she makes specific, clear statements in her performances, but more importantly, as Blair McDonald explains, her *becoming* her art shows a commitment to her own creative powers, which she tries to use to remind her fans that they too possess such creative powers (McDonald). Gaga regularly reminds her fans that she is no different from them; that "we're all born superstars" (Lady Gaga). The point, it seems, is not that anyone can become a superstar of such celebrity as Lady Gaga, but

rather, that everyone can value their grand creative visions, no matter how strange or small they may seem.

In the music video for "Edge of Glory," Gaga dances flailingly by herself on a fire escape in a city-facade to somewhat cheesy, cliche lyrics that might, at first listen, make the audience laugh uncomfortably, or want to look away, embarrassed for her. But, is this all that different from everything else she does?

> "Cheesiness is meant to make you look away
>
> so were alien prosthetics meant to
> as were giant shoulderpads
> and meat dresses" (Klaver).

Becca Klaver writes, in a poem-essay titled "Pop Time," about how this particular cheesiness becomes moving and meaningful. In the song, Gaga sang (lip-synched) about being "on the edge of something final we call life," accompanied in the video by only one person – saxophonist Clarence Clemons, who died of a stroke just two days after the video's release (Lady Gaga). No one could have predicted this, yet it serves to underscore the poignance of Gaga's trite message about the potential glory in the present moment created by the unknown of an unstable future. Becca Klaver writes that "cheesy becomes poignant just like that" (Klaver).

As Robin James argues, although we may initially laugh at the song's cheesiness, it also seems to laughs with us, through the excessive theatrics of the smoke and lights that compose Gaga's cityscape (James). By reveling in this exaggerated cheesiness, Gaga urges us to come along, laugh with her at our own schlocky cheesiness, and revel in the "glory" of the banal while dancing ecstatically poorly with her. This is a dance that we all

can do in the midst of our ordinary little lives, if we're brave enough to laugh at ourselves.

As excessive as her gesturing is in the "Edge of Glory" video, it is nevertheless considerably less choreographed than we have come to expect from Gaga. The unimpressive dance moves and absence of her usual storyline and multiple costume-changes paired with lyrics about being "on the edge of glory" may initially fail to impress. Those of us who are accustomed to a plethora of visual symbolism to unpack in every Gaga video initially come up empty handed from this one. Danielle Pafunda grapples with this, and then explains:

> "This is the kind of dancing one does by herself in front of the mirror [...] with the imaginary body of your hopeless crush. This is the dance you do when no one's home and you hold the doorframe and thrust your torso through it like into your lover's arms. This is the kind of dance you do that feels so big in your body, but would look small, ridiculous, would shame you if anyone caught it on film. [...] The edge of glory is in fact not an edge at all. You're just a little person having a big feeling" (Pafunda).

Figure 1.38: Lady Gaga with mannequin head. Terry Richardson 2011.

By doing this private sort of fantasy dancing, Gaga positions the viewer, her fans, as the imaginary "you," the fantasy other, to whom she sings, and with whom she dances. She

fantasizes her fans dancing with her, just as her fans have undoubtedly fantasized her. She makes this uncoordinated dancing worthy of a music video, worthy of glory – anyone can dance this way, anyone could be Gaga, could be this glorious – and framed by this video, her fans are *are* this glorious because they, too, are doing this dance. Rather than a fan-made video of fans dancing like Gaga, dancing with fantasy-Gaga, this is a Gaga-made video of Gaga dancing like fans, dancing with fantasy-fans. Perhaps this plane of fantasy and imagination is where Gaga and her fans converge on the most authentic level. As Danielle Pafunda writes, "she fantasizes the poet just as the poet fantasized her, and these fantasies converge, actual coitus" (Pafunda). Perhaps the plane of phantasm is the most real performance – more real than fantasy performed *into* reality, the performance of fantasy *is* reality.

Figure 1.39: Lady Gaga crowd-surfing at Lollapalooza, 2010. Bollywood Sargam. <http://www.bollywoodsargam.com/talkingphoto.php?poster=7272234687>.

And, as the lyrics suggest, this fantasy might be all that we have: "I'm on the edge of something final we call life tonight" (Lady Gaga). Derritt Mason explores such a relationship to the present moment and the possibility of no future in his article "Take Gaga Out Tonight (One Song on the Edge of Glory)." Mason draws on Halberstam's *In a*

Queer Time and Place to explain the "sense of a 'constantly diminishing future' that 'creates new emphasis on the here, the present, the now, and while the threat of no future hovers overhead like a storm cloud, the urgency of being also expands the potential of the moment and [...] squeezes new possibilities out of the time at hand'" (Mason). While Gaga does enact an ecstatic dance of wild abandon that conveys a sort of squeezing all the glorious potential out of the present moment, she also indicates the possibility of a future when she sings that she is merely at "the edge," of glory, implying that the actual glory, whatever it may be, is yet to fully arrive. Mason explores Gaga's potential enactment of Halberstam's "queer time and place" and José Esteban Muñoz's theory of "queer utopian thinking" as a feeling of some sort of future potential that is vital, and also precarious. Mason cites Muñoz's *Cruising Utopia: The Then and There of Queer Futurity* to say that "[f]or Muñoz, (and Gaga, it would seem), 'the present is not enough,' and it is only by maintaining a 'relation to alternative temporal and spatial maps' that we can begin to disrupt linear, straight time and imagine a queer future" (Mason). Indeed, Muñoz wrote in his Introduction to *Cruising Utopias:*

> "Queerness is not yet here. Queerness is an ideality [...] that can be distilled from the past and used to imagine a future. [...] Queerness is a structuring and educated mode of desiring that allows us to see and feel beyond the quagmire of the present. [...] We must strive, in the face of the here and now's totalizing rendering of reality, to think and feel a *then and there*. Some will say that all we have are the pleasures of this moment, but we must never settle for that minimal transport; we must dream and enact new and better pleasures, other ways of being in the world, and ultimately new worlds. Queerness is a longing that propels us onward, beyond romances of the negative and toiling in the present. Queerness is that thing that lets us feel that this world is not enough, that indeed something is missing. Often we can glimpse the worlds proposed and promised by queerness in the realm of the aesthetic. The aesthetic, especially the queer aesthetic, frequently contains blueprints and schemata of a forward-dawning futurity" (Muñoz).

Gaga's lyrics referencing an "edge of glory" do seem to point toward a queer "then and there," a future that is not-yet, but near enough to be imagined. The lyrics don't describe what this future "glory" might look like, instead focusing on the present "edge" as a place wherein one must live fully and with wild abandon, dancing as she does "in the flames" (Lady Gaga). For Muñoz, it is queerness, or the potential for undoing restrictive modes of identification, that points toward shaping this utopic queer future (Muñoz). For Gaga, it seems much less complex – she seems to want to create a future in which absolutely anything she can imagine is possible, without wanting to use a foundation built upon the past and present realities of society and geography. So, perhaps what Gaga is doing is a partial move toward imagining the queer futurity that Muñoz writes about, though she ultimately fails at this because her blueprints for the future fail to be rooted in the experiences of the past and present. So, then, Gaga's un-choreographed flaily dancing and embrace of the banality of cliché words seem to be a sort of call to translate the precariousness of the future into a whole-hearted embrace of both the glory and the banality of the present moment. Maybe the "edge" that is the present moment depends upon the "glory" of a queer future that we might need to dance towards, just as exuberantly as Gaga does.

Humans and Cyborgs

Fittingly perhaps, time crashed into Gaga. Lady Gaga made a sudden disappearance from the spotlight in February 2013 after she (really!) injured her hip from over-performing. She was forced to cancel the rest of her Born This Way Ball tour, and disappeared from the social media scene for a forced time of rest and healing. She

couldn't perform, couldn't occupy the spotlight, and, so it seemed, she couldn't *be* Gaga during this time. But why should an injury, a temporary disability of sorts, prevent her from *being* Gaga? Gaga is, after all, (somewhat) human, and has always preached the message of self-acceptance, bravery, follow-your-dreams, and you-can-do-anything. So, wouldn't Gaga still be able to gaga, only slightly differently than before? And why should difference be such an issue for someone who morphs and transforms into new creatures, new manifestations of herself, every day (multiple times per day)? Is it because she has fashioned herself in such ways so as to seem unhuman, beyond-human, and thus not susceptible to injuries of the flesh like the rest of us mere mortals? Though she has been fashioned in this way, she also regularly preaches her lack of difference from all of her "little monsters" – any one of us could be her; "we're all born superstars;" all of us mere mortals can "go gaga," so to speak (Halberstam 2012). We are all just flesh, and flesh changes over time. Peter Kline addresses some of these questions that arise surrounding his feelings about the cancelled Born This Way Ball tour, in his article "Things Fall Apart." "Is this not the lesson that Gaga has been teaching us all along? That identity is not stable but exists in a continual moment of birth, death, and re-birth? That pain, loss, tears, and blood are the stuff of life?" (Kline). So why, if life in flesh is change, and identity is fluid, does one bit of flesh in Gaga's right hip coming undone have to mean the coming-undone of the entire Born This Way Ball?

The whole Born This Way Ball came undone when Gaga's hip did because she could no longer perform the version of utopia that she had imagined, since it was unhinged from life, and from the physical limits that are a part of being human. The world of the Born This Way Ball depended upon Gaga being able to dance, leap about,

and strut, and perform infinite possibilities of her imagination that were not at all connected to possibilities of accidents and aging, from external pressures and one's own will.

We all lose abilities, and gain others. Gaga was recovering from surgery in a wheelchair, and apparently quite upset about her changed abilities, and angry with herself and her flesh for failing her, for failing her fans. But what if this wasn't a failure? Gaga must be allowed to be tired and worn out, if she is indeed, as she sometimes claims, at least somewhat human like the rest of us. And in her case, this was a temporary disability caused by an injury that appears to have been able to heal. How does this temporality affect her experience of her abilities, her understanding of herself as merely human, and her fans' understandings of this? Unlike in the music video for "Paparazzi," this temporary "disability" of sorts was not just for performance. She was injured; not disabled, and instead of being a theatrical demise caused by fame and domestic violence like in her music video narrative, it was perhaps only an imagined demise—or what she had previously failed to imagine that then actually happened—caused by ignoring the limits of being a fleshy embodied creature. In "Paparazzi," Gaga's injuries are a temporary state of brokenness caused by someone else, and she must struggle to overcome this and heal in order to be whole and empowered again, though she does this with a sort of grim determination to "get even" (Hamilton). But this is a lie about the power of will; real disability isn't temporary or necessarily "curable." In the case of her "real" injury, she appears much less impenetrable than she did in the polished chrome bodysuit/body-cast/armour in "Paparazzi"; she seems to feel more broken, vulnerable,

more human. Why should this mean that, during her period of recovery, she could not *be* Gaga? How dependent is Gaga's image upon her able-bodied-ness? Kline asks:

> "What if Lady Gaga were never to walk again, or dance again, or get on stage again and throw her body around wildly and passionately? What would that mean? [...] Would we still love her with such extreme devotion if she became permanently disabled? [...] Would her extraordinary ability to create and inhabit digital worlds be enough? Or do we need her body, her flesh, her ligaments and tendons and hip sockets?" (Kline).

Figure 1.40: Lady Gaga in wheelchair after hip surgery, 2013. JustJared.com

With these questions, Kline contrasts Gaga's presence in the flesh with her digital presence online, the form that is her most insidious incarnation, and the location of the vast majority of her relationship with fans. Kline's questions may seem overly melodramatic, since Lady Gaga did not die, nor cease to exist in the flesh at all. However, the reaction to Gaga's injury from both Gaga and from her fans can be gauged from the amount of devotion invested in Lady Gaga by both Gaga and her fans, and from the suddenness and unexpected change to the way things had been working. The incident was

difficult for Gaga and for her fans because it served as a reminder of Gaga's fallibility and mortality, as well as her fans. Regardless, getting lost in this sort of melodramatic questioning might prevent us from being able to recognize the experiences of those whose differently-abled statuses are not so temporary. Apart from the hype surrounding Gaga's injury, it is indeed quite possible to exist in physical, fleshy form with different abilities and limited mobility. It seems that it is indeed quite possible to dance, move about, and even do tricks with or without the aide of prosthetics that able-bodied humans can't do. Gaga has been creative about incorporating "not-prosthetics" into her bodily being before, so it might seem odd that, once faced with the necessity of doing so for purposes of utility, she displayed such resistance and sadness. Perhaps prosthetics and body modification are more exciting when they're freely chosen on a creative whim, rather than forced out of necessity. Perhaps Gaga was just sad, and scared. Perhaps her failure to embrace her temporarily altered state of physical ability is just another indication that she, too, is human. And even though this was only a temporary injury and she was able to heal, all such injuries have a lasting effect. She may have healed, and may be performing again, dancing and flailing around with apparently just as much vigour as before, but, as with all healing, the previously injured part is never quite the same. Though she has healed from this injury and made her comeback, seeming to have put the incident entirely behind her, it can never be fully behind or reversed because mortal human bodies are not endlessly malleable. As with any physical object, her joints experience wear and tear and cannot exist and perform endlessly.

Figure 1.41: Video Still from "Paparazzi." Haus of Gaga, 2009.

Failure

Throughout the six months of Gaga's injury, surgery, and recovery, her fans were desperate for any word from her, or any photo of an appearance in her fancy designer gold-plated wheelchair. The very few tweets from Gaga during this period expressed her anguish at being unable to perform or to please her fans, disappointment at her own human fallibility, and a stubborn refusal to accept her own physical limitations.

Gaga finally made her return in August of 2013 with the release of "Applause," the first single from her forthcoming album ARTPOP. This song came out when her fans were desperate for anything from her, having been deprived for so long, and its lyrics express her own desperation for her fans and their applause—her hunger for the spotlight. Perhaps this is a demonstration of her failure to *exist* without the spotlight; without her fans and their appreciation. In *The Queer Art of Failure*, J. Jack Halberstam writes about embracing failure as an alternative to the endless struggle for "success," because the grand narrative of "success" is so often ill-fitting with queer identities. Halberstam suggests that, since queers have such a long history of failing to adhere to established

social norms, failure might actually be more of a style, or perhaps a method for breaking free from heteronormativity, and exposing the cracks in a structure that fails to encompass and include queer identities (Halberstam 2011, 3). However, failure can be definitive, and in this sense it is not just a "style" that can be easily put on or taken off. Halberstam seems to be using the word "style" to mean a pattern that emerges from this failure, which can be used as a tool for challenging heteronormativity.

Roland Betancourt addresses Gaga's engagement with the queer art of failure in *Applause* in his article "CODA: Lady Gaga is Over." Prior to the release of *Applause*, the Haus of Gaga—Lady Gaga's creative team—released a brief video containing a snippet of the music from *Applause* and a visual of a sort of plastic-encased Gaga sneering as she pulls some kind of rubbery of straps from her head that, in a somehow cringe-inducing image, appear to stretch elastically from her temples. Concurrently, these words trail across the screen:

> "- If you don't like pop music, you should turn this off.
> - Lady Gaga is no longer relevant.
> - Ever since Born This Way, she's a flop.
> - DO NOT buy her new single 'Applause' on iTunes.
> - Give her no A-P-P-L-A-U-S-E.
> - DON'T dance to the song at all.
> - DO NOT buy *ARTPOP* on November 11.
> - She's over." (Haus of Gaga)

Figure 1.42: Video Still from "Lady Gaga is Over." Haus of Gaga 2013.

Betancourt points at this "play with concepts of failure and faltering" and argues that "it is in this lust for failure that Gaga truly has the potential to excel." (Betancourt) Cleverly, by planting the seeds of criticism against her before *ARTPOP* can even begin, she partly resists being harmed or controlled by criticisms of her failures. More importantly, Betancourt argues that this is an instance of Gaga embracing failure as a queer tactic for resisting the ideals of "seriousness and rigor" (Betancourt). Gaga invites criticism, and indicates that she might even intend to fail – and then when she does, she has permitted herself to revel in her success at failure.

"Applause" is a catchy song and Gaga's fans seem to love it, so for those reasons, perhaps it is indeed successful. But for myself, such catchy, pop-y songs are earworms that quickly become annoying, perhaps because I fail to be able to maintain the energy to keep up with such a peppy tune endlessly skipping through my head. (So perhaps the failure is mine; not Gaga's?) But, Lady Gaga is thrilled to finally offer up this song, speaking of it as though it were a precious treasure, borne from deep within her being, offered raw and eager to her beloveds—her fans. And "Applause" was released earlier than intended because it was leaked – she failed at maintaining the planned release date,

and then, as a result, failed at being prepared with outfits for an earlier-than-planned single release (Lady Gaga). Perhaps this is a demonstration of a failure to wait and be patient, on behalf of both Lady Gaga and her fans. Or perhaps she intentionally allowed this to happen to demonstrate her failure at following "pop star rules," and to invite her fans to demonstrate their levels of devotion. A leaked song shows how much her fans and critics desire her, with an urgency to rip her apart and devour and critique, *right now*. And this happens because she needs it – she needs the spotlight, applause, and the fame to *be* Lady Gaga. In the first verse, she sings "If only fame had an I.V., baby could I bear, being away from you, I found the vein put it in here" (Lady Gaga). But, fame doesn't have an I.V., and she has failed at being away from her fans, just as her fans have failed at being away from her.

Gaga makes her appearance at the single release, in the cover photo for the single, and other performances with bright blue, red, and yellow primary colours smeared all over her face. Her face blurs into a primary palette, and her eyes and lips contort as the colours move away from their respective facial features – she has come undone. She fails at keeping herself together – the strain of being away from her fans has begun to dissolve her face, or perhaps even her identity. The primary colour palette contains the potential for mixing absolutely any colour; so, on Gaga's face, her fans are offered the raw materials necessary to create any image of her that they please. (Betancourt) And this is exactly what she intends, having previously explained in her Manifesto of Little Monsters that she is "something of a devoted jester" to her fans; more of a muse than an artist. (Lady Gaga).

Figure 1.43: Lady Gaga's makeup for "Applause" release, 2013. <http://www.newnownext.com/while-you-were-sleeping-lady-gaga-steps-out-in-applause-makeup-jennifer-aniston-avoids-angelina-jolie-and-more/08/2013/>.

This song may not be golden, but Gaga is clear that she loves it, and clear about what it is for. It is not a depressing ballad; rather, it is for dancing to and not judging and connecting with others while dancing and singing, carried on the same rhythm. Maybe it is for getting your makeup messed up to, or for just feeling messed up.

But how does one even dance to this mess of sounds? Whatever way feels right, perhaps. Or perhaps one could dance the way her body spasms and jolts in the video – maybe that's the only thing that can be done with this sort of music. You may as well embrace it once it's planted itself in your head, since it isn't going away any time soon. Vibrate with the frenetic beat, and *put your hands up make 'em touch make it real loud* (that is, if you have hands, and the physical mobility to be able to raise them up). We have failed at everything else—at making sense of all this; at being rigorous scholars, at maintaining the boundaries of a supposedly legible life, and most of all, at keeping time, and injury, at bay.

But the main failure to point out here is that, despite all attempts at dismantling social norms and embodying creative visions for a self-created life, no version of queer utopia can be anything but uneducated hope if it is not grounded in wisdom from the past and present. This is why, despite sometimes coming out with an exciting performance that queers gender norms or plays at new possibilities for performance and identity, Lady Gaga still ends up appropriating images from cultures that are not her own, and perhaps misjudges the potential negative effects of her intentions. Discussed here were many examples of where she does something interesting – where she offers potential for creatively undermining gender norms – as well as instances where she missteps, appropriates, fails to understand her privilege, and doesn't connect with reality. In some ways, she makes it possible to be fabulously queer by spectacularizing gender performance— but where does this leave queers who don't want to wear lobsters on their heads or foot-high contorting shoes or copious sequins, spiked thongs, studded vests or fire-shooting bras and no pants? Where does it leave queer visibility when, some days (most days), one doesn't have any interest in sequins or glitter? Where does it leave people who aren't cis-gendered able-bodied white women with endless economical resources and an army of staff at one's beck and call ready to bring one's every whim to fruition? Where does it leave queers who work messy, physical jobs, or even just those whose utopic visions of livable lives don't include dressing in sequins and listening to loud club anthems; those who instead prefer to climb trees, hike through the forests and marshes, canoe, kayak, scramble over rocks or fall into a pond? Sometimes in the spaces of real life it is impossible to keep sequins or studs affixed, impossible to keep mud from

the clothes, the boots polished, and the hair tidy and free of twigs and dirt. Where, then, are the signifiers of visibility for camping, as opposed to campy, queers?

Lady Gaga at first seemed to be a promising figure, and she indeed does interesting things, however, it seems that the usefulness of her project for envisioning a utopic queer future is limited because of her limited connection to the real. Gaga stays too much inside, her spinning restricted to a tiny stage and confined within tiny glowing screens. Her visions for a utopic queer future depend too much upon the ability to physically create her fantasy visions, which depend immensely upon the enormous amount of material and technological resources she has at hand. They also depend greatly upon her ability to use these resources and physical abilities to do whatever she envisions, but, while preaching her message of youth empowerment, she has forgotten that time passes, and with it, youth and a seemingly endless physical ability. No part of us or our worlds are endlessly malleable, as other performance artists working with issues of queerness not only find, but teach. While Lady Gaga learned this lesson on stage with an injury, other contemporary performance artists look to the capacities and limits of our interactions with the natural world to learn and teach something about the constraints that we inhabit as physically embodied beings.

Chapter 2— Performing in Nature with the *Lesbian National Parks and Services*

Shawna Dempsey and Lorri Millan's performance art piece *Lesbian National Parks and Services*, first performed in Banff in 1997, caught my interest because of its use of parody to perform their humourous, queer vision into a "reality," of sorts. They display the same sort of commitment to their performance that Lady Gaga does – staying in character, refusing the idea that the performance is purely fiction, and therefore forcing onlookers to consider the implications of their performance on social reality. But unlike Lady Gaga, their art operates more tangibly; rather than striving to create fantasy otherworlds through extensive and expensive fabrications that only really operate with a certain amount of privilege, and thus create worlds with often limited connections to the physical and social realities of people's lives, *Lesbian National Parks and Services* operates in specific physical locations, and addresses more specific social realities. Most importantly, *Lesbian National Parks and Services* does not aim to perform a utopic queer world into being through the specifics of its performance. Rather, this performance engages playfully and humourously with problematic aspects of the status quo, turning these problems on their head and unsettling ideas about the naturalized heterosexuality.

Introduction to *Lesbian National Parks and Services*

First performed in Banff in 1997, *Lesbian National Parks and Services* calls into question the seeming naturalness of heterosexuality that is entrenched in narratives of nature and Canadian national identity. By performing as lesbian park rangers amongst unsuspecting everyday Banff tourists, Dempsey and Millan are able to move their work out of a gallery or journal and onto the streets and trails, effectively performing their

social critique into a sort of social reality (Maclear). By working with the concept of a vast wilderness that is so essential to Canadian national identity, Dempsey and Millan's performance ends up critiquing not only the supposed naturalness of heterosexuality and unnaturalness of homosexuality, but also the ways that heteronormativity has become embedded in Canadian national identity. Their alternative narrative of "wilderness" spaces points to the ways in which "wilderness" is a human construct that can be shifted. As a human construct, "wilderness" naturalized as "wild"; that is, non-human or "uncivilized" by white settler society.

The mostly-positive audience reception to their performance points partly to the effectiveness of their performance, but it also raises questions about how it was that Dempsey and Millan were so easily able to pass as 'real' park rangers, therefore accessing the authority necessary to carry out their critique. It seems that their effective mimicry of the 'real' park rangers and their whiteness combine to allow them access to a presumed anglo-Canadian identity, allowing their critique to be initially palatable and unthreatening to a mostly white settler tourist audience (Walter). By accessing and then unsettling a particular aspect of this figure of authority through humour and parody, they directly challenge heteronormative narratives of nature, while also raising questions about the legitimacy of the colonial park ranger's authority in relationship to nature and Canadian national identity.

Figure 2.1: Shawna Dempsey and Lorri Millan, *Forest Guards*, 1997, Photo taken as part of the performance *Lesbian National Parks and Services*, Photo by Donald Lee. <http://performancecanada.com/events/publication-in-canadian-theatre-review/>.

Shawna Dempsey and Lorri Millan debuted *Lesbian National Parks and Services* in Banff, Alberta in 1997. Their piece was a part of a group exhibition called "Private Investigators," curated by Kathryn Walter, a guest curator at the Walter Phillips Gallery at the Banff Centre for the Arts. The eight artists exhibited in "Private Investigators" explored many contradictions within the tourist mentality and the marketing strategies of the commodified "wilderness" of Banff National Park. Fitting with the curatorial theme of the show, the pieces in the show worked with histories of colonialism, heteropatriarchy, and capitalism, and the various identities that have been made invisible and erased from the landscape as a part of the colonial capitalist project of nation-

building (Crowston *x*). Dempsey and Millan, in *Lesbian National Parks and Services*, employ a feminist and subversive performance art strategy of using personae to create dialogue that questions established norms. They create a parody of the "real" park rangers by performatively standing in as representatives of the Canadian state and mediators of the iconic Canadian "wilderness," (that is, the concept of a vast landscape that is untouched-by humans and therefore purely wild and free). By performing as and taking on the role of park rangers, the *Lesbian National Parks and Services* (LNPS) raises issues about park rangers' roles in constructing narratives of nation and nature. Specifically, here, because of the location of the original performance in Canada's first national park, they can lead us to question the role of sexuality and gender in the formation of national parks, and in the colonial project of nation building.

In the introduction to the *Lesbian National Parks and Services Field Guide to North America: Flora, Fauna, and Survival Skills*, Dempsey and Millan explain the goals and purpose that gave rise to their vision for LNPS. They say:

> "Until the formation of the Lesbian National Parks and Services we, Founding Rangers Shawna Dempsey and Lorri Millan, were [...] avid woodswomen with a passion for biology. However, despite our boundless outdoor enthusiasm, [...] with each dogged step into the wilds it became increasingly clear that, without the support of scientists or conservation officials and, in fact, ignored by wildlife professionals in general, lesbian Flora and Fauna had been left to wither and decline, surviving mainly in isolated communities largely invisible to the casual observer. This official indifference frustrated us. We knew well the rewards of careful observation and patient tracking, and had uncovered hidden worlds of lesbian activity in even the most inhospitable environments. These communities were particularly vulnerable to changes in political climate and unnatural disasters such as religious fundamentalism and assimilation. Sadly, lesbianism was operating far from its peak potential. Even when confronted with this problem, most conservationists responded blankly. Try as we might, we could not prevail upon park wardens or wildlife officials to act.
> Impassioned concern often kept us awake long into the night. [...] If only the fragile lesbian ecosystem was given the attention required to encourage proliferation! If only a force of trained professionals could turn its vigilant gaze

> on the plight of the lesbian wilds! [...] 'What if,' we wondered [...], '*we* were to form an organization dedicated to lesbian wildlife?' The time was nigh, we realized, to take matters into our own hands.
> With vigour and excitement we set about creating a service entrusted with the stewardship of all lesbian life forms. [...] Hence, Lesbian National Parks and Services [LNPS] was born" (Dempsey and Millan 2002, 20-23).

Dempsey and Millan set up the purpose of their project here in the language of environmental conservation. They suggest that there is something different about lesbian species and lesbian ecosystems that is being overlooked by conservation officials who, presumably, are only concerned with heterosexual species and ecosystems. By creating their own version of a national parks organization to humourously focus on lesbian ecosystems, Dempsey and Millan use parody to suggest the heteronormativity in dominant ecological and national narratives.

For the three-week duration of the group exhibition, they dressed in park-ranger-like uniforms, complete with the *Lesbian National Parks and Services* crest sewn onto their shirts and hats. They interacted with the public in Banff National Park and in the town of Banff, and successfully 'passed' as park rangers, sometimes drawing confusion and awkwardness from those who suddenly realized that they weren't talking to 'real' Parks Canada park rangers after all. They took groups on walking tours to visit such sites as the "Invisible Lesbian Heritage House and Gardens" and the "Invisible Plaque Dedicated to our Founding Foremothers," which humourously, and quite bluntly, pointed out that some identities and their accomplishments have been made invisible by the dominant narrative that excludes and writes over others (Dempsey and Millan). They forced their audience to consider the roles of invisible (specifically lesbian) identities in shaping the current physical and social landscapes, and reminded their audience that queerness is nothing new, but rather, is rooted as deeply in history as any other identity.

By narrating a history of lesbianism, they offer some sense of normalcy that comes with continuity. They also provided visitors with brochures, presented in the style of informative pamphlets, to educate the public on the importance of respecting diversity in every ecosystem, including neglected lesbian species of all kinds (Dempsey and Millan 1997b). Poking fun at fear-mongering myths about homosexuals recruiting children to homosexuality, they held a recruitment stand, offering lemonade to passersby under the banner "Lesbian National Parks and Services Wants You." Also poking fun at the style of military recruitment, some of their notes from their daily ranger reports reflected the joy that they experienced at a child's upward gaze of admiration. Dempsey and Millan kept up these activities for the duration of their three weeks in Banff, staying in character as lesbian rangers, such that their presence became more than a performance—their place in Banff and in the so-called "wilderness" of a national park started to seem "natural."

Figure 2.2: Dempsey and Millan. in *Private Investigators: Undercover in Public Space* Eds. Kathryn Walter and Kyo Maclear. Banff: The Banff Centre for the Arts, 1999. 53.

Their performance did not end after these initial three weeks in Banff: in 2002, they released a documentary-style short film, which depicts Dempsey and Millan as head

rangers, leading a group of Junior Rangers through their training drills, while explaining to the viewer the demands, duties, and rewards that come with being a member of the lesbian forces. The training drills depicted in the film mimic a macho military style with an emphasis on the homoerotic. And, just as the military appeals to potential recruits with promises of meaningful work and camaraderie, the head rangers explain some of the rewards of joining the ranks of the lesbian forces, such as companionship on adventures in the bush, with other "eager beavers" (Dempsey and Millan).

Figure 2.3: Shawna Dempsey and Lorri Millan with "Eager Beaver" junior lesbian ranger recruits. Dempsey and Millan. <http://www.fingerinthedyke.ca/index.html>.

Also in 2002, they published *The Lesbian National Parks and Services Field Guide to North America: Flora, Fauna, and Survival Skills*. Presented in the style of a common field guide for identifying species of plants and animals, this Field Guide boasts an illustrated cover depicting Dempsey and Millan posing in a rangerly stance in front of a lake and mountains, one hand rested on a canoe, and framed by birch trees that match the kitschy birch branch frame around the title (Dempsey and Millan). (Anecdotal evidence suggests that, when left lying on a coffee table, this book may look deceptively drab to onlookers who are not already fascinated by kitschy outdoorsy field guides.) Inside, the book covers various types of lesbian species in the lesbian wilds, and features

sections devoted to lesbian-centric survival skills, such as starting a fire, finding your orientation, keeping wet, essential knots, and what and whom to eat (Dempsey and Millan 2002). They also have a small Junior Ranger's Handbook that includes instructions on proper rangerly posture, attire, and behaviour, as well as a suggestive Junior Ranger motto and salute, and lyrics and music for a Junior Ranger song (Dempsey and Millan 2001). The Handbook comes with a patch depicting the Junior Lesbian Ranger crest, which can be sewn onto a bag or jacket for official identification purposes so that those seeking rangerly advice will know to whom to turn.

Figure 2.4: "Junior Lesbian Ranger" patch from Dempsey and Millan's "Handbook of the Junior Lesbian Ranger." Wyndi Palmer, 2008. <http://stompin-about.blogspot.ca/2008/06/lesbian-national-parks-and-services.html>.

Deconstructing Heteronormativity in Narratives of Nature

With their enactment of this particular take on the park ranger identity, Dempsey and Millan tell a sometimes-exaggerated, alternate version of history, biology and geography, quite different from the sorts of stories that we might hear from Parks Canada

interpretive information, or read in a standard textbook. As Rachel Loewen Walker explains in an article titled "Becoming Queer: Performance Art and Constructions of Identity," the Lesbian Park Rangers' "detailed re-telling of biology from the lesbian perspective [...] situates the queer—specifically lesbian—identity as the norm through which all else is read, effectively 'decentering the center'" (Loewen Walker 2). By "decentering the centre," or relocating the marginalized lesbian identity to the centre of their worldview and treating it as the norm by which everything else is measured, the lesbian rangers end up not only performing a shift in what is considered normal, but also identifying the binaries that support power dynamics. Their parody of park ranger authority uses humour to "poke at the knowledge systems that govern biology as we know it, and therefore encourage the reader to re-think his or her "factual" assumptions about nature" (Loewen Walker 16). At first, Dempsey and Millan's lesbonormative narratives about nature seem absurd, to the point of hilarity. But, if one considers the reason for this absurdity – the fact that every plant and tree and animal and rock doesn't really embody lesbianism – it becomes clearer that, likewise, the plants and trees and animals and rocks don't adhere to or embody sexual identity at all, in the way humans have constructed it. Nevertheless, our dominant narratives suggest otherwise. For example, in David Quammen's 1998 essay "The Miracle of the Geese: A Bizarre Sexual Strategy Among Steadfast Birds," he describes heterosexual and monogamous mating habits of geese, and characterizes these habits as somehow more virtuous than others for their efficiency, suggesting that any other flirtatious or sexual activity is a wasted effort. "They commit themselves to endurance, to each other, to the future—and not to maximizing their sexual options" (Quammen 238). After extolling these virtues to be

found geese bahaviour, he says: "I was glad to find an ecological mandate for permanent partnership among animals so estimable as *Branta canadensis*" (Quammen 240). He uses his selective observations and selective research to make geese into an example of what is supposedly pure and natural. But Alex Johnson counters this heteronormative claim in his article "How to Queer Ecology: One Goose at a Time" when he points out that there are plenty of other examples of all sort of species, including geese, behaving in non-heteronormative ways. This is just one example of the flawed dominant narrative that writes heterosexuality onto nature, and there are many more examples of heterosexual and homosexual interaction between animals, and sexual and asexual reproduction amongst plants. However, investigating details of scientific evidence of sexual fluidity amongst various species is not the focus of the *LNPS*. Rather, their critique looks beyond these specifics to ask the audience to imagine the possibilities of a queer-centric narrative of ecosystems and nature, and a queer-centric narrative of settler-Canadian national identity.

History of Park Ranger Role

Dempsey and Millan's choice to employ the persona of the park ranger for their parody is a strategic one, given certain stereotypes about rugged masculinity that are embedded in this role, and what the park ranger represents in the context of Canadian national identity. Historically, the typically white and anglo masculinized park ranger's role has been to police the boundary between the European-settler "civilization" and the supposedly uninhabited "wilderness" of Canada—educating citizens (white European settlers) with patriarchal, heteronormative, and colonial interpretations of nature, while

keeping both nature and the so-called "civilization" safe from each other (Sandilands 2005, 146). According to Freeman Tilden, who was an American park ranger in the early 1900s, the park ranger is also responsible for interpretation of nature, or educating park visitors about scientific, historical, and architectural facts about their natural surroundings (Tilden). Of course, this interpretation of the natural world is never free from bias in the form of the park rangers' own identities as usually white settler heterosexual men. According to Sandilands, by acting as a mediator between wilderness and "civilization," the park ranger performs a neutralizing role, removing the threats (physical and perceived) of the wilderness so that white European settlers can marvel comfortably at its beauty and grandeur. Catriona Sandilands describes this role in her article "Where the Mountain Men Meet the Lesbian Rangers: Gender, Nation and Nature in the Rocky Mountain National Parks." She explains that park rangers were tasked with maintaining the boundaries between the wild and the domestic, as representatives of the Canadian state within the state-controlled spaces of national parks. On one hand, park rangers are tasked with educating the public about the history of parks, as well as the natural environment represented in national parks, and promoting a cautious recreation at a safe distance from the parts of nature that are too wild, such as mountain lions or dangerous cliffs (Sandilands 2005, 147). And of course, this educational and cautionary story of ecology and history within national parks is a version that buttresses the interests of the Canadian state, and reinforces the apparent naturalness of colonialism, heterosexuality, and patriarchal gender roles. It does this by representing First Nations peoples as backwards and uncivilized, in order to frame colonialism as a positive step in an inevitable chain of events. On the other hand, the park ranger's role is also to preserve

and protect the so-called wilderness by keeping it safe from environmental destruction that would result from over-development, careless use of resources, pollution, and poaching (a problematic category that has often included First Nations hunters). Of course, the park rangers' ability to protect and preserve the environment is often limited by the competing demands of protecting citizens and promoting the national narrative. It is also limited by the park's own borders, which cannot contain the movement of water, air, and animals, or the effects of occurrences outside the park boundaries. And importantly, these imposed borders go through traditional Indigenous territory, often serving to sever connections between different First Nations groups by preventing travel through national parklands.

If, historically, this role of the park ranger has been to mediate between so-called "civilization" (white European settler) and "wilderness" (not-yet colonized lands), it has served largely to reinforce the idea of Canada as a vast and supposedly empty land, a wilderness hardily conquered and civilized by white European settlers. But in order to imagine Canada as a vast, uninhabited wilderness available for conquering, the original peoples who inhabited the land had to be pushed out, and erased from the social memory of the landscape. Even more to the point, the very designation of certain areas as national parks as areas "protected" from the damaging influences of human activity also involves restricting First Nations peoples from their original uses of their own land. The park ranger's role was thus dual: on the one hand, to "protect" this wilderness by policing its boundaries and restricting First Nations access, and, on the other, to protect white settler civilization, with its feminized domestic spaces, from the incursions and dangers of the wild (Sandilands 2005, 146). And of course, while doing this work of "protecting," the

park ranger also needed someone to take care of his domestic needs. Thus, the construction of wild and domestic spaces in contrast with one another and respectively gendered as masculinized and feminized spaces, has served to promote heterosexual pairings (Sandilands 2005, 153). The proliferation of heterosexual pairings that result from such neat divisions between "wild" and "civilized," "male" and "female," is then built into the growing body of knowledge about nature, and the natural. Concepts of "nature" appear to be all about the naturalness and inevitability of heterosexuality.

Dempsey and Millan's Enactment of the Park Ranger Role

Kyo Maclear, a participant in The Arts Journalism Residency in Banff which ran concurrently with the "Private Investigators" exhibitions, wrote about her observations as a witness to the original performances in the exhibition catalogue. She describes Dempsey and Millan's activities, and the public reception, as follows: "This would be side-show entertainment were it not for the highly suggestive and involving nature of the performance. The rangers' starched uniforms and earnest demeanour have encouraged a Pavlovian response—visitors all seeming to cry, 'Lead me!'" (Maclear 1999b, 56). Maclear explains that she finds this reaction understandable; she recounts the way she was trained, on a fourth grade field-trip to Algonquin Park, to view park rangers as her friends. She goes on to say:

> "Lorri and Shawna, you see, have fused stereotypes to create a new social breed. The first thing they want us to know is that nothing is what it seems: not the mythical 'lesbian' (demonized as a social threat, target and outsider), or the equally fictionalized 'ranger' (celebrated as a front-line guardian of the Canadian wilderness). The Lesbian Park Rangers make it clear that social scripts, determining who will be loved, hated, and revered, can easily be scrambled. Identities can be cross-wired and reprogrammed because they are based on unstable attributes. Thus, Lorri and Shawna test social definitions and values.

> They know it is difficult to vilify someone who is there to protect and guide you [...], and even harder when that someone bears a striking resemblance to an erstwhile Canadian folk hero" (Maclear 1999b, 57).

By scrambling and cross-wiring the identities of lesbians and park rangers, Dempsey and Millan confuse the expected social responses to these roles. Should the audience vilify and fear them, or revere their knowledge and respect them for their protection? Should they be trusted or mistrusted? Should they be kept away from children, treated as social threats, or presented as inspiring role models? This scrambled social script, composed of their effective presentation of charming and endearing helpfulness alongside a parody of stereotypes with thinly-veiled sexual innuendo, seemed to leave the audience confused, though amused and engaged. The initial effect of their "passing" as "real" park rangers made their audience initially trusting and receptive to their friendliness, which set up an already-engaged audience, ready to receive their parody. The audience might have wondered: Why are the park rangers lesbian? Why are they claiming there are lesbian species of wildlife? Are they for real, or are they just making it up – and why? With this sort of questioning comes the potential for identifying cracks in the dominant narrative that naturalizes heterosexuality. Why *not* lesbian park rangers and lesbian wildlife? Why *not* lesbian heritage sites? What other identities have also been excluded and forgotten by our dominant narratives?

Clearly, stories that depict Canada's national origins erase and stereotype First Nations' presence. Many of Thomas King's stories illustrate the gaps between the ways in which North American stories of national origins portray First Nations peoples and the reality of First Nations lives. King illustrates this rift in one story, called "You're Not the Indian I Had in Mind," when he encounters someone who has trouble understanding him

as North American Indian because he doesn't resemble the stories and "authentic" images of First Nations peoples fabricated by white settlers (King 48). King explains that the importance of stories is because they are where we live – stories of the past shape the present and future (King 9). If our stories about the past are all wrong and exclude some people, then our present social realities will reflect this injustice as well.

Park rangers, as employees of the federally run Parks Canada, claim a position of authority when they interact with the public, disseminating information that reflects the dominant national narrative as though it were fact. Thus, by initially passing as real park rangers and enacting a lesbian version of nature, Dempsey and Millan are able to reveal some fissures in the narrative of nature and Canadianness. Still, we must ask: Why is it that they are able to so easily "pass," and so successfully gain access the authority and credibility necessary to carry out their project of disrupting assumptions about nature? Who has authority over any given matter, and what is it that makes observers so willing to unquestioningly accept their version as fact?

This question is partially addressed by curator Kathryn Walter, in the exhibition catalogue for "Private Investigators." Walter gives an eyewitness account of how Dempsey and Millan interacted with and were received by the public. She explains that, as 'out' as it may seem to wear the words "Lesbian National Parks and Services" emblazoned on every article of clothing, it was actually very "subtly inserted into public view," because it was presented "with such formality and apparent legitimacy" (Walter 45). Walter suggests that it is this formality and posturing, along with their charm and friendliness, that lends the Lesbian Rangers the credibility and authority necessary to go about their project without much trouble.

But, in an article titled "The Lesbian National Parks and Services: Reading Sex, Race, and Nation in Artistic Performance," Margot Francis explains what is missing from this analysis. Historically, park rangers were white male representatives of the colonial Canadian state, managing the landscape to suit the interests of white European settler society. Undeniably Dempsey and Millan's whiteness allows them to be recognized as what Eva Mackey calls "Canadian-Canadian": their whiteness grants them an initial impression of belonging in this place, and the legitimacy of their Canadian citizenship is never contested (Mackey 1999, 19). Non-threatening to a mostly white tourist audience, their whiteness, in addition to their crisp uniforms and effective posturing, allows them to access an initial un-questioned authority. This permits spectators to be caught off guard by their lesbo-normative approach to ecology and geography (Francis 133).

In the "Private Investigators" exhibition catalogue, Kyo Maclear talks about why Banff is such an ideal setting for a project that aims to unsettle ideas about Canadian history and national identity. Banff is a tourist town, and images of its Rocky Mountains and vastness are iconic of Canadian national identity. For example, although I have never been to Banff, or even to Alberta, I can nevertheless easily find postcards in a town on the opposite side of the continent from the Rocky Mountains that bear the inscription "CANADA" beneath an image from Banff, or Jasper National Park. Images of Banff's mountain scenery have been made into a nationally legible symbol, and have become a marketable icon that seems to encapsulate the essence of Canadianness. Because of this, in Banff itself, tourists may expect to find something quintessentially Canadian. Of the tourist mentality, Maclear says:

> "A happy-trails mentality invites social amnesia. Without leaping into the archives, how are Banff initiates to know that the land they walk on is part of a

> Siksika Nation land claim... that the Rockies served as a physical and symbolic border for Japanese Canadians who were not allowed west of the mountains until the late 1940s... that the peaks are unmarked graves for Chinese railroad labourers who *died in the thousands*? Countless legacies and multiple 'others' have gone MIA; certain histories have become subterranean. Why? Because as ecotourists, we are encouraged to travel with our heads in the clouds, our eyes fixed on the stars, our feet on the forest paths before us. [...] When it comes to imagining the past— or for that matter, the social present— [...] guidebooks make a virtue of being *resource poor*. We *turistas* are encouraged to be flat broke on thought, dizzy on the scenery, as we indulge our wanderlust. Banff's spectatorial aids—its postcards, pamphlets, natural museums and monuments—continue to stone us on beauty and apathy. Every time we fancy ourselves first-time explorers, every moment we imagine that our presence is in some way *inaugural*, we assent to this collective hallucination" (Maclear, 1999a, 10).

Thus, the role of the tourist as a consumer of airbrushed stereotypes is encouraged by the commodification of Canadian national identity—which would not be so appealing or palatable as a commodity if it challenged idyllic preconceptions about the place, or disrupted the seeming tranquility of the setting. It would not be so palatable or profitable if the landscape's cross-hatching of racist, colonial, patriarchal, and heteronormative histories were made visible, interrupting the pure awe and wonder of a landscape imagined as untouched and pristine – that is, if the information presented by the park authorities helped to *undo,* rather than sustain, a collective amnesia (Maclear, 1999a, 15). By making their audience question who carries the authority of the "real" park rangers, and the legitimacy of that authority altogether, Dempsey and Millan also force a questioning of this notion of an idyllic and wondrously beautiful Canada that national parks represent. Can we believe the stories on the placards and displays? Can we believe the stories from Parks Canada representatives, the "real" park rangers? What is Banff really, if this story that we know and buy into has so many holes in it? What is Canada? What other stories, alongside those told by lesbian park rangers, are missing from the dominant narrative? The Lesbian National Parks and Services only offers their own

alternative, but doesn't point to others except through the possibility of undermining the dominant narrative. Still, it is clear that one place that the Lesbian National Parks and Services doesn't operate an easy critique is around whiteness.

Blurring Truth and Fiction through Performance

Nevertheless, if the Lesbian Park Rangers are initially palatable to their audience because of their non-threatening whiteness and "real" park ranger likeness, they are, nevertheless, a sort of cultural Trojan Horse. After slipping past the public's defenses in this way, they have then assumed the necessary authority to do their work of unsettling the park ranger persona and the grand narratives that it represents. Of the repeat effects of Dempsey and Millan's performance over several weeks, Kyo Maclear says:

> "Gradually the surrogate rangers are becoming ever more real, ever more familiar. Of course, there are repeated references to 'the funny lesbians in costume,' but the conceptual satire seems to have titillated visitors (myself included) to the point that we have become willing participants in the masquerade. Are we falling prey to parody? Or is the fiction unravelling the real[...]?" (Maclear 1999b, 56).

By so convincingly occupying the expected position of the park ranger, Dempsey and Millan enter a space where they are offered an initial trust and respect, even before they start their interaction. Then once they begin their interactions as lesbian rangers, this trust in images is ruptured – the resulting confusion leaves audiences doubting themselves, perhaps glancing around to see if others are also as confused or taken aback by the lesbian rangers' seamless presentation of normalcy. Perhaps, then, we might wonder whether audiences of the lesbian park rangers might also regard the "real" park rangers with cautious discernment, and question the legitimacy of their stories as well. There is no way to know for sure the effect that a performance has on the real world, even when it

takes place in the real world. It is hard to say if this particular performance was able to have any lasting impact on the original confused audiences, or what that impact might be.

Understanding the effects of works of performance art on the world is complicated by the ephemerality of the work itself – once completed, it is an event in the past that lives on only through documentation. The documentation of performance art is mediated through various lenses, images are manipulated and curated into a final representation, and even this can shift over time (Maclear 1999b, 56). The documentation may actually have more potential for impact because it is able to exist long after the original performance event is over, and because it is potentially malleable for the artist. Dempsey and Millan's "Lesbian National Parks and Services" continues to exist through various forms of documentation: via photographs depicting their original performance, as well as their daily "ranger reports," written descriptions of their activities by other people, and a few years later, a book, handbook, and mocumentary. From written descriptions from witnesses to the original event, it seems that audiences were mostly enamoured although slightly confused, with the exception of a few small displays of homophobia. These slightly confused but enamoured folks may have taken their experience of being caught off guard by the lesbian rangers to question the authority of everyone who poses as a rangerly figure of authority, or, they may have laughed and soon forgot about it.

Although Dempsey and Millan do present a challenge to the authority of the park ranger authority, they cannot dismantle the personae of park rangers once and for all. This is not to say that performance art, or any art, is thus ineffective at enacting any social change. Rather, perhaps the effects of performance art can stretch further through future

performance – rather than just theorizing about how Dempsey and Millan have indeed created conversation that moves toward dismantling the park ranger persona through their work of art at a point in history, perhaps the more poignant lasting effect would be if others took up this method of performance to explore the presence of performativity in their own lives.

Queering Nature, Interrupting National Narratives

Heteronormativity, entrenched in iconic imagery of the hypermasculine park ranger as representative of nature and nation, means that queer identities, amongst many others, have been erased from "nature"— and also from Canadian national identity. The grand narrative of Canadian history, as told from a white settler Canadian perspective, thus omits not only the theft of land and the appropriation of nature by patriarchal heteronormative European culture, but it also renders the colonial and heteronormative structures that reinforce this narrative invisible. In presenting a queer version of nature, Dempsey and Millan interrupt this grand narrative by making the embedded heteronormativity visible. By enacting the role of lesbian park rangers, Dempsey and Millan place themselves and their queer identities into a space where queer identities, among so many others, have been erased. By telling an alternate story of the natural world, the Lesbian Rangers show that concepts of "the natural" can be malleable, and suggest that the grand narrative of national identity is subject to interpretation, reinterpretation, and historical change. When they point out imaginary sites of interest such as invisible monuments and gardens in commemoration of women's contributions to shaping the current social landscape, they use humour to point out the holes in the

dominant narrative. There are many more holes that Dempsey and Millan don't point out, but pointing to a couple of them may help to expose the flimsiness of a story fabricated from selective threads, and help to demonstrate that official park plaques and narratives are not the only authorities on history.

In their work of exposing holes in the dominant narrative, Dempsey and Millan explore the ways that landscape—like personal identities—has been constructed to tell a seemingly natural story about Canadian national identity. In revealing the fissures in this "natural" story, they work toward making space for imagining queer new ways of relating to nature and understanding histories. In one of their promotional brochures, Dempsey and Millan explain their goals for their work as such:

> "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" (Dempsey and Millan 1997b).

They also place their own lesbian feminist identities at the centre of Canadian national identity and ask us to imagine, and then understand, what kind of difference a shift in the norm can make to our understandings of nature. Their playful and humourous approach to the iconic park ranger persona thus helps us to ask questions about sexuality and gender in nature; and indirectly also about race and national identity.

Borders

While National Parks may be able to facilitate some interaction with the natural world leading to safe, yet valuable environmental experiences, but they can't facilitate everything. These experiences can't facilitate the wonder of discovering you can climb a

tree, or the flying feeling that comes with sitting in the top branches, holding the trunk as it sways slightly in the wind. Without the opportunity to climb trees, some may never know the joy of discovering their own agility, or overcoming a fear of heights. National Parks can lead people, with cleared gravel trails and informative maps, to the photogenic look-off where one can take a postcard-perfect picture, just as thousands of others have, but they usually can't take one to the less spectacular, though equally wondrous corner of the lake where, if sitting still and quietly for long enough, an otter may leap by in a graceful arc on its way into the water, making brief and casual eye contact as she sails by. As effective as National Parks may be at facilitating interaction with the natural environment and providing educational information, this version of information and interaction is exactly that—only a version, amongst many possible other versions. Not only are queer histories and First Nations histories mostly not included, but to some extent, the sense of discovery and the adventure of finding one's own trail are also excluded.[1]

Likewise, although National Parks can and do take measures toward protecting and preserving the diversity of Canadian landscapes and ecosystems, their borders cannot keep out the effects of environmental destruction right next door. Deforestation, fracking, drilling, pipelines and oil sands create pollution that spreads through an interconnected ecosystem with the movement of water and air, and animals, regardless of where

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[1] I do not argue that there should never be trails – indeed, in Kejimkujik National Park, the forest is not regenerating in places due to trampling of the undergrowth by thousands of yearly visitors. It is important for visitors to stick to the trails, for the most part. But in the woods nearer to home, I frequently find myself off the trails, or mapping found trails in order to direct others. Nature may sometimes be best experienced through some guiding and facilitation, but certainly not always. Some rules are necessary to prevent us from completely destroying the remaining wilderness spaces that we have, but perhaps we also need enough flexibility within these rules so that visitors are not just removed observers.

colonial-settler lines denoting "protected" areas have been arbitrarily imposed upon the landscape. The choices about where to place national park borders are strategic and often reveal the other interests that are an important, though less advertised, part of a story of Canadian national identity. For example: In 2012, Canadian Prime Minister Stephen Harper visited the Arctic to establish the new Naats'ihch'oh National Park Reserve in the Northwest Territories, and although his rhetoric around this event used the discourse of increasing environmental protection, the borders of the park seem to have been established with the intention of protecting mining interests on adjacent lands (Fitzpatrick). Drawing a line between lands available for environmentally destructive mining activities and a supposedly protected parkland is hardly an effective way to keep out the detrimental effects of compromised water quality and disturbed wildlife habitats and migration patterns. Further emphasizing the farce of Harper's claim to environmentalism, he avoided meeting with local groups who were critical of his actions, opting instead for a photo-op ATV ride across a fragile ecosystem. He not only ignored signs that instructed hikers to stick to the trails to protect the fragile ecosystem, but for his off-trail pursuits he used an all-terrain-vehicle—a vehicle known for its destructive impacts on any ecosystem—showing a complete disregard for the delicate tundra that he crushed (Bolen). Facts like these are not as palatable or conducive to the "happy trails mentality" (Maclear) that is promoted by a tourism industry that might like to promote recreation to thrill-seeking ATV-aficionados. But if informative plaques were to depict information about illegal government actions and nearby government-sanctioned environmental destruction, it might spoil the feeling of wonder and the desire to come back again and spend more money on tours and souvenirs.

The narrative of Canadian history and identity facilitated by the Canadian state through its national parks also leaves out the parts of history about First Nations peoples being forced off their lands, banned from hunting, forced onto reserves, and vilified and arrested for attempting to protect their lands. At Kejimkujik National Park, for example, the official narrative presents supposedly informative signs and placards that depict illustrations of ghostly, transparent figures of First Nations peoples drifting primitively through the place in an apparently long ago time, far away from and mostly irrelevant to the present. Presented at such a distance, this information seems to be offered for the purposes of fanciful free-spirited imagination of a romanticized exotic "other."

Figure 2.5: Informative plaque at the Visitor Centre, Kejimkujik National Park. Photograph by Jennifer MacLatchy, 2012.

The ghost figures place First Nations people in the past, leaving out the present reality of their claims and rights to this land. The narrative presented on these signs also leaves out the parts of the story about the present-day third-world living conditions of First Nations communities across the country. It leaves out the hundreds of missing and murdered First Nations women and girls, and a government that condones this by refusing to acknowledge or even take the meager action of an inquiry into this atrocity. It leaves out a government that unapologetically violates treaties, forces pipelines through First Nations land, and violently arrests and incarcerates First Nations peoples, labeling them as "terrorists" for daring to defend their own land and water. This is the same narrative that, depicted in an October 16th, 2013 speech from the throne, claims that early Canadian settlers and pioneers reached out across a vast continent to form a nation "where none would have otherwise existed" (Governor General of Canada). Then, just one day after the government thus claimed that Canada was an empty land devoid of other nations, the Canadian government sent out its RCMP forces to forcibly and violently make it so: by removing First Nations peoples and their supporters from their own lands at Elsipogtog for protesting against the hydraulic fracturing that threatens their land and water (Patten). A nation whose government violently breaks the treaties that enable it to exist on occupied territories—that violently breaks its own laws—is not a part of the whimsical story that is depicted on these placards and signs with images of ghost First Nations peoples standing passively in the past.

Figure 2.6: Interpretive sign by the Mersey River in Kejimkujik National Park. Photograph by Jennifer MacLatchy, 2012.

On another informative sign, an illustrated image of a white and heteronormative sight-seeing family has the effect of excluding those non-normative others who thus do not appear as "Canadian" or as worthy of national park recreation; they are therefore not written into the park recreation narrative. It also, and only somewhat accurately, represents the demographic that can afford the necessary money and leisure time to be able to access national parks and so-called "wilderness" areas for recreation. It leaves out the parts of the story about how the lands chosen to be set aside as National Parks are those lands that are not considered valuable for resource-development, and about how the Navigable Waters Protection Act was gutted in 2012 to make way for pipelines (Scoffield). It doesn't include federal government's cuts to Parks Canada, causing some parks to be "closed" at times – such as Kejimkujik National Park, which is now closed from October to May, for seven and a half months of the year (Ware). It also leaves out

information about how many Parks Canada jobs have been cut, eliminating scientists who have the necessary knowledge to promote the protection of endangered species of plants and animals (Ware). In the wake of this, Parks Canada employees have essentially been given a gag order, threatened with disciplinary action should they speak out against the government ("Parks Canada Staff Banned From Criticizing Feds"). The suggestion that one could do the work of environmental protection and preservation without also engaging in the political structure that affects it may seem absurd, but none of these things will appear in informative information that is presented in park narratives.

Playing "Junior Lesbian Rangers": Kejimkujik National Park

Though National Parks do provide some learning opportunities and educational information about the geology, geography, ecology, and history of the areas, all of this selective information together composes a Canadian narrative that reinforces ideals about landscape, wilderness, and national identity, at the expense of longstanding and contested human histories. By enacting the personas of Lesbian Rangers, Dempsey and Millan set out to toy with these narratives and investigate public reactions through performance. The method of using performance art as a part of research has been written about by Dwight Conquergood in "Performance Studies: Interventions and Radical Research." He explains that, by engaging in performance, one can become involved in a subject on a different level than by just engaging with text (Conquergood). More can be discovered through embodied participation than through removed observation alone, and by traversing the gap between spectator and observer, we can move toward a more situated and embodied knowledge. Since Dempsey and Millan's work is performance-based and engages with

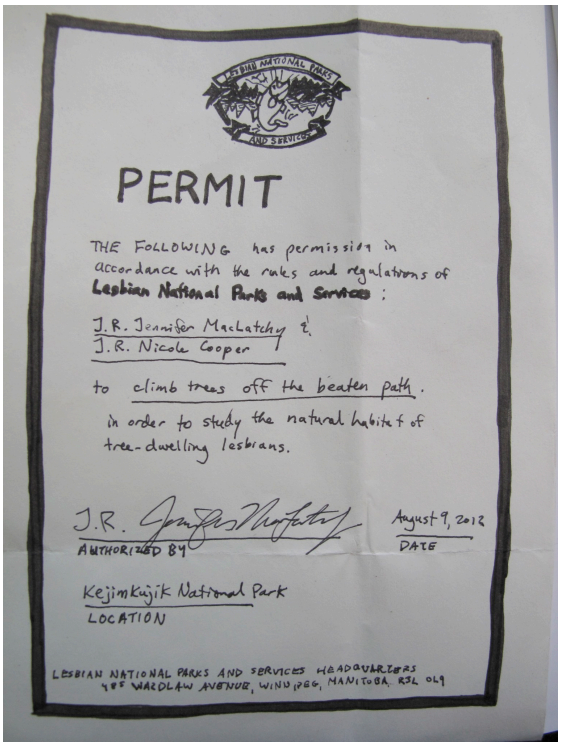
theory on a more embodied level, it thus made sense to take their invitation and engage with their work on a performative level.

Using this methodology of performative research, I sought to embody the persona of the lesbian park ranger as a part of a short group artist's residency with other NSCAD University students at Kejimkujik National Park in August, 2012. Founding lesbian rangers Dempsey and Millan had made this easy by including a recruitment effort into their piece when they sought to enlist Junior Lesbian Rangers as a part of their ongoing performance. Ready with my copy of the Field Guide and Junior Lesbian Ranger Handbook and official badge, a friend and I sought to assemble ourselves some ranger uniforms in accordance with the specifications in the handbook. We even made friends with a Parks Canada ranger and NSCAD graduate performance artist who was enthusiastic to hear about our performance plans, and so we thought we might ask if there were any spare ranger-like duds lying around that we could borrow. As it turns out, Parks Canada is very possessive of their uniforms and as territorial about their look as they are about colonized lands; they might, we learned, even go so far as to charge someone with impersonating a federal agent for wearing their uniforms without authorization. Surprised by this information but not discouraged, we assembled some smashing uniforms from our own and our friends' camp gear. We wore our Junior Lesbian Ranger badges and set out to investigate the lesbian wilds, fully aware of the overlapping jurisdictions of Parks Canada and Lesbian National Parks and Services, and striving mostly to adhere to the rules of both.

Figure 2.7: Performing "Junior Lesbian Rangers," after Shawna Dempsey and Lorri Millan. Kejimkujik National Park. Jennifer MacLatchy with Nicole Cooper, 2012.

Much more shy about our performance art than the admirable Shawna Dempsey and Lorri Millan, we did not actively try to recruit new members to our ranks, nor did we distribute pamphlets. No one seemed to mistake us for "real" rangers, and since no one asked us for directions, we told no one of the presence of invisible monuments and heritage houses. Nevertheless, we carried on with our explorations of the so-called "wilderness" of a national park in the role of Junior Lesbian Rangers, allowing this perspective to shape our observations and notes. As would be expected in a National Park, we found that there was a facilitated, museum-like quality to nature. Rules about staying on the trail make sense for the purposes of forest preservation in an area so frequently visited by humans. However, treading only on crusher dust trails and even pitching tents on crusher dust "tent pads" had the effect of leaving us feeling slightly removed from our "wild" surroundings – and slightly uncomfortable at night, longing for

the soft cushion of moss or carpet of pine needles. Fences designed to keep us from tumbling down a steep bank also (theoretically) prevented us from feeling the moss between our toes, and testing our agility at climbing over rocks and roots. Rules about staying on the trails also meant that visitors were restricted from climbing trees, although trees can be climbed safely – safe for both trees and climbers alike. Fortunately, I decided that Lesbian National Parks and Services should issue permits—in this case, a permit to climb trees for the purposes of studying tree-dwelling lesbian species—so I issued one.


PERMIT

THE FOLLOWING has permission in accordance with the rules and regulations of Lesbian National Parks and Services:

J.R. Jennifer MacLatchy
J.R. Nicole Cooper

to climb trees off the beaten path.

in order to study the natural habitat of tree-dwelling lesbians.

J.R. [signature]
AUTHORIZED BY

August 9, 2012
DATE

Kejimkujik National Park
LOCATION

LESBIAN NATIONAL PARKS AND SERVICES HEADQUARTERS
485 WARDLAW AVENUE, WINNIPEG, MANITOBA, R3L 0L9

Figure 2.8: Junior Lesbian Rangers tree-climbing permit. Jennifer MacLatchy, 2012.

In doing all of this, we set out to experience the park through a different lens, to see if we could inscribe the landscape with alternate narratives that counter the dominant ones. Through performance, we set out to explore the rifts between the national narrative presented in national parks, and our own identities and lived experiences by interacting with the environment. In these experiences, we discovered the aforementioned placard

depicting a heteronormative white family being spectators of the sights of nature, and we wondered how this place might be set up differently to facilitate our particular experience. We experimented with wearing twig antennas to improve our gaydar for finding queer species (which was just as effective as one might imagine). In order to sum up our experiences of lesbian ranging, we took pictures of ourselves in ranger-like poses against a stereotypical Canadian wilderness backdrop of Kejimkujik's trees and rocky lake, complete with a canoe. We posed, as Dempsey and Millan did, in exaggerated mimicry of the macho stance of explorers and surveyors who perform mastery over their landscape with a wide stance and lifted chin. We discovered the absurdity of setting up a camera on its self timer, balancing it on a rock on a mini tripod that slowly tips over, shifting the frame to chop off our heads, and springing into action to hold a pose. Anyone who happened to see us at the time might have thought we were having a great time taking silly pictures of ourselves, and would certainly not have suspected we were park rangers or considered coming over to ask us for directions. Here, there is a clear rift between the experiences of our original performance for the camera and the way that the resulting photographs have been formulated to depict something that would not have come across for an onlooker at the original event. At the time, we could not convincingly perform ourselves into authority figures or fool any onlookers into asking us for directions, nor did we aim to do this. Rather, we opted for the method of performance for photography. And by creating images and satirically writing about our experiences, I was able to fabricate our experiences in such a way that they generated an image that moved toward depicting a queer presence in nature.

The Canoe as a Symbol

We felt that the presence of a canoe in these images was important, because the canoe is often used as a symbol of Canadian national identity. It tends to represent the history of a settler nation's colonial expansion into a vast and supposedly uninhabited wilderness of lakes and rivers, and is now a whitewashed symbol of outdoor recreation. We had noticed the popularity of canoeing in Kejimkujik National Park, which is understandable – what better way could there be to quietly explore and play on meandering lakes and rivers? Kejimkujik made canoe rentals available to campers and visitors who wish to explore the lake. One also sees stories on plaques, pamphlets, and in the interpretive centre—notably about the Mi'kmaq history of canoe travel through the area (featuring the aforementioned ghostly illustrations, complete with ghost canoes). This information invited visitors to take part in canoeing the Mersey River and Kejimkujik Lake as though they were taking part in Mi'kmaq traditions, as though these traditions were located only in the past, and were presently available for the use of any tourist to play make-believe, or "play Indian."

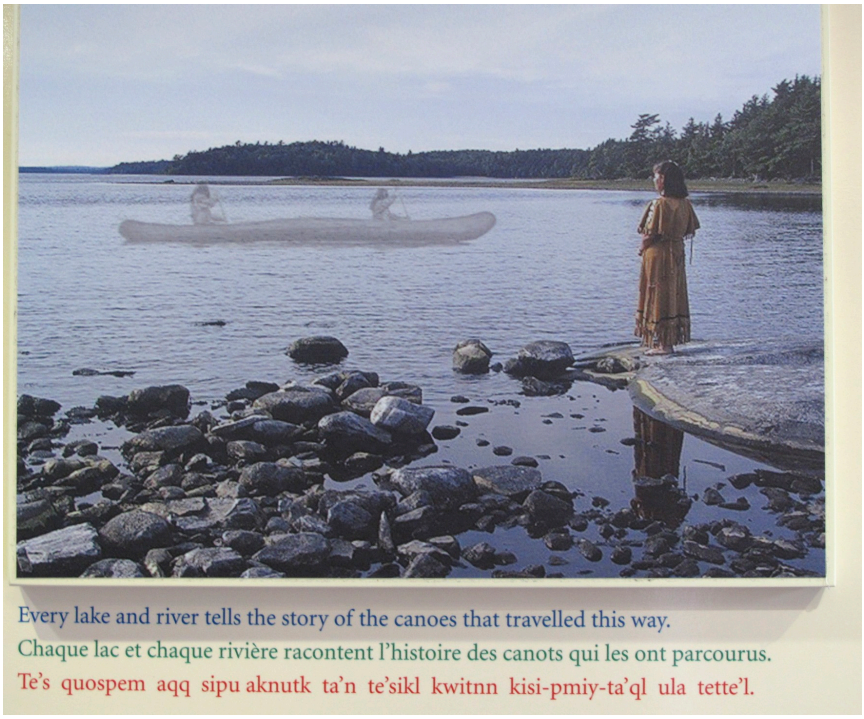


Figure 2.9: Interpretive sign depicting ghost canoe, Kejimkujik National Park. Photograph by Jennifer MacLatchy, 2012.

Despite the canoe being represented as a favoured mode of transport for a supposedly outdoors-loving and wilderness-dwelling nation, anecdotal evidence at Kejimkujik National Park suggested that there were quite a few canoeists who were unfamiliar with its tipsiness, and how to maneuver it through rocky rivers. There also appeared to be a gendered family dynamic and seating arrangement in many canoes, usually featuring a man at the stern and woman at the bow, sometimes with children in the middle. For us, as junior rangers, this gave rise to the question of who it is who has access to this "Canadian" activity of canoeing. We discovered that canoeing is available, in general, those who can afford the time and money necessary to own or rent a canoe, to those who have access to leisure time and the means to access "wilderness" spaces, or at least some canoe-able body of water, along with the physical abilities necessary to carry and/or climb into, sit in, and paddle a canoe, as well as enough familiarity with being in

and around water in order to feel safe. Indeed, these observations are reflective of a social trend that sees less use of National Parks by non-white visitors. A 1999 study, in the United States, for example, showed that, at a group of American National Parks, 90% of visitors were Caucasian, of European decent (Floyd 41). This trend is likely similar in Canada because of the similar structure of National Parks, and similar histories and present structures of colonialism and racism. Theories about the racial disparity in access to National Parks include lack of socioeconomic resources, cultural factors such as differences in norms and values, and the possibility of experiencing discrimination in unfamiliar places (Floyd 43-45). All factors seem to be reflected in the narratives of nation and nature that are presented in National Parks, which are told from a white, colonial perspective and make assumptions about the identities of visitors.

Our brief foray into experiencing a National Park from the perspective of a Junior Lesbian Ranger led me to wonder about the implications of the canoe as a symbol of Canadian national identity: how are race, gender, and sexual dynamics embedded in and reinforced in its use as a symbol? What narratives does it tell, and how do the preferred "official" narratives of Canadian national identity work to exclude certain identities and populations from inclusion in national identity via such symbols? How do colonial, patriarchal, and heteronormative narratives serve to naturalize racism, sexism, and homophobia, in an ongoing and apparently "innocent" way? Just how does this affect who has access to the wilderness? How do our unremarked biases in our national narratives contribute to making the wilderness seem like a dangerous place to be avoided for many non-white, non-straight, and female Canadians?

Chapter 3— Landscape, Nation, and Canoeing: Failure of the Myth

Bruce Erickson explores what it would mean to queer landscape in his article "fucking close to water: Queering the Production of the Nation" (sic). Beginning with the statement, often attributed to Pierre Berton, that "A Canadian is someone who knows how to make love in a canoe," Erickson unpacks the meaning embedded in this myth of hypothetical Canadian-canoe-lovemaking to reveal heteronormative, patriarchal, and colonial narratives of landscape (Erickson 309). Citing survey results from the late 1980s, he says that only 18% of Canadians claimed to have had sex in a moving vehicle, including boats; a fact which indicates that Berton's statement, and the idealized version of Canadian national identity that it represents, may more of a fantasy than a reality (Erickson 310). Indeed, on the Canadian Canoe Museum's blog, another more recent study is cited that says that only 8% of Canadians claim to have had sex in a canoe ("Bringing the Canoes to Life: 'Joy-tub'– Canoes for Courting"). Erickson points out that the failure of this myth and the failure to define Canadian identity may indeed be a part of what identifies Canadianness. He raises questions about how the failure of this particular narrative of Canadian identity reveals a "failure of the nation and nature to be exactly what we wanted;" that is, a failure of the myth of the canoe and its embedded stories about Canadian national identity to hold up in the real spaces of landscape and nature (Erickson 324).

He begins his article by arguing that the canoe, as a symbol of connection to landscape, works to cover up racist structures within the Canadian nation:

> "[T]he ideal relationship of connection to landscape held by the canoe, [...] is about hiding the actual form of the relationship with the landscape, whether racist colonialism or the production of heterosexuality, to accomplish a

> fetishizing of the leisured, supposed innocent connection to the land of the new world" (Erickson 313).

He goes on to argue that the canoe, as an illustration of a nation intimately connected with its landscape, thus serves to naturalize colonialism and heteronormativity: that is, it makes it seem as though these structures emerged from the landscape itself (Erickson 313). He talks about the possibilities of undermining such oppressive structures that are hidden behind the innocent imagery of the canoe. Rather than naturalized heterosexuality and colonialism, Erickson argues that behind the symbolism of the canoe, there is a "pattern of male homosocial desire, where the land becomes the desired object of relations between men (Erickson 322)."

He concludes his article by arguing that we need to find a politics of nature that

> "is not bent toward the utility of power. Opening ourselves to the possibilities of history means addressing the ways in which the ideologies and concrete practices that have formed our current understanding of nature represent more about the desired human outcomes than they do about anything nonhuman. It means reconceiving the nation to understand that its supposed unifying function is built upon the exclusion of certain targeted parts of the nation (Erickson 324)."

Given an understanding of a nation that is built upon exclusion, Erickson asks us to consider the possibilities of "what could have been," were this different (Erickson 324). Erickson argues that "showing the sexualization of space through colonialism [...] forces us to remember the possibility of a less determined sexuality of nature" (Erickson 327). Indeed, behind all this colonially imposed heteronormativity, we might find that, in nature, expressions of gender and sexuality are more fluid. The key argument in Erickson's article is his assertion that the myth of the canoe ultimately fails in practice, because both nature and human identities turn out to be more fluid than simple and static definitions seem to permit.

In addition to colonially imposed heteronormativity in settler Canadian society, it seems that colonialism is also embedded in settler versions of queer theory and activism. Scott Lauria Morgensen is a Native queer theorist in the U.S. who draws a distinction between what he calls Native queer modernities and non-Native queer modernities. By queer modernities, it seems, he means contemporary social constructs of queerness and queer activism; in his discussion, he aims to show the differences and spaces between a colonially-structured non-Native and more mainstream queer culture, and Native constructions of queer culture. He uses Jasbir Puar's concept of "homonationalism," which he describes as "the process whereby whiteness and imperialism create U.S. queer subjects as 'regulatory' over peoples queered by U.S. rule" (Morgensen 2). In other words, colonialism structures non-Native queer identities as normative in contrast with Native queer identities. Thus, while narratives of national identity are working to structure heterosexuality and colonialism as normative and natural, these same colonial narratives operate within queer cultures to structure non-Native queer cultures as normative and Native queer cultures as non-normative. Although Morgensen and Puar work and theorize about these issues in the United States, the concepts apply to Canadian colonialism just as well. An investigation into the ways in which historical and current uses of the canoe in Canada have been used to structure gender, sexuality, and race, can thus expose the holes in and failures of Canada's heteronormative and racist colonial myth of national origin.

Canoeing in Canada: Colonialism, Patriarchy, and Heteronormativity

The canoe is strongly steeped in a history of Canadian nation-building, having been appropriated from First Nations cultures and then used as a tool for colonization. Initially made from materials extracted from the landscape in which it was designed to travel (such as a birch bark canoe, or cedar dugouts), the use of the canoe as a national symbol depicts a nation that was contained within a landscape, waiting for the right people to come along and extract it – these people being, according to the myth, masculine white European explorers. The canoe is perfectly suited as a Canadian icon because of its utility as a tool of colonization for European settlers in trading, mapping, shaping, transporting and populating the nation (Erickson 312, 320). With its embedded colonial, patriarchal, and heteronormative narratives, the canoe represents a nation that was extracted from landscape – thus, the colonialism and heteronormativity embedded in the narrative of national origins are naturalized by seeming to have originated from the landscape.

The Canadian Canoe Museum in Peterborough, Ontario depicts this narrative of a Canadian past and present, as read through the symbolism of the canoe. In a September 2013 article in *The Peterborough Examiner* about the Canadian Canoe Museum, Michael Peterman explains that for hundreds of years before Champlain arrived, Native peoples paddled and fished, but that the real boom in canoe production and usage occurred with the arrival of white settlers, and eventually again with the beginning of the phenomenon of cottages. "So many of us have grown up with a canoe and paddle close at hand – at summer camp, at a cottage, on a camping or fishing trip, or visiting a 'wilderness' lodge" (Peterman). Indeed, many of us have—myself included—however, inclusion in

this "us" is restricted to those who can afford the cottage, canoe, leisure time, and enough experience to feel comfortable around water – and to those of us who had a parent, friend or relative who was willing and able to teach us to canoe.

Peterman continues, explaining the significance of the Canadian Canoe Museum to Canadian identity:

> "the museum is [...] an eye-opening celebration of the canoe, canoe travel and culture, and an essential record of Canadian history. In many ways the CCM is the quintessential commemoration of Canada. After all, Canada came into being as a country because of the canoe. It made its vastness accessible; it allowed explorers, fur traders, and surveyors to penetrate the interior and make sense of a daunting and difficult wilderness" (Peterman).

This sort of language reinforces the idea that this "daunting and difficult wilderness" was only ever "[made] sense of" by the European white man explorer. It forgets the First Nations peoples who had already been "[making] sense of" the wilderness for centuries, and indeed, as a result of this "[making] sense of," had been able to craft many varieties of canoes for the purposes of travel through it. By characterizing the wilderness as "daunting and difficult," the masculine European explorers, having "[made] sense of" the wilderness, are cast as superior to First Nations peoples, both in rugged strength and in intellect. The idea that First Nations peoples' understandings of, and familiarity with, their own lands did not constitute "[making] sense of" in the same way that white European explorers' activities of mapping, claiming, and colonizing were able to "[make] sense of," implies a lost and confused, helpless First Nations peoples, waiting for rescue and enlightenment from the superior "make sense of" abilities—that is, intellect and rugged masculine strength—of the white European explorers. In Peterman's statement, then, the phrase "make sense of" means to map, claim ownership and take control of, and

colonize. And indeed, it was this colonizing activity of "[making] sense of" and taming a difficult wilderness that produced the current colonial state of Canada.

Gender and sexuality are also woven inextricably through this narrative, as evidenced by Peterman's select choice of words that illustrate the gendered dynamic between masculinized European surveyors and the feminized landscape. The canoe-as-phallus penetrates the feminized wilderness and conceives of Canada in a colonial, heteronormative narrative that has come to be the tale of national origin. Thus, the first European explorers, like the original park wardens, were "idealized as [...] rugged, white male individual[s]" who ventured into the wilderness to "penetrate" and map it, manage it, and civilized it; their success and survival a testament to the superior masculinity of a superior "civilization" (Sandilands 2005, 148). Queer environmental critic Catriona Sandilands explains the importance of the historical role of park wardens because, in "their earliest incarnations as fire and game guardians to their currently diverse roles as law enforcement officers, safety monitors, and resource managers, [park wardens] embody the official and contradictory mandate of the national parks" (Sandilands 2005, 146). By exploring these roles, she shows how the national narrative is manifested in the official mandate of national parks as enforced by park wardens.

Sandilands illustrates the masculine role of the original park wardens through a description of various aspects of their lives. The park warden was "*idealized* as a rugged, white male individual whose work [took] him deep into the dangerous wilds for weeks and months" (Sandilands 2005, 148). Despite this individualist masculine ideal, park wardens' wives often accompanied them in their remote cabins in order to provide the comfort and refuge of the domestic sphere. Despite these women's hardy work in

providing food and safety in a rugged environment, the wilderness is narrated as something to be weathered and navigated by masculine strength alone (Sandilands 2005, 148). By "attach[ing] wilderness spaces to performances of heterosexual masculinity," the narratives that are told through the park warden role perpetuate the gendered power dynamics embedded in the construction of landscape and nation (Mortimer-Sandilands and Erickson 3).

As a national symbol and contemporary mode of access to recreational outdoor experiences, the canoe becomes a tool for attempting to access the heart of Canadian-ness. With a canoe, one can venture into and imagine oneself becoming a part of the narrative of vast and supposedly uninhabited wilderness. One can explore what feel like wild spaces, imagining oneself to be just like the early European explorers, conquering mother nature with a superior rugged and masculine strength. As a recreational activity, camping and canoeing appear to offer the potential for "getting away from it all," where "it all" refers to the domesticated and feminized, polluted urban spaces of every day life where masculine heterosexuality is perceived to be threatened. Away from the encumbrances of these supposedly feminized spaces of white-settler "civilization," wilderness recreation has been constructed as an opportunity for practicing the performance of whiteness and heterosexual masculinity. Often men go into wilderness spaces and practice performing feats of strength and mastery over the landscape, and seem to act with an entitlement around taking up space and altering space. Pierre Trudeau, former Prime Minister of Canada, was known for his love of canoeing. In one famous image, he paddles a cedar strip canoe while wearing a buckskin leather jacket,

embodying the image of a rugged white masculinity with appropriated elements of First Nations culture.

Figure 3.1: Pierre Trudeau paddling a canoe. <http://corymorgan.com/pierre-trudeau-and-jean-chretien-had-the-right-idea/>.

This is one image of canoeing in Canada: the solo white man with a masculinity rough and rugged enough to be a master over nature, who is also "civilized" enough to promote a white settler version of nature that reinforces colonial domination. (This phenomenon of white hypermasculinity in the landscape is evident in many of my own observations of the behaviours of other humans in the woods, which will be discussed more later in this chapter, and again in Chapter 4). Given the ways that canoes are used in real wilderness spaces, the vessel's continuing use as a symbol of Canadian national identity reinforces the narratives of the vigourous naturalness of colonization and heterosexuality. The second image of canoeing in Canada is the heterosexual white couple - either on a romantic venture to a secluded wilderness location, or perhaps paddling with a child or two, on a nice heteronormative nuclear family getaway. Both of these images promote the same constructs of racist colonial versions of heteronormative gender and sexuality.

Romanticization of Canoes

The assumption that Canadians know how to make love in a canoe characterizes Canadians as a people with a great wildness of hearts, bodies, and landscapes. This canoe-lovemaking story of national identity is built upon the presumed existence of vast expanses of rugged wilderness, and Canadians' ability to be completely at home in it. This endless wilderness would allow ample space for privacy en plein air — according to this story, one might never find other campers or unpleasant evidence of human presence in the secluded and untouched places of the Canadian landscape. This, however, isn't usually the case. The protected wilderness spaces that we have are usually national parks, which are carefully managed and frequented by numerous visitors. The unprotected wild spaces that are left are never really uninhabited – the concept of terra nulius, or land that has always been empty of human inhabitants and has never been claimed, is, as we've discussed, a colonial construction. More often than not, one might arrive at what one thought was the ideal secluded place to find empty beer cans and broken glass, boisterous and noisy neighbours, or just other people seeking the same sort of solitary space. There are ample spaces like these in the idealized Canadian landscape that is depicted in tourist advertisements, however, in reality these spaces are often full of other people or the negative effects of human development. (See figures 3.2 – 3.5.)

Figure 3.2: Crowds at Crystal Crescent Beach, Nova Scotia. Jennifer MacLatchy, 2013.

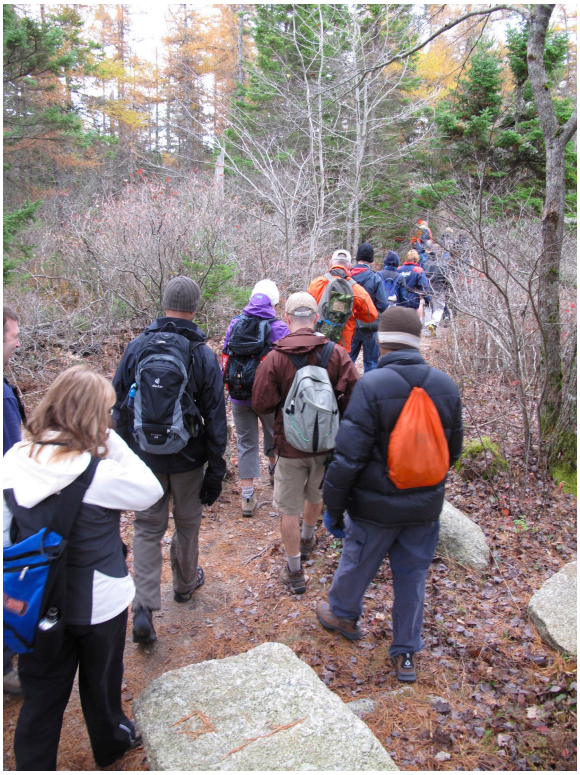


Figure 3.3: Hiking crowd at The Bluff Wilderness Hiking Trail, Nova Scotia. Jennifer MacLatchy, 2012.

Figure 3.4: Hiking crowd at Blue Mountain Summit, Nova Scotia. Jennifer MacLatchy, 2012.

Figure 3.5: Site-specific installation with found objects, Cape Chignecto, Nova Scotia. Jennifer MacLatchy, 2012.

In the "ideal" version of Canadian landscape, everyone has equal access to the necessary resources for being able to enjoy the landscape. Everyone would be able to afford to own or rent a canoe, have ample leisure time in which to use it, and live within

proximity of or within affordable travel distance to a body of water that is unpolluted enough for recreational usage. Such ideals work to erase the realities of environmental destruction that make it unhealthy or unsafe to spend time in areas that have toxic levels of chemical contaminants, as well as the social realities of those who do not have access to wilderness recreation.

The Summer 2012 issue of *Up Here* magazine (Yellowknife) presents a heteronormative representation of "sex in canoes" amongst a list of fun things to experience in the Canadian North. The illustration depicts a heterosexual white couple in a boat that is much wider than any canoe that I have ever seen and is lacking thwarts, and one of their paddles is floating away. The couple is propped up by impossibly levitating pillows, the male participant appears not to be in possession of two knees, and nothing about the scene looks comfortable. Their blanket and clothes are falling overboard and getting wet, and their wine has spilled. While it is certainly intended to be a whimsical, humourous illustration, the discrepancies between the image and realistic human and canoe proportions suggest that sex in a canoe is not a common activity.

Figure 3.6: Illustration by Monika Melnychuck, in *Up Here: Life in Canada's North*. Summer 2012, pg. 38.

Even the popular American *Cosmopolitan* magazine (the highly questionable representation of North American sexual practices that it is), has, amongst its plethora of "sex tips," instructions for the "Canoe Canoodle" in its online "Sex Position of the Day" section (Cosmopolitan Magazine). The instructions and accompanying diagram portray, again, a heteronormative caucasian couple, and offer unrealistic and useless instructions, written by someone who may not know that canoes and rowboats are quite different, and usually have thwarts and/or seats. The "Why You'll Love It" section is comical in its attempt to characterize an uncomfortably hard and impossibly too-small space as somehow pleasant. Regardless of the unlikelihood that *Cosmopolitan* readers actually will go out and try this suggested "sex position," the success of this activity is perhaps less important than the success of the idea (Erickson 314). (And indeed, as *Cosmopolitan* magazine is an American publication that is distributed internationally, it seems that the idea of love-making in canoes may not be an exclusively Canadian activity.)

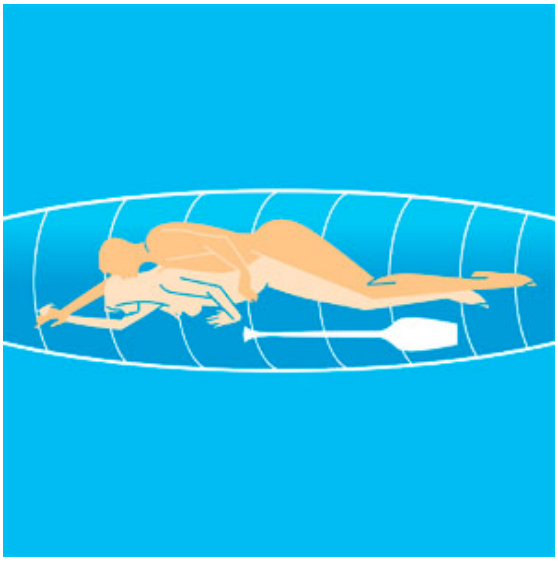


Figure 3.7: "Canoe Canoodle" diagram. Cosmopolitan Magazine. <http://www.cosmopolitan.com/sex-love/positions/canoe-canoodle-sex-position>.

Hunter Oatman-Stanford writes, in an article entitled "Love Boats" in *Collectors Weekly* in 2012, about the prevalence of love-making in boats in the United States in the 1900s and 1910s. He explains that canoeists often equipped their boats with cushions, reclining seats, lanterns, and phonographs. In a time before automobiles were available to adolescents seeking to get away from uptight chaperones on Saturday nights, canoes provided better potential for amorous escape than bicycles. Postcards and advertisements for chocolates alluded to this activity, and canoe manufacturers even marketed a wider boat lacking thwarts called the "Courting Canoe," in which there would be sufficient room for two to be side-by-side (Oatman-Stanford).

Figure 3.8: Postcard from early 1900s depicting heterosexual white couple kissing side-by-side in a canoe. <http://www.collectorsweekly.com/articles/love-boats-the-delightfully-sinful-history-of-canoes/>.

If one attends to such popular histories, it is clear that canoeing is not uniquely Canadian at all. Indeed, the etymology of the word "canoe" emerges from the Arawakan (Caribbean)"canaoua." This was the origin of the Spanish word "canoa," which Christopher Columbus used to describe the boats used by First Nations peoples who he encountered in the Caribbean (Harper). Not only is canoeing not unique to North America, but canoe-like boats have been used in all areas of the world (Erickson 320).

Unsurprisingly then, the word "canoodle" is of British and American origin and means to caress or fondle; thus a fortuitous play on words came to refer to the practice of romancing in canoes (Harper).

The surge in popularity of "canoedling" in North America in the 1900s—no doubt aided by the increasing numbers of factories, urbanization, and growing middle class with expendable leisure time—resulted in a moral panic surrounding canoe conduct. In various American cities where canoe rentals made this activity popular, policemen in boats with spotlights would patrol popular areas to ensure that canoeists and reputations remained upright and intact. In Minneapolis in 1912, a 12 am lake curfew was imposed, and in 1914 there was great concern over the menace posed to society by tight skirts worn in canoes—the apparent sole reason for this concern being that tight skirts would prevent girl canoeists from being able to swim, and thus result in drownings. In Boston in 1903, fines were imposed for kissing in canoes, while the Minneapolis Parks Board tried to enforce a rule that canoe occupants of the opposite sex over ten years of age must be sitting facing each another (Oatman-Stanford). Aside from being somewhat unclear how such a requirement was meant to accomplish the preservation of chastity, it seems that this seating arrangement might have made paddling difficult for the person who was forced to sit backwards.

Sexuality, Gender, and Race in the Myth of the Canoe

Not only does the popularity of this "canoedling" activity tend to promote heteronormative gender expressions, so often does discussion of the act of men canoeing canoeing together, or alone. In 2013, Nick Offerman, actor in the comedy sitcom *Parks*

and Recreation and author of a book titled *Paddle Your Own Canoe: One Man's Fundamentals for Delicious Living*, made an appearance on an American morning talk show called "The Today Show" to promote his book (*The Today Show*).

Figure 3.9: Nick Offerman on The Today Show, October 1, 2013. <http://www.cnn.com/2013/10/25/showbiz/gallery/moonlighting-celebrities/index.html>.

The resulting interview contained a plethora of imagery and behaviours aptly illustrating the ways in which constructs of gender, sexuality, and race are built into the symbolism of the canoe, and are not exclusively Canadian. The presentation was intentionally campy, and the exaggerated performance of rugged masculinity appeared to be somewhat in parody of itself. The interview took place in two canoes—talk show hosts Roker and Geist shared one canoe, while Offerman, in keeping with the title of his book, had the other canoe to himself. The three men wore business suits, and appeared against a backdrop of generic fake wilderness (a wilderness that is, for Canadian viewers, humourously reminiscent of "Fake Lake-gate" – the Canadian government's creation of a $2 million indoor fake lake at the G20 summit in Toronto in 2010 for use as a photo backdrop) (Brennan). It would seem that the commodification of wilderness, Canadian or not, is useful primarily as something that holds value for its ability to make a nice picture, palatable to consumers who may not be interested in dealing with the realities of insects,

weather, wildlife, or bumpy, rocky trails. Roker and Geist performed clumsy ineptitude in getting into the canoe: Roker entirely failed to get his legs into the boat, and Geist fell backwards off his seat to end up resting cozily against a stiff and uncomfortable Roker.

Figure 3.10: Willie Geist and Al Roker interviewing Nick Offerman on The Today Show, October 1, 2013. <http://www.thewrap.com/al-roker-fails-at-canoes-video/>.

This sort-of-cuddling performs the classic trope of male homosocial bonding by spending time together in the "wilderness," practicing their performance of, or "getting in touch with," their masculinity. Roker's posture and facial expression convey a discomfort with such physical contact with another man, which serves to affirm his heterosexuality and thus, masculinity. By making eye contact with the camera during this first moment of awkward glancing-around, Roker is seeking understanding and commiseration from the audience, whom he presumably expects to be like-minded and understanding heterosexual white men. Also notable were their seating positions: Roker, who is white, was in the stern, while Geist, who is Black, was in the bow. Their positioning in the boat, along with the positioning of their roles in the narrative of male homosocial bonding,

were aligned with the tendency for constructing white masculinity as superior to a feminized non-white masculinity. This narrative is consistent with the way that race and sexuality construct the gendered power dynamics of seating positions and paddling roles (even though, on this show, nobody is paddling); it is also consistent with the title of Offerman's book, which makes paddling or steering one's own into canoe a metaphor for having control over the direction of one's own life. At one point, Offerman describes a gendered power dynamic between men and "mother" nature when he says: "When you make a canoe yourself, as well as the paddle you're locomoting it with, there's something very powerful about the defeat of mother nature using our opposable thumbs and cognitive thought" (Offerman). This narrative, aided by the surroundings of fake nature, reinforces the separation between humanity and nature, leaving "real" nature as something to be overpowered and domesticated by "superior" white masculinity.

That this event occurred on an American talk show confirms that this particular performance of white heteronormative masculinity is not exclusive to Canadian national identity. It is, however, built into Western narratives of human interaction with landscape, which happens to be a large component of Canadian national identity. As we have seen, narratives that inscribe the landscape with heteronormative white masculinity are repeatedly built into the stories of Canadian national origins. Their perpetuation is imperative for patriotism—something that is evident in the lyrics of the national anthem that refer to "our home and native land," for which "all thy sons" "stand on guard" (Canada).

Despite Canada's iconic claim to canoeing and patriotic commitment to colonial heteronormativity with every repetition of the national anthem, the prevalence of "canoe-

canoedling" in the United States in the early 20th century again shows that sex in canoes may neither be as difficult nor as unique to Canadians as Berton's assertion suggests. Thus, we see a failure of sex-in-canoes to be an exclusively Canadian activity. In addition, as evidenced by the study cited at the beginning of this chapter that states that only %8 of Canadians claim to have had sex in a canoe, it is clear that Canadians are not a homogenous group with collective sex-in-canoes experiences and skills (Erickson 310). Erickson addresses this failure of Canadian canoe-sex, suggesting that the failure of Canadians to live up to Berton's statement demonstrates the "failure of the nation and nature to be exactly what we wanted" (Erickson 324). The "we" in this statement would refer to those Canadians who like to identify with, or desire to identify with, the wildness of hearts, bodies, and landscape that is encapsulated in Berton's statement. Erickson thus tracks not simply a disappointment with Canada's failure to be a nation of rugged outdoorsy people, in a landscape of vast and pristine so-called "wilderness," but points to such "failures" as potentially productive of new insights. Indeed, countless other "we"s don't necessarily identify with this particular canoe-charged desire for nation and nature. Many Canadians, especially today, may not even desire canoeing or visiting vast uninhabited wilderness spaces; many more may desire access to these things, but may lack the luxury of sufficient leisure time and necessary access to a canoe. Canadians are not a homogenous group with the same desires and opportunities, just as the Canadian landscape isn't a homogeneously vast, uninhabited, unclaimed and unpolluted wilderness.

Figure 3.11: Cartoon couple failure at canoe sex. <http://canoemuseum.wordpress.com/2013/02/14/bringing-the-canoes-to-life-joy-tub-canoes-for-courting/>.

Despite such lack of "real" homogeneity, the national narrative depicts canoeing more homogeneously. Most of the time, the default picture of canoeing in Canada consists of white middle-class men venturing into the landscape to relax and play while getting in touch with (or, performing) rugged masculinity together, or heterosexual white couples, with the man in the stern—in the position of control—and the woman in the bow, daintily paddling, or perhaps just sitting, enjoying the ride, until they reach the desired locale for romancing side-by-side. Men might bond with each other through communal bonding with the landscape, and women may go on spiritual retreats. Families may spend wholesome quality time together, away from the negative influences of a corrupt and polluting culture, and children at summer camps may "play Indian," as they explore and learn about the meaning of the canoe in defining the Canadian nation. All of this may seem to work as long as there are no real First Nations peoples—or perhaps even canoes—in the picture.

Figure 3.12: Heteronormative white nuclear family displaying gendered paddling roles. <http://www.adventuresbydisney.com/north-america/montana-alberta-vacations/>.

Figure 3.13: Heteronormative white couple displaying gendered paddling roles. <http://www.treksinthewild.com/grand-river-canoe-rentals-ontario/>.

Figure 3.14: Heteronormative white families displaying gendered paddling roles. <http://www.saugeenconservation.com/canoe.php>.

Figure 3.15: Children "Playing Indian" in a canoe at Vancouver Youth Leadership Training Outdoor Centre. <https://sasamat.org/cgi/page.cgi?_id=40>.

Figure 3.16: Children "Playing Indian" at Langskib Boys Camp, Ontario. <http://northwaters.com/photos/langskib-for-young-men/>.

Failure of the Myth

As Erickson points out:

> "It is not the mere ability to canoe, or even to have sex in a canoe, that embodies Canadian-ness, but rather the reiteration of desire to canoe in Canada—a desire for Canadian canoeing—that embodies Canadian-ness expressed through the canoe. This desire, naturalized through a history of landscape, privileges heterosexual white desires over any different, non-national, or perverse forms of canoeing pleasure" (Erickson 314).

That is, although many Canadians fail at performing the ideal version of Canadian canoeing, the idealized version continues to be perpetuated through the highlighting of select stories and the ignoring of others. Through such select storytelling, the colonial settler nation maintains the seeming naturalness and inevitability of its claims to the land, ignoring all evidence that suggests otherwise. Other stories about the past and present usages of the canoe that do not fit with the myth of Canadian-ness get figured as what Erickson calls "different, non-national, or perverse forms of canoeing pleasure" (Erickson 314). At first glance, Erickson's title might imply that having queer sex in a canoe or elsewhere near water would be one "different, non-national, or perverse" way to alter the myth of the canoe and its production of nation. But being queer, or aiming to "queer" established notions, is not only about having queer sex—it is more about the ways in which heteronormative categories fail to fit or accommodate a diversity of desires, bodies, identities, love, and lives. But what ultimately falls short about this argument is that, no matter how critical, one individual experience does not have some sort of universal effect that could ripple outward and alter the dominant narrative on a wider scale.

Elsewhere in his article, Erickson explains that a normative desire for Canadian canoeing in the dominant narrative "follows a pattern of male homosocial desire, where land becomes the desired object of relations between men. In rethinking the possibility of canoeing desire, we need to reach beyond the bounds of these relationships" (Erickson 322). Erickson here refers to the pattern of male (homosocial) bonding through a mutual performance of mastery over an object of desire, which follows the pattern of heterosexual attraction such that the landscape and the female body can stand in for each

other. Though it is easy enough to simply not engage in such patterns in ones own life, it is unclear how Erickson proposes that "rethinking the possibilities of canoeing desire" would have a farther-reaching effect on the national narrative.

How, indeed, do the roles embedded in the myth of the canoe play out in the reality of contemporary Canadian canoeing? How does the reality of canoeing performance compare with the nation-making myth of the canoe; what might queer canoeing look like? To be clear, it is not the act of canoeing itself that could be queer or heteronormative – the laws of nature, and canoes, don't seem to care how the occupants of the canoe identify with sex and gender categories. Rather, perhaps by resisting the tendency for the heteronormative colonial myth of the canoe to dictate and structure canoeing experiences, "different, non-national or perverse canoeing" can find space to exist outside of a narrative that promotes their erasure. Although it is hard to say that any small individual action, such as my own habit of canoeing alone in the wilderness despite being a lone small female, could have any wide-reaching impact on a national narrative that structures this as a masculine-dominated space, perhaps this personal level resistance still has value in its refusal to be configured by norms of gender and race. In what follows I look into a few stories of my own experiences with canoeing in order to think about how my experiences may have been affected by this national narrative, or not.

Recently while canoeing with a male friend, I sat at the bow, and felt awkwardly feminine – perhaps this was because I normally try to resist potential gendered power dynamics, but perhaps it was also in part because it was unfamiliar. It did make more sense for me to be in the bow – it was his canoe, we were going to a place that he knew how to get to, too, I was smaller than he, and a canoe steers better with the centre of

gravity closer to the stern. But, I'm used to paddling in the stern where I control the movement of the boat, and where the most stable way to sit is with knees spread wide, braced against the gunwales, in what could be classified as a more masculine pose. The bow has less space as it comes to a point in the front, making my knee-gunwale brace smaller, and seemingly daintier and more lady-like. Usually, when I paddle in the stern, taking up space with knees spread wide, I feel ownership of and control over the canoe and its movements, but this was not the case in the bow. As we paddled, without any prompting, my friend offered to switch places with me and apologized for not having offered sooner. I told him we could switch later, as I felt more content in the seating arrangements knowing that he was willing to switch and was thus not trying to perform hypermasculinity or reinforce any oppressive gendered power dynamic. So it seems that a part of my discomfort in this paddling role was just the possibility that there could be some external expectation and effort to construct my actions were indicative of an adherence to gender norms.

In contrast with this experience, another time I was about to embark in a canoe with a different male friend and things went quite differently. This friend had assumed that he would be sitting in the stern, and, as I also wanted to paddle in the stern and was unwilling to let the dominant scripts of gender fuel his entitlement, I resisted sitting in the bow. In this instance I was less willing to compromise, likely not so much because of how much I wanted to steer the boat on that particular day, but rather because I was unwilling to allow someone who was assuming certain entitlements seemingly granted to him by dominant narratives of gender roles to impose this structure on my experiences. Indeed it seems that, thanks to the gendered construction of paddling roles, along with

how gendered ways of taking up space in a canoe combine with another person's gender performance, mere seating arrangements in a canoe can sometimes (as we saw with the *Today Show*) be cause for discomfort and anxiety.

When I canoe alone, I take up space in order to stabilize the boat. I love the feeling of my muscles moving, pulling me across the water's surface, and I love the way the boat moves under me as I shift my weight. I love the quiet and solitude of an inlet, or the next lake, further away from the more popular spots. I desire the activity of canoeing, and I desire the landscape that it allows me to explore. I also desire the solitude made possible by a mostly unpopulated wilderness area, and sometimes desire the companionship of a friend or two with whom I explore the lakes and forests. In these scenarios, there is less to make me feel imposed upon by other humans who might be attempting to force me into enacting particular gender roles because of my appearance as a cis-gendered woman. In these instances it seems that although I might be resisting the dominant narrative about gender roles in nature, I am also partly fulfilling the desire for canoeing that defines the colonial idea of a vast and unpopulated wilderness. The seeming irrelevance of gender when there aren't any other humans present to perform or enforce suggests that perhaps gender doesn't really exist on its own in the wilderness in some "natural" form. But, when I am alone in the so-called "wilderness" of yet-undeveloped land, I am always aware of the potential for someone else to appear. This constant awareness is partly necessitated by my being a lone woman, since, although I may feel safe in my own company, I can also feel unsafe because of the potential for the appearance of a male human with greater physical strength than my own. This constant awareness might also be present for genderqueer and trans folks who could feel unsafe in

the wilderness because of the potential for coming across another person who might want to enforce the gender binary. Occasionally I start to feel unsafe alone, not because of the potential for encountering other humans, but because of the possibility of falling through the ice or encountering coyotes and having no one to help me, and then I find myself hoping for the appearance of another human. This push and pull between desire for solitude and company, between fear and safety, reflects a gendered dynamic that affects who is able to access wilderness spaces by feeling safe alone.

Indeed, when I go out to a lake alone, I sometimes do stumble upon lone men in canoes, and often lone men sunbathing or exploring by the water, but rarely do I ever see another lone woman or non-cisgendered-male person. Perhaps part of the reason for the lack of lone women in canoes is that it can be a long portage in, and, as a generalization based on trends in muscle mass across the gender spectrum, it may be more difficult for women to carry a canoe alone. Although I like to think that I am stronger than I look, I cannot carry an average-sized canoe by myself, and I only have access to one at this particular lake because my friend, who is male, has carried it in and left it locked to a tree by the lake. But such typically gender-marked differences in body mass and strength also affect many female-identified peoples' ability to feel safe alone in the less-populated spaces of the landscape.

Failure as Possibility

Perhaps, as J. Jack Halberstam proposes in *The Queer Art of Failure*, the failure of sex and gender norms to hold up in the real world contains the possibility for exposing more of their cracks (Halberstam 2012, xv). In terms of canoeing, these cracks in the

myth would be in the places where Canadians don't canoe, don't want to canoe, don't know how to canoe, or canoe in ways that don't reinforce the national narrative. By pointing out these cracks and failures, the myth of the canoe is shown to be a selective fabrication of stories assembled for the purposes of naturalizing and justifying white settler colonization. By embracing the ways in which our lives and experiences fail to uphold structures of gender, sexuality, and race, as Halberstam proposes, we may find one small way of queering the myth of the canoe on an individual level. Perhaps, then, it becomes apparent that the failure is not so much on behalf of the queer person who fails to adhere to norms of gender, race, and sexuality; but rather, the failure is on behalf of the gender norms that don't hold up under the pressures of lived experiences and real lives.

People who identify with the term "queer," or people who don't, could canoe together, make love or not make love, and could use the canoe to "penetrate" the wilderness via lakes and rivers, or just use it to drift gently over the water's surface and play ecstatically under the stars. Queers or non-queers could get stuck on rocks, or tip over, and fail to canoe anywhere. Queers could use the canoe to explore and investigate a variety of queer behaviours amongst flora and fauna, reading queer desire into the landscape, overriding the heteronormative narrative that shapes understandings of nature. Queers could also have no desire for canoeing, because it is hard work, and it is damp and there are bugs. Queers and non-queers alike could canoe, or not canoe, and could occupy any paddling role or combination of roles, or perhaps invent whole new ones. Queers could be Indigenous or non-Indigenous and could complicate normative settler gender and sexual norms in a multitude of ways.

This opening up of queer possibility does not depend on forgetting past histories of violence that have been naturalized in the dominant narrative in order to free ourselves —this practice of forgetting is what allows the dominant narrative to continue excluding so many identities and perpetuating violence. Rather, in remembering these histories, we could imagine the future that could be at once more honest and more inclusive (Erickson 324). If, in remembering and denaturalizing, we trouble the myth of the canoe, and with it, trouble the colonialism and heteronormativity embedded in Canadian national identity, we might be on the way to remembering and reinventing other, multifarious canoe narratives. While canoeing, if we could carry an awareness of the colonial violences that have enabled white settler society to access North American waterways in this particular type of boat, perhaps this would be a first step toward resisting the ways in which the colonialism and heteronormativity embedded in the myth of the canoe impose themselves upon our lives. And in the space that this opens up, we could move from imagining "what could have been," toward "what could be," or maybe even "what will be" or "what is" (Erickson 323).

As I've said before, canoes and waterways do not care about the sexual orientation or gender identity of the canoeists. The same laws of physics still apply, and the wind and waves still act the same way upon the boat. It seems, then, that perhaps instead of insisting upon a homonormative narrative of nature to override the heteronormative narrative, the homonormative narrative (such as Dempsey and Millan's lesbo-normative narrative) serves to uproot the heteronormative narrative by exposing its absurdity. A queer narrative of ecologies wouldn't necessitate that any form of sexuality or gender be natural or unnatural; rather, it would point to the complexities and fluidity of

various facets of human identity, and make space where more of us are able to *be*, comfortably.

Chapter 4— Performance Research as Embodied Theory

Methodology: Performative Research, Autoethnography, Reflexivity

In his article "Performance Studies: Interventions and Radical Research," Dwight Conquergood argues that engaging in performance art in the area that one researches is a way to actively be involved as a participant in the production of knowledge, rather than a removed observer. Conquergood begins his argument by citing de Certeau, who says that "what the map cuts up, the story cuts across" (Conquergood 145). Conquergood goes on to explain how a "scriptocentrism" in dominant epistemologies privileges the written text, and those aspects of knowledge that can be seen, measured, and recorded in it. Explaining that scriptocentrism erases meaning derived from "other forms of skilled, intelligent, creative activity, Conquergood argues for a "promiscuous travel between different ways of knowing" that offers potential for knowledge derived from a direct engagement with the subjects, rather than the more removed "view from above" (Conquergood 146-147).

Sandra Harding explains the differences between two such sorts of epistemologies in her article "Reinventing Ourselves as Other." Ahistorical foundationalism, she explains, is the idea that knowledge can be unsituated in experience and social location, and thus be objective (Harding 141). Humans are never without social location, and so, though one may try earnestly to be unbiased and objective, this goal seems somewhat impossible. Even if it were possible, any piece of knowledge produced without connection to experience or concrete reality would run the risk of being overly abstract and irrelevant (Harding 141). In contrast, Harding also describes experiential

foundationalism as the epistemological view that any spontaneous and uncritical understanding of an experience is true because of its grounding in concrete reality (Harding 141). While grounding in experience and concrete reality is valuable and crucial to the production of knowledge, critical reflection is also crucial in evaluating various possible explanations for experiences. In addition, simply being of a certain identity or social location does not make one equipped to speak on behalf of all people of similar identities or social locations (Butler 301). Thus, Harding argues for a combination of these two positions, which incorporates parts of both such that a grounding in concrete experience as well as critical reflection upon these experiences is useful in the production of knowledge (Harding 142).

Donna Haraway describes the absurdity of attempts at generating purely objective knowledge from a view that is both from everywhere and from nowhere, or, what she calls "the god-trick." In an article titled "Situated Knowledges: The Science Question in Feminism and the Privilege of Partial Perspective," she explains that attempts at formulating absolutely objective scientific knowledge result from a masculinist delusion that the social positioning of the white Western heterosexual able-bodied male is neutral, while everyone else's social location is marked as non-normative, and therefore unable to produce unbiased knowledge. She points to the tendency for the use of technology-enhancing vision in scientific research to cause the delusion that we can remove ourselves from social location. "I would like to insist upon the embodied nature of all vision, and so reclaim the sensory system that has been used to signify a leap out of the marked body and into a conquering gaze from nowhere" (Haraway 1991, 188). She

argues that, rather than attempting to leave behind our bodies and social locations in pursuit of some imaginary objective truth, that it is important to both value the knowledge gleaned from an embodied and situated social location as well as to apply critical reflection in the production of knowledge. "We need the power of modern critical theories of how meanings and bodies get made, not in order to deny meaning and bodies, but in order to live in meanings and bodies that have a chance for a future" (Haraway 1991, 187). Her arguments, then, emphasize the importance of a more embodied research such that the knowledge that we gain will be grounded in and relevant to real life. These two components of embodied research and critical reflection align with the two related and interconnected feminist methodologies of autoethnography and reflexivity.

By engaging with issues on a personal level, I utilize the methodology of autoethnography, wherein one derives knowledge from one's own experiences as an embodied being in a particular social circumstance. Through my work at participating in performance, I aim to achieve the more nuanced ways of knowing than can be achieved from a purely theoretical version of academics. Autoethnographic research looks to the body as the site where all research and scholarship originates. This is a point of view that Tami Spry clearly articulates clearly when she writes about her personal experience of using this methodology.

> "Autoethnographic texts express more fully the interactional textures occurring between self, other, and contexts [...] I have begun creating a self in and out of academe that allows expression of passion and spirit I have long suppressed. However academically heretical this performance of selves may be, I have learned that heresy is greatly maligned and, when put to good use, can begin a robust dance of agency in one's personal/political/professional life. So, in seeking to dis-(re)-cover my body and voice in all parts of my life, I began writing and performing autoethnography, concentrating on the body as the site

> from which the story is generated, thus beginning the methodological praxis of reintegrating my body and mind into my scholarship" (Spry 708).

Indeed humans are embodied creatures, and cannot escape this in order to supposedly free the mind to perform the "god-trick" of floating up to an objective view from at once everywhere and nowhere. Rather than treating the body and social location as an obstacle in attaining knowledge, autoethnography looks to the body in its social location as the source of more nuanced epistemologies.

Using an awareness of my own social location with respect to structures of oppression as a lens for understanding my experiences, I aim to employ the other lens that Haraway asserts is crucial for feminist epistemologies, which is the feminist method of reflexivity. Reflexivity is the process of evaluating how one's own social location along striations of power and difference necessarily affect the ways in which one produces knowledge. Rather than dismissing social location as bias-producing and detrimental to research, reflexivity is the method of uncovering these potential biases and using their effects on the research process as a source of knowledge, too (Pillow 177).

In addition to deploying these methods of engaging in performance based research, I also looked to other performance artists who have also engaged with similar themes of "wilderness" performances in the same region of the Halifax Regional Municipality, Nova Scotia. I begin by examining the work of two such artists—Anne Macmillan and D'Arcy Wilson—who work in multimedia and performance art, and engage with themes of wilderness and human presence, and human knowledge about and connection with wilderness spaces. I look to the work of these two artists in Halifax because their work operates within the same region as my own, and so our work may overlap not only in themes but also in terms of space. Macmillan doesn't appear to

directly engage with issues of gender or sexuality in her work, though Wilson does a little bit. Perhaps, as we've begun to see in other chapters, sometimes alone in the woods, gender fails and become less relevant as a category without other humans to enact gender dynamics. Regardless, both are women who spend time alone in the wilderness in order to carry out their work, and so, in a small way they both engage in claiming space for women to be safe enough to access the wilderness alone.

Anne Macmillan - "Little Lakes"

In Halifax, Nova Scotia, as a part of the Halifax Regional Municipality's 2013 Fieldwork residency program, Anne Macmillan took on the task of mapping twenty lakes within the HRM that all share the same name—"Little Lake"—by swimming their perimeters and tracking her route with GPS. Each swim resulted in a drawing of the swimmable perimeter of the lake, created from the GPS data that she collected along her route. Layered on top of existing maps, Macmillan's drawings contrast the map data and satellite imagery with her experience of the lakes' swimmable perimeters. She describes the process as a way of getting to know each lake in a unique and intimate way, gaining knowledge and familiarity with the lakes that isn't available from looking at a map (Johns). Mapping the lakes by actually submerging her body in them and swimming through them, weeds, muck, leeches and all, is a way of getting to know the shape of the lakes in a phenomenological and sensuous way, quite different from simply looking at a map (Johns). Macmillan's work addresses the abstractions of the process of mapping, and explores how the experience of being in the landscape starkly contrasts with the resulting

image of a map – a seemingly distant and removed perspective, as though viewed from Hawaway's "god-trick," objectively from above (Haraway 1991, 189).

In taking on the task of mapping, Macmillan collects experiences and stories to go along with every curve and bend in the mapped line she draws. The experiences, discoveries, and stories that she collects along the way have a place in her maps, because they affect every bend and curve in the line, even though these stories may not be immediately evident in their details to a casual observer. In this way, Macmillan's maps contain a lot more information than maps from satellite data, even though the particular information contained in the stories of her experiences isn't necessarily evident from looking at the map. In the image below, the line drawn by her swim does not entirely follow what appear to be the edges of the lake from a satellite view. This tells the viewer that the spaces between Macmillan's line and the visible shore are likely marshy or mucky and shallow; unswimmable in some way. Likewise, the places where her line appears to go onto the land beyond the edges of the lake suggest other possible bits of information about the landscape: there could be a low-lying area that was above water when the satellite image was captured that is now under water; patterns of water currents, erosion, and changes in water levels could have altered the edges of the lake, or there could be a small island, barely separated from land by a thin strip of water. It is also possible that the line drawn on the map is not exactly the route that she swam – GPS data is not always completely accurate, and often contains errors.

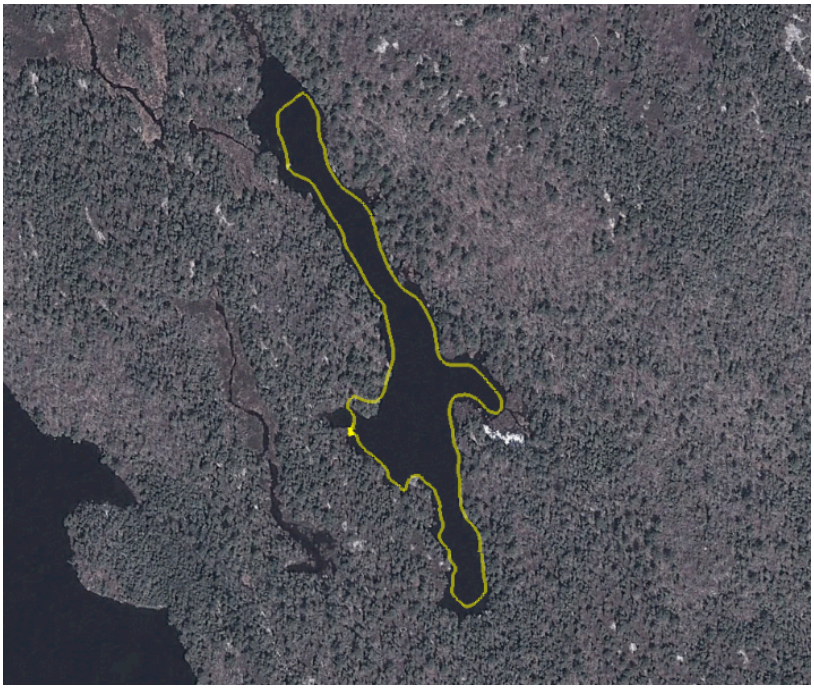


Figure 4.1: Swim map by Anne Macmillan. “Little Lakes,” 2013. <http://www.annemacmillan.com/little-lake>.

All of these unknowns suggest that her route, and the shape of the lakes, are impossible to definitively pin down, and impossible to know objectively or through a single set of parameters. The discrepancies between Macmillan’s swum line and the visible edge of the lake in the satellite image suggest that the landscape is not fixed, but rather fluid and shifting with time. Likewise, the contrast between her swum lines and the visible edges of the lake points to the fallibility of our supposedly objective ways of knowing.

Kathleen Dean Moore, in the prologue of her book *The Pine Island Paradox,* wonders about how one might go about taking measurements of an island. She imagines using a measuring tape, and wonders if it would be best to pull the tape tightly around the headland or to measure the distance along every crevice and barnacle. She points out that the cartographers job of measuring an island would be even further complicated by the

changes in tides, waves and weather, and the ways that every seeming division in the landscape is actually porous.

> "How will you map the seepage of nitrogen from the alders into the ocean, and the way the haircap moss breathes oxygen that catches in the waves? [...] I push aside the rubber stems of bull kelp, searching at the edge of the water for the place where the land ends and the sea begins. I can stand in the dark heart of the hemlock forest, feet planted firmly on the ground, and say, 'This is Pine Island,' or slosh knee-deep into the bay and say 'This is the Pacific Ocean.' But the distinction doesn't hold up at the edges. The more I search, the more elusive the edge becomes" (Moore 2004, 3-4).

The elusiveness of edges is a part of what Macmillan's work explores. Though we may already have maps of these particular lakes, she literally immerses herself in them in order to search for this edge, and finds that it is never exactly the way the map suggests it is.

Macmillan's choice to explore all lakes named "Little" is also significant, seeming to point to the strangeness of there being twenty lakes, within just one municipality, that all share the same name. This raises some questions: Are they all so diminutive that they are not worthy of their own name? What other names might they have had before the English name "Little" was applied, and what histories and stories, whose voices, might have been erased by naming them all the same thing? Are all twenty of them as indistinguishable as their name? Why is "little" the only feature notable enough to be name-worthy? "Little" is a physical characteristic, but it does not say much about the character of the lake. Anne Macmillan's painstaking mapping through physical immersion in these lakes seems to point to the fact that, though all given the same name that suggests their insignificance, each Little Lake is actually very different.

Although she makes use of the technology of GPS satellites, Anne Macmillan's swim-mapping also points to the implications of different mapping methods. The

mapping of early European settler surveyors was made into a removed activity of exercising power over the land. Earlier maps would have been made by drawing the shape of the land onto paper after exploring it and trying to measure its shapes and proportions. Maps are drawn as though viewed from above in order to give a better perspective on how one thing connects to the next, although this view is rarely ever a view from which we directly experience the landscape. Although it is useful for understanding some things, this view-from-above enacts a sort of power and control over the landscape that has been mapped, understood, and contained. Satellite imagery that is used to create maps like Google Earth also produces images of the landscape as though from the viewpoint of the "god-eye" (Haraway). The knowledge that can be gained from this removed view from above is quite different from that which can be gleaned from the experience of mapping by immersing oneself in the landscape. By immersing herself in the lakes, Macmillan partially gives up this power by giving herself over to experience of whatever the particular lake may offer – weeds, rocks, muck, leeches, debris or other unknown monsters, some of which may affect the shape of her path. Of this part of her experiences, she says, in an interview with The Coast, "I'm really interested in these aspects because they alter the shape of the recorded swim path, my experience and the identity of the lake" (Johns).

In some ways, Macmillan's mapping isn't all that different from other forms of mapping – people explore landscapes and then plot their features on paper, using various technologies to understand the shape of the land from a far-away, removed perspective. She even makes use of GPS technology and satellite data to compose her finished drawings. But her method of mapping differs from common mapping methods because of

the details she chooses to focus on: the lakes called "Little," and the little, minute details that make up their swimmable perimeters. Her activity of mapping is also different because she physically immersed herself in the subjects of her mapping, undoing the sense of removed viewership that one can get from a map. Because of this, the resulting maps of the swimmable perimeters are not the only information she gained; she became personally acquainted with the locations. Usually one first reads a map in order to follow it and explore the features that it describes – any knowledge gained from reading a map does not negate the desire to follow it, because it is only by immersing oneself in the landscape that the landscape gains personal characteristics that cannot be conveyed through a map. Indeed, the knowledge that Macmillan gained from being in the water is quite different from the knowledge that she would have gained by looking at maps made from satellite images.

More than just a simple line drawing on the map, each of Macmillan's drawings thus contain the implications of all her experiences as she swam - the muck, beaver lodges, rocks and submerged branches, leeches - all that one can imagine one might encounter on such an endeavour. Macmillan's performance of swimming is an enactment of inscribing the landscape with her own narrative. By taking on this role of map-maker, she makes a claim to space for women in the task of mapping and plotting out routes, and a space for herself to claim expertise on landscape. By adding her own narrative lines to existing maps, she raises questions about how much more there is to know about a place, and how many other layers of history there may be in a map that we can't immediately see—including layers of history that have been written over by colonialism, and how shifts in landscape have been affected by human actions.

D'Arcy Wilson - "Protect Your Love" and "Recalling Your Presence While Calling Your Name"

D'Arcy Wilson is another Halifax-based artist who works with ideas of human interaction with nature mediated through technologies. Her 2012 performance art piece called "Protect Your Love" involved setting up her tent in an electric fence enclosure, and then attempting to make contact with wildlife by talking through a walkie talkie that was connected to a "communication station" of other walkie talkies hung in trees in the nearby area (Young). She repeatedly called "hello," read stories and sang songs into the speakers, and, not surprisingly, no wildlife responded. She performed this activity in Cape Chignecto Provincial Park, Kejimkujik National Park, and Cape Breton Highlands National Park. Later on, she installed a "communication station" in the woods in Long Lake Provincial Park, and made the transmitting walkie talkie available to the public in the gallery of the Khyber Institute for the Arts, so that anyone could project their voices into the woods, from the distance of a downtown building.

Figure 4.2: D'Arcy Wilson watching for wildlife at a "Communication Station." The Coast. 24 Nov 2012. <http://www.thecoast.ca/halifax/ImageArchives?feature=Events&oid=3494764>.

The irony of trying to "make contact with" wildlife by putting oneself inside a fence that will forcibly keep wildlife out, alongside an attempt at communication that—

opposite to the desired effect—frightens any wildlife away, parodies the ways that humans try to interact with nature. Though she failed to establish contact, Wilson did note that animals were present in the areas where she set up her camp and "communication stations," as evidenced by tracks and droppings that she noticed along her hikes in and out (Wilson 2012). About her experience in Kejimkujik National Park, she wrote that, after a long day of failing to establish contact with the wildlife, she heard a large animal move past her fence at night but was too afraid to say anything (Wilson 2012). Wilson's futile struggles to connect and make contact with wildlife illustrates the sense of an elusive, intangible wilderness that remains just out of reach for a culture that is estranged from the environment. We want to see wildlife, but at the same time we are afraid of that wildlife, and so we concoct controlled scenarios in which we can interact with wildlife from across a barrier, resulting in inauthentic and forced interaction, not at all representative of how wildlife would behave without human interference. Moreover, Wilson ended up being a prisoner inside her own fence, making her scenario into a sort of reversed zoo environment. Rather than finding any meaningful connection with wildlife, she scared animals away, and rather than experiencing the freedom and excitement of exploring the wilderness, in the photos she appears to be bored, possibly pacing the confines of her small enclosure. Rather than immersing herself in the wilderness, she kept herself isolated and alienated with an electric fence, on a patch of ground that appears brown and dead in contrast with the green plants just outside her fence. This performance of alienation, caused by our own fear, unawareness, and misunderstanding of the wilderness and wildlife around us, shows that the resonant feeling of disconnect with nature is a human construction.

In 2013, Wilson was the artist in residence at Point Pleasant Park, where she completed a project that dealt with the impacts of human development on wildlife. This series of connected works, titled "Recalling Your Presence While Calling Your Name," recapitulated the themes in Wilson's previous projects. In tribute to the animals who would have once inhabited the Halifax peninsula before they were driven away by human development, Wilson held a memorial service in Point Pleasant Park. During this memorial service, she used a megaphone to announce a loud apology to those animals—the sort of sound that is a part of the ruckus that has driven wildlife away—and then waited, and not surprisingly she received no reply. On another occasion, she walked around the park at dusk, making stops to read aloud bedtime stories to the animals that featured anthropomorphized versions of the animals to whom she read. Performing an anthropomorphized version of nurturing, she walked around the park as though to tuck the animals into bed and wish them sweet dreams. Again, she found no interaction with the wildlife, and any potential remaining species would have been startled by her presence and voice, rather than comforted and lulled to sleep.

In a photo series titled "Helper," Wilson was shown standing in the ocean, holding up a handful of mussels as an offering of food for seagulls, and piling sticks and branches on an inflatable mattress to float out into a lake as an offering for beavers. Neither the seagulls nor the beavers appeared to have come to collect Wilson's offerings; most likely animals were frightened by her presence and were not in need of this particular kind of "help." In these works, Wilson shows the alienation and disconnect that results when humans attempt to connect with wildlife, especially in instances where the motivation for the attempted connection is to "help" wildlife in ways that don't address the actual

problems, such as destruction of habitat, pollution and contamination. Her actions illustrate how often human attempts at nurturing, lacking an understanding of and connection with these animals, can actually end up having the opposite effect. In all of her work, her nurturing, kind efforts to connect and interact with wildlife are juxtaposed with the complete lack of response from wildlife who are most likely terrified by her electric fences, crackling voice through walkie talkies, megaphone apologies, startling presence and nonsensical stories, and not-so-helpful interference with their activities. Her endearing performance juxtaposed with the unsettling lack of response serves to highlight the the extent of disconnect between humans and the surrounding environment, and the dangers that this poses. In this collection of performances, she acts out, for us, our own oblivious deafness. The title of this residency, "Recalling Your Presence While Calling Your Name," highlights the gaps between memory and presence, and between human desire for connection with wildlife and human obliviousness to how this could possibly work. Wilson strives to remember the presence of various animals that would have lived in the Halifax area, and "tries" to call out to them. Despite calling their names, Wilson ultimately fails at connecting because she is only *re*calling – the opportunity for calling was in the past, when the animals were present and humans were interlopers in their terrain.

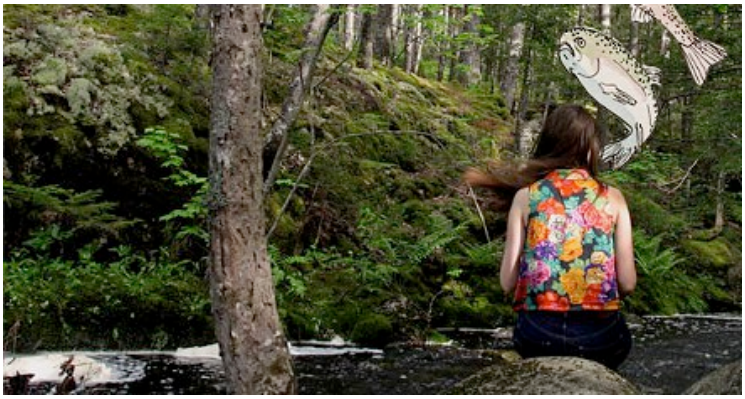


Figure 4.3: D'Arcy Wilson performing "Recalling Your Presence While Calling Your Name." Photo for the Coast: "Trout Lakes." 25 July 2013. <http://www.thecoast.ca/halifax/taking-names/Content?oid=3944974>.

Also a part of this residency, Wilson started what she called the "Woods and Lakes Swim Club and Naturalist Society." She had done research on the history of wildlife presence in the Halifax area before the urbanization of Halifax by European settlers. She led the Woods and Lakes Society on outings to various lakes accessible by bus from downtown Halifax, to hike and swim and observe wildlife in their present state, after urbanization. One afternoon I joined the Woods and Lakes Society for a visit to Long Lake, past Witherod Lake. Along the way we saw some ducks, and encountered a human who was busy clearing a build up of beaver dam across the stream flowing out of Witherod Lake into Long Lake. He told us that he lived nearby, and had been doing his part for years to keep the stream clear of beaver dams, thus protecting the woods from flooding. This act of "protecting" made an interesting contrast with D'Arcy's efforts at helping beavers by collecting and offering branches. Who is at fault for environmental destruction: humans, beavers, or both? By forming the Woods and Lakes Society and leading outings to visit nearby lakes, Wilson encouraged others to join her in observing wildlife in near-urban settings, and to consider how we connect, or don't, with the surrounding environment.

In focusing on the ways in which there is a growing disconnect between humans and nature, Wilson draws attention to the dangers of a society that doesn't understand its own place in relation to the natural world. Lacking such understanding, our efforts at addressing environmental problems or "helping" may end up causing more harm than good. Such disconnects may also be of particular pertinence in an age where children play less outdoors and more on computers, and rising rates of mental illness are contrasted by studies that show that exposure to nature calms and comforts people (Louv 3).

Self-Appointed Birch Cove Lakes Ranger and Artist-in-Residence

Having been inspired by Shawna Dempsey and Lorri Millan's *Lesbian National Parks and Services,* and after spending a lot of time in the Birch Cove Lakes and Blue Mountain Wilderness area in Halifax, I decided to appoint myself as the area's artist-in-residence and "official" park ranger. I set up a blog, titled *Self-Appointed Birch Cove Lakes Artist-in-Residence and Ranger,* where I post details of my adventures and discoveries in the area, as well as information about safety and conservation (birchcoveranger.wordpress.com). Part of my inspiration for assuming this persona was the area's confusing status as 1) part crown land wilderness reserve, 2) part privately owned by developers and mining and lumber companies, 3) part set aside for a new four-lane highway to run through the middle of it all, and 4) all of it a proposed regional park. The Birch Cove Lakes and Blue Mountain Wilderness Area is an expanse of forest, lakes and bogs that is about the size of the Halifax peninsula, and parts of it border on the edges of highways, industrial areas, and a sprawling suburban subdivision. The divisions

between the developed landscape of the industrial park with its endless expanse of pavement and the undeveloped woods with rugged granite outcrops are easy to spot. However, the divisions between protected wilderness reserve areas, land possibly slated for development, and land set aside for a new highway, are invisible in the woods. All of this land is caught up in the politics of ownership and land value along with unfulfilled promises to protect and make a regional park out of this land. My choice to play park ranger for the area is partly a reflection of my desire to protect it from development that would negatively affect its current state, but it also stems from an interest in how the area will be changed, for better and for worse, in its future as a regional park, and how it will be structured to tell a certain narrative of landscape that contributes to regional, and national, identity. It is an attempt to explore the ways in which issues of gender, strength, and ability play out within this marginal landscape to reveal information about how dualist theories fail in real spaces.

In engaging with the landscape through performance in this way, I continually question whether I actually move to undo any part of the colonial narratives contained within in the park ranger role. I am another white person roaming around the forest, claiming authority from nowhere, making trail maps of the areas that are of interest to me, and dispensing information as though from an expert, despite having only first set foot in the Birch Cove Lakes and Blue Mountain wilderness area three years ago. I continue to wonder how, and if, I find the balance between "passing" as an authority on this particular landscape – as Dempsey and Millan did in order to grab and hold people's attention – and making people uncomfortable by unsettling tidy narratives of the naturalness of heteronormativity and colonialism. I must question whether the prospect of

being invited to be on a committee dedicated to trail-planning for the future park mean that I am succeeding at posturing, or failing at undoing? Like Dempsey and Millan, I hope to continue to use humour and parody as tools for claiming the necessary authority to carry out my project. In ongoing work, I aim to further complicate the role of park rangers in a colonized landscape.

Accessibility: Gender and Strength

Alongside the gendered issues of strength and ability that I mentioned in Chapter 3 with regards to the accessibility of wilderness canoeing, there are narratives about gender and safety that may affect who is able to feel safe alone in the wilderness. I have a few times encountered others (some of whom were lone men) who acted surprised at my aloneness and expressed concern for my safety. I am never certain what it is that I am expected to be afraid of— perhaps the possibility of getting injured, or having an encounter with dangerous wildlife and then having no one around to help. These are possible scenarios, but I usually carry a cell phone with which I could call for help, and I always have a whistle. These things cross my mind, but don't bother me much. The possibility for injury or wildlife encounters has been cause for others' concern perhaps once or twice, but primarily, it seems that others expect me to be afraid of encountering a dangerous male human, and having no one around to protect me. This expectation of fear seems somewhat counterintuitive to me, because part of what I'm doing in the forest, rather than on city streets, is avoiding crowds of other people. The myth of a scary man lurking around the forest waiting to prey on women in a place where no one would be able to hear them scream also seems improbable to me – how long would said predator-

man have to wait for his female human prey to stumble along? Furthermore, most of those few men who I have met on the trails or the lake have turned out to be solitude and quiet-seeking outdoorsy folk like me – friends. The only male I encountered who did cause me to feel uneasy turned out to be skittish when spoken to. Should I happen to encounter a questionable or threatening character who wasn't skittish when spoken to, it is probable that I could run faster, climb higher, and would know the trails better. But despite my rejection of the myth of some potentially dangerous otherman in the woods, the myth still exists, and, sometimes it is not a myth. Regardless of its status as myth or non-myth, it still inspires fear that can prevent women, trans and genderqueer folks, as well as some cisgendered men from feeling safe exploring the wilderness alone.

The only character I have encountered in the Birch Cove Lakes areas who has caused me apprehension is a man who paddles a red canoe and follows others from a distance. It is not only me who he has followed – one time, my male friend encountered this same man when he was paddling alone, and also felt that he was being followed. On yet another occasion, this same friend's teenaged children were camping when this man decided to set up his camp too close to them. Frightened by his lurking, they ended up phoning their father to come and get them from across the lake in the middle of the night. This fellow is likely harmless – when I spoke to him, he seemed more frightened of me than the other way around – but he certainly has a knack for inspiring uneasiness in others. I was somewhat comforted to know that he had also followed my male friend, because this meant that he wasn't just interested in women and young teens. Perhaps he lives out there and is lonely for other humans, but doesn't possess skills of social interaction. I, too, at times have been excited to see other canoeists on the lakes, and been

curious to know where they're going or what interesting things they may have discovered. Though if I do paddle towards them, I usually wave and say hello and smile, rather than making futile attempts at stealthy spying from an easy-to-spot brightly-coloured boat. Perhaps his habit of following other humans in canoes is similar to my frequent attempts to spy on wildlife. I paddle slowly and quietly, waiting and watching for loons to appear from under the water, or hoping not to frighten a bird perched in a tree. It is worth asking who watches whom in nature, because creatures are always watching another, whether in seeking prey, in seeking to protect themselves, or simple in curiosity. By engaging in performative research as a more embodied way of knowing, we risk dissolving the clear separations between viewer and viewed, theorist and theorized. By asking who watches whom, we might uncover power dynamics embedded in how we fit into the hierarchy of watching and being watched. (I can be sure, for example, that the loons also watched me.)

Perhaps my comfort with being alone in the wilderness is just because I like the quiet and solitude, and does not mean I am not really doing some brave thing, conquering the fear that I have been socialized to nurture (though that fear does arise, at times). Still, I am a white cisgendered woman, and thus privileged to know that if I were to go missing, the discourses of colonialism that strive to erase First Nations peoples from the landscape, especially First Nations women, wouldn't prevent the authorities from bothering to look for me. Discourses of racism and classism wouldn't raise questions about whether I was being irresponsible or inviting trouble by engaging in questionable activities (although there could be wonder about whether I should have been alone in such an isolated place). What, then, do I perpetuate or resist by taking up space, alone, in

the wilderness? In some ways, it seems that I resist narratives that suggest a masculine ownership of wilderness spaces by being a lone female, taking up space in the woods. Yet in other ways, it seems that I perpetuate colonial narratives about an endless empty wilderness available for white settlers to use at their disposal. Although I like to think that I also resist this by being a part of the efforts to prevent this landscape from being developed, I am still a white settler enacting a sort of entitlement to determining the future of the landscape.

On occasion while canoeing on the lakes, I have stumbled upon lone white men sunbathing naked, but never any lone women doing the same. One man seemed startled by the appearance of two women in a canoe and quickly dashed into the bushes, reappearing shortly with his shorts on. Another continued his sunbathing, paying us no mind; perhaps he was asleep. Yet another clearly saw us and then decided to stand proudly contrapposto at the edge of the water, gazing into the distance as though he were posing for Michelangelo. Although this small sampling of anecdotal evidence isn't enough to make any generalized conclusion about the role of gender and race in people's ability to feel comfortable and at ease in the wilderness, it does seem safe to say that gender and race likely play a role in who feels entitled to take up space, and who is able to feel safe and comfortable alone in the wilderness.

Hypermasculinity in Nature

On another occasion at Susie's Lake, at the popular swimming spot at the base of a steep granite outcrop, a friend and I encountered three white men, a ten-year-old boy, and a dog. The men were loud and rowdy, wildly hollering while jumping off rocks into

the water in a grandiose performance of machismo. In their flawless display of masculine bravery (that is, stupidity), they were lucky not to discover a shallower rock in that area, just deep enough to not be visible through the brown-tinted water. Their dog was barking loudly and incessantly, and their response to this was to swear and yell insults at the dog, which, not surprisingly, seemed only to add to the din of noise rather than silence it. They tried to skip rocks on the water for the dog to fetch, resulting in the dog getting hit in the face with a rock, which only made him bark more, and louder. When the three men decided to swim across the small inlet to jump from rocks on the other side, the boy hesitated to follow, and one man, who seemed to be the father, yelled "You're ten years old, don't be a coward!" Clearly the boy, and the dog, were failing at their indoctrination into hypermasculinity, and the men had to further demonstrate by way of exaggerating their performance of brute machismo. Or, perhaps the display of machismo was performed for my friend and me – perhaps if we hadn't been there to provide an external audience, they would have been less inclined to perform for each other.

Such performances of hypermasculinity demonstrate an inherent colonial entitlement to taking up space: these men burst forcefully into the scene and inserted their loud and abrasive voices, imposing their presence upon anyone and anything within earshot (which, in this case, would have been a fairly large area). They trampled undergrowth and broke branches to throw for (or at) their dog and left behind garbage. This entitlement to taking up space and altering space through careless intrusion has been normalized by colonial narratives that position the landscape as an expendable resource. Performances like these that leave marks on the landscape serve to reinforce that narrative by making it visible.

Figure 4.4: N 44º24.939 W 065º14.471. Broken glass and maple leaf along the Mersey River, Kejimkujik National Park. Jennifer MacLatchy, 2012.

Figure 4.5: N 44° 28.946 W 063° 46.188. Colourful paint splatters on rock. Polly's Cove, Nova Scotia. Jennifer MacLatchy, 2013.

In my Birch Cove Lakes wanderings, I have come across quite a few samples of evidence of human presence that contain signifiers of a performance of this heteronormative colonial hypermasculinity. On my website that is my platform for talking about my project of appointing myself as the ranger and artist in residence for the Birch Cove Lakes, I wrote about one of my discoveries of human destruction on Crane Lake. There are old ruins of a cabin on Crane Lake that include a stone and concrete

fireplace and still-sanding chimney, and seem to have been used somewhat recently as a camp by a messy group of people. A rough structure, now fallen, seems to have been built from cut trees around the fireplace and a picnic table and hung with tarps to make what might have been a cozy shelter. The surrounding area had small clear-cuts and was strewn with mildewed camping gear of all varieties, including moldy shotgun cases, rusty ammo boxes, and shell casings scattered all over. The scene reeked with leftover signifiers of a performance of white hypermasculinity enacting a colonial entitlement to the land and its resources.

Given my assumed role of park ranger, I offered the following reminders about etiquette and conservation when back-country camping for whomever might happen to stumble upon my blog.

1. If you need wood for building shelter or for firewood, seek out already-fallen dead wood, and seek it out from various locations. Avoid stripping any one area of its deadfall, and avoid disturbing the undergrowth as much as possible as you collect it.

2. If you absolutely must cut down a tree, choose one from an area where many young trees are growing in close proximity. This way, the space you create by taking one tree will give the others more space in which to grow. Do not clearcut! This should be obvious. Do you want to go camping in a clearcut? I don't.

3. Pack In, Pack Out: If you carried it in there, you can carry it out! This includes, but is not limited to, 2 dozen empty fuel canisters, bottles and cans, axes and saws, fishing tackle, gun cases and ammo boxes, coolers, about 17 tarps, pots, 2 cast-iron pans, cooking and eating utensils, colander evidently used for target practice, dishes, moldy sleeping bags and blankets and slabs of foam, an old toilet, unopened canned food without labels, your moldy sneakers, lanterns, broken lawn chairs, a barbecue, and approximately 283 bullet shell casings. And seriously, how did you get a picnic table in there? Never mind, you probably used an ATV to drag it in while crushing the undergrowth and mashing up the wetlands. Just leave it there; it's already on its way to decomposing.

4. If you're trying to "get away from it all" to reconnect with nature and such, remember that hypermasculinity is a human construct, and is therefore a part of the "it all" that you seek to "get away from." Thus, it might be best left behind. Also, asserting your masculinity by going on a rampage of destruction, killing trees and animals willy-nilly, and acting with a sense of entitlement to use and abuse the landscape, is not all that attractive. Try to remember that the earth is not a disposable resource, that your actions have an impact, and that there might be some attractiveness to a masculinity that can exist in harmony with the landscape. (Of course, I am making assumptions about your gender identity based on your camping style, and I could be wrong. If you are actually just a bunch of extremely misguided eco-feminist queer folks and allies, my apologies; but still, clean up your act.)

5. Moose are endangered in this area – I hope you're not shooting them. Don't shoot the moose. This would be called poaching and is illegal. Never mind, you were probably too loud to see any wildlife.

Figure 4.6: N 44° 40.109 W 063° 42.805. Camping debris in the Birch Cove Lakes. Jennifer MacLatchy, 2013.

Other Human Impacts

In other places, I have discovered more examples of—often destructive—human presence. The shore of Quarry Lake that is most easily accessible from the road is strewn with camping garbage, spray paint, and broken glass. One rock face, tilted on one side of a small inlet to face a rock on the other side, appears to have been used for target-practice

for throwing glass bottles. The exposed granite glitters brilliantly with its covering of multicoloured glass shards, and more of these shards glitter from below the surface of the water where they have accumulated. The impossibility of cleaning up such a mess weighs heavily – this is not the ocean where there would be enough wave action to wear down so many thousands of sharp edges that are now inextricably mixed in with the lake bottom.

Another rock face is covered with graffiti, and written overtop of it all in giant blue letters, someone has ironically declared all of this a "WASTE OF PAINT." Nearby, on a small island (which is really just a large rock jutting out of the water in the middle of the lake), someone has placed an old armchair. I appreciate the incongruence of such a comfortable seat placed in such an impractical and difficult-to-access location, though I am aware that it will eventually deteriorate and fall apart or be knocked off the rock and end up in the bottom of the lake, like the rest of the garbage. In another location, someone has built a precarious raft from wooden pallets and plywood, likely dragged in from the junk heap behind the building supply store. In yet another place, someone has spray-painted the words "ideal dance floor rock" along with a whimsical dancing cat on a flat piece of granite by the edge of the water, offering, along with the contamination that comes with paint chemicals and the visual evidence of human presence, the suggestion of a fond memory and an invitation to others to similarly enjoy of the space. I appreciate the chair and the raft, and select spray-painted messages, though they all have some negative impact on the environment as well.

Figure 4.7: N 44° 40.334 W 063° 41.878. Enjoying the easy chair on a rock island in Quarry Lake. Photo by Francis Mullins, 2013.

Figure 4.8: N 44° 39.508 W 063° 41.297. Testing out the slowly sinking trash raft on Susie's Lake. Photo by Chenise Haché, 2013.

Figure 4.9: N 44° 37.898 W 063° 39.123. Graffiti in Long Lake Provincial Park, Nova Scotia. Jennifer MacLatchy, 2013.

Indeed, as critical as I am of other people's messes and destructive performances of hypermasculinity, I appreciate the more whimsical and creative human evidence. And, I too leave behind evidence of my presence: a swing hung in a tree, the ropes slowly wearing scars onto the branch from which it hangs, dead branches below it cleared out to make room for swinging; some broken pieces of patio stone and flag tape along a trail, some burnt sticks. The swing provides fun and comfort, and invites whomever discovers it to experience the landscape in a different way. The broken patio stones and flag tape help keep shoes dry and guide the way for other visitors, and the burnt sticks kept me warm and cooked my breakfast. But, the plastic flagtape, synthetic rope, treated wood and pieces of concrete all contain materials that are not natural to this place, adding traces of contamination to the landscape. When I swim, sunscreen from my skin makes an oily slick on the water—is this any different from the contaminants that result from spray paint and garbage? Perhaps the difference between human impacts that I like and dislike are in the level of care taken to minimize impact, and the level of creativity involved. Certainly there are others who would disapprove of my swing, the easy chair in the

middle of the lake, or the evidence of campfires. It is clear that there is no distinct moral boundary between good and bad human impacts on the landscape, just as there is no way to separate humans from nature, or to eliminate evidence of human presence from an otherwise supposedly pristine landscape. Sometimes the good things fall apart and turn into garbage and pollution. And sometimes the garbage is the material for new creations and new ways of interacting with the landscape. Sometimes the flag tape that marked the trail becomes garbage that will choke a bird, and sometimes the industrial park garbage will become a raft. Sometimes the flotsam and jetsam that washes in with the tide is toxic and entangles shore birds, but sometimes a piece of old fishing net becomes a hammock, and ropes and buoys become a swing or a game of bowling. Although we can certainly make some moral claims about environmental pollution and destruction, it is never as simple as claiming that human influences on landscape are entirely bad, while nature in its so-called "pure" form unaltered by human presence is entirely good.

Figure 4.10. N48° 36.353 W124° 43.763. Found fishnet and driftwood hammock, West Coast Trail, BC. Jennifer MacLatchy, 2013.

Figure 4.11: N48° 36.383 W124° 43.813. Found buoy bowling alley, West Coast Trail, BC. Jennifer MacLatchy, 2013.

Conundrums of Parks vs. Non-Parks; Urban vs. Wilderness

Parks are often depicted as pristine areas that are protected from the negative impacts of human presence, even though parks are usually created for the purposes of human recreation. First Nations residents of areas that have become parks have often been pushed off of their land in order to create the impression of a "terra nullius," empty wilderness (Mackey 2000,130), so that thousands of visitors and tourists can pass through and have the feeling of a wilderness experience in an artificially altered but supposedly-pristine wilderness. Borders drawn around protected areas do nothing to prevent movement of wildlife and contamination within an ecosystem. A fine example of this is a stream that flows from a culvert beneath a highway into a wetland that eventually flows into Susie's Lake. The contaminants in the stream pay no attention to human-drawn lines between suburb and wilderness area, and so, the negative effects of human activity in the developed area are carried into the "protected" area.

Figure 4.12: N 44° 39.589 W 063° 40.613. Plastic garbage and cloudy water in the stream flowing from the culvert under the corner of Lacewood Drive and Highway 102. Jennifer MacLatchy, 2013.

Another irony of protected areas is the way that they are shaped around developed areas, often composed of land that is less useful for development or resource extraction and therefore considered "waste" land. Indeed, in the Birch Cove Lakes and Blue Mountain wilderness area, there is a corridor of unprotected land through the middle of the area designated as a right of way for a proposed new highway. One argument in support of building this highway suggests that it would help to protect the wilderness area by blocking further expansion of suburbs (Environmental Design and Management Limited). While suburban expansion should indeed be curbed in this area, it seems somewhat absurd to suggest that building an unnecessary four-lane highway would be the best way to go about this. A highway would also cut off the area from a wildlife corridor, thus making the area less desirable, if not inaccessible, for various species of wildlife that are undoubtedly an integral part of the landscape.

Figure 4.13: N 44° 41.368 W 063° 43.982. Found “proposed 4-lane highway” sign and added “moose crossing” sign along the trail to the peak of Blue Mountain. Halifax, NS. Jennifer MacLatchy, 2014.

Figure 4.14: N 44° 41.368 W 063° 43.982. “Moose in the Middle of a 4-Lane Highway.” Jennifer MacLatchy with Emily Davidson, 2014.

These are some of the things that I consider when I play with the idea of being a park ranger for an area that will likely become a regional or provincial park. The documents that study plans for the hypothetical park’s layout specify that the park would be intended for human recreation, and not as a wildlife reserve (Environmental Design and Management Limited). The separation between wilderness as suitable for wildlife and wilderness suitable for human recreation suggests that the desired idea of wilderness for human recreation is not really a wilderness at all, but rather, a constructed and controlled space with managed activities and access. These constructed wilderness spaces are designed to deliver the user with what *feels* like a true wilderness experience through careful management of the placement and lines of sight of buildings and amenities and city lights, and distance from sources of noise such as highways (Environmental Design and Management Limited). But this act of carefully arranging and curating a constructed

"wilderness" experience seems contrary to the definition of wilderness as a wild space, not controlled by humans. In some ways, this is no different from my use of the space when I go there to escape the noise and bustle of the city. I seek out the places where there is no garbage, where I am unlikely to encounter other people, and where I can no longer hear the highway. When I take photographs, I sometimes try to edit these things out of the images. I do this in an attempt to create an image of the expansive wilderness that I want it to be. But, I also take pictures of the garbage, the broken glass, and cut trees, in an effort to make known the negative impacts of human presence, but also in an effort to resist the colonial narrative of parklands as pristine spaces unaffected by human presence. Perhaps this is simply a part of the reality of a so-called "wilderness" space in such close proximity to an urban centre, completely surrounded by suburban sprawl and highways and industrial developments. As D'Arcy Wilson's performance projects illustrate, and as is discussed in Richard Louv's book *Last Child in the Woods,* having lost much of our connection to nature and understanding of our own place in the ecosystem, we are often unable to recognize the ways in which the wildlife is missing or the landscape has been altered. Regardless, perhaps it would be worth aiming for a more meaningful preservation of wilderness than simply keeping at bay the obvious visual appearances of human presence, and instead aim for a sort of "real" preservation.

It seems that any place that has been stamped with the human-applied label "wilderness" is bound to be not-quite-that, as it is managed by humans to moderate human influences in order to preserve it for for human purposes of recreation and enjoyment. In turning the Birch Cove Lakes and Blue Mountain wilderness area into a park with the intention of representing the unique natural characteristics of the region and

make it more attractive for tourists, we continue the processes of colonization that European settlers began when they created the first national parks in the Rocky Mountains (Sandilands 14). National parks regularly write over First Nation's histories and others, or alter histories to seem more benign, thus promoting the continuation of the narrative of Canadian national origins that naturalizes colonialism and characterizes Canada as a land of "difficult and daunting wilderness" that could only be "penetrate[d] and [made] sense of" (read: colonized) by the supposedly superior rugged masculine skills and intellect of white male European explorers (Peterman). Though the Birch Cove Lakes and Blue Mountain wilderness area will not be a National Park, provincial and regional parks contain similar narratives about their own particular regions. Thus this park will develop its own official narrative about the landscape, history, and culture of the Halifax area, and this narrative will likely cover up whatever other unsavoury histories there may be that tell stories of racism, colonialism, wildlife depletion, and environmental destruction, as these stories may decrease enjoyment and do little to promote tourism. As J. B. MacKinnon writes in *Once and Future World,* once landscape is altered and wildlife fades away from where it once was thriving, human society is quick to forget what once was. He explains his dismay over a suburban development on the prairie grasslands of his childhood home that forced the red foxes away, and his even greater dismay upon learning that these foxes, which for him had represented true wildness, were actually an invasive species themselves (MacKinnon 8). Things are rarely as they seem. The layers of stories that tell of the past of the landscape are quick to be covered up and replaced by new versions. Thus, in the future Birch Cove Lakes and Blue Mountain regional park, there will likely be placards and signs that tell select stories,

most likely of the sort that are not so difficult to hear. There will likely be no posted facts about the absence of the endangered mainland moose which prefers not to cross highways, nor about the effects of nearby developments on the water quality in a certain stream. How many more layers of history are there that I have yet been unable to uncover? What are the First Nations histories of this area? I don't know what First Nations histories there may be in this particular piece of landscape, and so far have been unable to find anything other than a map that highlights areas of high potential for archaeological significance (Environmental Design and Management Limited). I managed to come across this map within the *Halifax Regional Municipality Focus Report for the Proposed Highway 113*, as though the information were only important for purposes of highway planning. The report says that, while there are known sites of archaeological interest somewhere in the general area, these locations cannot be made publicly known in accordance with the "Special Places Protection Act"(Environmental Design and Management Limited). All that can be gleaned from this, then, is what we could already assume: indeed, if we look we may find First Nations history embedded in this particular landscape.

Implications of Playing Ranger

By playing at being the "Birch Cove Ranger" I aim to explore the ways that humans impact the landscape and the implications of this landscape's future as a parkland, both positive, negative, and otherwise. Part of what draws me to the place in its current state is its being relatively unmanaged; my interactions with the landscape are mostly unmediated, thus making it feel closer to that abstract idea of a pristine, untouched

wilderness. Because it is not currently regulated as a park or supervised as such, there remains a sort of freedom to play and explore, unhindered by official trails and rules that restrict movement and activity. There are no informative signs to facilitate an understanding of the place, "spoil" the view, or to direct visitors to the places with the best views so that they can take the same photograph as thousands of others before them (though this still does happen, with the top of the steep granite outcrop that offers expansive views of Susie's Lake being the location for many photographs that represent the area, including some of my own). What trails do exist in the area have been made and maintained by those who use them. Many of the mountain biking trails feature small bridges, also made by those who use them from logs and branches nailed together, along with some lumber, possibly sourced from the aforementioned industrial park junk heap. The portage routes between the lakes have been marked by canoeists with small reflective squares nailed to trees. The things that facilitate human usage have been put in place by those who use it, partly using materials already present, including human refuse, eliminating the need for management from above. In some ways this is not all that different from park trails maintained by authorities which thus mediate and direct a hiker's wilderness experience, but, in other ways, these clearly user-created and maintained trails and markers invite visitors to become participants in shaping the wilderness for themselves and for others.

However, while the lack of enforced rules allows for more freedom in some ways, it also fails to prevent the environmental destruction that results from tree cutting, garbage, and careless fires. This wilderness area, with its current lack of park status and accompanying management and control by park officials, seems perhaps closer to that

ideal image of Canadian wilderness than any of the official parks that aim to create this image through careful control and management of the wilderness. The improbability of this area, in such close proximity to a city so as to be easily accessible but still mostly unpopulated, seems to be more fitting with that idealized vision of endless and accessible Canadian wilderness than any national parks are with their carefully constructed versions of picturesque wilderness. By playing with the role of the park ranger in this space then, I aim to unpack the ways in which certain narratives have been inscribed upon the landscape, and explore the ways in which we might go about unsettling or changing these.

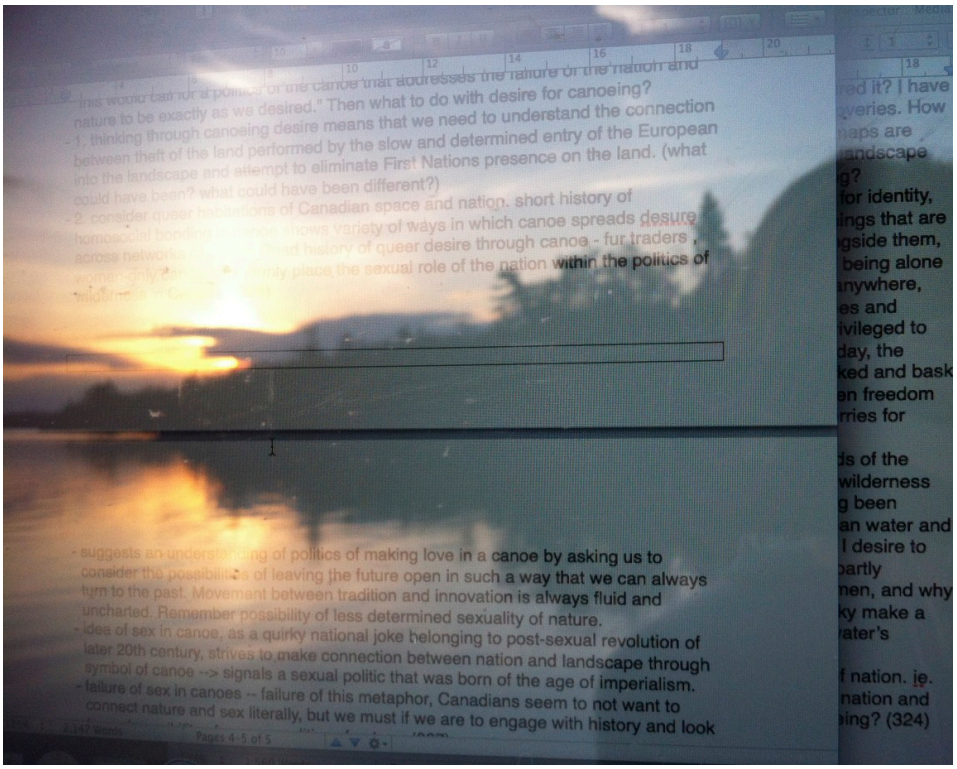


Figure 4.15: N 44° 39.513 W 063° 41.387. Computer reflections of sunset and lake. Susie's Lake. Jennifer MacLatchy, 2013.

The Ideal Falls Apart

Catriona Mortimer-Sandilands writes about the tendency to commodify landscape into symbols that promote ecotourism in a time of ecological destruction in an article titled "Melancholy Natures, Queer Ecologies." She explains that environmental destruction and the loss of many wilderness places cause a desire for what is missing, and this desire, or the feeling that something is missing, then fuels ecotourism. There is a tendency to imagine a binary between the destructive effects of human activity and the contrasting peaceful gentleness and wondrous creativity of nature. Ecotourism promotes this idea of wondrous nature, she explains, by selling palatable romanticized images of the most spectacular places, and making promises of intimate connection to it all. However, in reality, although such places may indeed be spectacular, they don't always manage to live up to the promises of the romanticized images. In the space between what is and what is hoped for—represented in the romanticized images of the spectacular—is where we experience the melancholy of disconnect. To illustrate this, she quotes SueEllen Campbell, who writes about her experiences in the desert in New Mexico:

> "I couldn't even tell myself that if humans are violent and destructive, the natural world, at least, is peaceful and enduring, not while I lay with my back pressed tightly against the remnants of enormous volcanic explosions and the cold winter earth stole my own body's warmth" (Campbell 5).

A couple of friends and I went camping last summer in the Birch Cove Lakes area, which was much more appealing to us than the idea of visiting an official campground and paying park fees to camp on a gravel "tent pad" next to noisy neighbours with dogs and kids and RV's that start their engines at 6am and waft exhaust fumes into the tent. Despite this freedom, things didn't turn out quite as we'd envisioned. We packed all our things into dry-bags, tied them together with a rope, and floated them

on the water as we swam across to an island. But the island turned out to be rocky and steep with dense bush, and had nowhere that we could set up a tent. So we swam back, and along the way I kicked a hidden submerged rock and ripped open the top of my foot. Once back on shore, we resigned ourselves to a spot that appeared to have been frequently camped on, featuring cleared brush, a fire pit and log benches, scattered empty bottles and cans, broken glass, and, tellingly, an empty can of Raid. While I tended to my wounded foot, my friend carefully picked out a glass-free patch of flat ground upon which to pitch the tent. We quickly discovered that this spot, like every other spot on the edge of the lake this year, was infested with aggressive red ants that were determined to chase us away. They would not let us build a fire, relentlessly climbing and stinging whoever's hands were attempting to pile twigs. They were biting the wound on my foot, and soon all three of us were chased into the shallow water for respite. Then, possibly drawn by my blood in the water, an enormous leech appeared, causing all three of us to end up perched on a not-quite-big-enough boulder protruding from the water, where we sat, trying not to fall off as we swatted blackflies. But it wasn't all bad – my friends had found, in a recently abandoned box of empty beer bottles by our campsite, two unopened beers which they decided were safe to drink after they had submerged them in the lake for a while to chill them.

Shortly afterward, we opened our dry-bags to discover that a couple of them had leaked, including the ones that contained our food, and some clothes. Naturally, it rained overnight, which had the helpful effect of chasing away the ants, but unfortunately it also further soaked the things that we had hung up to dry, including newspaper that we had planned to use for kindling. Unable to start a fire, we ate soggy trail mix while we packed

up our muddy things and then made the fifteen-minute trek along the muddy trail to the Tim Hortons right near the trailhead. We did our best to ignore stares while we dripped mud and twigs onto the floor, and thoroughly enjoyed a hot breakfast in a building surrounded by pavement, and welcomed the experience of drinking bad coffee from paper cups printed with silhouetted treetops.

On one hand, this story could illustrate the great wilderness adventures available in a free-for-all land of woods and lakes right at the edge of the city, complete with some human comforts such as beer kindly left behind by previous campers and the familiar comforts of a nearby Tim Hortons (in all of its commodified Canadian supporting-kids-camps-and-hockey-team-charities splendour). On the other hand, fitting with the image of a wild and unruly "difficult and daunting wilderness" (Peterman), on this occasion the wilderness did indeed seem to assault us from all angles, rather than inviting us into a peaceful tranquility as we had hoped. On this occasion, our idealized image of landscape —the landscape that we desired and set out in search for—failed to hold up in the face of the realities that we encountered. So it seems that nature resists simple definition, causing our tidy ideas about nature to come undone as soon as we leave the house. Leaving behind the position of the removed and objective theorist and actually becoming immersed in an unruly nature, we find that it that shifts and flows out of the clean borders we have drawn for it.

How, then, does one go about exploring wilderness places and appreciating the more enjoyable parts of such adventures without spectacularizing or creating romanticized images? I seem to have a habit of collecting pictures of myself doing handstands or other such photogenic acrobatic things before magnificent backdrops of

mountains, sunsets and beaches, mud flats and cliffs and tide, shoreline and coastline, in trees, atop rocks, or balanced on other people. I suppose this is partly an expression of joy and energy, along with a celebration of my ability to move and align my spine, just a few years after a back injury. These pictures seem to make something monumental of the experience of being in that place. I post them online so that I can share my excitement with others, but probably also so that others will view me as an adventurous, agile, energetic and interesting person, full of life. Or, perhaps it is so I will perceive myself that way, and feel accomplished in the task of living life to the fullest. This perhaps has less to do with gender, sexuality, or race, but rather has more to do with another sort of story about the realities of being a vulnerable, breakable, mortal human body in the wilderness. I love these pictures for the memories that they represent, and because they remind me of the experiences that I've had, so that they can continue to fill me up. Where is the line between experience and memory? How can we treasure memories without romanticizing them and therefore running the risk of trying to turn nature into something it is not? Perhaps the key is in remembering that there is always more to an image than what meets the eye. Perhaps in recognizing that although images may depict what appear to spectacular moments, these too were also ordinary moments wherein tidy narratives of nature fall apart.

Figure 4.16: N 49° 07.247 W 125° 53.727. Handstand at Long Beach, Pacific Rim National Park, BC. Jennifer MacLatchy, 2012.

Figure 4.17: N 45° 18.943 W 064° 26.413. Handstand on a low tide mud flat at Cape Split. Jennifer MacLatchy, 2013.

Figure 4.18: N 45° 39.228 W 062° 29.649. Handstand at sunset at Melmerby Beach, Nova Scotia. Jennifer MacLatchy, 2013.

Figure 4.19: N 44° 41.473 W 063° 08.372. Handstand at Martinique Beach, Nova Scotia. Amber Moon Graveline, 2013.

At times in my explorations of the Birch Cove Lakes wilderness area I felt restless, as though my adventures weren't big enough or spectacular enough. Instead, I desired places that I have learned about through the ways in which they have been marketed as tourist destinations. What does it mean to appreciate, and what does it mean to spectacularize? Is it entirely a bad thing to spectacularize? Perhaps the danger in spectacularizing lies in its capacity to separate us from an understanding of the full spectrum of stories contained within a particular place and time. Instead of

spectacularizing, perhaps we would do well to appreciate the grandeur and wonder or peace and tranquility that these experiences in nature provide without forgetting the many other layers of stories that all exist simultaneously.

In Celebration of Confusion

As my time in the Birch Cove Lakes area has shown me, the borders between "wilderness" and "civilization" are fairly arbitrary. In the case of the Birch Cove Lakes, the apparent division seems to be mostly a result of where developers have yet seen fit to develop box stores and parking lots, and where they haven't yet got around to it. But in reality, the human/nature divide is a false dualism (Johnson). How much of the idea of "protecting" the wilderness has to do with keeping our own human influence out? And how much of this effort to restrict human influence is actually just a restriction on the aesthetic changes that human presence would bring, in order to facilitate and maintain a "wilderness experience" for park visitors? As evidence for this focus on maintaining only the aesthetics of a landscape untouched by humans, there are maps of the Birch Cove Lakes and Blue Mountain wilderness areas that painstakingly plot out sight lines between wilderness areas and developed areas, for the purposes of curating a pure wilderness aesthetic for backcountry areas.

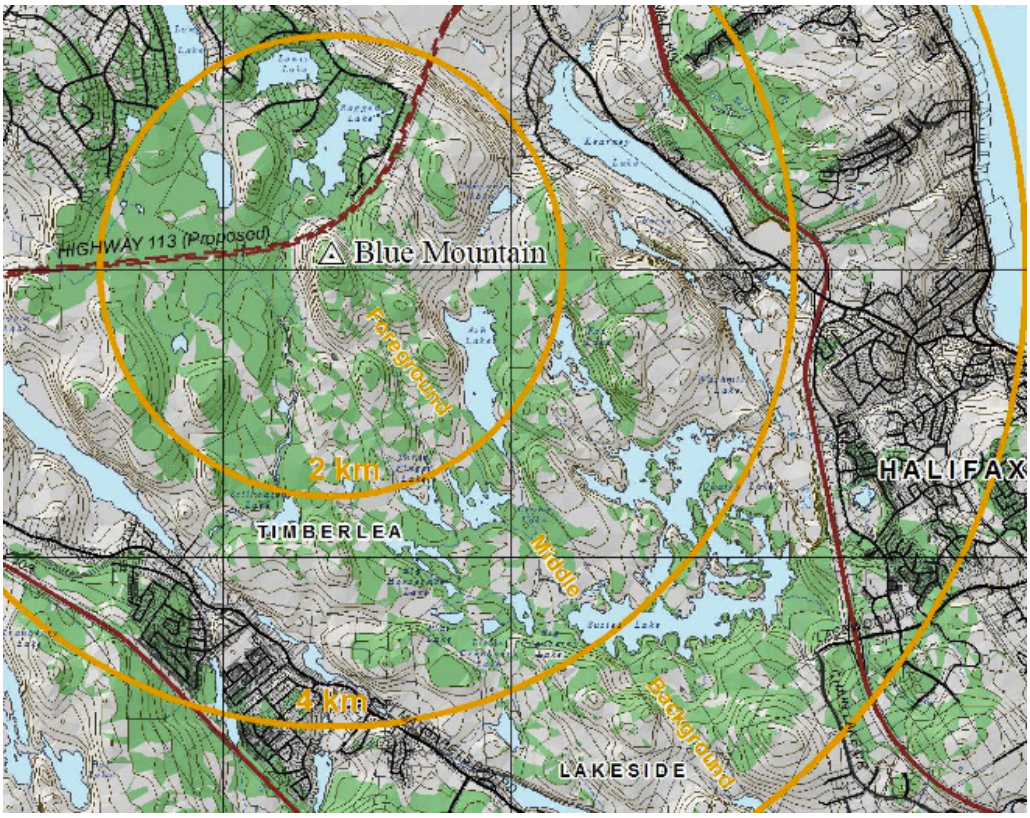


Figure 4.20: Map of sight lines from Blue Mountain summit: green areas are visible, light grey areas are not. “Focus Report for the Proposed Highway 113.” HRM, 2006. <https://www.novascotia.ca/nse/ea/highway113/Hwy113_app_b1.pdf>.

Figure 4.21: Map of sight lines from some of the lakes in the Birch Cove Lakes wilderness area: green areas are visible. "Focus Report for the Proposed Highway 113." HRM, 2006. <https://www.novascotia.ca/nse/ea/highway113/Hwy113_app_b1.pdf>.

Even if one cannot see any signs of human development from a particular backcountry location does not mean that that location is in any way "pristine" or untouched by humans. Even if the obvious presence of human development is not visible, one may still be surrounded by a landscape that has already been drastically altered by human development. The larger animals are mostly absent, and the trees are likely a lot smaller than they would have been if the area had never been logged. Various species of flora and fauna are endangered due to human intrusions. So although the appearance of pure and endless wilderness can be partly facilitated through careful park planning, the

immediate surroundings in the backcountry have already been altered by human presence in ways that may not be immediately detectible if one doesn't know what to look for.

But human presence is not always something separate from and destructive of nature. Eliminating views of buildings may be one way to eliminate the *appearance* of human presence on the land, but ultimately human presence cannot be separated from the landscape, since humans are not separate from nature. Alex Johnson explains this in his article "How to Queer Ecology: One Goose at a Time":

> "Do I spend equal times in the parking lot and the forest? Can I really say the parking lot is separate from the forest? What if I end up staying in the parking lot the whole time? What if it has been a long drive and I really need to pee? The problem is, the Nature/Human split is not a split. It is a dualism. It is false. I propose messing it up. I propose queering Nature"(Johnson).

Johnson goes on to address the cultural habit of equating "nature" with moral purity, which becomes problematic when narratives of nature are made to normalize and naturalize heterosexuality. He recalls having felt as though he'd been hit in the gut after reading an essay by David Quammen titled "The Miracle of Geese" because of its use of geese as a shining example of social order, partly in relation to their apparently monogamous heterosexual pairings. Quammen's article contributes to the social narrative that constructs heterosexual monogamy as natural and therefore healthy and morally pure, and, by contrast, homosexuality and non-monogamy are presumed to be unnatural. Johnson points out a basic fact that begins to expose the flaws in these assumptions: "plenty of geese aren't straight" (Johnson). Johnson explains:

> "Quammen assumed that geese are straight because it was easy to do. [...] But generalizing about the habits of both humans and the more-than-human living world not only denies that certain behavior already exists, it limits the potential for that behavior to become more common, and more commonly accepted" (Johnson).

His point here isn't to argue that, because there are examples of queerness in nature, humans should embrace queerness too, but rather, that the project of queering nature is more about imagining the possibilities of nature when our preconceptions about it fall apart. He points out the variety and unpredictability of nature, and argues that there is therefore no fixed definition of "natural."

> "The living world exhibits monogamy. But it also exhibits orgies, gender transformation, and cloning. What, then, is natural? All of it. None of it. Instead of using the more-than-human world as justification for or against certain behavior and characteristics, let's use the more-than-human world as a humbling indication of the capacity and diversity of all life on Earth" (Johnson).

Like Sandilands, Johnson goes on to explain the problems with nature writing that attempts to romanticize nature as something pure and constant, separate from modern human complexity. Given the fluidity and indeterminability of nature, he argues that to truly be willing to write about nature requires being willing to embrace the contradictions and paradoxes, and to be wrong or confused. "Nature has always humiliated the self-congratulatory scientist. Let's stop congratulating ourselves. Instead, let's give a round of applause to the delicious complexity" (Johnson).

In his article, Johnson uses the word "queer" as a verb to refer to the action that is required to unsettle knowledge that depends upon the false split between nature and human. To begin with, there are contradicting narratives of nature and humanity from which we can choose, depending on what point we are aiming to prove. On one hand, nature is considered to be pure and good, while on the other hand, it is messy and dangerous. Again, Johnson explains:

> "People who call gays unnatural presume that Nature is pure, perfect, and predictable. [...] *Gays act against nature*. And yet: we rip open the Earth. We dominate the landscape, compromising the integrity of the living world. [...] Our culture sets Nature as the highest bar for decorum, while simultaneously giving

> Nature our lowest standard of respect. [...] We call geese beautiful and elegant and faithful until they are shitting all over the lawn and terrorizing young children. Then we poison their eggs. Or shoot them." (emphasis in original) (Johnson)

In exposing the impossibility of conformity, Johnson points to the complexity of the realities of human existence and nature. He says, "Instead of talking about noncomformity, I want to talk about possibility and unnameably complex reality. [...] The problem with unnameably complex reality is that it's really hard to pin down and even harder to write about." In order to begin to attempt this discussion, Johnson draws on the origins of the word "ecology" (Johnson). He explains that the term was first meant to refer to the study of the dynamics between living things and the environment, and the constant state of flux of these beings, relationships, and things. "Queer ecology, then, is the study of dynamics across all phenomena, all behavior, all possibility. It is the relation between past, present, and future" (Johnson). It also must be open to whatever happens, complexities and inconsistencies and all.

> "Any writer who chooses the more-than-human world as a subject must acknowledge both the complexity and paradox contained within the subject of nature, as well as the contradictions wrapped up within the writer's very self. Such a writer will write about the parking lot and the invasive knapweed and the unseasonably warm weather and how he or she is undeniably mixed up in the complications. [...] A queer ecology is a liberatory ecology. [...] No man can categorize those relations without lying. Categories offer us a way of organizing our world. They are tools. They are power. Acknowledge the power. Acknowledge the lie" (Johnson).

Indeed, when I write about the Birch Cove Lakes and Blue Mountain wilderness area, I find myself entangled in this lie, struggling to untangle the "real" nature from the places affected by human influence. However, there is no way to separate the two, because the landscape, though forested rather than covered in pavement, is inextricably woven with human history, human presence, and human plans for its future. Even what

seems to be the physical boundary between the parking lot and the forest is blurred, as branches and leaves blow onto the parking lot, a squirrel skitters across one corner, a groundhog makes its home in the caverns amidst the piled rock that supports the parking lot, and the garbage blows over or is dumped over the edge. Yet this is where I go, when I go into nature to get away from the built landscapes of noisy streets and crowds of people. Indeed it is a refuge away from all of this, and in the forest the trees continue growing and the water continues flowing, mostly paying no mind to the city that has different and conflicting plans for it's future. In some ways, the forest is indeed very different from the city. But inevitably, when I imagine these difference to be absolute, I am falling into the idea of the false human/nature split.

I struggled with my own internalized construction of the human/nature split one afternoon when I sought to get away from the city bustle and busyness by immersing myself in the simplicity of the forest, only to find that the forest wasn't so simple or easy after all. I spent an hour riding a crowded bus through traffic jams to get out to where the industrial park borders the forest surrounding the Birch Cove Lakes. I walked around to the back of the building supply box store, climbed over the piles of discarded and damaged patio stones and lumber and dead sod, and across this arbitrary line between city and wood nature. I followed the small footpath as it winds up and down over rocks and granite outcrops and through scruffy stands of evergreens, and to the top of the hill that overlooks the water, where a tall white pine rises above the rest. I had climbed this tree before, though it lacks any low branches. Previously, I had pulled on a small branch to bring a bigger limb within my reach, and then monkeyed my way up from the

bouncing, dangling end of the limb, towards the trunk. Once in the lower branches, it was an easy climb from there.

But on this day, I pulled on the same smaller branch, and before I could reach the limb to which it was attached, the small branch snapped off in my hand. There were no other smaller branches within reach that could be used to pull the limb toward me. I tried using the fallen branch to reach over the limb and pull it down, but the small branch snapped again under my weight. I tried jumping, running leaps, and piling stones, all to no avail. Exhausted, I lay sprawled on the ground under the tree, looking up into its beckoning branches, feeling quite discouraged and defeated. As I lay there, I reflected: *Maybe I can't climb this tree, maybe I can't do just anything I put my mind to. Maybe I'm not as agile as I'd like to think I am; maybe I'm not actually Spiderman. Or maybe the tree doesn't want me in its branches today. Maybe I, white settler city girl, can't always imagine that I'm somehow entitled to reach the peak of every mountain, or top of the tallest tree, just because I feel wonder at its grandeur and imagine that it is beckoning to me, as though it were there for me to climb and conquer. How did I end up here? I live in the city. I eat food from the store, drink tap water, sleep under a roof that keeps me warm and comfortable, and get around on roads, on buses. If I get hungry or thirsty or cold, my needs will be met by the city. My bag is full of snacks and water from the store and the tap, and a smartphone that can tell me my exact location, and how to get home, at what time and on which bus. I am privileged enough to be able to afford the time and money necessary to ride the bus out to the edge of the city in order to spend recreation time frolicking in the woods... Maybe the tree isn't here for the sole purpose of comforting me.*

I pondered all of these things, and tried to let go of my determination to climb the tree, but I couldn't. I looked up into the highest branches, and felt as though I needed to be there. I got up and walked over to a different branch that drooped low enough to reach, but was thinner a branch than I'd usually try climbing. I pulled on it, and it bent easily down toward me, but didn't break. I tested it with my whole weight, and it strained, but held me. I pulled myself up, hooked my legs around it, and monkeyed my way up the bouncing branch toward the trunk. Once in the lower branches, I climbed easily, way, way up. I sat comfortably between two branches, hugging the trunk, gazing out over the lake and forest, and stayed there for a while, breathing and pondering. I felt as though I should apologize to the tree for being so rough in my determination to climb. I broke off a small branch, knocked off a lot of twigs, failed to leave no trace. Who was I, so entitled to be there, that I thought I could force my way? But still, it let me rest in its branches.

Once I came down from the tree, I looked again at the small limb that I had used to gain access. Thin and pliable, who knows at what point it would have snapped? Directly beneath it, a rock jutted out of the ground, forming a small point— it was right above this where I had been hanging, all four limbs struggling up the branch, none below me prepared to break a fall. I imagined myself falling on my back, my spine breaking across the rock, and remembered the pain of being broken.

Again, I wondered: *Why do I take these risks? I thought I had already learned that I am not invincible; to respect the limits of the body, its fragility, and its wondrous capacity to heal— when treated properly. Perhaps I have more to learn— but still, I know I will want to climb that tree again, and I know I will want to find a way. Am I failing to understand my limitations, or my relationship to this "wilderness?" Why is it that I think*

I can come here to "get away," for just a few moments, by crossing an arbitrary line between land managed as an industrial park, and land managed as a wilderness reserve, with its own rules that regulate human activity? Why is it that I think I can still be in control of my own interactions with landscape, while imagining myself in some free and untouched place? Am I engaging in colonization by climbing this tree? Am I trying to perform the competent woods-woman, conqueror explorer, agile, nimble, resourceful, and strong, performing an acrobatics of identity, determined to be who I must believe myself to be, at the risk of injuring and debilitating that self?

Such questions seem at once both trivial and potentially telling. The tree doesn't invite me to an easy climb, and faced with its reality, my preconceptions about this tree as a refuge fall apart. In imagining myself immersed in nature, I fail to leave my humanness, colonial entitlements, and the structures of the city behind. Likewise, as Johnson, points out, geese resist being characterized by human ideals about them. Indeed, geese are often used as a symbol of Canadian wilderness, but they also shit all over lawns and river-side bike paths, and occasionally chase young children—and even adults sometimes—while hissing with threatening beaks open wide. One consequence of this confusion of conflicting nature narratives is that neither are quite right, and neither hold up in the real spaces of the landscape. Another consequence is that it can force us to ask questions and pick apart assumptions about identity that are based upon over-simplistic narratives of nature. Perhaps, like in the confusing status and contested borders of the Birch Cove Lakes, conflicting narratives of nature can be a place to play, and explore the ways in which narratives and theories sometimes fail.

Kathleen Dean Moore writes, in her book *Pine Island Paradox,* about her attempts at stalking seals from her kayak. She explains the dynamics of watching and being watched when she describes noticing the seals watching her, and then, once she turns her gaze upon them, how they slip away and disappear from sight. She chronicles her attempts at paddling towards them with her hat on backwards so that they might think she were paddling away, and then paddling backwards towards them, all to no avail. She writes, "It is a heartache, honestly, to be so shunned" (Moore 2004). This heartache, perhaps, is part of the melancholy that Catriona Mortimer-Sandilands describes that is in the space between what we wanted nature to be, and what it actually turns out to be (Mortimer-Sandilands 337). Moore writes about the next progression in her seal stalking efforts when she describes how, after allowing herself to drift silently toward the seals on an outgoing tide, she finds herself face to face with two of them, and, startled at their sudden appearance and movements towards her, she paddles frantically away (Moore 2004, 18-23). In these scenarios, the seals resist being framed by her ideals, and she only manages to eventually feel a connection with them when she is not trying to find it. They offer her comfort, but not when she wanted it and went seeking it (Moore 2004, 22).

Along similar story-lines, I have developed a certain affection for the enormous population of crows that congregate at the top of a hill around dusk every day, and I stand in awe at the sight and sound of them all lifting up into the sky at once. I tell myself fantasies about the purity of the crows' understanding of community and connectedness with each other, and go walking with the intention of spending time with them, learning from them. But as I stop to gaze up at them with such warm thoughts of community and connectedness pinned upon them, they lift up into the sky again, shit on me, and fly away,

leaving me alone and quite uncertain about my momentary conviction of the greater moral status of crows. Similarly, I recently put myself to the impossible task of stalking a herd of about twenty deer. I followed their tracks on skis, and for reasons that are perhaps obvious, I proved unable to disguise myself as one of them and slip undetected into their midst. Although at times I like to think of myself as agile and graceful and swift, I was, in contrast with the deer, extremely slow, clumsy and loud. The closest encounter I had with them, aside from taking pictures from a distance through a zoom lens as they leapt and sailed away from me, was when one male deer stayed behind the herd to stomp on the ground while having a staring contest with me. I tried blinking slowly, looking away and cocking my head to the side, and purring slightly—all tried and true methods for making friends with partly feral cats—all to no avail. Eventually the deer stopped his stomping and staring, and let out a high-pitched squeal as he leapt off to join the others, leaving me behind. These deer failed to live up to my Snow White ideal; or, perhaps more accurately, my fantasy Snow White ideal failed to hold up in the real spaces of nature. The heartache that Moore describes at being so rejected by the seals is perhaps a result of feeling as though it were a rejection on behalf of all nature. Perhaps what it might actually mean is that a connection with nature doesn't quite work that way. Perhaps it means that, as suspected, I am a human, not a deer.

Another animal that seems to have found itself frequently representative of Canadian-ness is the beaver. Inhabiting the many lakes, rivers, and streams that Canada likes to make itself known for, the beaver is also an industrious worker, cutting down trees and building lodges and dams. Unfortunately, the romanticized part of the beaver's story ends here, because we are faced with what seem to be destructive acts of cutting

down trees and causing flooding by damming waterways. These behaviours perhaps only seem destructive in the ways that they mirror our own human habits of destruction, and sometimes thwart our efforts to curb our own negative environmental impacts. Sometimes, in our state of disconnect from the natural world, we fail to distinguish between the destructive actions of humans and beavers. The image below depicts the base of a tree on the edge of the Ottawa River, fittingly located just below Parliament Hill. The text, partly obscured having been gnawed off by a beaver, reads " whoever is cutting this tree [...] aware of the value [...] of LIFE. This includes [...] theirs. [...]" Beside this, someone else has written "It's a beaver you moron! Who chips off fucking slivers of wood?" and beneath this message, a cartoon drawing of a beaver says "Hi hi." Sometimes, in the name of the preservation of nature – even within the downtown core of the nation's capital city – we end up admonishing nature itself for not behaving as expected, and for containing the same elements of violence and destruction that we sometimes believe are a human invention in opposition to a nature which is entirely gentle and good. Sometimes, in the misunderstandings that result from such a disconnect, we may end up causing more harm than good, or may at least cause a beaver to have indigestion that might result from consuming sharpie ink.

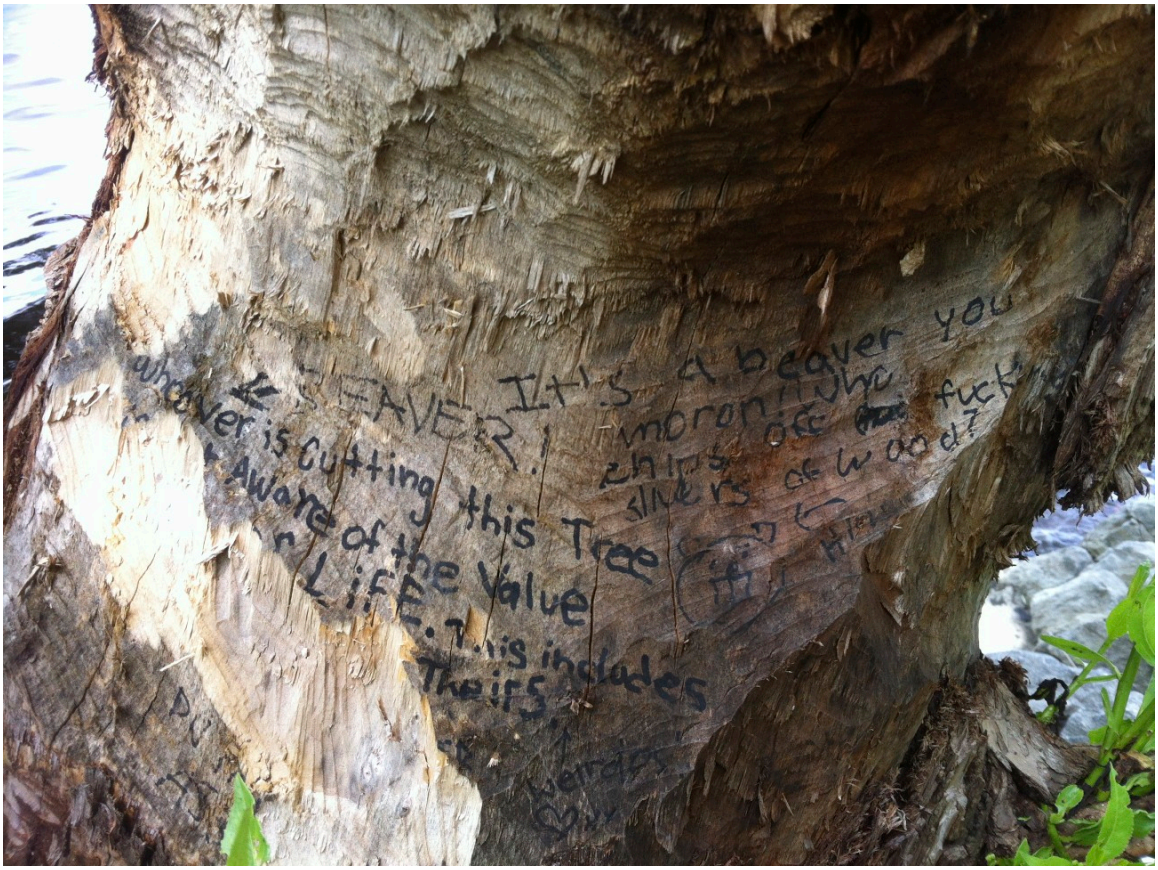


Figure 4.22: N 45° 25.619 W 075° 41.926. Beaver-chewed tree on the shore of the Ottawa River, suitably located just below Parliament Hill. Jennifer MacLatchy. Ottawa, 2013.

Because of the constant flux and indeterminability, a queer ecology must be one that allows for the unsettling of dominant narratives about a human/nature split. A queer ecology must be open to whatever happens, complexities and inconsistencies and all. In my performance research of enacting the role of a park ranger, I made a humourous effort at exposing the lies or inconsistencies in the categories that try to organize the world and create social striations of power and privilege. I cannot escape my whiteness that grants me access to a presumed "belonging," nor would it be productive to attempt to do so. Rather, using the research methodology of reflexology and striving to maintain an awareness of my position as a white settler acting as an authority on wilderness, I aim to complicate the role of the park ranger as a seemingly benevolent mediator between

humans and nature. While my own small actions cannot make a change to the greater dominant discourse of colonialism, my explorations in performance art can serve to ask questions of it in whatever ways I can. Perhaps most importantly, initially my actions serve to teach me what works and what doesn't in some practical ways.

Thus, by weaving my own identity as queer into this performance as well as my identity as a woman who often spends time in the wilderness alone, I aim to complicate the dominant narratives that naturalize a patriarchal and heteronormative version of wilderness, both in my doing and in my telling. By taking Dempsey and Millan's invitation to join in the performance of enacting a lesbian park ranger role, I likewise uncover some of the ways that heteronormativity structures conceptions of nature in the particular marginal landscape within which I carry out my project.

By exploring all of these intersecting and often conflicting narratives through performance, I question the positive, negative, and otherwise ambiguous possibilities for the methods of environmental conservation structured within the constructs of national and regional parks. Within a marginal landscape such as the Birch Cove Lakes, caught between various development projects all vying to encroach on its boundaries, I explore and try to map out the porous and shifting division that tries to define the human/nature split. I question whether it is possible to to find some middle space between turning this particular landscape into a romanticized symbol of Canadian national identity and allowing competing desires for development turn it into more industrial park box stores, parking lots, suburbs and highways. In performing the park ranger role, I invite others to experience the complexities of the landscape for themselves, after offering my own bits of useful information about safety and trails and points of interest.

I also find that my ideals about my own sense of self and self-perceived identity as outdoorsy, adventurous, strong and agile fall apart when held up to the challenges of the real spaces of the wilderness. Sometimes I need someone else to carry the canoe in order for me to be able to access those canoe-able places, and sometimes I just can't climb that tree. Sometimes I have a peaceful afternoon, reading or writing alone in an isolated corner of the lake. Sometimes a lone man shows up and asks me what I'm doing out there alone, offering a patronizing caution against such reckless activities as going outdoors without bringing along a man for protection. Sometimes I try to commune with the wildlife, but it swims, leaps, and flies away from me. Other times a seal does pop up right beside my kayak, and a loon flies right overhead. Sometimes I am warm and comfortable and well-fed and refreshed, and yet other times everything is soaked and my foot is hurt and I just want a hot breakfast. To continue to perform the role of the (sometimes junior lesbian) park ranger in these places is to continue asking these questions and complicating tidy ideals that try to structure landscape as heteronormative by showing how, for myself and others in wilderness spaces, these ideals fall apart.

Conclusion

In this convoluted mapping of research interests, aimed at getting at what happens "out of bounds," I have explored a variety of ways that certain attempts at dismantling restrictive categories of gender and sexuality fail, as well as the potential for performance art to engage with and affect perceptions of reality. Lady Gaga appeared to be a promising figure of neo-Dadist rebellion against social norms, imagining and performing utopic visions that might bring a new queer world into being. But ultimately, her work fails, because it is not grounded in the irreversible physical and social realities of real human lives. Indeed, as her disastrous last tour shows, such shapeshifting comes crashing down when it collides with human limitations. Subsequently, I looked to Shawna Dempsey and Lorri Millan's *Lesbian National Parks and Services* as an example of a work of performance art that takes place in another, much more expansive source of fantasy space, the national parks. Dempsey and Millan slip past detection as impostors and interact with an unsuspecting public in an everyday setting, thus complicating assumptions about the heteronormativity of dominant narratives of wilderness. Careful thinking about the canoe, one of their props, and the symbol often taken to be at the core of Canadian settler and First Nations identity, permitted me to further explore issues of gender, sexuality, and race, as they are embedded in narratives of nature and nation. However, it wasn't enough simply to critique others performances and props; it was time too put my research to work. Taking Dempsey and Millan's invitation to become a "junior lesbian ranger," I developed my own performances, finding that a performative

research methodology yields much more messy and interesting results than a more strictly abstracted and theoretical method.

Lady Gaga's promise was in the ecstatic, glittery version of a queer utopia that she committed herself to performing into reality. In many ways, she resists being structured by public expectations, instead seeming to embrace the abject and monstrous, creating a dynamic of push and pull between attraction and repulsion, potentially and usefully causing viewers to question the nature of their own assumptions and desires. Although Gaga lives through her performance creations and appears to eliminate the divide between artifice and reality, or between the stage and her real life, she fails to truly integrate her imagined queer utopia with social reality. She offers messages of self esteem and youth empowerment, speaks out against bullying and the epidemic of queer youth suicide, and invites all her "little monsters" to be brave and join her ecstatic song and dance about self acceptance. But she doesn't manage to meet all "little monsters" in the spaces of their various social realities, where issues of poverty, racism, and ability dramatically affect the ways they can engage with her performance. Gaga often reminds her fans that she is no different from them, having become the superstar that she is through hard work and the appreciation and encouragement of others, and suggests that, therefore "we're all born superstars," or, that everyone can live their dreams just as she has. She invites all little monsters to join her on stage, but the stage turns out to be not big enough, and inaccessible to those without enough money for the most coveted front row concert ticket. While an attractive idea, it is not actually the case that just anyone can access the economic and human resources that Lady Gaga has that enable her to bring to

fruition so many of her extravagant performance fantasies. Indeed, even her own fantasy world falls apart as soon as she becomes injured and is forced to face the reality of living in an aging mortal human body, no matter how many resources she may have at her disposal to assist her.

In Dempsey and Millan's *Lesbian National Parks and Services*, I found a somewhat more accessible example of performance art that integrated itself more easily with a social reality with which I was familiar. By enacting their own queer version of nature within the context of a national park, and by claiming the authority of a park ranger in order to project their work into unlikely audiences, they moved toward exposing the cracks in a fixed narrative of nature. This fixed narrative of nature constructs heterosexuality as natural and ignores the existence of other identities. It also tells a certain patriarchal and colonial version of national history, which the lesbian park rangers work to disrupt at least in part by telling their own stories about invisible and forgotten histories of women's contributions to shaping the national landscape. Although Dempsey and Millan's work counters heteronormative narratives of nature and encourages us to question the authority of park rangers, it does not help us to see clearly what other versions of history, in addition to queer histories, have been pushed aside by the national narrative.

By examining the ways in which Dempsey and Millan's whiteness contributes to their ability to access the necessary authority to carry out their project, it becomes apparent that the discourse of colonialism is even more deeply embedded in narratives of nature and national origin. Using the national symbolism of the canoe as a vehicle for

exploring these colonial discourses of nature and nation, I look to uncover the ways that the dominant narrative makes colonialism and heterosexuality seem natural and inevitable. By looking at the ways in which this national myth of the canoe fails to hold water in history and in the present, I suggest that a queering of ecology would mean allowing this myth to fall apart, taking with it all of its tidy categories of identity.

While delving into my own performance project of enacting a park ranger persona, I looked to the performance work of Anne Macmillan and D'Arcy Wilson, who also engage with issues of human relationships to nature in the Halifax Regional Municipality. Drawing inspiration from their work as well as Dempsey and Millan's, I decided to appoint myself as the ranger (and artist-in-residence) for the Birch Cove Lakes and Blue Mountain wilderness area. This particular location has served my performance research interests well, because it complicates the boundaries between human and nature, city and wilderness, showing such categories to be messier and more porous than they seem at first glance. By enacting the persona of a park ranger, I aimed to move to the other side of the divide between performer and spectator, theorist and subject. By taking on this persona and engaging these actions through my own body in the actual space of the wilderness, I also lost some of the security in maintaining clean divisions between researcher and researched, subject and object. By enacting the role of a "park ranger" in a landscape with a future made uncertain by the conflicting interests of development and conservation, I aimed to complicate the mediation of public interactions with landscape and wilderness experiences.

Figure 4.23: N44°39.767 W063°40.883. Ice on grasses, Susie's Lake. Jennifer MacLatchy, 2013.

In the Birch Cove Lakes area, and in my own experience, I rediscovered the failure of the binary of a human/nature split. I also found, along with the failure of this split, a general failure to distinguish between destructive human impacts on nature, and positive or indifferent human effects on the shaping of landscape. Most importantly, however, I found that my own idealized versions of nature failed to hold up in the real spaces of this marginal wilderness landscape. Sometimes, when we think nature is going to be beautiful, peaceful, and comforting, instead we find armies of stinging red ants, enormous leeches, windstorms that make paddling difficult and threaten to capsize us; sometimes, while admiring the birds, we get shat upon. Sometimes we find moments of peace and tranquility, contentedness and wonder, but just as often we get injured, rained on, hungry and cold, or find ourselves tired and alone on a difficult icy trail while dusk approaches; the same landscape that just moments ago was welcoming and gentle is now transformed into something hostile and threatening. And then it switches back again, and

is none of the above, or other things as well. This work is of course only beginning. In my life, I have so many more threads to follow in the task of understanding, raveling, and complicating human relationships with/in nature.

Figure 4.24: N 44° 39.613 W 063° 41.742. Sunset on Susie's Lake. Jennifer MacLatchy, 2013.

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