# Mythical Beasts: How Queer Bodies Expand the Religious Imaginary

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A thesis submitted to the faculty of the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts in the Department of Religious Studies (Religion and Culture).

Chapel Hill
2009

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**ABSTRACT**

MEGAN GOODWIN – Mythical Beasts:
How Queer Bodies Expand the Religious Imaginary
(Under the direction of Randall Styers)

The chiasmus of work on and with the body (*askesis*) and knowledge created by being-in-body (*noesis*) makes possible radically different thought about bodies and religiosity. Religion thus emerges as a site of meaning-making: an explanation for why one's body is the way that it is and a space in which to celebrate that body and use it in service to the divine. I read Foucault's theory of becoming-homosexual and Jantzen's religious philosophy of becoming-divine against the interviews and writings of Raven Kaldera, a male-to-female transsexual in the Northern Tradition. Kaldera's story is one of self-fashioning: he has shaped his body and his life to reflect his noetic experience of the divine – Hela, Norse patroness of the dead, requested that Kaldera serve as shaman to a sexually transgressive Norse Pagan community. I conclude that Kaldera instantiates a liberatory model of religiosity for those excluded by the western religious imaginary.

"I've gotten up every morning for the past 18 years and looked in the mirror and seen an abstraction made flesh, a mythical beast. It is very, very real for me. Here I am, folks, a unicorn, a dragon, a chimera. Here I am, fellow beasties. Are there enough of us, yet, to spill over the pages of the fairy tale books and hold hostage the rules of this world?"

~ Raven Kaldera, astroqueer.tripod.com

“The god of the imagination is the imagination. The law of the imagination is, whatever works. The law of the imagination is not universal truth, but the work's truth, fought for and won.”

~ Salman Rushdie, *The Ground Beneath Her Feet*

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## INTRODUCTION

### Mythical Beasts

Every May since 1979, EarthSpirit has hosted the Rites of Spring in the Berkshire Hills of western Massachusetts. Rites of Spring is among the largest and oldest Pagan festivals in the United States. The festival offers workshops, rituals, and performances to celebrate the earth as sacred. In May 1990, a Pagan woman attended a workshop on sacred androgyny with two men, her husband and her lover. She remembers:

> I walked into [the] workshop...and a large, heavyset, hairy woman with a body like mine (and a 5 o'clock shadow like mine—only mine was blond and didn't show) got up and told everyone about how she was an intersexual who'd found a spiritual calling in hir[1] condition. I sat stunned, my tongue frozen in my mouth.
>
> I'd always believed it was something to hide, a shameful, annoying thing. My husband and lover, who flanked me, didn't even know what I was. I'd

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1 Pronouns become slippery when you're disrupting the gender binary. Throughout this thesis, I default to "xe" (subjective) and "hir" (objective) whenever gender identity is indeterminate. Gender-ambiguous pronouns are jarring and disruptive. Here, that disruption is absolutely intentional, in deference to and indicative of the negotiation and transgression of gender boundaries that characterize transgender identity.

Despite his painstakingly and religiously cultivated third gender identity, however, Kaldera linguistically identifies as male – which is to say that he uses male pronouns to describe and refer to himself. He addresses his deliberate use of male pronouns in his essay, "Feminist on Testosterone:"

> There is no appropriate pronoun in English for a masculine androgyne, or a feminine androgyne. The neuter pronoun in our language is reserved for inanimate objects. Therefore, by process of elimination, the only available and appropriate pronoun for a masculine androgyne (FTM) is "he", and for a feminine androgyne (MTF) is "she". To do otherwise is a blatant fuck-you, saying that you don't care whether or not you ever have any kind of meaningful communication with that person. Deliberately using a pronoun that you know will offend someone is no different than using a racist or sexist term to describe them. Either way, you are telling the world that they have no say in your public definition of them and the marginalized group that they belong to (ravenkaldera.org).

Thus when discussing Kaldera, I employ specifically male pronouns.

> hidden it that well. And here there was someone like me, someone saying that this was a gift from the gods? I walked out shaking all over. (library.humboldt.edu)

Today, this shaken woman is Raven Kaldera, a female-to-male transgendered shaman[2] in the Northern Pagan tradition. Kaldera was born with an intersex condition called secondary congenital adrenal hyperplasia[3] and was raised as female (churchofasphodel.org). Though he lived as a woman for decades, Kaldera recalls that he never "felt like" a woman: "I was often accused of 'male behavior,' even when I couldn't figure out what was wrong with my behavior" (library.humboldt.edu). He married a man and gave birth to a daughter (library.humboldt.edu). Kaldera credits Siren, the intersex woman leading the sacred androgyny workshop mentioned above, with first inspiring him to come out as a "sacred third gender" individual (twpt.com).

Despite the impact the workshop had on him, he did not have gender reassignment surgery immediately. Kaldera's body later began to reject the artificial female hormones he'd taken since puberty. The hemorrhaging caused by this rejection was life-threatening. In what Kaldera recounts as a near-death experience, he was visited by Hela, Norse goddess of death. Kaldera recalls that he had ignored his body dysphoria and the

2 I have no interest in entering debates about the legitimacy of non-indigenous magic-practitioners using the term "shaman." Neither am I concerned with exploring either the construction of historical shamanic practice or that of neo-shamanism. My primary focus is the dual construction of gender and religious performance. I use the term "shaman" here because Raven uses it.

Briefly, Raven defines *shaman* as "a spiritual and magical practice that involves working with spirits and is designed to serve a tribe" (northernshamanism.org). He traces the words to Siberian roots, specifically the Tungus people. "Unfortunately," he writes, "the English language does not have a single word for 'spirit-worker who has been seized by the spirits, died and been reborn to a lifetime dedicated to serving a tribe via their spirit-given abilities.' The reasons for that are the fault of our ancestors, but the damage is done. We need a word. This one is already in use... Although the word 'shaman' is currently surrounded by a swirl of confusion and controversy, it's a place to start; a beacon to lead those who need it to what they need" (northernshamanism.org).

3 Congenital adrenal hyperplasia (CAH) is a group of inherited disorders of the adrenal gland. The body produces more androgen, causing traditionally male characteristics to appear early or, as in Raven's case, unexpectedly. CAH affects both male and female fetuses; the increased androgen levels produce sex/gender "ambiguity" in chromosomally female fetuses only. For more on intersexuality, see Morgan Holmes's 2008 *Intersex: A Perilous Difference*.

hormonally-induced hemorrhaging until "the Goddess who owns my ass ordered me to do this, to get on with it already. When I protested, she told me that she was sending me where I was needed most" (sensuoussadie.com).

Kaldera attributes his decision to surgically and hormonally alter his body to Hela's command. He had a bilateral mastectomy and began taking testosterone. In the late 1990s, Kaldera founded Northern Tradition Shamanism, a Pagan tradition that creatively reconstructs and re-imagines Viking religiosity by combining medieval Scandinavian civil codes and mythology with personal experiences of the Norse gods. The tradition's membership is almost wholly queer. Kaldera explains that Hela ordered him to change his sex so as to better serve his tribe: transpeople, genderqueers, and other sexual transgressors who honor the Norse pantheon (lgbtran.com; "Transgendered Spirit Workers," ravenkaldera.org).

At its base, Kaldera's narrative is one of learning to think in radically different ways about bodies and religion – and of creating alternative modes of relationship with self, community, and the divine based on that radically different thinking. To call Kaldera's gender performance[4] transgressive is perhaps an understatement: as Kaldera himself has noted, his silent bodily presence in a room deliberately challenges commonly held assumptions about gender as binary and sex as biologically determined (Kaldera

4 My use of the word "performance" here is of course informed by Judith Butler's theories of gender performativity, particularly as presented in her 1992 *Bodies That Matter.* Briefly, performance in this context implies neither disingenuousness nor radical voluntarism in the behaviors that characterize gender identity. Rather, gender performance is informed and constrained by cultural constructions of sex/gender. For Butler, then, gender is both something we are and something we do. As she explains in *Undoing Gender:* "If gender is a kind of doing, an incessant activity performed, in part, without one's knowing and without one's willing, it is not for that reason automatic or mechanical. On the contrary, it is a practice of improvisation within a scene of constraint" (Butler 2006, 1).

Kaldera explicitly refers to the performative qualities of his own gender identity in his essay, "*Ergi*: The Way of the Third." I discuss the concept of *ergi*, or unmanliness, in my second section; for now, we need only note that Kaldera understands his "unmanliness" or third-sex identity as performative because unmanliness is, for shamans, "both something we are and something we do" ("*Ergi*," ravenkaldera.org).

2002, 23).[5] Likewise, his religious beliefs and practices run counter to those of what philosopher Grace Jantzen called the western religious imaginary: whereas western divinity has traditionally been understood as male, singular, transcendent, fixed, and presumably heterosexual and white for all that "He" is disembodied, Kaldera's gods are multiple, mutable, immanent, carnal, and decidedly queer.

This project is about the intersection of queer bodies with queer religiosity – about what happens when people whose bodies do not fit neatly on either side of a gender binary go looking for (or, as in Raven's case, are found by) deity/ies who reflect(s) the experience of being in bodies that don't fit the "normal" order of sex/gender. For the purposes of this project, I define queerness broadly. In referring to sex, gender, and carnality, I intend the term to encompass both sex/gender and sexual practices. Bodily queerness, then, should not be understood as the binary opposite to heterosexuality, but incorporates same-sex sexual object choice, non-traditional gender presentation (transsexuality, transgenderism, intersexuality), and transgressive sexual practices (including but not limited to celibacy, s/m, and non-monogamy/polyamory). In short, bodily queerness refers to both sexuate bodies and sexual practices. Queer religiosity expands the western religious imaginary – it reflects and celebrates the multiplicity and mutability of this bodily queerness in honoring and/or worshiping multiple,[6] mutable, immanent god/dess/es who sanctify non-traditional sexes, genders, and sexualities.

The construction of religious beliefs and practices that hallow bodily queernesses

5 Here again, my thinking on sex/gender is informed by Butler – see both *Bodies That Matter* and *Undoing Gender*. Butler disputes the binarization of sex and gender, such that sex designates biology and gender indicates cultural construction. Rather, as she argues in *Bodies That Matter*, scientific discourse is itself shaped and constrained by cultural understandings and expectations regarding anatomy. See also Megan Goodwin, "Be Witched, OR, the Function of Citation in Abject Religious Discourse" (paper presented at the Southeastern Commission for the Study of Religion meeting, Atlanta, GA, 7-9 March 2008).

6 'Multiple" here includes but is not limited to polytheistic religiosity. Cf. Laurel Schneider's work on theologies of multiplicity in *Beyond Monotheism*.

and allow them to flourish is, I suggest, a move toward expanding both the western religious imaginary and a western bodily imaginary. In using the term imaginary, I do not mean to diminish or demean the beliefs, practices, or bodily experiences in question. This is to say that "imaginary" should not be read as "untrue." Rather, I use the term to designate the symbolic and linguistic systems that inform and constrain our understandings of what it is possible to do, be, think, and believe. As Grace Jantzen defined it in her 1999 *Becoming Divine: Towards a Feminist Philosophy of Religion*, the western religious imaginary traditionally understands divinity as transcendent, logical, infinite, salvation-oriented, and disembodied (while paradoxically also portraying god as one heterosexual white man). The western bodily imaginary, I suggest, insists that bodies can be neatly divided into two biologically evident sexes, and that the sex evident at a child's birth is a permanent feature of that child's identity.

Kaldera and his tribe of sexual transgressors are simultaneously and deliberately challenging both religious and bodily imaginaries. Regarding the gender binary, Kaldera states:

> We are advocating an entire renovation of the gender system. We may disagree on what it should look like, but we're pretty much in favor of bringing on the drills and chisels. We shouldn't pretend otherwise; it insults the intelligence of the frightened masses. Yes, what you fear is true. And you know what? You'll live. (library.humboldt.edu)

In other words, Kaldera advocates a radical deconstruction and re-imagining—a queering—of gender. And with good reason: the western bodily imaginary does not admit that Kaldera and people like him exist. For this reason, Kaldera refers to himself as a "mythical beast:"

> I'm not just a medical condition. I'm a mythical beast. I know because when I was I0 years old, I found the word for what I am in a book of Greek myths and it said so. Two years later, when I hit puberty and grew

> breasts and facial hair, saw my hips spread and heard my voice crack, bled and got erect, I knew it was true. They said it was a myth, but here I am—a unicorn, a dragon, a monster, a piece of magic let loose on the world. Your reality gives ground before my undeniably solid presence. (library.humboldt.edu)

Thus for Kaldera and his tribe, expanding the western bodily imaginary is not a philosophical exercise but rather a demand for recognition: this, too, is what bodies can be. His religious practice, Northern Tradition Shamanism, reflects and instantiates Kaldera's experience of being-in-body, as well as his relationship with Hela and the rest of the Norse pantheon. I refer to the knowledge created by this bodily and religious experience as bodily *noesis*, a concept to which I shall theorize more fully later in the paper. I mean first to establish the relationship between gender and religion, as Kaldera understands both terms.

In an interview with *The Wiccan/Pagan Times*, Kaldera explained that his tradition, Northern Tradition Shamanism, closely resembles other Pagan reconstructionisms in its emphasis on deism, polytheism, animism, and spiritual discipline (twpt.com). "Translated without all the big words," Kaldera says, "that means that I firmly, solidly, and even fanatically believe the following: The Gods are real, not merely archetypes, and are independent of our existence. All gods are not one god or goddess, but have separate existences. All natural things (and some manmade things) have an indwelling spirit. Spiritual discipline to burn off karma is always worthy work" (twpt.com). Polytheism and animism, among other qualities, directly challenge the western religious imaginary.

Further, Kaldera insists that gender—specifically transgender—can and should play a central role in one's religiosity (lgbtran.org). As I noted previously, most of his tribe are queer. Of the roughly 30 members of Northern Tradition Shamanism,

approximately 80% are transgendered. According to one such member,[7] if we expand the definition of queerness to include "atypical gender presentation…third gender, androgyne, or any degree of gender dysphoria, or simple gender transgression… that percentage rises to 99%." Northern Tradition Shamanism creates space for and sanctifies non-traditional gender identities while challenging the western religious imaginary.

Analysis of the religious work Kaldera is doing requires a definition of religion that extends well beyond belief. For the purposes of this paper, religion refers not merely to thea/ology, nor to practice understood strictly as ritual. Kaldera owns and operates a Pagan homestead in western Massachusetts: his life is tied to the land, and organized by his religiously informed ethics – which encompass everything from the remunerations he is allowed to accept for his shamanic services to the ways and times in which he can slaughter his animals for food or sacrifices. Religion in this context is a lived and living thing: it concerns daily realities, activities, and objects; but it is also literally, emphatically embodied – by which I mean grounded in the experience of and knowledge created by being in a mortal, changeable body.[8]

William James used the term *noesis* to designate the authorization of personal experience as knowledge of the divine (Proudfoot 1985, 136). I shall use the term here in specific corporal terms: bodily *noesis* refers to the creation of knowledge about the divine by bodily-being (or sexuateness, in Jantzen's terms). Practice and thea/ology can and do shift to reflect bodily contingency; however, lived religion also reflects work on and with that mutable body. I shall call this work on and with the body *askesis* – in Foucauldean

7 Galina Krasskova, email message to author, 29 Oct 2008.

8 Jantzen highlights the contingent and finite nature of humanity in relationship with divinity in her *Becoming Divine*, a point to which I shall return in my third section.

terms, technologies of the self.

In this paper, I argue that religion occurs at an an intersection point—a chiasmus[9] —between bodily *noesis* and queer *askesis*. That is, religious belief and practice may occur at the point at which knowledge created by being-in-body and deliberate work with and on that body toward ethical subjectivity come together. This chiasmus makes it possible to think differently about both bodies and religion. Thus religion emerges as a site of meaning-making: an explanation for why one's body is the way that it is and a space in which to celebrate that body and use it in service to the divine. In Kaldera's case, he suggests that he was born intersex and transgender to better serve a sexually transgressive community. In researching subarctic circumpolar shamanisms, Kaldera said that he

> discovered that there were accounts of exactly what I had gone through [near-death experiences, visitations from spirits and/or deities], from all around the world… [and] many shamans were also gender crossing. You don't have to be [transgendered], but it is the one job for which it was an advantage. So it's very clear to me why this was done to me. The powers that be [did this] in order that I would have this advantage and do my job better. (shewired.com)

This quote exemplifies the noetic quality of bodily being; but it must be noted that bodies are not fixed in time and shape. Bodies change over time: they grow and shrink, age and strengthen. Our bodies can also mean very different things to us and to others over the course of our lives. We can moreover work to alter our bodily behaviors to change and improve ourselves, just as Kaldera worked and continues to work on and with his body to serve Hela and his community. Thus Kaldera instantiates not only a religious bodily

9 I borrow this term from Jantzen via Derrida and Levinas. As she explained it: "a chiasmus is a figure taken from the Greek letter X ("chi"), which shows a crossing-over, an interconnection and yet separate trajectories...[a chiasmus] symbolizes *both* that we cannot start from nowhere—we are always already situated in relation to a dominant text/discourse and culture and must take it seriously—and *also* that we need to look for ways in which that dominant reading is intersected by its own undoing, thus opening up a gap for thinking differently" (Jantzen 1999, 74-5).

*noesis*, but also a cultivation of the bodily self as an ethical subject, or *askesis*.

I've conceptualized this work on the self as *askesis* for several reasons – primarily because Foucault's project of homosexuality as an ethical horizon heavily informed my thinking on Kaldera's bodily/religious identity. I discuss Foucault's "becoming gay" at length in the following section; however, let me briefly say that queer *askesis* works as a model for this kind of thinking about embodied religiosity for two reasons. First, *askesis* is a liberatory project, dedicated to illustrating the extent to which radically different though about sexuate bodies is possible and ethical; and second, because Foucault understood homosexual becoming as an imaginary project, much in the same terms as I have described my own project of bodily and religious imaginaries. Paramount among these reasons, however, is that Raven Kaldera's story is one of self-fashioning: he has shaped his body and his life to reflect his noetic experience of the divine – specifically, Hela's request that Raven serve as shaman to a sexually transgressive Norse Pagan community.

In arguing for a religious chiasmus between queer *askesis* and bodily *noesis*, I have divided this paper into three sections. My primary methodology throughout this paper will be discourse analysis and textual ethnography, by which I mean engaging my interlocutor through his interviews and essays. I begin by outlining Foucault's project of homosexual becoming as he presented it in his interviews with the gay press from 1981 until 1982. I suggest that the second two volumes of his *History of Sexuality* theorized *askesis* in large part to support this gay becoming. I then demonstrate the occlusions of Foucault's project, specifically those of gender, queer bodies, and religiosity. I suggest that while Foucault's queer asketical project offers insight into Kaldera's self-fashioning, the masculinism and secularism of homosexual becoming render the project ultimately

insufficient to encompass Kaldera's queer religiosity.

In my second section, I demonstrate the ways in which Kaldera both instantiates and challenges Foucault's model, particularly with regard to Foucault's insistence upon secularism and queer practice to the exclusion of religion and queer bodies. I suggest that the knowledge created by Kaldera's experience of being-in-body (*noesis*) informs the transgressive self-cultivation (*askesis*) of his gender and religious identity. Third, I examine the ways in which bodily *noesis* and queer *askesis* work toward expanding religious and bodily imaginaries. To this end, I place Jantzen's model of becoming divine and Foucault's becoming homosexual in conversation with Kaldera's work on and with his body. I conclude by suggesting that Kaldera instantiates the potential for religion to mark a chiasmus between bodily *noesis* and queer *askesis*, thus providing a liberatory model of religiosity for those excluded by the western religious imaginary.

## CHAPTER ONE

### BECOMING HOMOSEXUAL: FOUCAULT'S QUEER *ASKESIS*

I suggested in my introduction that religion can act as a nexus for embodied knowledge of self (*noesis*) and work on that self toward ethical subjectivity (*askesis*). Work on and with the body that also insists on acknowledging the multiplicity and mutability of bodily-being makes possible radically different—queer—understandings of corporal religiosity. These queer understandings of both bodies and religion present liberative possibilities in their affirmation of both queer bodies and queer experiences of the divine – that is, those understandings of divinity that fall beyond or outside the scope of the western religious imaginary.

This section focuses on work on and with the body toward ethical becoming, specifically in the context of Foucauldean *askesis*. I read *askeses*, or technologies of the self as presented in *The Use of Pleasure* and *The Care of the Self*, as part of Foucault's project of becoming homosexual. That Foucault understood homosexuality as a horizon, as something to be desired and worked toward, is significant for my project because it suggests that queerness can (also) be deliberate ethical work on and with the body. However, as I shall demonstrate, Foucault's model of homosexual becoming was both masculinist and secularist, thus complicating the radical voluntarism of his project and excluding queer bodies and religiosity from "becoming gay."

In this section, I explore the concept of queer *askesis*: that is, Foucault's liberatory project of sexually transgressive work on and with the body toward ethical subjectivity. I

argue that Foucault's project of homosexual becoming provides an insightful analytical model for thinking about the transformative potentiality of sexual transgression; however, his project also occludes the creatively disruptive potential of queer bodies and/or religion from becoming homosexual.

Foucault introduced the concept of "becoming gay" in his interviews with the French and American gay press from 1981 to 1982, and argued for its historical precedent in the context of male-male sexual behaviors in *The Use of Pleasure* and *The Care of the Self*. I begin by examining Foucault's interviews with the gay press. I then place the interviews in conversation with the second two volumes of his *History of Sexuality* to demonstrate the ways in which Foucault's historical project supported male same-sex sexual behaviors (and sexual transgression more broadly) as work toward ethical subjectivity. Finally, I discuss the occlusions of Foucault's project – specifically the masculinism and secularism inherent in homosexual becoming. I conclude by briefly reviewing the subject-forming role religion has played throughout Foucault's work, thus providing a genealogy for the Foucauldean relationship between religion and bodies. This sets the stage for discussing the ways in which Raven Kaldera's religious work on and with his body both confirms and challenges Foucault's broader liberative project: that of thinking differently about sexuate bodies, and expanding the possibilities for what those bodies can do and mean.

Becoming Gay: Interviews, April 1981 – June 1982

In interviews he gave to the French and American gay press from 1981-1982, Foucault suggested that homosexuality was not an identity, but rather something to be desired. "We have to work at becoming homosexuals and not be obstinate in recognizing that we are" (Foucault 1996a, 308). To become gay, he suggested, was to continuously

work on oneself, both to prioritize sexual choices and to allow those choices to change one's entire life (Foucault 1996c, 370). Homosexuality represented the potential for new pleasures, new relationships, new ways of being in the world. For Foucault, then, becoming gay entailed a *virtualité,* the possibility of becoming more than what we are, and the space to seek pleasures that don't necessarily conform to a static sexual identity.

Foucault located "becoming gay" within the ethical project of the second and third volumes of his *History of Sexuality.* In "Friendship as a Way of Life," he referred to a "homosexual *askesis*," one that would "make work on ourselves and invent, I do not say discover, a manner of being that is still improbable" (Foucault 1996a, 310). *Askesis*, as Foucault introduces it in *The Use of Pleasure,* is a technology by which one cultivates oneself in pursuit of ethical subjectivity: work one does on oneself for the good of the self and that self's society. For Foucault, homosexuality offered the self a position from which to cultivate a culture and an ethics, one that valorized bodies and pleasures, sexual choice, and the pursuit of new "polymorphic, varied, and individually modulated" relationships of self-to-self and self-to-society (Foucault 1996a; 310, 312). "Becoming gay" implied this sort of work on the self: an *askesis*, or technology, by which the self might strive toward ethical subjectivity.

Foucault's project of gay becoming is discernible throughout several key interviews with the French and American gay press: "Friendship as a Way of Life," conducted by Rene de Coccatty, Jean Danet, and Jean le Bitoux for *Le Gai Pied* in April 1981; "The Social Triumph of the Sexual Will," conducted by Gilles Barbadette for *Christopher Street* in October 1981; "Sexual Choice, Sexual Act," conducted by James O'Higgins for *Salmagundi* in March 1982; "History and Homosexuality" (originally "L'Homosexualité dans l'antiquité"), conducted by J.P Joecker, M. Ouerd and A. Sanzio

for *Masques* in Spring 1982; and "Sex, Power, and the Politics of Identity," conducted by Bob Gallagher and Alexander Wilson in June 1982 and published in *The Advocate* August 7, 1984. As I shall demonstrate, Foucault aligned becoming gay with *askesis* in these interviews. As *askesis,* "becoming gay" represented ethical work on and with the body toward ethical subjectivation.

In his late-life interviews with the gay press, Foucault consistently evidenced an interest in queering—or productively disrupting, with reference to same-sex sexual practices—discourses of sexuality. More, he insisted that sexual choices were capable of creating culture(s) and ethics. De-centering sexuality, the eroticization of the entire body, had the potential to create new forms of pleasure. Those forms of pleasure, Foucault insisted, had the potential to create new relationships and communities, new ways of life. He identified the creative disruption implicit in the pursuit of these pleasures as "becoming gay." Foucault's interviews with the gay press establish the extent to which Foucault connected becoming gay with *askeses*, technologies intended to cultivate an ethical relationship of the self to the self.

The earliest of these interviews, "Friendship as a Way of Life" (April 1981), explicitly links "becoming homosexual" with *askesis* (Foucault 1996a, 310). It's worth noting that Foucault did not contextualize *askesis* within ancient Greece in this interview; rather, he defined it in opposition to asceticism: "asceticism as the renunciation of pleasure has bad connotations. But the *askesis* is something else: it's the work that one performs on oneself in order to transform oneself or make the self appear that happily one never attains" (Foucault 1996a, 309-310). (I shall return to the opposition of *askesis* to renunciation and asceticism in my conclusion, with regard to the deliberately secular genealogy of *askesis*.) However, this work on the self is not singular nor strictly internal;

rather, “Friendship” speaks longingly of the new kinds of relationships made possible through homosexuality. Becoming homosexual should involve making oneself “infinitely more susceptible to pleasures,” thus escaping (and helping others escape) traditional relationship structures (Foucault 1996a, 310). The question of becoming homosexual was, for Foucault, one of a “multiplicity of relationships” – of “what relations, through homosexuality, can be established, invented, multiplied and modulated?” (Foucault 1996a, 308). Becoming gay as an *askesis*, then, implied not only work on the bodily self, but also work toward new forms of interpersonal relationality.

Foucault expanded on the relational component of becoming homosexual in “Social Triumph of the Sexual Will” (Oct 1981). In this interview, he suggested that gay rights—understood simply as the legality of same-sex sexual acts—could not be the culmination of gay becoming. The choices and values implicit in loving someone of the same sex, Foucault argued, involved “ a whole series of other values and choices for which there are not yet real possibilities” (Foucault 1997a, 157). “It's not only a matter of integrating this strange little practice of making love with someone of the same sex into preexisting cultures; it's a matter of constructing [*créer*] cultural forms” (Foucault 1997a, 157). Foucault was adamant that homosexuality-as-becoming had the potential to create both culture and ethics that allowed for relationships beyond the marital and familial.

> We should fight against the impoverishment of the relational fabric. We should secure the relations of provisional coexistence, adoption...why not? – of one adult by another... [W]e should try to imagine and create a new relational right that permits all possible types of relations to exist and not be prevented, blocked, or annulled by impoverished relational institutions. (Foucault 1997a, 158)

Not only did Foucault suggest adoption of adults by adults—an unusually prescriptive

element[10] in his broadly theoretical work—he implied that these new modes of relationality will benefit non-homosexuals as well (1997, 160). He further noted that becoming homosexual must be a new form of *askesis*, as the ancient Greeks never admitted the possibility of adult same-sex love (Foucault 1995, 162). In these ways, "Social Triumph" expanded upon the ethical and cultural potentiality of homosexual becoming.

In "Sexual Choice, Sexual Act" (March 1982), as the title suggests, Foucault emphasized the necessity for legal and cultural latitude to make transgressive sexual choices. He distinguished between sexual choices and sexual acts, because "there are a sexual acts like rape which should not be permitted whether they involve a man and a woman or two men. I don't think we should have as our objective some sort of absolute freedom or total liberty of sexual action" (Foucault 1996b, 324). However, he maintained that regarding freedom of sexual choice, we must be "absolutely intransigent" (Foucault 1996b, 324). Foucault argued that sexual choices were not simply the result of physical desires and legal restrictions; rather, sexual behavior is "also the consciousness one has of what one is doing, what one makes of the experience, and the value one attaches to it" (1996b, 322). Though he refused to comment on the likelihood of either biological predispositions to or social conditioning toward homosexuality, Foucault insisted that consciousness of self-as-homosexual involved both personal experience of the self and awareness of the self as part of a community (1996b, 323). This link between work toward realizing self-as-gay and homosexuality as culture-generative again connects homosexuality, and sexual choice more broadly, to *askesis*.

10 In the notes to *St. Foucault*, Halperin refers Claude Mauriac's memoirs on this point. Toward the end of his life, Foucault inquired as to the procedures—never pursued—for legally adopting Daniel Defert, his lover of twenty years (Halperin 1995, 214).

"History and Homosexuality" (Spring 1982) is more explicit about positioning the need to "set on being gay" in conversation with a classical Greek archive (Foucault 1996c, 369). In this interview, Foucault rejected the notion that the Greeks unconditionally accepted male homosexuality; he argued that the amount of writing on the subject of "man-boy relations"—as opposed to the relative dearth on the subject of male-female sexual acts—suggests that "these relations were difficult to accept morally" (1996c, 364). Nevertheless, Foucault argued that these methods of ethically cultivating the self through sexual control were creative as well as restrictive. Contemporary ethical cultivation of the self through sexual practices, he suggested, could be likewise generative. "These sexual choices must at the same time be creative ways of life. To be gay means that these choices spread across a whole life" (Foucault 1996c, 369). One must not necessarily engage in same-sex sexual behaviors, he insisted, but ethical subjectivity demanded that one "set on being gay" (Foucault 1996c, 370).

Finally, in "Sex, Power, and the Politics of Identity" (June 1982), Foucault elaborated on sexual technologies toward becoming an ethical subject. Specifically, he suggested "sadomasochistic eroticism" (hereafter s/m) made possible new forms of bodily pleasure. In the spirit of susceptibility to pleasures, Foucault argued that s/m—which he explored in an exclusively male homosexual context—decenters sexual activity, expanding pleasures beyond the genitals to eroticize the entire body (1996d, 384). "These practices are insisting that we can produce pleasure with very odd things, very strange parts of our bodies, in very unusual situations" (Foucault 1996d, 384). More than simply discovering new bodily pleasures, however, s/m created a culture, with a location (San Francisco) and a (leather) community of its own (Foucault 1996d, 385). In short, s/m's decentralized bodily pleasures created a culture based on the primacy of those

pleasures, thus instantiating the creative disruptions of normative sexuality inherent in becoming gay.

Throughout his interactions with the American and French gay press, Foucault connected gay becoming with a life devoted to work on and with the body. He suggested that this relationship with the self, or *rapport à soir,* was an ethical one, "which determines how the individual is supposed to constitute himself as a moral subject of his own actions" (Foucault 1997b, 263). He argued that the ethical subject should pursue bodily pleasures rather than attempt to fit sexual behaviors within a predetermined sexual identity. Sexual choice, he maintained, had the potential to create new modes of culture, new kinds of relationships, new locations for kinship and community.

In the above interviews, Foucault explicitly and implicitly linked the generative capacity of an ethical relationship with the bodily self—a relationship cultivated through becoming gay—with *askesis,* a Stoic concept he developed more fully in *The Use of Pleasure.* This, I suggest, demonstrates a concern with *queering:* the potential for same-sex sexual choices to productively disrupt conventional modes of sexuality. In my next segment, I shall demonstrate the ways in which Foucault employed *The Use of Pleasure* and *The Care of the Self* to provide a historical precedent for the creative-disruptive potential of same-sex sexual choices and, more broadly, non-normative sexual ethics.

Historicizing Work on and with the Body: *The Use of Pleasure* and *The Care of the Self*

In this segment, I explore the second two volumes of *The History of Sexuality*, paying particular attention to the ethical exploration of male-male sexual relationships. I highlight areas in which Foucault demonstrates the moral and political utility of sexual *askeses* both for the individual and for the community. I argue that his focus on same-sex sexual choices in aid of constitution of self as ethical bodily subject demonstrated an

interest in queering—or productively disrupting—historical narratives of sexuality. I suggest that Foucault intended this queering of historical sexuality narratives to support his project of homosexual becoming.

*The Use of Pleasure* and *The Care of the Self* diverged sharply from Foucault's initial intentions for the *History of Sexuality* project. Whereas *The Will to Knowledge* demonstrated post-Enlightenment constructions of power/knowledge regulatory systems through discourses of normalcy and deviance, the series' second and third volumes focused upon the relationship of the self to the self that results in moral systems, specifically in the context of ancient Greece. Foucault's professedly increased interest in subjectivity[11] over sexuality explains his departure from modern discursive analysis, but not his subsequent archive selection. I offer two possible explanations for the shift, both of which have bearing on the project of becoming gay: the potential of Greek and Hellenistic sources to demonstrate non-normalizing codes of conduct; and the productively disruptive examples of ethical struggles provided by these sources.

In his 1995 *St. Foucault,* David Halperin suggests that Foucault shifted both his archive and his focus because these classical texts provide "concrete examples of a discourse that could construct norms *without* producing effects of normalization" (109). Halperin continues, "the study of Greek sexual morality discloses...the possibility of an ascetic discipline whose effect—*unlike* that of the modern disciplines—is not to normalize but, if anything, to marginalize: that is, *to queer"* (1995, 111; Halperin's emphasis). The technologies of ethical self-improvement (*askeses)* were adopted only by

11 In a public lecture at the University of Southern California in October 1981, Foucault claimed a growing interest in how "a human being turns him- or herself into a subject" (Foucault et al. 1988, 3). In April 1983, he moreover indicated a waning interest in focusing exclusively on sexuality: "I am much more interested in problems about techniques of the self and things like that than sex...sex is boring" (Foucault 1997b, 253).

male elites; thus, Halperin argues, the purpose of these ethical guidelines was to encourage men to distinguish rather than normalize themselves in relation to their communities (1995, 111; see also Foucault 1997b, 254). Non-normalizing ethical codes of sexual conduct would complement Foucault's project of gay becoming.

I concur with Halperin's hypothesis, but would add that Foucault was also invested in disrupting a particular intellectual narrative: that of unqualified acceptance of homosexuality by the ancient Greeks, and undeniably condemnation of homosexuality by the early Christians. "It makes no sense to say that homosexuality was tolerated by the Greeks," Foucault insisted (1996c, 363). This is because, as he demonstrated in *Will to Knowledge*, the idea of a static sexual identity is a decidedly modern concept. The Greeks did not have a concept of sexuality congruent with post-Enlightenment thinking. More importantly, however, same-sex sexual activity was not met with unconditional approbation in ancient Greek context. The reason there are numerous texts on moral comportment in man-boy sexual relations, Foucault suggested, "is very much the fact that these relations were difficult to accept morally" (1996c, 364). *The Use of Pleasure* and *The Care of the Self* demonstrate textual evidence for ethical struggles with male-male sexual activities, but also subtly argue that these struggles were productively disruptive, technologies by which men distinguished themselves ethical subjects and better citizens. The creative disruption instantiated by *askesis* is, I suggest, directly contributed to Foucault's exhortation to become gay.

Foucault's concern with "becoming gay" is discernible throughout the final published volumes of *The History of Sexuality,* marking a discursive shift for the series from universalized codes of conduct toward the self's relationship with self. Through his engagement with classical Greek texts on sexual morality, Foucault demonstrated not

only that the Greeks had no concept of homosexuality as sexual identity, but that male-male sexual behaviors were a matter of moral concern and vehicle for self-betterment. The struggle for sexual self-control and the choices made regarding sexual behaviors extended into every aspect of the citizen's life, thus illustrating the political and ethical utility of "becoming homosexual" (1996c, 369).

Foucault's focus for the second two volumes of the *Sexuality* series was the "history of the manner in which pleasure, desires, and sexual behaviors have been problematized, reflected upon and thought about in Antiquity in relation to a certain art of living" (Foucault 1996e, 456). This art of living, or technology of the self, was *askesis*. Though he first theorized the concept of *askesis* in his 1982 University of Vermont lecture series,[12] Foucault only fully developed the concept in the second volume of *The History of Sexuality.*

*The Use of Pleasure* explores the aesthetic cultivation of the self. In his April 1983 working sessions with Paul Rabinow and Hubert Dreyfus, Foucault reiterated his interest in the non-normalizing function of ancient Greek *askeses*. These aesthetic technologies did not meet with unqualified approbation: as Foucault noted, "pagan ethics was not at all liberal, tolerant, and so on, as it was supposed to be" (1997b, 254; see also 257). However, the *asketical* lifestyle was a "personal choice for a small elite[13]...the will to live a beautiful life, and to leave to others memories of a beautiful existence" (Foucault 1997b, 254). To pursue *askesis,* then, was to dedicate one's life to rigorous codes of sexual morality meant to set the citizen apart from and above his community. An

12 Collected and published as *Technologies of the Self* (Foucault et al. 1988).

13 It's worth noting that this elite was entirely male – Foucault presented *askesis* unapologetically as "ethics for men" (Foucault 1985, 22). I return to Foucault's masculinist theorizations of a universal subject in my conclusion to this section.

asketical mastery of the self was a "personal choice, aesthetics of existence," but ultimately improved the citizen's ability to "take care of the city, of his companions" (1997b, 260). Thus *askesis*, as Foucault theorized it in *The Use of Pleasure*, comprised a *tekhnē tou biou* [art of life] (1997b, 259).

*The Care of the Self,* by contrast, demonstrated a shift toward a hermeneutics of the self, one that lay for the most part outside sexual behaviors (Foucault 1997b, 255). Inasmuch as the archive for this volume dealt with sexual acts, the texts conveyed an increased concerns about the dangers of the flesh (Foucault 1997b, 258). The hermeneutics of the self diverged from *askesis,* particularly as it approached the normalizing discourses of early Christianity. Moreover, sexual ethics in the first and second century CE focused less on acts and more on desires. At this point in the genealogy, sexuality was understood as passivity, rather than as the activity it represented in Stoic context (1997b, 259). More broadly, care of the self was for sake of the self, rather than to make that self and his community more beautiful. *The Care of the Self* detailed the shift of concerns for ethical subjectivity from specifically sexual to more broadly social arenas, noted an increased sense of danger about sexual activity and morality, and demonstrated a move toward institutionalized and normalizing systems of sexual regulations.

Foucault does not strictly establish a declension model between the two volumes, but does imply that individual subjectivity suffered with increased external regulations of sexual conduct. Ethical self-cultivation interrogated the self, called the self's actions to mind, and conditioned that self for right, moral, ethical behaviors. Foucault's work on the constitution of the self as an ethical, embodied subject suggested that institutional sexual interdictions were unnecessary in light of and perhaps less effective than the bodily and

spiritual discipline of the self by the self. *Askesis*, in particular, illustrated that a constant struggle for self-mastery was both possible and ethical. In the final volumes of *The History of Sexuality*, readers have an example of, if not a methodology for, a system of individualized—potentially queer—sexual ethics.

Foucault's project of gay becoming was more in keeping with *askesis* than a hermeneutics of the self. The contemporary project of homosexual *askesis,* however, emphasized the pursuit of new bodily pleasures rather than the strict regulation of sexual practices. Again, Foucault acknowledged that becoming gay was not equivalent to classical *askesis*: there was no space in these Stoic discourses for a sexual and romantic relationship between two adult male citizens (1996a, 162). But both the *askesis* of antiquity and contemporary gay becoming demonstrate the creative disruptions made possible by non-normalizing codes of moral sexual conduct. These ethical systems are intended to set the individual apart, but also improve the self and ultimately generate new pleasures and new modes of life.

However, these *ethoi* are not without their limitations. Gay becoming as *askesis* provides a useful analytical model for thinking about homosexuality: in Foucauldean terms, homosexuality is not a sexual identity but rather work on and with the body toward understanding and betterment of the self. Becoming homosexual, then, expands the potential for bodily pleasures and creates new forms of community that might prove liberative (or, in Jantzen's terms, flourishing) for those excluded or pathologized by existent forms of sexual identity or communities. But gay *askesis* is not universally liberative, despite Foucault's presentation of a universal subject throughout his interviews and the second two volumes of *The History of Sexuality.* As I shall demonstrate in my next segment, homosexual *askesis* occludes concerns of gender, queer bodies, and

religion.

Occlusions: Gender, Queer Bodies, and Religion

I suggested in the previous segment that *The Use of Pleasure* and *The Care of the Self* provided an historical precedent for Foucault's project of gay becoming. In what follows, I locate the occlusions of Foucault's project: specifically those of queer bodies and of religiosity, both of which challenge the voluntarism of becoming homosexual. I suggest that contemporary gay becoming, like Stoic *askeses*, is a radically voluntaristic, masculinist, and secularist ethical system.

In an interview with Rux Martin (October 1982), Foucault explained that his purpose in writing *The History of Sexuality* was to show that we "are much freer than they feel, that people accept as truth, as evidence, some themes which have been built up at a certain moment during history, and that this so-called evidence can be criticized and destroyed," (1988, 10). Classical *askesis*, as he presents it in *The Use of Pleasure*, is performed by the male citizen on himself, presumably for the betterment of his friends and community; but his household, friends, and community did not, as Foucault presents them, contribute to these constitutions of self. Likewise, Foucault fails to problematize the constraints upon "becoming gay" in contemporary societies – for example, class, race, education, physical ability, geographic location, and—as I shall demonstrate in a moment—gender.[14] These constraints, I suggest, problematize the radical voluntarism of becoming homosexual.

Gay becoming, as Foucault outlined it in the aforementioned interviews,

14 Lin Foxhall discusses the gendered decontextualization of Foucault's *History of Sexuality* at length – see "Pandora Unbound: A Feminist Critique of Foucault's *History of Sexuality.*" See also Judith Butler's *Bodies That Matter: On the Discursive Limits of "Sex"* for a critique on the radical voluntarism at play in Foucault's later works.

suggested a radical degree of voluntarism in cultivation of the self while failing to meaningfully engage with gender concerns. In at least three of his interviews with the gay press from 1981 to 1982, Foucault consistently discussed becoming gay without mention of cultural restrictions of the project. In five of these interviews, he was questioned about the gendered implications of *askesis* and/or becoming gay; his answers were by turns perfunctory, cryptic, and dismissive. Though these interviews are a limited archive, they are the sole textual exploration of Foucault's notion of gay becoming and the project's link to *askesis*. Given Foucault's (again, limited) theorizations of becoming gay throughout the interviews, I suggest that the project was inherently masculinist and radically voluntarist.[15]

We can detect a radically voluntarist aspect of Foucault's gay becoming in at least three interviews: "Friendship as a Way of Life;" "The Social Triumph of the Sexual Will;" and "Sex, Power, and the Politics of Identity." "Friendship" demonstrates the level of exuberant voluntarism perceptible in the introduction to *The Use of Pleasure*, as well as in *Technologies of the Self*. Homosexuality represents the possibility of establishing, inventing, and modulating a multiplicity of relationships (Foucault 1996a, 308). The question, Foucault suggested, is precisely "what new game can we invent?" (1996a, 312). In "Friendship," at least, there is no theorization of the restrictions placed upon individual reinventions of interpersonal relationality.

"Social Triumph" does address to some extent the issue of legal constraints. Foucault does not dismiss civil rights so much as insist that homosexuality cannot rest there.

15 See, for example, Butler's *Bodies That Matter* on this point. Butler theorizes the constraints heteronormativity places on queer performativity via Lacan in direct response to what she feels is Foucault's overestimation of subjective voluntarism (1992, 98). While I shall not argue for levels of cultural or social constriction comparable to what Butler suggests, I do concur with Butler that Foucault's *askesis* and his gay becoming are perhaps overly voluntaristic.

> [A] right, in its real effects, is much more linked to attitudes and patterns of behavior that to legal formations. There can be discrimination against homosexuals even if such discriminations are prohibited by law. It is therefore necessary to struggle to establish homosexual lifestyles, existential choices [*d' choix d'existence*] in which sexual relations with people of the same sex will be important. (1997a, 157)

There is acknowledgement that "attitudes and patterns of behavior" regarding homosexuality must be shifted, but no theorization as to how those behaviors might constrain gay becoming. I agree that a discourse of gay becoming must expand beyond the juridical; but I feel this rhetoric does not go far enough to demonstrate the material realities of the project. To illustrate, "Sex, Power, and the Politics of Identity" extols the subversive potentialities of s/m communities to expand pleasures and form new relationships, but fails to acknowledge the cultural and legal restrictions such communities faced (and face) in San Fransisco and elsewhere (Foucault 1996d, 385).

Foucault reads the constructed nature of sexuality as indicative of a possibility to radical change what sexuality does. "Sexuality is something we ourselves create—it is our own creation, [and]...a possibility for creative life" (Foucault 1996d, 382). I do not disagree. However, I take issue with the degree of voluntarism implied in gay becoming. Foucault makes "gay" sound like the best, most ethical *choice* regarding sexuality, but fails to engage with the experiences of those outside "gay," for whom sexual outsider-ness might be or seem less of a choice: specifically intersex and transpeople, whose gender identity is ambiguous and/or intentionally mutable. Foucault also does not address the space created for the kinds of disruptions he favors by legal work toward securing sexual rights. Again, I agree that queer becoming cannot and should not rest at merely legalizing behaviors; nor am I arguing against queer's creatively disruptive potential. Indeed, I shall discuss religious instantiations of such productive

insubordinations in my next section. Nevertheless, I cannot argue for unconstrained subjectivity, particularly to the extent of unmindfulness regarding those whom our projects-of-becoming exclude. Many factors, including but by no means limited to gender identity, constrain and shape our agency, limiting the voluntarism with which we may work on and with our bodies toward ethical subjectivity.

Foucault's most glaring omission from gay becoming is gender concerns – specifically those of women, though intersex and transpeople are likewise excluded by this masculinism. Interviewers asked questions regarding the place of women in *askesis* and gay becoming in "Friendship as a Way of Life," "Sexual Choice, Sexual Act," "History and Homosexuality," "On the Genealogy of Ethics," and "Sex, Power, and the Politics of Identity." In each interview, Foucault dismissed or evaded the questions. The evidence for a masculinist bias for gay becoming lies in the tension created by these dismissals and evasions. I am not calling Foucault a misogynist. I do not find evidence for a hatred of women either in his published works or in his interviews and lectures. What these sources do demonstrate is a reverberating silence: women are discussed briefly if at all, and only in relationship to men.[16] More, Foucault proposed homosexuality as a nominally universal potentiality but demonstrated an interest only in specifically gay male becoming.

"Friendship as a Way of Life" contains Foucault's most substantial engagement with gay becoming as it relates to women. He was asked: "Women might object: what do men together have to win compared to the relations between a man and a woman or between two women?" (citation). Foucault's response was to suggest that female friendship has historically created space for women to be physically affectionate with

16 See, for example, the limitation of women to matrimony in both *The Use of Pleasure* and *The Care of the Self*, as Foxhall argues in "Pandora Unbound."

each other, whereas “man's body has been forbidden to other men in a much more drastic way” (1996a, 311). He referenced Faderman's *Surpassing the Love of Men* regarding historical evidence for female homosociality, but did not discuss contemporary female friendship or, more to the point in a discussion about gay becoming, lesbianism. He devoted six sentences to women's access to each other's bodies, mostly to highlight the denial of men's bodies to men. This is the deepest and longest engagement with any question of gender posed to him throughout the interviews in question.

“Sexual Choice, Sexual Act” contains a more puzzling engagement with gender concerns. In answer to a question regarding the usefulness of distinguishing between male and female homosexualities, Foucault responded, “all I can do is explode with laughter” (1996b, 325). When the interviewer asked for clarification, Foucault replied that “the distinction offered doesn't seem to me convincing, in terms of what I observe in the behavior of lesbian women,” (1996b, 325). Foucault suggested that different pressures—presumably social?—face male and female homosexuals when coming out, and that radical feminists were unlikely to find sympathy in international intellectual communities. This question received four relatively short perfunctory sentences in response. Several questions later, Foucault mentioned that female same-sex sexual behaviors are more restricted than male-male sex, but failed to qualify the statement. In an interview in which most of his answers were several paragraphs long, Foucault's engagement with questions of gender was both dismissive and brief.

The interviewers for “History and Homosexuality” pushed questions of gender during this piece; here again, Foucault was dismissive, and unlike “Sexual Choice,” explicitly so. When asked if “taking up again the Greek ideal, masculine gay society of the 20th century...legitimates a misogyny that rejects women,” Foucault denied the

possibility, replying only that "Greek myth" influences behaviors-of-becoming only inasmuch as the subject allowed (1996c, 365). He did not explore the effect the exclusion or marginalization of women in this theory would have on women who might want to become gay. He turned the conversation toward female homosociality, again referencing Faderman's *Surpassing the Love of Men* and its characterizations of female relationships. Foucault cites Faderman's unwillingness to explore whether these female friendships had sexual elements, but evades the question of asketical misogyny. Interviewers then asked whether studying female homosociality without engaging the question of sexual behaviors "confines women to the domain of feeling, with its eternal stereotypes: their freedom of contact, their free emotions, their friendships" (Foucault 1996c, 365). Foucault explicitly refused to engage this line of inquiry. He acknowledged that his response might seem "lax," but suggested that these "phenomena"—presumably female relationships—were "so complex and pre-coded by grids of analysis already in place that one must accept certain methods" (Foucault 1996c, 366). That is, Foucault suggested (again, briefly, in an interview where responses were usually quite long) that those interested in analyzing female friendship should keep the current categories of analysis. When questioned about whether we can or should speak of a "female gay culture," Foucault replied only that homosexuality had a much stricter meaning in France. The extent to which Foucault appeared uninterested in the applicability to women of gay becoming or of *askesis* is most evident in "History and Homosexuality."

"On a Genealogy of Ethics" and "Sex, Power, and the Politics of Identity" both use women as counterpoints to theorizing about male homosexual behaviors or becomings. Regarding *askesis*, Foucault suggests that man-boy sexual activities were morally troubling to the Greeks based on the fact that it was discussed extensively.

"Because if there were no problem, they would speak of this kind of love in the same terms as love between men and women," Foucault suggested (1997b, 257). In response to a question about the extent to which lesbian s/m might create ways for "dominated subjects to formulate their own languages," Foucault responded briefly about the theoretical nature of resistance and another unclear reference to Faderman's book to the effect that lesbianism creates cultural space outside relationships with men. To a follow-up question about the degree to which lesbian s/m challenges the "dominant discourse," Foucault replied that lesbian s/m helped combat stereotypes of lesbianism, specifically of "femininity" and "antimale attitude" (1996d, 387). He mentions Gayle Rubin's article on the Catacombs, but does not mention women's (admittedly limited) presence or activity in San Francisco s/m subcultures (1996d, 385). These later essays demonstrate Foucault's tendency to engage with gender concerns only insofar as women serve as the foil for men, male friendship, and male homosexuality.

Given his extensive refusal to engage gender concerns and his positing of a markedly male universal subject, I suggest that both *askesis* and gay becoming are gender-blind projects. Foucault consistently and emphatically refused to engage with questions concerning gender. When pressed, his responses were brief, dismissive, and cryptic. Foucault's late-life interviews with the gay press are narrowed against gender concerns – ostensibly present universal subject; but in fact offering demonstrably male subject extrapolated to exclusion of all other bodily experiences. This is a frustrating theoretical moment: Foucault's appeal in gay becoming to a universal subject provides a useful model for thinking differently about sexuate bodies, and specifically about work on and with the body toward ethical subjectivity. But, as I have suggested, the masculinism and radical voluntarism of homosexual becoming limits the liberative

quality of Foucault's project.

David Halperin challenges Foucault's gender exclusivity in his *Saint Foucault*, though he retains Foucault's voluntarism to a large extent. Halperin's project is at least nominally more broad, including "anyone who is or who feels marginalized because of her or his sexual practices" (Halperin 1995, 62). Halperin explicitly discusses both the role of lesbians in queer becoming and the historical tensions between lesbians and gay men. More, if we take Halperin at his word in this passage, queerness can and should include bisexuals, the s/m community, the non-monogamous, and other sexual transgressives. Halperin also addresses the political location of queer becoming, acknowledging that queers do experience distinct "political disabilities" and "forms of social disqualification" that might render sexual identity a legally useful if necessarily limited concept (1995, 65).

In many ways, becoming queer addresses the exclusivity of Foucault's gay becoming. However, Halperin's queer becoming does not serve as a comprehensive corrective to the occlusions of Foucault's project. Most troubling is Halperin's ontologization of homosexuality, upon which his theorizations of queerness are predicated.[17] While Halperin makes perfunctory mention of the complications of gender and race to the political and ethical utility of queerness, he fails to address either concern

17 To wit: "one can't become homosexual, strictly speaking: either one is or one isn't" (Halperin 1995, 79). This sentence troubled me more than anything else in *St. Foucault* – which is impressive for a book that opines at length about the transformative potentialities of anal fisting. Halperin does not qualify his statement. He does not indicate what does or does not make one gay. Is it gender? Is it sexual object choice? Is it politics? Some combination thereof? Something else altogether? We're not told. This is an almost phenomenological understanding of homosexuality, ala Otto: if we are gay, we must know it. If we are not, Halperin's meaning must needs be beyond us. Affect aside, this is an irrefutably binary understanding of human sexuality: gay/not gay. This ontologization of homosexuality—the idea that there is something that homosexuality is, and therefore many things that homosexuality is not, leaving no space between sexual poles—is deeply problematic, and frankly counter to Foucault's conceptualization of both homosexuality in particular and sexuality itself at large. I find myself productively disrupted: the expansion of gay becoming to efforts toward queerness is, I think, a necessary and important one. However, Halperin underwrites his theorizations with masculinist and essentialist understanding of the nature of homosexuality.

in depth. More, he consistently undermines *queer*'s professed inclusivity. s/m and its transgressive sexual practices are the sole invention of gay men in Halperin's account; and, as with Foucault, discussions of fisting are limited to anal activity (1995, 96). This is an exclusivist and ahistorical claim. There is no consideration of non-penetrative sex —which is often a component of s/m practices—or of the different, no less transgressive, role fisting plays in lesbian sex. Further, there is no mention of early role women played in San Fransisco leather communities.[18] Halperin explicitly accuses bisexuals of providing means by which to "de-gay gayness" (1995, 65). For all its acknowledgement of political disabilities, *queer* as Halperin uses it is monolithic: there is no engagement with varying degrees of legal or social restraints with regard to sexual identities or practices. There is even less engagement with concerns of race, class, education, physical ability, or geographical location.[19]

Most significantly for my project, Halperin's corrective to Foucault's project—that is, Halperin's insistence on queerness rather than homosexuality—emphasizes transgressive pleasures to the exclusion of queer bodies. This is not to minimize the disruptive potentiality of transgressive sexual choice; however, limiting queerness to sexual practices occludes those bodies or gender identities outside the "acceptable," specifically intersex and transgender persons. This, of course, raises questions of self-recognition, as not all transgender (particularly transsexual) persons would recognize themselves as queer, nor would they find the identification of themselves as such life-giving (*cf.* Prosser). But as Raven Kaldera emphasizes in my next section, transgendered individuals *do* queer understandings of the way gender work, often only by their bodily

18 See Rubin's article on the Catacombs and her explicit mention of Pat Califia's participation.

19 cf. Halberstam on the normative bias toward urban settings as queer spaces, which she calls "metronormativity" (2005, 12).

presence. Transgender identity often involves a visible cultivation of the bodily self as queer, which might bolster and broadened Halperin's argument. Emphasizing choice to the exclusion of bodies limits the utility of *queer* as a corrective to homosexual becoming.

In addition to the exclusion of queer bodies, Halperin limits his project by excluding (as Foucault did) religion as a viable queer *askesis*. More than Foucault, Halperin emphasizes *askesis* as a spiritual[20] undertaking. However, Halperin fails to connect the ethics of *askesis* to a language of spirituality. Queer politics is "a kind of spiritual exercise, a modern practice of the self;" but we're not told what kind of spirituality is operative in queer politics (Halperin 1995, 101). Halperin is not wrong to argue that Foucault intended *askesis* and gay becoming as secular projects; Foucault is explicit on that point. Stoic systems were of interest because they based their ethics on civil concerns; cultivation of the self departed from *askesis* as it approached Christianity.[21] Contemporary gay becomings resembled ancient *askesis* because "most of us no longer believe that ethics is founded in religion" (Foucault 1997b, 255). (I'm not sure who "most of us" are, though I'm certain "us" includes Halperin and excludes roughly half of the United States.) Whereas Foucauldean gay becoming distanced *askesis* from conversion to the self, Halperin seems to elide the two concepts: "homosexuality for Foucault is a spiritual exercise" (1995, 78). Again, however, the spirituality of Halperin's queer becoming is avowedly secular.

I do not take issue with the professed secularism of Halperin's project, nor to his

20 There is a certain amount of slippage in Halperin with regard to ethics, spirituality, and religion. If I read him correctly, ethics and spirituality are nearly interchangeable, whereas religion implies unnecessary and anachronistic institutionalized moral codes.

21 Foucault did not imply that early Christians did not self-cultivate, a point to which I shall return in the conclusion to this section. However, he does intimate that Christianity presented a more normalizing discourse.

emphasis on the asketical potential of historical scholarship. I do wonder, however, at the deliberate exclusion of religion or religiosity from queer *askesis*. "It is no longer divinity but history...that guarantees us an experience of the Other at the core of our own subjectivity and brings it about that any direct encounter with the self must also be a confrontation with the not-self" (Halperin 1995, 104). For Halperin, history represents the height of intellectual and spiritual cultivation of self (1995, 105).

I do think that history can surface both internal alterity and the alterity of a nation to itself. Likewise, the study of history may serve as catalyst for personal or national transformation. But so, too, may religion: Saba Mahmood's work, for example, demonstrates the role of bodily devotional practice in ethical self-cultivation. I am unclear as to why history necessarily excludes divinity or the relationship of self-to-self as a relationship of self-to-divine.

As Jeremy Carrette demonstrates in his 2000 *Foucault and Religion*, religion and spirituality[22] were common themes throughout Foucault's work. Carrette suggests that Foucault "continually drew religion into his work – he recognised religion as a major part of the 'history of the present'" (2000, 2). He notes a renewed analytical engagement with Christianity in Foucault's fourth, unpublished volume of *The History of Sexuality*, allegedly titled *Confessions of the Flesh.* However, Carrette contends, "Foucault's late work on Christianity was not a sudden or abrupt turn to religion;" rather, he argues that *The Use of Pleasure* and *The Care of the Self* "can be seen as an extended preparation for the themes of sexual austerity in Christianity" (2000, 24).

22 With Carrette, I note verbal slippage in Foucault's work between the terms religion and spirituality. As per Carrette, religion seems to indicate "overall phenomenological term to refer to any institutionalized faith tradition, though this predominantly means institutionalised Christianity" (2000, 6). Spirituality "appears to refer to any religious faith, but is used [by Foucault]...to avoid the word 'religion' and strategically disrupt traditional religious meaning" (Carrette 2000, 6).

To read Christianity as the specter haunting *The History of Sexuality* is perhaps to miss the point. As I have argued, I believe Foucault's asketical project in *The Use of Pleasure* and *The Care of the Self* was, at least in part, in service to his contemporary project of homosexual becoming – a project that did not so much respond to as dismiss Christianity and religion more broadly. Christianity absolutely represented both normalizing moral discourses and subject-forming bodily disciplines within Foucault's work. However, the asketical project was, as I have demonstrated, more concerned with the socially disruptive quality of pre-Christian same-sex sexual behaviors and the productive nature of that transgressive disruption for both the subject and his society.

Carrette nevertheless rightly notes religion's lingering presence throughout not only *The History of Sexuality*, but Foucault's life-work. Religious discourse, religious institutions, and religious practice all function in Foucault's analyses as apparatuses of subjectivation. The key difference between Foucault's reading of spirituality/religion/Christianity and that of queer *askesis*, I would suggest, lies in engagement with the body. Whereas Christianity/religion, for Foucault, creates subjects through renunciation, discipline, and silencing of the passive (male) body, *askesis*/becoming homosexual affirms and amplifies the active (male) body and its pleasures.

Foucault's continued engagement with embodied religion and religious bodies might provide insight into his formulation of homosexual becoming as a secular project. Both religious practice and asketical ethics constitute subjects. However, as Foucault theorized it, religion (broadly read here as Christianity) forms subjects by grafting the soul on the body. In this reading of religion, the soul lacks a metaphysical referent: it is a disciplinary power/knowledge order that imprisons the body (Carrette 2000; 124, 115).

Foucault suggested that religion disciplines passive bodies, making them docile. These docile bodies renounce themselves—their flesh and pleasures—in confession, which Foucault considered among the earliest paradigms for regimes of bodily discipline and self-mastery (Carrette 2000, 118). Confession and monasticism constitute the self through the negation of bodily desire (Carrette 2000, 112). Thus "Christianity paradoxically constructs a self in the very sacrificing or silencing of the embodied self" (Carrette 2000, 42).

Both classical *askesis* and homosexual becoming, on the other hand, are grounded in the affirmation rather than renunciation or silencing of the body and its pleasures. Whereas Foucault understood Christianity and religion more broadly as bodily disciplines that imprisoned the body, becoming homosexual was intended as a liberatory project. Queer *askesis* cultivates active bodily subjects, rather than passive, docile selves. Finally, the disciplining of bodies through confession and renunciation was meant to establish and maintain civil order. Foucault intended homosexual becoming to disrupt and re-imagine societal constructs, particularly those of sexual identity and relationality. For these reasons, Foucault conceptualized becoming homosexual as a deliberately secular project.

As I have demonstrated, however, neither Foucauldean homosexual becoming nor Halperin's queer becoming account for queer—that is, intersex (gender-indeterminate) and transgender (gender-ambiguous or -mutable)—bodies. Further, as I shall argue in the next chapter, Kaldera's work toward ethical cultivating himself is done for explicitly religious reasons. Foucault's queer *askesis* moreover does not incorporate religiosity, nor does his theorization of religion allow for divine presence (a point to which I shall return in my third section). Thus, while the model provides analytical insight into ethical work on and with the body, Foucault's homosexual becoming fails to fully account for

Kaldera's bodily self-cultivation. In my next section, I shall suggest that the knowledge created by being-in-(queer)-body, or bodily *noesis*, complements and enhances Kaldera's work on and with his body (*askesis*). This illustrates the manner in which the chiasmus of bodily *noesis* and queer *askesis*, manifested as religion, can be used to create liberative meaning of and for queer bodies.

To review: in this section, I have argued that the Foucauldean project of homosexual becoming helps us think about the ways in which transgressive work on and with the sexuate body may productively disrupt sexual discourse. I detailed Foucault's project of becoming homosexual as he introduced it in interviews with the French and American gay press from April 1981 to June 1982. I suggested that *The Use of Pleasure* and *The Care of the Self* historicize the project of ethical self-subjectivation through asketical work on and with the body. I argued that while becoming homosexual is an effective liberatory project in many ways, Foucault's theorizations are masculinist and secularist, which challenges the radical voluntarism of the project. As a result, Foucault occludes both queer bodies and religion from homosexual becoming. I offered brief suggestions as to why Foucault might have formulated becoming homosexual as a secularist project, but ultimately concluded that the model was insufficient to encompass Raven Kaldera's (religious) work on and with his own (queer) body. In my next section, I suggest that Kaldera's knowledge created by being-in-(queer)-body, or bodily *noesis*, complements and expands the religious work he does and has done on and with his body.

## CHAPTER TWO

### THIRD SEX SHAMANISM: "UNMANLY" RELIGIOUS EXPERIENCE

I suggested in my previous section that Raven Kaldera's work on and with his body both confirms and challenges Foucault's model of becoming homosexual. Foucault's insistence on the transformative potentiality of sexual transgression provides insight into Kaldera's own queer *askesis*. However, the masculinism, secularism, and radical voluntarism of Foucault's project all exclude Kaldera from becoming homosexual. Foucault's model provides an analytical framework for Kaldera's ethical bodily subjectivation: Kaldera, like Foucault, makes it possible to think differently about sexuate bodies, and to imagine broader possibilities for what those bodies may signify and accomplish. But homosexual becoming is insufficient (or, perhaps more accurately, not intended) to encompass religious work done on and with queer bodies. Thus I argue that Kaldera's bodily ethics incorporates queer *askesis*, but also bodily *noesis*: knowledge about the self in relationship to divinity, created by the experience of being in a queer body.

I draw the term *noesis* from William James' theorizations of mysticism in *The Varieties of Religious Experience.* In James' typology, the noetic (or knowledge-creating) quality of a religious experience was one of four marks characterizing an experience as mystical. In discussing Kaldera's bodily *noesis*, however, I am not limiting my engagement to mystical experiences – though Kaldera's encounters with Hela could certainly be considered mystical experiences. Rather, I suggest that the experience of

being-in-body can itself be noetic, by which I mean bodily-being can (seem to) create knowledge both about the self and about the divine. This *noesis* can—and in Kaldera's case, does—inform gender identity and religious practice.

Bodily *noesis* presents itself as recognition of the self in divinity: not as idolatry or even necessarily anthropomorphism, but rather as an understanding of divinity that honors the sexuate self as sacred, that affirms the knowledge created by being-in-body. The desire for a deity who reflects bodily knowledge is not new, of course; the push for Goddess imagery played (and continues to play) a key part in feminist and womanist thea/ologies.[23] I shall return to this desire for divine reflection in my discussion of Jantzen. Bodily *noesis*, in its recognition of knowledge created about the self and the divine by the experience of bodily being, may then inform *askesis*, work on and with the body. This is, I would argue, the case with Kaldera.

In its emphasis on individual affective experience, bodily *noesis* can certainly be read as a phenomenological category of analysis. I certainly intend noesis to engage with personal religious and bodily experiences, but am reluctant to categorize it as phenomenological. My reluctance stems from phenomenology's investment in intentionality.[24] On this point, *noesis* should not, at the very least, be read in psychoanalytical terms. I am less concerned with intentionality than with application: that is, my concern is the ways in which the noetic quality of being-in-body informs work

23 See, for example, Ntozake Shange's poem, "we need a god who bleeds now"

24 Analyses of religious or sexual transgression often begin questions of intentionality – see, for example, Palmer's exploration of American "heresy" in her analysis of US new religious movements. Many ethnographies concern themselves with questions such as: why would someone choose such a radically alternative religious practice or gender lifestyle? As Kaldera himself notes, "it's hard to be a freak. It's especially hard to be a sexual freak, as any transsexual can also tell you" (alt.com). But beginning an analysis by asking why anyone engages in transgressive behaviors sets an interlocutor "the impossible goal of explaining behavior that has already been defined as deeply irrational or incomprehensible" (Halperin 2007, 11). Questions of intentionality moreover imply a degree of voluntarism in both gender and religious performance that is frankly incompatible with Kaldera's accounts of both his bodily and religious queering.

on and with that body (*askesis*) in religious contexts. I shall not offer explanations as to *why* Kaldera wants or does anything. Rather, I concern myself only with what Kaldera does, and why he says he does it.

Kaldera attributes the work he does and has done on and with his body to his relationship with Hela, Norse goddess of the dead, and to his obligations as shaman to a queer tribe. In this section, I examine the ways in which Kaldera's thealogy and religious practice—expressed through ethical, bodily self-cultivation—are informed and authorized by his own bodily *noesis*. Again, I am arguing that Kaldera's bodily ethics should be considered in terms of *askesis*, but that Foucault's model of homosexual becoming does not account for the noetic quality of queer bodily-being. Thus throughout this section, I identify points at which Kaldera's work on and with his body confirm and/or challenge Foucault's model. I begin by locating Kaldera's practice, Northern Tradition Shamanism, in a broader Pagan context. I then explore the ways in which bodily noesis informs and authorizes Kaldera's religious/gender identity. Next, I demonstrate the extent to which Kaldera's self-cultivation can be considered a form of queer *askesis*. I locate Kaldera's refutation of the masculinism, secularism, and voluntarism of Foucault's project. I suggest that Kaldera's bodily *noesis* deeply informs these refutations. This chiasmus between queer *askesis* and bodily *noesis*, I offer, presents a liberatory understanding of both bodies and religiosity beyond those offered by western imaginaries. This precedes the exploration in my final section of the ways in which queer bodies and non-traditional religious practice and thought expand western religious imaginary, allowing more sexuate creatures to flourish.

Raven Kaldera and Northern Tradition Shamanism

As I mentioned in my introduction, Raven Kaldera is a female-to-male (or FTM) transgendered shaman. Kaldera identifies as *argr*, or "unmanly" in Old Norse. He uses "unmanliness" (*ergi*) to refer to a third, sacred sex—that is, transgender. Kaldera locates his shamanic authority and power in the visible and constant performance of this unmanliness. Roughly a decade ago, he founded a tradition organized around acceptance both of sexual transgression (bodily and practical) and acknowledgement of intimate relationship with and knowledge of the gods (also known—somewhat pejoratively—in Norse Pagan circles as "unverified personal gnosis," or UPG.) Kaldera's tradition, Northern Tradition Shamanism, embraces and embodies unmanliness as both a gender and a religious identity.

Kaldera suggests that Northern Tradition Shamanism is different than many other kinds of Neopaganism because

> We have so many people who are too weird for other groups. Our members are transgendered, or intersexual, or queer, or pierced-up, or tattooed, or polyamorous, or perverts, or sex workers, or poor, or homesteaders, or disabled, or autistic, or a little crazy, or they have odd religious practices, they get god-possessed or talk to spirits in a way that's not currently fashionable... [But] we're loyal, we're productive, we take care of each other, and we have damn little in the way of political wars compared to other small groups. (alt.com)

Northern Tradition Shamanism is one of a number of Norse Paganisms that reconstruct or re-imagine medieval Germanic and Nordic religious praxis. Their primary source material is a body of Icelandic texts dating between 1100 and 1300 CE. Known as "the lore," this body of texts includes stories about Norse deities and heroes, collections of epic prose and poetry, and medieval civil codes.

Since the early 1970s, American Norse Pagans have been using the lore to create

contemporary versions of Viking religiosity. The only sociological survey of American Neo-Pagans[25] estimated that there were between 500 and 1000 Norse Pagans in the US in 1995. While at the time of the survey sociologist Helen Berger did not consider Norse Paganisms a statistically significant portion of the US Neopagan population, membership in such groups has increased rapidly in the past decade. Margot Adler, author of the only comprehensive ethnography of US Neopaganisms,[26] noted in 2006 that Norse Pagans represent a vocal minority among the currently estimated 500,000 to 1 million Neopagans in the United States.

With a few exceptions, Norse Pagans fit the demographic profile of most American converts to new religious movements. They are almost exclusively white and primarily male (65%), though the number of female converts to Norse Paganism has increased over the last ten years. Most Norse Pagans have graduated college and fall within the lower middle-class tax bracket. Compared to the general Neo-Pagan population, Norse Pagans are more politically and socially conservative; but it bears noting that the general Neo-Pagan population is far more liberal than the US public at large. (For example: In Berger's 1995 survey, 85% of the general Neo-Pagan population supported gay marriage; 72% of Norse Pagans favored same-sex marriage.)

Norse Pagans are vehement polytheists and, as I mentioned above, rely on primary texts for their knowledge of the Norse pantheon. Norse Paganism is primarily a votive religion, which is to say that its practitioners mostly concern themselves with honoring their gods. Magic use is decidedly a secondary concern, and tends to take the form of oracular divination, or *seidr*; the *seid*-worker, allows a god, spirit, or honored

25 Helen Berger's *Voices from the Pagan Census: A National Survey of Witches and Neo-Pagans in the United States* (2003)

26 *Drawing Down the Moon*: *Witches, Druids, Goddess-Worshippers, and Other Pagans in America* (1979, 2006)

ancestor speak through her to provide protection or advice. Spellwork in Norse context is traditionally women's work; more strictly textual (or orthodox) Heathenries discourage or forbid men from doing spell-work for this reason. But among moderate Norse Paganisms, increasing numbers of male practitioners are performing oracular divination despite the practice's unmanly genealogy. Few "mainstream" Norse Paganisms, however, adopt and celebrate unmanliness in the way that Kaldera and Northern Tradition Shamanism do.

Bodily *Noesis*: Kaldera's Gendered Religiosity and Religious Gendering

Unmanliness, or *ergi,* is both a gender and a religious positionality in Northern Tradition Shamanism. Kaldera in particular understands his religious identity as shaman and his bodily identity as transgender to be inextricably entwined. The embodied nature of Kaldera's knowledge about himself and his religiosity, I suggest, indicates bodily *noesis*.

In describing himself, Kaldera says "I now see myself as exactly what I am – a bigendered being who prefers a masculine body but who has no illusions about being anything but intersex where it matters" (Kaldera 2002, 14). Intersex and transgender—or more specifically unmanliness as a sacred third sex—is for Kaldera a religious gender identity. It's worth noting that Kaldera does not consider all transgendered or transsexual persons to be third sex. He defines transgender as an "umbrella term to describe anyone who deliberately crosses back and forth over the boundaries of what we call male and female in this culture" (Kaldera 2002, 10). Transsexual for Kaldera refers to "someone whose discomfort with the sexual characteristics of their body is so deep that they are willing to physically alter it through hormones and possibly surgery in order to make it resemble what's inside their head" (Kaldera 2002, 10-11). Third sex, or *ergi*, is a subset

of transgender as Kaldera defines it: third sex "describes a feeling more than an ideological stance – specifically the feeling that your soul, the deepest part of your being, is poised somewhere between male and female, partaking of both but creating something different in the process" (Kaldera 2002, 11). Note that Kaldera discusses unmanliness as a feeling, in the deepest part of his being, that he is between genders, *and* that that position has specifically religious implications. This, I suggest, is bodily *noesis*.

In response to the question "how do your spirituality and your gender intersect?" Kaldera states that "they are completely intertwined. I believe that the experience of being Third in whatever form can be and is a spiritual path" (myhusbandbetty.com). In his essay, "*Ergi*: The Way of the Third," Kaldera indicates that he did not initially connect transgender identity with shamanism. Rather, he says, Hela, Norse goddess of death who "owns [him] body and soul," ordered him to change his gender. Only during his post-surgery research on historical shamanisms did Kaldera connect the two. "When I began to read up on shamanism, the transgender issue hit me like a shock wave. These things weren't separate, they were part and parcel of the same system" ("*Ergi*," ravenkaldera.org). Here again, transgenderism and shamanism are for Kaldera inextricable, another instance of bodily *noesis.*

Regarding his research, Kaldera emphasizes the prevalence of gender-ambiguous or transgender shamans in what calls "subarctic circumpolar shamanisms," specifically among the Inuit, Chukchi, and similar tribes.[27] Kaldera suggests that many such shamans historically transgressed gender roles and engaged in unusual sexual practices ("*Ergi*," ravenkaldera.org). "If an ordinary person of the tribe decided to change their gender,

27 It's worth noting that the inclusion of non-Norse mythologies into theology is an extremely contentious practice among Norse Paganisms. Use of non-lore source material and the incorporation of individual experiences of the divine (referred to with some disdain as UPG, or "unverified personal gnosis") sets Northern Tradition Shamanism at some distance from more mainstream Norse Paganisms.

they might be shunned; but if a shaman did it, it was a sacred thing done by the spirits to give them extra power," ("*Ergi*," ravenkaldera.org). Kaldera references archaeological findings, anthropological accounts, and historical documents to present a cogent narrative history for what he calls third sex shamanism – a religious practice centered on recognition of the self as physically between and/or beyond gender ("*Ergi*," ravenkaldera.org).

Kaldera's Queer *Askesis*: A Shaman's Work on and with his Body

Throughout his writings and interviews on his religion and his sexuality, Kaldera stresses the need for a third-sex shaman to work *on* hir body and *with* hir body in service to hir tribe. This bodily self-cultivation, I suggest, constitutes queer *askesis* in Foucauldean terms. Work on the body includes addressing the role of gender in the shaman's work and understanding sexual practices as sacred, including s/m practices. Addressing gender issues is vital for the third sex shaman, Kaldera insists.

> We must deal fully and completely with our gender issues, as quickly and as honestly as possible. It is the first thing on our training, before any drums or rattles or chanting. If we do not deal with it, nothing will go right for us until we do. Period.
>
> … Why do we have to deal with this, first? Because it's a tool. Because it's a power. Because seeing things from both of those sides is an important part of learning to shift shape, to see from other eyes, to walk between worlds. While non-trans people can learn it in other ways, there's no question that we do have something special when it comes to gaining perspective. ("Transgendered Spirit Workers," ravenkaldera.org)

Addressing gender issues can but need not include surgery, Kaldera suggests. He does not recommend reassignment surgery unless the shaman is willing to risk much for the privilege of "buying your body back" ("Would-be Transsexuals," ravenkaldera.org). (Again we see knowledge created by being-in-body – here, an acknowledgement of internal alterity, of being simultaneously self and not-self. I shall return to this point in a

moment.) Kaldera explains that he resisted surgery "even to the point of nearly dying, except that the Goddess who owns my ass [Hela, Norse Goddess of Death] ordered me to do this, to get on with it already. When I protested, she told me that she was sending me where I was needed most" (sensuoussadie.com). In this instance, knowledge of divinity informed Kaldera's work on his body: a religiously motivated asketical undertaking, required because (as Kaldera explains it) reconciling gender issues is the first work a third sex shaman performs on hir body.

Recognizing sexuality as sacred is equally crucial for third sex shamanism. Work on the body also includes transgressive sexual practices: Kaldera's work places heavy emphasis on the risk of s/m in sacred context (again recalling Foucauldean asketical queer praxis). Indeed, Kaldera insists that that is how we know the practices are sacred: they're not—nor can they be made—entirely safe (Kaldera 2006, 136). His book, *Dark Moon Rising: Pagan BDSM and the Ordeal Path*, argues for the importance of spiritual discipline and rites of passage in Pagan praxis. Specifically, Kaldera's work details the multiple uses of pain and ordeal in ritual context. He argues that using pain is "a perfectly valid way of creating a spiritual altered state… Of course," he qualifies, "since we so often do this in the context of sexual play, people tend to give us the hairy eyeball over it," (Kaldera 2006, 23). S/m techniques can function within ritual context in a number of ways, Kaldera explains: in addition to inducing altered states, pain creates energy that the top[28] can direct, can bring ritual participants back into their own bodies after trance, can serve as sacrifice to a deity, a strength ordeal, or as emotional catharsis. Kaldera offers lived examples of s/m's radically transformative potentiality. Kaldera's Ordeal work is an intrinsic part (though by no means the extent) of his religious praxis. It

28 In s/m parlance, a top is dominant during the scene, or designated and negotiated s/m activity.

also, as Foucault suggested, instantiates s/m as an asketical practice. The recognition of sex—particularly transgressive sex—as sacred is thus crucial to third sex shamanism. Understanding sex as sacred, I would suggests, indicates a bodily noesis; the practice of honoring that sanctity through s/m work on the body is asketical.

Work *with* body in third sex shamanism manifests both through simple bodily presence and deliberately transgressive gender performances. It also includes the practice of *seidr*, the practice of oracular divination I mentioned in my introduction to this section. While Kaldera is deeply invested in deliberately queering normative understandings of gender, he explains that the very presence of a transgender person does spiritual work. This is what he calls the "first transgender mystery": "We are all, every one of us, catalysts. We change people, and we don't even have to work at it. All we have to do is stand around, and people have to struggle with their worldviews just to cope with our very existence" (Kaldera 2002, 23).

Kaldera further explains that the contemporary third sex shaman's body must transgress gender and sexual norms in religious context. More importantly, the shaman must be public about both gender-queering behaviors and transgressive sexual activities. In this model, gender queering can span from cross-dressing in ritual context to a full surgical gender change, according to what the gods ask of the shaman. Kaldera further clarifies that transgressive sex need not necessarily be homosexual object choice. "When you move into the middle of the gender continuum, there comes a point where labels like 'gay, lesbian, straight' are irrelevant; all sexual interactions become somehow queer" (Kaldera 2002, 22). Kaldera places primary emphasis on the need for public performance of these transgressive behaviors.

> It isn't enough to be third-gendered internally. You have to be visibly different in that way as well, whether it's only that your ceremonial costume has strong elements of clothing that is socially acceptable only for a sex different from the one that you most appear, or that you must act in a way that is deliberately gender-inappropriate. Your gender transgressing has to be evident to everyone who comes to see you in your professional capacity, and you may never deny it when asked. ("*Ergi,*" ravenkaldera.org)

Publicly breaking gender and sexual norms sets the third-sex spirit worker apart and allows hir gods and honored dead to speak through hir, specifically through oracular divination. Kaldera calls this third-sex spirit work *argr*, unmanly, because "we need a word for this thing that we are and do (for it's both something we are and something we do [that is, the word is performative]), and we see the echo of this same power/blessing/curse/wiring/energy/ sacredness in those brief glimpses of the ones called *ergi* [in Norse Pagan lore]," ("*Ergi*," ravenkaldera.org).

Finally, the third sex shaman works *with* hir body in religious context through the practice of *seidr*: speaking on behalf of the dead to guide hir spiritual community. Kaldera's tribe, as he calls them, extends beyond Northern Tradition Shamanism to include

> transsexuals, both transwomen and transmen. Genderqueers. Cross-dressers of whatever stripe, fetishistic or otherwise. The normal-looking ones who have an inner female or male so strong that they demand part of their life, especially part of their sexual life. The intersexuals like myself who look in the mirror and know what they are, and want the freedom to be that. The ones who just know, inside, that they are both male and female -not theoretically but intimately, to know with every fiber of your body that you have walked in the world and male and female and something in between. You are all my tribe. ("Transgendered Spirit Workers," ravenkaldera.org)

Kaldera and his tribe have dedicated themselves to honoring their gods, to ministering to other "unmanly" people who also feel called to honor these gods, and to speak for their honored dead—those killed for doing and speaking gender wrong.

> Our Dead are angry, and they demand this of us: that as much as we are able, we will do what has to be done to make sure that there are no more fallen in this war. In order to save each other, we must band together and take care of each other, because alone we go down. ("Transgendered Spirit Workers," ravenkaldera.org)

Thus transgender presence, performance, and practice (*seidr*) all constitute shamanic work *with* the body – and, I would argue, queer *askesis* in religious context.

Kaldera's queer becoming further constitutes queer *askesis* in his bodily cultivation of the self by the self, the establishment of a non-normative morality, and the experience of internal alterity. As I have suggested, however, Foucauldean homosexual becoming does not fully account for Kaldera's work on and with his body: primarily because becoming homosexual does not incorporate queer bodies and religiosity. More, Kaldera's becoming queer is not wholly based on choice. Thus while Foucault's model provides insight into Kaldera's work on and with his body, I suggest Kaldera's experiences require a further analytical model: that of bodily *noesis*.

Work on the body through addressing gender discomfort constitutes a self-cultivation in this context, but one informed and reinforced by bodily knowledge. For Kaldera himself, dealing with his gender included hormone treatments and a double mastectomy, which he refers to as "buying [his] body back" ("Would-be Transsexuals," ravenkaldera.org). Kaldera notes that this cultivation of self, in addition to reflecting his religious role as shaman, nourished his body and his mind.

> I learned from [an FTM support group] that I didn't have to be squarely on the opposite end of the gender paradigm in order to change my body, that I didn't have to live with the discomfort. Change was possible and reasonable and didn't need to be justified...
>
> It was one thing to think that my body would make things better, but nothing prepared me for how good it would actually be. Twelve hours after my first shot of testosterone, the chemical depression I'd had since puberty lifted, literally, on the spot. It was as if a gray cloud had been

> lifted from the world, and I laughed hysterically the entire first night. "Who needs Prozac!" I crowed. "I've got boy juice!" (library.humboldt.edu)

Kaldera emphasizes that having his body reflect his inner understanding of self benefits him physically and mentally, while making it possible to better serve his tribe and his gods. This bodily cultivation for the betterment of self and community recalls the project of queer becoming, but also suggests a knowledge created by being-in-body.

Though Kaldera maintains that third sex shamanism is incontrovertible for him, he acknowledges that his religious practice is not for everyone. **"**I call myself a pagan fundamentalist [but] it's not because I'm intolerant – my religion states that this path is not for everyone, so I am fundamentally, rabidly tolerant on principle" (twpt.com). Third sex shamanism, then, represents a non-normative morality characteristic of queer *askesis*, but is nevertheless rooted in noetic transgender identity.

Finally, the experience of internal alterity recalls Foucault's project of queer becoming while reflecting a specific kind of bodily knowledge. Indeed, the feeling of being other-than one's body inherent to transgenderism brings this experience of alterity into sharp relief. Kaldera relates:

> I felt like an impostor, no matter what I did. I was afraid that no matter how hard I tried, they'd still somehow be able to look at me and strip away my mask. Sometimes they did. I was often accused of "male behavior," even when I couldn't figure out what was wrong with my behavior. My health deteriorated in reaction to the medications I took to keep my body from becoming masculine. One night as I endured the massive hemorrhaging that threatened to put me in the hospital—a side effect of my artificial hormonal soup—I finally decided that maintaining my assigned gender was not worth ruining my health. I began to contemplate changing to male hormones. Once I'd faced the idea, there was no turning back.
>
> There's a card in the tarot deck called "temperance." The often androgynous angel on it, shown standing with one foot on the water and one on land, is pouring fire and water back and forth between two cups. I

> feel like that much of the time, one foot in each world, frantically juggling opposite elements. Not just male and female either; there are also the separate countries of hormones and culture, intersex and transgender, spirituality and intellectualism, queer and transsexual, and so forth. The lines aren't stable; they move around, but they're easy to find. Just come and look for me. Where I stand, there's the line. Where I move, the line goes with me. I live on it. It is imprinted into my flesh. You can take my clothes off and see for yourself. (library.humboldt.edu)

The experience of feeling not-self is not a philosophical one for Kaldera. The experience of internal alterity, of being other-than-self, is a key component in his queer religiosity and his queer becoming – one informed by bodily knowledge of feeling not-self.

Kaldera's religiosity is demonstrably a cultivation of the self; however, in sharp contrast to homosexual becoming, his self-cultivation is to some extent involuntary. This lack of choice can be attributed first to Kaldera's transgenderism – his queerness is bodily, not based solely on sexual practice (contra Halperin).[29] However, Kaldera's relationship to divinity—Hela owns him; he is a godslave—further complicates the limitation of queer becoming to sexual choice. In each case, we may observe bodily *noesis* functioning: both in the bodily knowledge of self, and in the embodied knowledge of divinity. In this way, n*oesis* complicates the radical voluntarism of queer *askesis*.

Kaldera repeatedly refutes the notion of choice in transgenderism throughout his writings and interviews.

> Those of us who "do" gender...twist it and play with it and transform it into something quite different from what society intends... *We don't get the privilege of living an unquestioned life.* (Kaldera 2002, 58; emphasis added)

> There's a place in that hell called 'transition' where you are passing from one side to the other, and you are suddenly so much both that you are

29 It's worth noting, however, that transgender as a bodily or sexual identity has only existed since 1974 (cf. *The Oxford English Dictionary*, as well as Halberstam, on this point.) Compare "transsexual" (1957). While I do not contest or intend to undermine Kaldera's statement, it bears consideration that the lack of voluntarism he gestures at is considerably *less* constrained than it might have been even fifty years ago.

> neither. For some, it's a split second; for others, several years, but we never forget it. We may repress it, but we never forget it. Some of us are living in that sacred space right now... *We did not choose to be what we are, and we cannot unchoose it.* But being what we are has given us choices, choices the likes of which you can only hope to imagine. ("Feminist on Testosterone," ravenkaldera.org; emphasis added)

The marginality of trans-existence is, as Kaldera demonstrates, not based solely on choice. It is a fact of trans life – a matter of knowing one's body. This lack of choice is further complicated by the surrender of agency to a deity. As I have mentioned, the Norse goddess of Death owns Raven. Thus, he says, "I'm spiritually required to 'speak my truth'...I'm not allowed to euphemize it by the Powers that Own My Ass" (sensuoussadie.com). He and third sex shamans like him are "the ones who have no choice, for whom spirit-work has eaten our entire lives, the ones for whom saying no is impossible because we are already bound by this calling" ("Transgendered Spirit Workers," ravenkaldera.org). Kaldera's relationship to divinity is further connected to his bodily knowledge. Religious obligation and bodily necessity complicate the rhetoric of radical voluntarism operative in both gay and queer *askesis*.

Thus, as I have shown, Kaldera's queer religiosity both instantiates and challenges Foucault's homosexual becoming. While *askesis* provides a useful analytical model within which to think about Kaldera's work on and with his body, Foucault's model is ultimately insufficient to describe Kaldera's religious experience. I have argued that bodily *noesis*—knowledge created about the self and about divinity by the experience of being-in-body—offers further insight into Kaldera's self-cultivation. In my next section, I explore the ways in which queer *askesis* and bodily *noesis* work together to expand what Jantzen calls the western religious imaginary, thus creating space for queer bodies and non-traditional modes of religiosity to flourish.

## CHAPTER THREE

### Queer Bodies Becoming Divine: Expanding Western Imaginaries

I suggested in my previous section that Raven Kaldera's story is one of noetic self-fashioning: he has worked on and with his body in ways that reflect his embodied and bodily experiences of the divine. Thus I have argued that Kaldera instantiates the ways in which religion occurs at the chiasmus between queer *askesis* and bodily *noesis*.

By using the term chiasmus, I imply an intersection, but also a creative disruption within the western bodily and religious imaginaries. In *Becoming Divine: Towards a Feminist Philosophy of Religion,* Grace Jantzen employed this Derridean term to indicate the convergence of close reading and alterity – what Derrida referred to as "double reading" (1998, 59). Chiasmus, then, suggests a dominant reading "intersected by its own undoing" (Jantzen 1998, 74). The term implies an opening in dominant discourse, the irruption of radically different modes of thought. Specifically in the context of the western religious imaginary,

> what the chiasmus opens out is the possibility of thinking differently, recognizing that this God of classical theism around whom the binary is constructed is not the only concept of God available, and that a feminist philosophy of religion would do well not just to debate or critique [Lacan's] 'good old God' ...but to explore other conceptions of the divine. (Jantzen 1998, 75-6)

These other understandings of divinity, I have suggested, are informed both by knowledge created by being-in-body and the deliberate work with and on the body toward ethical subjectivity. In this way, religion allows queer *askesis* and bodily *noesis* to create meaning about bodies in relationship to themselves and to the divine. In the case of Kaldera, these bodily/religious relationships, perhaps unsurprisingly, are transgressive – one might say, queer. However, as Foucault and Kaldera have both demonstrated, such

modes of relationality create space for those outside the traditional scope of bodies and religion to flourish.

This space for flourishing, I suggest, is largely imaginary. As I mentioned in my introduction, imaginary here does not imply false. Rather, the term encompasses the symbolic and linguistic systems that inform and constrain our understandings of what it is possible to do, be, think, and believe. I have referred to both bodily and religious imaginaries. The western religious imaginary, which Jantzen theorizes at length and to which I shall return in a moment, understands divinity as transcendent, logical, infinite, salvation-oriented, and disembodied (while paradoxically also portraying god as one heterosexual white man). I also posit a western bodily imaginary, complicit in the understanding that bodies can be neatly divided into two biologically evident sexes, and that the sex evident at a child's birth is a permanent feature of that child's identity.

Raven Kaldera, as I have shown, challenges both the western bodily and religious imaginaries. Kaldera advocates and embodies radical deconstructions and re-imaginings —a queering—of gender and religion. In this section, I examine the ways in which Kaldera's queer *askesis* and bodily *noesis* work to expand bodily and religious imaginaries. I begin by laying out the western religious imaginary as Grace Jantzen conceptualized it in *Becoming Divine.* I then examine the function of sexuate bodies within Jantzen's religious imaginary, and explore the ways in which Kaldera's queer *askesis* and bodily *noesis* ratify and expand Jantzen's thought. Finally, I detail the incompatibilities between Jantzen's feminist philosophy of religion and Kaldera's religious practice, particularly with regard to divine presence. I conclude by suggesting that while Jantzen's divine becoming does not fully describe Kaldera's bodily or religious experience, divinity as horizon does work in ways comparable to Kaldera's noetic self-

fashioning.

The Western Religious Imaginary

By suggesting that queer *askesis* and bodily *noesis* work toward expanding the western religious imaginary, I mean the following: transgressive practices, transgressive bodies, transgressive identities, push the boundaries of what it is possible to think about religious practice, about human bodies, about subjectivity. The religious imaginary, like gender and other cultural constructs, is not wholly our own; what we imagine is constrained to varying degrees by history, culture, education, and personal experience, among countless other factors. But I would suggest that it is precisely the expansion, the tension between what is and what is possible, that make these efforts toward queer becoming so significant.

Struggles to expand the religious imaginary—to queer the ways we think about religion and about divinity—are concrete, ethical efforts toward thinking differently, toward seeing if we can be other than what we are. In striving to become religiously queer, we are asking ourselves: what else can be divine? What else can be religious? Throughout this paper, I have suggested that queerness can be a site for the religious cultivation of the self, as religion can be a site for the queer cultivation of the self. In struggling to become queer, we ourselves can approach the divine. The struggle to become divine makes this so.

Grace Jantzen defined divinity as the conditions under which one can flourish. Flourishing for Jantzen implied an ethical process of achieving subjectivity; to that end, she worked toward creatively disrupting the western religious imaginary. *Becoming Divine* addressed the masculinist construction of the western religious symbolic. Anglophone philosophies of religion, Jantzen argued, have imagined divinity as a "God

who is also a Word...who in his eternal disembodiment, omnipotence, and omniscience is the epitome of value," (Jantzen 1999, 10). The God of the Western imaginary, she argued, lacks materiality but is presumably both male and heterosexual for all that "he" is incorporeal. Though she is not explicit on the point, Jantzen's presumed godhead is also singular, indicated by her continued use of the first person masculine singular in describing "Him." Thus according to Jantzen, the traditional god of the west is one straight male without a body, an "assumed divine presence" signifying everything, hidden behind and within both language and broader symbolic patterns of cultures themselves (1999, 188).

Following Irigaray, Jantzen argued that subjectivity requires the disruption of the western religious imaginary itself, since "religious discourse serves as the linchpin of the western symbolic," (1999, 12). Jantzen, with Irigaray, called us to displace "masculinist structures by a new imaginary not based on the Name of the Father but on new ways of conceiving and being" that honor the subjectivity of all people (1999, 12). Jantzen did not intend this displacement to be a singular departure from the Western religious imaginary; rather, she described re-imagining divinity as a process of becoming divine. Divinity for Jantzen is creativity, endless possibility, "a process…ever new" through which we, as embodied, sexuate creatures, nurture and protect each other (1999, 254).

Jantzen posited a model for divinity-in-process: god as divine horizon. She suggested that we must strive toward an understanding of God as radically immanent, multiple, carnal, material, and not necessarily or exclusively male or heteronormative. For Jantzen, God had ceased to be a placeholder for disembodied transcendence, truth or salvation. Rather, she argued, it is our moral obligation to achieve subjectivity—to speak and live in ways that honor the interconnectedness and transience of all living things. In

short, Jantzen challenged us to become divine.

To become divine—that is, to achieve embodied, sexuate subjectivity—Jantzen maintained that we must recognize and disrupt the existent western religious symbolic. *Becoming Divine* primarily focuses upon the symbolic organization(s) and coding(s) of religious discourses, which Jantzen identified as intrinsically masculinist. The western symbolic is constructed through linguistic systems wherein the phallus is the dominant (Lacan would say universal) signifier. The western religious symbolic understands this phallus theologically: Lacan explicitly linked the phallus to God as Father (Jantzen 1999, 10). Anglo-American philosophers of religion, Jantzen argued, have established a reflexive system whereby they attributed their values (detached and timeless intellectualism, what she called "the scientific method of modernity") to Lacan's "good old God," and then defended the primacy of disembodied reason as god-given (1999, 23).

Jantzen argued that western religiosity is dictated by logic, invested in truth claims, organized according to binaries, and opposed to both death and difference: or what she identified as "the detached and objective intellectual stance which traditional philosophers of religion assume and which they take also to be characteristic of God" (1999, 263). The truth claims implicit in western rationalism lead to an emphasis on "creedal and epistemic justification" (Jantzen 1999; 197, 99). Creedal primacy—what Kristeva referred to as the "thetic" pillar of masculinist logic—yields a theological over-emphasis on salvation and the afterlife1. "It is precisely whether one has true beliefs or not that is decisive for salvation, where salvation is understood ultimately in terms of life after death" (Jantzen 1999, 21). The god of the western religious imaginary, following this line of thought, could be considered logically, would known best in terms of belief, and must come from beyond the material world to save us from death. Thus logic, belief,

the intellect, and God-the-Word himself are the guarantors of meaning in western discourse: the phallus, in Lacanian terms.

If, as Derrida and Jantzen suggested, God functions as the phallus—that is, as the guarantor of linguistic meaning, allowing entrance into the symbolic, and thus into civilization—then (following Lacan) God the Word denies the Other access to both subjectivity and divinity. This denial is ultimately and broadly harmful, Jantzen argued, because

> a religious symbolic which functions to perpetuate a dream of masculine self-presence, where the male subject refuses to recognize his situatedness, his embodied sexuate self, and his unconscious fears and desires of death, is destructive…in that it will nourish in such men the idea that it is their God-given right to dominate all (m)others...in that it allows no emergence of women subjects in relation to a female divine. And it is destructive of the men themselves, whose self-constitution as little godlings actually perpetuates their own fears and insecurities. (Jantzen 1999, 173)

By simultaneously sanctifying gender hierarchy and obscuring its linguistic and cultural functions, western philosophy of religion demonstrates "a masculinism hostile to the possibility of women subjects," and, by extension, hostile to the subjectivity of queers, people of color, non-westerners, the impoverished, and all other Others (Jantzen 1999, 175). The alleged gender-blindness of religious linguistic systems is thus indicative of broader and more insidious inscriptions of difference throughout western religious thought.

Jantzen suggested that although language—particularly language about God—is usually masculinist, we also can use language against itself to say new things, to think differently. In order to change the way we think about God, Jantzen argued, we must first change the language and symbols we use for God. That is, we must shift the religious imaginary.

To achieve subjectivity, women and all those "othered" by the western cultural symbolic must re-imagine the divine. Citing Irigaray, Jantzen insisted that

> for women to develop a subjectivity of our own, and not merely take up masculinized subject positions, it would be necessary to disrupt the symbolic, displacing its masculinist structures by a new imaginary not based on the Name of the Father but on new ways of conceiving and being which enable women to be subjects as women. And since religious discourse severs as the linchpin of the western symbolic, it is religion above all which requires to be disrupted. (Jantzen 1999, 12)

However, gender-inclusive religious language does not necessarily disrupt the western symbolic or automatically grant one subjectivity. "Rather human personhood is achieved, and achieved at considerable cost" (Jantzen 1999, 9). The gendered, desiring subjectivity Jantzen envisioned was continually being achieved in "fragile and fluctuating fragments," and constructed in recognition of a multiplicity of difference and attentive to concerns of justice (Jantzen 1999; 37, 26). This subject could no more be the unified female subject of "women's experience" than the unified male subject posited by western philosophy of religion (Jantzen 1999, 58).

In order to productively disrupt the western religious symbolic and achieve gendered, desiring subjectivity, Jantzen (with Irigaray) necessitated a divine horizon, "an ideal of wholeness to which we aspire" (Jantzen 1999, 12). That is, Jantzen re-imagined God as a horizon, a process of becoming. She borrowed Mary Daly's concept of God-the-Verb, of "Godding," to think of the divine not in terms of who It is, but of what It does (Jantzen 1999, 258). Jantzen would have us understand God as growth and change, in radically feminist terms. To do this, she suggested, we should think of God as not something (or Someone) to be believed in dogmatically, but to be imagined in terms of possibility: "'the possibilities of awareness and transcendence' of the personal and interpersonal positions we take up as subjects in space and time" (Jantzen 1999, 12). God

should not be an entity that comes from outside to save us from ourselves, but the process by which we, as embodied, sexuate creatures, nurture and protect each other and our environment. Imagined thus, becoming divine allows us to flourish.

Contingency, mutability, embodiment, and justice are all implicit in the achievement of divine subjectivity, of "becoming our sacred sexuate selves in relation to the earth and to one another" (Jantzen 1999, 24). Imagining God as in process, as within time, as embodied, radically immanent, and within all living things—imaging divinity as us—allows us to flourish. Rethinking religion in this way, Jantzen argued, makes creedal claims less important and "prioritize[s] the ethical rather than the ontological" (Jantzen 1999, 252; cf. Levinas). Thus for Jantzen our fundamental religious obligation was not right belief, but the achievement of gendered, embodied, desiring subjectivity. She challenged us to bring God to life "through us and between us, embodied, transcendent, the projection and reclamation of ultimate value, the enablement of subject-positions as women" (Jantzen 1999, 275). In short, Jantzen championed divinity as the process of achieving sacred subjectivity and exhorted each of us to flourish, to become divine.

[First sentence is funky] I am by no means arguing that religion is a gender-performance exempt; however, there is a degree of latitude granted to insubordinate gender performances in (some?) religious context(s?). Religious gender transgression, whether votive or practical, is not unconstrained by an existing religious imaginary. However, what space there is allows for transgressive performances; the imaginary expands each time someone does religion different. Kaldera, as I have shown, does both religion and sex/gender *very* differently: significantly, in a non-normative manner (cf. Foucault and Halperin), and without concern for salvation or set religious doctrine (cf. Jantzen).

Kaldera's emphasis on deism, polytheism, animism, and spiritual discipline all challenge traditional religiosity as Jantzen presented it; but his greatest challenge to the western religious imaginary lies in his insistence, like Jantzen's, that gender can and should play a central role in one's religiosity. However, Kaldera's thealogy and religious practice challenge the western bodily imaginary in ways Jantzen's feminist philosophy of religion did not.

The Western Bodily Imaginary

For all her emphasis on the gendered work done by the western religious imaginary, Jantzen did not address the ways in which that imaginary shapes and constrains our understandings of bodies: specifically, the notion that bodies always come in two discreet sexes; and that anatomical sex is always unambiguous and fixed. Kaldera, obviously, challenges both these assumptions. Jantzen challenged neither.

While there is brief mention of heteronormative complicity within the western religious imaginary, Jantzen failed to account for what I have called queer bodies. I suggest her theory might have been strengthened if she examined in greater detail the ways in which bodily and religious imaginaries mutually reinforce each other. As I have shown, Jantzen presented God the Word as God the Phallus (cf. Daly), and problematized Lacan's insistence on the phallus as the universal signifier. Thus, as Jantzen demonstrated, the phallus stands in for a metaphysics of presence. However, I would suggest that the phallus similarly bestows meaning and significance to human anatomy, thus constraining understandings of what bodies should look like, do and mean. The western bodily imaginary further includes heteronormativity; that is, how sexuate bodies should interact with each other.

I would suggest that Jantzen's reification of what I call the western bodily

imaginary contributes, at least in part, to her philosophical gender essentialization and the occlusion of queer bodies[30] from her project. Nevertheless, divinity-as-horizon demonstrates the ways in which religiosity may mark a chiasmus betweeen queer *askesis* and bodily *noesis*. Embodied sexuateness as flourishing creates space for a subjectivity that does not bracket those transgressive sexual practices that inspire recognition of self as queer. Thus sacred queer becoming is a horizon, a struggle to flourish in the world, both a moral obligation and a system of bodily practices. In such a relationship, religion may create space for transgressive gender performance, while expressions of transgressive gender may authorize unconventional modes of religiosity.

Kaldera discusses this in his "*Ergi*" essay: shamans, he claims, were allowed to do things, religiously and bodily, that ordinary people weren't. Regarding his research on subarctic circumpolar shamanisms, Kaldera explains: "if an ordinary person of the tribe decided to change their gender, they might be shunned, but if a shaman did it, it was a sacred thing done by the spirits to give them extra power" ("Ergi," ravenkaldera.org). Note here that, much as with Foucauldean *askesis*, the authorization for queer practice is not legal or rights-based. Rather, religion (also) makes space for this kind of queer becoming – one informed by knowledge created by being in a queer (in Kaldera's case, intersexed and transgendered) body.

The Challenge of Divine Presence

The location of religious practice and identity in personal experience can be a liberatory gesture, particularly when more traditional modes of religiosity deny both one's

30 I should reiterate that not all transfolk are politically, theoretically, or religiously invested in queering anything. As Jay Prosser notes in his 1998 Second Skins: The Body Narratives of Transsexuality: "not every gender-crossing is queerly subversive… There are transsexuals who seek very pointedly to be nonperformative, to be constantive, quite simply, to be" (264; contra Halberstam). But, to bastardize Derrida: there is not one, but many queernesses. In Kaldera's case, I suggest, transgender identity can (also) be understood in terms of queer becoming.

experience and one's existence. This, certainly, has been the case for Kaldera – which is why he calls himself a "mythical beast." While the western bodily imaginary occludes intersexed and transgendered bodies, and the western religious imaginary marginalizes polytheistic, embodied, contingent divinity, Kaldera and Northern Tradition Shamanism acknowledge and celebrate queer bodies and queer religiosity.

There is danger, as well as space to flourish, in basing religious ideology on personal experience. As Wayne Proudfoot suggests, religious experience is always shaped and constrained by language, though the noetic quality of that experience makes it seem immediate. And as Jantzen has shown, our language and symbols are rife with gendered and religious assumptions – which is why she, with Derrida, argued against religious truth claims and a metaphysics of presence. It perhaps safer to assume, with Foucault, that the soul and God have no metaphysical referent. If we made god, we can fix Hir, too. But while Kaldera, like Jantzen, de-emphasizes the primacy of creedal claims, he also adamantly maintains an ontological concept of divinity. Thus I must suggest with Laurel Schneider that understandings of divinity, like understandings of bodies, must be multiple and must account for divine presence. Indeed, "multiplicity exceeds abstract principles (even attractive ones like 'becoming') whenever those principles eclipse presence" (2008, 4).

For all that Kaldera differs with Jantzen on the matter of divine, I would suggest that the elasticity of the western religious imaginary as she has theorized it allows for the kind of queering Kaldera embodies. This is not meant to make the religious imaginary sound utopic. Religious practice and religious belief are strongly policed by what Jantzen calls the western religious imaginary; though it's beyond the scope of this paper, I would argue that what Pellegrini calls the Christo-normative religious attitude of the US abjects

those unwilling to imagine divinity as a one male presumably straight often while disembodied deity. It's also worth noting that the kind of queer becoming proposed in this paper—one in which the subject cultivates hirself toward an ethical, sexual, and religious horizon—could work equally well as a model for de-queering: see, for example, Erzen's work on ex-gay ministries in *Straight to Jesus*. Further, as I have argued elsewhere,[31] we cannot fully account for how others will read our attempts at disruptive gender performance. Failure to perform gender in legible ways can result in grievous bodily, as the alarmingly high rate of homicide in the trans community suggests. Nevertheless, Kaldera's account of his own beliefs and practices demonstrates that it *is* possible (not easy or simple, but possible) to queer the western religious imaginary. His beliefs and practices have quite literally created space for others to pursue comparably transgressive gender identities and religious practices: he, his wife Bella, and his boy[32] Joshua own and maintain a pagan homestead in central Massachusetts.

Kaldera's is a queerness based not solely on sexual choice, but also on an embodied *noesis*: the knowledge about oneself created by the experience of being in one's body. Becoming queer, particularly in the case of transgender or intersex persons, necessitates the confrontation of internal alterity – of feeling other than what one looks like, or has been told to be. Neither the asketical efforts to become queer nor the noetic quality of bodily-being happen in a vacuum: our self-cultivations and our knowledge of

31 Megan Goodwin, "Dangerous 'Interscetions:' 'Unmanliness' in Abject Religious Discourse" (paper presented at the national meeting of the American Academy of Religion, Chicago, IL, 31 Oct – 2 Nov 2008).

32 The term "boy" here fits within a s/m taxonomy. Again, I use this term because both Raven and Joshua use it. They have a Master/slave relationship. Raven owns Joshua, by which I mean he controls every aspect of Joshua's life, with Joshua's consent. This plays out not only, or even primarily, in blatantly carnal context, but also in ritual context—Raven will offer Joshua's blood as sacrifice—as well as under quotidian circumstances (while I was at Cauldron Farm, Joshua asked Raven's permission before drinking each of two and a half beers at Loki's birthday party).

ourselves are constrained by many factors, sexuate discourse not the least among them. But there is space for insubordination, for productive disruption – for queering. And queering, ultimately, is the role of the third sex shaman. As Kaldera says, "unmanly" shamans "turn the world upside down. We are living, walking catalysts, and this is the first mystery of our existence. We turn everything that people think they know about gender - that supposedly safe ground beneath their feet - upside down. We change worlds" ("Ergi," ravenkaldera.org).

## CONCLUSION

Throughout this paper, I have argued the chiasmus of work on and with the body (queer *askesis*) and knowledge created by being-in-body (bodily *noesis*) makes possible radically different thought about bodies and religiosity (expansion of western imaginaries). Thinking differently about bodies and religion, I have suggested, creates space for those occluded or excluded by traditional conceptions of corporality and/or divinity. The emphasis on an understanding of the body and the divine in which queer people of faith may recognize themselves should not be considered a mere pluralistic inclusion, but rather an attempt at a liberatory epistemic shift. Honoring the sexuate self as sacred both acknowledges knowledge created by the experience of being in a mutable, multiple, finite, and contingent body, and informs and directs religious work on and with that body.

In pursuing this argument, I first examined the concept of queer *askesis*. I located this idea in conversation with Foucault's project of becoming homosexual, as he described it in a series of late-life interviews. I examined the ways in which *The Use of Pleasure* and *The Care of the Self* provided an historical precedent for ethical bodily self-cultivation through non-normalizing sexual moralities. I then demonstrated the occlusions of Foucault's project, specifically those of gender, queer bodies, and religion. I suggested that homosexual becoming offered analytical insight into the shamanic work Raven Kaldera has done on and with his body; however, the radical voluntarism, masculinism, and secularism of Foucault's model occluded Kaldera from becoming

homosexual.

My second section offered a second concept through which to consider Kaldera's self-cultivation: that of bodily *noesis*. I looked at the ways in which the knowledge Kaldera located in his queer bodily being informed the religious work he did on and with his body. I noted points at which Kaldera's experience both confirmed and challenged Foucault's model. The chiasmus I have located in Kaldera's religious and bodily experience, I suggested, presents a a liberatory understanding of both bodies and religiosity beyond those offered by western imaginaries.

In my final section, I suggested that Kaldera's bodily noesis and queer askesis challenge western religious and bodily imaginaries. Kaldera advocates and instantiates queer bodily-being and queer religious practice, thus expanding what is thinkable for both. This expansion of western imaginaries is important, I posited, because this liberatory project creates space beyond traditional religious and bodily imaginaries, which mutually enforce each other. Thus I have demonstrated the potential for religion to mark a chiasmus between bodily *noesis* and queer *askesis*, providing a liberatory model of divinity for those excluded by the western religious imaginary.

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