

The “Projective”  
Unconscious: Charles Olson  
and Carl Jung

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### *Dedication and Thanks*

I would like to dedicate this thesis to the three people that I have been most blessed to have as a part of my life: my mom, my dad, and my fiancé. I am inspired daily by my mom's bravery and kindness, my dad's dedication to his job and his family, and Phil's devotion to change the world. All three have supported me throughout everything, enabling me to accomplish more than I could have ever dreamed. They are the best friends I could have ever asked to have.

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*Table of Contents*

Introduction..... 3

Healing the Self, Healing the Society..... 8

Healing the Psyche through Language..... 24

Healing the Psyche through Symbols..... 43

Know Thyself: Olson's Jungian Integration..... 57

Works Cited..... 75

## ***Introduction***

American poet Charles Olson's history with Swiss psychiatrist Carl Gustav Jung is a complicated one. After Olson's first exposure to Jungian philosophy through the writing of his 1948 dance-drama, *The Fiery Hunt*, Jungian thinking began to filter into Olson's work. Although the poet denounced Jungian psychology as sub-par in 1950, Olson's works became increasingly Jungian, beginning with his famed poem "The Kingfishers" (1949) and subsequent manifesto, "Projective Verse" (1950). Ultimately, Olson reread Jung, became enthralled, and ended up inviting Jung as one of his first speakers at Black Mountain College in 1952, where Olson was teaching. After this time, the Jungian foundation of Olson's later work is strongly evident through his aversion to the cephalic nature of Western society, his frequent use of specifically Jungian terms such as "unconscious" and "archetype," a poetic tendency towards myth-making, his use of the "hero" archetype in the Maximus Poems, and his creation of symbols through metaphor.

Though Olson's focus became far more Jungian by the time he wrote the essay "Proprioception," he does not forget his earlier works, but incorporates their already-Jungian elements into his new style of writing. I argue that Olson's poetic and prose works after *The Fiery Hunt* are all consistently Jungian, and that these pre-1952 works are ultimately incorporated into the Jungian philosophy that Olson espouses later in his career. His aim is thus an attempt to re-instill the lost balance of a neurotic Western world that both Olson and Jung would agree to be too dependent upon human consciousness and thought.

Carl Gustav Jung (1875-1961) was a revered psychiatrist from Switzerland who has made great and lasting changes in the field of psychology. Though he is commonly

known for collaborating with and learning from the older, already-famous Sigmund Freud, Jung's separation from Freud enabled the younger man to make bounding advances in his field without the label of "Freudian." The separation, stemming mostly from conflicting ideas about the human unconscious and infant sexuality, enabled Jung to found the movement of analytical psychology. De-emphasizing the Freudian empirically-driven approach towards examination of the psyche, Jung was fascinated by individual encounters with the unconscious. He examined these encounters through the lenses of dreams, religion, mythology, visions, and art.

Jung's lasting contributions are great, not only in psychology, but in philosophy, post-modern art, creative writing, the physical sciences, and other interdisciplinary studies. As Pellegrino D'Acierno and Karin Barnaby state in the preface for their compilation of Jungian essays, Jung's empirically-evasive "theoretical anarchism" has become symbolic of a post-modern world, embracing mythology while also retaining scientific validity (xvi). The solution for Jung, therefore, becomes less of a Freudian answer as much as it is a process. This progressive attitude is explicit in one of Jung's famous theories of individuation, a process of human development that leads to the conscious recognition of the unconscious.

Jung's other, more famous theories include the existence of the collective unconscious, archetypes, and synchronicity. Many of Jung's ideas, these three included, describe the existence and expression of specific psychic energies. The unconscious, "collective" because of its shared, inherited qualities, is an energy that affects all human beings, past and present. Archetypes, which are both conscious and unconscious in nature, are patterns of psychic energy that reveal themselves to human beings through

symbols. Synchronicity is essentially a “meaningful coincidence,” which Jung uses to prove the existence of the unconscious (M. Stein 234). Synchronicity is thus the intersection of conscious and unconscious energy with the physical world, in which a dream or vision will actually occur.

Charles Olson (1910-1970), writing the bulk of his most influential works in the late forties through mid sixties, is an American poet who gained fame as a teacher in the Black Mountain College, a successor of Ezra Pound, and a predecessor for the L=A=N=G=U=A=G=E movement. Just like Jung, Olson is very much interested in interdisciplinary work, referring to himself as both poet and historian (Butterick ix). He is a historian, however, in the most complex sense of the word. Olson is simultaneously a scientist, a linguistic anthropologist, a philosopher, and, of course, a poet. All of his historical and poetic endeavors aim at revealing the complex and innermost workings of both the human mind and natural environment as microcosms of a greater universe – the “human” universe, as he fittingly describes in his 1951 essay, “Human Universe.”

Olson gained immediate popularity for his poetic manifesto, “Projective Verse,” which argues for poetry as an “open field” and his uses of shorthand. Olson’s open field poetics, stating that word location on the page of poetry is just as important as the word itself, is deeply interested, like Jung, in energy. In Olson’s 1951 essay, “The Gate and the Center,” he describes a poem literally as a transfer of energy from the writer to the reader. In order to conserve this force without weakening the high-energy construct of the poem, Olson begins to use a new brand of short-hand language in his works. The ampersand replaces the common conjunction it references, and vowels are dropped from smaller

words. All of his shorthand tactics help reinvent the Poundian idea of the ideogram as language, forging words with more meaning and, of course, more energy.

Although Olson shared very similar concerns with Jung and read the psychiatrist's writings as early as 1948, very little scholarship acknowledges the influence that Jung may have had on Olson. I have only been able to find one book that dealt with both the psychiatrist and the poet: *The Secret of the Black Chrysanthemum* by Charles Stein. The *Black Chrysanthemum*, however, primarily treats *The Maximus Poems* with little explicit focus on his earlier works.

Other leading scholars such as Ralph Maud, who specialize in Olson's earlier works, neglects the presence of Jungian ideas in early, famous poems and essays. Maud wrote a critical book on "The Kingfishers," yet skirts the issue of Jungian influence completely. Though Maud also wrote a biography of Olson that discusses Olson's interactions with and opinions of Jung, he safely avoids a Jungian analysis in any of Olson's pre-1952 works. Later poems, on the other hand, such as "Proprioception" and other individual poems within *The Maximus Poems*, appear to be universally regarded as Jungian by scholars like Maud, Stein, and Butterick. Many even compare these Jungian poems to their pre-1952 predecessors, citing similarities. However, to the best of my knowledge, no scholar has argued that Olson's earlier works are Jungian in their own right. My thesis addresses this gap. I conclude with the argument that all of Olson's works acknowledge the existence of the Jungian unconscious and revolutionize Jungian philosophy by locating the unconscious within the human body.

This thesis begins with the complicated history and ideas that Olson shares with Jung. It subsequently addresses the goals and themes of Olson's early works (namely

“The Kingfishers,” “Projective Verse,” “The Gate and the Center,” and “Human Universe”), and how they very readily map on to Jungian thought. Ultimately, I argue that Olson is thoroughly Jungian, even in his early works, because of his treatment of Jungian instruments of language, change, tradition, symbols, and balance. Finally, I relate all of Olson’s early works to an acknowledged Jungian later work, “Proprioception,” to prove formal, symbolic, and thematic similarity between the Jungian and the supposedly non-Jungian.

Throughout this paper, I use “The Kingfishers” as a touchstone work for many reasons. First, this poem is the reason why Olson’s major defining manifesto, “Projective Verse,” is in existence. This instructive manifesto speaks volumes about the poet’s purpose and ideas; the poem that spurred its writing must also be important. Olson even cites it within the manifesto as a great example of what projective verse should look like. “Projective Verse” and “The Kingfishers” express many of the same themes. Additionally, I found that “The Kingfishers” also treats many of the ideas at the core of “Human Universe” and “The Gate and the Center.” “The Kingfishers” is thus a point of synthesis for all of Olson’s major early prose works. Finally, “The Kingfishers” is widely accepted as Olson’s most famous and successful pre-*Maximus* poetic critique of Western society. It is therefore an ideal point of transition in Olson’s poetry to his great Jungian works. Within the pages of “The Kingfishers,” I have found that Jung’s ideas speak through Olson’s art to the point where all of Olson’s early works become distinctly Jungian.

### *Healing the Self, Healing the Society*

Upon reading Carl Jung's book entitled *Psychology and Religion*, Olson declared in a letter addressed to Frances Boldereff dated 6 July, 1950 that Jung was "as [he] always hunched, a lazy fraud" (Maud, *Reading* 98). However, this was not to be Olson's attitude towards the famed psychologist for long. A scant two and a half years later in 1952, Olson undertook a massive project of reading more of Jung's works, supposedly inspired by the loneliness he felt during a separation from his wife and child. Turning to Jung in a time of loneliness would make perfect sense, as many of Jung's works are primarily associated with what he calls the individuation process, entailing a development of the self as uninfluenced by its surroundings. Those of his works not about individuation typically emphasize the often-ignored (at least in the Western tradition, as Olson argues) but always-present interconnectedness of human beings and nature within the collective unconscious. This combination of a powerful connection and potential for self-growth could have allayed whatever feelings of loneliness that Olson may have been feeling at this particular time.

It was during this period of vigorous reading that Olson came to appreciate Jungian theory with the fervor that shone through in his poetics, particularly those works written after 1952. However, it would be a mistake to assume that all of Olson's works prior to the massive reading of 1952 could not have possibly been Jungian, even acknowledging Olson's blatantly negative sentiments in the Boldereff letter. It is evident that Olson had read a good portion of Jung's works as early as April of 1948, when he was in the midst of writing *The Fiery Hunt*, a dance-drama based on Herman Melville's *Moby Dick*. Commissioned by a man named Erick Hawkins, whom Olson had met at a

dance symposium in Washington earlier that year, *The Fiery Hunt* seeks to portray Ahab as a Jungian neurotic, whose conflict lies within his own psyche, and not at all with the whale (*Fiery Hunt* xiii). Hawkins supplied Olson with an outline of the play's themes, replete with Jungian psychological references, while Olson was responsible for supplying the characters with language (or perhaps more accurately, an appropriate "discourse," which he speaks of in his later essay, "Human Universe") and describing the performative emphasis of the numerous dances. Dance itself is a distinctly Jungian activity because it translates archetypal unity of thought and instinct into action, a subject that I discuss later with respect to "Projective Verse."

Olson's acquaintance with Erick Hawkins and his subsequent writing of *The Fiery Hunt* necessitated his newfound familiarity with the works of Carl G. Jung in April and May of 1948. We therefore know that Olson was reading Jung as early as 1948. After a turning point in 1952, Olson became an avid worshipper of Jung's works, performing a total reversal from former claims that he could "smell, by way of a sentence, say, the totality of [Jung's] work," to later addressing the "fraud" as "my dear and honoured Carl Jung" in an invitation as one of his first-choice speakers at the Black Mountain College (Maud, *Reading* 98). Though Jung never made it to Black Mountain, his associate, Mary-Louise Von Franz, came in lieu of the "great doctor" (99).

The problem, then, is how to interpret the works written by the "pre-Jungian" Olson: the Olson who had been exposed to Jung's works in depth, but who had not yet become a self-professed Jungian. I argue that Olson's exposure to Jung shows through even in his 1949 work, "The Kingfishers," its subsequent 1950 manifesto, "Projective Verse," and two 1951 prose essays, "The Gate and the Center" and "Human Universe."



Through these four defining works of Olson's early career, he cultivated a variety of Jungian ideals, likely implanted in his mind through the writing of *The Fiery Hunt*, expressed throughout his major early works, and then ultimately realized in the culmination of *The Maximus Poems* and "Proprioception." It would seem, then, that Olson was a Jungian before he was aware of the fact – a notion that is Jungian in and of itself.

Olson's early tendencies toward Jung are most visible in what is perhaps his most famous poem, "The Kingfishers." This poem was not only a vehicle through which Olson's poetic reputation skyrocketed, but was also a personal favorite accomplishment of Olson's, as he reportedly later called it the poem "which I value more than anything I have written" (Maud, *WDNC* 17). Above its fame, the importance that "The Kingfishers" holds in Olson's mind gives an important look into the inner workings of Olson's system of values – values that certainly resonate with Jung's.

"The Kingfishers" is, at its core, a poem advocating a dramatic change from the status quo of social order, tradition, and thought. Olson establishes this change's necessity by highlighting human deficiencies through an examination of societal attitudes towards the kingfishers, which the poem is named after. These kingfishers lose their once-legendary mythical qualities because the human race has failed to create a balanced and healthy society. Human beings, who Olson says have trouble tapping into natural and mythical energies, therefore play a hand in creating social ills. In viewing society as an ill, imbalanced institution, and insufficient personal respect for nature as its cause, "The Kingfishers" falls readily in line with Jungian teaching.

Jung, concerned primarily with the individual sense of self and personal growth within the process that he calls “individuation,” provides a social commentary by focusing on the individual. Jung believes that all cultures must be seen through the lens of the individual person, and Olson echoes this belief by opening up his poem with not a society of people, but a single person – Fernand. It is through Fernand that we can understand the role culture plays in his neurotic poverty of self-awareness. Because Olson began to share many of Jung’s psychological goals after being so intimately aware of them during the writing of *The Fiery Hunt*, it is natural that Jungian ideals would continue to be expressed later in Olson’s career.

In *C.G. Jung and the Humanities*, a compilation of Jungian criticism, Gilles Quispel argues for Jung’s connection to famed novelist, Hermann Hesse, in his essay entitled “Gnosis and Culture.” Quispel states that it is “common knowledge” that Hesse’s writings, particularly *Demian*, “lean heavily” upon Jung’s *Septem Sermones ad Mortuos* (31). To illustrate his point, he quotes both Jung and Hesse in a comparative manner that becomes highly relevant to viewing “The Kingfishers” as Jungian. Jung’s description of the first mandala that he had ever drawn (he views mandalas as an expressive symbol of the self) speaks of a “tree of life” that sprouts from the god, Abraxis, who is “the source and origin of everything” within the universe. Jung then describes a reversing of world-order through the changing nature of the Self, which grew out of the tree of life and “breaks the world egg and creates the world.” Quispell then goes on to cite the nearly-congruent, yet far more accessible imagery set forth in Hesse’s *Demian*:

The bird fights its way out of the egg. The egg is the world.  
Who would be born must first destroy a world. The bird flies  
to God. That God's name is Abraxis...Abraxis is a godhead  
whose symbolic task is the uniting of godly and devilish  
element. (31)

The above quotation thus not only definitively links Hesse with Jung, but parallels how Olson invokes Jung within his own poem.

Though the god, Abraxis, is never explicitly mentioned in "The Kingfishers," the poem relies very heavily upon the cyclical theme of birth, death, and decay in the lives of kingfishers – a type of bird that builds its nest out of decaying animal and natural matter. Hesse's and Jung's symbolic representation of the self as "bird" maps on very readily to Olson's depiction of "the kingfishers" as a product of the society (the egg/the nest) within which it dwells. However, neither the birds described by Jung and Hesse, nor Olson's version of the kingfishers, are solely mediated by social perceptions. The juxtapositions of birth and death, upon which Olson's kingfisher's life and sense of being is predicated, establishes a binary that illustrates what is currently stagnation, but could potentially be change-driven regeneration.

It is within their very mode of reproduction that the kingfishers can "rise up / and act" as the potential solution towards overcoming the death and decay on which their lives are based (Olson, *Collected Poems* 87). The birth-upon-death paradox enables the kingfishers to be more than simply a cultural emblem: they become the hope for the societal revolution that Olson says the Western world needs. The kingfishers, in their accumulation of various "rejectamenta" to the point of building a "fetid mass," have

become a symbolic representation of the Jungian neurotic “self” that Western society has fostered. This fetid mass reflects the over-accumulation of not only material objects, but also thoughts reflective of a discourse that mimics the Greek dependence upon the cephalic. This discourse, Olson later states, has become too heavily reliant upon cognition over what Jung would argue to be of greater importance: instinctive spirituality, expressed in the archetypal unity of human consciousness and collective unconsciousness.

Hope, however, does not die with each kingfisher and its subsequent building of “another fetid nest” within the neurotic world. In this Western climate of stagnation, and even within the very nest of decay, the generativity implicit in the birth cycle holds the key towards a more transformative, change-filled present. The potential that lies within the kingfisher to overcome what appears to be his decay-ridden future by embracing his myth-laden past, is the only way that he, and Western society by proxy, may “uncover honey / where maggots are” (Olson, *Collected Poems* 93). To live successfully, Jung’s, Hesse’s, and Olson’s birds must break through their respective societal barriers using the Jungian instruments of unity of opposites, synchronicity, and implicit in both, constant change.

When utilizing these tools of psychological reunification in concert, the birds themselves become Jungian symbols of transcendence, breaking through the barricade of stagnation and serving as a bridge from the unconscious to the conscious. The egg-shells are shattered, the fetid nests are abandoned, and a world-order is reversed. The kingfishers, and the society of “selves” (individual people) that they represent, *can* provide an effective remedy for the Western world’s cultural neuroses. However, they

must first commit to the change that Olson urges is necessary, and begin their “hunt among stones.”

Olson’s statement, “I hunt among stones,” implying a return to the instinctive and primitive activities of the past, is a declaration designed to create discomfort. Like many medical treatments, the healing of the dissociated individual who belongs to a neurotic Western society is not a simple task. Dissociation, according to Jung, is a splitting of the psyche, occurring when man cuts himself off from the power and symbols produced within his unconscious (Jung, *MAHS* 6). The modern human tendency is to repress what is unconscious and unknown by relying upon what can be scientifically deduced through sensory observations and conscious thought. Dissociation, in particular, is problematic for that very reason: if humans are already predisposed to ignore unconscious elements, a completely severed relationship between consciousness and unconsciousness produces a severe condition, which Jung calls “neurosis.” Though there are other causes for neurosis, Olson’s poetry focuses on the dissociative, and specifically on the dissociation of the individual in relation to his Western culture. To restore the balance of Western society, Olson says, one must first restore the balance of one’s own psyche.

It is therefore fitting that Olson begins his poem, “The Kingfishers,” with not a society of people, but the neurotic Fernand. Fernand provides the core of the poem by introducing the major themes of healing and also providing a locus in which it can occur: the individual body and the personal psyche. In many ways, he becomes a microcosm of the Western society that has created and maintained his neurosis. As Jung says in *Man and His Symbols*, “the individual is the only reality. The further we move away from the individual toward abstract ideas about *Homo sapiens*, the more likely we are to fall into

error” (45). However, that does not mean we cannot look at the individual in context. As Murray Stein states in *Jung's Map of the Soul*, “the self is paradoxically *not* oneself...its essence lies beyond the subjective realm. The self forms the ground for the subject's commonality with the world, with the structures of Being” (152). Essentially, though Fernand's role cannot be generalized to the greater human race, *Homo sapiens*, what we *can* do – and Olson *does* – is perform an in-depth study on the individual (Fernand) and seek to understand how he has come to be the way he is: dissociated. Olson's conclusion is that the culture to which Fernand belongs – a Western culture of modernity – further enhances his inherent human tendency toward neurosis.

Fernand's role in “The Kingfishers” is therefore significant in that the rest of the poem becomes an explanation for, as well as an attempted redressing of, his dissociation. In the same way that the West is a society whose values espouse neuroticism in the individual, “The Kingfishers” uses Fernand as a vehicle for seeing beyond the individual and into the neurotic society that has created him. Fernand becomes, like the kingfishers themselves, a springboard for viewing Western culture as a dissociated “self” composed of many neurotic individuals.

Though often viewed as a Prufrock figure, Fernand has more “determinacy” and wider resonance than does Eliot's character (Maud, *WDNC* 24). While Eliot's “Love Song” is written solely through the lens of Prufrock himself, Fernand in “The Kingfishers” has both a perspective of his own, but can be realistically examined as a product of his society because of his connection to Olson. In a letter from George Butterick addressed to Peter Blanc, Butterick makes it obvious that Fernand was based on painter John Gernand. Butterick describes a party scene similar to the one that opens

“The Kingfishers,” including Gernand’s drunken cry, “The blue – the blue of the kingfisher’s feather!” (25). After the exclamation, Gernand “ran out the door and clattered down the iron steps into the night,” says Butterick, just as Fernand leaves abruptly after his unsettling remarks in “The Kingfishers” (26). Fernand’s existence in the personage of John Gernand is important when considering Olson’s views on the relationship between poetic purpose and social commentary. As Ralph Maud states, Fernand and the odd birds that follow, who also have live counterparts, “demanded the poem; they are not there because the poem’s subject suggested their appropriateness” (27). Thus, Fernand’s actions and remarks in “The Kingfishers” can definitively be linked to a commentary on, at the very least, Olson’s perceptions of the physical world. However, as the broader themes that Fernand introduces are developed, his physical existence has remarkable bearing on the implications of the poem as a whole. Fernand and his world exemplify the greater Western society and what it means to be a member of that society.

We know from Fernand’s first introduction in the poem that he is not quite well – he wakes, “fully clothed, in his bed” and immediately thereafter is seen “sliding along the wall of the night, losing himself.” The phrase “losing himself” bears an added, grave importance in light of Olson’s only commandment in the poem, expressed through the ancient E on the stone – “know thyself.” Though Fernand’s observant remarks appear to be constantly on the brink of discovering the self from which has become separated, he remains stuck, and unable to “go beyond his thoughts” (*Collected Poems* 86). This dependence on the cognitive as well as the inability to see beyond human reasoning, which is limited in scope, is the hallmark symptom of Jung’s neurosis. Remembering



that dissociation is caused by a separation of the conscious mind from the unconscious self, Fernand cannot be seen in Jungian terms to possess a healthy psyche. He is the one to introduce the themes of change in the poem, yet he himself is unable to comprehend what he's saying. Maud says that this makes Fernand's "disintegration" indicative of Western man's condition on the whole. I would take Maud's word one step further and call this "disintegration" a Jungian "dissociation."

The poem opens with the elusive "what does not change / is the will to change," yet Fernand's "last words" before leaving the party are "the pool is slime," indicating what is essentially change's antithesis: stagnation. Fernand's following declaration that "the pool the kingfishers' feathers were wealth why / did the export stop?" places his previous comment into an immediate economic context. When remarking upon the nature of dreams, the window into the human unconscious, Jung, too, speaks in the economic terms of "gains" and "losses." Jung, while not denying the "great gains" that modernity and scientific advances have afforded civilization, questions their benefit in relation to the "enormous losses" that have befallen the human psyche as a result (Jung, *MAHS* 36). Human consciousness's gains in science and technology, says Jung, have an inverse relationship with such values as wisdom and introspection that belong to the domain of human unconsciousness (Jung, *Psychology and Religion* 20). As the dependence on the cognitive increases, human access to unconscious elements in the psyche decreases. The economy is therefore a perfect metaphor for the transactions in a neurotic individual. In a perfectly healthy person, export of unconscious material will consistently equal the import of sensory observations in consciousness. It is the imbalance that ultimately leads to neurosis.



The collective unconscious is a shared, inherited psychic force that is essential to personal wholeness and individual health. The unconscious, according to Jung, “consists of a multitude of temporarily obscured thoughts, impressions, and images that, in spite of being lost, continue to influence our conscious minds” (*MAHS* 18). Just as many items that were at one point conscious can at any point in time “vanish” into unconsciousness (Jung uses the example of lost keys), items that were once unconscious can, in a psychologically healthy individual, resurface at any time. The unconscious, called “collective” by Jung because of the interconnectedness that human beings have with one another, is a way of communicating not only with oneself, but also drawing upon other human experience both past and future. It is the “ancestral heritage of possibilities of representation... common to all men, and perhaps even all animals,” that is the “true basis of the individual psyche” (Storr 67).

Murray Stein terms this unconscious phenomenon of shared connection between an individual and his or her surroundings, “participation mystique.” He states that an individual’s consciousness is always connected to his surroundings without necessarily being aware of this connection (179). “Consciousness and the object with which one is identified are mysteriously the same thing” through the collective unconscious. Described in another way, an individual can seemingly be understood in terms of two materials: self and other. Through participation mystique, however, the self can be projected onto the “other,” and the “other” can be introjected onto the “self” until both substances become indistinguishable. This “intermingling of inner and outer contents” that Stein describes is the nature of the collective unconscious.

This shared, natural element of unconsciousness is what has led many to conjecture that the collective unconscious resides within DNA, the shared chemical building blocks of all natural life. Olson, as I will discuss later with his essay, "Proprioception," places the unconscious instead in the spaces of the body cavities. Regardless of location, the unconscious famously houses what Jung has termed "archetypes," which serve as "impressions of ever-repeated typical experiences" that "behave empirically like agents that tend towards the repetition of these same experiences" (Storr 71). Archetypes therefore have a historical component, uniting human experiences of the past with those of the present. In fact, the archetype has evolved out of Freud's concept of "archaic remnants," describing leftover elements from human history. The archetype, an unconscious element, makes itself known to its conscious counterpart, the ego, by expressing itself through symbols most commonly in dreams, but also in religious experiences, alchemy, astrology, or other Gnostic or mystical practices. Archetypes attempt to transcend the gap between human unconsciousness into the conscious domain in order to restore the balance within a neurotic individual.

The "self," an individual's sense of identity and purpose is, according to Stein, the most important archetype because it transcends psychological elements and is *whole* (153). The self's wholeness – the balance between unconsciousness and consciousness, just like that of yin and yang – is what an individual's psychic health depends upon. The self's task of "holding the psychic system together" becomes a dynamic balancing act, that if disturbed, will solicit the help of the unconsciousness' archetypes to reintegrate

(159). It is with that notion that I will reconsider Fernand, a definite neurotic who “cannot go beyond his thoughts,” and is therefore out of touch with his unconscious identity.

Fernand’s declarations of economic imbalance are therefore both personal and social. If Fernand’s reflection that the “export stop[ped]” is true, there is a resulting imbalanced prevalence of import. “Import” implies two highly specific and important concepts upon which the poem rests: the import-dependence of Western economies, and the subsequent import-dependent human psyche. As Western nations, particularly America, are known more for their importing of materials than for exporting quantities of equal amounts, this leads to what Olson would view as the over accumulation and ultimate stagnation of goods, forcing the economic “pool” to be “slime.” The imagery here is that of a stagnant pool or pond – if left alone without a stream to infiltrate the pond and offer a dynamic change and exchange, the pond’s bacterial life will increase exponentially until the entire pool is overcome with slime.

This slime and stagnation is disastrous, especially when Olson applies it to the cognitive dependence of the human psyche. Just as the Western economy must, according to Olson, heal its neurosis by rebalancing import and export, so too must the human being. Olson and Jung believe that the individual psyche has become far too dependent upon the “import” of sensory input and cognitions. The poem therefore goes on to encourage a rebalancing of the psyche by focusing on restoring the “export” of unconscious material through introspection and wisdom. However, restoring the balance means changing from the status quo. To redress the pool’s slime-ridden stagnation, one must infiltrate it with new waters from an entirely different source, for “into the same river no man steps twice” (*Collected Poems* 89). To balance the scientifically-driven

society and mind, Olson draws from its opposite in an attempt to achieve a dynamic equilibrium: Eastern thought.

Olson definitely establishes an East/West binary throughout “The Kingfishers,” and the majority of criticism on Olson points to the fact that he favors the Eastern tradition of Communism over the Western one of Capitalism. However, through the perspective of Jungian psychology, it becomes evident that Olson favors neither, but simply views both institutions as capable of balancing each other into dynamic wholeness. In *Man and His Symbols*, Jung remarks on Eastern vs. Western philosophy:

These two archetypal principles lie at the foundation of the contrasting systems of East and West. The masses and their leaders do not realize, however, that there is no substantial difference between calling the world principle male and a father (spirit), as the West does, or female and a mother (matter), as the Communists do. Essentially, we know as little of the one as of the other. In earlier times, these principles were worshipped in all sorts of rituals, which at least showed the psychic significance they held for man. (85)

“Eastern” vs. “Western” therefore has no bearing in a Jungian context: both are simply abstract theories that happen to be at opposite poles of the same political spectrum. What Olson ultimately provides in his juxtaposition of Eastern upon Western in “The Kingfishers” is not a Communist or Eastern revolution, but a cultural remedy for a society that has become too entrenched – and therefore neurotic – due to its dependence on solely one philosophy.

Though Mao, and Eastern philosophy by proxy, speak the inspiring lines of “nous devons / nous lever / et agir!,” showing the change-driven action upon which the poem so firmly depends (translated: we must / rise / and act), Eastern philosophy is not blameless in “The Kingfishers.” Olson writes

I thought of the E on the stone, and of what Mao said

la lumiere”

but the kingfisher

de l’aurore”

but the kingfisher flew west

est devant nous!

he got the color of his breast

from the heat of the setting sun!

The juxtaposition of East and West is clear here: Mao, from an Eastern nation, uncharacteristically speaks in French. His statement translates to “the light / of the dawn / is before us,” which implies the image of a sun, rising in the East. It is this statement that expresses the ultimate flaw of both Eastern and Western philosophy: the view of history as something that must be forged with the rising of a new sun and the start of the new day. Both East and West have become so future-oriented that the past has become neglected, and the past, say Olson and Jung, is a source of untapped psychic power. Recalling that Jung’s collective unconscious and the archetypes that dwell within it are a pattern of human past, existing since the dawn of mankind, both Olson and Jung encourage backward-thinking as a way of tapping into the power brought through unity of consciousness and unconsciousness.

Interspersed with Mao's statements is the kingfisher's flight West, where he receives his mythic power from the light of the *setting* sun. This is the retrospective thought encouraged by Jung and Olson as a remedy for both the Eastern and Western philosophies. The closed quotation marks that punctuate Mao's French statement depict how the forward-thinking bias of both Eastern and Western philosophies literally close themselves off from the myth and legend of the past, and therefore symbols projected from the unconscious. These closed quotations serve as the opposite to the "open field" of energy that is encouraged by the open parentheses in Olson's "Projective Verse." Again, as the unconscious is associated with the limitless expression of psychic energy that parallels Olson's "open field," which I will discuss later, the closed quotations serve to divide humankind from their own unconscious, enhancing their tendency towards neurosis.

### *Healing the Psyche through Language*

“The Kingfishers” is thus a prime example of the Jungian idea of thought being either closed or opened through the institution of language, or “discourse,” as Olson would say. Benjamin Whorf, a major linguistic anthropologist of the 1930’s, was greatly influenced by the psychological writings of Carl Jung. Whorf had read much of Jung’s more famous works, adopting Jungian terminology and ideology as his own. The psychologist’s definition of “libido,” described as an “energetic principle” within the collective unconscious appears throughout Whorf’s major achievement: the Sapir-Whorf Hypothesis, formulated in conjunction with a teacher of his, Edward Sapir (Waterman 207-208). The linguists’ hypothesis, which deals primarily with the way that language as an institution affects cognitive thought and the formation of the self, is therefore greatly indebted to the prior works of Carl Jung.

Olson shares similar concerns with both Sapir and Whorf, not only regarding his connection with Jung, but also in his interest in ancient languages. Both Olson and the ethnolinguists shared a fascination with the ancient Mayan language and its correlation with the languages of today. Because of language’s implications in the institution of selfhood, Olson, Jung, and the Sapir-Whorf duo all embarked on a retrospective linguistic examination, attempting to document their findings and use them as a way to understand and improve the modern-day conceptions and treatments of written and spoken speech. Olson branded this impressive quest as belonging to the “archeologist of morning,” a title he willingly accepted by similarly labeling a poetry collection of his own. His poetic aim, however, remained that of the archeologist’s well after the specific collection,

continuing to expand on the linguistic mission of Whorf, and resting upon the Jungian foundation of self-discovery.

Jung believes that individuals who study history and those who study language are embarking on journeys to the cradle of mankind. In doing so, they study the symbols and archetypes generated by the collective unconscious, and therefore provide a way to balance modern man's neurosis. In *Man and His Symbols*, Jung says that the "eternal symbols" are revealed through "philologists and religious historians, who can translate these beliefs into intelligible modern concepts" (97). As Jung previously stated, symbols are "natural attempts to reconcile and reunite opposites within the psyche" (*MAHS* 90). Thus, language plays an essential role in discovery of one's own self through the motion towards understanding the collective unconscious.

Language itself is a vehicle through which the human being can truly "know thyself," as described in "The Kingfishers." It is not surprising, then, that much of Olson's works, primarily his prose essays and manifestoes, center around the complex relationship of mankind with its sense of self and his language. As we have already seen in "The Kingfishers," Western society behaves very much like a neurotic individual, as evidenced by Fernand, who constantly "loses" himself. The Jungian ideal-driven Sapir-Whorf Hypothesis rests upon the two-way dynamic of language as both a creation *from* the self and a formative substance *of* the self. Similarly, in "Human Universe," Olson states that he views the "definition" of language and discourse as both a "part of the act" as well as a "sensation itself" (*Collected Prose* 155). We ourselves, combined with the language we use, are therefore "both the instrument of discovery and the instrument of



definition,” meaning that both the sense of self and the expression of self are interrelated, constantly changing, and essential to psychic health.

“Projective Verse,” a manifesto written by Olson in response to his successful poem, holds “The Kingfishers” up as the epitome of a new brand of poetry: the poetry of the projective. In “Projective Verse,” Olson not only expands upon the themes centering on selfhood, change, and balance that were set forth in “The Kingfishers,” but he also correlates these ideals with their expression in human languages. Just as we are to achieve balance within our core of self, language must reflect this constant path towards unity of opposites and harmony within the language we choose to speak, or for a poet such as Olson, record. “Projective Verse,” and “The Kingfishers” in tow, revolutionize the language of both poetics and human discourse. Through these pieces in conjunction with Olson’s other essays on the rebuilding of language, “Human Universe,” and “The Gate and the Center,” Olson’s ideas emerge as distinctly Jungian.

As we have seen through both Jung and Sapir, man is certainly shaped by the language he uses, and man simultaneously shapes language itself. Either way, man is both the product and the maker of his speech. For Olson, it is no different. In both of his most influential discussions on mankind and his relation to language, “Projective Verse” and “Human Universe,” he very explicitly states that the prerequisite for both good (projective) poetry and adequate, action-oriented discourse, is for the speaker himself to be entirely present throughout. His words are therefore no longer just words: they are breath, thought, physiology, movement, and kinetics.

Olson’s poetic worship of the “syllable king” and its twin, born of the “union of mind and ear,” the “LINE,” derides other contemporary artists who abuse the institution

of language. Olson believes these artists go wrong, in that they “go lazy RIGHT HERE WHERE THE LINE IS BORN,” and therefore do not treat language with the proper respect that it deserves (*Collected Prose* 242). This critique of other poets, accentuated appropriately with all capitals, in Olson’s thinking, is manifold. In Jungian thought, the physiological life-presence in all human activities is a necessity for being in touch with one’s own psychic core. In fact, when describing the neurosis of Western culture, he describes that within the very process of civilization, we have “increasingly divided our consciousness from the deeper instinctive strata of the human psyche, and even *ultimately from the somatic basis of the psychic phenomenon*” (*MAHS* 36, emphasis my own). It therefore seems fairly evident that Jung considers the human body and its actions to be an integral means of knowing the unconscious properties of oneself, and thereby also healing one’s own neuroses.

Though others may “go lazy” when it comes to expressing physiology and movement through poetry, Olson remains uncharacteristically “dogmatic” in that respect. In fact, language serves as one integral part of the *only* thing he remains steadfastly dogmatic about: change. In “The Kingfishers,” Olson shows how dogma, when not coupled with change, can become perverted by human consciousness. He expresses this dangerous occurrence through stale religious tradition, which is a definite negative in Olson’s eyes. However, as I have discussed in the context of the East/West dynamic in “The Kingfishers,” Olson’s technique is one of restoring balance. While neither Eastern nor Western philosophy was absolute truth or non-truth in either Olson’s or Jung’s eyes, they both needed each other to maintain a steady balance of matter (East) and spirit (West) (*MAHS* 85). Similarly, though religious tradition in and of itself is not a negative,

when it loses its mystical, physiological, and psychic qualities, it becomes an empty, neurotic shell of what it once was.

Jung has a name for this integral component of Gnosticism implicit within all religious practices: numinosum. Numinosum, a term Jung borrows from Rudolf Otto, is defined as a “dynamic existence or effect, not caused by an arbitrary act of will” (*Psychology and Religion* 4). Essentially, what Jung says is that religious experiences cannot be contrived or sought out by the individual. Just as Olson declares that language should be about the “act of the instant” and not “the thought about the instant,” so too must dogma stem from numinosum – the true “act of the instant” pertaining to religion. It is through tradition, the “thought about the instant,” that Olson expresses Jungian disdain for the neurotic culture from which it stems.

Tradition, therefore, is a complete disregard for the experience of numinosum. Religious tradition, as opposed to religious numinosum, is a cognitive alteration of a once-powerful human experience. Olson describes best the collective human loss of numinosum in the fourth section of “The Kingfishers:”

Around an appearance, one common model, we grow up  
many. Else how is it,  
if we remain the same,  
we take pleasure now  
in what we did not take pleasure before? love  
contrary objects? admire and/or find fault? use  
other words, feel other passions, have  
not figure, appearance, disposition, tissue

the same?

In this reflection on the necessity of change to get out of the now-stagnant pool of tradition, Olson blends predictable diction, “passions” and “love,” with unlikely nouns, “tissue” and “words.” When read in conjunction with Jung, Olson’s objective becomes more obvious: he is trying to restore the psyche’s balance through his placement of the body within the word. He is literally breathing life into a stale tradition that has become too dependent on the cognitive, and lacking in numinosum.

Olson is trying to step away from the ancient Greek concept of thought, and the subsequent form it takes within Western expression and discourse. The Greeks, says Olson, “went on to declare all speculation as enclosed in the ‘UNIVERSE of discourse’” (*Collected Prose* 156). The term “universe” when referring to the Greek view of language is the result of what Jung would call a dire misunderstanding of what language *is* at its core. For the philosophers that Olson alludes to, such as Aristotle, the “highest good,” referring to the most virtuous and happy way of living, is a life of contemplation (*Nicomachean Ethics* Book X). The life that the ancient Greeks advocate, then, would be what Jung would deem a recipe for certain neurosis. Jungian neurosis, essentially caused by a cognitive dependence, neglects the somatic origin of unconscious energy. Essentially, a prejudice in favor of the mind is also one that quashes the spiritual energy of the self within nature.

Language is not, as Olson adamantly states, an absolute (*Collected Prose* 156). “Universe” is too expansive a term to apply to a Greek discourse so dependent upon logic and argument – both of which are products of only the mind. The present-day inheritance of this cephalic-driven perception of language would fall in line with what Jung deems to

be “scientific” reasoning. Though not always diametrically opposed to logic, as is the modern conception, a numinosum experience is difficult to achieve while dwelling solely in the domain of the mind. Science and religion would therefore seem to be at odds, because “dogma represents the soul more completely than a scientific theory, for the latter expresses and formulates the conscious mind alone” (*Psychology and Religion* 57). Dogma, according to Jung, does not mean a religious creed of any kind, but a dream-like expression of the unconscious (56). The unconscious depth of the numinosum experience therefore appeals to the irrational nature of the psyche. The emotionally-detached nature of the scientific theory frankly *cannot* be deemed a “universe,” the reason being that it is, according to Jung, “exclusively rational.” Neglecting the irrational parts of the psyche is what causes the Jungian neurosis seen so clearly in both Olson’s Fernand and Western culture on the whole.

Science and religion, though, are not always on opposite poles of the same mind/psyche spectrum. An example of this unity is within the then-revolutionary Heisenberg uncertainty principle, which Jung extols in *Man and His Symbols* as science’s major advancement towards documenting a numinosum experience. The first objective that the Heisenberg principle achieves is that it shuts out “the delusion that we can comprehend an absolute physical reality” (*MAHS* 253). According to the *Encyclopedia Britannica*, the Heisenberg Uncertainty Principle rests upon the foundation that “the position and the velocity of an object cannot both be measured exactly, at the same time, even in theory. The very concepts of exact position and exact velocity together, in fact, have no meaning in nature” (“Uncertainty Principle”). Heisenberg’s principle thus contends that human beings cannot, through any amount of scientific reasoning,

comprehend any formula, natural occurrence, subject, or object in its entirety. The only thing a person can begin to understand is him/herself.

Jung uses Heisenberg's principle as an opportunity to discourage the "tremendous faith of modern man in anything that bears the label of 'scientific'" (*Psychology and Religion* 56). The misguided religious faith in science, and not in the unconscious revelations of the self, is precisely what both Jung and Olson are attempting to redress. Jung quotes Werner Heisenberg in *Man and His Symbols* as saying, "when examining nature and the universe, instead of looking for and finding objective qualities, man encounters himself" (381). The Heisenberg Uncertainty Principle is thus one of the ultimate examples of the marriage between scientific reasoning and the numinosum experience of religion. In consciously knowing that one cannot comprehend a truth scientifically, humans must delve deep within their own unconscious to understand the principle to be part of the natural world, part of the *broader* universe, and within the irrational nature of the human psyche. For any one occurrence, scientific or otherwise, to bring about a true numinosum experience, man must – as Werner Heisenberg so eloquently puts it – "encounter himself."

To truly understand scientific observations, cognitive experimentation must be accompanied by a "psychological investigation of the *inner origin* of our scientific concepts" (*MAHS* 381). Thus, into every preconception, tradition, or experience that has become neurotic due to the modern-day dependence on cognition, Olson and Jung say that we must literally breathe life back in, by once again reuniting the mind and spirit. Overall, the way to combat neurosis is to reinsert the somatic basis of humanity into daily experiences, preventing the emotionally-detached hegemony of scientific thought. The

first way that Olson goes about redressing this debilitating neurosis is by literally placing the human body back into the neurotic vehicle upon which all knowledge depends: language. As Sapir and Whorf describe in their theory, in revolutionizing the institution of language, man concurrently rebuilds himself.

Olson says that, to be of worth, human beings must be present in both the language they use on a daily basis, and for Olson's case in particular, within the poetry he produces. If no "man is in there" (the poem), the poem itself is meaningless in terms of psychic health (*Collected Prose* 241). Olson's works rewrite Aristotle's *Ethics* by redefining the "greatest good" to be complete harmony of the psyche, which can only be achieved in the quest to know oneself. If "the poet is the only pedagogue left," as Olson states in "The Gate and the Center," he is the only one who can reach others by transferring psychic energy, harnessed through the somatic basis of the psyche and the collective unconscious, through the poem directly to the reader. The poem must be "a high energy-construct" because of the very fact that the "poem is energy transferred from where the poet got it... by way of the poem itself to, all the way over to, the reader" (*Collected Prose* 240). The energy of the unconscious is what Olson hopes the reader will tap into when reading his poetry, and in order to transmit that energy successfully, he undertakes a style of writing that he deems, in his manifesto, "Projective Verse," to be "projective."

The essence of what projectivity entails at this point in Olson's poetic career, is making the poem organic, breathing, and *living* through his usage of language. For Olson, the language of poetry itself is literally born of a somatic phenomenon. The building-block of all language – the syllable – comes into existence due to "the union of



the mind and the ear" (*Collected Prose* 242). The other unit of verse, the line, though still originating from within the body, has an entirely different source. To "put it baldly," as Olson says, the "SYLLABLE" originates from "the HEAD, by way of the EAR," whereas the "LINE," verse's other half, stems from "the HEART, by way of the BREATH" (*Collected Prose* 242). Olson thus presents what are essentially two sides of the same coin: the head and ear as the cognitive origin of psychic matter within language, and the heart and breath as language's unconscious origin.

Further explained, Olson states that the union of the mind and ear resembles incest, for they are both made of the same substance: conscious thought. The ear, he states, is "so close to the mind that it *is* the mind's, that it has the mind's speed" (emphasis my own). The mind is an instrument of conscious, rational thought due to the cognitive biases that prohibit individuals from experiencing numinosum within their daily lives. The ear, solely responsible for sensory input that is a direct line to the integration center, the brain, is also a solely rational entity within Olson's "Projective Verse." The ear can provide no *output* to balance the *input* it receives from the outside world: it is the weaker half of the union of mind and sensory perception, denoted by the "mind's" absolute possession of the ear (242). The ear and the mind are thus one half of the somatic and psychic whole that is present not only within nature, but within Olson's poetry.

The second half of the somatic origin of verse, "the HEART, by way of the BREATH, to the LINE," is consciousness's polar counterpart, the unconscious. The heart will beat and breath will be drawn regardless of whether one is consciously aware of these processes. Nowhere in the sequence of heart, breath, and ultimately line, does one



encounter anything having to do with cognition, because to do so would be physiologically – and therefore naturally – inaccurate. Though it is true that breathing and heart rate are controlled by the brain just in the same manner as cognition and sensory integration are, they are controlled by two completely different *parts* of the brain.

Executive functioning, including cognitive thought, logic, and Western argument, are all cerebral activities. Anything that Jung would assign to the “conscious” domain rests comfortably within the cerebrum. The “brain stem,” however, is typically not associated at all with the executive functions. The medulla, part of the brain stem, houses the medullary rhythmicity center, regulating breathing, as well as the cardiovascular center, regulating heart rate. Thus, the answer that Olson sets forth to rectify the widespread neurosis of the individual and of his culture is two-fold: first, that the body must be placed into our activities to make them *living*, and second, that the body we integrate should not just comprise a small part of our brain (cerebrum), but the entire brain and entire *body*.

Olson’s use of metaphor, explicitly discussed throughout “Projective Verse,” is also very important in re-instilling this organic basis of language. Stephen McCaffery, when reflecting on Olson’s use of language, borrows one of Olson’s own statements and declares that there is a great “distinction...between language as the act of the instant and language as the act of the thought about the instant” (53). Olson makes the distinction between successful writing and unsuccessful writing by emphasizing that language *cannot* be solely rational. In accordance with the works of both Sapir and Jung, a cognitive bias in language would both express and create further neurosis.

Olson says in "Projective Verse," speaking solely in metaphor, that "simile is only one bird who comes down too easily" from the "whole flock of rhetorical devices" available for use (*Collected Prose* 243). The Oxford English Dictionary defines "metaphor" as "a figure of speech in which *a name or descriptive word or phrase is transferred to an object or action different from, but analogous to, that to which it is literally applicable*" (emphasis my own). This resonates with Jung's idea of the collective unconscious, that, through two distinctly separate entities, a unified whole can be consciously created, and unconsciously experienced. Remembering that Murray Stein's description of Jung's unconscious includes the term "participation mystique," referring to two objects illogically becoming one through the psychic instrument of projection, the OED's definition of metaphor can be seen in an entirely new, Jungian light.

Murray Stein states that the way an individual interacts with his unconscious self is through what he describes as "participation mystique" (179). In this status, "consciousness and the object with which one is identified are mysteriously the same thing," and "we are unconsciously united with the world around us." Metaphor, like this participation mystique, is essentially a projection of one object onto a separate, seemingly-unrelated object until they both become so similar that their differences are indistinguishable. Thus, Olson uses metaphor as a direct acknowledgment of the importance of a relationship between the unconscious self and nature, and thereby encourages reintegration of a world that has a tendency to speak in nothing but detached simile.

Simile, though a literary device that is comparable to metaphor, carries a totally different message for Olson. The Oxford English Dictionary provides a very basic definition of simile as “a comparison of one thing with another,” though what is especially important is that similes generally rely on the words “like” or “as” to indicate comparison. This is a direct contrast with the metaphor’s reliance on more organic grammatical integration, in which language serves as a living, breathing bridge linking both objects together. Regardless of the form that metaphor takes, whether “A is B,” “the A of B,” or “the AB,” metaphor can always be seen as a “transformed literalism... unif[ying] the concrete and abstract,” essentially allowing participation mystique to occur (Brogan, 185).

The only bridge that exists in the simile is a cognitive construct; the simile relies upon rational thought to function. The reason why Olson discourages the use of simile, therefore, is because the use of simile in language becomes indicative of a neurotic, cerebrally-dependent society. In a simile, subject will always remain distinct from the object, preventing Jungian participation mystique from occurring. Just as the ancient Greeks’ creation of the “universe” of logic has separated language from its somatic roots, so too does rationalization sever the organic bridge of metaphor, causing it to collapse into the cognitive lens of simile.

Instead of the Greek “UNIVERSE of discourse,” then, Olson advocates what he feels to be a more fitting universe: a bifold system of two complete universes that form a far larger whole. The two universes that Olson advocates include a return to the corporeal body, as in “Projective Verse,” and also the environment surrounding man (*Collected Prose* 156). These two universes work together in “harmony” to form one

larger, “post-logical” universe – the *human* universe, from which the essay’s title is derived. The description of this human universe as “not logical” or “post-logical” is significant in terms of rebellion from the Greek tradition of logic and classification as absolute. Remembering what Jung said on the topic of religion and science, all scientific research must be simultaneously introspective as well as projective: it is beneficial to use the executive instruments of the mind to a certain degree, but disastrous to use them alone. In advocating for *two* universes that embrace man as an entire organism, but also acknowledging the environment from which he comes, Olson replaces the soma into the overly-cerebral “universe” of discourse. In doing so, Olson allows for a Jungian numinosum experience to occur, thereby allowing human beings to greater understand themselves, and by extension, their culture and world.

As Jung discusses in *Psychology & Religion*, one can only know one’s god(s) through knowing one’s own self. He says that “what one could almost call a systematic blindness is simply the effect of the prejudice that the deity is *outside* man” (72). What Jung is referring to is a *true* numinosum experience, which is different than the failed attempts towards achieving numinosum found within “The Kingfishers.” For a numinosum experience to be true, man must encounter himself – the way Heisenberg did in his famed scientific theory – by tapping into the energy of the collective unconscious.

Thinking back to the “dogma” that served as an introduction to Jung’s theories on numinosum, it is certainly not in and of itself a cause for neurosis. Dogma is solely an expression of the unconscious – it is not “creed.” However, when dogma becomes polluted by religious tradition, which Jung calls “ritualistic performances,” dogma and religion become more dangerous for the psyche. The religious evolution from dogma to

creed is a move dominated by logical thinking. As Jung defines it, creed and religious tradition are executed solely for the “purpose of producing at will the effect of numinosum” (*Psych & Religion* 5). While religious tradition can be performed successfully without producing neurosis, the imposition of logic onto a numinosum experience, especially within an overly-cephalic culture, can open the door for neurosis.

The neurotic pull of religious tradition is exemplified by the death of numinosum in Olson’s “The Kingfishers.” In section I.3, Olson speaks almost entirely about how consciousness destroys the religious experiences of the everyday. When describing “another time” better for psychic health, he describes the seamless, easy transition from unconscious religious experiences and numinosum to the cognitive imposition of religion, and ultimately into destructive neurosis:

“of green feathers feet, beaks and eyes  
of gold

“animals likewise,  
resembling snails

“a large wheel, gold, with figures of unknown four-foots,  
and worked with tufts of leaves, weight  
3800 ounces

“last, two birds, of thread and featherwork, the quills gold, the feet  
gold, the two birds perched on two reeds

gold, the reeds arising from two embroidered mounds,  
one yellow, the other  
white.

“And from each reed hung  
seven feathered tassels.

In this instance, the priests  
(in dark cotton robes, and dirty,  
their dishevelled hair matted with blood, and flowing wildly  
over their shoulders)  
rush in among the people, calling on them to protect their gods

And all now is war

The first four stanzas describe, as Olson says, “another time” in the past, when the human psyche was still in touch with the psychical, mythical qualities of everyday objects in nature. The bird’s magical qualities in its “feet, beaks, and eyes / of gold” described here directly contrasts with section I.2’s rigidly-scientific encyclopedia entry describing the “features...(syndactylism of the 3<sup>rd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> digit) / the bill, serrated, sometimes a pronounced beak, the wings / where the color is, short and round, the tail / inconspicuous” of the kingfisher. The above passage in section I.3 is far less concerned with definition than its preceding section, and more focused on the beauty of the natural

images observed, their connection with the human psyche, and the self-revelations that can stem from such connections.

Animals in general, but specifically birds – presumably the kingfishers – are the objects of focus in the beginning of the quoted passage. Jung sees animals as symbols of the Self, which “represent our instinctive nature and its connectedness with one’s surroundings” (*MAHS* 220). Thus, animals are a direct link to the Self as well as the collective unconscious, both of which are vital to perfect psychic health. The wheel, introduced here in the third printed stanza, is a Jungian symbol of the complete Self. As a line extending over itself into eternity, the wheel is similar to the ouroboros, another Jungian image of wholeness. The imagery of two birds perched upon two nearly-identical (except for color) reeds again provides a symbol of the complete Self, but also the unity of paired opposites. Jungian psychic completeness rests on the balance of yin and yang, anima and animus, and ego and shadow. All of these Jungian symbols of psychic health and wholeness are accented by the open-quotations indicative of Olson’s openness to composition by field and its subsequent transfer of psychic energy.

After the first four stanzas, however, there is a marked change as the numinosum experience described in the previous stanzas evolves into religious tradition. The image that Olson describes, “from each reed hung / seven feathered tassels,” is one that does not occur naturally, but is a conscious attempt of the priests to impose a cognitive element onto what was once a completely illogical, numinous experience. The transition becomes the most crucial point in section I.3, accentuated by its indentation. These lines allow one of two options to occur: either the conscious nature of the tradition can be fully integrated into the mystical unconscious, forming a dynamic whole, or the logic

implicit in cognitive thought can trump the illogical nature of the numinosum experience, paving the way for neurosis.

Unfortunately, the latter of the two options occurs. The descent into neurosis *through* meaningless tradition becomes evident as the priests rally around the cognitively-dominated perversion of the numinosum experience. Instead of looking towards the birds, gold, and wheels of before, they have begun trying to replicate a numinous experience by using solely man-made objects and thoughts. As they don their “dark cotton robes,” it is evident that the priests have become less – if at all – in tune with their unconscious. Though the “wildness” of their hair might appear to indicate an instinctual drive resembling the unconscious, the wildness is due to the raging neurosis that these priests have experienced since the turning point at stanza five.

Particular evidence of this regression into neurosis is the priests’ actions of “rush[ing] in among the people, calling on them / to protect their gods.” These priests are enlisting the help of human consciousness in what should be an unconsciously-driven activity. Remembering that Jung, in *Psychology & Religion*, describes that blindness is implicit in seeing any deity as outside man himself, it is easy to see that the priests’ neuroses have taken over their psyches. The priests here have, over the course of section I.3, forgotten that to know their gods they must know themselves. In their deep neurosis, they are now only faced with their own psychic demons and the war that they have themselves created through the abuse of tradition and the abandonment of the numinosum experience.

As language is itself a tradition passed throughout many generations, the example that the priests lead in “The Kingfishers” is yet another reason why Olson endeavors to



reinstate the somatic basis of the Self into the hollow, neurotic shell that is discourse. The false "universe" of discourse and the abuse of tradition are inextricably linked as both symptomatic of and reinforcement of neurosis. To reinstate the unconscious into these neurotic institutions, Olson follows Jung's advice to replace the corporeal part of existence into language by literally making it breathe, as in "Projective Verse." He also provides a remedy for the stale tradition in "The Kingfishers" by encouraging a return to a pre-tradition, pre-logical time in the past when man could experience numinosum by being in touch with his own unconscious through being in touch with nature through participation mystique. Olson uses Jungian philosophy to redress social ills by attacking them through societal institutions, primarily tradition, of which language is an example. In addition to Olson's tactics of reuniting body and mind to heal the neurotic wounds of meaningless tradition, he also employs a great deal of Jungian symbolism to restore wholeness.

### *Healing the Psyche through Symbols*

Symbols serve as “carriers” or messengers between human unconsciousness and consciousness. According to Jung, an accurate interpretation of a symbol “enriches the poverty of consciousness” so that the observer can once again “understand...the forgotten language of the instincts” (*MAHS* 37). Even in Jung’s own words, symbols are deeply tied to the concept of learning the unconscious’s *language*, and in doing so understanding one’s center of self. It is therefore no surprise that, in his attempts to restore a healthy balance to a neurotic society, Olson uses Jungian symbology in addition to the reinvention of language and the restoration of the numinosum experience. Symbols help the process of reunification and healing, especially in a collective context. The human unconscious is said to have collective elements, having arisen from “a long evolutionary history” shared by all humans. Similarly, the major elements that arise from the unconscious are also considered collective: archetypes and symbols.

Though archetypes and symbols are very often two halves of the same cooperative whole, they are not always so. Archetypes are merely “tendencies” towards establishing a specific “motif” that can vary greatly “without losing their basic pattern” (*MAHS* 58). However, for an archetype to be revealed to human consciousness, it almost always takes the form of a symbolic image, either in dreams or deep meditation. I have already briefly mentioned the symbol of the wheel and its relation to the archetype of the Self. The ego, an individual’s own identity, is in constant conflict with the archetype of the Self throughout the individual’s lifetime. When the psychic pull of both ego and Self are in dynamic equilibrium, the individual is said to be whole and healthy. This ideal of completeness is expressed through a great variety of symbols, including trees, flowers,

and, as is seen in "The Kingfishers," the wheel. Of course, with many of these symbols, their appearance in a dream or revelation does not necessarily express that wholeness has been achieved. Rather, the symbols, such as the wheel in "The Kingfishers," often appear to express the need to return to a way of life that would enable the individual's sense of self to be complete and healthy once again.

Another incredibly important symbol throughout "The Kingfishers" is that of the bird itself. In the Jungian tradition, any kind of bird is generally a very important symbol of transcendence. Symbols of transcendence are the foundation of many of the earliest known sacred traditions in history, and are at their very core indicative of the type of change that "The Kingfishers" calls upon throughout the poem. These transcendent symbols, which will be discussed within this section, concern a human being's liberation from – or *transcendence* of – any constricting pattern of existence (MAHS 146). This naturally complements Olson's theme in "The Kingfishers" of transcending the neuroticism that has become so rigid throughout the life of the modern-day human and the culture that he or she creates. The recurring imagery of the kingfishers throughout Olson's poem bearing their name is therefore a very suitable answer to the problems that Olson believes society has created.

The birds themselves are not only Jungian symbols in their own right, but are also utilized throughout Olson's works as harbingers of both change and harmony between consciousness and unconsciousness. Even when discussing language and the necessity to use metaphor over simile in "Projective Verse," Olson uses birds as the subjects of his discussions on metaphor. The birds described in "Projective Verse" allude back to the preceding poem upon which the manifesto is based. Speaking in metaphor, Olson says

that "simile is only one bird who comes down, too easily" (*Collected Prose* 243). It is telling that Olson avoids using simile even in his discussion of its attributes. Though birds may represent unconscious transcendence, Olson's avoidance of simile exemplifies the limitations of their abilities. As will be discussed later, the kingfishers are very much at the mercy of how they are perceived by human beings. Just as the simile is a metaphor that has been destroyed by cognition, so too are the kingfishers at the mercy of human thought.

Though the kingfishers possess incredibly intricate, sometimes seemingly contradictory roles throughout the poem, at their core they encourage the change and introspection that formulates the theme of "The Kingfishers." It would be fair to say that there are, at the beginning of the poem, two separate kingfishers. Or, rather, there are two ways the role of the kingfishers are interpreted by human beings within the poem. Olson makes a very clear distinction between the kingfishers of yesterday and the kingfishers of today. The kingfishers of the past are imbued with an immensely powerful mythical energy, while the kingfishers of the present are merely subject to the naming, defining, and categorization of their physical attributes in an encyclopedic manner. On a very simple level, the kingfishers' past is characterized by holism, with the modern kingfishers being worth no more than the sum of their parts, or "features" as Olson says in I.2.

When viewed on a Jungian level, the problem of the kingfishers becomes more than a lack of holism, but one of immediate psychic danger. The mythical energy that the kingfishers of the past possessed is, in the Jungian tradition, interpreted as psychic energy because of the close link between myth-building and the numinosum experience. On a simple level, imbuing the kingfishers in mythical excellence is nothing more than a

projection of one's own psyche onto another object. Projections come from the depths of the unconscious, "occur spontaneously," and "create a view of the world and of reality that is based on unconscious images and structures rather than on tested perceptions of reality" (M. Stein 142). The difference between the two kingfishers has nothing to do with the birds themselves, but the psychic prejudices of the individuals who observe them. The myth-laden kingfishers are thus symptomatic of the Jungian pinnacle of psychic health: the individuals in these kingfishers' society can have a myth-building numinosum experience which extends from their own unconscious. They are basing their religion upon the notion that the deity is somehow within their own selves.

The other, modern kingfishers have no deified projections whatsoever, but instead provoke scientific thought and formulations. Though the neurotic Fernand in section I.I recognizes that there was something special about the way the kingfishers used to be, he cannot understand why. He agonizes over the fundamental question of the poem: "The pool the kingfishers' feathers were wealth why did the export stop?" In his inability to go beyond his thoughts, he answers his own question, yet remains oblivious to his doing so. As is the trend throughout Jungian tradition and Olson's poetry, it is Fernand's reliance upon scientific, cognitive thought that has killed the myth and numinosum of the kingfisher. Because the kingfishers have been reduced to merely the sum of their parts – the "feebleness of the feet," "the bill, serrated, sometimes a pronounced beak," etc., they no longer have the legendary power they once did.

When Olson paints a negative view of the kingfisher, he does so in mourning the loss of a past age and culture, not because he himself advocates the death of legend. As

his rightfully says after his encyclopedic definition of the kingfishers, the birds themselves do not cause societal problems:

But not these things were the factors. Not the birds.

The legends are

legends. Dead, hung up indoors, the kingfisher

will not indicate a favoring wind,

or avert the thunderbolt. Nor, by its nesting,

still the waters, with the new year, for seven days.

It is true, it does nest with the opening year, but not on the waters.

It nests at the end of a tunnel bored by itself in a bank. There,

six or eight white and translucent eggs are laid, on fishbones

not on bare clay, on bones thrown up in pellets by the birds.

The factors are, as Olson says, *not* the birds themselves, but the death of the legend that they represent. The kingfisher is an ideal symbol for Olson to use because of their rich past tradition of legend, and their current obscurity.

The kingfisher has been the subject of many myths throughout time, and Olson refers to two such legends in the poem. The first is an ancient mariner's superstition that carrying the dried body of a kingfisher would ward off poor sea-faring weather. This was brought about by the belief that the kingfisher creates a floating nest on the water and that, wherever it happened to float, the water would be absolutely calm so as not to disturb the young eggs the nest contains. The second has to do with a myth taken from medieval Christianity, where it was believed that the kingfisher was the second animal

taken onto Noah's ark before the Great Flood. According to legend, once the rains had stopped, Noah sent the gray-colored kingfisher out in search of land. The kingfisher flew to heights so great that its back absorbed the blue color of the sky, while her breast was "burnt" from her close proximity to the sun and thereby turned a warm orange-red.

Olson is saying that the kingfisher of today can neither calm the weather nor get "the color of his breast / from the heat of the setting sun." Though the kingfishers can be seen in the poem nesting upon various "rejectamenta," it is not the birds themselves who have brought about their destruction, but the society in which they dwell.

The modern-day human prejudice in favor of cognitive thought that dominates the modern-day kingfishers' society may seem to allocate them nothing but a "dripping, fetid mass," but there is a definite hope. Though they create their nests out of excrement, decayed fish, and rejected pellets, the kingfishers are constantly sending new generations forth into the world throughout the poem. The undertone of death, decay, burial, and rotting that is present throughout the poem is accompanied with imagery of birth, baptism, and newness. The word "death" (and its derivatives such as "dead") is mentioned explicitly three times throughout the poem, and spoken of in metaphor countless other occasions. However, the word "birth" (and its derivatives such as "born") is mentioned three times as well, and alluded to in numbers to match its counterpart.

The kingfishers themselves are thus not harbingers of death, sorrow, loss, or decay, though it would be easy to see them as such. They are at the will of the projection of a tragic human neurotic condition, yet somehow remain resilient throughout the poem, retaining a shred of hope throughout. Just as Fernand, lost in his own neuroticism, can still listen to tiny pieces of his own unconscious, so too are Olson's readers supposed to



heed the overtones of hope that he has written into his kingfishers. In this recognition, both reader and Fernand could, hypothetically, go beyond their thoughts and into a more harmonious psychic state.

In order to facilitate the transition from being stuck in one's thoughts to possessing a balanced psychic energy, incorporating both conscious and unconscious elements, Olson uses "The Kingfishers" to build his own myth. When one thinks of famous birds used to depict cyclical birth and regeneration, the one that generally comes to mind is the phoenix. There is no question about the similarity between Olson's kingfishers and the phoenixes of ancient mythology, but the similarity is not intended to allude to the kingfishers' Egyptian counterpart. The connection that the phoenix and the kingfisher have traces back from far before the Egyptian civilization – and all civilization in general. The link that they share is archetypal, stemming from the cradle of primitive humankind.

The idea of an archetype, often confused with definitive mythological images or motifs, has nothing to do with the well-known mythologies of the ancient Egyptians, Greeks, or Romans. In fact, Jung describes allusions to these types of established mythical images as "nothing more than conscious representation[s]" of what *should* be unconscious material (*MAHS* 57). Archetypes are not references to ancient mythological structures, but the unconscious-driven tendency to form representations and symbols of a specific motif. These motifs can manifest themselves in great variation without losing their basic patterns, which belong to the domain of the unconscious (58). In creating what seems to be a modern-day phoenix out of the kingfishers, Olson does not refer to a mythological symbol, but a deeper-rooted archetype upon which both myths are centered.



The symbols of both the phoenix and the kingfisher are what Jung calls symbols of transcendence. Symbols of transcendence, as I have mentioned before, are connected with periods of transition in an individual's life, and point to the human need for liberation from any state of being that is too immature, too fixed, or too confining (*MAHS* 146). Typically taking the form of a bird, but also sometimes a lonely journey or pilgrimage, snakes, fish, or even rodents, symbols of transcendence all encourage personal change and healing. Through utilizing these diverse symbols, the individual can always "become acquainted with the nature of death" (*MAHS* 147, 150). This death, however, is neither final nor dangerous. It is the death of stasis, symbolizing the archetype of an individual's embarkation into a new phase of life. Jung says that any strong movement or change can be indicative of a transcendent symbol, and Olson channels Jung's attitudes towards change and his symbols of transcendence into his kingfishers, which carry the poem's theme atop their regenerative wings.

Birds are the most fitting symbols of transcendence, according to Jung, which could be why the image of the phoenix (and its counterparts, such as the Egyptian Bennu bird, the Persian Huma, the Chinese Fenghuang, etc.) has become a widespread icon. It had even been associated with the Christian church as an image of resurrection and immortality. Birds serve as particularly good symbols of transcendence because they not only exhibit a balance between terrestrial and aerial life, but in flight, they can observe distant places and events. As Jung says, they represent "the peculiar nature of intuition working through a 'medium,' that is, an individual who is capable of obtaining knowledge of distant events – or facts of which he consciously knows nothing – by going into a trancelike state" (*MAHS* 147). Birds in and of themselves, according to Jung, are a

way to tap into unconscious psychic energy and peer into the window of primitive history (“distant events”). Using the medium of the bird, Jung believes that one can tap into psychic energy through the trancelike state of unconsciousness, and open the conscious human mind to the unconscious-dominated part of the human past. Birds also serve as vessels between terrestrial dwelling – representing the conscious aspect of humanity – and the open sky, which, like the ocean, represents the depth of the human unconscious. The bird, due to its dual life in both the air and on the earth, represents the unity and balance of both logical and illogical aspects of human life.

The kingfishers, in particular, fit the bill of being a transcendent symbol. They serve as windows into the pre-tradition era of human past because of their mythical history, when true numinosum was an everyday occurrence. In addition, they are also steeped in the poem’s message of change, another important element of the Jungian symbol. The theme of the poem can be summarized in the brilliant first line: “What does not change / is the will to change,” and the kingfishers themselves become living emblems of the poem’s paradoxical paradigm. Though the kingfishers, at various points throughout the poem, seem to be stuck in their own fetid nests, this is solely due to the projection of modern day human consciousness, as I have previously discussed. The fact that must not be overlooked is that the kingfishers never cease their reproductive cycle at any point in the poem. With each new generation comes a new potential for hope, but more importantly a new potential for change. What does not change throughout the never-ceasing reproductive cycle of the kingfishers, is their potential for – and therefore will to – change.

Olson's poem is thus not designed to mourn the loss of a golden age, but to remind his readers that change is possible and necessary. The "two" kingfishers become not only a representation of the separate societies and cultures they belong to – past and present – but also become a remedy for societal ills. At the very end of section I, the longest section in the poem, Olson unites the two kingfishers on the circular continuum of change. He says,

the origin and  
the end, between  
birth and the beginning of  
another fetid nest

is change...

In this figure, birth and death occur at the exact same point on the circular continuum. Though the kingfisher's nest is made of dead, decaying materials, new birth will always occur upon the unlikely swaddling. Envisioning a graphic representation of what is occurring in the kingfishers' cycle of progeny, "birth" is stacked immediately upon "death." In between the two occurrences, however, there must be an elliptical course of action – no straight, fixed line will allow the kingfishers to find a path towards reproduction. The cycle of the kingfisher can thus be seen as a circle, with its route changing each time the circle bends.

The circle itself is a complete representation of dynamic equilibrium. The circle, though having a fixed shape, is often conceptualized as having an infinite capacity.

Historically, Archimedes computed the first area of a circle by inscribing polygons into the circle's center. He proceeded to take the limit of the total area of the polygons in summation as the number of sides approached infinity, thereby finding the area of the circle. Viewed another way, a circle can be seen as a curved line of uniform slope at every potential point of measurement. This line has no point of termination, but keeps traveling over itself in constant motion for an infinite length and infinite amount of time. As many perceptions of the circle involve an idea of motion and infinity, it is no surprise that Jung found the circle to be a symbol of the Self.

Olson views the circular life/death cycle of the kingfishers as correlated with the Jungian archetype of the Self. The circle, static in that it is of uniform diameter at any trajectory, is also, as we have seen, dynamic. In Jungian tradition, the circle – among other geometric shapes or natural objects – symbolizes how human consciousness and unconsciousness should interact. At any given time, the force exerted upon the psyche by cognitive leanings should be no greater and no lesser than the force exerted by the collective unconscious. The image is that of a perfectly logical, measurable, wholeness that appeals to the conscious part of the psyche. There, formulaic accuracy reigns true whenever one tries to analyze the circle for area, slope, etc. However, there is also an illogical element to the circle, which appeals to the unconscious. Here, the inability of human beings to comprehend the depth and breadth of irrational numbers – such as square roots and pi – is inextricably associated with the circle as well.

Historically, the circle is also rooted in innumerable religious traditions, which are also of psychic importance. Some familiar religious representations of the circle are: the halo in Christianity, mandalas in Zen Buddhism, and sun wheels found throughout the

Neolithic epoch even before the wheel itself was invented (*MAHS* 268-269). All represent in some form a tension of opposites (humanity and divinity in Christian haloes, yin and yang in Chinese philosophy, etc.) that ultimately come together and form one complete, perfect, whole. This whole is, of course, the symbol that embodies an individual in his/her most perfect condition of psychic health.

It is therefore no surprise that Olson's remarks on the life, birth, and death cycle of the kingfishers are followed very closely by a discussion of selfhood. After Olson provides the circular, dynamic image, he directly refers to his "message:"

And what is the message? The message is  
a discrete or continuous sequence of measurable events distributed in time

is the birth of air, is  
the birth of water, is  
a state between  
the origin and  
the end, between  
birth and the beginning of  
another fetid nest

is change, presents  
no more than itself

And the too strong grasping of it,  
when it is pressed together and condensed,  
loses it

This very thing you are

The kingfishers, in their odd cycle of death and birth, represent change. The “message” is the same regardless of whether it is the origin or the end, the birth or the death, or even the kingfishers of yesterday or the kingfishers of today. At whatever point and time in their life, the kingfishers must be constantly changing. As their personification within the poem is the result of human projection, human beings must also be dynamic entities. If human thought remains stagnant, perceptions – and therefore projections, which stem from them – cannot “MOVE, INSTANTER, ON ANOTHER!” as Olson urges in “Projective Verse.” When individuals do not change, they do not merely dwell in an environment of over-accumulation, which Fernand speaks of when he says “the pool is slime.” They also lose themselves, a fate far more grave.

The notion of change is where language and selfhood truly intersect in Olson’s works. It is at this point that “Projective Verse,” “Human Universe,” and “The Kingfishers” become “dogmatic,” to use a word of both Olson’s and Jung’s. Dogma, as defined by Jung, means a true numinosum experience. Dogma, as used by Olson in “Projective Verse,” is very similar in that it is surrounded by the context of three powerful, Jungian ideals: change, an awareness of self, and a renewal of language. The dogma of the so-called “pre-Jungian” Olson is therefore truly Jungian, in that he employs not only the Swiss psychiatrist’s ideas on symbols and language, but does so in the

context of change. Even Olson's notion of change is clearly linked with Jungian personhood and concept of the archetype of self.

Olson speaks dogmatically, in the Jungian sense of the word, in section I.4 of "The Kingfishers" when he quotes the philosopher Heraclitus, saying "into the same river no man steps twice." This one sentence embodies Jungian elements that Olson discusses in "Human Universe," "Projective Verse," and, of course, the poem in which the phrase appears. Implicit in Olson's dogma is that change is necessary, lest the "river" be converted into the pool of slime that Fernand speaks of in the poem's opening. All three of Olson's major early writings work in concert to encourage the change that Jung deems to be necessary for psychic health.

None of Olson's poems can be viewed alone. To say that "Human Universe" is solely about encouraging the re-creation of language without an implicit change of self would be a falsehood. Whether Olson chooses to renew language or tradition, he does so in context of the energy and motion found throughout "Projective Verse." This energy very readily falls in line with the Jungian teachings on the collective unconscious, as it has no specific locus, yet affects human beings greatly, especially in the context of language and myth-building. This energy becomes the "breath" inside of Olson's poems, and therefore also "the man." It is an energy that is therefore a part of humanity, and appeals to humanity's consciousness through the Jungian vehicle of the symbol, whose purpose is to unify the divided, neurotic psyches that both Jung and Olson observe to be progressively growing worse due to societal cognitive biases.

### ***Know Thyself: Olson's Jungian Integration***

After Olson undertook the massive project of re-reading Jung's works in 1952, his poetic goals did not change, but were reinforced by his self-professed appreciation for and integration of Jungian philosophy. While Olson was distinctly Jungian during the era of "The Kingfishers" and "Projective Verse," he was, ironically, unconscious of his own similarities to the Swiss psychologist whom he often defamed. Through Olson's re-reading, however, he became conscious of the goals he shared with Jung, and built upon the foundation of his previous works to create a more dynamic and almost entirely somatically-oriented art.

As we have seen throughout "The Kingfishers," these birds are gradually being destroyed not due to their own shortcomings, but because of a flawed, projected human perception. The solution that we have seen Olson provide for the kingfishers thus far is thereby a remedy for humankind: change. Olson has, in his "pre-Jungian" era, steadfastly prescribed a change-infused therapy, including the Jungian instruments of symbology (such as that of the circle and those of transcendence), replacing stale tradition with numinosum experiences, and breathing life into the stagnant pool of language by reinserting the soma into every spoken and written line. However, all of these prescriptions are repeatedly ineffective if not executed correctly. Just as a physician's medicine will not work if the patient is unwilling to follow instructions, so too will Olson's teachings fall short if they are not properly integrated.

These teachings of change are Jungian at their core, advocating living in "the center," and being deeply aware of one's own body as an instrument through which to look towards both the past, present, and future. Themes such as these are solidified in one



of Olson's crowning post-1952 works, "Proprioception," an essay that is replete with the psychologist's ideals as well as distinctly Jungian vocabulary such as "archetype," "consciousness," "Unconscious," "psychology," "the self," and "projection." However, while it is a deliberately Jungian work, "Proprioception" also builds upon many of Olson's famous pre-1952 works, especially "The Kingfishers." "Proprioception," through its very title and theme, is not only indebted to Jung, but is also implicitly connected to the idea of "feed-back" and the oracle of "know thyself" originating in "The Kingfishers."

The command to "know thyself" alludes to a famous essay by Plutarch, "On the E at Delphi," generally published along with some of Plutarch's other writings in his *Moralia*. This fictional essay depicts five philosophers discussing the ancient E on the stone and its commandment to "know thyself," all the while using logic, mathematics, and even religion to postulate on its meaning. Most important, however, is the style of argument in which the philosophers discuss their views. Early in the essay, in section VI, they agree on a "dialectic" style of argument, in which the outcome is not one of refutation, but one of synthesis of opposing ideas (*Moralia*). As I have shown, the unity of opposites is an idea that Jung draws upon, stating that the purpose of the symbol is entirely to "reconcile and reunite" opposing forces within the psyche (*MAHS* 90). It is thereby no surprise that Olson enterprises on Plutarch's essay, incorporating both "the E / cut so rudely on that oldest stone," and its command to know thyself, as they represent the change-implicit action that Olson seeks to portray.

Knowing oneself would begin, fairly simply, with knowing one's own flesh and one's own sensory perceptions. I have already shown how vital it is to reinstate the soma

into overly-cognitive activities in order to heal psychic neurosis. I have discussed how symbols, archetypes, dreams, and visions can arise from the collective unconscious and heal the psyche. However, I have not yet discussed the body's innate abilities to regulate its own actions and needs. It is within this vital idea that Olson both embraces and builds upon Jungian teaching. Olson believes that the flesh and the body, appearing consistently throughout almost all of his poetry, is where Jung's collective unconscious is located.

Jung himself, though he declared the existence of the unconscious through his studies of dreams, visions, and artwork, never began to conjecture the locus of its existence. Other psychological scientists, such as Thomas J. Musial and Julian R. Pleasants, have observed the similarities between Mendelian genetics and the Jungian unconscious. Because of the chemical stability of DNA, allowing the same functional enzymes to be expressed across species, there is truly very little difference between man and bread mold (10). Musial and Pleasants thus go on to suggest that genetic material, particularly DNA, has, embedded within its stable molecular structure, the "prehistory" of man. Having survived as the building block for all life forms since the dawn of humankind with very little alterations to itself as a molecule, DNA can be a window to the past, and thereby a glimpse into the unconscious. This type of introspection thus leads to "a retracing of cultural evolution within the individual psyche," and the ultimate discernment that the common elements of DNA have been "inherited with virtually no change except in combination" (11). Due to the stability of the DNA molecule and its resistance to mutation, Musial and Pleasants state that the human body, in terms of genetic function, is almost identical to the first human bodies that roamed the earth.

Though Olson does not mention genetics within his poems, he focuses specifically on the human body and its relationship to the unconscious. Taking the E on the stone's commandment of "know thyself" very literally to mean knowing one's own body, Olson embarks on the great Jungian journey to balance the modern cognitively-driven psyche with the archetypes of human pre-history. Olson, as early as "The Kingfishers" expresses the importance of bodily awareness in relationship to human prehistory and the energy of the unconscious:

hear

hear, where the dry blood talks

where the old appetite walks

la piu saporita et migliore

che si possa truovar al mondo

where it hides, look

in the eye how it runs

in the flesh / chalk

but under these petals

in the emptiness

regard the light, contemplate

the flower

This passage, incredibly complicated with images of wholeness in the flower, yet also the frightening speech of Hernando Cortez, describing "the most savory food found in the world," creates significant tension between stanzas (*WDNC* 68). This utterance is

definitely Cortez, because Olson uses the word “conquistador” throughout the poem. Also, Maud describes in his book, *What Does Not Change*, the similarity between specific lines in “The Kingfishers” with a book Olson owned: William Prescott’s *History of the Conquest of Mexico* (61). Maud states that Olson uses history (particularly Cortez) in “The Kingfishers” to examine both tradition and violence. I argue that these human institutions are both triggered and reconciled by the energy of the human body, as illustrated by the jumping alignment of the stanzas on the page.

In “Projective Verse,” Olson identifies hearing as an explicitly cognitive activity, because it belongs solely to the brain. Accordingly, the opening of the above passage in section II – the command to “hear” – indicates the danger that is to come. The ear is an inadequate instrument to “hear / hear, where the dry blood talks / where the old appetite walks,” which is why the next stanza exemplifies the pinnacle of human confusion and treachery. The voice of Hernando Cortez, the “conquistador” whom Olson speaks of negatively throughout the poem, is indented so far on the page that it is visually imbalanced. Most unsettlingly, further, is that Cortez, like Mao in section I, does not speak in his native tongue. Combined with the invocation to “hear,” the juxtaposition of Italian upon what should be Spanish is evidence of neurosis. Though heeding the calls of the “old appetite” could lead one to the Jungian image of wholeness, it is impossible to solely get there cognitively, through the “hearing” that destroyed Cortez.

The passage does not end on such a dire note, however, as the next stanza provides a complete return to the left-hand margin in an attempt to look further into the past, before Cortez, to the cradle of mankind. In contrast with the opening stanza of the passage, this one does not begin with an invocation to “hear.” In fact, it does not open

with a verbal sensory command at all. It starts with the quiet, implicit call to be aware of one's own body, where "it" (the old appetite) "hides." Though it is followed by the command to "look," Olson clarifies *where* to look, which he did not in the first stanza. The answer, Olson is saying, is to look inwardly. The stanza starts with "where," the beginnings of a question, and immediately answers its own inquiry by starting the following two lines with the answer, "in." The answer is "in the eye," "in the flesh," and throughout the human body itself. "Know yourself" has now become a call to understand the "old appetite" of prehistoric man, recognizing the energy of its presence and "how it runs" through one's own body.

Unsurprisingly, the recognition flowing from the powerful third stanza visually reconciles the preceding two. The fourth stanza is exactly centered between the left-margin and right-margin extremes, providing a Jungian unity of opposites. After one has discovered that truly "knowing oneself" occurs through introspection of the body and mind, Olson makes it possible to peer "under the petals" of the human boundary of skin, and into the very "emptiness," where he begins to posit on the location of the unconscious. He says that there is "light" in this emptiness, where "the flower" can arise. Flowers, like circles, are Jungian symbols of the perfect wholeness of self. The "light" is the unconscious, the "emptiness" is the spaces and cavities of the human body where Olson later places the unconscious in "Proprioception," and the "flower" is the wholeness that can grow due to the balance of light and dark, of mind and body.

Ralph Maud, in his book on "The Kingfishers," only mentions "Proprioception" once briefly, stating that Olson's definition of proprioception is to "know thyself" on an "instinctive physical level" (82). While I certainly agree that the E on the stone, the

“feed-back” of “The Kingfishers,” and “Proprioception” are all broadcasting the same message of “know thyself,” I believe Maud’s perfunctory treatment of the correlation between the two poems leaves much to be desired. Though he provides an entire chapter on the development of the Self in Olson’s “The Kingfishers,” he only mentions Carl Jung once in a footnote, saying that Olson “could have been aware” of the archetypal importance that Jung places on the Delphic oracle. Olson was very aware of Jungian philosophy through his writing *The Fiery Hunt*, and would have had, as a result, a sturdy Jungian foundation throughout his writing of “The Kingfishers,” which took place less than a year after his writing of the dance-drama. “Proprioception,” an undeniably Jungian poem, is very intimately linked to “The Kingfishers,” as Maud points out, in theme. It seems evident that “The Kingfishers” is therefore, if not overtly, unconsciously Jungian.

“Proprioception” is different from Olson’s previous poem only in that it explicitly states what “The Kingfishers” declares implicitly. In “Proprioception,” Olson overtly declares that “the soul is proprioceptive,” meaning it has “SENSIBILITY WITHIN THE ORGANISM / BY MOVEMENT OF ITS OWN TISSUES.” In “The Kingfishers,” Olson states

not accumulation, but change, the feed-back proves, the feed-back is  
the law

Into the same river no man steps twice

When fire dies air dies

No one remains, nor is, one

Olson's "feed-back" occurs in "The Kingfishers" only because change is possible. What "Proprioception" alludes to outright and "The Kingfishers" implies is a dependence on the human body's physiological reliance upon self-regulation to create what biologists call dynamic equilibrium.

Proprioceptors have a very real purpose within the body. Almost every life process that human beings take for granted, such as digestion, body temperature regulation, and blood pH regulation is controlled by some type of feed-back mechanism. Though some of these feed-back reactions are chemical in nature, many are also proprioceptive, meaning that the human body itself recognizes how it is moving, and uses the information it receives to either inhibit or enhance the reaction taking place. The process of childbirth is a prime example of the body's ability to monitor its own activities and achieve a desired end through feed-back. Proprioceptors in the uterine wall "know" that a contraction is occurring, and release oxytocin, a hormone, into the blood-stream, where it will encourage more contractions. This process will repeat until the desired end occurs: the child is born. The example of childbirth is that of a "positive" feed-back loop, meaning that the effects of the regulation are amplified until the end is reached. Many more of the body's feed-back loops are "negative," such as blood pH and body temperature, meaning that they inhibit the escalation of any situation in favor of homeostasis.

Homeostasis, composed of word roots for both "same" and "standing," is a rather misleading term. Though bodily characteristics may appear to be fixed (i.e. body temperature remaining at 98.6 degrees F), it is only because the body is always changing, adjusting, and fluctuating that such attributes seem stable. This dynamic equilibrium is

made possible by proprioceptors throughout the body that regulate its activities and keep it, in a word that both Jung and Olson would like, centered. Neither proprioception nor feedback is “knowing thyself” in a merely “instinctive physical level” as Maud argues. It is knowing how to change while staying the same. In the passage above from section I.4 of “The Kingfishers,” Olson describes feed-back in terms of both balance and change, but places it in the immediate context of self-hood. Fire needs air to exist, but if an excess of either substance occurs, the fire will cease to exist. If proprioceptors did not work to maintain the delicate balance of the human body, the human being would not be stable on a physiological or psychological level. The failure of homeostasis within the body is, at the very least, illness. Even more grave, the inability to sustain dynamic equilibrium results in death. Olson understands the importance of the balance, saying that without it, “no one remains, nor is, one.”

Similarly stated in “Proprioception,” Olson expounds on the idea of feedback in “The Kingfishers,” combining the themes of balance and change in section I.4 with those of the “flower” in the darkness of section II. In “Proprioception,” Olson’s theme of dynamic selfhood is the same as “The Kingfishers,” but here, he takes on a dictionary-like form, which he highlights with Jungian terminology. He unconventionalizes this conventional form to critique a modern world too dependent on language, tradition, and definition that are all devoid of the numinosum experience. Here, we see Olson discuss two extremes, ultimately resolved in a discussion of selfhood, just as in “The Kingfishers” :

*Proprious*-ception

‘one’s own’-ception



the 'body' itself as, by movement of its own tissues, giving the data of, depth. Here, then, wld be  
the soul is what is left out? Or what is physiologically even  
proprioceptive the 'hard' (solid, palpable), that one's life is  
informed from and by one's own literal body –  
as well, that is, as the whole inner mechanism,  
which keeps us so damn busy (like eating, sleeping,  
urinating, dying there, by deterioration of sd  
'functions' of sd 'organs') – that this mid-thing  
between, which is what gets 'buried,' like, the  
flesh? bones, muscles, ligaments, etc., what one  
uses, literally, to get about etc

that this is 'central,' that is – in  
this ½ of the picture – what they call the SOUL,  
the intermediary, the intervening thing, the inter-  
ruptor, the resistor. The Self.

Here, again, we see "one's life" being "informed from and by one's own literal body."  
However, we also see Olson dividing bodily activities into two halves "of the picture,"  
implying that the entire human body itself is too broad of a location to place the  
unconscious.

One half of "the picture" that Olson creates is the "instinctive" physicality that  
Maud alludes to: the "whole inner mechanism, which keeps us so damn busy (like eating,  
sleeping, urinating, dying there...)," etc. All of these activities, in their most basic forms,

have absolutely no conscious value whatsoever. All humans must eat, sleep, urinate, and eventually die, regardless of whether they try to do otherwise. However, the other “half” that Olson presents immediately thereafter is the “bones, muscles, ligaments, etc., what one uses, literally, to get about etc.” These parts are instruments of motion, but more importantly, instruments of choice. They can be used, not used, used properly, or used improperly. Muscles, ligaments, and bones, therefore, can be thought of as the intersection between thought and motion.

Olson speaks of this exact point of intersection, referring to it as “this mid-thing between,” which is not present in the perfunctory activities of eating, sleeping, etc. This “mid-thing” is both “central,” in that its location is in the center, between thought and motion, but it is also “central” in that it is of utmost importance. The center, Olson goes on to say in accordance with Jung, is both “the SOUL” and “the self.” These two words are often interchangeable, and both represent the “intervening thing” in the body that allows it to carry out dynamic equilibrium, constantly changing to remain the same.

The question then arises, what exactly *is* the soul? It is relatively simple to understand its function, but difficult to visualize. Since Olson says that the soul/self exists as a mediator within the body, it is no surprise that he later says that “the ‘soul’ then is equally ‘physical.’” It exists within the body, but it is not solely tissue, for it is not just “flesh” that ultimately “gets ‘buried.’” It is something more holistic, a combination of factors, which Olson subsequently defines:

...the three terms wld be:

surface (senses) projection

cavity (organs – here read ‘archtypes’)

unconscious the body itself – consciousness:

implicit accuracy, from its own energy as a state of

implicit motion.

The soul *is* “the body itself,” not merely tissue, flesh, and muscles, but a living, proprioceptive, and holistic body that is far more than the sum of its parts. This living entity can either exercise control over its own functions (consciousness: muscular movement), or be completely devoid of control over its activities (unconsciousness: digestion, breathing). What Olson is saying is that the human body is essentially a microcosm of the universe.

The human body is like the universe because of its unconscious elements, conscious elements, and every shade of mixture between the two. The first of the three parts, the “surface,” can be thought of as simple sensory intake, a predominantly conscious activity. Olson immediately equates it with “discrimination (of the object from the subject),” which is the polar opposite of the unconscious’ “participation mystique,” where identity and consciousness somehow become the same as the object with which one is identifying. That kind of unconscious activity, Olson says, arises from the empty hollows within the body: the “cavity.”

Unlike Jung, who did not attempt to locate the unconscious, Olson places it in a very real place: the space within our own bodies. The organs, surrounded by unconsciousness, are therefore equated with the archetypes, or “archtypes,” as Olson says in shorthand. Archetypes, as described by Eileen Preston, “regulate instinctual energy and are at the same time the instincts’ inevitable fulfillment. Archetypes take their shape in consciousness as images with a very powerful mystical quality... [which] would

appear to be at variance with the nature of the corresponding instinct” (D’Aciermo 12-13). The organs, then, as archetypes, are the unity of common instinct with the highest of conscious thought.

Organs are, unsurprisingly, where proprioceptors are found throughout the body. Proprioceptors, located within organs, are therefore equated with the “intervening thing” between consciousness and unconsciousness that Olson discusses. It is because of proprioceptors that we can coordinate muscle movement, retain muscle tone, and allow the other organs of the body to “know” where they are in relation to other organs, and whether they must flex or relax (Encyclopedia Britannica, “mechanoreception”). Proprioceptors are therefore fundamentally different than both exteroceptors, which coordinate sensory information from outside the living body (consciousness) and interoceptors, which interpret sensations from within the body itself (unconsciousness). These special kind of receptors are what Olson would view as the mechanisms who dwell in the “center,” synthesizing information from both within and outside of ones own “human universe,” and translating that into unified motion. Essentially, proprioception is taking what is available within the body, combining it with what affects the body from the outside, and making it of “USE,” a quality that Olson heralds throughout “Projective Verse.”

Just as Heisenberg encountered himself by delving into the mysteries of his famed Uncertainty Principle, so too does Olson encounter himself in his own physical body. The final third term, “unconscious the body itself – consciousness,” shows the human body as being entirely proprioceptive. It is, like the organs containing the proprioceptors themselves, sandwiched syntactically between the unconscious (cavity) and conscious

(surface senses). However, within that mediating role, "the body itself" is capable of forming its "own energy," and making its own "implicit motion." Essentially, proprioceptors not only maintain dynamic equilibrium within human body processes, but in Olson's poetry, coupled with Jung's psychology, they maintain homeostasis of the psyche, always changing to adjust for slight misalignments.

Being proprioceptive is thus, paradoxically, the willingness to know without knowing, or to be conscious of one's own unconsciousness. Paradoxes as a literary device are common throughout Olson's major works, particularly "The Kingfishers" and "Proprioception." The major theme of "The Kingfishers" is not only a paradox but the very first line of the poem: "What does not change / is the will to change." The kinetics that the paradox rests upon are very similar to the motion that the proprioceptors regulate. Implicit within a paradox is a two-way displacement of energy, thus exemplifying change, which is one half of the major theme of the poem. The other half, of course, is balance, which the paradox typifies as well. Olson's first line embodies the notion of balance particularly illustratively, as the slash separating the two halves of the paradox literally serves as a syntactical fulcrum, upon which both halves can maintain stability.

The slash also visually represents the "mid-thing" that regulates how much force flows in which direction. Because of their structure, paradoxes naturally deal with the unification of opposites and coordination of motion, just as proprioceptors do. They also are responsible for maintaining a state of dynamic equilibrium, similar to the feed-back mechanisms within the body. A paradox can never be truly static any more so than the visual representation of yin and yang of Eastern tradition can be thought of as motionless. Because both structures operate through the synthesis of opposites into one complete

whole, the two distinct entities are always “interplay[ing] on one another;” as one increases, the other decreases (Encyclopedia Britannica). Their forces interplay, therefore, in favor of balance in harmony, which the human body understands as homeostasis, or constantly changing to stay the same.

I would also argue that the final declaration and resolution of “The Kingfishers,” when viewed in context with “Proprioception,” is a paradox in disguise. The phrase “I hunt among stones” signifies the supposed ending of the poem, though it trails off without any finite trace of punctuation. By hunting among stones, what Olson is alluding to is the ancient E on the stone, which he mentions throughout the poem in various capacities, referencing both the stone itself and its commandment to “know thyself.” As Olson states in “The Kingfishers” itself, knowing oneself is a type of “feed-back” mechanism, which rests upon the same foundation of change and balance that the paradox does. We know that proprioception is knowing oneself in both a conscious and unconscious capacity, which is, again, a paradox. “Proprioception” has more to offer, however, than just a reconciliation between both the “instinctive” and “psychic” within the human body. In its last, paradoxical line, it offers an answer that synthesizes most of the major themes of his previous works into one compact phrase: “the unconscious is the universe flowing-in, inside.”

In this small declaration, Olson nods back to his famous pre-1952 essay, “Human Universe,” in which Olson seeks to overturn the inherited cephalic nature of Greek “UNIVERSE” of discourse. As I have discussed, he splits the one neurotic “UNIVERSE” into two distinct, yet cooperating universes: the human and the environment. In “Proprioception,” the universe is both “flowing-in,” implying an

external force, and already “inside” the human body, where it appears to reside. Here, again, there are two universes: that of the unconscious outside the body, and that of the unconscious within the cavities of the body.

The comma between “flowing-in” and “inside” is therefore a fulcrum very much like the slash in the opening line of “The Kingfishers,” regulating a dynamic balance of outside and inside. There is also, interestingly, a balance between consciousness and unconsciousness implicit even within Olson’s supposed “definition” of the unconscious. By distinguishing between the universe outside and the universe inside, Olson allows for the intellectual separation of “object from the subject,” which precedes the final declaration of the poem. However, in the meeting of the human universe and the environmental universe at the point where one is flowing-in, and the other, inside, is being projected out, is purely unconscious. This unconscious intersection of subject and object is another way of describing participation mystique; the point where self and other mysteriously become one. It is also therefore the point where the unconscious becomes collective, where in becoming one, unconsciousness becomes a shared history, present, and future with every other living being.

This final declaration, balanced by unconscious and conscious elements *is* what the E on the stone means when it says to “know thyself.” Olson highlights his intentions in linking the two, when presenting the final conclusions of “Proprioception.” He states explicitly that the “universe is one” identity, meaning that we can find ourselves not only by looking inward, but by looking out into our natural surroundings as well. A human being, therefore, must be a proprioceptor within the world, juggling the identity of the human universe within oneself with the universe outside as well. One must at all time

know one's own position in relation to the movements that one intends to make, and dynamically adjust to remain the same: resting on the fulcrum upon which the opposing pairs of unconsciousness and consciousness, syllable and line, human and environment, and self and other, balance.

### ***Conclusion***

Olson's later works are distinctly and thoroughly Jungian, as evident by his themes of change, balance, and unity of opposites, often expressed through the lens of an individual. Just as it is impossible to understand any poem without having a comfortable knowledge of the topics to which it alludes, Olson's works are impenetrable without a firm foundation in the works of Carl Jung. When the words "archetype," "self," or "unconscious" appear in any of Olson's poems, ignoring them comes at a price: the incomplete comprehension of the poem or group of poems.

Many scholars acknowledge the correlation of specific themes between Olson's pre and post-1952 poems, but oddly do not impose the title "Jungian" on the early poems. Despite scholarly agreement that Olson's early works pave the way for the others' conception, they fail to be united except through the ideologies of Carl Jug. The core problem that Olson addresses in all of his major early works is the self as both product of and creator of societal illnesses. The answer that Olson provides is thus a healing of the self through numerous routes: the reinvention of language, reintegration of the soma into cognitive activities, and ultimately, creating a dynamic balance by living and acting proprioceptively. Olson, a scholar and historian by nature, would not attempt to embark



on such a distinctly psychological task without consulting the works of at least one specialist. Though Olson is a talented poet whose works can certainly stand alone as brilliantly and artistically executed – even revolutionary – they cannot be fully understood without first looking towards Jung, the specialist of the self.

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