

Looking For Mr Wednesday: Towards An Odian Philosophical Framework

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Abstract

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The thesis explores the theory and praxis of Odianism in order to articulate the fundamentals of a possible philosophical framework underpinning the Odian paradigm of reality. It is argued that Odian magical praxis needs to be understood as a discrete category of experience offering a specific understanding of and a particular route to self-becoming.

Magic is a problematic category to define and shares fuzzy boundaries with a number of other concepts related to non-ordinary states of consciousness. The thesis seeks initially to clarify the specific nature of magic and to contextualise Odianism within the broader Western Mystery Tradition.

The main body of the thesis considers the philosophical framework proposed by contemporary Odianism. This narrowing of focus is inevitably limiting, but necessary to allow a sufficiently detailed examination of a particular approach to magical praxis.

The thesis explores Odian epistemological, ontological and ethical positions. Odian magical praxis is examined in the context of those philosophical perspectives. Particular attention is paid to the concept of Odian self-development or Self-becoming. It is argued that Odianism regards non-ordinary consciousness as essential to all forms of magical praxis. The thesis concludes by exploring the wider relevance and value of Odian perspectives and of magical praxis in general.

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iii. Note On The Text.

Many of the terms found within the thesis have a number of etymological cognates. Except where explicitly stated, terms have been rendered in Old Norse. Similarly, Old Norse orthography has been applied to proper names and associated terms.

Quotations from the *Edda* and the *Poetic Edda* have been taken from the Faulkes' (Sturluson, 1987) and Larrington (Larrington, 199) translations respectively, except where otherwise stated.

Where material is quoted in translation, the translator is provided in the bibliography. Where non-published translations have been used, this is made clear in the body of the thesis.

iv. Statement of Word-Count.

Total Word-Count: 101,125

Word-Count excluding Title-page, Abstract, Acknowledgements and Contents: 99,873

v. Acknowledgements

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This thesis will also serve as my Master Work within the Rune Gild and it is to the Gild, the Old Gods and the Master of Secrets that my work is dedicated.

:R↑R:

vi. Glossary

A:: A:: : The A:: A:: was an occult organisation established by Alastair Crowley. Initiates worked with a variety of magical and meditative techniques within a grading system that drew on the structure of the Order of the Golden Dawn.

Aesir: Within the Northern Tradition, the Gods belonged to either the Aesir or the Vanir. There are a number of theories about the basis for the separation between these two groups, but it is generally agreed (and etymologically supported) that the Aesir are the Gods of consciousness.

Alchemy: Most people are familiar with the concept of alchemy as a form of proto-chemistry. However, alchemy involves a range of practical experimental approaches such as Spagyrics (working with plant tinctures). Moreover, alchemical praxis often focuses on internal or Self-development as well as the generation of external effects.

Armanen: The term was coined by List to describe the earliest Priest/Magicians of pre-Christian Germania. Etymologically it can be associated with the word 'Yrmin' meaning 'Great' or 'Mighty' and other Proto-Germanic root words associated with divinity. The Armanen Runes proposed by List and are so-called because of List's belief that he had reconstructed from source materials the original rune meanings known by the Armanen or Herminonen people described by Tacitus in his *Germania* (Tacitus, 2010).

Ásatrú: This term refers to those who honour the Aesir and literally means, 'True to the Aesir'.

Asgard: One of the Nine Worlds, Asgard is the home of the Aesir group of Gods.

Aurum Solis: An occult order associated with the Western Mystery Tradition which was established in 1897.

Eddas: The Prose Edda and The Poetic Edda provide the primary source material for our understanding of Skaldic poetry and Scandinavian Mythology. The Prose Edda was written by Snorri Sturluson around 1220 CE and contains numerous references to

traditional poems describing the pre-Christian beliefs of the Norse Folk. The Codex Regius Manuscript which was compiled in the Thirteenth Century contains a number of unattributed traditional mythological narratives in poetic form. Following its rediscovery in 1643 it was referred to as the Poetic or Elder Edda.

Eormensyl/ Irminsul: Literally meaning ‘Great Pillar’, the Irminsul or Eormensyl represents the link between the Gods and the Folk and the innate connection between all forms of life in the Universe.

Erulian: This term is used within the Rune Gild to indicate a Rune Master or skilled Rune magician. This interpretation derives from the presence of the term ‘Ek Erilaz’ in a number of Migration Period Futhark inscriptions. This phrase can be translated as, ‘I, the Erulian’ and the Rune Gild interpretation presumes that ‘Erulian’ refers to mastery of runic inscriptions. However, academic research (Mees, 2003) indicates that ‘Erulian’ is a linguistic antecedent of ‘Earl’ and ‘Jarl’ and is most closely related to terms indicating a warrior.

Etins: The term ‘Etin’ is often translated as ‘giant’. However, the Etins are not all regarded as being physically giant-like. The giant nature of the Etin comes from their very singular nature and the power of the force that they represent (such as cold-ness for example). The Etins were among the first discrete entities to emerge into existence in the cosmogony of the Northern Tradition. It is also their status as early, unrefined forms of existence that gives them their giantish nature.

Folk: The term ‘Folk’ derives etymologically from the Old English word, ‘Folc’ which means ‘people’ or ‘multitude’. There are cognates for ‘Folk’ in most Germanic languages and the term has come to be used as a term that indicates the majority population often rendered as ‘common people’. Its use in modern times has tended to indicate non-privileged, but popular and enduring expressions within a given culture such as ‘folk-music’, ‘folk-tradition’ and ‘folk-religion’.

Thorsson (1996) describes the Folk as consisting of a range of relationships that begins with the family, and then extends to the Clan, the Tribe and ultimately the Nation. It is recognised within the Gild in practice, while not explicitly stated within its texts, that in a

contemporary context in which humanity is increasingly mobile and in which individuals develop their own personal cultural commitments, membership of such groupings and thus of a Folk is largely a matter of self-identification.

Within this thesis the term ‘Folk’ is used to reflect the terminology of the Gild and Heathenism more generally, it is used as a group term to refer to all those people who might potentially regard the Northern Tradition as reflecting their folk-heritage and culture. Consequently, the Folk can potentially refer to any and all people in the world, since the Rune Gild adopts a Universalist rather than an ethnically exclusionary approach to potential adherence to the Northern Tradition.

This is an inevitably fuzzy definition, but is perhaps best approached in terms of Wittgensteinian notions of ‘Family resemblance’ (Bilewicz & Bilewicz, 2012; Loobuyck & Jacobs, 2010) A member of the Folk in the context of this thesis would self-identify with one or more of the following qualities and/or commitments: Being of Northern European ethnicity; experiencing the world conceptually and linguistically through a Germanic language; adhering to beliefs and value systems that are of Northern European origin; regarding as one’s own cultural and physical heritage the physical culture (buildings, art, music and so forth) of Northern Europe.

Freya: One of the Vanic deities, Freya is associated with sexual desire and fertility both animal and vegetative. Like many deities in the Northern Tradition she is associated with certain animals: boars, cats, and falcons. Freya uses her sexual prowess to acquire the magical necklace Brisingamen from the dwarves. Freya is also a martial figure linked with both fighting (her mount is Hildisvíni (Battle-Boar) and death: She divides the slain warriors with Óðin, half of whom spend the afterlife in her hall, ‘Folkvang’ (‘The Field of the Folk’). Freya’s other key associations are with magic and wealth: Óðin learns the secrets of Seiðr magic from her and it is widely thought that Freya is the female figure known as Gullveig (‘Gold Greedy’) whose repeated burning by the Aesir leads to the war between the Aesir and the Vanir.

Freyr/ Yngvi-Freyr: The brother of Freya, Freyr is God of harmony, virility and growth. It is these qualities that lead to the association of Freyr with Kings, since his character and behaviour provided an exemplar for any leader of the **Folk** in the pre-Christian era. Freyr has a particularly close relationship with the Elves and this may also have relevance

for his association with Kingly qualities. Like Freya, Freyr is associated with the Boar, but also with antlered animals.

Futhark/ Futhorc: This term refers to a runic alphabet and is formed from the initial letter in the names of the first six rune staves in a given runic alphabet.

Fylgja/ Fetch: An element within the Self-complex, the Fylgja is connected to the Self-complex but can also act independently. While the normative consciousness exists in the phenomenal world, the Fylgja moves at will between various dimensions of reality. It is often perceived by an individual as an animal, a geometric pattern or a human figure of the opposite sex.

Galdor: This term refers to a particular form of magical working. The word itself is etymologically related to words meaning ‘spell’, ‘incantation’ and ‘sing’ or ‘chant’ in Old Norse, Old High German and Old English. In Odianism this term is used to refer to those magical works where the chanting or singing of certain combinations of sounds (which may or may not be actual words) is key to the effectiveness of the magic.

Gard: This term refers to a secure enclosure thus, ‘Asgard’ the secure enclosure inhabited by the Gods. As well as having a physical or geographical significance, the term Gard also has a psychological function. That which exists within the Gard is controllable and understood, while in the Uitgard (Outside the Gard) all known laws and paradigms of reality become subject to change. Óðin exemplifies the role of the Odian in his many journeys to the Uitgard in order to bring back new wisdom to the Folk.

Gildisbók: A key text within the Rune Gild, this book develops the themes of the *Nine Doors of Midgard* text (Thorsson, 2003). Much of the theoretical basis for the magical work of the Gild is provided within this text.

Ginnungagap: A key concept in Germanic cosmogony, the Ginnungagap refers to the state of the Universe before the creation of matter and energy. The term literally translates as ‘magically charged space’ or ‘Divinely charged space’.

Golden Dawn: The Order of the Golden Dawn was formed in 1888 by three members of the masonic ‘Societas Rosicruciana In Anglia’. The order claimed that its authority and teaching regarding practical magic rested on the so-called ‘cipher manuscripts’ although it is widely believed that the textual basis for the Golden Dawn was constructed by Westcott, one of the three founding members. There are a number of contemporary magical groups which are inspired and informed to some degree by the original Order.

Gnosis: Originally referring to knowledge of the ultimate ordering and content of the Universe, this term, when used by within contemporary esoteric discourse, refers to a particular state of consciousness in which magical work can be effectively carried out. Gnosis can be achieved by a range of practices, which can generally be separated into Inhibitory methods such as deep meditation and excitatory methods such as vigorous ritual dance. It is this state of consciousness that allows magical acts to achieve their desired effects.

Great Work: The Great Work refers to the ultimate aim of the magician within the Western Mystery Tradition described by Eliphas Levi as, ‘the creation of man by himself’ (1984). Different traditions attribute different specific outcomes, but in general terms this might be understood as the realisation of the individual’s full potential through magical means.

Hamingja: One of the elements of the Self-complex, the Hamingja refers to the luck or fortune of an individual. Rather than being a randomising factor in the life of individuals, Fortune is understood within the Northern Tradition as being meted out in relation and proportion to other characteristics of the Self-complex. The strength of one’s Hamingja is partly determined by the relationship with one’s Fylgja.

Heimskringla: Ostensibly a history of the Swedish line of Yngling Kings and the subsequent Norwegian rulers, Sturluson’s text also contains many references to the deities of the Northern Tradition and pre-Christian magical practices, albeit as understood through the cultural milieu in which Sturluson was writing.

Hávamál: One of the poems in the Poetic Edda, its title translates as ‘Sayings of The High One’. The main body of the poem consists of advice from Óðin, but it also deals directly with Óðin’s self-hanging and subsequent winning of the runes (stanzas 138-146). Odianism incorporates versions of this section of the Hávamál into its magical rituals. The concept of a sacrifice of ‘self to self’ described in this poem (stanza 138) is central to the Odian understanding of Self-becoming.

Heathen: A generic term to describe adherents of indigenous Northern European spiritual and cultural belief systems (The Northern Tradition). In the saga literature individuals were described as either belonging to the new religion of Christianity or as ‘Heiðni’, the latter term is the etymological source for the current term, ‘Heathen’.

Hel: This term refers to both the Goddess Hel and the location (one of the Nine Worlds) in which she resides. Hel as a location is not a place of punishment (this is a later Christian overlay), but a place of little to no activity at all. The dead who arrive in Hel simply slumber.

Hermetic Kabbala: The Kabbala began as a system of Jewish mysticism and from it sprang Christian Kabbala in the Renaissance, using the texts and methodology of Jewish Kabbala. Hermetic Kabbala is foundational to the Western Mystery Tradition and combines both Jewish and Christian Kabbala with a variety of other esoteric structures and methodologies including Egypto-Grecian Mystery Schools, astrology and alchemy.

Higher Self: This term is used by a range of esoteric systems and spiritualities to refer to that part of the Self-complex which is regarded as unchanging, infinite both temporally and in extension and through which an individual achieves a connection to the Divine. Within the Northern Tradition there is no such concept.

Holotropic: This term refers to a personal experience in which there is a felt sense of a movement towards wholeness. It is usually associated with a state of Non-Ordinary Consciousness in which the boundaries between the self and not-self become blurred.

Holy: In common usage this term is often used interchangeably with ‘Sacred’ and both terms suggest spiritual or divine power being associated with a person, place or object. However, Holy derives etymologically from Old English and has an innate connection to a sense of ‘wholeness’ and ‘health’. This is significant in understanding of the nature of the sacred in the Northern Tradition.

Life Meaning: Our ‘Life Meaning’ (Sharp, 2004) refers to the individual’s felt sense of their own meaning in the world and in relation *to* the world; the sum of all aspects that I might include when I identify that which constitutes my ‘I-ness’. It is dependent on the ‘felt’ meaning of an individual rather than any externally observed instrumental relations. It is both ontological and epistemological, encompassing the individual’s sense of being in the world and the framework within which that conception of being is known.

Magical praxis: Magic can be broadly understood as a praxis in which intended effects are achieved through means that are not wholly material or psychological. The causal power that allows a magical act to create the intended effect varies depending on the particular magical system or tradition and may include one or more of the Will of the magician, the necessary outcome of following prescribed ritual gestures and/ or incantations, the achievement of certain states of consciousness, and the intervention of trans-human entities. In many traditions the importance of magic lies not in the particular effect of a specific magical act, but in the internal changes that are felt to arise from engaging in magical acts.

Ceremonial Magic: A form of magic that is characterised by extended and carefully crafted rituals. The rituals are often created by the application of complex systems of sympathetic symbolism. For example, a ritual focused on developing the intellect might well incorporate symbolism linked to the number eight, the colour orange, deities such as the Egyptian Thoth/ Tahuti and the Greek Hermes, the planet Mercury and the Sephira Hod on the Kabbalistic Tree of Life.

Low Magic: A categorisation of magic that refers to magical acts whose intended outcome is entirely material. This categorisation would include magic intended to increase an individual’s wealth, their charisma or career position for example.

High Magic: A categorisation of magic that refers to magical acts whose purpose is to effect internal transformation or spiritual alchemy. The results of High Magic are not necessarily observable by anyone other than the magician.

Magical Revival: A term that is often used to reference the resurgence of interest in all manner of esoterica that lasted from the mid-Nineteenth Century through to the late 1930's.

Mead of Poetry: The mythical mead that was formed from the blood of Kvasir, a figure of immense wisdom. Óðin obtains the mead through his cunning and carries it while in the form of an eagle to Asgard. However, in doing so a small portion falls into Midgard thus allowing the frenzy of inspiration to be obtained by those humans who access this symbolic drink.

Midgard: One of the Nine Worlds of the Northern cosmology, Midgard literally translates as the 'middle – gard (enclosure)' and refers to the world or dimensional plane of humans.

Neo-Pagan: There is no single set of beliefs or established dogma that defines Neo-Paganism or unites its adherents. A very broad term, it refers to all beliefs that seek to reawaken the polytheistic and traditional spiritual beliefs of pre-Christian Europe.

New Age: The term can be used in a narrow sense to reference new spiritualities that are specifically concerned with the dawning of a new phase in human spiritual potential. However, it is often used in an extremely broad way as an umbrella term to describe a range of spiritual, magical and mystical practices and beliefs.

Non Ordinary Consciousness: This is an overarching term for various states of altered consciousness which arise through occult/mystical or spiritual practices, but not exclusively through those practices:

Spiritual Experience – Non Ordinary Consciousness that is experienced or conceptualised through a post hoc articulation as directed towards or engaged with a fundamental transpersonal reality.

Occult Experience – Non Ordinary Consciousness that is experienced as a result of specific magical/occult practices.

Holotropic Moment – Non Ordinary Consciousness that generates a felt experience of a movement towards wholeness and may or may not be occult in its methodological inception or spiritual as experienced by a subject.

Norns: The Norns are non-human entities that are concerned with the destiny or fate of individuals and groups. The Norns are not deities, but they do have the power to determine the flow of a person's life. There is considerable debate about the relationship of Norns to other female deities and quasi-divine mythological figures. What seems to set the Norns apart is that while they may be benevolent or malevolent they are generally not susceptible to any human attempts to influence their actions.

Northern Tradition: The spiritual and esoteric beliefs and practices that derive from the pre-Christian culture of North-Western Europe. There is a tendency to focus on traditions that are associated with the Germanic linguistic region, but Celtic and other non-Germanic traditions from this geographical region could be legitimately included within an understanding of the Northern Tradition.

Óðin\ Woden\ Wotan\ Mr Wednesday: Óðin and Óðin-like deities (Wotan, Woden) appear in a number of Northern European spiritual traditions. Óðin is a complex multifaceted deity. This is indicated by the plurality of names by which he is known, referring variously to his qualities as a hidden or disguised deity, magician, poet, protector, battle leader, ecstatic visionary, bale-worker and investigator of mystery.

Odian/ Odianism: In *The Nine Doors of Midgard* (2003, p.xv) Thorsson defines the Odian as:

One who does not *worship* Óðin (Woden), but rather emulates him . . . the Odian becomes himSelf. . . The Odian does not seek union with Óðin but

rather with his own unique self. . . The Odian is: bi-polar, egoistic, transformative and cooperative.

Odinist: Odinists are neo-pagans who honour Óðin as their primary deity. Most organised forms of Odinism such as the Odinic Rite and the Odinist Fellowship also recognise the other deities within the Northern Tradition such as Thor and Freya. While Thorsson argues for the specificity of Odianism its focus on magical self-development, Odinism also recognises the power of magical work.

ONA: The Order of Nine Angles or ONA is a contemporary Satanic group that promotes a praxis that is blatant in its rejection of accepted moral norms. The most extreme example of this is perhaps the ONA's advocacy of human sacrifice (Beest, 1992).

Ordo Templi Orientis (OTO): This quasi-masonic society is associated primarily with Alastair Crowley and the Thelemic (the religion created by/ revealed to Crowley) OTO is the dominant current incarnation of the order. The original OTO was based on the Memphis & Mizraim Masonic rite and based its praxis around sex-magic and meditative practices.

Ørlög: Etymologically this term derives from the concept of 'primal law' or 'primal layers'. Within Odianism it is regarded as referring to the inevitable and necessary consequences of actions in the world. This consequential principle does not imply a moral basis to the primal law, but simply the existence of causal relationships that are beyond the power of any individual to amend or escape. Each individual, family, tribe and folk generates an Ørlög and so at the level of an individual the working out of primal law will determine one's cultural inheritance as well as certain specifically personal qualities and events that will be encountered during the life of the individual.

Polarian: The notion of a Polarian method and of Odianism being a Polarian Tradition appears in a number of texts and talks by members of the Rune Gild. Godwin's *Arktos* (1996) provides a valuable introduction to the concept of Polarian perspectives within an esoteric context, but it is worth examining from a specifically Odian viewpoint. In *Rûnarmál* (1996 pp. 23-26) Flowers details the application of the Polarian method in the

context of Odianism. The key to a Polarian approach lies in the view that holistic balance is achieved through simultaneous occupation of extremes (or poles), or dynamic oscillation between them rather than occupying a position that sits equidistant from both extremes. This immediately highlights the notion of Odianism as an active path with the individual as agent. The Polarian approach manifests itself in a number of ways such as the injunction to combine subjective passion or ecstasy with objective precision and clarity in magical workings, or the combination of extreme individualism with an absolute obligation to effect change in Midgard.

Ragnarök: Translated as either, ‘The fate of the Gods’ or, ‘The final destiny of the Gods’, Ragnarök refers to a series of events that take place in the Nine Worlds during which the Aesir and Vanir battle various opposing forces leading to the death of many of the Aesir and Vanir. Within Odianism Ragnarök is not understood as a final apocalypse, but as one more phase within an eternal temporal cycle or spiral.

Rune: It is important to distinguish between the two terms ‘Rune’ and ‘Rune-stave’. Rune does not have an exact translation but may stem from root terms ‘reu’ meaning to roar or to whisper and ‘Rûn’ meaning secret. We can find etymologically linked words in a range of Northern European early languages including Gothic, Old English, Middle Welsh and Old High German (Thorsson, 1987). Barnes (2012) also notes the possibility that ‘rune’ is etymologically associated with words relating to the act of digging into a surface or carving. The term stave refers to a symbol representing a particular rune.

Rune Gild: The Rune Gild is an organisation concerned with the practical, esoteric exploration of the Northern Mysteries from an Odian perspective. It is structured in the manner of a traditional trade guild rather than an occult order with members progressing from apprenticeship through to mastery.

Rune Row: This term describes a complete Futhark/ Futhorc or runic ‘alphabet’, so the Elder Futhark of 24 rune staves may also be referred to as a ‘rune row’ of 24 staves or the Elder Rune Row.

Runology: The scholarly study of runes irrespective of whether the runes are approached as a form of proto-alphabet of solely linguistic interest or are regarded as a magico-spiritual symbol system is referred to as Runology.

Sacred/ Holy: Places, objects and individuals can be regarded as possessing the innate spiritual power implied by the terms sacred or holy. Within the Northern Tradition the concept of the sacred and holiness are represented by the terms, ‘Wihaz’ and ‘Hailagaz’. The distinction between these two terms is explored in more depth within the body of the thesis. In simple terms, Wihaz refers to both the power of that which is sacred and its setting apart from that which is not Wihaz, while Hailagaz (from which the term holy is derived) refers to a sense of wholeness (Misarnu, 2011; Polomé, 1997). Thus, the sacred status of a location or object or indeed a person derives from its ‘wholeness’.

Skald: Poetry has a very special value in the Northern Tradition, Bragi, for example, is welcomed into Valhalla because of his poetic skill. A poet who worked within the complex and precise rules governing traditional alliterative poetry was known as a skald.

Skuld: In simple terms, Skuld refers to the concept of the Future. However, it is also the name of one of the three Norns who are concerned with the flow of temporality in the Northern Tradition. Skuld refers to a Present that is yet to occur but which will occur if current circumstances continue.

Self-Complex: The Odian model of the Self consists of a number of elements, all of which contribute to a holistic totality. The term Self-complex is used to reflect the fact that Self-becoming within Odianism refers to the development of multiple components of a complex identity. The elements of the Self-Complex include the ‘Lík (material body), the ‘Hugr’ (seat of the Will and consciousness), the ‘Minni’ (the memory), the ‘Hamr’ or ‘Hyde’ (provides the physical shape of an individual and how an individual is perceived, which can be used in ‘shape-shifting’ magic), the ‘Hamingja’ (magical power and luck), the ‘Óðr’ or ‘Woð-Self’ (the faculty of ecstasy), the ‘Önd’ or ‘Athem’ (the vital breath), the ‘Ørlög’ (a causative function that plays a part in the determination of the individual’s Wyrd), the ‘Fylgja’ or ‘Fetch’ (a semi-independent non-corporeal aspect), the ‘Sál’ (that

aspect of the Self that may persist after death) and the ‘Ek’ (the ‘I’, the locus of consciousness through which the Self-complex is experienced).

Seiðr: Seiðr is a specific magical praxis within the Northern Tradition. It is focused on a trance based approach in which the practitioner becomes open to the influence and to communications from trans-human entities.

Seiðkona: This term refers to a female practitioner of Seiðr magic.

Sigils: A sigil is a symbolic depiction of the intent of a magical practitioner that is used as the focus of a magical work. A sigil may be usefully compared to those symbols that are recognisable magical symbols such as pentagrams. However, a sigil is designed by the practitioner. It often consists of a pictorial arrangement of certain letters within the phrase that summarises the intent of a particular magical work. The key function of a sigil is to provide a focus for the work by symbolically representing in a single image the intent of the magician.

Solve et Coagula: Originally a term from alchemy, this literally means ‘dissolve and coagulate’. In spiritual alchemy and many other esoteric practices this expression is used to refer to the process by which the individual first destroys all aspects of the self in order that the holistic self may be ‘rebuilt’ in the light of the wisdom gained through various magical practices.

Tantric Tradition: Tantra refers to a set of practices that emerged around the Fifth Century CE in India. Tantra requires practice rather than belief and its purpose is the achievement of spiritual insight and liberation. There is no definitive list of necessary practice elements, but tantric praxis will usually involve meditation, mantra chanting, the use of symbolic gestures and the use of symbolic diagrams. In Right Hand Path Tantra (Dakshinachara) praxis does not conflict with main-stream Hindu values, whereas in Left Hand Path (Vamachara) Tantra praxis will also include ritual practices such as the consumption of meat, or ritualised sexual activity. The Left Hand Path is regarded as a swifter route, but one that is not suited for most people to attempt.

Theodism: An approach to Heathenry that also includes a concern for the reconstruction of social structures and cultural beliefs alongside the commitment to the specifically religious or spiritual focus that Theodism shares with Ásatrú.

Theurgic: This term describes an approach to magical praxis in which divine powers are called upon by the magician in the enacting of magic.

Thurses: The Thurses are a type of giant or Etin who live in Jötunheimr, ‘Home of the Etins’. The label ‘Thurses’ tends to be restricted to those Etins who are both powerful and represent unconscious or unreflective forces.

Troth: An important virtue or ‘Thew’ in the Northern Tradition, Troth refers to loyalty. A person or group may be described as being truthful to a tribal deity or to set of values for instance. The term ‘true’ is described from ‘troth’ and we might therefore regard Truth within the Northern Tradition as being as much about that which commands loyalty as it is about the extent to which the veracity of any claim can be established.

Urðr: In simple terms Urðr refers to the past. However, it is also the name of a Norn. The Norns are a type of Dísir (female trans-human entities) that influence the destiny of individuals and groups. The individual Norn Urðr is responsible for the movement of events into the past and their on-going influence.

Valknútr: A symbol consisting of three triangles interlaced either as a unicursal or tricursal arrangement. The Valknútr translates as ‘the knot of the slain’, although the name is a modern appellation. The positioning of the Valknútr in archaeological finds suggests a close association with Óðin in his role as a psychopomp, while the numerical symbolism of three, nine and twenty seven has encouraged the use of the Valknútr within Odian workings.

Valkyjur: The Valkyjur or Valkyrie are literally ‘the choosers of the slain’ and select Freya’s share of the dead following the conclusion of a battle. They have also been linked with the Fylgja concept.

Vanatrú: Those heathens whose primary commitment is to the deities of the Vanir are described as being Vanatrú or ‘trothful to the Vanir’.

Vanir: A group of Scandinavian deities who are primarily associated with organic processes, fertility and wisdom. While the Aesir are regarded as gods of consciousness and human social organisation, the Vanir are associated with natural processes.

Verðandi: In simple terms Verðandi refers to the present moment. However, it is also the name of a Norn who plays a role in determining the particular nature of the present that is experienced by a given individual or group. This Norn represents the inherent unpredictability of our experience of the moment; whatever we might discern as likely from analysis or an understanding of our Wyrd, the Norn Verðandi has the power to bring in the unexpected.

Vitki: The magician within the Northern Tradition may be known by various terms. The generic term is ‘Vitki’ (literally ‘Wise one’), but one might also be a Galdor magician or Seiðr worker (Plowright, 2006; Thorsson, 2005).

Volva: A term that refers to a female magician within the Northern Tradition

Wicca: The most well-known form of neo-paganism, Wicca was created by Gerald Gardner and others in the 1940’s as an attempt to re-introduce pre-Christian religious beliefs. Magic is integral to Wicca, Gardner referred to his reconstruction of traditional beliefs as ‘The Witch Cult’ (Heselton, 2003).

Gardnerian Wicca: The growth of multiple schools of Wiccan praxis and lineages has led to the use of the Gardnerian Wicca, or British Traditional Wicca to indicate adherence to the original Gardnerian theory and praxis.

Alexandrian Wicca: Although its founder, Alex Sanders was only initiated into the First Degree of Gardnerian Wicca, Alexandrian Wicca is often regarded as a form of British Traditional Wicca. Its praxis is less prescriptive in some respects than Gardnerian Wicca

and it draws widely on ceremonial magic ritual practices. However, in its fundamentals it is very similar to Gardnerian Wicca.

Eclectic Wicca: Eclectic Wicca describes approaches to contemporary Wiccan praxis in which beliefs and practices from a range of spiritual traditions, or indeed those entirely constructed by the individual, form the basis for an individual's practice.

Western Mystery Tradition: This term is commonly used in academic discussions of occulte as well as by practitioners. It refers to the study and practice of various forms of Kabbala, ceremonial magic, astrology, alchemy and the tarot.

Will: The concept of the will is often referenced within discussions of magical praxis, but rarely defined with any clarity. In magical terms the will of an individual might be regarded as synonymous with the intent or desire of an individual with regard to a specific outcome or result. However, the use of 'Will' suggests that the intent is based on a deep understanding of the goals or destiny of the individual that goes beyond the surface ego-based sense of intent or desire. Will is also used in an instrumental sense to explain the effectiveness of magical work, magical effects are seen as being created by the 'will' of the individual. In this context the will refers to the power by which an intent or desire can be projected or manifested by an individual.

Woð-Self: The term 'Woð' provides the linguistic root for 'Óðin' and refers to a state of inspired frenzy or ecstatic consciousness. While there are strong similarities between the concepts of ecstasy and frenzy, there is a sense of joy and a connectedness to things implied by the concept of ecstasy, while the concept of frenzy indicates overwhelming and uncontrolled excitation of consciousness without any particular emotional state being implied. The Self-complex within Odianism contains a module or element that represents the capacity for this kind of quasi-shamanic state of consciousness. The individual who emulates Óðin in learning how to inhabit this state of consciousness may be said to be experiencing and acting in the world through his/ her Woð-Self.

Wyrd: A concept that is often misunderstood as negatively fatalistic, Wyrd refers to the consequences that flow from our actions as well as the actions of others including trans-

human entities. Wyrd is etymologically linked with words related to concepts of turning and so we can think of our Wyrd turning over time and being shaped on an on-going basis by a number of influences. Wyrd is not a simply law of physical cause and effect, it can be very difficult to determine one's Wyrd as the forces that influence its turning are multiple and complex.

Yggdrasil: Many cultures have a cosmic tree at the heart of their cosmology (Evola, 1995) and within the Northern Tradition this tree is known as Yggdrasil. This literally means, 'the horse of Ygg'. Since Ygg is one of the many names of Óðin we can understand Yggdrasil as 'Óðin's horse'. There are strong associations between the horse and the concept of the Fylgja and so there is a suggestion within Odianism that Yggdrasil as the world-tree represents the Fylgja of Óðin and thus that the manifestation of the nine worlds is literally an element of Óðin's Self-complex. It has been suggested, although the source materials refer only to a 'windy tree', that Yggdrasil is the tree on which Óðin hangs for nine nights in an ecstatic magical state in order to win the runes (Kure, 2006; Metzner, 1980; Schnurbein, 2003) and this is the view taken within Odianism and reflected in the body of the thesis. Thus, Óðin comes to know the ultimate Mysteries by binding himself to his Fylgja, suggesting that the Mysteries are to be found within the Self-complex.

Ymir: A mythological entity who was the first distinct being to arise from the meeting of Fire and Ice in the Ginnungagap. Ymir is the ancestor of all giants or Etins and ultimately of Óðin. Ymir is not portrayed as a conscious or reflective entity and is murdered by Óðin in order that the physical universe can be made from his dismembered body. We might regard Ymir as the emergence of life or the capacity for life, but not a differentiated specific life-form itself.

Yrmin Drighten: Deriving from the term 'Drighten' meaning 'a leader' and 'Eormen' meaning 'whole' or 'universal', the Yrmin Drighten is a title used within the Rune Gild to refer to the leader of the Gild as a whole.

1. Introduction

1. The Thesis Structure

Practical occultism is not an area of human experience with which most people are familiar and there is still less familiarity with specific forms of occultism such as **Odianism**; an approach to Mystery inspired by the example of **Óðin**. The multiplicity of names or ‘heiti’ by which Óðin is known gives some indication of his complexity. Óðin is not only ‘All-Father’ and ‘Mr Wednesday’ (from Wotanstag or Woden’s day) he is also the ‘Father of Lies’, the ‘Hidden One’ and a ‘Bale Worker’.

In its simplest terms this thesis attempts the beginnings of a philosophical framework that might be derived from the theory and practice of Odianism. In addition to reflecting the explicit philosophical positions expressed by Odianism, the thesis seeks to determine those philosophical positions that are implied, but not articulated. The thesis does not attempt a sociological or anthropological analysis of Odianism, but is focused on the philosophical analysis of the core Odian texts and is perhaps best situated within the general field of transpersonal psychology in its approach to magical praxis.

A glossary has been included, immediately preceding this introduction in order to assist readers who may not be familiar with the technical lexicon of occultism in general and Odianism in particular. Terms that are explained within the glossary are shown in bold text the first time that they appear within the thesis.

For the purposes of this thesis the term ‘Odian’ should be understood as referring to the practices, values and beliefs of the Rune Gild as expressed through its published materials as a body and by those materials which are therein referenced as being of relevance. The majority of these materials are written by Stephen Flowers, sometimes under his pseudonym or magical name, Edred Thorsson.

The term ‘Odian’ is Thorsson’s invention and is based on the word ‘Óðr’ meaning ‘ecstasy’ or ‘inspiration’ rather than being derived from ‘Óðin’. It is, to my knowledge,

used as a self-description only by members of the Rune Gild. The choice of the term, ‘Odian’ is explained to members of the Gild as having been chosen to indicate the Rune Gild’s focus on the development of the ‘Óðr’ (ecstatic, inspired) aspect of the Self. Granholm, (2009, p.94) notes the Rune Gild’s claim that the Odian is distinguished from the Odinist due to a desire to emulate Óðin through magical self-development. However, while there is no requirement for an Odinist to engage in magical work, Odinism accepts the validity of magic and many Odinists actively engage with Galdor magic, runic divination and so forth. Odianism’s distinctiveness from Odinism is nuanced rather than stark and in many ways is a matter of different degrees of emphasis on certain practices rather than an absolute or necessary difference.

In *The Nine Doors of Midgard* (2003, p.xv) Thorsson defines the Odian as:

One who does not worship Óðin (Woden), but rather emulates him . . . the Odian becomes himSelf . . . The Odian does not seek union with Óðin but rather with his own unique self. . . The Odian is: bi-polar, egoistic, transformative and cooperative.

Thorsson goes on to explain that bipolarity represents a rejection of moral dualism and of favouring any one extreme over another in general. The Odian seeks to occupy both extremes co-incidentally. Thus this aspect of Odianism can be seen as dualistic, but in a peculiar manner in that each pole is accepted and recognised on its own terms.

If the Odian is committed to an extreme individualism, then it is only in keeping with the first value of bi-polarity that he also commit to a cooperative approach with other seekers of Rûna. Moreover, the commitment to cooperation also extends to an implicit duty to the **Folk** as a whole.

The Odian is not a mystic, although the Mysteries are a key goal after which he strives, but is first and foremost an individual who is seeking to manifest particular types of change. Consequently, Thorsson ends his description of the nature of the Odian with a note that what really matters are the achieved ends: ‘Knowledge, power, wisdom, self-transformation and service to folk’ (2003, p.xvii).

It was important to include a chapter that closely addresses the overall context of occultism and the narrower **Northern Tradition** within which **Odianism** can be located. This chapter (Chapter 3) provides a categorisation of various concepts which fall within the purview of occultism and in setting the background against which the research is undertaken may be regarded as a Literature Review of sorts.

Subsequent chapters then take the reader through the philosophical perspectives implied by Odian theory and praxis. Firstly, an epistemology section explores an Odian theory of knowledge. This leads to a consideration of consciousness itself; the means by which both being and knowing come to be conceptualised and experienced. Having proposed how things may come to be known an Odian ontology explores the nature of reality that is implied by an Odian epistemological model.

The thesis then shifts from a consideration of frameworks to an examination of the actuality of **magical praxis**. An exploration of Odian magic raises a number of questions regarding the framework of ethical values within which that magical praxis is undertaken. A closer examination of the Odian model of Self Development completes the thesis.

Non Ordinary Consciousness is of particular importance throughout the thesis as this is the mode in which magical practice occurs. Mysticism tends to focus on the ‘holotropic’ (Grof, 1976; Grof 2000) but occultism proposes a range of Non-ordinary states of consciousness with differing functions and qualities.

2. The occult nature of occultism

The term ‘occult’ can be defined as that which is hidden or secret. The precise meaning of ‘occult’ along with related terms such as ‘esoteric’ and ‘magic’ has been the subject of significant debate (Granholm, 2014). For the purposes of this thesis, ‘Occultism’ refers to a broad range of beliefs and practices that are based in a commitment to the existence of secret or hidden truths and sources of power, which can only be fully understood or utilised through a specialised, often highly secretive, praxis. Occultism is concerned with secret truths, hidden realities and mysterious powers. Occult practices are those activities which attempt to access those mysterious powers and hidden truths. Occult practices are concerned with both the inner development of the practitioner and with causing change in

the world at large. A commitment to the mysterious and supra-rational are intrinsic to occultism and separate occult practices from other practices such as psychotherapy or even microbiology which could both be said to be practices that uncover hidden truths and realities. Most forms of occultism have a strong spiritual dimension and almost all forms of occultism require a commitment to multiple levels of existence or reality, often populated with trans-human entities, that can only be perceived after a degree of proficiency in occult praxis has been achieved.

In recent times a commitment to the validity of occult praxis has been a potentially dangerous position to adopt; being regarded by some as evidence of mental disturbance (American Psychiatric Association, 1994). The suspicion of alternative belief structures is not restricted to the world of medicine; we can find examples of similar bias at work in custody decisions for instance (Lee, 2008). Dearden's epistemic definition of controversiality (1984, p.86), requires that contrary positions about a given topic must not be contrary to reason. I would argue that a belief in the effectiveness of occult practices should be regarded as controversial rather than unreasonable. An emphasis on the grounds of disagreement is also a feature of Rawls's attempt to illuminate the nature of reasonable disagreement between reasonable persons via the notion of the 'burdens of judgement' (Dearden 1984 pp. 86-87; Bridges 1986 pp. 21-22; Rawls 1993 pp. 54-58). The view that occultism is contrary to reason would raise a fundamental objection to the validity of the thesis, but if instead occultism is regarded as controversial, then there is a value in assisting the development of a rigorous debate regarding the paradigm of reality proposed by occultism.

It should be recognised that there is a growing academic interest in certain aspects of occultism. However, for the most part the academic study of occultism does not concern itself with the potential validity of occultism as a means of understanding and engaging with the world. The University of Amsterdam maintains a Centre for the History of Hermetic Philosophy & Related Currents (<http://www.amsterdamhermetica.nl/#>) and a number of other institutions offer PhD supervision and Masters' courses in the historical, sociological and anthropological study of Western Esoteric Traditions. These developments may indicate a gradual recognition that study of the esoteric allows us to shine a light on a largely unexplored area of human activity. The field of Transpersonal

Psychology has as much relevance for this thesis as the study of esotericism. While the latter tends to take a historical or anthropological approach to the field of human activity and belief of which Odianism is a particular example, the former discipline engages with issues such as non-ordinary consciousness, holotropic experiences and perceptual models of knowing that are important to an experiential understanding of magical praxis. There is a growing need for new methodologies with which to explore and conceptualise subjective consciousness (Shear, 1997) and this includes the spiritual and transpersonal dimension, of which occultism, in most of its forms, may be deemed to be a part.

My philosophical commitments are broadly phenomenological and consequently have some sympathy with related methodologies such as Garfinkel's Ethnomethodology (2002) in which the ordering and/or categorisation of social interactions is given by participants, or the Grounded Theory of Glaser (1992) who argues against the use of literature reviews in order to allow the social praxis being studied to be seen more clearly on its own terms. In keeping with the commitment to the need to understand phenomena phenomenologically; that our enquiries should exclude as far as possible that which is external to the object of our enquiry; I would argue for the importance of an emic approach to Occultism and a degree of caution about the extent to which etic categorisations, while providing a valuable means by which comparisons and categorisations may be formed, unavoidably lose something of the specific nature of the praxis under consideration. If a combination of emic and etic perspectives provides the most balanced approach then I would argue that there is a need to establish emic articulations of occultists' paradigms of reality, as given by the implied philosophical framework of their particular praxis. This need is demonstrated by the limited understanding in some contemporary sociological accounts of sacral acts, for example, whereby, the act of sacrifice is considered in terms of a typology based around resource access and consumption (Bruce & Voas, 2007). Hope & Jones' 2006 paper is similarly problematic, in arguing that paganism should be understood as an entirely modern phenomenon, the paper conflates Paganism, **Gardnerian Wicca**, **Eclectic Wicca** and **Runology**, while confining its empirical research to a group of practitioners of an extremely eclectic form of Wicca.

3. Background to the research

I have a strong personal interest in carrying out this research as I have been a practising occultist for over twenty years. My practical investigations into the world of occultism have brought me into contact with a variety of groups and a range of methodologies for achieving both internal and external results.

The fact that occult practice proposes an alternative paradigmatic view of the possible does not mean that it should be free from rigorous critical examination. The explosion of so-called **New Age** systems in recent years represents a growing concern with the transpersonal, but has also seen the growth of a heavily commercialised exploitation of this desire for spiritual growth. On a very personal level it is my hope that this thesis demonstrates both the possibility and the importance of engaging with occult practices in an intellectually rigorous fashion.

The formal process of research began with a paper given to an International conference on the spiritual dimensions of counselling and experiential psychotherapy (Sharp, 2004). In this paper I sought to utilise the Husserlian category of the eidetic mode of perception in order to fit the non-ordinary consciousness that lies at the heart of the magical or mystical experience into a wider philosophical framework. This initial paper was mainly concerned with presenting a philosophical framework which allowed for the actuality of spiritual experience as a separate category of consciousness. In producing this paper I encountered, in my own personal reflections, a number of questions about the nature of non-ordinary consciousness in relation to occultism.

A key aspect of my research is an exploration of the question, ‘what lies behind what occultists do?’ When I began exploring this question it became apparent that my proposed field of study would need to be significantly narrowed. In order to achieve any depth of understanding it would be necessary to focus on one particular occult tradition. I decided to look exclusively at Odianism since it is the particular tradition within which I am working and to which I am committed.

The central focus of the thesis will be on the writings of Edred Thorsson/ Stephen Flowers who is the **Yrmin Drighthen** of the **Rune Gild**, but works of other Masters and Fellows within the Gild will be drawn on also. In addition to those contemporary sources,

writings of earlier practitioners within the **Northern Tradition** will be considered as relevant to the Odian approach, as will primary sources such as the **Eddas** (Larrington, 1999; Sturluson, 1987, 1990).

This narrowing of focus solves a practical problem in terms of the limitations to what can be usefully considered within the word limit of a doctoral thesis. However, it creates the danger that my thesis becomes my subjective interpretation as an Odian practitioner. There are methodological approaches that would see such a wholly personal approach as valid, either because of the ‘thickness’ of data that would be generated for future analysis or due to an ideological position that denies the possibility of any kind of shared reality (Bochner, 2001; Ellis & Bochner, 2000; Laslett, 1999; Wall, 2006). I have some sympathy for these positions, but my aim in this work is primarily to attempt to articulate the philosophical framework that is implied by the key texts that might be regarded as ‘canonical’ within Odianism. Personal data is used intermittently within this thesis, but its function is mainly illustrative.

I continue to be persuaded that practical magical work is in fact a research approach in and of itself. Indeed, my reading of some methodological approaches suggests that certain principles of research owe a greater debt to the history of Western occultism than they may recognise. In Kumar’s *Research Methodology* he advises the reader that:

A research problem is like the foundation of a building. The type and design of the building is dependent upon the foundation. If the foundation is well-designed and strong you can expect the building to be also. The research problem serves as the foundation of a research study: if it is well formulated, you can expect a good study to follow (Kumar, 1996).

Not only does this reflect the approach to the so-called **Great Work** advocated by all schools within the **Western Mystery Tradition**, but the metaphoric image of a building and its foundations will be recognisable to anyone with a passing interest in any European esoteric system as one of the fundamental thematic tropes of the Western Mystery Tradition (Butler, 2002; Crowley, 1991; Evola, 1995; Evola, 2001; Phillips,

2001; Regardie, 1994). However, academic discourse like all other forms of social interaction is governed by accepted norms. It is not currently an accepted norm that the exploration of the consciousness through magical ritual is an academically respectable research methodology. It therefore remains necessary for me to engage in a kind of meta-research activity at this point.

4. The broad aims of the research

A fundamental feature of magical praxis is the proposition that the felt experience of the practitioner goes beyond the limits of reality proposed by those who would see the human experience as wholly socially constructed (Sharp, 2006). There is an immediate problem that emerges as soon as one tries to adequately represent this type of experience in a manner that is potentially available to a reader: The rendering of the experience in words immediately returns the experience to the socially constructed world of language.

We might assume an inescapably hermeneutic nature to all forms of understanding due to the historicity and linguistic nature of consciousness. However, Non Ordinary Consciousness can be seen as an experiential state in which our prejudices, in the Gadamerian sense (Gadamer, 2001), that render our understanding as merely interpretative can be suspended. In that act of suspension one may know the objects of consciousness in an eidetic manner (Sharp, 2006). The eidetic mode of perception is proposed by Husserl (1982) as a means of returning to ‘the things themselves’ (Husserl, 2001, p.168). Husserl argues that the eidetic mode requires that we ‘bracket’ off all presumptions and focus only on the object of consciousness itself. The achievement of an eidetic mode of perception has a number of associations with esoteric and spiritual practices (Sharp, 2006).

Philosophically, I have long been interested in Phenomenology, and am strongly in sympathy with the view that the task of any investigation should be to view the object of interest on its own terms. In terms of my research focus it is important that, as well as giving a reasonable consideration to the arena of occultism generally, I examine a particular manifestation of those practices in order to see the detailed experiential aspects more clearly.

5. Wider Areas of Application

In my conclusion I consider the potential for future research and draw attention to the ability to apply my methodology as a means to prepare a ground that would allow researchers to approach other forms of contemporary occult practice empirically on their own terms. I also hope to encourage a shift in the perception of occult practices from being activities to be researched to a position where they may have recognition as research methodologies in their own right. The potential for occult praxis to be recognised as a form of research is limited to a very small range of existing areas of academic practice: In the fields of transpersonal psychology; the spiritual dimensions of person-centred counselling; phenomenological approaches to consciousness and Focusing Theory, for example, we find a growing body of research that is concerned with the role of non-ordinary consciousness in personal development; epistemological models that include the attainment of knowledge that is authentic but eludes articulation and the knowledge creating possibilities of perceptual consciousness (Adams, 2002; Anderson, 2000; Crane, 1992; Depraz, 2001; Gendlin, 1997; Grof, 2000; Hardy, 2005; Hinterkoppf, 1998; Kastrup, 2012; Lancaster, 2004; Margitay, 2010; Poellner, 2003; Sharp, 2006; Soskin, 2003; Zahavi, 2001, 2004). The research in this area recognises that the particular contents of non-ordinary experiences may not be capable of articulation, but that the methods by which such non-ordinary states are achieved; the means by which perceptual knowing can arise; the felt experience of such states; and the post-hoc reflections on the impact of that non-expressible content can be articulated and represent valid research outcomes. It is in this, admittedly narrow, field that aspects of occult praxis; ontological and epistemological models implied by that praxis; and the articulation of the methods employed to achieve states of non-ordinary consciousness might eventually be accepted as research methodologies.

The definition of what Odianism is and what Odians are doing when they engage in Odian magical praxis that is offered within this thesis has potential implications for the wider field of exploration into the nature of ‘felt experience’ (Gendlin, 1997). The underlying conceptions at work in occult practice have a history that stretches back far beyond the emergence of psychological models that gave rise to a concept of transpersonal psychology as currently understood. Edwards (2003) proposes the possibility of not only a transpersonal psychology, but of a transpersonal philosophy. I

would regard my own work as an attempt to take part in a conversation that utilises a transpersonal philosophy. On a more personal level it also reflects an individual commitment to a holistic approach in any academic enquiry that relates to humans, in order that the full complexity of what it means to be human is taken fully into account.

2. The Aims and Limitations of the Research

‘Do you know how to carve, do you know to interpret,
do you know how to stain, do you know how to test out,
do you know how to ask, do you know how to sacrifice
do you know how to dispatch, do you know how to slaughter’ (Hávamál St. 144).

1. Background

It is impossible for me to fully separate my research into occult practices from my own involvement with them. An essential requirement for progress within any magical system is that the practitioner’s magical work is accompanied by honest reflection on his/ her sense of self both as a separate manifestation of being in the world and in relation to the world that is experienced as ‘not – self’. Occultism has an unusual understanding of the nature of our being in the world and the extent of our agency. However, the particular techniques of any given system of magical praxis provide a systematic and structured means by which the practitioner seeks to increase their understanding of his/ herself and the world. An examination of the texts that underpin the particular occult system may allow us to determine the inherent philosophical framework and the extent to which, while unusual, the understanding of the world that is presented can be regarded as internally coherent.

One major issue that emerged for me was whether my commitment to Odianism and the value of magical praxis compromised my objectivity to the extent that it might compromise the credibility of my research analysis. Objectivity in matters of research is linked to, but is not analogous to the concept of validity and seems to be obviously slippery in all forms of research. The notion of objectivity itself is problematic and it is open to question whether any research can be truly objective. Any articulation of claimed knowledge will be influenced by the researcher through the way in which that knowledge is represented in the body of the research narrative. The construction of a narrative requires that the individual makes choices in terms of tonality, word use and the philosophical framework through which the analysis is conducted. It would seem reasonable to suggest that the knowledge that is presented will inevitably be coloured by the perspective of the writer.

Gadamer (1989) recognised that all interactions and all linguistic acts are partially constructed out of the ‘pre-judices’ that are held by the individual and which co-create their conceptualised perceptions and their linguistic performances. In following Gadamer’s notion of inevitable prejudice, it might be more transparent and honest to produce research narratives that embrace commitment, but at the same time seek to foreground it rather than unsuccessfully exclude it.

In all research narratives it is the presence of analysis that moves the status of the text from a description or presentation of results to that of a completed research performance. I use the term performance to emphasize the fact that a narrative construct is the product of certain actions and choices enacted by an individual. In order to engage in an analysis we must adopt a conceptual framework, some of which may well be explicit and publicly claimed, but a portion of which is likely to be tacit. This selected analytical framework becomes the mould by which the data is shaped in order to be understood and then represented by the researcher. The dimensions may differ, but the analytical framework demands that a certain shape is always applied. The data functions as a raw material that allows the vision of the researcher to give itself visible form and shape.

2. Developing the Research Approach

In looking at the data I had gathered from an early empirical study with fellow occultists I noticed that the really interesting issues, those that were particular to occult practice and an occult paradigm of reality could not be communicated to the non-occultist reader without a significant amount of clarification. What marks out magical praxis as a particular way of engaging with the world is its understanding of reality. The descriptions of rituals obtained in this early study; rituals designed to invoke a particular deity, to improve someone’s social status, or to deepen the practitioner’s connection to their ancestors were certainly interesting. However, this descriptive approach did not probe the implicit philosophical framework that would provide a model of reality in which those rituals would make sense as a way of trying to cause change in the world. My aim is not to simply describe practices but to get to the philosophical perspectives that underpin those activities. I want Odianism to be able to speak with its own voice. This is particularly important in relation to magical praxis since, ‘it is difficult, perhaps

impossible to know and speak about this state of consciousness from *outside* of it' (Ristandi, 1998).

In my early empirical research I was concerned that I might be putting the empirical cart before the conceptual horse. Magical practices do not take place in a vacuum, if I believe on a Thursday that I can for instance communicate with my so called **Higher Self**, this also has implications for the way in which I understand my more usual interactions with the world the rest of the week. The reality paradigm or conceptual framework underpinning occult praxis is so radically different, that its conceptual framework needs to be clearly articulated before the detail of that praxis can be usefully investigated.

Kumar suggests that researchers should focus on what their study is 'about' rather than what they are seeking to 'find' (Kumar, 1996). The importance of not reaching for the detail of the 'answer', but remaining focused on the most appropriate means of addressing the question was an important concept for me when trying to frame the most concise description of the aims of my research. The Odian paradigm like any alternative or marginalised world view is axiomatically strange and opaque when regarded by those on the 'outside'. In order to engage in more accessible future empirical research around the experiential dimensions of occultism there is a need to have clearer philosophical frameworks through which occult perspectives might be articulated. In order to 'find' a possible Odian philosophical framework I would need to be able to clearly articulate the beliefs and values that require inclusion within that framework. As noted in the Introduction above, the source of those beliefs and values whether explicit or implicit has been the 'canonical' Odian texts.

The academic study of esotericism remains a relatively new area for academic institutions and the vast majority of work that is being done remains sociological and historical. This means that an academically rigorous picture is being created of what occultists over the centuries have set out to achieve, and also some of the methods that have been used to try and achieve those goals. We have access to a narrative around occultism in a historical sense, but little that hones in on those philosophical frameworks implied by magical praxis. There are numerous extant methodological approaches to the study of magic ranging from anthropological studies, to ethnographies of contemporary magical groups,

to sociological analysis (Cunningham, 1999; Otto & Stausberg, 2013; Stein & Stein, 2010). In terms of sociological approaches the analysis of magic as discourse (Asprem, 2012; Granholm, 2013, 2014; Stratton, 2013) addresses magic as a social phenomenon and may provide a deeper understanding of the ways in which those who regard themselves as practitioners of magic construct their experiential reality.

It is also important to consider magical praxis qua praxis. A fundamental aspect of magical praxis is the belief in the causal power of magical acts. Research into magical praxis can usefully consider the possibility and consequent philosophical implications of magic as causally effective in practice. In addition, there is a value in research that considers aspects of magic that have corollaries in the lived world of individuals who are not engaging with magical praxis. A number of studies have looked at the notion of sympathy and contagion in relation to empirical psychological investigations that suggest the ubiquity of irrational fears of contagion (Coughtrey, Shafran & Rachman, 2014; Eskine, Novreske, Richards, 2013; West & Willner, 2011; Young, Morris & Scherwin, 2013).

There is a growing interest in the role of cognition in the commitment to magical praxis and the belief in its effects (Bever, 2008; Legare & Herrmann, 2013; Sørensen, 2010; Subbotsky, 2010) and a cognitive theory of magic has been proposed (Sørensen, 2007). For some scholars exploring a cognitive model, ‘magical thinking’ is no longer seen as a developmental stage in human development, but as a valuable and necessary aspect of healthy human existence (Bever, 2008; Subbotsky, 2010). Cognitive approaches to the study of magic do not suggest that magical acts are causally effective in an instrumental sense, but that magical thinking offers a valuable and valid interpretative strategy in relation to the world as experienced.

From the perspective of practitioner research I would argue that there is a need for a consideration of the implied philosophical framework that is required by a commitment to the fundamentals of magical praxis. For example, magical praxis involves a belief in the causal power of the Will; the ability of intention alone in combination with certain techniques to cause changes in the world. A practitioner of magic might perform operation ‘X’ in the belief that in so doing s/he would achieve outcome ‘Y’. There is a

need to consider what sort of philosophical worldview would be required to treat 'X' as genuinely causing outcome 'Y'. The proposal of such a philosophical perspective would also allow occultism to be discussed within academic discourse as a set of contestable ideas to be judged in terms of their internal coherence.

Transpersonal psychology is a recently established academic discipline that shares a number of interests in common with occultism:

[Transpersonal psychology] draws upon ancient mystical knowledge that comes from multiple traditions. Transpersonal psychologists attempt to integrate timeless wisdom with modern Western psychology and translate spiritual principles into scientifically grounded, contemporary language (Caplan, 2009, p.231).

Transpersonal experiences are those experiences in which the felt-sense of the self for the individual extends beyond the physical limits of the body-self and are accompanied by a deepening of the felt-connections to aspects of reality that transcend the physical self. Such experiences are often associated with spiritual practices and involve a felt-connection to a reality that is felt to be richer and more significant than the reality that is normally experienced.

Inevitably, the nature of the transpersonal is highly resistant to being explicitly or definitively articulated. One way in which academics have attempted to approach the problem of transpersonal experience is through the use of surveys. However, Edwards (2003) notes the problem of vagueness and the inappropriateness of labels within questionnaires relating to spiritual belief and practices. Various psychometric scales have been used to try and sufficiently capture the variety and breadth of spiritual belief and experiences (Hill & Hood, 1999). Hood's mysticism scale (Hood, 1975; Hood, Morris & Watson, 1993) separates various factors of mystical as opposed to religious experience and provides a means of allocating any given experience in this area to a point on that scale. However, this presumes a measurability that is not generally felt to be present in these types of experiences.

My own view is that the particularity of such experiences is what makes them so significant for the individual. Moreover, it is because of their particular, non-repeatable nature that a questionnaire is insufficient as a tool to try and capture their essence. A limitation of any questionnaire is that it restricts the range of experience that can be represented and the range of responses to that experience. It therefore seems an unsuitable approach to the complexity of spiritual or magical experience.

Even in areas of similarity between strong religious observance or mysticism and occult practice there are sufficiently significant conceptual differences that in order to engage with occult practice on its own terms we need to articulate a particular philosophical framework in which it can meaningfully be approached. It's important to stress that this is not to suggest that there is only one possible conceptual framework that could be applied. The aim is to create a conceptual space in which those claims can be meaningfully discussed on their own terms.

3. Giving a voice to magic

My own magical practices led me towards a realisation that the voice of the occultist as a voice in and for itself should be as valid as the voice of any other paradigmatic perspective. In terms of the historical source data that supports the Odian worldview I have therefore restricted myself as much as possible to the primary sources and to Odian interpretations of those sources.

Research methodologies can be viewed as competing orthodoxies containing a variety of assumptions, many of which are so engrained as to be almost invisible. The Odian paradigm is often at variance with these assumptions and so it has been extremely difficult for me to find an appropriate methodology. This is partly due to the way in which many methodologies are constructed in such a way that an ideological position is built into their very structure. Hammersley and others (Hammersley, 2005; Tooley, 1997) draw attention to the role of ideological commitments that not only inform a great deal of social science research but also lead to the critique of other research outputs based on the underpinning ideology rather than the coherence of the presented argument.

Much of the research that has been undertaken in the area of Occultism emerges as a side interest within a wide array of established disciplines and so tends to borrow the methodological frameworks known and accepted within that discipline. It is unsurprising that many researchers in the field have some degree of active engagement with practical occultism and could be regarded, like myself, as participant-researchers. The obvious danger in being a participant researcher is that one is too immersed within the group to be able to operate outside the parameters that the group has set for itself as the limits of what is “thinkable”. However, all research is affected by this dilemma to one degree or another. Additionally, much observer-participant research suffers from a related problem, where the researcher is insufficiently immersed in the culture of the observed group and as a result misinterprets or misses key aspects of the group’s activities and beliefs. I would agree with Hammersley (2005) that research produced from within a community does not prevent its access from outside the community and while the insider may obtain insights not immediately available to the outsider that does not mean that such insights are permanently opaque to all but community members. Although the process of magical work is highly individual this does not mean that it cannot be potentially communicated outside of the individual. Along with Hammersley (2005) I retain a commitment to the possibility of truth and see this as a guiding principle of research activity.

4. The problem of validity

When critically examining the conceptual framework of any reality, the concepts need to be considered within the ontological framework of the given reality. Consequently, my research does not deny the possibility that magical operations produce the effects claimed for them by occult practitioners. Equally, the research will not claim that magical causality is empirically proven. Magical work requires a belief in a number of possibilities that can seem outlandish: future possibilities can be glimpsed, non-human entities can be contacted, third parties can be healed or harmed and aspects of our deepest self can be changed; all through the application of non-ordinary states of consciousness. However, it is important to remember that the dominant scientific paradigm is not based in any certainty about the fundamental nature of reality. A materialist scientific model of reality offers a useful tool for engaging the world as normally experienced. The fact that the dominant paradigm does not allow for the sorts of experiences proposed by a magical paradigm does not in itself undermine the claims of magical practitioners, since the

scientific is no more than an explanatory tool or heuristic with which we manage our normal experiences. Different explanatory tools and paradigms are needed to accommodate the experiences of non-ordinary consciousness.

The validity of research findings is often associated with their generalizability. In the broadest sense, without some generalisation all events would be unique and unrelated to past and future events. In the Northern Tradition Óðin is accompanied by two ravens, Huginn and Muninn, whose names mean ‘thought’ and ‘memory’. Óðin’s greatest fear is that he will lose Muninn, since without memory, which implies generalisation, it is no longer possible for Huginn to function (Larrington, 1999). In generalising we could be said to be using the function of Muninn under the influence of Huginn. In order to move beyond a mere listing of experience some generalisation is inevitable. A generalisation can only be seen as effective or appropriate if it agrees with related evidence that has been stored by the faculty of memory whether that of an individual or group.

Generalisation is by definition a temporally governed activity in that it involves a movement from instance ‘A’ to general idea ‘X’. In the Northern Tradition time consists of the past (**Urðr**), the present (**Verðandi**) and what should or ought to follow (**Skuld**). Verðandi is constructed by the threads flowing from Urðr and so our present is a collection of pasts, we are thus in a constant nexus of pasts and also in a permanent present. Consciousness in the present is the result of generalisations of the past in order to generate cognitive coherence and so before we address a conscious generalisation we need to be aware that the possibility of this new generalisation through Huginn or thought is dependent on a pre-generalisation from Muninn that allows Huginn to function.

Evidence is paradigm dependent and so there is a problem when generalising from ‘evidence’ gleaned through magical work since the dominant notion of ‘evidence’ comes from an empirical paradigm in which magical work would not be recognised as ‘valid’. It is not yet possible to treat the ‘evidence’ directly arising from magical work as a valid research output. Magical work is explored in detail later in the thesis, but in general terms magical work tends to be of two broad types. Some magical work seeks to cause changes within the individual, while more controversially some magical work is designed to cause changes in the external world. An example of the former type might be a magical

working intended to strengthen an aspect of the individual's personality such as his/ her persuasive skills. An example of the latter might be a magical working designed to ensure a successful outcome to a legal dispute. For both these broad types of magical work the difficulty of proof lies in the problem of satisfactorily attributing the outcome to the magical work. Most magical work involves a combination of visualisation, breath control, chanting and the manipulation of symbolism with no apparent causal connection to the desired outcome.

The nature of any experience of Non Ordinary Consciousness is that it tends to be intensely personal. It is therefore difficult to take a view on the validity of the data that is gained in research into such experiences. By validity I do not mean the "truth" of the spiritual beliefs or ontological frameworks that are generated or stimulated by those experiences. What I mean by validity in this context is whether there is an internal coherence within the reported experiences in the context of the paradigmatic framework within which they occur. When considering validity it should be noted that it is not a measurement of the founded basis for 'truth claims', but a judgement of the potential coherence of a given truth claim. We also need to be aware that the framework of that judgement is itself structured by a number of pre-existing agreements about the potential validity of a number of truth claims that allow the construction of an assessment of new truth claims. I would argue that the experiences arising from magical praxis have a definite validity for the individual practitioner and also that, within the constraints given by a phenomenological understanding of the possibility of 'proof' and the concept of validity described above, the data arising from magical praxis and non-ordinary consciousness may have more general validity. This general validity may not relate directly to the particular contents of a given experience, but to the practices and methods which give rise to such experiences and the identifiable changes that accompany such experiences. While it cannot currently be empirically proven, my own experience of magical work has also led me to a personal commitment to the causal effectiveness of magical praxis.

'Hawthorne effects' (Gillespie, 1991) refer to the reactive effects of experimental arrangements or the impact of a-typical settings on the validity of findings; this is a perennial problem faced by any research that would seek to test the empirical claims of

magic. If we take an ethnomethodological approach to the truth claims of magic practitioners then internal validity cannot be established by control systems that would be deemed to ‘interfere’ with the work from a magical perspective. The philosophical framework proposed within this thesis will hopefully assist in the shaping of new understandings of validity regarding magical praxis.

5. Ideology and Methodology

The question of validity in social research is increasingly concerned not only with experimental design, but with notions of social justice. The role of social or ideological commitments as valid methodological factors forms the focus of Lather’s seminal 1986 article (Lather, 1986). However, the notion of socially just actions/ states of affairs is itself highly contested. The Northern Tradition generally and Odianism in particular do have conceptions of ethics and consequently a concept of social justice can be derived from those ethical positions. However, the particular values espoused; the particular contents of an Odian model of social justice, may have little in common with the concept of social justice as conceptualised by Lather. It seems reasonable in the broad context of social science research to adopt a methodology that reflects a less common ideological framework, such as that of the Northern Tradition, provided that its presence is clearly noted, as opposed to any requirement for its use to be justified on objective or positivistic grounds.

It is now recognised that social and cultural contexts play a major part in the way in which our identity is formed, experienced and understood. There is I think a growing danger that identity is perceived as a group experience, forgetting that communities of discourse as framed by Foucault (1989, 2002) ultimately consist of individual subjects. For me each individual’s sense of themselves is uniquely interesting. Not least because whenever we explore someone’s sense of themselves we can find a mass of complexity and contradiction that cannot be fully accounted for by cultural or social classifications.

All methodologies are inevitably influenced by the value positions of the researcher. While many qualitative theories argue that this is an essentially politically driven ideological positioning it seems reasonable to suggest that this claim in itself is the result of the value positions of many advocates of qualitative research. I would argue that the

positioning of our observations need not only be understood through an ideological gaze in the political sense; our observations might be positioned through ideologies or frameworks that are primarily driven by philosophical or spiritual or other commitments.

My own primary value positions could be closely aligned with Radical Traditionalism. Radical Traditionalism has much in common with the Traditionalism of Evola, Guenon, Coomaraswamy and others in its commitment to the existence of primordial Truths that can only be accessed through dedicated esotericism. Radical Traditionalism is radical in the sense that it seeks to transform society and culture rather than just the individual who engages in Traditionalist activity. The term ‘radical’ is also appropriate in that Radical Traditionalism attaches great importance to the culturally specific roots (*radix*) of esoteric traditions. The values of Radical Traditionalism are ably summarised in the occasional Traditionalist journal, *Tyr*:

[It] means to yearn for the small, homogeneous tribal societies that flourished before Christianity — societies in which every aspect of life was integrated into a holistic system (Buckley, Cleary & Moynihan, 2002).

The common claim that all views are situated faces a significant logical problem; namely that this claim must regard itself as a situated view and no less contingent than the position that some views are not situated. Recognising the logical flaw in this position is more than philosophical sophistry, it allows us to reclaim the possibility of Truth. This need not be absolute Truth, but the notion that Truth can exist for us as an individual consciousness. Instead of being cast adrift on a sea of uncertainty by the generalised dismissal of all commitments we can find ourselves a boat that we can sail in our own way providing that the map we use is internally coherent we can say that for us it is at least potentially True.

6. Analytical Framework

In broad philosophical terms I will be taking an approach that takes on board the Gadamerian notions of tradition (‘überlieferung’) in the development of ideas and in the interpretation of narrative (Gadamer, 2001). I will be taking an analytical approach that recognizes the validity of the personal felt experience while also being grounded in a

commitment to the importance of our status as embodied and socially contextualized and at least partially inscribed beings.

In ‘Sources of Bias’, Edwards (2003) proposes the development of a transpersonal philosophy that might work in conjunction with a transpersonal psychology in order to deepen the discourse around transpersonal experience. Transpersonal psychology is concerned with a rigorous psychological examination of those experiences in which our consciousness extends beyond the limits of our physical self and approaches a quasi-spiritual understanding of the world. A transpersonal philosophy should attempt to find an overarching framework of reality which accounts for the reality of transpersonal experiences. I would suggest that my approach taken in the thesis is perhaps best understood as an attempt to enter into a transpersonal approach to philosophy. To paraphrase Husserl, ‘unless one is engaging in transpersonal practices one is not doing transpersonal philosophy’.

Edwards also refers to what he calls a ‘logical thinking bias’ (2003). While I would not hold with Edwards that the application of logic to analysis is necessarily evidence of bias, I do find the general thrust of his argument is convincing: That direct experience is not rational and that social science methodologies often attempt to understand lived experience through a rational lens. In arguing against the dominance of logic I think that Edwards misses an opportunity to make the point that there are any number of possible logical frameworks through which reality can be experienced and analysed. Edwards need not dismiss logic entirely in order to make the case that research should not be dominated by any one logical framework.

The practice of magical work offers a route to the achievement of Non Ordinary Consciousness wherein it may be possible that the normally socially constructed nature of our perceptions may be suspended. In certain states associated with magical work we may come to see the hidden (occult) nature of things (Sharp, 2006). As discussed in the Introduction above we might compare the mode of perception experienced in certain states of non-ordinary consciousness to the ‘eidetic’ mode of perception proposed by Husserl (1982, 2001). In its simplest terms the eidetic mode of perception refers to a state of intentional consciousness in which we are able to see ‘things in themselves’ (1982).

Husserl proposes the possibility of a state of consciousness in which our pre-conceptions regarding an object of consciousness are suspended or ‘bracketed’ (1982) such that the only aspects of the object of consciousness that are perceived are those that are intrinsic and present in that object of consciousness. As Depraz (2001) and others (Zahavi, 2004) have noted the eidetic perception can be applied to non-ordinary states of consciousness in which the individual’s phenomenological experience is one in which objects of consciousness appear to be (or indeed are) experienced in an unmediated way such that they can be experienced as things in themselves rather than as things as symbolically represented. The means by which non-ordinary consciousness provides a possible route back to an experience of things in themselves was the subject of my chapter in *The Spiritual Dimension in Therapy and Experiential Exploration* (2006) in which I argue that to the extent that phenomenology provides a valid philosophical construct in which objects of consciousness may represent things in themselves, it is only through a non-conceptual and non-ordinary consciousness that the necessarily linguistic and therefore culturally constructed mode of perception can be genuinely suspended or bracketed. In appropriating the eidetic experience it is not my aim to return to a pre-Heideggerian position whereby the temporal aspect of consciousness is ignored. It may be that we can postulate an eidetic consciousness while recognising the normative state of consciousness as one that is hermeneutic and socially constructed. The rehabilitation of Non-ordinary Consciousness has implications for a range of enquiries and challenges post-modernist positions that recognise only the sign and deny the validity of what we might call “core experiences”.

3. Odianism In Context

‘... Magic, conceived as a domain of knowledge, has historically been fiercely excluded from the University curricula’ (Carr, 2005)

1. Introduction

As the quote above indicates, when one chooses to investigate magic from an academic perspective there are a number of barriers that have to be overcome. This is particularly the case if one is seeking to study magic unambiguously labelled as such, ‘as a domain of knowledge’, in the post-enlightenment period (Hanegraaff, 2012). When Occultism is considered in an academic context it is has often been viewed sociologically as a form of broadly deviant behaviour or as an adaption to surrounding social structures (Bainbridge & Stark, 1979, 1980; Bittarello, 2008; Granholm, 2014; Hartman, 1976; Jorgensen, 1981, 1984; Jorgensen & Jorgensen, 1982; McCloud, 2007; Truzzi, 1972; Walters, 2007) rather than as an experimental investigation of alternative paradigmatic realities.

2. Is Occultism a Form of Active Mysticism?

William James (1960) describes the mystical as Ineffable, noetic, transient and passive. This is at odds with magical praxis, which is by definition active and seeks to make permanent changes. In exploring transcendent experiences, Bailey (1998) notes that these experiences are usually unlooked for, unsought, unpredictable and unusual, whereas magical experiences tend to be directed, partially predictable and intended. The practice of magic in accordance with our cultural heritage may offer a form of reconnection to the **holy**, particularly when we understand ‘holy’ correctly as implying a state of ‘wholeness’. Thus mystical experiences are not necessarily magical, but certain forms of magical praxis may lead us to the experience of Mystery.

Underhill in her seminal work *Mysticism*, published in 1911 (Underhill, 1995), defines mystical experiences as practical, entirely spiritual and psychological. Underhill is committed to the existence of a divine source for mystical experiences. She argues that psychological theories related to personality type and to mental processes provide a means for more fully understanding the mystical experience. Underhill moves beyond an attempt to describe the qualities of mystical experiences when she argues that all mystical

experiences are focused on Love. This mirrors the view exhibited by many writers in the field of transpersonal psychology in its attempt to imbue those experiences with a particular moral slant.

While James regards mystical experiences as transient and incidental, Underhill proposes a five stage process of mystical development. The five stages move from awakening through self-knowledge to illumination, surrender and finally union. All these stages occur introspectively and must be awaited rather than initiated by the individual who is seeking mystical development. Underhill's definition of mysticism is firmly located within a monotheistic paradigm in which the individual human is expected to submit or surrender to some higher moral agent.

Daniels (2003) and Wainwright (1981) both argue that religious belief does not offer the faithful a mystical experience. Daniels regards the mystical encounter as a direct experience of the 'Real'; a felt connection with the deep spiritual underpinnings of the Universe. The value of religion to Daniels is that it may point the way towards mystical experience. Daniels points to the fact that definitions of the Transpersonal can be extremely broad and the extent of this breadth is explored by Walsh and Vaughan (1993). Daniels does not position the mystical as a subset of the transpersonal but sees the transpersonal as a concept that only potentially overlaps with the concept of mysticism.

Daniels also addresses the question of whether all mystical experiences arise from the same source and are windows, so to speak, on a single universal mystery. He concludes the mystical experiences are essentially the same and determines that they do share a homogenous basis (*ibid*). Daniels' commitment to the ultimate homogeneity of mystical experiences contrasts with a constructivist view that would regard mystical experience as culturally determined and consequently varied in accordance with inter-cultural differences. There is a further alternative in which the moment of mystical experience transcends its cultural context, while any post hoc conceptualisation or description of the experience is at least partially determined by the surrounding context. Daniels' claim that all mystical experiences are fundamentally equivalent appears to recognise the presence of a force beyond the human, but it can also be understood as denying any substantial actuality beyond the socially constructed world. This is because such a view has the

tendency to posit a non-differentiated trans-human realm, which implies a non-populated space. This is a key area in which magical praxis can be usefully separated from mysticism, since the former regards the trans-human realm as densely populated.

Unlike James and Underhill, Zaehner (1969) is quite explicit about his religious bias in his explanation of mystical experience. Experiences are ranked by Zaehner in the following order of importance: Theistic, Monistic and Natural. Happold (1970) develops Zaehner's categories by introducing one-ness, timelessness and disassociation from the ego as aspects of the mystical experience described by James and slots these into Zaehner's topography but without hierarchical stratification. Stace (1960) regards mystical experiences as non-sensual, non-intellectual and generative of a sense of unity. Stace argues that causes of mystical experiences are irrelevant since experiences which are phenomenologically equivalent are the same experience. If we adopt a strict phenomenological position; that we can only sensibly talk about objects of consciousness rather than any reality that is presumed to exist beyond the objects of consciousness, then Stace's position appears reasonable. Experiences that are indistinguishable in terms of their intentional content would be incapable of distinction by any intentional consciousness and so must logically be regarded as the same experience. However, Stace does not offer any evidence to suggest that what is given to consciousness during different mystical experiences is phenomenologically equivalent or how this equivalence might be adequately identified.

Stace presents the mystical event as a single self-contained instance lacking any effect beyond itself. Stace also separates extrovert and introvert mysticism and favours the latter as a higher form of mysticism. Stace continues the trend of trying to define mystical experiences by the application of certain key characteristics. The increase in number to seven key characteristics suggests that this type of approach inevitably moves in two equally problematic directions. On the one hand we have a set of characteristics that are too narrow to allow for all types of experience that could be reasonably described as mystical, on the other we move towards a listing of characteristics that is so broad that the idea of gaining any clarity around the particular characteristics of mystical experiences is lost. In *The Idea of the Holy* Otto (1917) recognizes the importance of the non-conceptual

and adopts a neutral position regarding any possible moral content to the mystical experience.

Otto divides the mystical experience into two primary categories, the ‘mysterium tremendum’ in which the individual is over awed by an overpowering sense of a transcendent force and the ‘mysterium fascinans’ in which the individual also derives a sense of the possibility of salvation and/or mercy within the experience. Otto may appear to be describing a moral dimension when referring to notions of ‘salvation’ and ‘mercy’. However, Otto uses these terms to refer to the individual’s felt experience rather than to imply an external source for those feelings or suggesting that there is any conformity to a moral requirement in those experiences being so described. This allows us to regard the ‘fascinans’ aspect as that which is suggestive of some interior change or communication with the ‘mysterium’. It is also important to note that while other authors have been more vigorous in inscribing all forms of peak experience with a moral tone, Otto is specifically concerned with moments that are experienced as ‘holy’.

Otto’s relatively neutral approach is taken up and developed by Schlamm who sees Otto’s interpretation as offering a pure form of the numinous experience (Schlamm, 1991). For Schlamm the mystical experience *per se* is not the limit of the numinous experience but is only one of many possible post hoc conceptualisations of the numinous experience. The numinous is ineffable and therefore insusceptible to definitive or singular categorisation. Schlamm’s approach is more sympathetic to a magical development of the peak experience since it removes the necessity of a felt movement towards a sense of unity. Schlamm approaches numinous experiences on their own terms and recognises that all categorisations are at a significant remove from the experience of the ineffable itself. Daniels (2003) questions the inevitability of a numinous quality to the mystical and opposes Schlamm’s placement of the mystical as a subset of the numinous. Daniels argues that mystical experience is the broader category of which numinosity is only one possible variety. There is a possible danger in these disagreements that the discussion around Non Ordinary Consciousness becomes a conversation about semantic labels rather than focusing on the experiential dimension itself.

Rawlinson (2000) proposes yet another diagrammatic approach in which experiences are labelled either Hot or Cool. Hot experiences are those which are suggestive of a contact with a genuine otherness or transpersonal reality, while Cool experiences are those in which the individual experiences a deepened awareness of self. We immediately face a now familiar problem with these categorisations in that there is no space for those experiences where the individual becomes both aware of a deep self and of transpersonal level of reality. We could perhaps label them as tepid, but this would falsely suggest that such experiences somehow occupy a middle position between two theoretical poles. Rawlinson is neutral in that neither Hot or Cool is prioritised, but his terminology is reductive in ignoring those experiences which fall into the category of being both, neither or indeterminate. Rawlinson follows all the authors discussed above in distinguishing between the other and the self and in visualising this distinction as an inside versus outside separation.

Wilber is perhaps the most overtly teleologically minded of contemporary transpersonal theorists. He proposes a strictly hierarchical model of development utilising his own particular nomenclature and definitions of psychological states. According to Wilber (2000, 2006) we move from the ‘Psychic’ to the ‘Subtle’ at which point we are linked to the ‘Real’ other. This is followed by a negation of the material in the ‘Causal’ phase and finally the achievement of the ‘Non-Dual’. It is perhaps in the Causal phase that Wilber is most prescriptive about which spiritual traditions are acceptable. There are many systems that involve the achievement of non- ordinary states of consciousness that do not regard the denial of the material as an essential aspect of self-development or self-becoming. Moreover, Wilber’s hierarchy is flawed in terms of the implicit ontology of his vision of the transpersonal. Wilber places much importance to the achievement of what he refers to as ‘one taste’ (*ibid*). It is an experience that requires one to be embodied in the world to achieve, but Wilber places this within the Non Dual category. There is clearly a problem with a system that negates the material and then requires materiality in order for a higher state than that at which the material is rejected to be achieved. Wilber’s hierarchical approach to spiritual experience is mirrored by his attempt at articulating an ontology that allows for the transpersonal (Wilber, 2000), in which matter occupies the lowest rung followed by Life, Mind, Soul and Spirit. Wilber’s increasingly limiting construction of experiential spirituality is robustly critiqued by Schlamm, while Adams offers a

philosophical critique that locates a key flaw in Wilber's a-priori promotion of non-duality and his inconsistent definitions of 'God' (Adams, 2002; Schlamm, 2001).

The disagreements between theorists of the transpersonal are clearly more than semantic, but they do suggest a problem with the language that has been traditionally used to describe the types of experiences in question. At one level there is a broad shared understanding of the types of experiences about which there is a dialogue intended to categorise those experiences and facilitate further discussion. However, the primary terms utilised in this conversation are vague and often loaded with undeclared spiritual commitments. This is amply demonstrated by the disagreements between Wilber and Zaehner. Neither author is willing to accept that their model of development may not be absolute and so Wilber's state of emptiness clashes with Zaehner's final state which involves a personal contact with the Higher.

Wilber appears to be a victim of his honesty, for while most of the writers above propose particular models of spiritual experience as though they were universally appropriate categorisations it is Wilber who is most regularly attacked on this basis (Ferrer, 2011; Heron 1998; Wright 1998). Ferrer has been prominent in his critique of Wilber's, 'monistic nondual bias' (ibid, p.5). Ferrer's participatory approach with its recognition that 'significant divergences' (ibid) exist between similar states as experienced within different Traditions may offer hope for a non-reductive approach to the transpersonal that does not lead to mere relativism. However, Ferrer's participatory approach and willingness to recognise alternative positions does not extend to ethical frameworks; he remains committed to the dominant assumptions within the transpersonal field (ibid, p.7). Moral commitments aside, the participatory approach does recognise the mutual validity of the culturally specific and the trans-cultural as well as proposing a model of Being and Knowing that is closely aligned with the approach found in Odianism:

Participatory enactment. . . is epistemologically constructivist and metaphysically realist (Ferrer & Sherman quoted in Ferrer, 2011, p.9).

3. Defining Occultism

According to Galbreath the Occult can be defined as a concern with:

Extraordinary matters that intrude into the mundane world and appear to have special significance; the teachings of various mystery schools the contents of which are kept hidden from non-initiates; matters which are intrinsically hidden from normal cognition, but which may be available to us through certain special states of consciousness (Galbreath, 1983).

Galbreath does not fully define what is implied by the term 'hidden'; it could refer to ideas or experiences that would be transparently intelligible but for the active attempt by initiates to conceal them. However, the reference to states of consciousness carries with it the suggestion that occult matters are hidden from the non-initiated due to a lack of understanding of the requisite states of consciousness needed to unlock these secrets. Within the body of this thesis as noted on p.29 above the term Occultism is used as a general label for systems and activities that are concerned with uncovering hidden truths and mysterious forces that underpin the deep structure of reality and potentially deploying that knowledge through magical acts. As a practitioner I have come to a personal understanding that the secret or hidden nature of occult knowledge and/or powers refers to the extent of committed practical work and study that is required for a functional understanding to arise.

In the field of sociological exploration Occultism is defined by the view of social relations governing the analytical framework of the sociologist in question. Commonly, sociological definitions of Occultism concentrate on its potential role as either cultic; deviant or substitute religious expression; an alienated form of social bonding or a response to commercial promotion (Bainbridge & Stark, 1979 & 1980; Hartman, 1976; Jorgensen, 1981; Tuzzi, 1972). While some researchers such as Bainbridge and Stark have gone as far as proposing multiple models of occult activity, they are nevertheless focused on the externally observable nature of that activity. It is often the case that the categorisation 'occultist', in sociological terms, encompasses a much broader group than those who are actively involved in esoteric work. Moreover as Bainbridge and Stark's model of Cult Movements, Client Cults and Audience Cults (*ibid*, 1979) amply indicates,

the definition of Occultism can sometimes have little or nothing to do with the practice or experiential reality of occultists themselves.

The term ‘occult’ has been avoided by the **Rune Gild** in describing itself or its aims. However, Thorsson’s attack on occultism is directed at the potential to exploit the notion of secrecy in order to gain an undeserved sense of power over others and at the fetishisation of ‘secret’ terms, handshakes, oaths and so forth. Strictly speaking it is the manipulation of occultism that is being attacked rather than occult praxis. The occult nature of the Rune Gild is, in fact, strongly supported by Thorsson’s own writing:

Rûna means *the Secret or Mystery*, and the ultimate Secret is housed in the concept of Secrecy itself. It is not that something is being consciously concealed, it is a matter of approaching the Form or Principle of Hiddenness itself which lies at the root of the mystery.

(Flowers, 1996, p.14)

The consideration of occultism as a broad field involves a number of multi-disciplinary affiliations, for example, CESNUR – Centre for Study on New Religions based in Italy:

CESNUR's original aim was to offer a professional association to scholars specialized in religious minorities, new religious movements, contemporary esoteric, spiritual and gnostic schools, and the new religious consciousness in general

(<http://www.cesnur.org/about.htm#ing>).

One academic grouping that looks at magical praxis is Societas Magica. This organisation began with a focus on medieval magic and its original membership was drawn from across a range of disciplines working in the broad field of medieval studies. Over time it has grown in both size and scope and since 2006 has been affiliated with the peer reviewed journal, *Magic Ritual and Witchcraft* published by University of Pennsylvania Press. This publication considers papers from all chronological periods and accepts approaches to the subject of Occultism from the historical to those which empirically explore the experiences of contemporary practitioners. In keeping with the origins of the group the overall focus remains a History of Ideas approach as evidenced by the list of

the group's publications (<http://brindedcow.umd.edu/socmag/>). The Society's website says its publications:

...bring the resources of cultural, literary, and social history to bear on the history of the magic arts, and contribute towards an understanding of why the theory and practice of magic have elicited fascination at every level of society.

(<http://brindedcow.umd.edu/socmag/publications>)

A number of doctoral theses have been produced which examine aspects of occultism. Marco Pasi's exploration of British occultism (Pasi, 2004) in the period 1875-1947 is primarily a consideration of the historical aspects of occult praxis. Although his substantive area of focus, in keeping with the generality of academic esotericism, is the Western Mystery Tradition, Pasi constructs a useable definition of occultism and magic: rightly in my view, Pasi establishes that Occultism may include activities that can be defined as magical in intent and methodology, but that Occultism as a field of exploration does not of necessity imply magical praxis. Where I would disagree with Pasi's application of the term 'Occultism' is that in restricting its application to the period of his own study Occultism is understood primarily as a response to particular social conditions.

4. Esotericism

Very often the terms 'esotericism' and 'occultism' are used as though they are interchangeable. However, as Vitale (2006) notes, 'esotericism' refers to a field of study and interest that provides a framework of beliefs and concepts, some of which may be employed in the practice of occultism. This is an important distinction as it goes beyond the strictly occult. In addition, involvement in esotericism may not require the commitment to occult praxis. Occultism refers to the active engagement with a particular set of practices and beliefs, while Esotericism indicates an interest in the collection of data and theoretical perspectives regarding those practices and beliefs and the conceptual frameworks within which those practices and beliefs emerge. Thus occultists are also esotericists, albeit potentially within a narrow field, while esotericists are not necessarily occultists.

In terms of the areas of specific interest to the esotericist, Faivre (1994) proposes the following list:

- The sympathetic correspondences (such as the association of certain colours or numbers with certain states of affairs)
- The importance of specific modes of transmission regarding the communication of esoteric lore and practice (such as the need to be in certain sacred locations)
- The permeation of the Universe by divine forces
- A belief in the validity of the Great Work (a process of self-transformation and perfection)
- An epistemology that prioritises experiential learning through the imagination and practices such as meditation

While Faivre's list is thorough, it could be argued that 'extra-human forces' rather than 'divine forces' would be more appropriate in allowing a broader range of spiritual inclinations.

5. The Occultist Magician

In the same way that one might be an esotericist without being an occultist, it is possible to be an occultist without engaging in magical praxis. The occultist is concerned with uncovering the hidden realities at work in the Universe and unlike the esotericist must engage in practical attempts to reveal them. The occultist becomes a magician at the point where s/he seeks to actively work with those hidden realities and forces in order to cause change in his/ her lived world. Occult praxis may be primarily about an attempt to observe the nature of hidden Truth, while magical praxis requires an attempt to create change as an active agent in the world.

In its broadest terms we might define magic as the attempt to cause observable results which have no apparent causal explanation. In many ways, this is a reasonably accurate description, but it is also incomplete; the task of offering a final definition of magic is likely to remain unachievable. This is not just because magic has a peculiarly ambiguous quality through its link to the mysterious; or that an experiential exploration of magic is essential to any authentic understanding. It is also due to the irreducible complexity and indeterminacy of any concept when sufficiently closely examined.

Definitions of magic may tell us about the culture in which the definition emerges as much as they tell us about the nature of magic. The claim that certain beliefs or practices are magical has often been used as an accusation and to indicate the incorrect or inappropriate nature of such practices. A number of late nineteenth and early twentieth century studies regarded magic as primitive superstition which precedes religion. Magic is replaced by religion once the incorrect causal assumptions of magical causality are realised (Frazer, 1995[1922]; Tylor, 2006 [1871]).

Rather than drawing an evolutionary distinction, Durkheim argues that religion provides a social function while magic involves exchanges between individuals (Durkheim, 2012 [1912]; Vyse, 2013). Mauss (2001 [1902]) takes a different approach again and proposes that magic and religion arise from the same impulse and suggests that rather than preceding religion, magic develops through the individual development of religious practices. The split between religion and magic was also criticised by anthropologists who proposed that in non-Western cultures a ‘magical world view’ (Wax & Wax, 1962) underpinned people’s general understanding of their environment. This view as originally expressed was rightly criticised for presuming a commonality to all non-Western cultures. However, the suggestion that magic needs to be understood as an expression of a more general epistemology and understanding of reality is an important and valuable development.

It could be argued that the attempt to define ‘magic’ is doomed to failure in that the differences between different types of activity, belief, performances and effects that have been deemed to belong to the category ‘magic’ are so varied across time and between cultures that the possibility of a fixed definition of ‘magic’ breaks down. However, I would agree with Lehrich (2013) that a generalizable definition of ‘magic’ is a possibility and would also agree with the more general argument proposed by Lehrich (*ibid*) that the abandonment of the search for adequacy in definition has an ethical dimension as well as being intellectually open to challenge. I have attempted, in this thesis, my own definition of the necessary and sufficient defining features of ‘magical praxis’ and sought to distinguish magic from both occultism and esotericism. Definitions are necessary to allow the continuation of analysis and exploration of any subject, but it is equally the case that in order to allow that conversation to develop the contestable and often limited nature

of any attempt at definition must be accepted. Lehrich's distinction between generalizable and universal definitions reminds us that the attempt at definition need not imply the permanent and exclusive fixing of meaning but the construction of a coherent means of categorisation that may co-exist with any number of other competing categorisations.

Crowley famously defined magic as, 'the Science and Art of causing Change to occur in conformity with Will' (1991). This definition suggests that the important feature of magical praxis is that it must be initiated by the '**Will**' of the individual rather than relying on any supernatural agency. As a practitioner definition, Crowley's phrasing is inevitably informed by the socio-cultural milieu within which it was formulated.

However, while the explicit linking of 'Science' and 'Art' is suggestive of a reflection of the concerns of the time rather than reflecting a necessary function of magical praxis, the focus on the intentionality of the practitioner does not seem to be so historically tied.

Within the Odian Tradition magic has been defined by Travers (2009) as 'symbolic conscious action', which again places an emphasis on the agency of the individual rather than the specific means through which the magical act is effected. The importance of intentionality and consciousness relates to the belief within many occult traditions that the majority of the population spend their lives in a sleeping or trance-like state; only the magician is truly awake and capable of genuinely conscious action.

Magic is often divided into magic that seeks to affect the self (Transformation magic) and magic that seeks to affect the world around the self (Results magic). Transformation Magic is part of the search for that which is hidden (occultism), while Results Magic involves the application of hidden knowledge to a given situation. Results Magic involves the practical application of knowledge and capabilities discovered through occultism. In most Traditions both forms of magic involve a spiritual framework or a framework of transcendent reality in order to function. Transformative Magic attempts not only to use that transcendent reality, but to connect with it on a deep level.

Chaos Magic (Carroll, 1987; Hine, 1995) does not fit this framework, at least on the surface. The term 'Chaos Magic' describes a range of new approaches to magical praxis that began to emerge in the early 1970's. Perhaps its most radical approach was to regard

belief as simply another technique in the pursuit of effective magical results. The suggestion that our beliefs about the structure of reality may alter the effectiveness of magical work seems reasonable. However, it is very problematic to claim that our beliefs themselves can be manipulated or freely selected in the same way as a choice of technique. Future research into contemporary magic could fruitfully explore the ways in which Chaos practitioners attempt to manipulate their states of belief. Many of Chaos Magic's techniques, such as using self-created **sigils**, draw heavily on the work of the early twentieth century magical pioneer Austin Osman Spare (Frater U:D:., 1990, 2004). The Chaos Magic movement's focus on results and its willingness to experiment provided a creative space for magical praxis.

It should be acknowledged, though, that 'Belief as Technique' may ultimately be something of a red herring. While the belief being utilised in a magical working may be held only for as long as is needed to achieve a state of **Gnosis**, there is a primary belief that must go beyond mere technical expediency, namely the belief in the validity of Gnosis as a state of consciousness in which magical outcomes can be effected. It is worth noting that for many years the leader of the Chaos Magic group the IOT in the UK was not a Chaos Magician per se but the Rune Master and Odian, Ian Read. It could be argued that Óðin with his continuing curiosity and questioning represents the ideal and original Chaos magician recognising each apparently ultimate or absolute framework as but another veil of Mystery (Rûna).

6. The Relationship between Magic and Spirituality

Occultism may not be the same as religion although, as Crowley noted, it may in many cases share its aims (Crowley, 2005). Similarly, there is something of a fuzzy boundary between magic and spirituality when the latter is understood experientially. In addition to developing notions of implicit religion or folk religion (Bailey, 1998, 2001a, 2001b) we can also see the rise of the term 'mystical religion' to connote an engagement with activities that are felt by the subject to be both spiritual and potentially leading to personal growth or insights that cannot be arrived at by cognition alone (Barker et al, 2004; Bowman, 1999; Campbell, 1978; Gallup & Jones, 2000; Hanegraaff, 1996 & 1999; Ward, 2002).

Spirituality is a hotly contested term; there are even atheistic models of spirituality (Antinoff, 2009; Watson, 2008). Not surprisingly, each writer has their own particular definition or proposed solution to the problem of Spirituality (Rose, 2001). While not all magicians would regard their practice as necessarily spiritual, there are definite similarities between the difficulties in adequately describing magical experience and the problems in providing clear definitions of the terms 'spiritual' and 'spiritual experience'. The link lies in the resistance of certain experiences to adequate representation rather than any necessary equivalence between the experiences themselves in terms of their content. In the field of spirituality studies there is resistance to any consideration of occult practices as a valid form of self-research (Barker, Dinka, Sinisa & Borowik, 2004). This problem is acknowledged by Vitale (2006) in his proposal for a model approach to the study of Western Occultism.

Hunter and Whitten define the distinction between religion and magic as resting on the 'element of control', while further distinguishing magic from science on the grounds that the former remains empirically untested (Hunter & Whitten, 1976). Occult practice often involves the evoking or invoking of non-human entities, which may be Gods or entities of some intermediary status. However, according to the 'classic' definition of magic (Bailey, 2006; Hutton, 2000, 2006), this is not to equate magical ritual with prayer, since the magician is not dependent on the grace or favour of God for the efficacy of their ritual, but has 'some means of directing supernatural power to their own will' (Hutton, 2000, p.106). Hutton goes on to make the essential point that there is a considerable overlap between magic and religion, but that nonetheless the two are distinguishable. As a practitioner of magic and also philosophically, my own view is that, while recent sociological and anthropological examinations of magic do offer useful insight into the social relations and structures of magic as a social discourse, the fundamental qualities of magical praxis are founded on the conviction that certain actions carried out in the appropriate state of consciousness will yield results. Magical praxis, regarded as a causally effective means of interacting with the world, is dependent on the practitioner and his/her proficiency rather than divine intent.

7. New Age Spirituality

There is a growing public involvement in activities and belief structures that are variously referred to as New Age, alternative spiritualities, or New Religious Movements. Many of these emerging approaches to the spiritual have some degree of engagement with the world of magic: various forms of divination, attempts to use crystals for healing purposes, the manipulation of sound and breath for magical results along with various methodologies for astral projection, channelling (which bears comparison to certain forms of invocation) and trance work all find their place in the so called New Age movement (Aupers & Hautmann, 2006; Campbell, 2004; Houtman & Mascini, 2002; Landy & Saler, 2009). One of the difficulties with the concept of the New Age is that no clear definition of what constitutes the New Age has been provided and has been used to mean different things by both practitioners and scholars alike (Granholm, 2013; Redden, 2005). For the most part New Age serves as a descriptor of those alternative spiritualities that have emerged in the last thirty to forty years and which express sympathy with notions of esotericism, human potential and the importance of engaging with the world from a spiritualised perspective.

A further difficulty in thinking about the New Age is the need to separate the practitioner from the burgeoning Mind-Body-Spirit industry which functions as a commodification of the practitioners' praxis. Many scholars argue that the New Age is, rather than spiritual, unrelentingly consumerist in nature (Aupers & Hautmann, 2006; Carrette & King, 2005; Ezzy, 2006; Hope & Jones, 2006; Redden, 2005; York, 2001). While this may be an accurate and useful critique of the New Age industry, it would be wrong to extrapolate from this that all practitioners who draw on New Age (or so labelled) resources are themselves merely engaging in a novel form of consumption.

In contemporary society the most common form of esoteric activity is engagement with one of the ever increasing versions of Wicca (Berger, Evan & Shaffer, 2003; Lurhman, 1986). The connection between Wicca and the admittedly amorphous and hard to define New Age varies enormously from group to group. Traditional **Gardnerian** and **Alexandrian** Wicca might have little in common with New Age approaches due to the existence of a reasonably stable and well established belief structure, ritual framework and approaches to magical praxis. **Eclectic** Wicca, which takes a more syncretic approach, could be regarded as being a New Age form of Wiccan praxis, if one takes the

broad view of the New Age as referring to novel, free-form, esoterically inclined, spiritual movements.

The New Age has been described by a number of academics as incoherent, radically individual and not grounded in established spiritual frameworks but rather offering only a ‘bricolage’ of numerous pseudo-scientific and de-contextualised theories (Baerveldt, 1996; Hamilton, Sutcliffe and Bowman, 2000; Luckmann, 1967; Lyon, 2000; Possamai, 2003). These critics all point to the consumerist nature of New Age practice and its strong resonance with the cultural habits of late-capitalism. It would be useful to note that many contemporary practitioners of magic also have considerable disdain for the consumerism of the New Age (Travers, 2009). However, it is worth reiterating that this disdain can only reasonably be extended to the commercial exploitation of spiritual belief and magical technologies and should not be applied to individuals working within a New Age paradigm.

Aupers and Houtman (2006) argue that many of the authors referenced above are, in treating the notion of authenticity as a valid characteristic lacking in the New Age, engaging in a naïve critique. Heelas (2006) argues that the New Age offers a consistent approach to inner development and that the centrality of self is not a mere reflection of consumerist values. Instead, he proposes that the New Age recognises the underlying truths that underpin all spiritual traditions. Tomasi’s exploration of the way in which public ethics homogenise non-public values and beliefs (2001) is represented by the homogenising of discrete values by many New Age products and publications. However, once again, this critique does not negate the possibility of the individual working with, for example, a syncretic mixture of Shinto ancestor worship and trance working, experiencing a valid and authentic process of self-development.

Heelas (1996, 2006) argues that the New Age offers a means by which people can negotiate a successful path between antinomianism and social conformity in terms of their engagement with spirituality. Heelas is generally positive about this ‘turn to the self’ and regards the New Age as providing a spiritual dimension to the focus on the self. To some extent he is supported in this view by Höllinger (2004) who recognises the increasing conformism of countercultural movements, but argues that a residuum of

resistance exists within the New Age movement and Main (2002) who argues that the New Age offers a holistic approach to religiosity. Heelas' claim that the last hundred years have seen a radical focus on the self is open to challenge. When we talk of the increasing focus on the individual we are talking about the growth of a small number of post-industrial capitalist cultures and the new role of consumer that has been assigned to most people within those cultures. We might suggest that this is not a century of the self, but a century in which the way in which individuals understand the nature of self has been reordered and re-packaged by the capitalist structure within which they exist. However, in turning towards the spiritual, albeit in many instances through carefully priced and packaged products, the individual who engages with the concept of the New Age may still find a route to the types of experiences that are valued by more established esoteric traditions. If authentic magical experiences are possible, a view to which I am committed, such experiences are not ordered so as to fit within any surrounding societal framework since the focus of such experiences is on the persistent but elusive hidden truths. Consequently, while I and others may doubt the intentions of the industry from which New Age texts emerge, they may still provide the same personal outcomes as a commitment to other esoteric movements.

The Alternative Spiritualities and New Age Studies Association is an informal network of scholars focusing on 'New Age' spirituality and esotericism. It publishes a journal through the Open University, whose main focus is sociological and it has an editorial focus that is sympathetic to the concept of the New Age. Its journal articles often regard the esoteric as synonymous with the New Age. Some academics looking into contemporary witchcraft have noted that there is a tension between the practice of witchcraft and its management by the publishing market (Ezzy, 2003, 2006). In this regard witchcraft could be said to face the same difficulties described above in relation to the New Age. The eclectic market commodification of traditions that is associated with the New Age as an industry (York, 2001) may be seen as a point of separation from other esoterisms. However, Ezzy's papers indicate that the tension between the authentic expression of magical or spiritual praxis and the commodification of human experience is not limited to the New Age. Moreover, the tension is complicated in that without the publishing industry the spread of esoteric beliefs and practices would have been sorely hampered. It must also be acknowledged that the exemption of Odianism from such

exploitation may simply be a measure of its relative lack of market appeal than of any resistance to such popularisation by its adherents.

8. The Western Mystery Tradition

The ‘Western Mystery Tradition’ is a collective term for a range of occult systems that share an interest in **ceremonial magic, hermetic Kabbala, alchemy** (both spiritual and practical), and various other related practices. The primary focus of all branches of the Western Mystery Tradition is “**The Great Work**”. It is difficult to summarise everything that this phrase indicates, but essentially it is the attempt to make contact with one’s spiritual or higher consciousness.

Many of the practices associated with what is termed the Western Mystery Tradition originated in Mediterranean cultures. I had originally intended to propose that the Western Mystery Tradition might be more accurately regarded as the Mediterranean Mystery Tradition, and that the practices and belief structures originating in North-Western Europe be referred to as the Northern Mystery Tradition. Odianism would constitute a group within the Northern Tradition. However, while ‘Northern’ is used as a descriptor indicating the geographical/ cultural origin of the practices and beliefs associated therewith, ‘Western’ in this nomenclature is not an indicator of origin, but of the broad cultural milieu in which a range of practices have been developed over a number of centuries (Hanegraaff, 2013; Stuckrad, 2005). While it may be accurate to describe Kabbala, for example, as Mediterranean in origin, its development in myriad forms over the centuries is such that the Kabbala of Mathers (Mathers, 1991) is quite distinct from that of say Isaac Luria (Klein, 2005). Consequently, the term Mediterranean Tradition would be potentially misleading since the Western Mystery Tradition from the Renaissance onwards is informed by broadly European or ‘Western’ socio-cultural development rather than by a narrowly Mediterranean influence.

Across all forms of Western Occultism we find a great significance attached to Tradition, the development of the ‘**higher self**’ and the need for Balance (York, 2001). The notion of ‘Balance’ refers to a state of being or consciousness in which the individual is able to encounter the Universe from a position of deep understanding. The nature of that ‘Balance’ and how it might be achieved varies. The fin de siècle occult revival saw a

number of groups such as the Order of the Golden Dawn, Fraternity of the Inner Light emerge that were strongly influenced by an often Christianised hermetic kabbala and the notion of ‘Balance’ indicated by an analysis of the three pillars on the ‘Tree of Life’ (Butler, 2002; Encausse, 2000; Fortune, 2000; Gilbert 2013; Owen, 2004; Regardie, 1994, 2000). A number of groups within the contemporary occult milieu such as those inspired by, or claiming a lineage from the original Golden Dawn (such as the Ciceros’ Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn and David Griffin’s Order of the Golden Dawn), continue to be influenced by this understanding in which ‘Balance’ is manifested by remaining on a narrow central path avoiding the extremes of both ‘Severity’ and ‘Mercy’ (Butler, 2002; Cicero, 2003; Drury, 2011).

Odianism advocates a balance that is achieved through the ability to operate at and within extremes. The former is a balancing by negation while the latter is a balancing by exposure and overcoming. Within the Northern Tradition there is a focus on the historical source material that supports the adoption of certain practices, values and beliefs. Within those manifestations of the Western Mystery Tradition that are influenced by occult revival groups; the various contemporary attempts to revive the Golden Dawn, the A:.A:. or the Caliphate and Typhonian OTO organisations; the concept of Tradition tends to focus on the specific issues of lineage within particular orders and systems of praxis.

Scholarly interest in magical praxis within the Western Mystery Tradition has led to the emergence of some broadly accepted sub-categorisations. We find a division between ‘**Low**’ and ‘**High**’ magic as well as between those practices which see the magician as the object of the work and those in which the magician seeks to act on an object external to himself (Copenhaver, 1984; McVey, 2001; Walker, 1995). Walker and Copenhaver both propose a stable form of categorisation, albeit with different factors defining the allocation of magical practices to their appropriate sub-category. However, McVey questions the validity of such a fixed categorisation. For example he rightly points to the problematic nature of a fixed divide between the ‘spiritual’ and the ‘demonic’ (McVey, 2001) given the use of divine names in so called demonic acts of evocation and the reliance of transformative magic on the use of barbarous or demonic names and words of power.

The contemporary practice of magic within the Western Mystery Tradition is strongly influenced by the major organisations and practitioners of the **Magical Revival** that spanned the end of the nineteenth century and lasted into at least the 1920's (Morrison, 2008; Walters, 2007). Vitale (2006) makes the argument that the magical world view of those groups deriving from the Magical Revival is distinct from **Neo-Paganism** due to its relationship to the natural world. Vitale argues that while Neo-Paganism tends to seek an ecological relationship with the natural world, the Western Mystery Tradition is focused on the domination and manipulation of this world through the power of **Will** or in the case of strictly **Theurgic** practices through the superior power of the Divine. Vitale's argument may not be applicable to the Western Mystery Tradition as a whole, but does highlight an important feature of those groups that are influenced by monotheistic belief structures; a hierarchical separation between the physical realm and the supra-physical. The Northern Tradition posits a world, which is largely hostile since its inception, but that can be rendered liveable through our own conscious efforts (Travers, 2009).

Vitale (2006) is right to point to a high level of didacticism and textual instruction in many magical groups that can be located within the modern Western Mystery Tradition (exemplified by, for example, the Felkin's Stella Matutina order derived from the **Golden Dawn** or by the largest contemporary Golden Dawn inspired group (The Hermetic Order of The Golden Dawn Inc.)). The developing focus on texts and lineage based authority, alongside the shift towards a scientific interpretation of magical action and functionality is also described by Hanegraaf (2003). Hanegraaf uses this evidence to support his claim that occultism is not an incongruous practice in a 'disenchanted' world since the developments mentioned above have effectively disenchanted occultism without removing the interest in its practice. However, didacticism in instruction does not necessarily remove the possibility of an encounter with the numinous or mysterious arising from the enacting of magical practices.

9. The Northern Tradition

The Northern Tradition emerges out of the indigenous pre-Christian beliefs of the Northern European peoples (Cush, 1997; Harvey, 2007; Jones & Pennick, 1997). Unlike the Western Mystery Tradition which has had a continuous and well documented history over many centuries (Stuckrad, 2005), the Northern Tradition cannot point to a persistent

continuum of practice. While the Northern Tradition attempts to connect with the practices and beliefs of Pre-Christian Northern Europe, it is nonetheless, like Wicca (Hutton, 1999, 2011, 2012) a modern praxis with no direct uninterrupted link to those practices and beliefs which it attempts to reconstruct or emulate (Blain & Wallis, 2006; Harvey, 2007; Strmiska, 2005). Contemporary practice of magic within the Northern Tradition has interacted with and at times borrowed from the Western Mystery Tradition and indeed many of the current practitioners in the former field are active to a lesser degree in the latter.

There are numerous academic studies that explore the historical use of runes for magical purposes (Elliott, 1980; McKinnell, Simek & Düwel, 2004; McKinnell, 2007; MacLeod, 2002; Spurkland, 2005; Stoklund, 2006). Flowers' doctoral thesis (2009) provides an overview of previous scholarship in the field of rune magic. Flowers' focus is on the historical utilisation of runes in magical operations and his literature review considers the 'pendular swings' in the field of academic runology between viewing the runes as magical or as a mundane writing scheme. However, Flowers' thesis does not touch on contemporary runic praxis or its philosophical implications.

While much of the Ur-Tradition relating to Óðin must be extrapolated from archaeological finds, there are numerous literary sources, which while not contemporaneous with the beliefs they describe, are believed by Odians to provide some insight into the tradition and the Mysteries with which the Odian is seeking to reconnect. The *Heimskringla* (Sturluson, 1991), for example, contains numerous references to Óðin and his association with magical acts amongst its more prosaic tales of kingship and political intrigue for instance.

There has been some academic work out that suggests, although that there may have been a continuation of certain pre-Christian or **Heathen** practices by the clergy, particularly within monasteries, as well as among the laity in Medieval Europe (Liuzza, 2004; Page, 2001). However, while this is an appealing concept as an Odian, it is not a widely supported or evidenced academic perspective.

Thorsson (1994, pp. 1-10) presents an Odian ‘master-narrative’ in which, following the Christianisation of Northern Europe, the magical practices associated with the Northern Tradition were either absorbed by the emerging quasi-Christian culture or were practiced covertly. The first wave of the Northern Revival was primarily focused on Scandinavian pre-Christian culture and belief; specifically the peoples of Gautland who were thought to be the original Goths. This movement known as Storgoticism reached its height in the sixteenth century through the efforts of writers such as Johannes Magnus and Johannes Bureus (Thorsson, 1987).

The second wave of the Northern Revival began toward the end of the nineteenth Century and is marked by the publication of *Das Geheimnis der Runen* [The Secret of the Runes] by Guido Von List in 1908 (List, 1988; Thorsson, 1984 pp.15-16; 1996). List constructed a **rune row** known as the **Armanen** Rune Row which was derived from the rune references within the **Hávamál** from the Poetic Edda (Gorsleben, 2002; List, 1988).

The revival of interest in the Northern Tradition continued throughout the early and mid-twentieth century. Occultists such as Friedrich Marby, Siegfried Kummer, Karl Spiesberger and Eugen Grosche produced a number of private works and some public texts that sought to establish a Germanic magical praxis alongside scholarly investigations into the historical basis for the tradition (List, 1988 pp32-36) [translator’s introduction]; O’Donoghue, 2008; Thorsson, 1987). The Listian current was re-invigorated in the late 1960’s when the Guido von List Society was re-activated by Adolf and Sigrun Schleipfer (List, 1998, p.36). The Schleipfers were both also involved in the reinvigorated Armanen Order which has been in contact with the Rune Gild while following its own particular approach to the Northern Tradition (Thorsson, 2007, p.37).

The Northern Tradition is relatively ambivalent about post-death possibilities, offering a number of possible after-life states, including a particular understanding of re-incarnation for certain types of person. However, the key point here is that the Northern Tradition does not postpone the after-life experience to coincide with some greater cosmological shift, but regards each individual process as occurring in its own time frame.

10. Introducing The High One

Óðin is, according to Odianism, ‘the God of the rune masters, who attempt to emulate the archetypal pattern of his myths in their lives’ (Thorsson, 2005). An Odian may regard **Óðin/ Woden/ Wotan** as being an externally existing third party or as a mythological representation of a complex of ideas and values that the Odian takes as their guide. The ontological implications of different ways of perceiving Óðin are considered later in the thesis.

Óðin is a God of magic, poetry, ecstasy, warfare and above all consciousness.

Etymologically, his name derives from the root term ‘wodh’ which means inspiration, frenzy or ecstasy. The ‘An’ element in the proto-name ‘Wodhanaz’ can be translated as meaning ‘Master of’ and the Rune Gild interprets Óðin as meaning, ‘Master of Inspiration’(Thorsson, 1987). Within the Rune Gild the critical incident in the narrative of Óðin is his winning of the runes (Larrington, 1999). This is achieved through the sacrifice of self to self, which may be more effectively rendered as self to Self:

I know that I hung on a windy tree
nine long nights,
wounded with a spear, dedicated to Odin,
myself to myself (ibid, [Hávamál, st.138] p.34).

According to the Odian perspective, the giving of self to Self is not a sacrifice of the mundane self to a Higher Self, nor should it be understood as the sacrificing of the personality to an eternal Soul. The sacrifice of self to Self within Odianism represents the process of devoting one’s energies to bringing the totality of the **Self-complex** to consciousness. The complexity of the Soul lore within Odianism is explored later in the thesis and the significance of this sacrifice will hopefully be made clear.

It is important to note that Óðin is not bound by the ethical code of the society in which he plays a leading role, but will act outside that code in order to maintain the well-being and continuity of his folk or to further his own understanding of Rûna (Mystery). This seeming contradiction is explored in later chapters in relation to the ethical framework of Odianism and the central role played by paradox in the realisation of Odian praxis. Odianism may be dualistic in its use of binary oppositions such as Fire and Ice in its cosmogony and cosmology. However, its explanatory model of the universe is one that is intertwined and richly complex Thorsson claims that this complexity is also intrinsic to

the pre-Christian Northern European tradition and is evidenced in cultural artefacts such as the complex zoomorphic images of Viking Age artwork (Thorsson, 1994, IX, p.1).

In order to understand Odianism we need to understand the key characteristics of Óðin. He is regarded as the All-Father and within Odianism this is interpreted by some, including Thorsson, as a suggestion that other Gods should be regarded as hypostases of Óðin. However, this does not imply a move towards monotheism and most importantly there is no sense in which Óðin can be regarded as omniscient or omnipotent. Within the Northern Tradition the act of creation itself, the formation of the Universe, is not the result of a divine fiat, but a natural process that arises within the **Ginnungagap**.

Importantly, Óðin emerges sometime after the process of existence has begun. Odianism argues that Óðin functions as a magician from the moment he attains consciousness, with his earliest act being the alchemical creation of a new physical Universe. It is an act of alchemical magic rather than one of divine creation because Óðin destroys what already exists and re-constructs something wholly different from its constituent parts.

The Odianist recognises and honours Óðin as a God and as the All-Father, but does not necessarily seek to emulate the magical activities of Óðin. The Odian recognises Óðin's divine function, but is primarily concerned with emulating Óðin's example. Odian as a term derives from 'Óðr' rather than Óðin: The Odian seeks to develop the presence of Óðr within him/ herself. Óðr is the ecstatic, frenzied, inspired state of consciousness from which Óðin derives his power and position. In following the example of Óðin the Odian works with the runes (hence an Odian may also be called a Runer). The Runes are not the rune stave symbols themselves but the mysteries of which the rune symbols are symbolic representations. The Odian's external goal is to glimpse the ultimate Mystery or Rûna and the internal goal is to Self-become (Thorsson, 1994, VI, pp1-2).

The Odian Tradition is not just concerned with the development of the individual but also with the need to explore and value the cultural context from which Odianism draws its inspiration. In the *Gildisbók*, Thorsson adopts a model of culture in which four components are deemed to make up the cultural matrix for any given group. These four elements are Ethnic, Ethical, Material and Linguistic. A holistic culture in this model would be one in which all people who shared in membership of the culture group would

also have common bonds in all aspects of this cultural grid. The Odian is both committed to the value of holistic cultural structures and to seeking where possible to assist in the return to a more holistic social structure. There is a danger that cultural holism becomes oppressively homogenizing, but there is also scope for a significant range of expressions within a broadly shared cultural matrix. Odian cultural holism is not a quest for total identity between all members of a cultural community. It attempts to find sufficient ‘family resemblance’ across the aspects of the cultural grid such that a mutual understanding and co-operative mode of existence is a realistic possibility.

Odianism is committed to the existence of a continuum between the Gods and Goddesses and the Folk. In Odianism, Gods transcend the human but they do not transcend the Universe. Moreover, in the case of Óðin, his status as a God and knowledge of Rûna is only achieved through the successful use of certain magical rites. It is therefore reasonable within Odianism to regard oneself as seeking self-deification since this is the example set by Óðin. However, we must understand the term, ‘deity’ in its particular and limited sense. In Odianism Gods are not the creators of the Universe, nor are they omniscient or omnipresent. Consequently, we can understand the concept of self-deification as an attempt to ensure the permanent persistence of personal individuated consciousness combined with the ability to enact the will of that consciousness within the worlds.

The term ‘Odinism’ first appears in the nineteenth century, perhaps most famously in Thomas Carlyle’s lecture series on heroism (2007 [1840]). The first modern Odinist group, The Angelcyn Church of Odin, was founded in 1936 by Alexander Rudd Mills. Mills’ approach to Odinism exerted a significant influence on Else Christensen who established the Odinist Study Group (later termed The Odinist Fellowship) in the late 1960’s (Kaplan, 1996). Some adherents of the Northern Tradition refer to themselves as ‘Ásatrú’ (trothful to the Aesir) and the Ásatrú Free Assembly (AFA) was established by Stephen McNallen in the USA in 1972. At almost the same time, Beinteinsson achieved government recognition in Iceland for his pantheistic Ásatrúarfélagið faith (Erlendsdóttir, 2001). The AFA was to split in 1986 into the Ásatrú Alliance, which promoted a Folkish approach to the Northern Tradition and The Ring of Troth (later, The Troth) founded by Thorsson and James Chisholm which emphasized a non-racial approach to Tradition

(Gardell, 2003). While Mills, Christensen present Odinism as a religion, the AFA and those groups which emerged from it place greater emphasis on ritual and, particularly in the case of The Troth, the magical aspects of the Northern Tradition (Kaplan, 1997).

In the UK Odinism is primarily represented by The Odinic Rite and The Odinist Fellowship. The Odinic Rite was founded in 1973 as 'The Committee for the Restoration of the Odinic Rite' by John Gibbs-Bailey and John Yeowell. The Odinist Fellowship was established in 1988 by Ralph Harrison, who had previously been a member of the Odinic Rite (Jones, 2006; Kaplan, 1996; Snook, 2013). The Odinist Fellowship is explicit in its view that magical praxis is not an intrinsic aspect of Odinism: magical effects arise from the intervention of divinity or divinity working with humans, but not from the Will of individuals (<http://www.odinistfellowship.co.uk/>). The position of the Odinic Rite in relation to magic is more nuanced. The Odinic Rite regards its rituals as intrinsically magical (Fontaine, 1999; Krasskova, 2005), but beyond participation in those rituals which are an expression of faith, there is no requirement for members to engage in magical work. Within the Rite there is a sub-group, 'The Circle of Ostara', which is specifically concerned with the practice of magic (<http://www.odinic-rite.org/main/odinism-and-magic/>).

Many Odinists and contemporary Heathens do engage in magical work and many, if not all, Odians have a spiritual relationship to Óðin. Odianism, due to its primary concern with magical Self-becoming, is distinct from contemporary Odinism since the latter does not require that all its members engage in magical work. Whereas Odianism is primarily concerned with the use of magic in a search for Rûna (Mystery), Odinism is primarily concerned with honouring Odin (and often other deities within the Northern Tradition); magical praxis is either eschewed or is not seen as intrinsic to the practice of Odinism. Similarly, the contemporary Heathenism of Ásatrúar, Vanatrúar, **Theodism** and other forms of **Troth** are not necessarily associated with magical praxis. Magical praxis is fundamental to Odianism and in this sense connections can be drawn to Wicca. A modern religion that seeks to reawaken a connection to pre-Christian spiritual impulses and practices, Wicca was established in the 1940's (Heselton, 2003; Hutton, 1999). Wicca, despite its duo-theistic position, also refers to an unknowable mysterious level of divinity beyond the knowable Lord and Lady. This 'Prime Mover' (Gardner, 1988, pp.26-7)

might be usefully compared to the Odian concept of Rûna. In addition, like Odianism, Wicca places magical work at the heart of what it means to be a Wiccan (Bado-Fralick, 2002; Hume, 1998; Hutton, 1999; York, 1999) and this is emphasized by its three grades of initiation, the magical nature of much of its liturgy (such as ‘Calling the Quarters’) and the importance of the grimoire-like ‘Book of Shadows’. In recounting the development of the Rune Gild and particular nature of Odianism Thorsson (2007) does not acknowledge any influence from Wicca or from other contemporary paganisms and folk-magical systems other than those firmly within the Northern Tradition. However, it seems likely that, as the pre-eminent manifestation of contemporary paganism with an intrinsically magical approach to the mysteries, Wicca will have had some influence in the development of the Rune Gild as a specifically magically focused expression of the Northern Tradition.

11. A Summary of the Rune Staves

The Runes themselves are central to the Northern tradition and play a key role in Odian practice. The use of rune lots in divination is referenced by Tacitus in *Germania* (Mattingly, 2010). There is also significant evidence of runic and related practices continuing well into the post-Christianisation period (Thorsson, 1984, 2005). Runology as an academic discipline is split on the operative function of rune staves (Flowers, 2009 pp31-46). However, there is a significant body of evidence, not least the relatively contemporaneous shift from the Elder Futhark of 24 runes to a revised Futhark of 16 runes, which suggests that the runes did originally have a magical function (*ibid* pp85-126). Within contemporary Odianism the Elder Futhark of 24 runes tends to be used, but there are those who work with both the Younger Futhark and the Anglo-Frisian Futhorc (Thorsson, 1984).

Runes provide a useful doorway into an understanding of the reality paradigm within which Odianism operates. The Rune Gild has adopted the etymological association of ‘Rune’ with ‘Mystery’ (Thorsson, 2005), an etymology that is largely based on the meaning of the Old English, ‘Rûn’ (Page, 1999; Pierce, 2006). Within Odianism Rûna indicates the Universal category of Mystery or the totality of Mystery, while Rune refers to a particular instance of Mystery or a discrete secret or piece of wisdom that may be

apprehended by an individual (ibid). It is common to refer to the Futhark graphemes as runes and this can cause confusion in suggesting that the Mystery lies within the written symbol itself. Strictly speaking a grapheme from any of the runic futharks should be referred to as a, ‘rune stave’. This indicates that the futhark elements are to be regarded as representations of particular mysteries and not mysteries in themselves; they are means by which we can begin to approach mysteries (Thorsson, 1984, pp.1-3).

A complete ‘alphabet’ of rune staves is referred to by the terms ‘Futhark’ or ‘Futhorc’ depending on its origin. A more generic term for a full sequence of staves is a ‘rune row’. The rune row of the Elder Futhark is divided into 3 sub-rows or ‘aetts’ of 8 staves and each aett has a theme which links the individual mysteries represented by the staves. This Tripartism is also present in the rune stave meanings (ibid, p.3) and in the means by which each rune stave conveys its implied content. We can additionally treat the rune row as a representation of the process of development experienced by a **Vitki** or rune magician, whereby control over the physical leads to understanding and a struggle to win the mysteries culminating in a leadership role once wisdom has been won (Thorsson, 1987). It is also common, and in keeping with the nature of the rune staves as representing dynamic living mysteries, to explore the relationships between rune staves that have a structural relationship to each other: For instance, one might consider, as a group, the first stave in each of the three aetts with a view to developing an understanding of the Mystery represented by that triadic relationship.

The source material that gives rise to the interpretations within the Rune Gild is primarily the collection of Rune Poems (Flowers, 2002; Thorsson, 1984, 2003) of which three remain completely preserved. Every stave consists of a sound, a shape and its hidden lore. A brief summary of the meanings of the Elder Futhark staves drawing on Thorsson and discussions within the Gild more generally follows:

Fehu (Cattle)  represents mobile wealth, the circulation of energy within the body and the element of Fire moving freely in the Universe and outward force.

Uruz (Aurochs)  represents irresistible massive force in nature, the shaping forces within the self and the Universe and the element of Ice and Water in the Ginnungagap process.

Thurisaz (Thorn)  represents directed force in nature, the power of an individual to direct defensive or the use of aggressive force by the individual. This stave also refers to the **Thurses** in the Universe. Thurisaz is always applied to or against something. The first Thurses emerge from the clash of Fire and Ice in the Ginnungagap ( +  → ). This stave represents, ‘instinctual will devoid of self consciousness and is also a symbol of fertility and potency, stressful to the non-Odian but a source of strength to the **Erulian**’ (Thorsson, 1987, p.117).

Ansuz (Gods)  is the rune of magical breath and power. It represents conscious leadership, the power of ecstatic inspiration (Woð or Óðr), and the Aesir (specifically Óðin) in the Universe. It represents the medium through which spiritual or magical knowledge is obtained. Ansuz also refers to the ancestral powers and the meta-genetic link that exists between the Gods and the Folk.

Raiðo (Riding)  represents travel and movement, right action in accordance with **Wyrð** and the passage of time within the Universe as being dependant on action rather than a quality in itself.

Kenaz  represents a bursting forth, at the physical level can refer to sores and fever. In magical terms it represents moments where awareness bursts through into consciousness. Kenaz is the element of Fire under focused control. It represents technological knowledge and the ability to shape – the ‘solve’ of the alchemical formula ‘**solve et coagula**’ and so is also seen as the rune of human ingenuity. Kenaz appears to relate closely to Thurisaz, but while Thurisaz represents a self-created force that is then directed outwards, Kenaz represents a force that arises unbidden within and is directed inwards when and if controlled.

Gebo  represents giving amongst the folk, the giving of self to Self in magical development and the dynamic relationship of consciousness to the Universe. It also represents the relational nature of existence; that all things living and non-living exist in relationships to other things.

Wunjo  represents harmony and joy. This is not the harmony of Christianity but a joy that derives from self-sufficiency, holistic community and wisdom. It represents the individual state of being when fully awakened and the harmony in the Universe resulting from the proper dynamic of Gebo being observed. As harmony within the Northern Tradition arises from tribal relations, this rune also refers to the binding together of individuals as a discrete folk-unit.

Hagalaz  represents Hail as an image of natural catastrophe, the inner catastrophe of the initiatory experience and the element of Ice as a primal seed function. The initiatory aspect of this stave is supported by the saga sources which describe Óðin fashioning the world from the dismembered body of **Ymir** the frost giant or the first ice seed. Hagalaz is the rune that contains all others and the unfolding of the runes from Hagalaz is mirrored in the unfolding of the genetic code and the potential waiting to be unfolded in the Universe.

Nauðiz  represents the experience of need in the world and the concept of the ‘Need Fire’ when understood in terms of magical development. At the Universal level Nauðiz represents the restrictive aspect of form and the element of Fire as friction in the Universe. Nauðiz represents the mystery of cause and effect and is often regarded as the rune of coming into being

Isa  represents stillness and absence of growth in nature, the meditative calm in magical development and the element of Ice as a condensing force in the Universe. Ice works with Fire to create matter in the world represented by the hail seed waiting to unfold. Isa represents the force that holds the Self together during stressful initiatory experiences as imaged in the ice road referenced in the rune poem (Flowers, 2002).

Jera  represents the harvest in the organic world, at the individual level it represents the rewards won through efforts rather than through any concept of divine grace, at the Universal level Jera represents the seasonal tides be they the earthly tides or the cosmic tides. Diagrammatically, the Jera stave can be seen as related to the Swastika in its representation of the annual movement of the constellation of Woden's Wain (Ursa major) around the Pole Star (Godwin, 1996).

Eihwaz  represents the mysteries of life and death, the Yew being both an evergreen and deeply poisonous. It also represents the developing Vitki's ability to move between **Hel** and **Asgard** in terms of consciousness. Within the Universe it represents the world tree **Yggdrasil**. The rune Eihwaz also links to the **Irminsul** or **Eormensyl** Pillar that represents the link between humanity and all the realms beyond **Midgard**. Eihwaz and Jera between them represent the cosmological order (Eihwaz) and the natural order (Jera) along with the cyclical processes that are proper to both the cosmos and life in Midgard.

Perthro  represents the role of chance and luck in the life of individuals, it also represents the concept of the **Hamingja**, which is an element of the soul complex and within the Universe it represents the inescapable force of the **Orlög**. This rune points to Urdharbrunnr (The Well of **Urdhr**) as the source of the choices and destiny that emerges for the individual over time.

Elhaz  represents self-protection and protection of the folk, while warning against grasping at the ability to wield this metaphorical sword too soon. It also signifies the honouring of the Gods and the raising of consciousness through that process. Within the Universe it represents the role of the **Valkyjur**, the link to the personal spark of divinity. If Eihwaz represents a straight vertical link to the trans-personal then Elhaz represents a more winding and exploratory approach.

Sowilo  represents the nurturing power of the Sun. It is important to note that in the Germanic tradition the Sun is regarded as female since it lacks the element of threat associated with the Sun in hotter climes. For the individual Sowilo represents victory and attainment, connecting with the following stave Tiwaz representing the sovereignty that

follows victory. At the Universal level Sowilo represents the element of Fire as a creative nourishing force. Sowilo is transformative and protective, vital and dynamic.

Tiwaz ↑ represents the principle of legal order and troth amongst the folk, for the individual it represents honour and perseverance while in the Universe it represents both the Pole star and the God Tyr who sacrifices his hand in order to fetter the wolf Fenrir. While Sowilo represents the winning of victory in a range of contexts, it is Tiwaz that signifies the establishment of order subsequent to victory, in this sense it is a rune of the consolidation that follows a battle or struggle. Tiwaz has links to the pole star and is thus a more distant, permanent symbol of order than the cyclical nurturing power of Sowilo.

Berkano ♀ represents beauty without obvious fecundity and can be taken to refer to gestation, in the individual it represents the growth of insight and new wisdom while on the Universal level Berkano represents that which grows in secret. Berkano is both a source of beginnings and a container of endings. The role of Berkano has an association with the cyclical nature of time described by List (1988) in that from it all beginnings arise and to it all things return. Berkano itself is a conserving passive force that conceals and protects. It does not represent the initiation of any action but the space (almost Ginnungagap like) from which new actions arise.

Ehwaz ♂ represents the horse, which is a key totemic animal in Indo-European culture and is a source of power in excess of that achievable by man alone and so can be seen as representing the power of the transpersonal in very general terms. In the individual it represents the **Fylgja or fetch** element of the Self-complex and so facilitates the journeying of the Self-complex among the worlds of consciousness. In the Universe it represents synergistic forces. On a social level Ehwaz also represents relationships within the Folk that are based on trust and mutual loyalty.

Mannaz ⚡ represents Mankind and specifically the distinction of consciousness that man possesses. For the individual it represents the sovereignty of consciousness since the stave consists of the Ehwaz rune (the transpersonal) combined with the Dagaz rune (illumination). Within the Universe this rune represents mortality or entropy. The link to the divine implied by the sovereignty of consciousness is intrinsic rather than contractual.

Laguz  represents both water and by association depths but also the Leek and by association upwards and outwards expressions of power. To the individual the stave represents both the deep unconscious and the externally focused power that can be obtained through understanding this depth. In the Universe it represents the element of Water as formless potential and the well of Urðr. It is a rune of organic life and of the passage into and out of that state. Laguz is associated with growth and it is the connection to growth that ties it to both the primal waters containing life in potentia and the Leek which represents life at its most vigorously manifested.

Ingwaz  represents the Earth and its generative powers. In the individual it represents the core of Self in which concepts or symbols may be buried in order that they gestate and grow in power. In the Universe it is the God **Freyr** or **Yngvi-Freyr** the Vanic God of fertility and vital power. Ingwaz is a rune of concealment and of power growing in darkness. The association with secrecy and earthiness, of burying a substance of power in the dirt, has been interpreted as referencing certain sexual-magic practices.

Dagaz  represents both dusk and dawn, the movement from night into day and vice versa. For the individual it represents the process of inner awakening or illumination and a balance achievable by occupying all extremes simultaneously. On the Universal level Dagaz represents the mystery of paradox (Thorsson, 1984, p.67; 1987, p.133) as imaged by the shape of the stave itself.

Othila  represents the homeland and the Folk, visually it indicates the protected and enclosed nature of the **Gard**. For the individual this stave represents the meeting of one's proper Wyrd and on the Universal level it represents the completion of a cycle and the final manifestation of form as matter. Othila represents a **sacred** enclosure functioning as a selective barrier for either the individual or the folk as a whole.

Flowers (2009), in his doctoral thesis, claims that there is historical evidence to support the idea that the rune stave forms and their order were shared within a proto-Gild structure. This claim rests on the presumed redaction of the rune row leading to the Younger Futhark, which saw a reduction of complexity in terms of the number of

graphemes and the retention of a tripartite division of the rune row into aetts. This runs counter to typical alphabetical development which tends towards increasing complexity. However, Flowers' speculative extrapolation is not supported by any direct evidence.

12. The Rune Gild and Odianism

The Rune Gild is the organisation within which contemporary Odianism is expressed and manifested. There may well be individuals who have adopted an Odian praxis drawing Thorsson's published writings, but there is no other organisation or group that espouses Odianism. The total membership of the Gild is not published, but a reasonable estimation can be constructed: The Gild's internet forum has just over 200 members, most members of the Gild are members of the internet forum, and so it is unlikely that formal membership of the Gild exceeds 250 individuals. The Gild has six established Halls (groups of members that meet regularly) in the USA, Eormensyl Hall in England, in addition to a number of more informal Study Groups in France, Germany, Austria, Finland and Canada.

In addition to being a grouping of individuals each pursuing their personal quest for Rûna, the Gild has organisational aims that can be summarised as, 'the inspired use of objective (traditional) lore for inner development directed towards the highest purpose of restoring our Traditional symbolic culture' (Thorsson, 2007, p.164). In a recent announcement to the Gild the Yrmin Drighten (Head of the Gild) stated that:

The Gild is always to be ruled by four mainstaves:

- Runa (The Principle of Mystery)
- Óðin (The Seeker of Mystery)
- Sidhr (Tradition through History)
- Arfr (Tradition in Transcendence) (Excerpt from an announcement to the Gild 30/4/12).

A brief history of the creation of the Gild and the role of its founder in the Heathen revival more generally is provided in an appendix to *Green Rûna* (Thorsson, 1996). A much more detailed history has been recently published (Thorsson, 2007), which traces the establishment of the Rune Gild from its formal inception in 1980 to the position of the

Gild in 2005. The Rune Gild was established by Stephen Flowers who also goes by the name Edred Thorsson. The use of alternate names to represent different functions of the Self complex has a long tradition within a range of magical systems and within the thesis I have opted to refer to Flowers/ Thorsson by the name that is most relevant in the given context, largely indicated by the text that is being discussed.

The Rune Gild has a very flat structure (Thorsson, 2003, pp.169-170; 2007, p.161), individuals may either be an Associate Member or a Full Member. However, within that flat structure there is a requirement for significant work to be undertaken and it is made clear that the work of the Nine Doors Programme alone may normally take, ‘up to four years to complete’ (Thorsson, 2003, p.3). In order for someone to become a Full Member a Master must accept them as a student or apprentice. The Learner attains the status of Fellow upon completion of a piece of work of their choosing. The Master must have completed a significant body of work that represents a valuable contribution to the Odian Tradition (ibid, p.4). There are other titles within the Gild, such as Steward, and Drighten that may reflect administrative responsibilities or the contribution of an individual to the Gild. In terms of magical self-development there are only the three levels of Learner, Fellow and Master. The title of Yrmin Drighten is held by the Head of the Gild, and indicates ‘Great’ or ‘High’ leader of the Gild (Thorsson, 1994, Appendix A, p.3). It is the responsibility of the Yrmin Drighten. ‘to cast the vision of the Gild, produce its “doctrinal” works, and to work with Fellows toward Mastery’ (Thorsson, 2007, p.162). However, in the last year Thorsson has stood down from the active running of the Gild and a High Rede (High Council) has been established to undertake the duties and responsibilities previously associated with the Yrmin Drighten. The High Rede consists of five standing members from the Mastery, two Masters who are appointed biennially by the standing members and a Fellow who is elected by Fellows and learners.

The individual is not initiated into the Mysteries by a superior, as is the case in many other Traditions, instead Rune Masters are ‘recognised’ following the completion of relevant work. This is in keeping with the Odian rejection of revelatory models of spiritual development. The choice of the term ‘Gild’ was a conscious decision designed to emphasize the pragmatic focus, structural organisation and the nature of progression through the Gild.

There is a strong emphasis on individual work within the Gild, which is described as being, ‘not for “believers” but for seekers’ (Thorsson, 2003 p.2). As one would expect from a magical system that is based on the Northern Tradition great store is set by the Eddas as a source of historical material that can help to inform current practice. Similarly, the corpus of Saga literature is also seen as a valuable resource. The Rune Gild regards itself as one more group within a historical continuum that, at least in principle, reaches back to pre-Christian Germania. Consequently, the Gild also draws upon the textual legacy of the various phases of Germanic esotericism from the Storgoticism (Johannesson, 1991) of the likes of Olaus Magnus to the Runic gymnastics of Karl Spiesberger (Spiesberger, 1958), Friedrich Marby & Siegfried Kummer (Goodrick-Clarke, 1992; Gründer, 2009) and the Armanen system of List (List, 1988). Various practices that have been preserved, rediscovered and invented through practical experiment find their way into the recommended praxis for Gild members (Thorsson, 1994, 2003).

The Yrmin Drighten of the Gild refers to some of his own earlier writings as being ‘rather unripe’ (Thorsson, 1996) and to the development of the Gild being contingent on both magical and practical work (Thorsson, 2007, p.33-42). However, alongside the experimentalism with regard to praxis there is an attempt to identify those aspects of esoteric lore that are genuinely pre-Christian and Odian in nature. This rigorously scholarly approach is fundamental to the Rune Gild, both in terms of its self-identification and in the sense that it emphasizes the holistic aims of Odianism as a path that requires more than magical experimentation alone. A key concept within the Gild is the commitment to the existence of a mystical relationship with one’s kin-folk. This kinship can be established by the swearing of oaths, but the role of direct biological relationships cannot be ignored. Thorsson is unequivocal on the importance of meta-genetics stating that:

We are, in our deepest essence, our ancestors reborn and it is our work in this world to become who we are (2007, p.15).

Such statements are not always interpreted as representing a valid theorising around the ubiquitous sense of connection to one’s folk and their history. While I would dispute Gründer’s (2009) suggestion regarding the extent to which rune magicians such as

Marby, who was detained in a concentration camp on Himmler's orders, can be directly associated with Nazism, the exploitation of the Northern Mysteries and the runes by the Third Reich (Goodrick Clarke, 1993; Gründer, 2009) means that a degree of suspicion towards the Northern Tradition is likely to remain.

There are two key Gild specific texts, which can be regarded as a form of curriculum for the Rune Gild: *The Nine Doors of Midgard* (Thorsson, 2003) and *Gildisbók* (Thorsson, 1994). The latter of these foundational books is to a large extent an expansion and development of ideas presented within the Nine Doors programme, until very recently it has only been made available to members of the Gild. To these two texts should be added the collection of primary rituals or workings that are utilised by Rune Gild members (Rune Gild, 1992). The Nine Doors text is structured as a series of nine increasingly complex and demanding programmes of work, each of which requires a focus on intellectual development, engagement with primary historical sources and the practice of various magical workings.

The work of the Nine Doors programme is broken down into self-work, lore-work and Gild-work. Self-work encompasses all work that is directly concerned with Self-becoming irrespective of its type, including self-reflection, conceptual thought and magical workings. Lore-work represents the study of both the Germanic Tradition and the cultural matrix within which it has emerged, while Gild-work indicates the contribution that the individual makes to the organisation itself. This latter aspect is essential to the Odian approach since it ties the practitioner to the recognition of the importance of community.

Thorsson makes the claim (2003, p. Xii) that the basis of the Rune Gild's work is not 'in any essential way dependant on the *revelation* of any living Runemaster'. However, despite the requirement for the Odian to investigate the wider historical and cultural context of the Germanic Tradition, the work of the Nine Doors is described as a 'magical curriculum' (Thorsson, 2003 p. Xii). Moreover, as will be described in later chapters much of the work is dependent on relatively recent developments in esoteric runology and the broader arena of practical magic. Thorsson is very careful, though, to restrict his claim to essentials and to the notion of 'revelation' which is italicised by Thorsson for

emphasis. Thus, Thorsson does allow for innovations arising from scholarship or magical experiment, but resists a revelatory approach to the Odian Tradition. The Nine Doors programme also insists that the practitioner should not assume that, ‘his or her *subjective* realisation is of *universal* value’ (2003, p.xiii). This does not preclude the possibility of the content of subjective realisations having value beyond the self-development of the individual, but recognises that this would be a rare occurrence.

While not being teleologically explicit, Odianism is focused on its concept of ‘Rûna’ or ‘Mystery’. There is no sense in which the successful achievement of self-deification implies the end of the journey or the quest for Rûna; the ultimate objective of the Odian. ‘Rûna’ is translated within the Gild as ‘Mystery’ (Thorsson, 1984, pp.1-3), in keeping with the Germanic cultural significance of three-ness, we may understand Mystery as being:

- i) The mystery of the apparent fact of existence
- ii) The mystery of the Self-complex that is unfolded through the process of Self-becoming
- iii) The ultimate transcendent ‘mysterium tremendum’ (Otto, 1917).

The Odian acknowledges that the ultimate mystery or Rûna in her absolute state can never be fully understood, but s/he is nonetheless driven to seek out as much of that which is hidden from normal consciousness as is possible (Thorsson, 1994, VII, p.4). The story of Óðin is the tale of an entity constantly curious, seeking and learning. Winning the runes and the **Mead of poetry** is not an end but is the means by which he can begin his main quest; the constant search for wisdom and power.

The egoistic aspect of the Odian approach reflects a concern with individual uniqueness and a belief that such uniqueness can transcend the Ego-identity as understood in psychoanalytical terms. Although this may seem a particularly modern value to hold as foundational to a system that claims traditional roots, it is claimed by Flowers, in his doctoral thesis, that this can be traced to the importance of the ‘Ek’ formula in many of the archaeological examples of magical runic declarations (Flowers, 2009). The Odian does not work towards an acceptance of that which he currently appears to be, but strives towards a realisation and manifestation of that which he truly is.

13. Óðin and the Dark Side of Liberalism

A suspicion of the Northern Tradition is, to some extent, understandable due to the use of associated symbols by the National Socialist movement. However, what is often forgotten, but is recognised by Goodrick-Clarke's study (1992) is the fact that it was the leaders of Volkisch movements who were among the first to suffer under the Nazi regime. It is also worth noting that other fascist movements of the time used similarly traditional imagery and yet many of those symbols such as the Italian Fasces symbol, still used by the Federal government of the United States, remain acceptable.

A relative lack of research combined with the existence of contemporary groups that do combine symbolism from the Northern Tradition with extreme ideological positions inevitably leads to the possibility of misguided assumptions regarding the contemporary Northern Tradition as a whole. A recent journal article ostensibly focused on the so-called 'Far Right' in Canada went as far as advocating covert research into those New Religious Movements that meet certain criteria. This deceit was deemed to be wholly appropriate for, 'deviant communities...on the fringes of society' (Lauder, 2003). It is a depressing irony that this 'anti-fascist' impulse bears all the hallmarks of the totalitarian desire to label the other as 'deviant'. It is also clear from the article that the esoteric movements considered appropriate for infiltration are those of the Northern Tradition. It is perhaps not surprising in the circumstances that such groups are generally unwilling to take part knowingly in research projects given that the assumptions demonstrated by some extant academic commentaries on the Tradition (Alfred, 1976; Barrett, 1987; Chrisman, 1976; Lauder, 2003; Richardson, 1991) .

Shnirelman, in his comparative study of the growth of ethnic nationalism and its links with the rise of neo-paganism from the Baltic states to Transcaucasia details aspects of the resurgence of pre-Christian value structures (Shnirelman, 2002), while Poewe (1999) provides a reasonably thorough analysis of the links between Northern European contemporary Paganism and the New Right movement. However, both authors are quick to condemn such movements on rather dubious grounds. For Poewe there is a straight line that links the worst excesses of the Nazis with contemporary Northern European Pagan movements in Germany and France and groups such as G.R.E.C.E., a pro-Pagan right-

leaning think-tank. Shnirelman's article appears to assume that explicit commitments to homogenous community, respect for heritage and the right for self-determination are *a priori* xenophobic positions. The Northern Tradition has certainly been exploited by contemporary fascist and Neo-Nazi organisations (Gardell, 2003; Goodrick-Clark, 2003), but in this regard the Northern Tradition is no different to any number of religions and philosophies that have been distorted to support extreme viewpoints and behaviours.

14. Beyond Left and Right?

The terms Left and Right Hand Path originated within the **Tantric Tradition** and did not initially indicate any particular moral position, but defined the practical approach of different Tantric systems (Ellis, 2011; Taylor, 2011; Timalsina, 2011). These terms are now commonly used with reference to occultism, but point to the values, aims and belief framework of a given system rather than its praxis.

A useful working definition of the Left Hand Path has been offered by Granholm (2007, 2009, 2010). The Left Hand Path is defined as:

- Individualistic and vigorously elitist, though Granholm helpfully uses the term 'uniqueism' (2009) to emphasize the difference from what is commonly understood by 'elitism'
- It appreciates the 'here and now' and its spirituality is concerned with the lived experience rather than the possibility of an 'afterlife'. It occupies a perspective that could be usefully aligned with a Nietzschean Amor Fati
- Rather than seek union with Universal Deity it encourages self-deification
- An antinomian position is taken with regard to religious, social and cultural norms.

A concern with the here and now need not imply a lack of concern with Mystery or what might be regarded as spirituality. Although the Church of Satan is resolutely secular in its approach (LaVey, 2005) the same could not be said of the Temple of Set (Aquino, 2009; Dyrendal, 2009; Harvey, 1995, 2002) or the **ONA** (Order of Nine Angles). The latter organisation is particularly interesting in that it is both the most robustly Satanic in moral terms and also explicitly spiritual (Senholt, 2009).

In simplistic terms the Right Hand Path can be linked to those traditions which see the Great Work as henosis; an attempt to establish a union with Divinity sometimes referred to as The One or The Monad, while the Left Hand Path understands the Great Work as an attempt to achieve self-deification or the permanence of fully individuated consciousness (Dyrendal, 2009; Harvey, 1995). For both paths the lower magical aims reflect this higher aim such that Right Hand Path magic would seek to heal others while the Left Hand Path concerns itself more with the manipulation of circumstances for individual gain.

Granholm (2007, 2010) includes the Rune Gild as an example of a Left Hand Path organisation. It is worth noting that Granholm's 2010 article recognises that the complexity of the Rune Gild exceeds the boundaries of a strictly Left Hand Path designation (Granholm, 2010). The other organisations mentioned in his 2007 paper are the Temple Of Set, of which the **Yrmin Drighten** (Head) of the Rune Gild is a long standing member; The Church of Satan, from which the Temple Of Set developed (Aquino, 2009) and The Dragon Rouge, whose leader is a member of the Rune Gild. Given that the occult community as a whole is a relatively small grouping and that the Left Hand Path is smaller still in terms of active adherents, it seems highly significant that the Rune Gild is directly linked to the three other major Left Hand Path organisations in the world. Indeed, Thorsson's involvement with the Temple of Set caused considerable concern for many within the wider Heathen/ Ásatrú community (Kaplan, 1996). Granholm (2012) notes a number of similarities between the Temple of Set and the Rune Gild (*ibid*, p.212). Moreover, the Yrmin Drighten of the Gild states in his 1997 preface to *Lords of the Left Hand Path*:

It should be noted that the author of this book is not a Satanist, but is a practitioner of the left-hand path based on purely indigenous European models. (Flowers, 1997, pxi).

As noted above, the definition of Left Hand Path and Right Hand Path in terms of culturally European magical systems is problematic and so it is important to understand what Flowers' intends by this self-description. Within *Lords of the Left Hand Path* (pp. 33-9) Flowers offers his own definition of the Left Hand Path, which differs from that offered by Granholm (2007).

Flowers separates out two branches, one being an ‘Immanent’ branch focused on a materialistic antinomianism and the other being a ‘Transcendental’ branch focused on the work of the consciousness and self-deification. There is little substantive difference between Flowers’ (1997) categorisation of the Immanent Left Hand Path and the overall definition offered by Granholm (*ibid*). It is this latter transcendental branch with which Flowers self-identifies and with which he links the Northern Tradition. The only organisation that Flowers explicitly references as belonging to this transcendental branch is the Temple of Set. However, a number of philosophers and individual figures within the Western Mystery Tradition and indeed other traditions including Islamic mysticism, Northern European paganism and Vedic Tantra are claimed by Flowers as belonging to the transcendental branch of the Left Hand Path. The difficulty with Flowers’ approach is that his definition confuses necessity with sufficiency: The argument that a transcendental (or we might better say, ‘spiritual’) branch of the Left Hand Path necessarily requires a commitment to an investigation of the mysteries with the aim of Self-development is reasonable. However, a focus on the development of magical and/ or mystical insights that are deployed for the purpose of self-development is not sufficient to regard a particular philosophy of praxis as belonging to the Left Hand Path. That said, the proposal that the Left Hand Path, might possess a materialistic branch and a spiritual branch does potentially have value. These branches might function as a useful sub-categorisation of groups and belief systems that first meet the requirements of Granholm’s definition or a slightly modified version thereof.

The underlying argument that runs through *Lords of the Left Hand Path* (*ibid*) is the suggestion that the Left Hand Path best understood as representing the core values of pre-Christian magico-spiritual technology and philosophy. Flowers’ proposed core values need to be recognised as being an inevitably particular or situated interpretation of historically distant and often contestable beliefs and practices. The attempt to link the Left Hand Path to pre-Christian history is problematic in three aspects: The concept of ‘Left Hand Path-ness’ is a relatively recent introduction; Flowers’ text is simply too broad in the number of traditions it seeks to include and so is unable to offer sufficiently detail or supporting evidence regarding any particular pre-Christian belief or praxis that corroborates the general claim; Flowers’ requirements for a belief or praxis to be regarded as belonging to the transcendental branch of the Left Hand Path are too broad to

serve as a useful means of distinguishing between different systems; although the text covers two millennia it does not factor in the inevitable shifts in cultural norms and thus the changing status of ethical positions as either normative or anti-nomian.

The problematically broad definition of the Left Hand Path offered by Flowers is indicated by the inclusion of thinkers such as Plato and Pythagoras alongside occult orders such as the Fraternitas Saturni and the Temple of Set. This breadth of inclusion is largely due to Flowers' association of all forms of Gnosis as being intrinsically Left Hand Path. The argument for such an association is that gnosis relies on individual work rather than a descent of divine indulgence. The search for Gnosis as a striving for sacralised power (in the sense of knowledge and understanding that can be deployed causatively) is opposed to Pistis (Faith) within Flowers' taxonomy. However, as noted above, while the search for Gnosis may be a necessary element of a spiritualised approach to the Left Hand Path it is not sufficient in itself, without the inclusion of other elements (such as anti-nomianism or 'unique-ism'), to categorise a praxis as Left Hand Path.

In terms of Granholm's categorisation, which requires a strong antinomian and individualistic approach, Odianism would not necessarily be a Left Hand Path system. There are certainly elements in Odianism that map onto this definition, but the existence of commitments to others and to a particular master-narrative or Tradition mean that Odianism lacks the unequivocal individualism and anti-nomianism that Granholm's definition requires. Categorisation is always problematic and there is a question as to whether the differences between groups that can be situated within or closely adjacent (as one might regard Odianism) to the Left Hand Path are more significant than those qualities or commitments that would associate them with each other as Left Hand Path systems. From a phenomenological perspective this is an intrinsic problem with any etic categorisation rather than being particular to the Left Hand/ Right Hand distinction.

It could be argued that the Rune Gild is simply an extension of certain side orders within the Temple of Set, which has taken the Germanic interest of groups such as The Order of the Trapezoid (Aquino, 2009; Granholm, 2012; Thorsson, 2007, Appendices 5, 8 & 10) and expanded that interest to encompass the entire Northern Tradition. The operative key to the Odian work, 'Reyn til Rûna!' (Flowers, 1996, p.19) [which translates as 'Seek the

Mystery!], was first uttered in the context of Thorsson's achievement of the Fifth Degree within the Temple of Set (Thorsson, 2007, Appendix 5). If in fact the Rune Gild is a wholly Left Hand Path organisation this would not in any way invalidate the thesis, but it would narrow its usefulness in terms of future research into occultism to one specific area of practice.

The primary connection between Odianism and Setian or Transcendental Satanism lies in the primacy of consciousness and the attempt to work towards Self-becoming. Odian source texts such as the 'Hávamál' within The Poetic Edda (Larrington, 1999), which is a product of pre-Christian Northern European culture, establish that the magical achievement of full consciousness was understood as the function of Óðin long before the emergence of contemporary Satanism. The attainment of full consciousness or 'being awake' is also a fundamental aim of many practitioners within the Western Mystery Tradition and has been a core aspect of the tradition from its origins. We see this aspiration in the 'henosis' (Union with The One) of Plotinus (Afterman, 2013), the urge to 'awaken' in esoteric Christianity and contemporary Western Mystery Tradition groups (Machin, 2013), or the praxis of medieval kabbalism (Blumenthal, 2011). The distinction between Odianism and the Western Mystery Tradition lies in the mythological structures that inform the development of praxis and the conceptualisation of full consciousness in terms of the relationship of the individual to divinity that is implied by the achievement of self-deification within Odianism.

4. Towards An Odian Epistemology

‘You can’t tell anyone anything straight – it doesn’t work like that’ (Rune Master Ian Read)

1. Introduction

Platonism privileges Episteme (reason) over Doxa (knowledge derived from the world), Plotinus’ reading of Plato adapts this hierarchy in the proposed hypostases of being that begin in Matter and end in the Nous. The role of Neo-Platonism within the Western Mystery Tradition, which is well recognised by both its scholars and practitioners (Barcynski, 2001; Butler, 2002; Faivre, 1992; Fortune, 2000; Gibbons, 2002; Goodrick-Clarke, 2013; Gray, 1987; Knight, 1991; Wallis & Bregman, 1992) and the privileging of that which transcends the material is well established in many manifestations of the Western Mystery Tradition. Odianism, along with many Earth based spiritualities, is committed to the importance of embodied consciousness and of being in the world.

It can be argued that we must have a theory of existence before we can begin to develop theories of knowledge. However, it could equally be argued that until we have a theory of knowledge, it is not possible to know what it means for something to exist. Odianism asserts the centrality of our embodied experience of the world and recognises that we can never step outside our status as humans. Consequently, our models of reality are intrinsically human models. As embodied beings we construct ideas about the nature of existence. The construction of such ideas inevitably involves the use of theories of knowledge. We need a theory of how something can be known in order to construct a theory of how we know what exists. If we can construct an Odian epistemology, that theory of knowledge will provide a basis for determining an Odian theory of existence.

2. Odian Categories of Knowledge

The *Gildsbók* proposes a three-fold approach to epistemology: A rational examination of objective material is followed by a subjective synthesis and finally an internalisation and manifestation of that which is known or has become known (Ristandi, 1998). The method of teaching within the Gild is linked to this three-fold approach in that each apprentice must learn from a Master and that learning must take place in a face to face setting, this in

turn is also an attempt to mirror the teaching of the Gild in its earlier manifestations (Thorsson, 1996).

In *Runelore* (1987), Thorsson provides a diagrammatic representation of Odian epistemology (p.192) in which the triad of memory, cognition and the ecstatic consciousness are each essential for the generation of knowledge. ‘Cognition’ has a different meaning in various disciplines; it is used here to reference the brain-based processing and manipulation of data. Memory is essential for any information to be retained and any type of knowledge requires cognition. The Odian model is distinguishable by its focus on ecstatic states of consciousness as necessary for the achievement of what we might regard as holistic knowledge. Odian magical praxis includes various techniques such as breath control, physical movement and chanting that help the practitioner to achieve an ecstatic or frenzied state of consciousness. The knowledge gained in these ecstatic states is at the core of Odian Self-development.

Inevitably, the epistemology of any occult Tradition will be governed, like any theory of knowledge, by what is deemed to be available for us to know and the means by which it may become known. Odianism proposes a world of being in which both an objectively material world and a world of consciousness co-exist. Similarly, the approach to knowledge within the Odian Tradition recognises the scientific model alongside the experiential model which includes both Phronesis (practical wisdom) and rigorous intuition among its knowledge creation/ discovery tools. Such an approach is also found in many traditional schools of Indo-European esotericism (Srinivasan, 2007).

The triadic structure of the Odian epistemological paradigm reflects the developmental aspect of Runic magic: The practitioner moves from believing in the possibility of effective magical praxis, through to knowledge of the concepts and practices and ultimately to an internalisation and embodied understanding of magical work. The three categories of knowledge described within the Gildisbók’s ‘Germanic Epistemology’ (II, pp.6-12) can be summarised as Non-reflective knowing, Analytical knowing and Wisdom. Each category consists of three sub-categories generating a total of nine different categories of knowing. The selection of nine may seem to be somewhat convenient or contrived given the importance of nine-ness within the Northern Tradition

and in Odianism specifically. However, the categorisation is based on the terms for knowing that exist within modern Icelandic and this approach is justified by the virtual identity between the Icelandic lexicon and Old Norse.

2.1 Non-Reflective Knowing (Seeing – Hearing – Troth)

The first triad (non-reflective knowledge) consists of Perception (Seeing and Hearing) and what is known as ‘Troth’. Perception in the Gildisbók model consists of seeing and hearing and a strong argument could be made that the category of touch and even taste should also be included here as forms of knowing that arise from direct phenomenological engagement with something in the world. Their exclusion may arise from the aesthetic desire to create an epistemology based on triads. Magical praxis is both instrumental and aesthetic; in creating a magical epistemology it could therefore be seen as valid to define the paradigm of knowledge acquisition through aesthetic as well as functional terms.

Seeing and hearing are distinguished from the other forms of knowing in that they refer to direct experience of the world. They might also be regarded as experiences that are reliant on the function of conceptual consciousness, while taste, touch and smell might be regarded as pre-conceptual. This distinction potentially provides an, albeit tenuous, coherent basis for the exclusion of taste, touch and smell from an Odian epistemology. However, Odianism also requires recognition of pre-conceptual or perhaps supra-conceptual consciousness in order to make possible sense of a number of magical experiences and outcomes. To exclude the non-conceptual from its taxonomy of knowledge and knowledge creation would be problematic and so any support for this ennead of knowledge forms must rely on the aesthetic argument.

‘Seeing and Hearing’ (*ibid*, II p.6) are concerned with the knowledge of appearances and sounds. They refer to knowledge of presence rather than knowledge of meaning. Seeing and Hearing are forms of knowledge that allow distinctions to be made between qualitatively different presentations in sound or vision but do not provide any meaning to those different presentations. It is also a passive form of knowing in that the sight or sound is accepted as it appears without further interrogation.

The first triad of knowledge is completed by ‘Trúa’. Trúa may be translated as ‘Faith’, but is perhaps better understood as ‘Trust’ or ‘Troth’ the latter term being etymologically derived from the original Old English term, ‘Trēoþ’. Trúa is necessarily a cultural form of knowledge, a knowledge that is shared and inherited from previous generations of the Folk. The things that we know by virtue of the function of Trúa are those things which we regard as being so, because we trust in them to be so, or because we have faith that they are so. A more nuanced way of understanding the nature of Trúa would be to regard it as referring to those socially or culturally agreed truths to which we are loyal or to which we have given our troth. This subtle distinction allows for both the individual who genuinely has faith in the truth of such things and for the individual who may doubt the literal truth thereof, but who holds to those commitments because of the value they have for the Folk as a whole and also for the value of being ‘Troth-ful’ in and of itself.

If the first and second sub-categories of knowledge refer to perceptual knowledge that is received by direct experience, then this third sub-category refers to knowledge that is learned. What links Trúa to Seeing & Hearing is that both approaches to knowledge do not involve any formal testing or implied critique of the contents that present themselves as possible objects of knowledge. That which is seen or heard *is* and is known to be because it has been directly experienced, that to which one is troth-ful is accepted because it has been previously determined to be so by others. In neither case is there a need for the validity of that which is deemed to be known to be tested. A tree is known to be in front of me because I can see it and I know that it is a tree associated with a particular land-wight because I am troth-ful to the accumulated knowledge of my folk and the connection of that tree with a given wight has been established in the lore of the folk. The nature of Trúa allows me to regard this connection as representing a real state of affairs, but I may also know through a different approach to knowledge (such as empirical analysis) that the content held to be known under Trúa, may also be falsifiable. For example, in my magical work I always offer a gift of mead to a tree which has allowed me to remove one of its branches because I am troth-ful to this custom. However, from an empirical perspective I am aware that the tree cannot actually consume this gift.

The relationship to myth within Odianism relies upon the concept of Trúa. Locations, figures and events within the mythos are representations of states of consciousness that may be attained in Midgard (Ristandi, 1998). Mythic truths may not be literally true, but:

For meaning we must go to myth. Myth is not something which is not true – it is something that (for better or worse) is eternally true’
Thorsson (2005, p.194).

This is not an argument for relativism, but for recognition of the role that myth has to play in a dynamic epistemological relationship with that which appears to be knowable in the extant world:

Knowledge of the facts is the most nutritious food with which to feed a highly developed intuitive intelligence. Intuition fed on subjective junk will yield only junk – but feed that same intelligence with hard data and pure gold will emerge (Thorsson, 2005).

In the Northern Tradition each distinct substance or object consists of certain ‘hlutir’ or ‘lots’ (*ibid* II p.7) which make up its particular substance beyond its appearance. When we know something by virtue of our trust (Trúa) in its contents, that knowledge is based on our encountering the hlutir specific to that object and by trusting to the consistent association of those hlutir with certain objects we can satisfy ourselves that we know the identity and content or qualities of a given object. We trust that the qualities previously associated with apple-ness are consistently so associated and so objects encountered that present those characteristics are known to be apples. Within the Northern Tradition, values and ethical commitments are also known through the function of Trúa and this suggests that in Odianism, ethical commitments and values have the same solidity as material phenomena in the world. That is to say, a commitment to self-reliance, for example, is not a contingent value that one might choose or rebut as a positive value, but has the same force of actuality as the tree outside my door. Values are not selected from a rational analysis of possible value frameworks. Odian value commitments exist because they are known, in the sense of Trúa, to be required for a positive existence in the world. As we will see below, the Odian regards such an understanding of values to be necessary for the Folk to live in Frith (harmony) and therefore in certain states of consciousness holds those values to be True:

It is in Troth that the great masses of the folk should find their reality and thus their truth (Thorsson, 1994, II, p.8).

While it is deemed valuable for the majority of the folk to hold to the knowledge accessible through perception and troth-fullness, the Odian is advised within the *Gildisbók* to doubt and critically analyse all elements of the Tradition (ibid, III, p.1).

2.2 Analytical Knowing (Knowing About – Knowing How – Understanding)

The second category of knowledge is described within the *Gildisbók* as ‘scientific thinking’ (ibid). It consists of three sub-categories: Kenna (to know), Kunna (the ability to do), Skilja (the ability to understand). We might regard this triad as representing an analytical approach to knowledge, it moves beyond the acceptance of things as they seem or as they are deemed to be, to a position where the apparent realities of the world are tested. However, Odianism does not regard this approach to knowledge as a ‘better’ approach to knowledge compared to the first epistemological triad: Odianism does not place its faith in rational analysis above all other forms of knowledge, but remains trothful to an understanding of the world in which each category of knowledge has its proper place.

It is significant that the triad of analytical knowledge moves from ‘analytical knowing’ to ‘knowing how (to do)’ and ends with ‘understanding’. There are various perspectives in which the physical realm and the body appears to be devalued; whether through ascetism, the claim that the material world is illusory or through hierarchies of reality in which the spiritual is opposed to the material. The separation of the physical from the spiritual leads to a devaluing of ‘doing’ and the exulting of simply ‘being’.

The Odian analytical triad of knowledge, in contrast to ascetism or models that employ a soul: body dualism does not lead towards passive contemplation, but is directed towards the proficient application of knowledge for instrumental purposes. ‘Kenna’ or ‘Knowing’ is only the first step and is not an end in itself. The pragmatic nature of Odianism in its search for Rûna (Mystery) is indicated in that ‘knowing’ (Kenna) is a precursor for the achievement of ‘knowing how’ (Kunna). Knowledge itself without the application of that knowledge leaves the task of the Odian only half-completed.

In both ‘Kenna’ and ‘Kunna’ the individual is gaining knowledge of a substantially different type to that associated with the first Triad. Instead of relying on non-mediated data as in the first Triad, the individual is now engaging with symbolic or semiotic knowledge. In this Triad knowledge arises from conceptual analysis and manipulation. In the first Triad we know through perception and conceptual knowledge is limited to the identification of an object with a pre-existent signifier. In the second Triad instead of an acceptance of the world as it is (or appears to be) we engage in doubt and analysis. The knowing represented by ‘Kenna’ indicates that the object of knowledge has been cognitively assessed and satisfies a set of conditions such that it can be confidently known as ‘x’ as opposed to knowing through ‘Trúa’ in which the content of ‘x’ is accepted as presented directly to consciousness. It is only at the point of a symbolic interaction with potential knowledge content that it becomes possible to develop the ability to ‘know how to do’ or ‘Kunna’. The transition from knowing *about* something to instrumentally manipulating that knowledge requires some form of symbolic structure such as language. It is the ontological distinction between the signified and the signifier that allows the former to be represented in multiple contexts and to be re-represented to consciousness in alternative ways. The object of knowledge itself remains resolutely itself (In Odian terms it is a ‘hlutir’ or irreducible phenomenon), but through symbolic representation it may be reorganised in terms of how it is conceptualised by the individual. This understanding of analytical knowledge within an Odian context is important since it emphasizes the role that consciousness begins to play in the construction of our perceived reality once we move into the Analytical Triad rather than Troth-ful Triad.

In the ‘Hávamál’, Óðin states that a man should not be too clever, but simply clever enough, since to know too much leads to sadness. This poem also warns of the dangers arising from being merely clever rather than wise (Larrington, 1996, p.21). The *Gildisbók* follows this traditional source in recommending that the Odian should not spent too long focusing merely on ‘Kenna’ (knowing) before developing ‘Kunna’ (knowing how (to)), which allows that knowledge to be applied (Thorsson, 1994, III, p.11).

In contemporary culture the fact of knowing itself, the possession of conceptual awareness, is foregrounded. This knowing may then be further classified: To know how,

To know about, To know why and so forth. In Odian epistemology these different categories of knowing are regarded as sufficiently different activities to require wholly different signifiers. The distinction between ‘Kenna’ and ‘Kunna’ for example is not that they are different types of conceptual awareness, but that they are wholly different activities in which the fact of ‘knowing’ is not necessarily the dominant aspect. In the case of ‘Kunna’ for example it is the ability to apply knowledge that dominates. I may know that rune-staves exist for example and may also be able to read a description of how they can be carved into a piece of wood. This type of knowing would be ‘Kenna’. It is only when I also know how to apply that knowledge, to carve the runes myself, that I am using ‘Kunna’ type knowledge.

The final element of the Second Triad is ‘Skilja’ which means ‘To discern between’ and ‘To Understand’. The achievement of understanding within Odian epistemological theory allows the individual to move into the Third Triad. In a similar way, the state of ‘Trúa’ or troth-fulness which completes the First Triad opens the door to the possibility of doubt in relation to that which is accepted. The movement from one mode of knowledge to another is a reflection of the traditional source material:

Then I began to quicken and become wise,
And to grow and to prosper;
One word found another word for me,
One deed led to another deed for me (Larrington, 1999, p.34).

The form of understanding indicated by ‘Skilja’ is the awareness that there is *something* underlying and ultimately exceeding the knowledge gained from attending to perceptions of phenomena or by mediated analytical exploration. However, understanding the existence of this additional level of reality does not imply an understanding of its specific contents.

It may seem that ‘Skilja’ is hard to separate from ‘Trúa’ in so far as an individual retains a troth-ful attitude to the presence of unseen or hidden levels of reality. However, ‘Skilja’ arises from experience rather than being an untested commitment to a cultural value. It is the process of intellectually engaging with that which can be known in the world that leads to a growing awareness of something, not directly available for critical analysis, as

being nonetheless both present and significant. The presence of ‘Skilja’ in the Analytical Triad represents the proposition in Odian epistemology that solely analytical approaches to knowledge lead into a potentially recursive impasse. For some, the recognition of the impasse leads into an acceptance of radical uncertainty and the agency denying deferment of meaning that we find in postmodernism. However, for the Odian the exploration of reality through analysis will eventually lead to an understanding of the need to engage in a wholly new approach to knowledge. The knowledge of this need is represented by ‘Skilja’ or ‘Understanding’ and leads us into the Third Odian Epistemological Triad.

2.3 Wisdom (To Think – To Remember – To Be Fully Conscious)

The third category of knowledge is concerned specifically with Mystery and the knowledge of what lies behind appearances, accepted categorisations and analytical dissections of the world. It consists of ‘Huga’ (to think), ‘Muna’ (to remember) and ‘Vita’ (to be fully conscious). The form of knowledge associated with the Third Triad might be termed ‘Understanding’ as in the *Gildisbók*, but this is a very particular kind of understanding. The *Gildisbók* terminology is problematic since the final element of the Second Triad bears the same label, albeit to represent the emergence of understanding through analysis. Perhaps ‘Wisdom’ which is also used (*ibid*, II, p.10) to describe this triad is more appropriate, as it represents the shift from knowledge which is intellectual to knowledge which is both analytically defensible and wise.

The existence of this final category presumes a level of meaning and substance to the world that is both essential and hidden from ordinary perception. Moreover, when we know the world through this third epistemic approach we also transform the nature of the knowledge gained through the routes of direct perception, trust or faith and analysis. For instance, the *hlutir* (elements) that make up the known world are available for direct manipulation by the knower who encounters the world fully consciously.

The *Gildisbók* states that when seeking to know the world through the Third Triad, the individual, ‘begins to hear and understand the speech of the ravens’ (II, p.10). This claim operates on a number of levels: At the literal level, the individual who has begun to understand the hidden reality that leads to the greater Mystery (*Rûna*) may develop the magical ability to interpret the calls of ravens. The ability to understand the ravens’ song

(hrafnamál) is a skill that is believed by Odians to have been traditionally associated with rune-magicians. Most importantly, the raven is Óðin's bird; **Galdor** magic is, within the Gild, called 'the song of the ravens (Thorsson, 2005). The primary sources such as the Prose and Poetic Eddas, *Heimskringla* (Larrington, 1999; Sturluson, 1987, 1991), as well as numerous visual artefacts reference Óðin's association with two ravens. The names of the two ravens, Huginn and Muninn, have clear etymological links to the two faculties of Huga (thinking) and Muna (remembering). Consequently, we may regard the understanding of the speech of ravens as referring to the understanding of what our thoughts and memories are trying to communicate.

There is a link between 'Muna' or memory and 'Minni' (Mind). The concept of mind differs from the concept of thought in Odianism. Thought is concerned with the deliberate manipulation of data and is a kind of action. The 'Minni' (mind) is a state of consciousness entered into by the Self-complex rather than an action that the Self-complex undertakes. A key function of the Minni is awareness and it can be regarded as a relatively passive function in comparison to the active process of thinking. Additionally, while thought is wholly contained within the physical individual, the Mind has a transpersonal aspect. In Odian interpretations of traditional sources the Mind is connected to the Well of Urðr and so while thinking requires the generation of information by an individual, Mind is concerned with receiving or retrieving previously established information.

The idea that people spend most of their lives in a walking-sleep or quasi-trance is a common one in esoteric and mystical writings and there are numerous references throughout occulture to the need for the practitioner to awaken or be re-born in order to access the hidden layers of truth in the Universe. There is some emerging empirical evidence that suggests most actions may not be undertaken consciously but only agreed to in a post-hoc way (Guggisberg & Mottaz, 2012; Libet, 1993; Trevena & Miller, 2002). This would suggest that the full exercise of agency, if at all possible, requires a non-ordinary state of consciousness. When this is accepted it becomes easier to understand Crowley's claim that all Willed acts are acts of magic (1991) since most of the time what appears to be a willed act is nothing of the sort. In Odianism the greatest enemies of

humanity are the Giants or Thurses and the fundamental feature of Thorsic entities, as understood within Odianism, is their lack of consciousness (Flowers, 2006).

Óðin is originally ignorant of the various states of consciousness and the ways in which they may be manipulated to magical ends (Thorsson, 1994, VI, p.2), but his function as a deity and as an exemplar for Odians to follow lies in the development of his understanding of and control over the full range of states of consciousness. As a magical system that takes Óðin as its guide, Odianism is centred on consciousness as being both the source of magical power within the individual and the vehicle through which magical acts are effected. It is due to his ability to attain a range of Non-normal States of Consciousness that ‘no avenue to knowledge is barred to Óðin’ (ibid, p.4).

If we take the view that our normative state of consciousness is less than fully awake, then it follows that knowledge gained when in a normative state of consciousness will be limited and restricted. In order to gain knowledge that has the potential to encompass all levels of reality we must first achieve a state of consciousness in which those additional levels become available to us. Odianism proposes an approach to knowledge in which full consciousness is dependent on careful attention to the underlying messages within our thoughts and deep memory. Such careful attention requires a quiet and contemplative state and so the injunction to listen to the speech of the ravens may be understood as a metaphoric allusion to meditative practices. It is through such practices that the individual awakens into full consciousness; the state of understanding described by ‘Vita’, and thereby has access to knowledge that would otherwise be utterly inaccessible.

The third epistemological triad moves the concept of knowledge away from intellectual engagement with the world and points towards more intuitive methods of knowledge acquisition. This model of knowledge also implies the acquisition of knowledge through ecstatic or inspired states. The Odian does not cease to act once s/he achieves a state of full consciousness. In keeping with the injunction to emulate Óðin, the Odian takes an instrumental approach to the knowledge gained through this fully awakened state. The goal is not to simply know ‘about’ the Universe, but rather to achieve knowledge of the ‘hidden’ in order that one may act most effectively *in* the Universe (Thorsson, 1994, II, p.12).

The presence of this last epistemological triad is what distinguishes the sacralising epistemology of Odianism from the secularising epistemology that dominates contemporary culture. From an Odian perspective sensory data and subsequent critical and conceptual analyses thereof are valuable in themselves to assist in living well within the physical dimension of the Real. While a scientific secular paradigm would regard inspiration as a possible springboard to more reliable intellectual exploration, the Odian regards intellectual enquiry as a springboard to that knowledge which can only be won by developing an ear for the hidden songs of the ravens.

2.4 The Embodied Experience:

Each triad not only represents a different approach to knowledge, but also a different state of consciousness within the individual who is engaged in the act of knowing. Odianism recognises that theories of knowledge must be always be considered in terms of the embodied humans who are engaging in acts of knowing and that since knowing is a necessarily human act it cannot be adequately described if the fundamentally embodied nature of knowing is ignored.

Thorsson (1994, II, 4) acknowledges that the individual's way of knowing the world will be determined to a significant extent by the social structures within which they experience their life. However, in agreeing that we do need to socially contextualise our sense of self and our reflections on our understanding of the world, we do not need to submit to Bourdieu's claim that our 'habitus' necessarily leads us to accept unthinkingly our social conditions and their impact on our agency (Bourdieu, 1990, 1999; Myles, 2004). We cannot regard our identity as wholly constructed by external factors unless we wish to remove any claim to individual agency. I would concur with John Myles that in developing Husserl's concept of 'doxa' Bourdieu is mistaken in locating agency only in the arena of discourse and denying it to praxis, largely as a result of oversimplifying the multi-layered nature of the movement from multivalent doxic states to reflective consciousness (Myles, 2004). Since most of our conscious life is mediated through our status as embodied and social beings (McDonald, 2002, p22), it is through socially grounded theories of life-meaning that we will best understand the felt significance of those aspects of our lived experience. However, it is equally important that we are aware

of the limitations of social contextualisation and its inability to represent fully the individual experience.

When considering the experience of individuals it has become generally accepted that no individual's experience is ever "pure" in the sense of being wholly their own, but is inevitably mediated through the various influences of society and culture (Gadamer, 2001). The focus on our embodied status, powerfully developed by Merleau-Ponty among others has led to claims that the Husserlian approach to consciousness is solipsistic (McDonald, 2002), while others have more recently pointed to his awareness of the embodied subject (Bell, 1990; Dodd, 1997 cited in Myles, 2004). I would agree with Nathalie Depraz that Husserl's concept of intentionality is directed to the world and its contents; the process of bracketing is not seen as a negation of the existence of transcendent objects but an attempt to better apprehend the given nature of those objects (Depraz, 2001). The Odian recognition of both the primacy of consciousness and its fundamentally embodied nature has a good deal in common with these later interpretations of Husserl (Depraz, 1999, 2001) and this may prove a valuable avenue for future research.

2.5 Progression Through the Triads:

What presents to consciousness in the First Triad is deemed to be known solely in terms of what is non-reflectively perceived. In the Second Triad, the individual's consciousness takes a more active role in that what is deemed to be known arises from the individual's cognitive analysis. The knowledge referenced by the Third Triad is not attainable through intellectual effort, but arises out of the individual's magical praxis. The practitioner must find a way of accessing Tradition (Muna) and to develop those aspects of the Self-complex such that the process of thought (Huga) will lead to a state of Vita or fully awakened consciousness. To the extent that we might accept the equivalent legitimacy of such knowledge, we would need to regard the means by which it is gained as a novel form of enquiry. We might, therefore, regard complex magical enquiry and knowledge production as a particular kind of research methodology and recognise the application of that methodology as a new academic discipline. One of my future research aims is to draw on phenomenological theories of consciousness to develop this argument further.

Each category of knowing is associated with certain specific objects of knowledge (Thorsson, 1994, II p.6). The method of knowing is in some way determined by that which is coming to be known and indeed that which comes to be known is partly determined by the epistemic approach chosen by the Subject. For instance we might look at a rune stone as a physical carved artefact and know its shape or texture; we might also take an analytical approach and come to know its history or linguistic function. Another option would be to try and understand the Mystery that underpins the carving and this entails not only a different kind of epistemic outcome, but also that we approach the object of our study in a different manner.

Most theories of knowing require a separation between the knower and that which is known. However, in Odianism there is a sense in which that barrier is semi-permeable. The lack of a definitive wall between the knower and the known means that knowing need not involve the mental manipulation of an intentionalised consciousness of the thing being 'known', but may involve inhabiting the 'being' of that which is known. Knowing becomes a process of identification as much as it is a process of categorisation and description. An Odian epistemology requires the possibility of this holistic internalisation or identification and as such presents the paradox in which the process of knowing removes or at least blurs the distinction between subject and object.

In scientific epistemological models the falsification of a truth-claim is achieved by the construction of a repeatable experiment that produces contradictory results to those predicted by the original claim. Such an approach has the benefit of clarity and transparency. However, in the Odian epistemological model, the forms of knowledge implied by the Third Triad are not susceptible to falsification or proof in such a manner. In allowing the potential validity of knowledge arising from intuition, inspiration, ecstatic vision or other magical workings, the model creates a significant problem for its own stability in that it appears to allow for any claim to insist upon its truth without supporting evidence.

Odianism may offer the counter-argument that its model requires detailed intellectual enquiry, analysis and synthesis before any attempt to achieve knowledge through non-intellectual processes. In addition, the necessary precursor to the Third Epistemic Triad is

the achievement of ‘Skilja’, which not only implies understanding but also discernment. Nonetheless, it must be admitted that there is no definitive basis on which Odianism allows us to separate the wheat from the chaff in terms of knowledge claims that do not arise from observation, experiment or rational argument. This does not weaken the argument that a holistic epistemological framework should include the possibility of such knowledge. The difficulty in identifying the validity of specific examples of intuited knowledge does not suffice as an argument against the generalised concept of intuited knowledge, it simply confirms that such knowledge is difficult to identify. To try and assess the validity of an intuited or inspired claim through the same methods used to assess analytical conclusions would be the equivalent of using spectrographic analysis to test the tastiness of a slice of cake.

One key epistemological problem, given the field of study, is how we can know when or even whether a magical working has been effective. If I perform a working designed to assist a friend in obtaining a desired object and the friend does come into possession of said object, it may be an indication that my magic has worked, but it may equally simply be a matter of coincidence. The problem deepens when we consider the magical work an individual does which is designed to effect changes and transformation within the individual. However, I am persuaded from the results of my own work that I have had successes. This conviction is based in part on being troth-ful to the Northern Tradition’s view of the effectiveness of magical work and also an analysis of the possible alternative explanations for apparent results. For example, I performed a magical working intended to identify the nature of my Fylgja and this was followed by repeated appearances in unexpected locations of a squirrel and a number of associated dreams. From a troth-ful perspective I accepted that the appearance of a squirrel was an appropriate confirmation of my Fylgja. Analytically, I determined that the accumulation of experiences, while not conclusive, were persuasive of the effectiveness of the magical working. However, there was also an internal conviction, drawing on my previous experience of magical work and non-ordinary consciousness, of the significance of these experiences. Magical work that involves the realisation of a connection to a type of animal or to an animal spirit entity is common in a number of traditional cultures and earth-based new religious movements (Cumes, 2013; Hutton, 2004, 2007; Luna, 2011; Rountree, 2012; Sax, 2009).

The knowledge of magical effectiveness tends to arise within the Self-complex as a felt state of certainty immediately following the working; any supporting evidence that arises later functions merely as confirmation of that which is already, at a tacit level, known. On one level such claims are intensely suspect since they offer no tangible proof of their veracity and yet at the same time nobody would doubt the felt sense of knowing that is experienced at the point of hitting a shot straight at goal where one knows that the ball is going past the keeper long before the net begins to balloon. In a similar way and perhaps because magic, being a holistic practice, includes the physical self or 'Lík' we can feel the successful performance of a magical working.

3. The Application of Odian Epistemology

The commitment to both intellectual conceptual study and experiential learning is reflected in the requirements for Mastery within the Gild where a Fellow is required to submit a substantial body of work for assessment which should evidence both an intellectual and magical mastery over the Odian Mysteries. This rational approach is at odds with Webb's definition of occultism as being primarily irrational, representing a flight from the anxiety and powerlessness engendered by a rational assessment of one's agency within the world (Webb, 1974). It should be noted that the view of occultism as necessarily irrational is not held by the majority of scholars currently researching the broad field of Western Esotericism (Hanegraaff, 2005, 2012; Versluis, 2013).

Thorsson (2003) describes the epistemological approach that is fundamental to the Odian engagement with knowledge:

This method is one of first gathering and studying in an objective manner all that can be *known* of a tradition, then setting about to absorb subjectively the contents of that tradition and finally to enact that subjective (inner) synthesis. (pp. 5-6)

Thorsson (1987) argues that Óðin, 'synthesizes everything around him' (p.179). This reflects the epistemic hunger that Óðin represents in the Eddaic sources (Larrington, 1999; Sturluson, 1987) and also his desire to forge understanding from the plethora of data that he accrues through his travels and constant questioning (Sturluson, 1987, pp.7-58). This suggests that an Odian epistemology is concerned with the instrumental function of knowledge, in that Óðin is constantly seeking to make links between disparate data in order to put them to use in pursuit of his will.

The tripartite structure of one of the Gild's many names for Óðin gives another indication of how Odian epistemology may offer a new approach to knowledge generation.

Wodhanaz-Wiljon-Wihaz represents a speculative use of Proto-Germanic within the Gild to produce a triple Heiti (title) for Óðin and it can be broadly translated as Inspiration/Ecstasy- Will – Sacrality. We know that Óðin is associated with the gathering of knowledge and this particular Heiti suggests that knowledge is gained through the application of Will to sacred ecstasy. This is a model in which knowledge is ‘won’ by the individual’s own efforts, endurance and correct magical praxis. This mirrors the way in which Óðin wins the Runes by hanging on a wind-blown tree (presumed within the Gild to be Yggdrasil) for nine nights (Larrington, 1999, p.34). In my own magical work I have suspended myself from a tree while engaging in breathing and visualisation exercises. This led to a number of felt changes in the quality of my relationship to the mysterious, but which would be very difficult to clearly articulate through language.

Epistemologically, there is no rejection of empirically testable data within Odianism. However, other routes to knowledge are acknowledged as equally valid. Consequently the Odian combines objective data with his own subjective data. The subjective data must flow in an ordered and coherent manner from that which is objectively known about the tradition, but does not preclude the possibility of inspirational leaps which are then retrospectively understood through the Tradition. We must acknowledge that the nature of the Northern Tradition has shifted over time. For instance, according to some scholars, Tyr was replaced by Óðin as the chief deity of battle-craft (Hasenfratz, 2011) although the speculative nature of this view also reminds us of the difficulty in knowing with any certainty the detailed nature of the beliefs from which Odianism seeks to draw inspiration. This raises the question for future research of what it means to talk in terms of Tradition as an Odian.

The Odian Tradition recognises the validity of a distinction between the subjective world and the objective world. However, it does not treat this distinction as equivalent to a True: False dichotomy. There is no external methodology that can be applied to confidently distinguish the necessary validity of individual insights arising from magical work. The appropriate categorisation is dependent on the individual’s own level of

epistemic development and can only be fully addressed by that individual. This is not a convenient approach to assessing knowledge claims but it does recognise the fundamental problem of encountering the ‘numinous’ as a potentially knowledge bearing experience. One of the reasons for the emphasis on information passing from a ‘living teacher to a living pupil’ (Flowers, 2007, p.125) within the Rune Gild is that the Master within the Gild will be able to mediate the way in which the learner receives the knowledge provided.

3.1 Odian or Dumézilian?

Throughout the thesis it is acknowledged that Odianism is a contemporary human construction. It seeks to rediscover and employ Traditional methodologies, but it does so in an experimental manner recognising the absence of any unbroken chain of initiation into the Mysteries. Inevitably, when we consider the triadic epistemological approach of Odian praxis we need to consider whether The Rune Gild is drawing on some other contemporary epistemological model and retrospectively applying this to Odianism.

Georges Dumézil put forward a Trifunctional hypothesis, which proposes that all Indo-European societies consist of a hierarchy of three distinct groups or functions (Dumézil, 1973; Lyle, 1982; Puhvel, 1987). The First Function is concerned with leadership, the Second Function with martial qualities and the Third Function is concerned with production. The founder of the Rune Gild, Edred Thorsson, has been vocal in his support for a Dumézilian (Dumézil, 1973) analysis of the Northern Tradition (Flowers, 1997). There is an obvious attraction for any Odian in a model that is based in the primacy of triplicities as a means of understanding and structuring one’s engagement with the world. However, contemporary Odianism is not wedded to a Dumézilian approach and there are Masters within the Gild who are unconvinced by this structuralist model.

While Dumézil posits a tripartite structure as accurately describing social structures I would suggest that this is an over-simplification. There are a number of categories that do not neatly fit the division into three social functions of Priest/King/Magician; Warrior/Explorer/Defender; Farmer/Artisan/Producer. List (1988) sought to present tripartism as intrinsic to Germanic folk consciousness deriving this view from the ancient divisions referenced in Tacitus’ *Germania* (2010) of the Lehrstand, Wehrstand and

Nährstand; the ruling elite, the military and the peasantry. List's structural analysis was driven by a desire to associate esoteric insights into the nature of the specifically Germanic Mysteries with a social structure that would reflect his belief that occult significances were always threefold in nature (*ibid*). If we regard Tripartism as a primarily conceptual rather than sociologically descriptive model then it becomes much more useful. There is sufficient evidence put forward by Dumézil that a tripartite understanding of the world was at the heart of the many European societies' attempts to consciously represent the world and the Universe. We can trace this structuring at least as far back as Plato who argues for a tripartite structure in his *Republic* (1998).

4. Intuitive and Experiential Knowledge

Knowledge that arises from within the individual is central to magical praxis, but can be marginalised in other knowledge development practices, not least due to the difficulty associated with identifying and articulating such knowledge. However, there is a significant body of research and scholarship in the field of intuitive and experiential knowledge. This research is both philosophical (Chudnoff, 2011; Livingston, 2002; Nagel, 2012; Parsons, 1993) and empirical (Morewedge, Carey & Kahneman, 2010; Radin, 2008; Spelke, 1994); the role of intuitive knowledge in reflective therapeutic practice and in other professional contexts is also being explored (Billay, Myrick, Luhanga & Yonge, 2007; Clark, 2010; Kouffogiannakis, 2012; Markauskaite & Goodyear, 2014; Thomas & Beauchamp, 2011). Intuitive data emerges fully formed as a 'chunk' of insight. These moments of intuition create difficulties for any epistemology that recognises only the accumulation of knowledge through the mechanics of discourse. The idea of rational intuition (Flowers, 1996, pp15-16) in this context is intended to represent the two steps that are involved in 'accepting' this kind of knowledge. The first step consists of the 'intuition' itself, the awareness that arises within the self of a new piece of potential knowledge. Potential knowledge that is intuited differs from knowledge acquired in other ways, in that the sense of a new knowing spontaneously arises within the individual. When we know something intuitively we cannot say where this knowledge has come from, but the feeling that we have this particular 'chunk' of knowledge is very powerful and compelling. We may be able to engage in a post-hoc conformation of the veracity of this knowledge but at the point it emerges into the consciousness of the individual the intuition is simply felt strongly to be valid information.

This first step, the moment of intuition itself, is non-rational since it emerges and appears to speak itself to the Self-complex rather than being constructed in a conscious analytical manner. This potential knowledge is then subjected to rigorous analysis by a post hoc comparison to source data. This method of occult knowledge production is no less rigorous than any other form of knowledge production.

4.1 Intuitive Knowledge:

The importance of rational intuition is recognised within Odianism as a means of accessing data for progress in the process of Self-becoming:

When one experiences her [Rûna], it is in a private way and no one can share in that state, though they may arrive at it themselves
(Travers, 2009).

The intuitive or experiential component of knowledge arises from within the individual or as Thorsson expresses it, ‘it is whispered in our ear by the Óðin within’ (Thorsson, 1987, p.114). Much of the work of the Nine Doors programme is concerned with the development of this ‘intuitive sense’ (Thorsson, 2003, p.47).

It may appear that an intuitive approach contradicts the commitment to the concepts of Sidhr (knowledge) and Arfr (transcendence) being derived from a known Tradition. However, Thorsson advocates the use of both rational enquiry and intuitive methodologies (1987, 1996, 2003) in the pursuit of knowledge since:

over dedication to either extreme has its inherent limitations, but the harmonious development of both has unbound potential for growth
(1996, p46).

An approach to knowledge in which both rational analysis and intuition are valid, suggests a position, explored in Chapter Five below, in which the subjective and the objective work co-creatively within each individual. The three epistemological triads in Odianism propose very different, but equally valid ways of knowing. These different ways of knowing suggest that there may also be different but equally valid ways of understanding reality.

The importance of inspiration and intuition as well as learned knowledge is crucial to an understanding of the Odian epistemology. Indeed, it is symbolically represented through the two ravens that accompany Óðin on his travels: Muninn or Memory and Huginn or Thought. The primacy of the known and learned tradition as a guide to that which arises through personal experience and intuition is emphasised by Óðin's fear that the ravens may not return and the fact that he fears the loss of Muninn the most:

‘Huginn and Muninn fly every day
Over the whole wide world
I dread that Huginn will not come back
But I fear even more for Muninn (Larrington, 1999, p.54).

In addition to functioning as a representative of cultural memory and the possibility of individual memory, which is essential for even the simplest act of cognition, Muninn also represents a transpersonal aspect of memory. The transpersonal aspect refers to both the collective cultural memory that is deemed to be carried via a meta-genetic inheritance (or collective unconscious) and also to memory that is transpersonal in the sense of including the memories of non-human entities such as land wights.

The Odian understanding of runic divination relies upon a concept of intuitive knowledge in which a communicative connection is made between an aspect of the Self-complex and a trans-personal information source without any conscious engagement in the process of knowledge production (Thorsson, 2003, pp.64-5). However, while the content of a divination may be known intuitively, Thorsson refers to a second step in the process of runic divination whereby the passive state of consciousness is replaced by an active state in which the intuited content is brought to conscious awareness and analysed (*ibid*). For example, I may undertake a runic divination to see if a new career opportunity should be pursued. In the state of non-ordinary consciousness in which the rune tines (the wooden tiles carved with rune staves) are selected I may have a strong intuitive sense that I should pursue this career option. I may also have an intuitive response to the collected rune staves that I have selected; that the new career opportunity is broadly positive. However, I must then use my conceptual awareness of the lore regarding the symbolic meaning of each of the selected staves to refine my intuitive interpretation. In terms of the Germanic Self-complex the steps in the runic divination can be understood as a process by which

information held by the Minni (mind/ memory) passes to the Hugh (thought). The influence of the Óðr-Self (ecstatic/ inspired) allows the passage of information and inspires the Hugh to correctly analyse its content.

It might be argued (Cleary, 2011) that it is the separation from wonder that prevents the contemporary mind-set from easily accepting the notion of intuited knowledge. If we encounter the world only as a repository of means to human-centric ends we will be trapped within a epistemological framework that cannot see beyond a need to fix the meaning of our experience in relation to mundane instrumental priorities. The acceptance of intuited knowledge allows us rediscover a way of encountering the world in which we are more open to the being-ness of the other. Moreover, the immediacy of the intuitive experience brings us closer to a relationship with the other that is not reliant on analysis and constructed meaning, but accepts the other as it presents itself.

4.1 Experiential Knowledge:

Phronesis can be understood from Aristotle's definition (Crisp, 2000; Noel, 1999) as practical knowledge that is applied, but which goes beyond skill (Techne) as it also requires the presence of wisdom within the knower. The use of Phronesis is a key method for the acquisition and deployment of knowledge in magical work, which requires action as opposed to mere study. In terms of the Odian epistemological triads, we can align the concept of Phronesis with the third triad of 'Wisdom'.

As has been noted above, Odianism places great importance on 'knowing how' or 'Kunna'. Magical praxis requires the individual to develop practical skills such as the correct performance of magical chants and so the ability to 'know how' in terms of magical praxis requires learning through doing. This aspect of 'Kunna' has much in common with Polanyi's theory of 'Tacit Knowledge' (Margitay, 2010; Polanyi, 2009). Polanyi describes tacit knowledge as being acquired and deployed through praxis. It tends to be knowledge that is both hard to articulate and which is developed without the individual being able to explicitly identify how s/he came to possess it. Polanyi's theory is developed by Ryle (1963) who emphasizes the fact that learning need not lead to the ability to express verbally what it is that has been learned, but that the ability to execute a certain task is an indication of the development of tacit knowledge regarding that task.

Tacit Knowledge has much in common with the concept of ‘Kunna’ in its focus on the ability to ‘perform’ or demonstrate knowledge through doing rather than the ability to demonstrate knowledge by describing that which is known. It is also significant that Polanyi and Ryle support the notion that the inability to articulate knowledge is not a necessary reason to doubt its presence. We can see similarities to Polanyi’s model in Thorsson’s view that, ‘We can only learn the most important things through action and experience’ (1994, II, p.11). In addition, the Odian claim that knowledge only becomes understanding when theory becomes practice (Travers, 2009) echoes the structure of the three epistemic triads in which analytical thought leads to action. This view also emphasizes our status as embodied beings in the world and the unavoidable fact that all our knowledge occurs in an embodied manner.

The focus on an experiential approach to knowledge is ever present in the Northern Tradition and it is mirrored both in pre-Christian Germanic religion and later attempts to revive the indigenous spiritual culture. The desire to achieve what Hauer called an ‘immediate experience’ of the spiritual (Hexham & Poewe, 2005; Poewe, 2005) was associated by Jung with the growth of Wotan as an archetype and its grip on the German people (Jung, 2001 [1936]). Thorsson (1984, p.126) argues that the acquisition of runic knowledge is a form of experiential learning which bypasses the cognitive function or ‘Hugr’ altogether. The individual has an experience of something outside the Self-complex that informs and develops the understanding of both the Self-complex and of the world beyond the Self. This experience cannot be represented conceptually since its essential quality lies in the manner of its unmediated experience by the individual: It is not the intellectual possession of information that matters in magical Self-becoming, but rather the experiential process through which this process occurs (Thorsson 2003, p.139). Since the layers of Ørlög are fundamentally hidden from normative conscious perception (Flowers, 2007, p.148) some form of experiential approach to knowing is required for the individual to Self-become. In my own practice the experience of the knowledge of the Futhark and its meaning at the runic level is felt with the same immediacy as a physical feeling such as hunger and is similarly difficult to articulate: The full experience of hunger is known to the individual, but only an approximation of the experience qua experience can ever be communicate. However, the ability to point to an experience, even if we cannot construct a semiotic representation thereof (be it written or spoken) that has

a complete identity with the experience as experienced, means that meaningful communication *about*, if not *of*, the experience is entirely possible. From a strong Husserlian phenomenological perspective this state of affairs is not unique to experiential or intuitive knowledge, but is a necessary fact of all knowledge: phenomenologically, there is no identity between the intentional consciousness of any event as it occurs and any later attempt to articulate the event. The absence of identity is not a necessary bar to the possibility of meaningful communication.

When I was developing an understanding of the rune Isa I read a great deal about the nature of meditative stillness, the symbolism of Ice in the Northern Tradition and the physical qualities of ice as an actual phenomenon. I also read and reflected on the rune poem stanzas related to this rune and explored the various numerical aspects of its position within the Futhark as a whole. However, my deep understanding of the rune arose from magical work; chanting the ‘Galdor’ (magical phrase) associated with the rune while adopting the appropriate ‘staða’ (physical position) and using various other techniques to achieve a state of non-ordinary consciousness. In this state, my felt experience was no longer of developing knowledge ‘about’ Isa, but rather was one of inhabiting the rune Isa. For some moments it was as though there were no distinction between me and the rune. I could not put into words exactly what distinguished this sense of total identification. However, it would be equally difficult to articulate the detailed felt experience of being hungry. Similarly, I could no more doubt the experience of internalising Isa than I could doubt my sensation of hunger.

5. Magical Routes To Knowledge

The winning of knowledge through magical work may be regarded as a process in which a realm of pure reason is accessed, but it can be equally viewed as a process by which a hidden aspect of ‘the world’ is accessed. If we avoid the rejection of the physical world we may find ourselves in sympathy with the claim that all thinking is contextualised. However, knowledge that is gained in a non-ordinary state of consciousness does not have any immediately obvious surrounding context even though it can still be claimed to be ‘doxic’ in nature. Daniels (2003) and Hick (1989) both present mystical experience as a contextualised experience in its fundamentals. However, they do not resolve whether

mystical experiences which are felt to be qualitatively different in themselves are experienced as different because they are a genuinely different order of experience, or that the difference arises from the effect of the cultural context in which the experience occurs, or some combination of these factors.

In particular, it is the experiential nature of much knowledge produced during magical work that is problematic when subjected to the norms that are applied to knowledge produced through more conventional means. We may test the *post hoc* re-conceptualisation of the experience, but there will remain an uncertainty as to the identity between the formulation of the experience in words and the experience itself as experienced. The immediacy of presence does not require a nexus of meaning, but relies upon the apprehension of being itself. Although it is not directly articulated, any occult epistemology must rely on this immediacy, if it is to maintain the possibility of realities that defy articulation. A reasonable criticism can be raised that this is rather like claiming that one possesses a box, albeit a box that is both invisible and intangible, how does one set about testing such a claim?

A special epistemological framework is needed to cope with the problem of how we 'know' both the validity of our own occult experiences and how we best respond to those experiences reported to us by fellow occultists. The assessment of knowledge claims arising from magical work ultimately depends on mutual respect and trust. The mutual recognition between occultists of the validity of their respective experiential acquisition of inner knowledge is often understood as a sense of the 'presence' of the fellow seeker (Oldmeadow, 1992). This is a non-rational mode of judgement, but it is not necessarily an erroneous approach given the particular circumstances of that which is being judged.

Christine Hardy uses semantic field theory to suggest that the process of meaning construction as a dynamic act involves not simply the perception of an external and pre-existing reality, but can also involve the construction of reality (Hardy, 1998, 2005). Hardy proposes that the Universe is created or constructed through the interaction of matter and mind. To the extent that we create or impose meaning on the Universe, we may also be changing the very nature of reality. The mechanics of this model have not been fully worked out, but it relies upon a blurring of the distinction between matter and

mind, between phenomena in the world and our consciousness of those phenomena. Hardy's interest is primarily in the role of psi-phenomena, but her suggestion; that shifts in the way we know reality can in themselves cause shifts in the fabric of reality, may prove to be useful in future research into magically acquired knowledge.

Flowers describes the Rune as the, '(subjective) seed of the ultimate (final) objective physical reality' (1996, p.20) and thus proposes that the Self may create a manifest reality through their individual encounter with a rune. At such points the individual is operating as an 'omnijective' (ibid) entity, neither fully subjective nor objective but operating as a dynamic synthesizer of both epistemological poles. This mode of 'knowing' not only leads to new knowledge but also adds to what there is to be known. The act of 'realisation' (ibid) is both a process of internal awareness and a process by which the internally real becomes externally real or is made real through the power of the omnijective perspective. However, this omnijective stance must be initiated through rigorous analysis and cognitive work:

The idea of moving from objective knowledge to inner, subjective work was forever and always the kernel of the Gild's teachings
(Flowers, 2007, p.41).

5.1 Magical Language:

Most occult systems employ a complex symbolic language utilising a range of geometrical, representational and numerical symbols. In *Green Rûna* (1996) Thorsson develops his understanding of the Futhark as a collection of symbolic functions and begins to map out connections between the constituent staves in a way that is similar to the alpha-numeric relationships explored within the Hermetic Tradition through Gematria. This suggests that the staves function both as individual signs whose meaning is contained within their own function and as signs whose meaning and use is determined by their relation to other signs within an overall semiotic structure. What remains to be considered is whether this additional layer of functional meaning is inherent within the Futhark arrangement itself or is a later conceit. Language is regarded within the Northern Tradition as having a 'magical, shaping power' (Flowers, 2009, p.95). This applies to those magical utterances which lack any semantic or obvious semiotic content as well as

recognisably linguistic formulae. Flowers (2009) speculates on the possibility that those runic inscriptions which lack semantic content may be graphic representations of magical utterances. In order for an effective communication to take place any arrangement of signs must be recognised as signal rather than noise on both sides of the communicative dynamic. The use of utterances which may be unintelligible, but which are deemed to have very specific meaning to the trans-human consciousness to whom they are directed is common to many forms of magical praxis.

Language is crucial to an understanding of and the application of runic mysteries within Odianism. The importance of linguistic proficiency in effective Galdor work is stressed within the Hávamál (Larrington, 1999) and other primary sources within the Eddas (Thorsson, 1996). As noted by Priest, among others, a significant move in 20th-century philosophy was, ‘in a certain sense, the destruction of the very possibility of meaning’ (Priest, 2002, p.93; McDonald, 2002) and as Bevir notes, ‘According to Derrida, we cannot have knowledge of anything beyond language because language cannot represent the world’ (Bevir, 2000). However, Derrida’s own carefully constructed claims (1977, 1982) must lose any validity by virtue of his commitment to the necessary instability of meaning. The Northern Tradition suggests that the nature of experienced reality, both for ourselves and others, can be acted upon through the use of language or more broadly through the deployment of appropriate symbols. However, this does not equate with the strong post-modern position of Derrida whereby the totality of experienced reality itself is reducible to a system of signs.

Within the Rune Gild much use is made of Galdor techniques, which rely in part on the application of ‘vocalic breathing’ (Thorsson, 2003, p.32). Each phoneme is deemed to have a certain function and significance that is not reliant on any linguistic meaning, but is intrinsic to the sound itself. Combinations of phonemes with a linguistic meaning such as ‘Rûna’ may also be used in Galdor workings, but it is not necessary for this conceptual meaning to be present for any phoneme or combination thereof to have an intrinsic meaning when correctly deployed. This is epistemologically problematic since the question arises as to how the specific meaning attributed to any given phoneme can be evidenced or indeed how it is first identified. For the Odian who wishes to deploy these sound units in magical operations it is important that knowledge of these phonemic

characteristics is internalised. This is achieved by extended repetition whilst paying close attention to the thoughts, feelings and ideas that arise during these practices. Over time phronetic knowledge of phonemic qualities begins to develop. It is of course in the nature of experientially gained tacit knowledge that once gained this knowledge cannot be transferred or articulated; it must be won through experience for each individual.

6. Knowledge and Consciousness

In order to approach an understanding of the way knowledge is obtained through Odian magical praxis it is necessary to explore the nature of consciousness and in particular Non-Ordinary Consciousness in some detail. Odianism is explicit about the primary importance of consciousness both as a means of knowing within the third epistemological triad and also as a means of creating reality. While Hardy's approach (1998, 2005) has much to offer, the Odian understanding of consciousness has perhaps more in common with Giovanni Gentile's philosophy of Actual Idealism or 'Actualism' (Gentile, 1922; Holmes, 1937). Gentile goes further than Hardy in his claims for consciousness. While Hardy regards reality as susceptible to changes caused by 'Mind' rather than 'Matter', Gentile proposes that reality is entirely fashioned by acts of consciousness. Gentile develops the Husserlian position that all we can know are intentional objects of consciousness and argues that while there is an external reality it is a reality that is shaped by consciousness.

Gentile's argument accepts that knowledge of possible realities exists within consciousness, but also assigns a creative power to consciousness such that reality depends upon consciousness. Although reality is only ever experienced individually, it is the totality of a group consciousness (similar to a field theory of consciousness) and not the particular consciousness of any individual agent that gives rise to the reality that is perceived. This model proposes a reality that dynamically arises out of a constant interplay between the individual as perceiver of a reality created by the plenum of consciousness and the individual as a projector of possible realities into the collective consciousness. Gentile suggests that while all individuals shape reality through consciousness, only a small number of individuals consciously or significantly alter the

nature of that shared reality. There are some obvious resonances (not intended by Gentile) with a magical model of consciousness in which the focused will of an individual in an appropriate Non-Ordinary State of Consciousness may effect changes in reality.

6.1 The role of bracketing:

Husserl's notions of epoché (bracketing) and the eidetic mode of consciousness can be usefully employed to understand the acquisition of knowledge in non-ordinary states of consciousness. In simple terms the act of bracketing requires that the perceiving subject excludes all but the data given to consciousness by the object of enquiry. For example, a bracketed consciousness of a particular table would exclude all previous concepts about table-ness, previously encountered tables and all presumptions about the general function of tables from the consciousness of this particular incidence of table-ness. When this difficult task has been achieved we can be said to perceiving the table in itself and to be employing the eidetic mode of perception.

The employment of the eidetic mode to describe 'magical knowing' must consider Peter Poellner's (2003) claims that felt experience always exceeds, in its felt significance, the capacity to articulate experience: The act of bracketing in its fullest sense leads to a direct encounter with the 'thing in itself' and thus transcends a linguistic understanding or analysis since language serves to represent and describe but is never identical with that which it signifies. For this reason magical knowledge that is gained through 'Vita' in Odian terms can never be fully articulated. Northcote (2004) argues that the act of bracketing prevents the consideration of the reality of the supernatural. However, his argument presumes a partial approach to bracketing, such that certain a-priori ontological assumptions are retained in the process of bracketing. A genuine act of bracketing would exclude all presumptions about the likelihood of the supernatural and supernatural phenomena would be seen as no more likely to be false than any other object of consciousness.

6.2 Perceptual Consciousness:

According to Zahavi, the basis on which my self-awareness is grounded is not the difference in my articulated responses to shared experiences from other individuals who

have shared that experience, but on the very fact that I experience my conscious contents as mine (Zahavi, 1998, 2001, 2004). The awareness that I have of being in a first-person relationship to that which is given to consciousness is both a given of my status as a subject and the grounds on which I can be certain that said status accurately reflects the nature of my conscious experience. The use of language to represent any experience immediately shifts any experience to a socially constructed act of representation rather than a personal holistic felt meaning. At that point it could perhaps be argued that the meaning of my experience is now a public, socially determined sequence of signs, but at the point of being experienced it has an ‘intrinsic *myness*’[original italics] (Zahavi, 1998). As Polanyi (2009) and others have demonstrated it is not necessary for knowledge to be articulated through language for it to have epistemic validity. The acquisition of new knowledge can be expressed, for example, through actions, emotional affect or through shifts in the experiential sense of self (Clark, 2010; Gendlin, 1997; Koufogiannakis, 2012; Polanyi, 2009). Knowledge can be understood as a function that precedes language rather than as being language dependent (Husserl, 1970; Lewis, 2000; Poellner, 2003; Zahavi, 1996).

Zahavi (1998) argues that consciousness is co-incidentally directed towards objects and self-aware. He goes on to distinguish between pre-reflective awareness which corresponds to perceptual consciousness and reflective awareness which is conceptual (Zahavi, 1998, p.696). The hermeneutic approach to experience, the notion that we can only interpret experience rather than accessing an un-mediated experience is perfectly appropriate for conceptual modes of consciousness where our situated and socially embodied nature is active. However, the key defining feature of moments of non-ordinary consciousness is the sense of “immediate presence”. In states of non-ordinary consciousness the sense of a barrier between the experiencer and the experienced dissolves and thus that which is experienced is felt to be ‘immediate’ in that there is no temporal lag between the ‘presence’ of the thing being experienced and the consciousness of the experience of that presence. The experience of, for example, a tree, in non-ordinary consciousness is not felt to be a mediated or symbolically represented experience, but is an immediate encounter with the presence of the innate ‘tree-ness’ of the tree as it for itself. While we have no difficulty in attesting to the actuality of such experiences we find

it extremely difficult to communicate these experiences linguistically, and this is because such experiences are given to consciousness perceptually.

In contrast to Bevir's claim that, 'Theories are implicit in all the objects that appear before consciousness' (Bevir, 2000), Peter Poellner argues that conscious intentional contents are not necessarily conceptual (Poellner, 2003). The possibility of a non-conceptual consciousness, or a consciousness content that exceeds the conceptual is also suggested by Depraz's definition of 'transcendental genesis' (Depraz, 2001), which draws on Focusing theory for the structure of its argument (Gendlin, 1997). Poellner draws on Husserl's thesis of presence (1970 [1931]) to argue that 'there is always more to our experienced selves at any moment than what we are capable of articulating at the time' (Poellner, 2003, p32).

Naturalist or Physicalist theories of mind have often tended to argue against the validity of felt-experience or 'qualia' (Vaden, 2001). However, in the arena of cognitive science it is argued by some that all conceptual knowledge emerges from those felt-experiences that we are referring to as perceptual consciousness (Crane, 1992; Myles, 2004), or that there are definite conscious subjective experiences that are non-conceptual (Nagel, 1974). Additionally, Vaden argues that qualia are excluded only by the application of algorithmic explanations of consciousness, explanations that are by no means the only means of accounting for consciousness (Vaden, 2001).

De Wit, who accepts perceptual consciousness, describes it as wholly internal to the subject (De Wit, 1999 cited in Reich, 2001). However, Poellner is suggestive of a spiritual potential for perceptual consciousness when he writes of the effect of perceptual conscious contents:

It may for instance motivate an effort on the part of the subject to grasp it conceptually and thus to attain the sort of 'deeper' self-comprehension which Taylor, standing in this respect in a long tradition initiated by Plato, regards as highly important (Poellner, 2003, p.45).

6.3 Representing Non-Ordinary Consciousness

Grof separates objective knowledge that is conceptual from the knowledge that we can experientially gain in moments where we have an immediate experience of non-ordinary dimensions of reality (Grof, 2000). If we seek to articulate the experience of non-ordinary consciousness we must remember that it may not be possible to build an accurate picture of such experiences through the medium of language (Grof, 2000; Reich, 2001; Heimbrock, 2004; Poellner, 2003; Hinterkopf, 1998).

To determine what constitutes an accurate picture of knowledge that has been gained in a state of non-ordinary consciousness we must consider what is meant by a ‘truthful’ representation. From an Odian perspective Truth includes those things that are ‘Trúa’ and which we accept as true because they are given perceptually or by our troth to certain cultural positions. However, Truth also includes information that has satisfied some kind of analytical examination (the second epistemological triad). Lastly, we have those Truths which can only be known from a position of Wisdom and are recognised and experienced in a wholly individual manner. In Odian terms the articulation of magically acquired knowledge, through mythic narrative or the analysis of magical results would be true within the context of the relevant epistemological triad. However, the truth represented by Vita and found in non-ordinary consciousness can only ever be known to be true through direct experience.

It has been argued by some, such as S.T. Katz and Flanagan, that mystical experiences are socially constructed (Lancaster, 2004). When conceptualising from such an experience an individual will draw on known spiritual concepts. However, such post-hoc conceptualisations are a representation of the experience and not the experience itself. As we have said above once one has moved into the medium of language, one’s position with regard to one’s experience is immediately interpretative and that interpretation will always be framed by the social context in which one’s language use has developed.

Husserl argued for the possibility of describing pure consciousness or experience. Our aim in returning to the things themselves is to concentrate on our consciousness of these things without reference to any pre-judgements we may have of that object given to consciousness (Husserl, 1970 [1931]). Myles notes that Husserl was committed to

maintaining a hypothetical space in which consciousness could function free from external inscriptions (Myles, 2004, p.101). I would argue that it is within non-ordinary consciousness that such a mode of perception becomes possible. Bevir strongly argues that Husserl's concept of the immediacy of presence is wholly invalid within a relational theory of meaning (Bevir, 2000). This argument functions well within the constraints that Bevir has applied. However, Husserl's claim that the eidetic mode of perception is possible does not speak directly of 'meaning'. Rather it speaks in terms of apprehending the 'being' of that which is immediately given to consciousness.

6.4 Non Ordinary Consciousness as Epoché:

Husserl argued that we have access to a direct experience of the world as opposed to a mediated representation thereof (Husserl, 1970). Although it is unlikely that this can be defended in the context of our normative consciousness as socially situated and embodied subjects, it does offer a useful approach to Non Ordinary Consciousness. Natalie Depraz explores the possibility of achieving the phenomenological reduction 'as a disciplined embodied practice' and in so doing references this praxis to a range of spiritual traditions (Depraz, 1999).

The association of the epoché with spirituality is also indicated by others, for instance Lewis argues that such moments of suspension are a key aim of meditative practices that are intended to achieve holotropic consciousness (Lewis, 2000). While Depraz (1999) presents the experience of the reduction as impartial, disinterested and reflective, I would argue that the moment of suspension cannot fully occur while one is occupying a conceptual mode of reflective consciousness since that framework will in some part be constructed from pre-judgements. Grof claims:

The data from research on non-ordinary states of consciousness represents a critical conceptual challenge for the scientific paradigm that currently dominates psychology, psychiatry, psychotherapy, and many other disciplines (Grof, 2000).

Grof is supported in this claim by recent empirical research into the physiological and psychological effects of spiritual experiences (Lancaster, 2004). It is extremely difficult

to regard objects as being possessed of an essence that is potentially available identically to any subject (Depraz, 1999; Husserl, 1982), partly because as Gadamer would argue, in terms of our normative consciousness, it is our prejudices that significantly constitute our sense of self (Gadamer, 2001). However, the absence of essence can itself be seen as a result of cultural contextualisation. In a culture that placed value on the visions of its magicians and shamans it would be possible for the essence of an object to be articulated in terms of the first epistemological triad (Trúa) and for this to shape the normative view of that object.

7. Conclusions

To seek to specifically define the nature of the sacred would be oxymoronic (Heimbrock, 2004, p128; Winnicott, 1951/1958). The desire to fix experience through language and in so doing assign it to certain categories is an expression of a particular cultural yearning. The approach to knowing that emerges in the third Odian epistemological triad is very close to the Participatory model proposed by Tarnas (1991) and developed by Ferrer in relation to mystical or peak experiences (2011). The Participatory Model itself draws on a number of earlier thinkers and may be understood as a Hegelian dialectical model of consciousness. Ferrer (2011) summarises the debate about the ability to hold any valid knowledge claim regarding metaphysical reality and concludes that the denial of metaphysical claims is dependent on a Neo-Kantian epistemology and is thus far from neutral. What Ferrer does not explore is the possibility that we need not choose between metaphysical agnosticism or metaphysical commitments, but can pose a slightly different question: Rather than asking ‘is it possible to *know* metaphysical realities?’, we might instead ask, ‘What are the differential states of consciousness that give rise to knowable metaphysical realities and which states of consciousness render such realities unknowable?’.

The Odian approach to knowledge also has similarities to the ‘Integralist’ approach advocated by some figures within the field of trans-personal psychology (Wilber, 2000; 2006). Rather than separating different categories or fields of possible knowledge the Odian seeks to ‘grasp the total culture’ (Thorsson, 1994, II, 2) of the Northern Tradition. This requires a number of different approaches to the gaining of knowledge and this may involve moving from the intellectual study of archaeological evidence to the meditative

engagement with the products of that study through to the use of magical techniques to more fully internalise the content, values and frameworks of that Tradition (Cleary, 2011). Most magical systems regard the holotropic moment (a moment of ‘moving towards wholeness’) (Grof, 1976, 2000; Reich, 2001; Sharp, 2006) as a phase of consciousness from which we can begin to explore the occult nature of reality. While Graf et al focus on the ‘holotropic moment’, the Odian is not seeking a momentary awareness of hidden reality, but a development of consciousness such that this awareness underpins their whole life. Indeed, it could be argued that the search for Rûna aims at nothing less than the achievement of a fully holotropic state of being.

5. Towards An Odian Ontology

'Earth it's called among men, and ground by the Aesir,
the Vanir call it ways;
the giants evergreen, the elves the growing one,
the Powers above call it loam' (from 'All-Wise's Sayings'; Larrington, 1999).

1. Introduction

Understanding of any Occult practice is dependent on a knowledge of the radically different 'reality paradigms' (Kuhn, 1970) that inform the beliefs and values of occult practitioners. This chapter draws on Odian theory and practice in attempting to describe an Odian ontological framework. Ontologies attempt to describe reality; to define existence and the qualities or capacities necessary for something to be deemed to exist. Ontologies can also be understood as attempts to define and describe the nature of being. The concepts of existence and being are not necessarily identical. In some philosophical approaches the concept of 'being' is concerned with more than the brute fact of existence: 'Being' can imply a focus on the experiential dimension of existence.

The Odian epistemological triad of Troth-ful knowledge, analytical knowledge, and wisdom offers a framework through which we can approach an Odian ontology. Odianism treats Troth-ful knowledge as equally valid to knowledge gained through analysis and also proposes that there is a deep level of knowledge that can only be gained in states of non-ordinary consciousness. This suggests that the Odian model of reality will also be multi-layered and will need to accommodate experiences and claims that would normally fall outside most models of reality. For the purposes of this thesis the construction of an Odian ontology will attempt to address, *inter alia*, the following specific issues:

- The Odian Self-complex
- An Odian cosmogony and cosmology
- The different categories of existence within Odianism
- The understanding of Being as a specifically experiential aspect of existence

2. The Self-Complex

Odianism is committed to the fundamental importance of the embodied status of the individual and recognizes that we cannot step outside that status when we theorise about the nature of the reality. The Odian approach to reality, as indicated by its epistemological triads, is concerned with the experiential relationship that an individual has to the world. Since Odianism suggests that reality must be understood from the perspective of how an individual comes to know the world, it is appropriate to begin our exploration with an examination of the Odian concept of the Self-Complex.

Crucial to any magical paradigm is the notion of an ontologically discrete Self. This Self may or may not be inherently connected to other Selves depending on the particular magical tradition and similarly the modalities and expressions of that Self-complex will vary from system to system. Partridge (1999) in his exploration of New Age individualism contrasts the model of discrete selfhood with the de-centred self that is proposed by post-modernist thought. Partridge regards the New Age concept of Self as standing against the fractured or even fictional Self of post-modernism. I would agree, to some extent, with others (Carrette & King, 2005) that the Self referenced in some New Age texts and practices is not holistic but a fragmentary and splintered Self and as such is entirely post-modern. As has been noted previously in the thesis, this need not imply an absence of holism to the experiences of practitioners of eclectic or syncretic esotericism. Many critics of the New Age (Baerveldt, 1996; Carette & King, 2005; Lyon, 2000; Possamai, 2003) have pointed to texts that present a model of esotericism in which the practitioner is encouraged to make certain instrumental changes in their life-world, without the spiritual and/ or ontological implications of the causal effectiveness that is claimed for those practices being explored. This creates a splintering of the Self as presented in these texts in that the implied reader of said texts is both engaging in work that implies a highly sacralised and magical world without ever questioning the overwhelmingly materialistic and de-sacralised world in which those practices are taking place.

The Northern Tradition posits a Self-complex consisting of a number of elements that may or may not be active within any given individual and which can be developed or can

indeed atrophy dependent on the actions of the individual (Thorsson, 1996, pp.25-29). Whereas the modelling of the relationship between divinity and humanity within a Christian paradigm could be described, by virtue of the primacy of the ‘covenant’, as contractual; the Northern Tradition regards the relationship as organic with no strict separation between Gods and other entities in the world (Abram, 2011; Davies, 2006; Flowers, 2006). The notion of a separate soul that has a special relationship to divinity is essentially illogical or meaningless within the Northern Tradition. Flowers/ Thorsson provides an overview of a Northern European Soul Complex, as constructed by the Rune Gild, in a number of texts (Flowers, 2009; Thorsson, 1987, 1994, 1996, 2003) and rather than talk in terms of a single ‘soul’ uses the term ‘psychophysical complex’ (1987, p.168). When we look at the many parts of the Self-complex the need for such a term becomes clear. In *Rune-Lore* (1987), Thorsson divides the psychophysical complex up into nine distinct but inter-related elements. The nine divisions in Thorsson’s schematic are: the physical body, the shaping substance, the faculty of ecstasy, the vital breath, the mind, the memory, the post-death ‘subtle’ body, the fetch and the luck of the individual. The importance of the number nine in Germanic Tradition means that such a division is appealing, but there is no source evidence to confirm that this detailed breakdown of the Self or its elements was known in pre-Christian Northern Europe. The arrangement of these concepts as inter-related elements of a Self-complex is a contemporary speculative attempt to reconstruct a possible model of pre-Christian understandings of self-hood. The elements of the Odian Self-complex are listed below with a brief description.

2.1 The Constituent Elements of the Self-Complex

Lík is the material body, which in turn consists of various substances and aspects. As Thorsson (2003) points out these substances are themselves the recipients and the active agents in certain kinds of magical work. In the Odian ontological framework there is no hard boundary between ‘soul-stuff’ that may be mystic-magical and ‘body-stuff’.

Hugr is the seat of the Will and consciousness. This may be regarded as the active mind consisting of volition, perception and cognition. It is the Hugr that engages with the world. In the Eddaic poems Hugr and Minni are imaged as twin ravens, Huginn and Muninn who accompany Óðin (Larrington, 1999).

Minni can be understood as referring to the memory. However, this is not just the individual memory, but includes elements of the collective unconscious (Thorsson, 2003, p.24). The Odian paradigm regards the Present as fleeting since as soon as it is apprehended it has passed into the Well of Urðr (Flowers, 1996, p.41). While memory is not identical to experience, it is the Minni that holds our consciousness of all experience that is not occurring in the present moment.

Hamr (also known as the Hyde) is plastic image forming material, which can be controlled by the Hugr (active mind) with sufficient training. Any changes that are made within the Hamr will become physically apparent in the Lík (body).

Hamingja refers to magical power, but also the ‘luck’ of any individual. This is a faculty that can be developed through magical work and other forms of activity, but can also be damaged by one’s actions and so is closely linked to the working of one’s Wyrd in the world. The Hamingja works closely with the Fylgja in the individual for whom this latter faculty has been brought to consciousness. Our luck and magical powers are deemed to be enhanced by the strengthening of the Fylgja.

Óðr is the faculty of ecstasy, Óðr is the power that manipulates magical force (ibid, p.169). It represents an altered state of consciousness in which the root of Óðin’s nature is experienced as opposed to conceptualised. It is the faculty of Óðr that allows the individual to access their Woð-Self; a state of consciousness in which the Self-complex is governed by and experienced through a state of magical ecstasy.

Önd (also known as the Athem) is the vital breath, the gift of Óðin within the Eddas, Óðr is the gift of Hœnir and the various aspects of the Lík are the gift of Lóðurr.

Ørlög is not strictly a component of the Self-Complex, but is a causative function that plays a part in the determination of the individual’s Wyrd and is acted upon and changed in its causative effect by the actions of the individual. The nature of the Ørlög is initially determined by the actions of one’s ancestors and so each individual is shaped not only by

their own actions but the actions of their parents, their wider family, the clan and ultimately the tribe and nation from which they trace their descent.

The Fylgja is both personal and clanic (the Aettarfylgja) (Flowers, 2009). The Fetch concept in English relates directly to the notion of the Fylgja and we may see the later concept of the Familiar as a development or corruption of the original Fylgja concept. The Fylgja itself can be broken down into three forms, a contra-sexual form, an animal form and a geometric form. The nature of the Fylgja is that it both belongs to the Self-complex, but is also separate from it. It is the work of the Vitki (rune magician) to build a functional relationship with the Fylgja and achieving such a link marks part of the process of Self-becoming. The animal form reflects the nature of the individual and can according to magical tradition function separately from the individual in Midgard. The geometric form of the Fylgja is a manifestation to consciousness of the Ørlög that is accrued and carried by the individual.

Sál translates as the Soul, but refers to that aspect of the Self that may persist after death as a quasi-container for aspects of persistent consciousness. Thorsson (1987) refers the Sál to Jung's 'Shadow Self' (1978), but this is not an analogous concept.

Ek is the 'I'; the locus of consciousness through which the Self-complex is experienced. In *Runelore* (1987) Thorsson suggests that the individual can construct any number of separate 'Eks', each functioning as a distinct magical persona. Since Odianism is committed to the idea of the persistence of and potential deification of Self, there must be a hypothesised 'Ur-Ek' within which each of these subsidiary personae operate.

Insofar as it points towards an ontological theme what we find in the Odian Self-Complex is a commitment to a multi-layered Self with variant permeability between its different elements. This differs considerably from the strictly hierarchical nature of models of Selfhood such as those offered by Wilber (2000).

Once sufficient proficiency and understanding is developed by the individual it is possible, according to Odianism, to consciously reconfigure the Self-complex and the environment experienced by the Self-complex. This suggests a further layer of

ontological complexity in which, much like Gentile's Actual Idealism (Gentile, 1922) discussed in Chapter Four above, the nature of experienced reality is not only experienced solely through consciousness, but sufficiently developed individuals may create the reality that they and others experience.

3. An Odian Cosmogony

The question of the origin of the Universe can be approached analytically or empirically, but in constructing an Odian cosmogony we need to consider how an individual who is troth-ful to the Northern Tradition understands the emergence of the manifest Universe.

The process of the Universe coming into being is described in chapters 4 to 19 of the Eddaic text, 'Gylfaginning' (Sturluson, 1987). Thorsson (1984, p.73) notes that there is no personal creator God within the Northern cosmogony; 'the multiplicity of being' arises from within the naturally occurring pre-manifestation charged space of the Ginnungagap. The latent order suggested by the origin myth of the Universe within the traditional sources is one in which polar extremes determine the limits of being and acts of creation occur when the two extremes encounter each other (Thorsson, 1994, III, p.1).

The unfolding of the Universe can be represented as a process of nine key phases (Thorsson, 1987, pp.143-153; 1994, pp.2-3):

1. Fire and Ice as primary polar opposites provide the explosive force on meeting that gives rise to the first instance of differentiation.
2. **Ymir** (the first distinct entity and the source of all **Thurses** [entities with intent and purpose but without reflective consciousness]) and Auðumbla (the cosmic cow who feeds on the salt block formed by the meeting of Fire and Ice, thus revealing within that block the first deity, Búri) come into being
3. The Thurses and other **Etins** begin to be engendered from the body of Ymir. Ymir feeds on the milk of Auðumbla, who in turn feeds on the salt/ice block, which is the matrix from which all organic life is derived. Consequently, Búri and those who descend

from him arise directly from the source matrix of all life, while the offspring of Ymir derive from a force for creative differentiation that has been mediated through the role of Auðumbla. Auðumbla as the cosmic cow is an archetypal symbol of the well-being and social organisation of the Folk. Her role as a mediator between Ymir and the raw material represented by the Salt/Ice block is to give specific function to each life-form (the Etins) that emerges from Ymir. This contrasts with the beings that descend from Búri who are free to determine their own function and purpose. Thorsson notes (*ibid*, p.5) that the Etins are, ‘embodiments of the unchanging, eternal processes of nature’.

4. The first of the Aesir are born. ‘Aesir’ can be etymologically traced to the Sanskrit terms ‘ásu’ (life force) and ‘ásura’ (god). The first of the Aesir, Villi, Vé, and Óðin are the offspring of Borr and Bestla who are the descendants of Búri and Ymir respectively. Thus, while they are deities, the Aesir combine both the freedom to self-determine implied by the nature of Búri and the predetermined purpose or function implied by Ymir.

5. The first sacrifice occurs as Óðin and his brothers dismember Ymir in order to construct a physically manifest Universe. The innate and naturally determined patterning of existence represented by Ymir is transformed by this first act of conscious intent. The reality created by the Aesir in this act, represented by the cosmology of Yggdrasil, retains aspects of the unconscious patterning carried by the body of Ymir.

6. The Aesir create new life-forms: the Dwarves or ‘Svartalfar’ in order that the construction of the physical Universe may continue without the direct conscious involvement of the Aesir.

7. Óðin wins the runes (understanding of the Mysteries) through his Yggdrasil ordeal and thus creates a new level of consciousness in which the ultimate mystery (Rûna) may be intuited.

8. Asgard (the home of the Aesir) is created, symbolically establishing a permanent presence for the Mysterious within the Universe. Óðin begins to explore the magical application of the runic mysteries he has experienced.

9. The first humans are created by Óðin, Hoenir and Lóðurr. The physical bodies of proto-humanity exist through the craft of the Dwarves, but it is the gift of Óðin that allows humans to achieve consciousness.

In the Eddaic creation myth there are three fundamental qualities or gifts provided by the Gods, Óðin, Hoenir and Lóðurr, which lead to the emergence of mankind (Larrington, 1999, pp.3-13): physical movement, breath and consciousness. According to Thorsson (1984, p.76; 1987) these three Gods all function as hypostases of Óðin. There is some merit in this view: When Hoenir is offered as a hostage to the Vanir in the war between the Aesir and the Vanir it is noticeable that he cannot function independently, and is only able to speak with reason or insight when in the presence of Mimir. This suggests that Hoenir functions primarily as a vessel through which other deities can operate. Similarly Lóðurr is only mentioned in the company of Óðin. Thorsson's speculative interpretation thereof is to regard the introduction of Hoenir and Lóðurr as a means by which Óðin as a singular entity can be represented in the symbolically creative pattern of three-foldedness (Thorsson, 1987). Absolute reality, even at the level of the Gods is fluid. This implies a complex dynamic model of reality in which any number of competing models may be fully real in any given moment.

Since the Universe was shaped out of the body of Ymir, an entity without reflective consciousness, reflective consciousness is not the fundamental primordial Universal state, but a state that arises from the acts of Óðin. While reflexivity is limited to humans and certain other trans-human entities, the creation myth within the Northern Tradition can still be regarded as sympathetic to a fully animistic ontology: All matter in the Universe partakes of the spirit or force within the Ginnungagap and the Universe itself does not arise through any anthropomorphic or anthropocentric process.

For the Odian, perhaps the most significant aspect of this cosmogony is its presentation of a Universe that is not only amenable to magical activity, but is created in its present form by a series of magical acts: The Universe within the Northern Tradition is inherently and essentially magical. If the Universe is, at its heart, a magical creation then the development of sufficient wisdom (in the sense of the third Odian epistemological triad)

will allow the individual to begin to understand the fundamental magical structure of the universe. Once this structure is understood at a deep level, its magical nature means that it may be susceptible to magical influence by one emulating the magical approach of Óðin.

The Eddas describe the origin of the Universe as a physical reaction rather than the result of a divine fiat (Larrington, 1999; Sturluson, 1987): The collision of Fire and Ice within the void or Ginnungagap ultimately leads to the organisation of matter and energy to form the manifest universe. We may understand the two extremes of Fire and Ice as representing an expansive exothermic energy (Fire) and an extremely dense stable force (Ice). It is tempting to see in this description a close analogy for the Big Bang moment and indeed to see Ymir ('The Roarer') as representing the undifferentiated potential that explodes from that initial point of creation. There is a period of undirected unconscious generation, before the first Gods appear and seek to impose conscious form and order on the Universe. In placing the Gods, including Óðin, within the Universe rather than transcendent of it, we can see an emphasis on the lived world and the entwining of the physical and the trans-physical.

4. An Odian Cosmology

Odians need not reject cosmological models derived from the Eddas even if they also accept certain aspects of prevailing scientific cosmological theory. We can experience the Universe in a troth-ful manner without necessarily obviating the possibility of also understanding this traditional narrative as primarily symbolic. It would be extremely problematic to suggest that the existence of mythic concepts such as Yggdrasil can be experienced in the same way that we experience the existence of a table. However, if we look to the last epistemological triad which refers to those things which are known through the application of wisdom, we can see that the Odian cosmological structure proposes a reality that is only encountered through a certain state of consciousness.

There is insufficient space to explore all aspects of an Odian cosmology, so we will consider the most fundamental mythic concepts of Yggdrasil, The Nine Worlds and the Runes themselves.

4.1 Yggdrasil

The concept of some form of World Tree is common in a number of cultures and finds its way into many esoteric structures (Evola, 1995; Jung, 2002; Regardie, 2000). Within the Northern Tradition it is Yggdrasil that plays the role of the cosmic tree. The ‘Voluspá’ (Larrington, 1999, pp.3-13) details the centrality of Yggdrasil to an understanding of Germanic cosmology.

Rather than being separate from humanity there is an implicit connection between people and Yggdrasil. Humanity is described within the Eddas as being shaped from trees by the triple deity Óðin- Villi – Vé (Larrington, 1999; Sturluson, 1987) and as Thorsson points out (2003, p.45) there are numerous poetic tropes or ‘kennings’ which refer to humanity as trees. Within the Western Mystery Tradition much is made of the Kabbalistic concept that ‘Kether is in Malkuth and Malkuth in Kether’ (Mathers, 1991, pp.20-21) often rendered ‘As above so below’. This suggests that there is also a connection between the human world (Malkuth) and the realm of the divine (Kether). However, the two trees are very different in terms of their detailed structure, presentation and esoteric function. For example, while The Kabbalistic Tree of Life provides a linear hierarchy of abstract concepts, Yggdrasil presents a complex intertwined series of mythic images.

Yggdrasil is a dynamic structure that is constantly undergoing change. This dynamism is stressed within Odianism as an indication of the role that the image of the tree plays as a symbolic description of the potential for self-development (Thorsson, 1987, 2003, 2005). It stands both within and separate from the Nine Worlds. This is in itself points to the paradox that lurks within the Northern Tradition. Since the Tree represents a multiplicity of concepts it is necessary that it can be positioned in a range of standpoints relative to the position of the individual within the world.

At the base of the Tree we find the serpent Niðhoggr who coils round Yggdrasil gnawing at its roots, as do various worms, while harts are described as gnawing at the new shoots. Moreover, the very trunk of the tree is rotting (Larrington, 1999; Sturluson, 1987, pp.17-19). This suggests a Universe defined by fragility and exposure to constant threats. However, it is the very gnawing that generates the Tree’s most valuable gift; the mead produced by Heithrun (Bright Rune), the goat who constantly eats of Yggdrasil. Niðhoggr can also be regarded as symbolising both the universal force of entropy, the

primal drives within the individual and the function of the Nauðiz rune. The presence of numerous new shoots on the tree indicates a view of reality in which new forms of existence are constantly appearing rather than a static model in which the creation phase of the Universe reaches a terminus.

The fundamental importance of Mystery to the Odian cosmology and the importance of the manifest world to the realisation of Mystery are indicated by the role of Heithrun: Matter, represented by Yggdrasil, is converted by its assimilation and analysis (digestion) through the power of Mystery (Heithrun) into mead which symbolizes the ecstatic function.

After **Ragnarök**, a series of cataclysmic conflicts that results in the obliteration of the current world, the Tree will spout new shoots and grow again, thus we are presented with a cyclical or spiralling chronology with no ultimate end. Individual Trees, Worlds and people may die, but the principle of growth and decay will continue. The ‘Vaþrúðnismál’ states that Lif (Life) and Lifthrasir (Love of Life) hide in Yggdrasil through the **Ragnarök** phase (Larrington, 1999, p.47, 269) suggesting a cosmology in which the manifestation of life is a realisation of a priori principles: The love of and thus the will for Life. It would appear that the Northern Tradition places consciousness as foundational to the existence of a Universe in which life can arise. However, consciousness is not necessary to the existence of *any* Universe, since a Universe possessed entirely of Thursic or non-conscious forces precedes the Universe in which Odin manifests.

4.2 The Nine Worlds

The summary of the nine worlds provided below has been drawn from a number of sources (Crossley- Holland, 1993; Larrington, 1999; O’Donoghue, 2008; Sturluson, 1987; Thorsson, 1987, 2003, 2005). In Thorsson’s Runelore (1987) the description of the Nine Worlds describes an internal triplicity to each World such that the Nine Worlds contain within them both the mystery of three and nine. This symbolically links the Nine Worlds to the Odian symbol, the **Valknútr** (Valgard, 1998). The Nine Worlds should be understood as symbolic rather than literal and represent both the fundamental qualities of existence within the Universe and the essential make-up of individual humans. In this sense there is a link between The Nine Worlds and the Kabbalistic Tree of Life.

Asgarðr is the home of the Aesir and those Vanir who live with them. The Aesir are the Gods of consciousness and so we may view Asgarðr as the seat of consciousness. Within the individual this may be regarded as representing the **Woð-Self** and the abode of the Fylgja.

Hel represents the opposite pole to Asgarðr and is home of the Goddess Hel and the dead. Hel does not imply a moral negative, but represents the result of entropic dissolution. Within the individual there is no particular aspect of the Self-complex that refers to Hel. However, the state of being represented by Hel is that which is experienced by the individual who has no active Hamingja (Luck) and is not in any sense in touch with either their Fylgja (trans-personal aspect) or the Woð-Self (Inspired Self). It is akin to the state of the uninitiated in other religious and magical systems which regard the non-illuminated as ‘dead’.

Ljossalfheimr (Light-Elf Home) is a home to sub-divine non-human entities (Dísir, Elves, Demi-gods) who are primarily concerned with the intellect, aesthetics the assistance of individuals in magical work and artistic creativity. Within the individual this may be regarded as the source of the Hugh or cognitive ability.

Svartalfheimr (Black Elf Home) is home to divinised ancestral spirits as well as non-human entities that create manifest structures within the world and work with those energies that give shape and structure to things. This idea has continued in popular culture with the idea of dwarves as miners and tool makers. Within the individual this world represents the shaping forces within the Self-complex, both of the body itself (Lík) and the processes and forces by which it is shaped (Hamr).

Vanaheim is the home of the Vanir. While the Aesir are the Gods of consciousness, the Vanir are the Gods of the manifest organic world responsible for functions such as harvest and reproduction along with related magical operations. It is important to note that Freya is a Vanic Goddess and that it is from her that Óðin learns the magic of Seiðr. Freya’s Seiðr magic requires that the individual sink into a trance in order that s/he may receive communications from the trans-human realm of existence. It is not sufficient to

simply regard the Vanic Gods as the old Gods of Nature displaced by Gods representing the qualities of Man, since many of the Vanic deities are directly linked to human capacities. Within the individual, Vanaheim represents the organic dimension of the Self-complex and the ways in which the individual relates to the organic cycles within which they find themselves.

Jötunheimr (Home of the Etins) is a world occupied by non-consciousness in the sense of being inhabited by non-reflective or blind primal forces or Thurses. This does not imply chaotic forces, since forces of order and stasis can be equally blind. The Thurses represent forces of nature that are beyond the direct control of humans and even the Gods to some extent, but which can, in some circumstance, be resisted and at least temporarily overcome. In this sense we might consider the Thurstic forces or 'giants' to be representative of the entropic processes at work within the Universe. It is worth noting that the giants precede the Gods in the Northern cosmology. In this regard there is a similarity to the Greek Titans who also represent massive forces, which are as unthinking as they are powerful. Within the individual, Jötunheimr represents both the resistance to change and also other unconscious elements of the Self-complex some of which, such as temperature regulation are necessary to the preservation of the Self-complex.

Muspellsheimr is the World of Fire. In addition to being the source of the Cosmic Fire that formed one half of the catalytic reaction leading to the formation of the Universe, this is the symbolic location for all expansive energies. In itself the nature of Muspellsheimr is ultimately destructive since it is a state of pure and absolute energy without the stabilising effect of mass and density. The power residing in Muspellsheimr requires some counterbalancing force in order to function in a generative way. Within the individual this world represents both the animating life force itself, but also when combined with other primal forces the power of inspiration and other extrovert impulses.

Niflheimr is the World of Mist. It is the realm of cosmic Ice and the origin of all water in the Universe. It is a zone of negative existence, a realm of infinite contraction and density, essentially inert until it comes into contact with the infinitely expansive force of cosmological Fire. If the Nine Worlds represent a set of mysterious principles or runes on which the Universe depends then we might see Niflheimr as representing the state of pure

matter. That is, a matter that has no form is entirely static and lacks consciousness of any kind. Within the individual, this world represents the areas of the Self-complex from which consciousness has withdrawn or into which it has not emerged. Niflheimr should not be confused with the mystery of Isa (Ice) one of the Futhark runes, which while also representing a contraction and withdrawal of the Self, refers to a consciously willed contraction analogous to a meditative state of no-thing-ness.

Midgard or the Middle Gard is the central world in the Germanic cosmological model and represents the physical Universe. Central to this cosmology is the absence of any moral quality to the initial conditions of Midgard. It is neither fallen nor elevated, but is the space within which non-divine consciousness is potentially able to experience the Universe in a fully awakened state. The location of Midgard at the centre of the Nine Worlds demonstrates a recognition that it is from our embodied status within the world that we experience reality. The positioning of Midgard in the middle of the Universe as opposed to at the bottom of a hierarchical ladder leading up to the divine is significant on a number of levels (Thorsson, 1987). The Odian model regards the manifest Universe as the culmination of a process of creation. This structural location also recognises the inevitably human-centric perspective that humans will have in regard to the nature of Being in its most foundational sense. Although not explicitly expressed the centrality of Midgard foreshadows the importance of 'Being in the World' in the phenomenological exploration of ontological questions.

It is clear from the traditional source that the Nine Worlds should not be treated literally since the geography of the worlds is inconsistent both between different traditional tales and within individual accounts (O'Donoghue, 1998). The shifting nature of the location of the different worlds and the connections between the worlds is strongly suggestive of its symbolic function. However, the essential functions and types of existence that are presented within the Nine Worlds, such as cosmic Ice or the Alfir are understood as being real. This does not necessarily mean that they are physically manifest, since the Odian concept of the Real is not restricted to that which is extended in materially experienced Space-Time.

The ambiguity and uncertainty that arises when one studies the cosmology of the Northern Tradition is not indicative of a failure to fully understand its proposed structures. The Northern Tradition is radically non-linear, non-dogmatic and accepting of the irreducible complexity that we observe when trying to unravel the nature of the Universe. Moreover, rather than proposing any final point at which Truth may be revealed to the practitioner, the Northern Tradition insists upon the absolute Mystery of Rûna.

4.3 The Ontological Status of the Runes

The rune staves are not mysteries in themselves, but they do represent mysteries that are deemed to have an objective existence (Thorsson, 1987). Within an Odian ontology the rune-stave is a means by which a mystery can be graphically represented. The rune stave is real in the sense of having physical presence and the Mystery that it represents is also real, but the rune-stave is a pointer to the Mystery rather than an encapsulation of that Mystery. As we will see in a later chapter considering magical praxis the rune stave(s) can act with the power of the Mystery that they represent, but this requires the active intervention of the rune-magician.

The Runes (the Mysteries) themselves are outside any temporal framework since they are foundational to the Universe in which they operate (Thorsson, 1987). However, in keeping with the paradoxical nature of Odianism the runes, while preceding humanity, are also deemed to be contained within us awaiting the magical actions that will make them manifest (Thorsson, 2003, p.52).

Thorsson (2005) claims an ontological reality for the runes, but does not make it clear whether this trans-human reality should be understood as implying a concrete reality to the runes or an abstract reality such as that claimed for Universals. In *Nine Doors of Midgard* (2003, p.36) a more precise categorisation is offered; the runes are ‘principles’ that provide the ‘framework or structure of consciousness’. This suggests a view of a Universe that while not necessarily teleological is unfolding according to pre-determined patterns and within the constraints of pre-existing principles. Such a view is often associated with those mystical traditions in which the patterns are deemed to be evidence of and representative of the will of the Divine. However, we can equally regard such a Universe as having naturally unfolded itself in accord with innate principles (Runes)

formed at the point of creation. The runes appear to represent something akin to Universals as understood within Platonic Realism: We may find, for instance, the mystery of Gebo (sacrifice/ harmonious exchange) at work in the world through our fruitful relationships with others, but we are observing only an instance of the quality of the rune rather than the rune itself.

The Odian takes on the obligation of ‘Rune-winning to make them real for ourselves’ (ibid p.36). Thinking through how this might be an coherent aim within the framework of reality proposed by Odianism leads us towards a semiotic approach to the conceptual management of ontologically real trans-human entities. If we take the rune Fehu (circulating abundance/ wealth) for instance, there is a complex mystery (rune) that has an objectively real status in the Universe, which is identified by the sign ‘Fehu’. The rune (mystery) is not a single quality but a complex reality that contains within it many qualities and functions that only become clear when understood in an inspired or ecstatic state of consciousness. There are manifestations in our lived experience that may contain some of the qualities or effects associated with the rune Fehu, but which are not identical with the totality of that rune. If our experiential reality is shaped by consciousness and if consciousness can be manipulated through the use of signs and symbols, we may, in the right magical state of consciousness, use the label ‘Fehu’ to ‘speak into existence’ the qualities represented by the sign ‘Fehu’. Our subjective experience of the effect of ‘Fehu’ in our lived world will be determined by our understanding of the qualities and functions represented by the sign ‘Fehu’. The ability to manifest the power of ‘Fehu’ in the world requires the individual to have developed a deep Wisdom regarding the reality of the mystery behind the sign. In order to speak the language of the runes we need to develop an awareness of the reality that the rune words represent, which requires more than intellectual consideration.

The *Gildisbók* (Thorsson, 1994, II, p.9) states that rune staves can be regarded as having three distinct properties: Shape, Sound and Number. Each particular element in the Universe has an atomic structure (or Shape), a resonant frequency (Sound) and an atomic mass (Number). In this sense we might regard each fundamental element in the physical Universe as a rune stave written into existence by Rûna (the ultimate Mystery). Odianism regards the Elder Futhark as a particular collection of rune staves that are specifically

designed to represent the Universe as a field of consciousness, while not negating the existence of an experienced physical Universe. The primacy of consciousness within an Odian cosmology suggests that not only can the rune staves of the Futhark stand in a representational sense for phenomena within a Universe conceived as a construction of consciousness, but that when properly understood the runes can act in the place of that which they represent in the physical universe.

In *Rune Lore* (1987) Thorsson suggests certain key rune formulae have an independent reality as trans-human entities. These formulae can be spoken or sung but are not recognisable as words, their semiotic content being determined by the symbolic inter-relationship of the constituent rune staves. Examples of such formulae would be 'ALU' and 'LUWATUWA'. For example, 'LUWATUWA' can be chanted while the individual is in a non-ordinary state of consciousness until a felt-understanding of the power and purpose of this rune formula is understood by the inspired 'Woð-Self'. In addition we can look at the individual rune staves that make up this formula and see that it represents a state of dynamic balance in the Universe or within the individual. Laguz (L) refers to the understanding of the mysteries rising up from the depths of the individual, while Tiwaz (T) refers to the order in the Universe that is created by trans-human forces. The repeated ending 'UWA' indicates a massive or inevitable force (Uruz), moving the individual towards a harmonious existence (Wunjo) informed by a relationship to the mysteries (Ansuz). Consequently, we have the power of Laguz and Tiwaz approaching each other under the influence of 'UWA': the human and the divine approaching each other under the guidance of the mysteries to achieve an inevitable harmony. Crucially, for the magical practitioner, this plethora of meaning and symbolism can be activated in the conscious construction of experienced reality by the use of a single formula.

The intrinsic quality of the runes means that they can be encountered experientially in a number of ways. Thorsson (1984) refers to runic 'streams' which exist both in the world and within the individual and which can be experienced and potentially utilised towards specific ends. The idea of runic streams is not limited to Odianism but also underpins the writings of earlier rune-magicians such as Shou (2004, [1920]), Gorsleben (2002), and Marby (Thorsson, 1984). The Poetic Edda also hints at such a concept of runic forces within the world (Larrington, 1999).

Thorsson states (2003, p.92) that when Galdor work is performed correctly the rune, its stave and its song, ‘become one thing’. This suggests an essentialist vision of reality: For any rune, within each possible mode of representation there lies an essential quality that is identical across all the differing modes of representation. This does not mean that the stave and the song are identical in their totality, but that correct praxis has the effect of drawing into the consciousness of the practitioner the essential mystery of that which is represented through the given mode of expression. This state of affairs requires that the notion of an inter-subjective reality is deemed only to describe the human experience of reality, since essential reality is unaffected by subjective consciousness. The subjective consciousness may come to encounter this fundamental reality, but cannot directly affect its nature. It is this fundamental and unchangeable aspect of reality that constitutes Rûna. The Mystery of Rûna is deemed to have an existence of a more fundamental type than the inter-subjective nature of the reality that we directly experience and in this sense Rûna represents a transcendental level of existence (Thorsson, 1984, pp72-74).

5. The Embodied Experience Within Odianism

So far in this chapter we have looked at the understanding of the origin and structure of the Universe within the Odian tradition. The Odian individual adopts a troth-ful relationship to the Northern Tradition and regards these traditional realities as true from the perspective of both the first (Troth) and third (Wisdom) Odian epistemological triads. It must be acknowledged that while the Odian believes this cosmogony to resonate with a pre-Christian model, the trothfulness rests is the intent and commitment rather than in any established fact of identity between the Odian interpretation of the ancient Northern Tradition and that Tradition as it would have been originally inhabited and experienced. In my own magical work with the Nine Worlds, for example, I have experienced states of consciousness which I can most easily describe as being an encounter with Vanaheim. Following the chanting of appropriate Galdor phrases and inducing a frenzied state through ritual movement and breathing techniques, my felt experience was of being in the realm of Vanaheim and of interacting with its inhabitants. I may not have physically relocated, but as phenomenology asserts, reality is only ever experienced through consciousness and my conscious experience was of being in an entirely different dimension of reality. This experience, as with other similar encounters, corresponded

with the intentions and focus of the magical work that preceded it and so was not a random delusion. More importantly, the felt experience of that encounter influenced my understanding of the Universe beyond the encounter itself.

In addition to being troth-ful to the Northern Tradition and seeking, through magical praxis, to understand the underlying truths within its symbolism, the Odian is also an embodied individual. An Odian ontological framework needs to address the nature of experienced reality with particular reference to how the acceptance of a Universe that is innately and fundamentally magical influences our understanding of existence as experienced.

5.1 Temporality:

Temporality is a necessary condition of experiential existence; without the passage of time we could not distinguish one experience from another. If we hope to understand what it means for something to exist, which implies persistence over time, we must understand the role of temporality within that framework. Consequently, an understanding of the temporal distinctions within the Northern Tradition is important to an understanding of the Odian concept of experiential existence.

In the Northern Tradition the **Norns**, **Urðr** (Past), **Verðandi** (Present) and **Skuld** (Future) represent the possible temporal positions that can be occupied by any entity or state. The terms Urðr and Verðandi arise from the same root word meaning ‘to turn’, thus Urðr is that which has turned while Verðandi is that which is turning. The present moment is constantly moving into Urðr, which is seen as a well into which Verðandi flows. It is the contents of the Well of Urðr, fed by the water of Verðandi that shape Skuld.

Skuld broadly relates to a concept of the future with the exception that the etymology of Skuld emphasizes the not yet happened-ness of the future. The future is not a state that can be said to have existence as such within an Odian ontology since it translates as ‘the is to be’. It only exists as a concept based on the fact that there is a temporal point beyond Verðandi about which one can speculate, but it is not an existent state into which we move from Verðandi. Rather, we exist in a constant stream of quanta of Verðandi passing into Urðr (Thorsson, 2005).

The two time states of Urðr and Verðandi along with the potential state of Skuld are not subject to influence by individuals and in the source mythology the Norns are not subject to control by the Gods. This suggests an immutable reality to the passage of time and to all events, including events of consciousness, which have passed into the state of Urðr. The Norns stand outside time and their a-temporality places them beyond the influence of both Gods and humans. Time itself does not have the status of being in the world, the experience of movement or change gives rise to its conceptualisation, while the experiential reality is of a permanent present. A consciousness that is outside Verðandi could access both Urðr and Skuld equally, while a consciousness moving through states of Verðandi can access Urðr, but can do no more than speculate about the possible contents of Skuld.

A thing is often said to exist if it possesses extension in time and space. In the Northern Tradition, the notion of extension in time reaches backwards rather than forwards: The past of an existing entity, which has passed into the Well of Urðr, continues to shape that entity's existence in Verðandi. Consequently, the conceptualisation of temporality within an Odian Ontology must also consider the function of both **Ørlög** and Wyrd. Ørlög can be translated as, 'from-law'. Each individual, family, tribe and nation has an Ørlög that is determined by the actions accumulated within Urðr of those who have an ancestral relationship to the family, tribe or nation as it currently exists in Verðandi. Ørlög represents the shaping hereditary forces that determine the framework of potentiality within which an individual acts. For example, actions that diminish the Hamingja (Luck) aspect of the Self-complex and which have passed into Urðr, will affect not only the individual who engages in such actions but also future individuals who are bound to that Ørlög.

Within Odianism the key distinction between Ørlög and Wyrd is that the former is driven by an external Law presided over by the Norns: It represents a framework of possibility within which we operate. Wyrd is driven by our individual actions in a specific temporal framework and represents the way in which future events within our lifetime are seeded by our past actions. Wyrd etymologically derives from Urðr, but rather than being concerned with that which 'has turned' it is a concept related to what arises out of Urðr,

or the events that are seeded in Skuld as a result of an individual's actions passing into the cauldron of the past. Wyrd can be seen as a principle of becoming, but specifically a becoming that it is determined by that which has already occurred (Flowers 1996, pp. 41-43). Wyrd is not a form of fatalism or rigid predestination since it does not determine the individual response to the moment in Verðandi in which Wyrd manifests, only the framework of the event, within which the individual retains the possibility of free action. The range of available actions is in turn partially determined by the forces of Ørlög.

The individual is situated in a permanent present while events within Urðr (the pole of the Past) seed events in Skuld (the pole of the Future) the dynamic interplay between Urðr and Skuld is continually resolved and synthesised through the actions of the individual in Verðandi. This model implies a probabilistic model rather than a strictly deterministic model of causation. Far from being a fatalistic cosmology, Odianism proposes that we cannot predict specific effects directly from causes, but only a range of possible effects.

5.2 Subjective and Objective Experience:

Thorsson (1994, p.1) acknowledges the complexity of any attempt to satisfactorily define the 'double edged' (ibid) concepts of subjectivity and objectivity. However, he does propose a model in which there is a clear distinction between the two and expresses a commitment to the possibility of 'objectively real data' (ibid). Within the Gild more widely there are significant and on-going discussions about the precise nature of subjective and objective worlds and the extent to which a simple distinction allows for the possibility of the magical work that is at the heart of the Odian project. Thorsson's writings regard the objective world as that which is experienced as being external to consciousness rather than as necessarily objectively real in the sense proposed by a strictly materialist paradigm. In describing a subjective universe that becomes 'objectively real' (ibid, p.2) Thorsson seems to be implying an ontological framework in which the contents of consciousness, under certain circumstances, may become as real as any externally manifested phenomena.

A system, such as Odianism, that stresses the importance of being embodied and making changes within Midgard might be expected to commit to an external reality that exists beyond the mind. However, the felt experience of a reality that presents as a collection of

material phenomena existing independently of the individual need not mean that this experienced reality is not, at least partially, the product of consciousness. If we conceive of the Universe as a field of consciousness operating at varying levels of meta-awareness then the fact that the table in front of me for example is ultimately a projection of consciousness will not prevent my experience of it being that of a physical table made of ‘matter-stuff’ and categorically different in my experience from the day-dream of a table or the memory of a table. Moreover, if the physical tools with which I might test the physical reality of the table are similarly products of a Universal field of consciousness then there is no sense in which the table’s positive response to empirical testing invalidates the notion that nonetheless the table and the tools with which its reality is tested are ultimately creations of consciousness. In addition, the fact that we do not have the meta-awareness that allows us to see the table as a product of consciousness means that in terms of the lived experience and **life-meaning** of the individual the ‘real’ table can and should be treated as both materially present and categorically different to an imagined table.

In *Nine Doors of Midgard* (2003) Thorsson describes the distinction between the subjective and objective universe as follows:

By the objective world we mean the natural/ organic/ mechanical world outside the sphere of human consciousness. . . By the subjective universe we mean . . . human consciousness – and most particularly that ‘spark’ of the gift of Woðanaz which you possess. There is also the concept of the world, or the whole universe, which is the entirety of existence, both of the subjective and objective, known and unknown (ibid, p.36).

This indicates a commitment to the actuality of an objective reality that is not necessarily identical with the subjective consciousness of that external reality. However, it does not accord a higher validity to objective reality since the Universe consists of both subjective and objective realities equally. In our day to day lives the sense of real-ness is not restricted to external phenomena; we recognise that the reality of our hunger or sadness has an equal reality to the reality of the chair on which we sit. However, when considering magical experiences or indeed other kinds of non-normal experiences the question, ‘but is it real?’ often takes on an entirely materialistic meaning. The fact of a

personally claimed experience is regarded as insufficient to support the real-ness of such experiences. The distinction perhaps lies in the fact that objective reality is always open to being shared: The chair on which I sit can be sat upon, felt and seen by others for instance. My personal experience of hunger cannot be shared in the same way, but the personal subjective reality of hunger can be seen as a particular instance of a generally recognised objective reality. This suggests that subjective realities are only trusted as being real to the extent that they represent instantiations of generally accepted objectively real phenomena. This way of conceiving of reality is suited to a culture that is primarily focused on both the conformity of experience and the primacy of the material world. However, a culture that prioritises the inner development of the individual might take a very different, but equally valid, approach to the reality of the subjective.

From an Odian perspective, the validity of subjective reality is sufficiently given by it having been experienced. There is no sense in which the subjective world or the world of consciousness is somehow less real than the objective world. This does not necessarily imply equal value to all subjective realities and it does not propose a means of determining relative value for either instantiations of objective or subjective reality, it simply claims their mutual validity as types of reality.

In Idealist ontologies Reality is only granted with confidence to mental objects. However, Odianism proposes a dual ontology whereby the objective universe exists within a context made possible by the existence of consciousness. Thus, the experienced material universe is existent, but depends on consciousness for its existence, which is not to say that all potentially conscious entities must be fully conscious for its manifestation nor indeed that all sentient entities possess the same level of consciousness in actuality or in potential.

The Odian objective world as experienced is ultimately an inter-subjective construct that relies on our ability to regard processes that we cannot observe directly as though they were fixed substances. For instance, the objective reality of an iron railing is given by the way in which it is generally perceived by humans. It is pragmatic to treat the iron railing as though its apparent reality is the totality and complete reality of the railing. However,

iron, at the atomic level, is a mass of seething movement and flux; its ‘thing-ness’ as continuous and unchanging over time is a matter of human perception.

5.3 The Experiential Reality of Objects of Consciousness:

Odianism proposes that both substances extended in space and time and objects of consciousness should be regarded as equivalently real in so far as they are experienced and for the individual(s) who experience them. In terms of Odian temporality, something that physically manifests in Verðandi (the present) will have physical existence and will also be known in consciousness; that which exists in Urðr (the past) is retained in the memory and so exists only in consciousness at the point of recollection. Objects of consciousness that are not recollections have the same reality as the contents of the Well of Urðr, in that their continued existence is entirely a matter of consciousness. Since the contents of the Well of Urðr are deemed to be Real within the Northern Tradition, we must accord the same level of reality to other objects of consciousness.

The concept of the Will is another non-material phenomenon accorded objective reality within Odianism. In this regard Odianism is following the understanding of Will that has long been accepted within the Western Mystery Tradition. Will is commonly understood as the ability to make free choices or initiate actions. The magical understanding of Will differs in that it regards most seemingly conscious choices to be only the simulacrum of Will; considerable work is required before an individual genuinely becomes fully conscious and possessed of an authentic Will. In addition Will is used to describe the causative power in magical work such that in certain states of consciousness effects may be caused by the intention of the individual alone without the need for any secondary causes. Thus, a person might be healed or harmed without any physical intervention.

The ontological status of number within the Odian Tradition is touched only occasionally in contemporary written works. However, the use of number does suggest a quasi-Platonic understanding of numbers as real objects with qualities that exceed their function as arithmetical tools. This is indicated by the association of certain numerical structures with particular aspects of the self, (Thorsson, 1996). In hermetic kabbala, which has strongly influenced contemporary expressions of the Western Mystery Tradition, we find that the numbers one and ten are regarded as having primary significance and this relates

closely to an understanding of the Universe as being both teleological and closed. This contrasts with the symbolic value of number within the Northern Tradition that finds expression within Odianism. The triplicity as a dynamic pattern, rather than the linear progression of one to ten, is the primary basis of Odian numerological functions. Similarly, within the Western Mystery Tradition we find Four-ness represented by the cross or the square, shapes that are emblematic of a static presence (Hopper, 2001); while within the Northern Tradition the key quadraplectic sign is the swastika (Godwin, 1996). This representation of four-ness indicates the combination of both material presence and dynamism, since the swastika in its many forms can be understood as a pictorial rendering of eternal movement (Thorsson, 1996).

5.4 An Odian Approach to Trans-human Entities:

The Northern Tradition proposes a world that is genuinely alive: A milieu we share with a number of non-human entities possessing agency and intelligence. Some of these entities are closely linked with humans, some known as Land-Wights have a special relationship to specific geographical spaces, while others are wholly independent of humanity. However, in order for an individual to move beyond troth-ful knowledge of the existence of trans-human entities to the understanding that comes with wisdom, their existence needs to be experienced.

The magical methodologies of Odianism require an understanding of existence that is at odds with most prevalent models. In the field of Seiðr for example Curry (2006) agrees with Blain's characterisation of this magical praxis (2002) as proposing an Animistic Ontology understood as implying a world that is, 'more than human' (Curry, 2006). While Blain and many other authors in the field restrict the notion of trans-human spirits to anthropomorphised forms or archetypes, Curry correctly points out that a fully animistic ontology does not rely on human constructions, but on the ultimate source that leads to those constructions. This position is supported by Bates' work on shamanism (Bates, 1996) and Hick's arguments for the ontological reality of the trans-human (1989). Curry notes that an animistic ontology, in recognising the extra-human dimension of agency and being for itself, 'rejects the Cartesian split between culture and nature, which denies subjectivity to the latter' (*ibid*). It is therefore necessary when considering an animistic perspective to recognise that each spirit, land wight or other extra-human entity is not in

its essence anthropomorphic, but occupies its own category of existence while sharing the universe with those entities which occupy a human category.

In my own magical work, I have been able to establish what I regard as a relationship with a small number of land-wights. The development of the relationship, for example with the wight connected to an old Yew tree in my village, requires regular visits and the provision of simple gifts such as honey or milk. Although the wight can be ‘seen’ when in a non-ordinary state of consciousness, the felt experience is that the wight’s essence is not contained within any physical form, but is formed and shaped by its location and the nature of the organic feature to which it is connected (e.g. a tree or stream). My own encounters and discussions with others suggest that wights have the same visual form for all those who ‘see’ them. It is hard to accurately describe the nature of this ‘seeing’. The wight does not physically appear before the eyes, but nor is the visual experience of the wight equivalent to an act of imagination; ‘seeing’ a wight seems to fall into a fuzzy region somewhere in between these two types of visual consciousness. There is always a sense in such encounters of having temporarily interrupted the wight’s own experiential existence, which would continue with or without the presence of humans.

There are many points of contact between an Odian ontology and the Animistic Ontological model. The approach taken within Odianism (Thorsson, 2003) is that, to the extent that we can talk sensibly in terms of objective reality, the various ‘hidden folk’ occupy the objective world in the same way as humans or animals. While these wights do possess certain powers not normally available to humans they are not necessarily to be regarded as supernatural. If wights and their powers are in fact integral to the organic manifest Universe, then their presence and capabilities are no more supernatural than any other entity. However, perhaps some new category of existence is needed to distinguish such entities from those that can be encountered without attaining a state of non-ordinary consciousness.

5.5 The Reality of Spiritual Experience:

It is rare to see the question of spiritual reality addressed in contemporary ontological theories, but the nature of occultism in general and Odianism specifically is such that any

attempt to understand magical praxis from a philosophical perspective must engage with the issue of spiritual or trans-human existence.

Within the Germanic cosmogony and subsequently the Odian Tradition, Gods are as much a product of the Ginnungagap as the rest of the Universe. When looking at the possible categorisations of divinity in ontological terms we need to consider the reality of the numinous within an Odian context. Odianism employs two terms for the concept of the Holy: There is the term ‘Wihaz’, which indicates the awesome aspect of the numinous and is suggestive of its separateness from the mundane world (Thorsson, 1996) and the term ‘Hailagaz’, which references the sense of wholeness, power and wellbeing that is linked to the notion of holiness (*ibid*). As Flowers (2009) explains, a state of Wihaz can be said to belong to anything that is or has become part of the numinous realm and once it is Wihaz it then possesses the power indicated by Hailagaz. Nothing can have the power of Hailagaz without first being Wihaz. In magical terms, one can induce a state of Wihaz for an object (setting it apart in the numinous), but one cannot induce a state of Hailagaz without first working through the process of separation. However, this need not contradict the notion of immanence since that which has been made sacred (the act of *wihjan*) can reside in the numinous while also being manifest in the world. There is a third state that needs to be mentioned and this is the state of being a magically charged or innately sacred object indicated by the term ‘Ginn’ as in ‘Ginnungagap’ (magically charged space). The linguistic evidence suggests that the Ginn power cannot be wielded by humans. This builds on the Odian tripartite structuring of reality. We have modalities of magical/ spiritual power (Wihaz and Hailagaz) that can be enacted by humans and which must be linked in a dynamic relationship, while a third modality of magical power lies outside the power of humans and does not require the process of being made Wihaz, it simply possesses Ginn power.

The ontological status of the Gods and of Óðin specifically is not fully determined with the Odianism:

There are no ‘heresies’ possible in the Troth (Thorsson, 2005). There are suggestions that Thorsson’s personal position tends towards some form of externalised and independent existence for the Gods (Flowers, 1996 p.12, 2007, p.25, 29, 119; Thorsson, 1987; 1996). It is also clearly stated that the goal of all Odiants is, ‘the

establishment and maintenance of a true numinous magical link with the God of the Gild, Woden' (Thorsson, 2003 p.2). This is rendered ambiguous by the later statement in the same text that, 'The Woden within, the essence of the Self, initiates' (ibid, p.23). To the extent that deities can be thought to have an objective existence Odianism proposes that:

These objective realities are essentially three: (1) within the national group (an inherited "metagenetic" divine pattern), (2) within the species *homo sapiens*, and (3) independent of humanity. Not all gods partake of all three objective realities (Thorsson, 1987, p.176).

The independent existence that is accorded to certain deities *in potentia* is not one that is fully transcendent in relation to the Universe, but is an existence in which 'humans and gods are as one before forces influencing them both, all three of these elements being part of an organic whole' (ibid, p30).

Thorsson expands on the link between humans and Gods later in *Green Rûna* (pp37-8) with the claim that there is a reality to the notion that the Folk are descended from Óðin. However, this is not understood as implying a literal genealogical link, but a link that inheres within certain individuals by virtue of their Ørlög (inherited qualities) and the manner in which they meet their Wyrd (self-created fate). The complex represented by the term Óðin is regarded as being 'within' rather than transcendent, but at the same time the possibility of an externalised form of this complex is not rejected outright.

Importantly, the link to Óðin is described as 'genetic' and this implies that there are specific mysteries and relationships to the numinous for different folk dependent on their ancestry. This is the only reasonable position to adopt within an ontological framework where the notion of a fixed barrier or distinction between the 'spiritual' and 'material' simply does not exist and in which trans-human entities and qualities are intrinsically linked with geographical locations. In such a cosmology, the nature of any 'spiritual' heritage will be necessarily entwined with ethnic and socio-cultural heritage since all of these aspects are mutually informing. Indeed, this is a fundamental aspect of the nature of holism within the context of an Odian paradigm.

Thorsson's position appears to be that Óðin is a sovereign force for itself and to itself. There is, though, the scope for a number of positions on the ontological status of Óðin within the Gild (Thorsson, 1994, III, p.13). My own experiences have been that the more

you work with the Mysteries the more the active role of trans-human entities becomes hard to ignore. Unlike monotheistic approaches, Odianism allows for this same experiential sense and potentially objective reality to arise for any number of other deities. An interesting question remains as to whether Óðin qua Óðin can be understood as pre-human or whether it is better to think of a pre-human sovereign force that is multiple and extended which then becomes concretised in response to a relationship with a specific folk with particular qualities.

In Odianism's understanding of the source material within the Northern Tradition, the Gods, like humanity, are subject to the working of Fate. Fate operates outside the realm of conscious functioning as an entropic force in the Universe; since the Gods have a narrative of their own, they too are laying down layers of *Ørlög* which brings them into the purview of Fate. Moreover, consciousness is only coherent as a concept within a temporal context and so the Gods must also be temporally framed in order to allow for consciousness. Since the Gods and consciousness itself are products of the Universe rather than a precursor to the Universe it makes no sense to think in terms of human soul that transcends the Universe within which it finds itself.

The Nine Doors curriculum suggests that with sufficient practice the individual will, 'be able to speak the language of the gods' (2003, p.73). This suggests a hierarchy of being that can be experienced by the individual as a hierarchy of consciousness. However, unlike the Wilberian model of reality in which one must progress towards a 'correct' understanding of the ultimate reality, the level of being in which the language of the gods can be spoken is only appropriate in certain circumstances and is not necessarily a better state of being in and of itself.

6. The Process of Being and Becoming

Classical ontology concerned itself with existence understood as a question of substance and extension, or the vexed question of how to categorise abstract or non-physical entities such as number or geometric projections. From the Nineteenth Century onwards, arguably culminating with the high-point of phenomenology, the question of Being as an experiential process became increasingly a focus for ontological discourse.

The nature of Being need not be a matter only of what qualifies something as having existence. As Heidegger argues, we must also be concerned with Being that is intentionalised or is ‘for itself’ (Heidegger, 2002; Moran & Mooney, 2002, pp.243-288). Heidegger restricts the experience of Dasein to the human realm. Other entities may have objective existence and thus Being, but they do not have awareness of their Being-ness that leads into Dasein. However, within an overarching Animistic ontology we open up the possibility of trans-human entities possessing not only Being in the sense of manifest presence but also Dasein.

A potentially seductive approach to dealing with the problem of Being within a Reality Paradigm that allows for the possibility of magical functionality is to adopt a post-modern pose. The radical uncertainty of ‘Real-ness’ as a proposition in and of itself renders us free from any need to find a convincing framework in which our particular contingent model of reality attains internal consistency. However, Post-modernism not only fails in terms of its attempts to describe consciousness (see Chapter Four above), but its very basis is ontologically untenable. Post-modernism describes its epistemology in terms of constructed realities: We cannot achieve the Enlightenment goal of knowledge since we can only access what we perceive and what we perceive is always constructed by our position. However, if ‘being in the world’ appears to be mutually experienced, which is in no doubt, the claim that the world is always experienced through different perspectives does not negate the shared ontological certainty of ‘being in the world’; it merely raises questions about the totality of any epistemological position.

Heidegger’s concept of Dasein has a certain resonance with the Odian focus on ‘being in the world’. However, he falls short of approaching the expression of that attentiveness to Dasein as a state of desire or ecstasy. The emphasis within Odianism on ‘making change in Midgard’ (*ibid*) strongly suggests an ontological perspective that requires a commitment to Dasein in some form, but it also requires us to go further than mere attentiveness to Dasein. The Odian regards Óðin as an exemplar of how life should be lived, he represents an authentic and complete model of Self-becoming and this process of Self-becoming is predicated, as demonstrated by the root meaning of his name, on a willingness to enter a state of extreme desire or frenzy. Any ontological framework that

could meaningfully encapsulate an Odian concept of authentic being would need to recognise the primacy of ecstasy and desire in the actualisation of that authentic being.

Gilles Deleuze (Smith & Somers-Hall, 2012) appears, on the face of it, to offer a possible paradigm of being into which Odianism might comfortably fit. Deleuze proposes a univocal ontology in which Bergsonian vitalism (Guerlac, 2006) plays a role in the continuing flux of existence. In terms of lived existence this vitalism is expressed as desire. Not the desire born of lack of something but an innate desire for becoming. This very closely mirrors the dynamic ecstasy that is fundamental to Odianism. Deleuze takes the notion of becoming and argues that ‘becomings’ are perfectly real, but that what is produced can only be what the subject already possesses. In this sense the Deleuzian model of becoming can be applied to the Odian notion of ‘becoming who you already are’. However, in his work with Felix Guattari (Smith & Somers-Hall, 2012), Deleuze focuses on the concept of multiplicity and anomaly. Deleuze & Guattari interpret becoming as a process of bringing into presence an ever increasing multiplicity that is inherent within each personality. This precludes any coherent post-hoc development of conscious Selfhood arising from such ‘becomings’. The self is increasingly splintered and so the journey towards self-becoming produces a series of concentric selves creating a breadth of self but no depth. From this perspective the application of Deleuzian vitalism has limited value for an Odian ontology. However, Deleuze’s concept of consciousness as a transcendental field which is neither attached to the subject nor externalisable as an object does have considerable value. The idea of a field theory of consciousness removes the problematic gap between conceptual and perceptual consciousness that remains in my proposed Odian Epistemology. In proposing a transpersonal dimension to this field of consciousness, Deleuze’s model potentially allows for the projection of objects of consciousness beyond the individual.

The Odian model of reality regards relationships and processes rather than discrete substances as being foundational to Being. We can see this, for example, in the emergence of the Universe through the relationship between Fire and Ice. One of the relationships that is crucial for a sense of ‘being in the world’, is the relationship of the individual to the land. The significance of locale both for the quality of Being experienced by the individual and as a determinant of the nature of Being-ness for that

which belongs to a given place is recognised by Curry as central to Seiðr work (2006). In contemporary Odian work the importance of a sense of place is understood as an element of the subject's own being. This suggests that we can carry the significance of place with us, but also that we are at our most functional when our internal locus in geographical terms is matched by our actual location. If our being-ness in the world is shared with other extra-human beings and our interconnectedness involves an ecology of spirits who are geographically tied then it follows that as humans we are also to some extent geographically tied, or at least that our attempt to become who we are will be vastly assisted by correct geographical location. Such a strong view of the power of place suggests a possible sympathy within Odianism for Heidegger's concept of *Dasein* in terms of the individual's Being resting primarily on being-in-the-world rather than possessing the disembodied status of Agent or Subject against whom the physical world functions as a backdrop.

When we start to explore the notion that Being-ness is differentiated by location and that an essentialist relationship exists between the *Dasein* of the individual and certain locations we find ourselves in controversial territory. Within the primary Odian texts we find various references to the concept of 'meta-genetics' and the importance of ancestry and heritage as a partial determinant of the 'Ur-Being' that each individual potentially possesses. To some extent these concepts are influenced by Völkisch and Ariosophic ideas (Goodrick-Clarke, 1992) and continue to influence movements such as the New Right in France (Goodrick-Clarke, 2003).

The being-ness of the human is not limited to the physical extension of the *líf* (body) in Space-Time but extends beyond the material body both within the dimension of Midgard, but also in a potentially multi-dimensional way. The limits of each individual being are therefore determined by the consciousness of each individual. We may then think of being as a process rather than as a state of affairs or the presence of extended substance in space-time. Consequently, we can regard the being of a person as a process that necessarily develops in the four dimensions of space and time. However, the individual as process(es) may also, through non-ordinary consciousness and magical work, become a process operating in n-dimensions. The primary sources talk in terms of nine-worlds but a close reading of the literature such as the 'Voluspá' (Larrington, 1999) reveals any

number of worlds within those nine-worlds and multiple ways in which those nine-worlds present themselves to consciousness. Additionally, the repeated imagery of webs and wells of reality within the primary sources suggests that a multi-dimensional model of reality is in keeping with the Northern Tradition.

7. The Centrality of Paradox

Fundamental to Odian ontology is the proposition of a region of existence that is both unknown and unknowable, but nonetheless real. Consequently, the aspiration to fully define the nature of being is recognised as unattainable from the outset. The nature of reality as understood by the Odian must incorporate this ultimate limit of knowledge into any paradigmatic framework that they seek to construct. The Odian unknown, the great Mystery referred to as Rûna, is paradoxical since its content must always elude us, but it can be indirectly glimpsed during magically achieved experiences of Non-Ordinary Consciousness:

Rûna is the great Unknown and Unknowable which pulls the mind of Man and God ever onward and upward to greater Knowledge and Power. It is this Rûna which Odin confronts and assimilates in the Yggdrasil initiation (Thorsson, 2003. p.6)

Rûna might be seen as analogous to the role of the ‘Mysterium Tremendum’ (Otto, 1950 [1917]). If Rûna is a-priori unknowable then the question arises, how can we begin to posit its existence? Part of the answer to this paradox lies in the tripartite approach to epistemology which allows us to know the existence of Rûna through our encounter with it in non-ordinary states of consciousness. When we consider the paradoxical nature of the central concept of Rûna and the symbolic function of the rune Dagaz  it could be suggested that multiple co-existing ontological frameworks are both implied and required by the Odian paradigm.

The suggestion that ontological frameworks might be given by particular states of consciousness may seem to be a fundamentally flawed argument that violates the law of the excluded middle. However, the notion of multiple co-existent ontological states does not require a state of ‘P. ~ P’ but a series of states, ‘P.Q.R . . .’. Moreover the positing of Rûna, implies that each experienced ontological state is ultimately an aspect of a unifying

field state, Rûna. In that sense, what is proposed is not so much a multiple and potentially contradictory network of ‘Real-ness’ but a single Reality that is usually only glimpsed in one of its aspects at any given point.

In terms of ontological implications the foundational power of a polar opposition (Fire and Ice) may be regarded as pointing to a model that is grounded in the value of mutually occupying opposing extremes. The cosmos does not arise from a resolved dialectic. Instead, the two opposing principles are retained and mutually inform each other without either being diminished or altered. Ferrer (2011, pp.12-14) proposes a model of spiritual reality that is dynamic, open to human participatory endeavour and accommodates extra-human entities. The Odian model goes further and suggests that the totality of reality as experienced by humans is dynamic, populated multi-dimensionally, and is open to co-creative participation, primarily through directive non-normal consciousness or magic.

8. The Multiple Realities of Odianism

Within the Odian model of reality it makes more sense to talk in terms of multiple modes of Being or of various distinct but potentially interconnected Being-nesses rather than of Being as a unified singular concept. The Odian inhabits a reality that is primarily an inter-subjective construction of consciousness. Moreover, it proposes, in a similar manner to Gentile (*ibid*), that individuals have the capacity to change the nature of reality for themselves and others through acts of directed consciousness. For the non-Odian the acceptance of such a radical interpretation of reality requires some kind of ‘bracketing’, or suspension of judgement. However, as Northcote argues, following Berger, the act of bracketing is itself often performed within reductive frameworks that assume the illegitimacy of non-secular world views (Berger, 1974; Northcote, 2004). Northcote goes further than many previous advocates of non-biased bracketing (Berger, 1990; Evans-Pritchard, 1965; Hess, 1993; Wallis, 1979) in that he recognises the perceived need to engage in a bracketing process at all is a positioned decision which accepts the hegemonic demarcation of that which is deemed to be empirically true from that which is at the very least suspect (*ibid*). Non-ordinary experience by virtue of its suspect nature is always a prime candidate for bracketing.

While there are some definite similarities between the Odian paradigm of Being and a Husserlian understanding of the eidetic nature of being as applied to holotropic experiences (Sharp, 2006), there is a crucial difference. For Husserl, all that is known is limited to that which is given to consciousness. However, the Odian adopts a Polarian perspective in which that which is given to consciousness *is* the reality with which I engage, but the external world is known to have a reality of its own (Flowers 1996, pp38-39). The Husserlian eidetic perception allows for the perception of things purely as given to consciousness while the Odian who has fully actualised their Self-complex potentially perceives things as given to consciousness *and* as they are. In keeping with the tripartism that is foundational to the Northern Tradition, there is also a third layer of implied possible perception, in which the Odian achieves an omnjective perception: The Odian experiences their subjective reality; the objective reality in which the subjective reality is situated; and some aspects of the hidden underpinning principles or Mystery (Rûna).

Once a multiple ontological framework is accepted it becomes tempting to propose a Tripartite Ontology based on the fundamental importance of triads and triplicity within the Northern Tradition. It would be possible to mount a defence of tripartism by pointing to the role of three as a key number in many observable natural structures and similar arguments could be made around other key numerical and geometrical symbols within the Northern Tradition. However, in seeking to establish an absolute status for Triadic reality, rather than proposing a reality that is not a necessary reality for all those who experience a form of the Real, would go against the anti-Universalist approach of Odianism. While recognising its limited application within a Universe of multiple but equally valid ontological frameworks one could posit a tripartite ontological framework in which there are three distinct but overlapping ontological frameworks. In this model each framework is a sufficient model of reality that offers an internally consistent and coherent paradigm to allow an engagement with that which is deemed to have existence and to determine the criteria by which the claim of existence is satisfied.

Although he does not subscribe to the stratified model of consciousness suggested above and explored in detail below, Randrup (1999, 2002, 2004) offers a compelling and convincing argument for collective consciousness that allows for a non-solipsistic model of sceptical-idealism. Randrup starts from the accepted position that we cannot prove the

existence of anything outside consciousness. He then addresses the problem of shared experience by suggesting that rather than pointing to the necessary existence of material objects, shared experience might instead point to a shared consciousness. The material world is accepted as a sleight of mind that allows us to more easily and pragmatically engage with our conscious experiences. Although Randrup's position seems challenging, it actually meets the requirements of 'Occam's razor'. Unlike those theories which introduce the additional concept of materiality, Randrup relies only on that which is known, the existence of consciousness and the existence of shared perceptions. Randrup is able to elegantly allow for the consistency and relative permanency of phenomena across individual perceptions through the notion of shared consciousness. There is no necessary contradiction between this position and that proposed by Odianism whereby the material universe is deemed to have an objective existence. This is because the material universe accepted within Odianism is a materiality that is given by conscious experience and which can be altered by the application of consciousness through magical praxis. In the absence of evidence to the contrary, it is reasonable to propose that the collective consciousness provides the means by which a semi-permanent observable material reality is maintained and transformed.

Óðin is regarded as the first entity possessing consciousness and so the presence of consciousness is not a foundational fact of the Universe in the Northern Tradition, but only emerges with birth of Óðin. Consequently the definition of the Real within the Odianism cannot posit a Universe that depends upon consciousness for its existence since the emergence of Consciousness is dependent on a pre-existing reality. At the same time the Odian ontological framework does indicate a model in which the experience of reality is given by consciousness and that the only reality available to humans is that experienced through consciousness. Moreover, it is committed to a model of reality in which changes in consciousness can cause changes in the structure of reality.

As a closing word on the ontological framework implied by Odianism it is important to note that in keeping with the recognition of the irreducibly mysterious nature of the Universe any attempt to describe the nature of reality can only ever be regarded as a 'working model' (Thorsson, 2003. P.36). The Odian does not regard reality as irretrievably uncertain and indeterminate, but simply as more richly layered than we

would normally imagine, with each new level of reality being equally certain to the individual who is troth-ful to his/ her felt experience. The attempt to determine what constitutes the Real can be regarded as a process of consciousness and thus amenable to further examination through either Gentile's or Randrup's models. However, the Odian cosmogony describes a reality that precedes consciousness. An Odian ontology recognises that reality is only knowable to humans through the processes of consciousness, but also that existence *qua* existence does not depend on human consciousness.

6. Odian Magical Praxis

Shaping and steering unseen, wise words
and wilful works are sent,
within a wondrous web of telling tokens:
Goals to gain, or gifts; bale
to banish, break—or beget. Sooth to say
Woden's way is a cunning craft! (Unpublished poem – Michael Moynihan)

1. What Is Magic?

It is extremely difficult to satisfactorily define what constitutes a magical praxis. Despite its being a relatively uncommon human activity, there remain many competing scholarly theories as to the necessary conditions for an activity to qualify as magical and considerable differences of opinion as to the role of the individual human agent in effective magical operations (Bailey, 2006; Cunningham, 1999; Hanegraaff, 2003; Malinowski, 1954 [1925]; Moore, 1957; Tambiah, 1990). Practitioners of magic are similarly in disagreement. For example, the view of the role played by transpersonal entities in magical causality ranges from the strict atheism of the Church of Satan (LaVey, 2005) to the approach in the initiation rituals within the original Order of the Golden Dawn in which it was believed that 'God forms' were invoked by the various initiating officers (Regardie, 1994). Consequently, while it may appear a sufficiently narrow field to allow for a general approach, the most appropriate way to study magical praxis is to focus on particular traditions or groups.

Our understanding and interpretation of magical praxis has developed and changed over the centuries (Bailey, 2007). The most significant distinction in understandings of magical praxis is whether it is presumed that magical praxis is causally effective. While Tylor and Frazer regard magic as bad science, Tambiah (1968) considers magic as fundamentally about the rhetorical deployment of symbolic language and ritualised action. Malinowski's work (1954 [1925]) much earlier than Tambiah's, also drew attention to the view that in environments that accept the effectiveness of magical acts symbolic actions such as speech are deemed to have causative power. In terms of contemporary scholarship, Greenwood's exploration of magical experiences, including her own, stands out in its acceptance of the potential validity of magical realities (2000, 2013). Magic,

according to Greenwood, is best approached as an experiential reality; it is proposed that ‘legitimate knowledge’ (2013, pp. 208-209) may be gained in states of magical consciousness. I have a lot of sympathy with this view and while Odianism operates within a culturally specific ‘master narrative’, its understanding of magical effectiveness is also centred on the primacy of consciousness. In terms of my own research approach and methodological position I would also strongly agree with Greenwood’s argument for the validity of ‘inspirited’ (*ibid*, p.210) realities

To be an active occultist of any type one must believe in the ability of the individual to cause willed changes in the world through the force of one’s intentionality, or we might say, by the force of the magician’s will. While a Right Hand Path magician may place certain restrictions on what sort of changes are allowable, they must still subscribe to the view that the individual, albeit under the influence of divine oversight, has the ability to affect the world around us through non-normal means, including our own experiencing of and being in that world.

In general terms, theories of magical praxis can be separated into Dynamistic and Animistic theories (Grambo, 1975; Malinowski 1954 [1925]; Tambiah, 1990; Thorsson, 1984, 2012; Wax & Wax, 1962). Dynamistic theories of magic suggest that magic operates by utilising a pre-existent impersonal force or energy source in the Universe. Animistic theories rely on the immanent nature of spirit such that a magical operation represents an articulation of a command or request to a trans-human entity or spirit. In the dynamistic model a failure would indicate a misapplication of force, while in the animistic model a failure might also indicate that the command had been resisted or a request refused.

The Odian model allows for both Dynamistic and Animistic magic (Thorsson, 1984, pp.78-79; 2005, pp.84-88; 2012, pp.145-161). There are a number of non-human entities within the Odian cosmology. These entities are of various types, some of whom are contacted by animistic magical means and once contacted may use dynamistic magic to generate the desired magical outcome for the individual. Flowers goes on to further divide the Dynamistic aspect of magical praxis, in accordance with the concepts of ‘Wihaz’, ‘Hailagaz’ and ‘Ginn’ discussed in Chapter 5 above, into the pre-existent force

that can be wielded by the Vitki and pre-existent forces wielded by non-human entities (Flowers, 2009).

There are a number of terms in Old Norse, Old High German and Old English which reference the exercise and experience of magical power. These range from the concepts of Woð (the ecstatic self) and ‘Mag’ (to have power), where dynamistic power is directed towards the achievement of ecstatic inspiration, to the concepts of the Hamingja (Luck) and the Fylgja (transpersonal aspect of the Self) which reference both dynamistic and animistic principles. The work of the Nine Doors programme (Thorsson, 2003) relies upon a Dynamistic model of magical praxis almost exclusively in its earlier chapters and exercises. The process of chanting or singing galdors of Óðin’s many names for example, is a practice that activates the Woð power that the practitioner is seeking to develop (Ibid, pp10-11, pp. 50-51).

1.1 The Aims of Magical Praxis:

Hanegraaff (2003) provides some useful starting points for an exploration of occult praxis, when he points to the importance of the non-rational, active participation in the paradigmatic structures that allow for the possibility of magical effectiveness. The sympathetic correspondence delineated by Hanegraaff is one in which the symbol literally *is* the corresponding magical power or entity. Hanegraaff (2003) also points to the increasingly psychological approach of magical expressions of the Western Mystery Tradition using the example of Regardie’s heavily edited and reconstructed approach to the Golden Dawn system of magic (Regardie, 1994). Increasing psychologism leads to what Hanegraaff refers to as a ‘disenchanted’ occultism; an approach to magic that has internalised the ideology of rational instrumental causality. The ‘disenchantment’ of occultism leads to magical systems which focus on a quasi-therapeutic model of Self-development to the almost total exclusion of any magical work that seeks to impact on the world beyond the practitioner. Disenchanted occultism also replaces the role of the mysterious with a strictly mechanistic chain of cause and effect.

Husserlian phenomenology suggests that all that we can concern ourselves with is that which is given to consciousness. However, in that claim there is both a presumption that there is something external to consciousness that can be thus given and an unanswered question regarding the location of consciousness. The notion that even the physical world is itself the product of consciousness rather than unconscious material processes is an important possibility to retain when looking at magical effectiveness. If even the physical world is ultimately a complex construction of consciousness then it begins to be at least theoretically possible to conceive of the manipulation of consciousness through magical acts as being a means by which the external reality might be altered. Once again Gentile's model of Actualism (Holmes, 1937) in which an actual experiential reality exists, but is the result of inter-subjective consciousness and in which an individual consciousness may play a shaping role offers a model that can accommodate magical praxis without resorting to a solipsistic model of reality.

1.2 Explanations of Magical Causality:

Sir James Frazer was a pioneer in the study of magical praxis. Frazer regards belief in magic as an error of understanding that presents within societies which have yet to develop a more complex and accurate model of causality (Frazer, 1995 [1922], pp.11-47). His focus is on sympathetic magic, which claims a direct relationship between the signifier and the signified to the extent that an action towards a signifier (such as a poppet) will result in the signified (a person) experiencing the same outcome.

Frazer's model of sympathetic magic, while denying the validity of magical praxis does anticipate the semiotic model of magical activities. According to the Semiotic Theory of Magic (Travers, 2009) the magician uses traditional methods to communicate with an object or individual through a hidden level of reality. In his doctoral thesis, Stephen Flowers draws on the work of Baal (1971), Tambiah (1968) and Grambo (1975) to argue that magic should be understood as a communicative process (Flowers, 2009). Flowers proposes a kind of ontological oscillation whereby the symbol being used as the focus of the magical work is intermittently identified with and independent of the object of the magical work. It is the symbol that carries the communication with the trans-human realm through which influence is brought to bear on the object.

The semiotic theory of magic as described above adds a further layer to the process described by Frazer (ibid) whereby the symbolic (magical) act does not directly act on the intended object but communicates an intention, which is then directed towards the object of the operation. The semiotic theory also places more emphasis on the performative act itself rather than pre-existent relations between the material symbol of the magical operation and the operation's target. Consequently a more complex dynamic emerges in which the correct object relationships must combine with the correct performance and in some cases the agreement of the relevant trans-human entities in order for the magical work to be effective. The focus on communication leads to an understanding of magic as a symbolic act and a semiotic theory of magic:

Through willed communicative operations an operator (magician) is able to modify the symbolic universe in which he lives in ways which harmonize with his own will. Because the frame of reference for such operative acts ascribes a responsive quality to the object of such communications, this object in turn is seen to become an active agent capable of responding to the operator in the form of symbols or phenomena (ibid).

The semiotic approach supports a presumption of reality for the experiences that occur in the consciousness of the magician during magical work (Flowers, 2007, p.89). Thus, in my own work, I have felt myself to be transported to different physical environments such as the interior of burial mounds. From an Odian perspective such experiences are not merely imaginary. The experience of being in, for example, a burial mound, is regarded as having the same potential reality as if I had physically visited that mound. Odianism does believe that there *is* a world to be encountered but also maintains that consciousness is foundational to the construction of that world. From such a perspective it is not reasonable to treat the mental experience as necessarily of a lower order of actuality than a physical encounter. It is only from a materialistic perspective that the physical experience is somehow more real than the experience that is wholly contained within consciousness.

1.2.1 Magic and Spirituality

Right Hand Path perspectives often regard the Divine as at least partly externalised and this can create a blurring of the distinction between magic and mysticism: Right Hand Path magic is often understood as working with or enacting ‘the will of the Divine’ (Fortune, 2000; Regardie, 1994) rather than enacting our own free will.

From a Left Hand Path perspective the magician is actively seeking to realise their own power and bring it forth, in order that the individual’s full potential may be unleashed. Interestingly, the belief that the divine resides within is increasingly common: In a recent multi-national quantitative survey of spiritual views and beliefs a significant number of respondents felt that God resided within them rather than being a wholly externalised locus of power (Heelas & Houtman, 2009).

2. Odian Magic in Summary

2.1 The Distinctive Nature of Odian Magic:

Odian magical work, like so much in the Northern Tradition, operates on three levels: (1) Practical working of magic for practical ends both for the self and the Folk; (2) Working magic in order to draw closer to Rûna and (3) the greater work of Self-becoming. The nine aims of the Rune Gild articulated within the Gildisbók (1994, p.5) may be regarded as a summary of the intended results of prolonged magical work within the Odian Tradition:

- Expansion of consciousness
- Preservation of Odian traditions
- Understanding of the hidden workings of nature
- Development of communicable methods of instruction
- Immortalisation of the consciousness (the persistence of a personal consciousness beyond physical death)
- Strengthening of personal power and the power of the Gild
- Extension of personal wealth, pleasure and happiness
- Development of wisdom and just ethics
- Furtherance of the Cycles of Wyrd (following one’s destiny)

From an Odian perspective it is crucial to achieve actual practical success in magical workings (Thorsson, 1994, Appendix E, p.2). Since the value of the Runes is seen as being founded on the ‘truth or accuracy’ (Thorsson, 1994, p.2) of their interpretation and application, it is important that genuine practical proficiency is achieved.

There are various different types of Odian magical praxis. Galdor and Seiðr dominate, but:

For the Odian, ‘there is no one form of “magic” – there are instead many “magics”’ (Thorsson, 1994, IV, p.1).

Alongside an insatiable curiosity the Odian must retain a commitment to Tradition. In Odian magical praxis, all innovations must move from the known to the unknown (Flowers, 2007; Travers, 2009). This reflects the Odian epistemology, which begins with the commitments of Trúa and then moves into more exploratory approaches to knowledge acquisition. Odianism requires that the individual approaches magical work by first thoroughly studying the relevant primary sources. This should be followed by careful intellectual analysis and synthesis of the various threads that have been studied and only after this process should the practitioner begin to create his or her own operations and workings. This model for magical work draws on the triadic structure to knowledge production explored in Chapter Four above. The importance of both actions and language to the Odian approach to magic is indicated by Thorsson’s comment that, ‘the way of the Odian is dominated by two things: works and words’ (1994, VII, p.1).

In Odian magic acts of hiding or submerging the material basis for a magical work play a significant part (Flowers, 1996; 2009; Thorsson, 1987; 1994, VII, p.5). This not only reflects the importance of symbolic burial and drowning within pre-Christian Northern Europe (Eliade, 1978, 1989; Jones, 2005), but also has an operative function in that the act of submerging serves to block the aims of the magic from the ‘Ek-Self’ (the normative consciousness of the ego-self) which might prevent a successful outcome due to its own doubts and insecurities. On a transpersonal level the act of hiding symbolically places the object of the magical operation, or its physical representation (a charm or corn dolly for instance), into the magically charged void of Ginnungagap; the space in which un-fettered pluralities of possibility give rise to all forms of manifest reality.

The development of hand-stöður within the Rune Gild (Thorsson, 2003, pp.98-99) offers a useful example of how magical work within the Odian Tradition is approached. In hand-stöður work the individual combines the creation or rune stave shapes with the hands (each rune has a specific hand-shape) with a conscious focus on the particular power of the rune being symbolised. This is followed by a visualisation of the particular power flowing out of the hand into the world. The particular shapes used are based partly on Odian interpretations of the images found in relevant archaeological finds in Northern Europe, partly on the broader Indo-European tradition of mudra usage and partly as a result of contemporary experiment. This mirrors the approach taken by Óðin in his search for magical powers described in the primary source texts (Sturluson, 1987). In my own work I have found that the repeated practice of hand-stöður allows a kind of ‘muscle memory’ to develop such that forming the shape of the rune Thurisaz, for example, immediately shifts my consciousness to a felt identification with Thurisaz; that my felt consciousness *is* Thurisaz. Forging the link with Tradition, understood as a transpersonal aspect of Mind (Muna) is ‘what initiation is all about’ (Thorsson, 1994, II, p.11). The act of ritual working can assist in the forging of that link since in repeating those actions of our ancestors we establish a kind of harmonic resonance (*ibid*, p.15) and it is partly for this reason that magical praxis is focused on doing rather than simply believing.

Mead plays a significant role in Odian magical operations. On one level it serves a symbolic function, representing, ‘Oðroerir’ or the ‘mead of poetry’. Oðroerir was made from the blood of Kvasir mixed with honey. Kvasir himself was formed from a mixture of the saliva from both the Aesir and Vanic Gods and so represents a combination of all the wisdom and power held by both groups of Gods. Oðroerir is eventually stolen by Óðin in Promethean fashion (Sturluson, 1987, pp.62-3). The mead also represents the flow of the Woð or inspirational ecstasy within the physical self once it is drunk by the practitioner. At a more practical level, the fluid nature of mead allows it to be mixed easily with other magical ingredients such as blood, or the chippings of a carved rune stave.

2.2 The Relationship of Odian Praxis to the Western Mystery Tradition:

Much is made of the Traditional approach to the magical work that is undertaken within the Rune Gild and by Odians more generally. When we examine the actual workings

employed by the Rune Gild (Thorsson, 2003) we find that many have been constructed by members within the Gild drawing on a range of primary sources and their experience of applying magical methodologies to specific workings. There are also certain rites, which have been based on primary sources within the Northern Tradition. However, there are also a number of workings, which have much in common with the Western Mystery Tradition.

The Hammer Signing working (Thorsson, 1984, pp.91-93; 1994, VIII, p.9) is a main-stay of Odian magical praxis and is often used as a ritual means of establishing the Woð aspect of the Self-complex before progressing to the main body of any specific working. However, it bears a marked similarity to the Qabalistic Cross working (Regardie, 1994) popularised by the Order of the Golden Dawn and still used in various forms by contemporary magical groups. In conversation with fellow Odians it has been argued that the Hammer Signing working is drawing on primary sources and represents a re-appropriation of symbols. This claim is based on the fact that the signing of the cross derives from a pre-Christian tradition of making the sign of Thor's Hammer.

Another rite that bears more than a passing resemblance to a common working within a number of contemporary Western Mystery Tradition groups is the Yew Working (Thorsson, 2003, pp.45-47). This working utilises the vowel sounds within the Futhark to build up a circulation of runic power within the individual. There are some definite similarities to the Middle Pillar Ritual (Cicero & Cicero, 2003; Regardie, 2000) first developed within the Golden Dawn revival, in which the practitioner builds up a circulation of energy within them using vocalisations of God-Names. Within the Rune-Gild it is the link to the older Tantric practices that is claimed as providing the basis for the Yew Working and Thorsson refers to the connection between the 'hvels' or 'wheels' within the Germanic Tradition and the Chakras (2003, p.46, p.70-71). In the Middle Pillar Ritual, magical power descends from the Divine into the individual and is enacted under divine oversight. In the Yew Working, the 'Polarian' (Thorsson, 2003) method employed by Odianism requires that the consciousness of the practitioner co-incidentally ascends to Asgard and descends to Hel, while the magical work occurs within the Self-complex:

It is in Midgard and from Midgard, the centre of the cosmos, that the transformation of the whole world must be effected (Thorsson, 1994, IX, p.16).

The Odian system regards magical workings as a process of engagement with consciousness that may or may not involve the intercession of divine power (Thorsson, 1984, p.90). In the Middle Pillar one visualises the highest location on the Tree of Life (Kether or 'Crown') first and then draws power vertically downwards to its conclusion in the material world (Malkuth or 'Ornament') (Cicero & Cicero, 2003, pp.151-153). By contrast, in the Yew Working one works in a cyclical, rather than a vertical, pattern that is centred on Midgard (the material world). More advanced forms of the Yew Work (Thorsson, 2003, pp.68-70) are designed to develop the Woð-Self of the individual by awakening and developing an internal power and connection to the Mysteries. The Yew Working culminates at the centre of the practitioner and is a dynamic or explosive experience of power. The Yew Working allocates each vowel sound to a symbolic location within the body of the practitioner. In sound terms the resulting Galdor or magical chant of 'UAIEOM' or 'AUEIOM' can be shortened to 'AM' or 'UM' (Thorsson, 2003, p.72).

The subsequent Mill Working (Thorsson, 2003, p.70) is designed to stimulate the activation of the internal 'hvels' and draws on a combination of physical and transpersonal energies, but without any reliance on divine intervention of any kind. In all these workings the intention is to establish the macrocosm within the microcosmic individual (*ibid*) in such a way that the power of each runic element of the macrocosm becomes available for use by the practitioner.

Many magical traditions include some form of movement, often circular, in their magical rituals. In the contemporary Western Mystery Tradition most ritual movement follows a clock-wise or 'deosil' direction. Symbolically, such movement is a reflection of the movement of the Sun and is a replication of a closed ordered system. Physical actions and movement are also important in the Northern Tradition. For example, the laying on of hands empowered with certain runic signs is attested to in the source literature (Larrington, 1999, pp.167-168). In addition to the direct application of the physical body

to the object of magical intent there is also a strong physical element to those magical workings where the practitioner is not in direct contact with the object of the work.

The Odian approach treats movement as part of the process of awakening the ecstatic function, the Woð-Self. The Odian creates a spiral of movement and a sense of creative Polarian friction. Consequently the Odian may move in a deosil direction initially and then engage in a counter-clockwise or ‘widdershins’ movement in order that the creative friction of these opposing spiralling movements awaken and stir the Woð-Self. In the source tradition, the fully awakened Self-complex is symbolised by the relationship between certain creatures (see Chapter 5, 4.1) on the Northern Tree of Life (Yggdrasil). The Serpent representing the primal, instinctual self and the Eagle representing intentional consciousness are creatively agitated into action by the messages carried by the cosmic squirrel, Ratotöskr. This traditional symbolism resonates strongly with the approach taken to circumambulation in the Northern Tradition.

In *The Nine Doors of Midgard* (2003) Thorsson refers to the possibility of active communication through the ‘meta-language’ of the Runes in order to, ‘cause changes to occur in accordance with . . . will’ (p.1). This is a direct lift from Crowley’s definition of magic in *Magick in Theory & Practice* (1991, p. xii). Its use in the core curriculum of the Rune Gild further indicates Odianism’s links with the the Western Mystery Tradition.

The connections within Odian praxis to magical approaches that are not derived from the pre-Christian traditions of Northern Europe add weight to the suggestion that Odianism is fundamentally a contemporary rather than a traditional system of magic that is exclusively trothful to pre-Christian Northern European beliefs. However, it can also be argued that it is the nature of Tradition to evolve and adapt, that what matters is the methodology and values that shape any change. Moreover, the example of Óðin as a culture hero is of someone who constantly experimented and questioned in order to develop new insights, wisdom and personal power.

Many magical workings with non-human entities rely on concepts of subservience and binding with threats and protection or so-called banishing rites (Barcynski, 2001; Barrett, 2001 [1801]; Crowley, 1995 [1904]; Regardie, 1994; Waite, 1970). Odianism does not

employ banishing rituals, the preparatory workings such as the Elhaz Rite (Thorsson, 1994, VIII, p.11), are not designed to protect the practitioner, but to create a ‘semi-permeable membrane’ (Thorsson, 2003, p.73) between different dimensions of reality. Within Odianism the various wights (trans-human entities), or folk who walk the ways between the worlds, are to be approached in a dialogic manner as independent sentient beings (Thorsson, 2003, p.109).

The process of road wending (Thorsson, 2003, p.109-111) is similar in some ways to the path-working meditations seen in the Golden Dawn and related magical groups (Cicero & Cicero, 2003; Farrell, 2004; Regardie, 1994, 2000). However, while the Golden Dawn approach to path working is intended to reinforce established associations between symbols, the meditative exploration of the rune staves as paths linking the Nine Worlds is entirely personal. The aim of road wending is to support the process of ‘rune-thinking’ (Thorsson, 2003, pp15-17, 35, 75-76, 102, 111-113, 134) in the construction of a personal magical alphabet of sorts. Once learned this can be used, to continue the metaphor, to spell out the intention of the practitioner.

It has been noted elsewhere that the Rune Gild consciously models itself on a traditional Craft Guild rather than as a magical Order. The strong element of craft reinforces the association of Odian magic with the embodied Self-complex seeking to craft change rather than requesting divine intercession to act on the Odian’s behalf. If one accepts the ontological position that the embodied world is replete with extra-human entities and that the limits of objective reality are a constraint of consciousness rather than being absolute, the notion of magical praxis as a natural craft does not require that magic loses any of its mystery or wonder.

2.3 Causality in Odian Magical Praxis:

Odianism does not attempt to provide a full explanation of magical causality and the absence of a complete explanation need not affect the ability of an individual to engage effectively in magical work. The act of speaking provides a useful comparison: We may develop significant speaking proficiency without comprehending the detailed muscular processes that shape certain sounds; it is still possible to control what we say, how we say it and what effect it is likely to have on those to whom we speak.

The Gildisbók states that, ‘Every conscious or objective act is a projection of the contents of the subjective universe of the actor’ (Thorsson, 1994, VI, p.2). When such conscious projections possess causal power they may be regarded as magical acts. Odianism does not dismiss the spontaneous moment of encounter with Mystery (Thorsson, 1984, p.97), but seeks to build on the recognition of such possibilities so as to create a praxis in which those experiences are better understood and more consciously accessed. The Gildisbók (III, p.1) recognizes that the framework of reality through which the individual understands the world directly impacts on the effectiveness of any magical working. This supports the ontological and epistemological models discussed earlier in which consciousness plays a crucial role in determining the boundary conditions of any experiential reality.

2.3.1 The Power of the Will:

The Will is an inevitably slippery concept to try and articulate, but rather like hunger or tiredness it is easily recognised when actively experienced. In Odianism, the Will is represented by the Óðr (the ecstatic Self) and magical workings are primarily carried out through its power. The ecstatic or frenzied nature of the Óðr reflects the state of consciousness experienced by Óðin when he won the runes (Mysteries). The Óðr aspect, or Woð-Self, when strengthened through various magical practices, can create effects that extend beyond the physical limits of the body or ‘Lík’. The Odian model of magic proposes that in a state of Non-Ordinary Consciousness the active aspects of the Self-complex are the Woð-Self and the Fylgja. A key element of the preparatory stage of magical praxis is the creation and maintenance of a dynamic relationship with the Fylgja. The Fylgja or ‘Fetch’ is also known as the ‘Rûna Köna’ and this alternative name emphasizes the connection between the Fetch and Mystery (Rûna).

However, magical effectiveness depends on more than this link alone. The link with the Fylgja allows for the possibility of magical effects, but does not ensure them. The effectiveness of any given magical operation will also be affected by the strength of the individual’s Hamingja, which can be loosely translated as their luck or fortune. The requirements for an effective magical operation do not end there. A magical operation must be designed and this calls upon both the function of the Hugh and the Minni within

the Self-complex. Finally, the manipulation of the breath and the body are usually central to the actual magical act itself. Magical operations mirror the underlying Odian holism in that they involve all aspects of the Self-complex. In group workings at Eormensyl Hall (the Rune Gild Hall to which I belong) the opening section of the work refers to the holistic nature of magical working with the statement that, ‘the eight are gathered, the ninth is amongst us’: The individual must be fully aware of all eight aspects of the Self-complex in addition to the physical body, while the ninth element, the Óðr, circulates between and within the members of the group engaged in the working.

The final Triad in the Odian epistemology described within the *Gildisbók* is concerned with knowledge gained through magically altered states of consciousness (Thorsson, 1994, III, p.10). If we accept the ontological claims implied by Odianism, changing the state of consciousness also changes the nature of the manifest world and the objects within it. Consequently, in the Lone Rite of Entry (Thorsson, 1994, p.5) for example, the practitioner only takes up the gandr (wand) once s/he has established a shift in consciousness whereby the Woð-Self occupies the central intentional role. It is the power of the Woð-Self in Odian magical praxis that transforms the gandr from a piece of carved wood to a magically effective tool. The source of the ultimate power for the Woð is a mystery that remains beyond the impenetrable veils of Rûna, However, the commitment to the concept of Woð itself should be based on personal experience rather than Faith or Trúa alone.

2.3.2 Magical Communication:

One of the functions of the **Valknútr** glyph is to symbolically represent the control of the nine aspects of the Self-complex (Valgard, 1998). In the *Gildisbók*, the Valknútr is described as a key rune for the understanding and practical application of magic (IV, p.3). The Valknútr is also known as ‘The Knot of the Slain’ and ‘Óðin’s Fetter’. It is a symbol dating back to at least the Eighth Century consisting of three interlaced triangles in either a unicursal or borromean design. Its enclosed state represents both the fetter of Óðin upon the Odian, and the ability of the magical practitioner to employ magic to act as a fetter on other objects and persons. Galdor magic is essentially a process by which the practitioner is able to create fetters or to, ‘bind things with words’ (Thorsson, 1994, IV, p.3). Odian magic relies on the combination of passion and precision; the expression of specific intent

while in an ecstatic state. The valknútr's enclosure creates the narrow boundaries necessary for precision and the enclosed framework in turn creates a friction that assists in the development of a state of inspired frenzy (ibid, pp.4-5).

The *Gildisbók* (1994, IX, p.18) provides a diagrammatic representation of runic magic as a form of communication. The practitioner expresses an intent (the message) that is encoded in a range of media such as carved rune staves, gestures, movement or the manipulation of objects. The effective communication of this initial message is reliant on the magical skill and consciousness of the practitioner (ibid, p.19; Appendix F, p.3). The outcome of runic magic is also understood, in this model, as a message. In certain workings it may take the form of a communication between different aspects of the Self-complex, but it could equally be expressed as some observable changes in the phenomenal world experienced by the practitioner.

The suggestion that a process of communication can lead to observable changes in the experienced phenomenal world may appear to be deeply problematic. However, the phenomena of, 'Action at a Distance' (Berkovitz, 2008) has been accepted as an established feature of the Universe. The connection of action at a distance to sympathetic magic in which a lock of hair can be used as a proxy for a whole person is intriguing to say the least. This is not to try and explain all magical praxis through a scientific paradigm, but more to demonstrate that in the context of contemporary physics, the claims of magic are perhaps no more outlandish or counter-intuitive than those of respectable science.

A model of the Universe, such as that proposed in Chapter Five, allows for experienced reality to be amended as a result of an 'instruction' without presuming to explain the underlying physics that may be at work. Travers (2009) divides magical functions into two discrete categories: manifest actions and symbolic actions. A manifest action may not appear to be magical, its magical status stems from the fact that it is deemed to be executed 'in full awareness' (ibid). The concept of full awareness refers to the view, common in esotericism generally, that most people are effectively asleep and it takes prolonged magical praxis to achieve a state of consciousness in which we are genuinely, 'in full awareness'. Symbolic actions have more in keeping with a common

understanding of magic since they rely on non-ordinary models of causality for their effectiveness. Travers model of symbolic conscious action (ibid) is closely related to the semiotic model of magical praxis.

Odian magic claims to effect changes in the ‘real world’ rather than just in the individual. Odianism also proposes a very different understanding of the ‘real world’ and so the notion of effecting change in the world is a nuanced one. As noted in Chapter Five above, Odianism posits a world that is both physically manifest and is the inter-subjective creation of consciousness. Changes in the symbolic structuring of intentional consciousness will lead to changes in the fabric or web-work of reality. The use of ‘Ek – formulae’ (Flowers, 2009), seen in runic inscriptions from the Pre-Christian Era are seen within Odianism as a relatively simple way of changing the experienced reality by shifting the symbolic reality. Symbolic action is fundamental to all magical traditions and Odianism is no exception. Flowers (ibid) argues that the symbol system of any given culture structures its possible experiential reality and that magic works in part by manipulating the symbolic logic of that culture. If the Universe can be understood, as proposed by Gentile (ibid), as a product of consciousness then in many ways the experienced universe is itself a primarily symbolic reality. To the extent that we take a view of reality as wholly symbolic we can regard the process of existence as a narrative. Magic operates by imposing a particular narrative on the world or the subjective reality of the individual (Thorsson, 2003, p.133).

Linguistic expressions of magical intent are rendered in the past tense within Odian magical praxis (Thorsson, 2003, p.78). For example, after chanting a Galdor designed to bring a sought after book into my possession, I would say ‘Hlíðarendabók **is** mine to read’ rather than ‘Hlíðarendabók **will** be mine to read’. The former phrasing implies that the magical effect of bringing the book into my possession has already occurred. In terms of temporal ontology discussed in Chapter Five above this approach makes good sense. Once an event has passed into the Well of Urðr (the Past) it affects all events in Verðandi (the Present) and provides the matrix of possibilities through which the probabilistic state of Skuld (the Future) is formed. By creating a reality, through the use of the past tense, in which the chosen event must have occurred (since it is in the Well of Urðr) then by definition if the event has not yet happened in my experiential reality, its occurrence at

some future point becomes inevitable. This implies a flexible nature to temporality when encountered through a state of non-ordinary consciousness such that it is no longer experienced as strictly linear.

2.3.3 The Physical Dimension:

A key aspect to magical efficacy is the correct use of the breath. The Odian learns to control their breathing and this allows the correct expression of root sounds, each of which has its own particular power (Thorsson, 2003, pp11-13). The sending of runic signs relies on the control of the breath as a means of concentrating and directing the intent of the practitioner (Thorsson, 1984, pp.134-135). In the act of magic the practitioner does not think ‘about’ the intent, but focuses only on the breath and the magical expression itself (*ibid*). This is because cognitive activity would focus the consciousness in the Hugr rather than in those areas of the Self-complex that allow the practitioner to maintain a non-ordinary state of consciousness.

The success of Odian magical operations is highly dependent on the connection of the practitioner to material mediums through which the Will is communicated and Thorsson (1984, pp.84- 87 & 89) details the tools used in rune magic. The importance of the physical is most clearly evidenced in the carving or ‘risting’ of runic symbols: Once carved into a wooden base the resultant symbol is stained with a medium that usually includes the blood of the practitioner. In my own practice for example I use a mixture of ground red ochre pigment, raw linseed oil and blood. The importance of working with a material basis (Thorsson, 2003, pp.55-56) emphasizes not only the attempt to link to presumed ancestral practices (Flowers, 2009) but also the holistic nature of Odianism, through the inclusion of the manifest world in which magic is worked.

A key feature of magical praxis in a number of traditions is the complexity of the practical requirements for any given working; whether that is due to the need for a certain type of blood, performance at a given season, or the collection of a range of incongruous ingredients. It may well be that the real function of these complex practical aspects is to create the necessary quasi-obsessive concentration on the process. It is perhaps the intensity of focus, rather than the possession of certain material ingredients, that increases the probability of success. This would certainly explain why in many magical traditions

the need for props, tools and ingredients seems to diminish with one's developing proficiency. More importantly, it retains the notion of magical power primarily residing within the consciousness of the individual rather than in certain innate properties of particular objects in the world.

2.3.4 A Magical Formula:

We might map the process of a magical operation in functional terms as follows:

Achieve Non Ordinary Consciousness → Activate Woð-Self as centre of consciousness → Perform specific working → Return to Normal Consciousness.

The success of the operation might be determined by the following approximate formula in which variables occupy values between 0 and 1:

Probability = (Clarity of Symbolic Structure +/- Strength of Hamingja) * ((Clarity of Felt Intent – Competing Intentions) * (Totality of NOC – Residual Presence of ‘I’ Self)) * Assistance Given by Fylgja

2.4 Spiritual Dimensions of Odian Magical Praxis:

Active engagement with magical processes is fundamental to Odian Self-becoming since Óðin is first and foremost a magician. As Thorsson states:

(Óðin) can be understood only through experience in magical workings of the “Óðinic paradox” (1987, p.199).

The secrets of Odian magic, ‘are in the methods’ (Thorsson, 1994, V, p.1) and are discovered through ‘actual experience’ (ibid). This is in keeping with the example of Óðin and his experience on Yggdrasil as well as the focus on action in Odian epistemology.

Almost all Odian workings contain the following speech by Óðin from St. 138-139 in the Hávamál:

I know that I hung on a windy tree
nights all nine,

wounded by the gar given to Óðin,
myself to myself,
on that tree, of which no man knows
from what roots it rises
They dealt me no bread nor drinking horn,
I looked down;
I took up the runes roaring I took them,
And fell back again (Larrington, 1999, p.34).

One function of this recitation is to identify the active element of the Self-complex with Óðin or to bring to manifestation that part of the Self which *is* Óðin. This is distinct from the understanding of invocation in the ceremonial magic of Golden Dawn and related groups (Butler, 2001; Crowley, 1991; Regardie, 1994). In the Odian system the individual is rising up from within themselves, being quite literally filled with Woð. In the model of invocation proposed by the Golden Dawn and related groups, a God form descends upon the individual and this descent and consequent in-dwelling is dependant not on the will of the Self-complex, but on Divine will.

In Odian praxis objects inscribed with runes are referenced in the first person. One of the functions of the rune inscription is to make the object ‘Wihaz’ and thus filled with holy power that can then be shaped and directed by the Rune Master. In so doing the object gains an animistic status as a result of the use of dynamistic power by the Rune Master. The ability to render something Wihaz (set apart and made sacred) and subsequently for that thing to obtain a state of Hailagaz (holiness) is not dependent on divinity but stems from the power within the practitioner. However, within the context of the Odian cosmology, this does not reduce the sacral nature of the magical act. Thorsson describes the act of magic as one in which we reach into the realm of Wihaz in a manner that allows that realm to respond with the force of Hailagaz (Thorsson, 1996). In other words the practitioner accesses a numinous space in which power resides in such a way that the intention becomes a necessary state of being in the context of the holistic reality of the practitioner.

A great deal of Odian magic involves the practitioner engaging in some form of communication, either symbolic or actual, with various wights (Thorsson, 1984, pp.77-79)

and the detailed structure that can be adapted for all such workings is provided in the Nine Doors curriculum (Thorsson, 2003, pp.116-121). The diagrammatic representation (*ibid*, p.18) of this general working illustrates the reliance of Odian magic on an effective combination of the mythic power existing in the environment surrounding the practitioner; the ancestral link existing within the individual and the power of the individual Will, carried through the physical media of mead, sound waves and symbolic actions. Power flows into the participant from the objective world, while the Will of the practitioner flows out into the objective world. This exchange can be represented diagrammatically through the rune *Dagaz* (ᚫ) with the locus of the consciousness of the practitioner being placed in the central point of overlap between the two triangles where perception becomes ‘omni-jective’ (Thorsson, 2003, p.135).

One key function of magical work within the Northern Tradition generally and Odianism specifically is to connect with the ancestors. Given the importance of blood, cultural tradition and sacred land to the Northern Tradition it is not surprising that contact with the ancestors is regarded as a powerful form of magic. Ancestor focused magic within Odianism ranges from practical necromancy through to more symbolic forms of ancestor communication. Most important are the monthly Full Moon Workings (Thorsson, 1994, VIII, p.12), which not only attempt to link the practitioner to his or her ancestors, but also to the natural cycles of his or her environment.

3. Odian Magical Praxis in Detail

3.1 Preparatory Praxis:

The preparatory work of the Odian is focused on the internalisation of the runes and the Nine Worlds (Thorsson, 2003, p.67). The thinking behind this is common to many systems of magic in that it presumes that everything existing in the macrocosmic universe is replicated to some extent within the microcosmic individual.

The primary tool for building up an active awareness of the macrocosm (the Nine Worlds) within the Self is the use of the Yew Working and subsequently the Mill Working (Thorsson, 2003 pp33, 45-47, 68-71, 90-92, 110-111, 130-131). In addition to the development of intuitive knowledge these workings are also designed to develop a very physical sense of the locus of directed magical power within the body. The individual is

encouraged to identify their physical body with the Eihwaz (↖) and Jera (↘) runes, such that the Eihwaz rune is associated with the vertical axis of their body running along the spinal column and the Jera rune horizontally spins round the vertical column of Eihwaz. This serves as a symbolic identification of the Self with the Irminsul or Eormensyl Pillar (Hazenfratz, 2011) as the cosmic axis and the link between the here and now and other levels or dimensions of existence. At a cosmological level, this symbolism also emphasizes the link between Self-becoming and the Polarian concept: The Eormensyl Pillar points to the North Star while the motion of Jera around the Pillar of the Self replicates the turning of the constellation Odin's Wane (or The Plough) around the North Star, which is in turn linked to the Swastika (Godwin, 1996). The aim of this process of identification as magical training is to engage the whole Self-complex in the expression and projection of our magical acts into the world at large.

Much emphasis is placed in the Rune Gild curriculum on the runic-gymnastics developed by Kummer and others (Kummer, 1993; Thorsson, 1984, 2003) in which the individual assumes 'staða' shapes with their body or with their hands to represent individual rune staves. There is a claimed connection to the Indo-European Tradition here through the use of hand mudras (Thorsson, 2003, pp.96-97) that would benefit from further comparative research. The role of Staða work within the Odian Tradition can be understood as a means by which symbols are fully internalised and expressed by the individual in a bodily manner. Staða work or 'Rune-gymnastics' were developed in the early twentieth century by Marby and then developed by Spiesberger, Kummer and others (Thorsson, 2003, p.67). However, there is primary source evidence on the Gallehus Horns, for instance, that might suggest a pre-Christian form of Staða (Flowers, 2009; Thorsson, 1984, p.13; 2003; Todd, 1995).

The principle behind Staða work is that in replicating the shapes of rune staves and combining this physical form with vocalisations appropriate to the stave it is possible for the individual to shift his/her knowledge of the rune from a solely intellectual understanding to a holistic embodiment of the mystery of the given rune stave. Subsequently, the mystery is no longer known in a relational sense in which there is an ontological distinction between the knower and the known, but is internalised and becomes a functioning element of the individual's Self-complex. There are obvious

connections here with the principles of invocation in magic. At a very practical level the role of Staða work is to incorporate the physical self or ‘Lík’ into one’s magical work, thus avoiding any tendency to fall into the trap of regarding magic as purely the domain of the Mind.

In developing as a Vitki it is necessary for the ‘body to become a living receiver-transmitter for runic forces, and a proper vessel for the generation and storage of those forces’ (Thorsson, 2003, p.18). Staða exercises develop the ability of the individual to transform a part or the whole of his/her body into a symbolic function. Thorsson notes the value of beginning workings with the Isa (ᛁ) or ‘Ice’ staða both because it is the simplest (one stands with both arms vertically outstretched) and because Isa’s association with notions of stillness, inertness and contracted focus are ideally suited to the developing work of focused meditation (2003, p.54, 63).

If we separate Odian magical praxis into two stages then the first stage, developing the ability to wield magic, can be seen as an extended initiation process. This aligns with the experience of Óðin himself. Thorsson proposes a two stage model of magical praxis when he asserts that, ‘You must first really hear and understand the runes – deep down in the depths of your being – before you can begin to use them magically’ (2005, p.101). Many of the exercises that form part of the Nine Doors curriculum (Thorsson, 2003) are best regarded as belonging to the initial or initiatory phase of magical training. Practices such as Vocalic Breathing (ibid, p.11), Rune Thinking (ibid, p.35), Elemental Breathing (ibid, p.49), Runic Breathing (ibid p.49-50) are designed to build up certain skills within the practitioner in terms of breath control, visualisation abilities, concentration, physical resistance and so forth. When subsequently engaging in magical operations with specific intents the essential skills required to achieve the necessary state of consciousness and maintain it will have been developed and honed to a considerable level (Thorsson, 1984, pp.81-83).

Meditation is regarded as central to Odian praxis (Thorsson, 2003. pp13-15). However, there is no clear evidence that this is based on source materials. The Nine Doors curriculum argues that correct meditative techniques allow us to enter a ‘stead of timeless stillness’ (ibid, p.14) and it is this state of consciousness that can be regarded as

preparatory for later attempts at operative magic. In Galdor magic normative conscious awareness is maintained at the same time as the Woð-Self is active. Meditations that require the individual to be coincidentally conscious of both a void and a single-pointedness are one of the means by which the individual develops the ability to maintain coincident yet competing symbolic structures (Thorsson, 1984, pp.96-7). This is a particularly Odian approach in its manifestation of the Polarian or paradoxical internalisation of balance as the mutual occupation of extremes (ibid p.15).

The individual moves from the preparatory to an active phase as the Woð-Self is awakened (Thorsson, 2003, p.123). This may take considerable time:

A good deal of development in Rune-Work must be gained before
Rune Galdor can be used reliably (Thorsson, 1994, p.2).

Once the preparatory work has been completed the individual can experiment with the active manipulation of the runic forces. A common way of projecting the magical will (Thorsson, 2003, p.74) involves the projection of an appropriate rune stave. The underlying concept is that having constructed a macrocosm within the Self-complex, the individual can access universal causative principles and deploy them in the world. The distinction between simply imagining the rune stave having an effect on the objective world and magical projection relies on the time spent building up an internalised runic matrix of reality

Ultimately, the individual forges a magical persona (Thorsson, 2003, pp137-8). The creation of a magical self is paradoxical, like so much in the Odian approach, in that the individual is both bringing to consciousness that which already existed in potentia, but is also creating an entirely new discrete entity through which the Self-complex of the individual can effectively work magic (Thorsson, 2003, pp.129-132). The process of renaming the magical persona is regarded as a traditional practice within the Rune Gild; Flowers (2009) argues that this is supported by the 'Ek' declarations found in many archaeological rune finds where the rune carver ascribes a specific identity to themselves other than their originally given name.

3.2 Ritual Structure:

The Gildisbók provides a general working formula (1994, VIII, p.11) that details the three key stages in any Odian magical working:

Stage One

- Marking out of space and time as non-normal
- Establishing and marking of working environment

Stage Two

- Awakening and activation of the Woð-Self
- Development of ecstatic consciousness

Stage Three

- Directing consciousness towards a specific aim that is clearly articulated
- Assertion of the inevitability of the desired outcome (that its necessity has already been sunk into the well of Urðr)

The operative formula for working with rune staves also follows a triadic structure: the staves are first carved, then stained with blood and finally the appropriate verbal formula is spoken (Thorsson, 1987). The importance of three-ness is also reflected in the structure of other workings such as those designed to facilitate communication with trans-human entities (wights).

Physical direction is often an important structural aspect of magical rituals. In the Odian Tradition the practitioner faces North (Thorsson, 1984, p.88). In many writings and rituals within the Western Mystery Tradition the key direction is East, the direction of the rising sun and symbolically, the origin of external illumination. Within Odianism the North represents darkness and the responsibility borne by the practitioner that s/he must be illuminated from within.

3.3 Galdor:

Galdor work represents the dominant mode of magical practice within Odianism and is defined by Thorsson as, ‘the engineering of the objective and subjective universes in accordance with the will of that self’ (2003 p.37). Odianism is very clear that willed changes are equally magical whether they have effects within the subjective or objective world or both.

3.3.1 Magical Speech:

Within Odianism the art of Galdor is directly associated with the Aesir and Óðin, relies heavily on conceptual structures and is enacted largely through magical calls or songs. Thorsson claims that the term Galdor is etymologically linked to bird calls and in particular those of the raven (Thorsson, 2003, p.50). While this is Thorsson’s own analysis, the accepted etymology shows ‘Galdor’ is linked to words meaning ‘shout’ and ‘sing’ and thus may still be suggestive of a link between runic magic and the use of speech. This is further suggested by the etymological association between the Old Norse word meaning mouth and the name of the ‘Ansuz’ rune stave, which is associated in the contemporary Northern Tradition with Óðin.

Thorsson proposes seven categories of Galdor magic in *Rune Lore* (1987): natural language constructions; symbolic word formulae; Futhark formulae; magical word formulae; ideographs and Rune Master statements. In each of these categories the intent is framed in rune staves and then sent into a realm where the intention is transformed from intent into reality. The completed Galdor can be regarded as a kind of sound talisman (Thorsson, 2003, p.132).

Flowers devotes a chapter to the ‘Power of the word in operant runology’ in the first volume of *Rûnarmál* (1996). In it Flowers argues that the power of language lies not in its abstracted quality, the distance of the signifier from the signified, but in the performative nature of language. Language is primarily ‘parole’ rather than ‘langue’ in this perspective and thus speaking, carving or writing is a form of doing, an intentional act. The treatment of Galdor as a linguistic approach to magical praxis is supported by Watkins (2001) who points to a number of repeated formulae that are also used in traditional Indo-European poetry. The role of Kvasir’s blood (Sturluson, 1987, 1991) and Óðin’s status as a poet indicate the traditional importance of poetry in magical praxis.

In addition to Galdor calls, the Odian approach to magic uses so-called Galdor signing techniques in which the appropriate rune stave or bind rune (a combination of rune staves into a single glyph) are traced in the air. It is believed that the repeated practice of the Yew Work and the Mill Working builds up an innate awareness of the Hvels within the physical body from which the Will of the individual can be projected. The primary Hvel for these purposes is located in the area of the solar plexus. The rune glyph is initially visualised as a flaming red image in this Hvel and is then projected outwards along the line of the extended arm and through the seax (knife) or gandr (wand) of the practitioner into the physical space beyond the individual (Thorsson, 2003, p.51).

3.3.2 Non-Ordinary Consciousness:

Most magical systems strongly imply the need to engage in work that goes beyond simply performance in order for magic to be effective. This internal work receives a great deal of attention within Odianism. The *Gildisbók*, for example, provides a specific working for establishing the state of consciousness that is suited to Galdor working (1994, VIII, pp. 21-23) along with instruction on the use of physical movement and standing positions (ibid, IX, pp 4-5, 7-8, 12-13), which are intended to create the level of control and concentration required for magical work.

Zahavi's analysis of self-awareness (1998, 2001, 2004) offers a useful framework within which to understand the function of Galdor working. As discussed in Chapter Five above Zahavi claims the possibility of a state of consciousness in which the individual is co-incidentally self-aware and focused on an external object. In Galdor magic the practitioner must hold two competing states of consciousness in creative tension: On the one hand there is an outwards intentionality, represented by the spoken words and movements of the practitioner. At the same time the practitioner must remain fully self-aware. Odianism has drawn on the traditional description of the eagle and hawk on the World Tree (Larrington, 199; Peters, 1987; Rusu, 2008) to provide a visual metaphor of this process (Travers, 2009): a hawk (the observing self in Odianism) perches on the brow of an eagle (the Woð-Self in Odianism) at the top of the World Tree.

Zahavi's model of self-awareness allows for the perceptual consciousness of transcendent objects while retaining self-awareness. However, the Galdor state takes us a step further as we are engaging in a reflective awareness of both the transcendent object(s) simultaneously with a conceptual self-awareness retained by the 'huguaga' [approximately – 'mind's eye'] (Thorsson, 2003, p.34). Galdor work seems to propose a split within the self, but crucially it is not an atomising fracturing of the Self-complex. Paradox, extremity and liminality are important features of Odianism and Galdor work reflects this in its requirement for a paradoxical state of consciousness. The rune stave Dagaz represents a moment of awakening arising from the occupation of two opposing extremes and can be seen as a pictorial representation of the process of Galdor consciousness.

When Thorsson states that, 'all Galdor is effected through Runes in the sense that they are (in our tradition) the structures of consciousness' (2003, p.38) his claim sits coherently within the proposed ontological and epistemological framework of Odianism. Thorsson also suggests that Galdor is a system of communication between the objective and subjective universes in which:

The subjective consciousness of the Runer is able to "converse with" the objective and/or various parts of his or her own subjective universe' (ibid p.38).

Thorsson's use of the term 'subjective' here is a reference to the intentional consciousness of the individual. What remains missing from Thorsson's description is an explicit recognition of the necessary state of Non-Ordinary Consciousness in which attempts at symbolic interactions with the transpersonal may yield results. If the power to effect the intended changes lies wholly outside the practitioner and the magical act is entirely semiotic in nature then Galdor appears to be analogous to prayer rather than being dependant on the agency of the practitioner. Elsewhere, though, Thorsson is clearer about the responsibility of the practitioner for the effectiveness of Galdor workings when he writes that, 'Galdor requires a threefold balance among hugr-minni-Óðr to be both powerful and precise' (Thorsson, 1994, IX, p.10) and that success requires the practitioner to, 'keep the Óðr under the control of the conscious will' (Thorsson, 1994, IX, p.20).

3.3.3 Galdor and Desire:

In keeping with the Odian focus on the faculty of Óðr or Woð, and the ecstatic, inspired or even frenzied state that the Woð-Self occupies, there is a view that Galdor work will be most effective when the practitioner passionately wishes for the intended outcome to occur (Thorsson, 1994, IV, p.2). This contrasts strongly with the view popularised by Crowley that a desire for the outcome is seen as a potential obstacle to success. Crowley writes of the need for the absence of a lust for results (Crowley, 1999 [1904] p.31). In Crowley's model of magical praxis the intentions of a Higher-Self are imposed onto a lower self that retains all of its anxieties, fears and counter-productive tendencies. Consequently, the aspect of consciousness that engages in magical work must rely on various sleights of mind in order to get round the problem of an unreconstructed lower self.

Odian Galdor theory proposes a process of holistic unification of all aspects of the Self-complex. Once this is achieved the individual can utilise the full power of the ecstatic Woð-Self without fearing the intervention of the Ek-Self. After the magical working is completed, though, the individual should cease thinking about the intent of the working. Once the Self-complex is no longer bound together by the power of the Óðr, the possibility of interference by the Ek-Self arises and so the focus of the work must be 'hidden'. In practical terms the ability to let go of an intention after a working is at least as hard to achieve and requires as much disciplined practice as the magical work itself. In many ways it is a form of magical work in itself and has associations with the process within many magical operations where the object upon which the will is being projected will be symbolically buried or hidden.

3.3.4 Effective Galdor Praxis:

Thorsson (2003, pp 52-53) describes the process of effective Galdor Signing as one in which the subjective world of the individual is shaped through an act of Will and is then projected into the world where it effects the intended change. Most Galdor chants follow a similar structure in that the whole word or phoneme string is first sung as a single vocalisation a number of times, then each rune stave within the sequence is vocalised separately. Finally, the entire sequence is repeated as a single vocalisation for example the traditional Galdor 'ALU' (ᛘᛘ) would be sung: 'ALU, ALU, ALU; Ansuz, Laguz,

Uruz, AaaaLlllUuuu'. This approach is somewhat akin to the alchemical principle of 'Solve et Coagula' in that the Galdor is broken down into its constituent elements before being effectively reassembled in the singing of the Galdor. The long drawn out expression of the whole Galdor may be regarded as symbolically knitting together those constituent elements into a functional whole. By singing the finished Galdor first, the practitioner places the completed Galdor in the past, relative to its constituent elements and its construction.

Effective Galdor requires that the subjective constructs of the practitioner's Self-complex become objectively manifested in the inter-subjective world of shared reality. The suggestion that objective reality is potentially constructed from the intentional objects of consciousness relates directly to Giovanni Gentile's phenomenologically inspired philosophy of Actualism (*ibid*). In Gentile's model consciousness determines reality but is not reflectively aware of its creative function and regards itself as perceiving rather than constructing. In the magical model the practitioner is consciously aware of this attempt to construct reality.

3.4 Divination:

Divination is an important aspect of many magical systems and the use of runic divination is referenced in some of the earliest primary source accounts of Germanic magic (Larrington, 1999, p.6, 35; Tacitus, 2010; Thorsson, 2003, p.63). Thorsson distinguishes runic divination from Galdor in that the latter requires an active projection of the Will while divination involves the 'passive reception of impressions' (2003, p.62). The Odian theory of time is governed by the concept of Urðr, Verðandi and Skuld and as noted elsewhere in the thesis, our lived experience is a succession of states of Verðandi. The experience of each moment of Verðandi is determined by the actions in the preceding Verðandi space and the accumulation of influences building up in the Well of Urðr. The Germanic concept of temporality, like the notion of quantised space-time, implies that each discrete Verðandi moment adds to the shaping of the future. Consequently there is no fixed future and divination is a probabilistic process.

Thorsson describes the process of runic divination as one that involves a communication between runes (understood as the Mysteries in the trans-human realm) and the practitioner's Hugr (cognitive function) and Minni (memory and mind) under the influence of Woð (inspiration or ecstatic consciousness) (2003, p.78-85; 2005, p.104). This again presents magic as a form of communication in which a state of Non-Ordinary Consciousness is essential: The analytical function (Hugr) accesses knowledge lodged within the mind (Minni) that is present due to the communicative link with the trans-human that is established by entering a state in which the intentional consciousness is governed by the Woð-Self.

Divination methods are not restricted to the casting of rune staves, but also include the process of taking 'hail signs'. 'Hail' in this context is derived from an Old Norse term meaning good luck or prosperity. Thorsson (2003, pp.85-87) gives a brief introduction to this mode of divination, which relies on the signs that we find in the world around us such as the movement, number and species of birds that we may encounter. The Odian rationale for the taking of hail signs is that one's Woð-Self and Fylgja interact with the world in order to bring about personally significant events. This is in keeping with the Odian ontological hypothesis that the universe is permeated by a field of consciousness. A less obvious feature of the taking of hail signs is that it further emphasizes the importance of the embodied self and the manifested world of Midgard.

3.5 Taufr Workings:

Taufr magic involves the construction of a talisman (Thorsson, 1984, p. 98-124; 2003, p.76-78). The construction can be extremely simple and involve no more than the scratching of a magical glyph on an object such as a piece of wood or metal (Scudder, 2004, p.74). Within Odianism the talisman or 'Taufr' is imbued with its own life and as such acquires its own Ørlög or fate. In addition, the magical work that leads to the construction of a talisman includes the bestowing on the material basis a number of the properties that make up the Self-complex: The talisman is given an Ørlög; a lík (body); the capacity to effect change which implies both Hamingja (luck) and Hamr (shaping force) are present; a limited Hugr (cognitive faculties) in order to act and a Minni (mind and memory) in order to retain its purpose. The strength of any talisman will therefore be determined by the strength of the practitioner's own Self-complex since this will govern

the ability to impart such qualities to third parties or objects (Thorsson, 1984, pp.98-100). By extension, the Taufr will die a natural death once it has completed its magical function since that is what its *Orlög* requires.

The practical steps in a Taufr working are as follows (Thorsson, 2003, p.114-115, 2005):

- Hallowing of a working space
- Carving the appropriate runes while singing the Galdor associated with each rune and meditating on its symbolic function (risting and rowning)
- Stating the intent of the working (loading). The statement of intent must be in the past tense. This symbolically places the intended outcome in the well of Urðr and renders it a necessary part of the manifested world
- Fixing the symbolic intent to the Taufr by ‘fastening’. This is achieved by tracing a ring 3 times round the object, while visualising it enclosed within a sphere
- Concealment for a period of time to allow the Taufr to gestate
- Revealing the Taufr again (symbolic birth) and giving it an appropriate location while it carries out its work
- Following the achievement of the intended outcome the Taufr is deemed to have died and is given appropriate funerary rites

We might see a link in these ritual structures to the Listian model which categorises the active Mysteries inherent within the runes as consisting of three separate phases: Arising, Being (Acting); Passing away (List, 1988 pp.69-72). List’s model is itself drawing on the process model indicated by pre-Christian and Germanic folk magic practices, in which some form of symbolic death, burial, drowning was common to the process of inaugurating magical tools or bringing about magical changes within the Self (Frazer, 1995; Hand, 1968; Jones, 2005). The act of hiding also replicates the process within the practitioner in which the intent descends beyond the awareness of the Hugr into the Woð-Self (Thorsson, 1984, p.114).

The extended process of talisman creation described by Thorsson (1984) emphasizes the importance of commitment and immersion in the process. Magical effects require more than the repetition of certain ‘special’ words, to truly give life to a magical intent requires as much attention and care as if one were bringing a human life into the world. Similarly,

once the runic entity has completed its work it must also die and receive a proper funeral (ibid, p.124).

We can see in Taufr magic a development of sympathetic folk-magic approaches. Sympathetic magic works by exploiting a pre-existing connection between a person and for instance their image, a lock of their hair or even a drop of their blood or personal item (Frazer, 1995). The Taufr work does not require the physical link to be present but relies on the expansion of the Vitki's consciousness to make a connection to both the object of the magical work and the material basis through which that intention is expressed. One way of understanding the Odian structure of the manifest world is as a collection of patterns or processes working themselves out. The rune charm becomes active in the world as one more process working itself out.

3.6 Staves and Symbols:

The use of symbols in many occult systems allows complex ideas and states to be represented by a single sign. The practitioner works with a given symbol until it is no longer experienced as a primarily conceptual object but as a thing in itself. This process is broadly analogous to the development of muscle memory by athletes. The value of this process for the practitioner is indicated by Poellner (2003) who recognises the value of perceptual consciousness in the process of spiritual self-development.

3.6.1 The Cultural Dimension:

Within the Odian Tradition the key symbol sets are the Futharks. Each Futhark inevitably represents something of its cultural origin (Travers, 2009). Ristandi draws on the work of Bauschitz (1982) to point to the role of ritual action as a conscious linkage of all past acts to the present moment and as an opening up to the working of Ørlög (Ristandi, 1998). It is believed within an Odian context that a close attention to historical sources assists in the stimulation of the 'metagenetic' memory and Ørlög (Flowers, 1996, p.17) and that access to this deep transpersonal memory is a key function of the Minni. The concept of meta-genetics or of a collective unconscious, which taps into the realm of Rûna, allows us to make sense of many of the training practices we find within Odian magical praxis. It has been noted elsewhere that the individual must fully internalise the runes before beginning to deploy them in magical operations. It has been argued in Chapter Four

above that, in part, this internalising relies upon a form of intuitive and experiential knowing. In order for the internalised rune meanings to be more than a contingent collection of personal associations the work of internalisation must be placed under the aegis of the Minni and be seen as a process of memory retrieval. The memories accessed by the Minni are not merely personal, but collective and transpersonal and it is this quality that separates the process of preparatory runic work from personal speculation.

3.6.2 Galdor Staves:

Galdor staves are a particularly Icelandic form of talismanic magic, differing from Taufr work in the fact that rune staves are not always used in the symbolic design. Galdor staves are of three types: Aegishjalmr, Galdramyndir and Galdrastafir (Thorsson, 1996). The latter type is the closest in design to a Taufr as they consist predominantly of rune stave arrangements, albeit reshaped to create a more pictorial effect. Galdramyndir do not contain obvious rune grapheme elements, but the carved design remains symbolically significant:

Fig. 1: Example of a Galdramyndir:



Aegishjalmr otherwise known as 'helms of awe' follow a very particular design, which is based around a linear cross formation with various kinds of cross bars and terminal

markings which each give a specific function to the helm design. The historic evidence for the use of Galdor staves comes primarily from collections of Icelandic magical texts (Flowers, 1989; Rafnsson, 2008; Thorsson, 2005; Tulinius, 2008):

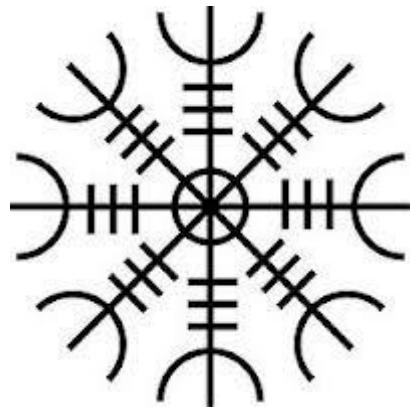
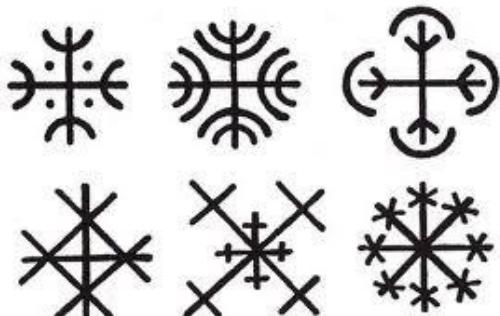


Fig 2: Helm of Awe:



From an Odian perspective the design of a helm of awe represents the practitioner's Universe. The design should be imagined as though consisting of three concentric rings representing, from the centre outwards: The core being of the Vitki; his/ her subjective universe and lastly, the objective universe (Thorsson, 2005). The marks on the helm of awe indicate particular intentions (by their shape) for specific elements of the individual's universe (by their position).

Although the use of ideographic signs is non-linguistic it does not necessarily follow that these magically charged designs are entirely non-semiotic. Perhaps most obvious in these signs is the prominence of certain numerical arrangements with the number three and nine being especially common. The importance of communication in Odian magic is also emphasised by the need to verbalise the magical intent in order to activate a Galdor stave. In addition, the design of the magical sigil utilises a symbol structure that is deemed to be shared by both the practitioner and the trans-human realm. Galdor staves are set to work through focused meditation concentrating on the exact centre of the image while visualising power being pushed along the lines of the image outwards. Galdramyndir do

not contain any recognisable symbolic language. For such signs to be magically potent they would need either to have power in and of themselves or to be elements of a coherent symbolic language that is now lost to us. I am inclined to take the latter perspective since this is most consistent with the other forms of Germanic magic so far investigated.

3.7 Seiðr Work:

In addition to Galdor other traditional approaches to magical activity include both Seiðr and Útiseta. Seiðr (Thorsson, 2005) was taught to Óðin by Freya and can be seen as strictly Vanic magic. Seiðr can be usefully compared to shamanism, but must not be regarded as directly equivalent. The term Shamanism (Eliade, 1989; Hutton, 2001) needs to be used with care, the term and role of ‘Shaman’ is specific to Siberia and surrounding regions and cannot be transparently applied to practices outside that tradition. However, as demonstrated by Eliade and Hutton (*ibid*) there are a number of non-Siberian cultures that engage in practices that have a great deal of similarity and might reasonably be regarded as broadly shamanic.

A Seiðr worker uses trance, slumber and rhythm to access the realm of magical communication. Útiseta, which is designed to strengthen the link to one’s Fylgja, can be seen as a mixture of Seiðr and Galdor techniques. The Útiseta working (Larrington, 1999, pp.124-125; Thorsson, 2005) is ideally carried out in the presence of grave mounds and consists of the following steps:

- Locate space for working and perform hallowing rite
- Meditate focusing only on the breath and not the object of the work
- At an intuitively appropriate point begin a Galdor call related to one’s intent
- Drink a toast to your Fylgja and pour half of the draught onto the ground
- Sing an invocatory Galdor until an awareness of the Fylgja arises in the Minni
- Attempt to communicate with the Fylgja while noting any physical indications of success (e.g. if the Fylgja is a magpie, noticing an actual magpie in the working space)
- Recall the Fylgja back into the physical self

It is noted (Thorsson, 2003, p.153) that the Fylgja is not ‘omni-benevolent’ and the Útiseta experience can be disturbing. The Fylgja is concerned only with the goal of Self-

becoming and not with the continuing ease of existence experienced through the lík and the Ek-Self.

There are few primary sources that detail Seiðr work in terms of original structure and mode of practice and this requires that academics and practitioners alike take care when making Seiðr related claims. Curry's research on shamanism (2006) for example, draws attention to the danger that writing related to shamanistic activity and specifically Blain's work on Seiðr (Blain, 2000, 2002) may be adopting an excessively anthropomorphic approach to the transpersonal.

The Rune Gild have published a concordance of Eddaic Seiðr references (Flowers & Chisholm, 2002), which collects source material references to Seiðr in a single text for the use of Odians in their magical praxis. The source materials used within the Gild indicate that the Seiðr work was conducted on a special platform known as a seiðhjallr (Flowers, 2009). The work consists of three elements: Surrender of the conscious control of one's cognitive processes; the minimisation of sensory data; the presence of an audible rhythm which is used by the Seiðr worker to 'carry' them through the process (Thorsson, 2003, p.142). The key distinction between Seiðr work and Galdor is that in the latter there is no surrender of the totality of one's consciousness to a trance state (Thorsson, 1994, IV, p.1). In Seiðr the practitioner is as much an observer and listener as they are an active agent in the process. To achieve the trance state a range of methods may be deployed such as fasting, pain and sleep deprivation (Thorsson, 2005). The physically liminal position of sitting on the raised Seiðr platform often helps to induce slumber through stillness and opens the practitioner to a shift of being such that their existence lies in both the human and the trans-human. In terms of the Odian ontological model of the Self, this shift moves the focus of consciousness to the Minni (mind/ memory) rather than the Woð-Self (active ecstatic self). Within the Rune Gild, Seiðr work is not something to be taken lightly:

Seiðr involves direct communication with the Other Worlds... generally speaking . . . the average "occultist" is not equipped for such work. He/She doesn't have the necessary knowledge, skill, or ability. . . . In those rare moments you *do* manage to communicate with an entity outside the self, you'll very likely not understand, or worse,

completely misinterpret the communication ... if one wants to do this effectively, and establish real and meaningful communication one has to lay the groundwork. . . It's not nearly as much "fun" or as "entertaining" as the kind of Seiðr one learns in afternoon workshops... but then, our business isn't entertainment: it's Self-Transformation' (Ristandi – in conversation 2010).

Once in a Seiðr trance the Seiðr worker may undertake a number of actions: Soothsaying is a primary Seiðr function and differs from divination in that the glimpse of the matrix of Skuld is provided by extra-human entities with whom the practitioner is in contact (ibid, p.144). In the Seiðr trance the broader objective reality which contains all the nine-worlds and trans-human entities can be experienced directly.

7. Towards An Odian Ethical Framework

‘Cattle die, kinsmen die, all that remains of a man are his deeds’ (from ‘Hávamál’ verse 78)

1. Ethics and the Occult

Occultism has always been concerned with personal, inner development, but the supposed ability of magical praxis to cause changes in the external world is also a key element of all occult systems. This latter aspect of any occult paradigm of reality requires particular ethical consideration. In dealing with the vexed question of what the ethics of an Occult paradigm might look like we face two initial problems. On the one hand, like so many seemingly homogenous social phenomena the closer we get to the various modes of occult praxis the more distinctive each particular school becomes. In addition as the increased acceptance of alternative spiritualities grows we begin to see the emergence of those potentially occultist groupings and systems that have adapted themselves in order to exploit the possibility of acceptance and respectability. This is even the case with those forms of esoteric exploration that have the most difficult relationship with main stream society. Thus we see the emergence of ‘respectable’ Satanism (Taub & Nelson, 2005). If we could identify Occultism as a single paradigmatic reality we might be able to deduce its implicit ethical framework. However, it is not possible to propose a single paradigm for the whole range of systems that might be labelled as Occult.

There are a small number of papers that explore the ethical dimension in relation to the world of neo-paganism and Wicca (Ezzy, 2006; Harwood, 2007). However, Wicca occupies a problematic relationship to the concept of Occultism as defined in Chapter Three of this thesis. Wicca, understood as the religion constructed by Gardner (Heselton, 2003), is primarily a system of belief that regards deity as immanent and dual in the form of the God and the Goddess. Wicca does utilise magical praxis, but it is perhaps best understand as a religious faith that accepts and employs magical power rather than as a form of occultism.

The ethical approach of the New Age industry is largely in keeping with the dominant discourse of consumption and individual gratification (Carrette & King, 2005). Zaidman relies on a qualitative study of a small number of New Age shops to support the claim

that the New Age is more than merely a new market-place. Zaidman's position is that New Age businesses also work toward the creation of sacred spaces (Zaidman, 2007). Helen Lee's study (2007) of the use of rhetoric in New Age 'development' texts presents a strong argument that the differing spiritual traditions and magical systems that are deployed in such texts function primarily as a decorative background against which a formulaic narrative is set. It is important to acknowledge that ethical positions that might be attributed to the New Age when considered as an industry are not necessarily applicable to particular New Age practitioners or indeed to forms of New Age praxis. This is not least due to the highly amorphous nature of what belongs under the categorisation 'New Age'.

Ezzy (2006) looks at the ethics of so called, 'White Witch Craft' and argues that the concept of 'white' magic is a construct of capitalistic ethics. According to Ezzy, the attempt to label some approaches to witch craft as 'White' is an attempt to avoid the harsh realities of existence in favour of a liberal-rational notion of personal growth understood as a particular kind of functioning that is consistent with the broad values of capitalist society (*ibid*). Hope & Jones in their 2006 article (Hope & Jones, 2006) argue that contemporary paganism is at root a manifestation of certain reactions to late capitalist society rather than a response to any spiritual stimulus. However, their paper is flawed in its failure to accurately describe its subject matter.

2. Left Hand Path Associations

There are a number of similarities that can be identified between Odianism and Satanic or Left Hand Path traditions. As has been detailed elsewhere in the thesis, Óðin is intimately associated with states of ecstasy and frenzy. Frenzy based magic is a mainstay of many forms of Satanism and Left Hand Path magical work. The Order of Nine Angles, for example, details various approaches to Frenzy Magic and also utilises a 'Tree of Wyrd', annotated with Gods from the Northern Tradition, in its approach to path-working visualisations (West, 1999).

The definition of Left Hand Path systems, like any other categorisation, is problematic. When we look closely at any particular group we find aspects that challenge the common

assumptions regarding the nature of the Left Hand Path. For example, the Order of Nine Angles (ONA), which advocates human sacrifice (Beest, 1992) also advocates the use of magical practices for deep self-development and the development of cosmic awareness (West, 1999). There is a dominant strand of transpersonal theory that associates Self-becoming with moral development and would find it hard to accommodate the cosmic awareness of the ONA. Even those who challenge the Universalist approach to Self-becoming such as Ferrer seem unwilling to question the inclusion of certain moral positions as necessary features of all forms of deep Self-development (Ferrer, 2011, p.7). The moral consensus is most obvious in the uncritical acceptance of compassion, empathy and love as unalloyed moral Goods (Noble, 2000; Orr, 2001; Underhill, 1995). There seems to be a common tendency to equate spiritual development with an increasing sense of love and compassion. In an article looking at the role of intuitive inquiry in investigating both subjective and objective data, Anderson (2000) immediately equates the presence of a felt sense with a tendency towards Love understood as, *inter alia*, ‘tenderness’ and ‘compassion’. Even when the notion of universal love appears to be being challenged (Rose, 2001, 2004), what is actually questioned is how Love manifests itself rather than the premise that ‘Love is all’. From any Left Hand Path perspective and certainly within the Odian tradition the role of Love is somewhat less central. This is not to say that there is no place for compassion, for example, within an Odian ethical framework, but that it is not regarded as a necessary and universal Good.

The difficulty in finding a pre-existing framework within which to locate Odianism stems in part from the relative lack of attention paid to Left Hand Path and quasi-Left Hand Path systems. For example, Soskin (2003) provides a map of psycho-spiritual studies, indicating eight key areas of development for exploration. This map is deeply influenced by monotheistic ethical structures. Soskin offers a definition of religion (*ibid*, p34), which cannot be reconciled to polytheistic spiritualities and is particularly unsuited to any Left Hand Path spiritual model. It must also be noted that the very small number of adherents may play a part in the relatively small amount of material that considers Left Hand Path approaches.

Daniels (2003) reviews various definitions of mysticism and determines that its primary basis is the experience of Noesis involving a sense of relationship to a ‘fundamental

reality' and the 'possibility of direct cognition' (p39). This is relatively value free as a description of one type of non-ordinary consciousness and allows the Left Hand Path practitioner to interpret this direct cognition and fundamental reality as referring to moments of Self-becoming. Hick (1989) also proposes a neutral conception of a fundamental reality. Although like Daniels the nature of this fundamental reality is not explored or articulated even in a tentative manner beyond the notion that it is fundamental.

Thorsson's statement that, 'Rune work is by definition a "dark side" endeavour' (1994, p.9) points to the connection between Odianism and the Left Hand Path. In order to truly Self-become the individual must be able to occupy all aspects of the Self including those that may be unsettling, uncomfortable or at odds with contemporary prevailing ethical norms. A willingness to explore this aspect of the Self-complex requires an investigation into the 'dark side' of the Self. However, this does not mean that Odianism is a Left Hand Path model in its entirety.

Óðin is a fundamentally ambivalent figure and so we should expect the ethical principles of Odianism to be similarly complex and ambivalent. The name itself, albeit one of many, means Master of Óðr and this means both 'inspiration' and 'frenzy'. This hints at the nature of Odian inspiration. In pursuit of extremity the Odian is expected to explore the way in which they live their day to day life. If the Odian seeks to attain conscious understanding and control of the totality of the Self-complex they face an ethical obligation to examine and challenge all aspects of self. The obligation to challenge what we feel to be our predetermined value structures arises from the Odian oath that we will always 'Reyn Til Rûna' or 'Seek The Mystery' (Thorsson, 1994). Any aspect of the Self-complex that resists examination may lead to obstacles or unintended outcomes when we begin to work directly with the Woð-Self. In this sense the Odian approach can be aligned with the Delphic injunction, 'Gnothi Seauton' (Know thyself), which remains a stated aim in many occult traditions.

Odianism is committed to the reclamation of a Northern Tradition and this entails an attempt to resurrect the ethical standards that were in place prior to the Christianisation of Northern Europe. This leads to practical ethical positions that can be very distinct from

the more familiar ethical positions promoted by a Christianised ethical framework. Violence, for example, is often honourable within the Northern Tradition; any negative ethical aspect arises from the circumstances in which violence is used and not violent action in itself. This is evidenced by the way that many sagas deal with the slaying of enemies (Ólason, 2003; Scudder, 2004, 2005; Sturluson, 1991), while *Njall's Saga* (Cook, 2001) provides a useful contrast between the Traditional and the Christian view of violence.

Occultists try to find the hidden truths and forces that lie behind the apparent or exoteric experience of reality. This means that established frameworks, including moral structures, are often rejected by the occultist in favour of more esoteric interpretations. Travers suggests that this iconoclastic approach may lead to a willingness to challenge the notion of orthodoxy in all its forms (Travers 2009, p35). My personal experience, though, over approximately thirty years in various occult groups, is that occultists are far from immune to the lure of dogma. Moreover, while Odianism is influenced by the fundamental ambivalence and curiosity of Óðin, it has established, albeit (as in many belief systems) fuzzy in some respects, clear boundary conditions as to what constitutes Odian praxis and/ or beliefs.

Óðin is a liminal figure and has a decidedly eerie side to his personality. His totemic animals are associated with threat and carrion. Rather than a shepherd to his flock, Óðin represents the wolf who keeps the flock on their toes. The ethical position of Óðin is also neatly summed up by one of his names, 'Svipall' which translates as, 'The Changeable One'. Amongst his liminal acts, Óðin breaks promises, slays the honourable, and offers no protection to his followers (Flowers 1997, p45). Odianism is comfortable with magical acts that other Traditions might regard as 'dark' or 'black magic'. For example, Flowers refers to the giving over of the souls of enemies to Tyr in his History of the Rune Gild (2007, p.111).

2.1 Self-deification:

The Western Left Hand Path is concerned with the continuance of individuated consciousness. The mission is to be as the Gods rather than of God. The aspiration to Self-deification must be understood in the context of a cosmology in which deity is much

closer to humanity: It is neither omniscient nor omnipotent and is subject to the influence of the Norns (Fate).

The Northern Tradition is not concerned with God worship, but is concerned with a relationship between Man and his Gods. It has even been claimed (Lindow, 2006) that traditional source material references certain humans, such as Bragi, who are deemed to be on equal footing with the Aesir. In many ways the goal of Self-deification relates to the attempt to remove the felt barriers between the experiencer and that which is experienced. The Odian strives towards an immediacy and depth of connection with the Universe that is akin to that achieved by Óðin. In Staða work (physical stances), for example, the identification of the Odian with the runic mystery being expressed removes any sense in which the Mystery is necessarily external to the practitioner. For deities such as Óðin almost all aspects of Mystery are available to be understood and used. For the Odian, striving towards a form of Self-deification, Mystery does not need to remain separate in order to retain its power or significance. It should be noted that even for Óðin there are some aspects of Mystery (or Rûna) that remain forever beyond understanding. Nonetheless, in the gradual absorption of Mystery and its operative functionality we can see what is intended by the notion of Self-deification.

2.2 Of the Devil's Party?

The Odian path as expressed within the Rune Gild also owes something in its provenance to the Left Hand Path as expressed within the Temple of Set, a broadly Satanic magical organisation (Aquino, 2009; Harvey, 1995, 2002). The Yrmin Drighten of the Gild is also an Ipsissimus within the Temple of Set and in his introduction to *Rûnarmál* (Flowers, 1996) equates the Erulian (an individual who has reached a high level of mastery in Odian magic) within the Gild with a Magus within the Temple of Set (*ibid*, p.2).

Additionally, the emulation of Óðin by the Odian has a direct parallel in the way in which Set is regarded as an exemplar within Setianism (Granholm, 2009, p. 94). The association with the Temple of Set is perhaps strengthened by the dual function of the word 'Rûna' (Mystery). This word functions both as the aim of those within the Rune Gild, but was also the Word with which Stephen Flowers attained the grade of Magus within the Temple of Set (Flowers, 2007, Appendix 5). In a number of magical systems including the Temple of Set it is believed that on reaching certain levels of understanding (e.g.

attaining the grade of Magus) the individual will receive a word that symbolically represents the main focus of that individual's magical work or philosophy (Aquino, 2009; Harvey, 1995).

The connection, through the word, 'Rûna', of Flowers' progress in the Temple of Set and the development of the Rune Gild raises the question as to whether the Rune Gild is best understood as a continuation of Flowers' work within the Temple of Set. There is not sufficient space to explore the philosophical framework which governs the Temple of Set. However, one fundamental difference between the two organisations lies in the extent of their commitment to individualistic antinomianism. The Rune Gild is far less antinomian and radically individualist than the Temple of Set and Thorsson is careful to balance the notion of the Odian as a 'lone wolf' against a commitment to a Tradition and the importance of a shaping framework of shared heritage (2003, p. xiv). Dyrendal (2009) details the importance of the concept of 'Isolate Intelligence' (ibid, p.62) within Setianism, which certainly links closely to the primary role of consciousness and the Woð Self within Odianism. However, the concern with emotional control and turning away from emotional connectedness to others (ibid, p.66) that Dyrendal finds within Setianism is not shared by Odianism. Moreover, the 'unique-ism' (Dyrendal, 2009; Granholm, 2009, 2012) and the focus on consciousness or being 'fully awake' is common to a number of Mystery Traditions including esoteric Christianity not all of which would necessarily be regarded as Left Hand Path in their orientation (Hunt, 2012; Lewis, 2012; Machin, 2013). Dyrendal's application of Heelas' conceptualisation of 'self-religion' (Heelas, 1991; York, 2001) to the Left Hand Path could also be applied to Odianism in terms of the Odian process of Self-becoming, but again it is not clear how this aspect of Left Hand Path magical praxis is necessarily distinct from Right Hand Path magical praxis. Granholm (2009) stresses the importance of self-designation when considering the application of 'Satanic' as a defining label to any group(s) and makes a very good case for the use of Left Hand Path as a more appropriate alternative etic categorisation. Interestingly, within the Gild there has been significant discussion as to whether Odianism is necessarily Left Hand Path or is not suited to categorisation along left/right hand path lines. Granholm's suggestion that we might regard some organisations such as the Rune Gild as 'post-satanic' (2012, p.215) has some appeal given the similarities

between the Gild and the Temple of Set and certainly provides a useful etic categorisation of groups that have some relationship to the Left Hand Path.

There may well be individuals within the Gild who would happily adopt such a descriptor for their own particular approach to the work of the Gild, and others who would argue that the focus on teaching others and concern for the Folk beyond the Gild mean that Odianism has a relatively loose identification with the Left Hand Path in general or Temple of Set in particular. While recognising the inevitable influence of my own commitments as a Fellow within the Gild, I am not persuaded that Odianism in terms of its ‘canonical’ texts is best understood as a post-Satanic philosophy. I would argue that Odianism lacks the sufficiently adversarial stance, strict individualism and antinomianism to fully qualify as Left Hand Path or ‘post-satanic’.

Granholm (2012) refers to the importance of so-called Lesser Black Magic (LBM) and Greater Black Magic (GBM) in Setianism. The Rune Gild does distinguish between magic directed towards practical ends and the act of seeking Rûna through magical means, but this is not necessarily reliant on the Setian distinction between GBM and LBM (Aquino, 2009) and could be equally regarded as drawing on the distinction found in Mystery Traditions more generally between practical and developmental magic. There are also differences between the grade structure and mode of advancement in the two organisations. The Temple of Set comprises six degrees modelled on magical orders such as the Golden Dawn and the A:. A:., members advance through a series of formal initiation processes and associated ritual ceremonies. The Rune Gild has three levels modelled on the structure of Craft Gilds and has no formal initiation ceremonies; members are simply recognised as having achieved each grade following an examination of the member’s submitted work.

It should be noted that in Flowers ‘Rûna Utterance’ submission to the Temple of Set in 1988 (Flowers 2007, Appendix 5), it is suggested that, ‘each Magus must Come into Being on a path unique to himself’ (*ibid*, p.1). This appears to be at odds with the fundamental commitment of Odianism to the methodology of Traditionalism and specifically the Northern Tradition in terms of source content. If the magical philosophy summarised in the verbal formula, ‘Rûna’ arises out of a fundamentally individual

process then it may be difficult to see how the concept of ‘Rûna’ can also lie at the heart of a system which sees itself as fundamentally Traditional and seeking to re-awaken a dormant folk current. However, Flowers’ progression with the Temple of Set will have been strongly influenced by his work within the Northern Tradition. The personal and internal processes that led Flowers to his commitment to ‘Rûna’ within the Temple of Set will have been unique and individualised, but this need not undermine the genuinely traditional nature of the concept of ‘Rûna’ itself. It would also seem that Flowers’ commitment to the Odian Tradition preceded his involvement with the Temple of Set as indicated by his reference to an extant Gild in his letter of application to the Temple (Flowers, 2007, Appendix 8). In *Red Rûna* (2001) Flowers draws attention to the fact that the Rune Gild was founded in 1980, while his membership of the Temple of Set is dated from 1984. Lastly, it could be argued that while Flowers is the Yrmin Drighten of the Rune Gild, the Gild is not an expression of Flowers’ vision of Odianism to the exclusion of other views or without reference to the Northern Tradition with which the Rune Gild claims association.

Flowers addressed what he regards as the key differences between Odianism and Setianism in his article, *Contra Templum* (Flowers, 2001, pp.33-45). According to Flowers the key distinctions lie in the ‘God Lore’ and cosmology of the two groups. However, Flowers’ contention that the Gild differs from Setianism by its narrowness of focus on one God appears to ignore both Setianism’s primary focus on the deity Set and the Gild’s interest in other Northern deities such as Freya and Thor/ Thunor. In this regard we might say that both the Gild and the Temple of Set share a primary focus on a single deity as exemplar and a willingness to explore the magical functions of other deities and extra-human entities. The claim that Odianism’s focus on a particular ‘cultural matrix’ and its commitment to the general good, rather than strict individualism has more validity as a means of drawing a clear distinction between Setianism and Odianism. Like the Craft Gilds on which it is based, the Rune Gild has no single voice that defines it, but is an organic body that is shaped by the various Masters. That Flowers sees an affinity between Odianism and the Setian perspective does not place a requirement upon any other Odian to share that view.

The liminality of Odianism does not derive from the association of many Odians with various forms of Satanism, but is given by examples within the source material and by the fundamentally liminal nature of all magical praxis. Much could be written about the relationship between Loki and Óðin. Loki represents a destructive force in many ways (Crossley-Holland, 1993; Larrington, 1999; Sturluson, 1987); he brings about the Ragnarök, insults all the inhabitants of Asgard and even steals Sif's (Thor's wife) golden hair. However, he is also Óðin's blood brother, helps Thor retrieve Mjollnir and gives birth to Óðin's eight legged steed, Sleipnir. Loki represents something of a shadow-self in relation to Óðin, a necessary although at times a disturbing and chaotic force. Without Loki, the fortress of the Gods of consciousness would be less creative, poorly defended and a lot less fun. Moreover, Loki enables the Gods to look at themselves honestly (Larrington, 1999, pp.84-96) and so analogously can be seen as a means by which the Odian may critically self-reflect. In addition it is through the agency of Loki that the inevitability of destruction is manifested and without the possibility of catastrophe, violence and the ending of things there can be no possibility of new beginnings or creativity. It would be possible to devote an entire thesis to the role that Loki and Loki-esque values play in Odian magical praxis and I hope to engage in further research in this area following the completion of this thesis.

Taub & Nelson (2005) propose a continuum of social acceptability within contemporary Satanism ranging from what they term 'underground Satanism' to 'establishment Satanism'. In exploring the ethics of the Odian Tradition it would be instructive in future research to determine precisely where it sits on such a continuum. If the influence from the Temple of Set is significant we would expect to find it ethically in the field of Establishment Satanism. However, this in itself would still not be enough to assert the claim that the underlying basis of Odianism derives from the theories expounded within the Temple of Set since such a position on the Satanic continuum is also held by the Church of Satan, an organisation that has no formal links with the Rune Gild. If the ethical structure of the Odian path is found to fit the Satanic Underground end of the Satanic continuum proposed by Taub & Nelson (2005), then there would be good reason for arguing that the Setian connection has had no significant impact on the Odian system. The assignment of Odianism within the Satanic continuum is not central to this thesis and

a separate paper, drawing on Granholm (2007, 2010) and others, dealing with this issue is in preparation.

3. Relativistic Aspects of an Odian Ethical Framework

The ethical tenets within Odianism are not to be taken as a universal guide to behaviour. One common approach to practical ethics, following Kant (Hill, 2009), is that ethical positions must be universally applicable (deontological ethics). However, Odianism allows for different but equally valid ethical frameworks such that ethically appropriate behaviour for the Odian may not be appropriate for other individuals and/ or groups. This is consistent with the commitment in Odianism (See Chapter 5 above) to multiple realities in which the nature of reality is at least partly a construct of individual consciousness. Similarly, the stratification of epistemology into Non-reflective Knowing, Analytical Knowing and Wisdom (See Chapter 4 above) supports differential ethical frameworks based on the means through which the individual comes to know the world in which his/ her actions occur. In proposing an Odian ontological framework it was argued that there need be no single ontological structure within which ‘reality’ can be adequately framed. It is philosophically consistent for this view to also be reflected in the ethical framework that is implied within the writings of contemporary Odianism. Thorsson’s article on Odian ethics (1996, pp.64-67) is explicit about the need to recognise the validity of a number of competing ethical frameworks and the exclusive nature of a particularly Odian ethical perspective.

3.1 The Exclusivity of Odian Ethics:

Odianism is an amoral philosophy. This is why the Odian Way is only meant for a few in our community (Thorsson, 1996, p.64)

The above statement by Thorsson encapsulates much that is necessary to an understanding of Odian ethics. The amoral position reflects the individual responsibility that each Odian must accept; to strive towards Self-deification. In this fully awake state, the individual Odian relies on their own understanding and inspiration to deal with questions of ethics. The criticism of a fixed morality, that is implied by Thorsson’s promotion of amorality, is aimed at religious morality in particular, rather than systems, such as the Utilitarianism of Mill or Bentham that while Universal do not rely on a transcendent moral order for their authority.

Odianism does offer a deeply spiritual paradigm of reality. However, in Odianism, morality is not determined by divine authority. Given that the Odian seeks to emulate rather than obey Óðin, it would be philosophically contradictory to accept any divinely given moral framework. It is also important to note that the focus of Odianism is the quest for Rûna. Since a fundamental quality of Rûna is that Rûna can never be fully known and since it is to Rûna only that Óðin defers, it becomes clear that there can never be a finally determined morality within Odianism. Additionally, the role of the Odian specifically requires amorality in order to facilitate an exploration of all poles of possibility within the Universe.

Thorsson (1996) contends that morality and ethics need to be seen as entirely separate concepts. Thorsson uses ‘morality’ and ‘ethics’ as oppositional terms to distinguish between theories of right and wrong that either rely on an immutable divine authority and are consequently absolute and universal (morality) from those which are developed over time and rely on an appeal to reason and/ or the values of a given group (ethics). It would be more accurate for Thorsson to talk in terms of absolutist deontological morality rather than simply ‘morality’. However, it is clear when reading *Green Rûna* that Thorsson is contrasting divinely revealed ethical frameworks (which he references as ‘morality’) to the Odian combination of consequentialism and virtue ethics (which he references as ‘amorality’).

The elitist contention of Odianism is that only few people are psychologically capable and possessed of the appropriate innate qualities to engage with the Mysteries specific to Óðin. The rejection of any ethical framework except that is not personally created offers both a great freedom and a great responsibility. In order to avoid a situation in which such a concept were regarded as license for hedonism, Thorsson stresses (*ibid*) that it is regarded as a mode of ethical living that is only feasible for a small number of individuals. Thorsson provides a useful contrast with the ethical framework of Thor and his adherents whereby Thor has learned what he must do in any given situation and follows a code of virtue whereas Óðin is always in the position of having to make ethical decisions without reference to any such code since he has final responsibility for the fate of the Aesir (1996, p.65). We might regard the ethics of Odianism as being quasi-Nietzschean:

Odian ethics . . . may fairly be characterised as Selfish . . . good is that which strengthens the Self . . . Óðin is not bound by any law in his quests. . . he could easily be called the *Übergott!* (Thorsson, 1996 [p. 65])

It is easy to see a strong affinity between the statements above and Nietzsche's pronouncements on his understanding of 'the Good' (Nietzsche, 1990, pp.125-126). However, while Nietzsche's statements appear to present a radically individualistic and materialistic manifesto, the concept of Self to which Thorsson refers is a 'Holy Self' (ibid). In addition, the Odian asserts a responsibility for those within the Folk who lack the capacity to take on such a role. This reflects the behaviour of Óðin within the Eddaic literature:

Óðin's quests for wisdom are almost always undertaken in the service of gods and men (ibid, p.65).

It is this commitment to service that prevents the Odian ethical framework from descending into a nihilist position and prevents the individual Odian from adopting a self-centred hedonism that ignores the needs or concerns of others. However, that avoidance of nihilism requires the Odian to regard the Odian ethical framework as being applicable only to the active Odian rather than being a structure that could be usefully applied universally. This is a form of ethical relativism that depends partly on the circumstances in which a given action may or may not be taken and the outcome of the action (Consequentialism) and partly on the innate qualities and character of the individual agent (potentially a form of Virtue Ethics).

4. Odianism and Society

Any consideration of 'society' is problematic; the meaning accorded to the term 'society' is determined as much by the philosophical perspective of the observer as it is by that which is observed. Tönnies' (2001) notion of Gemeinschaft as an organic community built on community relationships comes close to the Odian model of society. This can be contrasted with the abstracted individualism (Gesellschaft) that we find in contemporary European social relations (Allik & Anu, 2004). Odianism draws on European folk cultures to project a vision of social cohesion based on cultural heritage. This vision is currently no more than an aspiration. In this regard it occupies the same position regarding possible implementation as many ideological and spiritual commitments: The

aspiration for social ownership of the means of production, for example, is not invalidated as an aspiration by its current unfeasibility. It could also be argued that Odianism does not represent the totality of pre-Christian Northern European culture and moreover that its interpretations of those aspects of European history in which it is interested are inevitably contemporary re-interpretations and constructions. However, Odianism is not laying claim to any entitlement to direct the totality of any hypothesised future return to a Heathen organic community, only that such a return would, from an Odian perspective, be valuable and that in the event of such a return Odians would have an obligation to work for the good of the Folk. Indeed, Odianism in terms of its ontological perspective as well as its ethical commitment to Self-becoming does not imply the need for an Odian society as such, but of a re-sacralised polytheistic community of which Odianism would be but one member in a family of belief systems.

While the Odian ethical framework is self-described as amoral it does recognise the validity of ethically qualitative terms. We find in Odian texts, for instance, the Old Norse terms for both murk-runes (myrkruna) and shining-runes (heidhruna) (Thorsson. 1987). There is no individual rune which can be said to be murky (negative) or bright (positive). Rather any rune has the capacity to operate in a murky or bright manner depending on the context and intention. This reflects a view of good and bad as highly contingent and relative value statements. Thorsson (2003) states that in developing the Self-complex the individual should seek to approach the ‘ginnregin’, a Norse term that refers to a notion of holy or sacred wisdom and/ or advice. When the Odian operates within this context the aims of his/her magical work will not be, ‘at odds with . . . traditional values and sensibilities’ (ibid, p.37). Thus the Odian retains a clear commitment to some kind of ethical framework. The Odian approach is concerned with both the freedom of the individual Odian and the good of the Folk as a whole, but in order for its individualism and its non-collectivist social values to be understood it must be approached in the context of its broad paradigm of reality.

4.1 Odian Ideology:

It is not possible to talk sensibly about a single occult ideology. Even if it were possible to construct a generic framework that established the fundamentals of an occult paradigm, there would remain numerous points of difference. This includes implicit ideological

positions, to the extent that they can be identified, in alternative occult systems. Thorsson (1996) describes the Folk as consisting of a range of relationships that begins with the family, and then extends to the Clan, the Tribe and ultimately the Nation. Nation is here understood to refer to a body of people who believe they share significant bonds in terms of their language, broad values and cultural heritage. Nation is not to be understood as referring to an economic and political definition enforced by the establishment in law of geographical boundaries:

True nationalism involves respect for and assumed freedom and independence of other national folk groups (Thorsson, 2005).

While many religions are, at least in theory, opposed to wealth acquisition, Odianism does not regard wealth as necessarily problematic. The source material, specifically the Rune Poems' descriptions of Fehu (Flowers, 2002, pp.13, 14, 20, 24, 52), indicates the view of wealth adopted by Odianism. The rune Fehu represents mobile wealth and the poems describing Fehu refer to the benefit of wealth and goods. The poems also point to the need for this wealth to circulate within the community and to the high value of generosity.

4.2 Elitism:

There are similarities between Odianism and the 'holistic individualism' theorised by Farias and Lalljee (2006). The concept of 'holistic individualism' is put forward as a description of New Age spirituality. It refers to an attempt to create a deep understanding of the individual's relationship to the mysteries of consciousness, the trans-human and a multi-dimensional Universe in such a way that the New Age practitioner achieves a sense of authentic individuation. Holism implies the recognition of interconnectedness, but Farias & Lalljee also emphasize the retention of a discrete individual identity in New Age holism. The participants in Farias & Lalljee's study were selected on the basis of certain practices, which were deemed to reflect a New Age commitment. However, Farias and Lalljee define the New Age commitment as a spiritualised focus on self-development; a commitment that is in no way restricted to New Age believers. Despite the similarity of 'holistic individualism' to some aspects of Odianism, there are some key distinctions. Odianism is far more ambitious in terms of the boundaries that it sets around the scope of an individual's power. Additionally, the Odian model of the Self-complex specifies not

only a strong individualism but a holism that includes a link to the perceived *Ørlög* (innate qualities and accumulated fate) of one's family and one's folk.

Odianism is meritocratically elitist (Flowers, 2007, p.55). This stems from a Traditionalist belief in the inevitability and value of hierarchy. Odianism suggests that while we may become that which we are, we can never become that which we are not (Flowers, 2007, p.148). However, the Odian conceptualisation of society as *Gemeinschaft* means that all elements within a hierarchy are valued as a necessary, if unequal, part of the whole. It is not possible for someone to simply choose to join the Rune Gild (Thorsson, 1994, Appendix A, p.2) and this indicates a refusal by the Gild to accept the commodification of the Mysteries:

There is only a certain, surprisingly small, number of folks in the world at any one time truly capable of understanding. . . It is our search for these chosen ones which drives and guides our organizational principles (ibid, p.5).

The meritocratic elitism of Odianism is based in Thorsson's reading of Germanic cultural tradition and is at odds with the assimilative hunger of evangelical forms of monotheism (Flowers 2006, p.36-7). It is an attitude that would also be mirrored in many other contemporary Mystery Traditions, which seek to ensure that the Mysteries are reserved to those who are able to commit to a process of initiation and to the necessary work required to attain significant results. The distinctive nature, in terms of pantheons and praxis, that marks out the different contemporary expressions of occultism paganism, witchcraft and magic is perhaps one means by which the reductive power of globalising economic forces can be effectively resisted. To this extent, it may be that a discriminatory (in its proper sense) admission to the various Mystery Traditions has a value beyond the protection of a given Tradition's integrity.

In most, if not all, Mystery Traditions, including Odianism, Man has a potential relationship with the Gods rather than God being seen as wholly Other. The latter perspective, as Benoist (2005) notes, acts to debase the human, while the former inevitably leads to a stratification of society. A certain level of elitism is implicit in all occult practice. The occultist is distinct from the majority population as a result of what their occult practice reveals to them. It is believed by the occultist that their practices

produce additional powers and consequently the occultist occupies a privileged or elite position relative to others (Vitale, 2006).

4.3 A Problematic Inheritance:

Thorsson (1987) is at pains to point out the antipathy that exists between the philosophy of Odianism and that of National Socialism. However, he does reference the esoteric experiments of certain elements of the Schutzstaffel (The S.S.) as being worthy of further consideration (ibid, p.64). This should not be read as an endorsement of National Socialism and Odianism makes no attempt to argue for the superiority of any given cultural matrix. However, Odianism recognises that in the search for the potentially Universal Mysteries we are most likely to travel further along the path if we follow the marks in the undergrowth that were trampled by our ancestors and remain dimly lit in our shared unconscious as a road previously travelled.

There has long been an awareness of the association of certain esoteric positions with various Fascist movements throughout Europe (DeForrest, 2011; Goodrick-Clarke, 1992, 2003; Griffin, 1995, 1998). The best known example of this phenomenon is the link between Ariosophy and Nazism. Goodrick-Clarke's work, *The Occult Roots of Nazism* (1992) explores this entwined relationship in some depth. His main focus is political and economic; tending to view the esoteric aspects as supporting elements of what was essentially a political movement. Goodrick-Clarke also tackles contemporary manifestations of fascist and Neo-Nazi esotericism (2003) many of which groups draw either on the runes or Norse mythology in the promotion of a political agenda. However, Goodrick Clarke (2003) and Gardell (2003) also describe a number of groups whose focus is esoteric, but who also espouse fascist sympathies.

Although his position is hostile to all forms of Fascism, Roger Griffin's work argues that the impetus behind Fascism can be understood as an attempt at holistic transformation and the creation of 'the whole man' (Griffin, 1995). This is also the aim of Odianism, albeit for very different purposes and through an entirely different process, but Griffin's interpretation helps to explain why occultism, and in particular the Northern Tradition, is sometimes erroneously regarded as quasi-fascist.

Separating out the resurgence of the Northern Tradition in the years leading up to and including the period of the Third Reich is problematic. It is undeniable that there are elements of Wotanism and related traditions that are capable of reflection to some degree within National Socialism and these associations are maintained by some today (Campbell & Hill, 1972; Hexham & Poewe, 2005; Nanko, 1993). However, it is also important to note that the applicability of a value to Nazism renders that value necessarily National Socialist. The fact that some aspects of A can also be found in B does not imply that the totality A is identical with totality B or that there can be no elements of A that are in complete opposition to elements of B.

In the determination to root out fascist organisations wherever they may be hiding there is a danger that facts can be stretched and even distorted. For example, Poewe's 1999 article proposes direct links between the 'Extreme Right', contemporary Paganism, Ludendorff's Revolutionary Conservativism and Nazism. This is equivalent to equating the trade union movement with the genocide of the Ukrainian Kulaks by the Soviet Union. Despite Poewe's failure (2005) to distinguish between the ethno-socialism of Nazism and the aims of the New Right, the article itself does provide a useful summary of some of the key values of contemporary interpretations of the Northern Tradition, which in turn guide to a significant degree the ethical perspective of the Odian path: Fate; community; holism; inevitable imperfection as opposed to moral badness or innate goodness; respect for the distinctiveness of peoples (bio-diversity); Man as part of rather than distinct from the Divine; are all rightly cited by Poewe (*ibid*) as key values in the Northern Tradition.

4.4 The Occultist as folk magician and magician of the folk:

Contemporary interpretations of the Northern Tradition place great emphasis on the importance of community. In these interpretations the practitioner of magic has a role amongst the folk as worker of both harm and healing along with general guidance and divination (Davies, 2003; Horsley, 1979; Thorsson, 2003). Within Odianism, attempts to enact this tradition carry with them the intention of working for the folk as well as expanding the consciousness of the individual practitioner (Thorsson, 2003, p. xvii). This link to the 'here and now' and the wider dimension of society is encouraged in the Odian system:

Sovereign consciousness need not be kind or gentle, but it must have ultimate good as its eventual goal (Travers, 2009).

In a talk given in 1991 (Flowers, 1996), four ‘thews’ (*ibid*, pp5-9) or virtues applicable to the Odian were set out:

1. Doing Right among Men
2. Recognition of the Separateness of an Individual’s Soul Life
3. Intellectual Thews
4. Working Rightly in the World

The first of these virtues is regarded as encapsulating the Nine Noble Virtues recognised by most *Ásatrú* adherents (Blain & Wallis, 2004; Harvey, 2009). The Nine Noble Virtues followed by those who honour the Aesir (Northern Gods) are focused on leading a good life in the world. It is a non-transactional approach to the virtue of right action since it does not lead to any post-death benefit, ‘You just do the Good and keeping on doing it for its own sake’ (Flowers, 2007, p.110). The second virtue is specifically Odian in that it is concerned with the distinction between the common link with the folk and the ‘for-itself’ quality of the individual Self-complex when activated and developed. The third virtue is not as its title suggests concerned with acts of the intellect *per se*, but rather with the transformation of that which is known into a deeper realisation or understanding. This virtue is closely tied to the triadic model of epistemology proposed in the *Gildisbók* and discussed in Chapter 4 above. The final virtue is perhaps best understood as reflecting the first, but can only be enacted by an individual who also possesses the second and third virtues. At this point of Self-becoming, doing right consists in actively promoting a more holistic paradigm of human life-meaning to the world (*ibid*, p6). It can be seen as a form of Troth (Loyalty to the Odian understanding of the values of the Folk) appropriate to an individual taking on the responsibility of being an Odian.

There is still a need to recognise the importance of liminality in this structure. The Odian is both within society and placing himself on its edges. In his work the Odian eschews the moral norms of his society, but this is often in order that he may bring a benefit to that society. Finally, the Odian regards himself as a member of an elite that is separated from the folk in general by a gulf that is only passable if one is willing to enter the quest for

Rûna oneself: ‘In order to evolve one’s self, one must separate one’s self from the mass-body of one’s fellow men’ (Flowers, 2007, p.86). Yet at the same time the Odian is bound to a commitment to what Odianism regards as the deep traditions of that folk group and works to promote those values and structures which are felt to be of most value to the Folk. In order for Odianism to avoid a descent into evangelism the notion of what constitutes a ‘deep tradition’ needs to be carefully considered. It would be contradictory to the ethical position implied by Odianism for there to be a presumption as to what any other individual might regard as their deep traditions or indeed how a relationship to that felt sense of deep tradition might best be expressed. Consequently, my own reading of the Odian commitment to the notion of deep tradition (a reading that has been discussed with fellow members of Eormensyl Hall to general agreement) is that it is the felt connection to a deep tradition which is of value. The content that makes up that tradition will vary widely from person to person and group to group; and will be as much a process of speculative reconstruction as of the identification of definitive historical praxis or belief. The Odian should not be concerned with promoting any particular understanding or interpretation of ‘deep tradition’, but rather with promoting the value of the sense of connectedness and felt authenticity.

The Odian approach to culture is to recognise it as the result of a confluence of inputs from different individuals separated both geographically and temporally (Flowers, 1996). It is one of the roles of the Odian to explore that cultural heritage in order to seek the hidden principles that underpin it and which can be used in order to create what would be regarded from an Odian perspective as a functional organic community (*ibid*). This apparent contradiction between liminality and a concern for the folk and their heritage is not a product of the contemporary constructions of Odianism. It is found within the source tradition, where we see Óðin engaging in all manner of morally questionable behaviour in order to promote the interests of the folk (Larrington, 1999; Sturluson, 1987). However, the view that Óðin’s ethically ambivalent behaviour should be emulated is a contemporary Odian interpretation.

In her recent paper Lord (2008) argues that folk religion offers the potential for greater understanding and integration of differing religious traditions by virtue of its relatively non-articulated nature in terms of dogma or eschatology. However, from the Odian

perspective folk religion represents a partially articulated intuitive connection to a culture's deep traditions. While the advocates of implicit religion (Lord, 2008) see it providing an opportunity for the merging of divergent traditions, the Odian sees the folk religious dimension of implicit religion as a means by which the very particular mythic structures and values of a particular cultural heritage may be reinvigorated. What is perhaps not always explicitly recognised by Odianism is that its project is inevitably one of speculative reconstruction rather than having a direct identity with actual pre-Christian beliefs and praxis. However, much like Wicca, it can still stimulate an interest and research into what is known about pre-Christian society.

5. The Role of Traditionalism

The role of Tradition is crucial in the construction of any Occult paradigm of reality and this is especially foregrounded within the Northern Tradition:

Understanding the true essence of the Elder Gild is necessary to the rebirth of the Newer Gild today (Thorsson, 1994, p.3).

While many New Age practices offer a free-form approach to esoteric exploration, their apparently radical freedom may potentially present an obstacle to the construction of any clear understanding.

Odianism does not claim that the Northern Tradition is necessarily the correct tradition for all humans, but that the following of any sufficiently established Tradition will be of value in the process of Self-becoming. Thus it is the concept of Tradition *qua* Tradition rather than the specific content of any particular tradition that is of most value. One key function of Tradition is simply that in providing a well-established structure the individual is less likely to fall into the traps that hinder magical progress such as the over-valuing of personal gnosis.

Óðin is fundamentally curious and seeks answers to the Mystery of life anywhere and everywhere that might provide some insight. Consequently and paradoxically, it is Traditional in the Odian sense to seek new insights from systems outside the Northern Tradition. Exploring beyond that which is familiar lies at the heart of the Northern Tradition, as is amply demonstrated by Óðin in his own actions (Sturluson, 1987).

5.1 The Northern Tradition:

The works of the Rune Gild presume a connection to an on-going Tradition albeit one that has been interrupted many times over the centuries (Thorsson, 2003). It must be acknowledged that this connection is, like many other contemporary Mystery Traditions and paganism, based on a felt sense of connectedness that is informed by a combination of speculative reconstruction, previous revival attempts and interpretative readings of such source material as is currently available. Nonetheless, I would argue that like related traditions such as Wicca, the conscious attempt at a reconnection with the past potentially enables the construction of a world view that is not formed by the prevailing social conditions or cultural hegemony.

In his introduction to the third edition of *The Nine Doors of Midgard* (2003), Thorsson refers to the exercises contained therein as offering a, ‘universal paradigm’ that can be used to good effect outside the Germanic Tradition (p. Xi). This is potentially problematic in the context of the overall tone of the Gild’s publications in that it appears to undermine the importance of cultural specificity. The potentially universal nature of at least some of the exercises and methodologies within the Nine Doors programme raises the question over the extent to which we can legitimately regard Odianism as the continuation of a tradition.

The Odian should not hold their values simply because they are found in the sagas or archaeological extrapolations as this would be at odds with the example set by Óðin. Rather the Odian selects Óðin as an exemplar because what is known about that figure appears to conform to the set of values and beliefs held to be important by Odians. This would suggest that ultimately Odianism is not necessarily traditional in terms of its content, but that there is symbolic value to the Odian in laying claim to Tradition.

The nature of Óðin himself is problematic in terms of Traditionalist claims for Odianism. Flowers (2009) claims that a connection between Óðin and the runes is evidenced in early Germanic societies and that a broad equivalence exists between the figures of Odin, Woden and Wotan and the existence of other key deities from at least the early Bronze Age (Thorsson, 1996). In addition, strong links between Vedic texts and Tantric

processes and the Germanic Tradition are claimed by Flowers (Flowers, 1996, pp16-17; 1997, pp22-25). However, while there may be a family resemblance between these figures and activities we cannot demonstrate any identity between Odin, Woden and Wotan or indeed between Tantric practices and the magical practices of pre-Chirstian Europeans. Moreover, the anti-Universalism of Radical Traditionalism would imply a commitment to retaining and honouring those distinctions rather than reducing them in any way.

In constructing a model of a Northern Tradition the Odian faces the difficulty of effectively separating centuries of Christian culture and Ethics from Traditional European culture and its implied Ethics. This necessity and the difficulties that it brings is recognised by many writers with varying degrees of sympathy to the project of de-Christianisation (Benoist, 2005; Flowers, 2002; Ludendorff, 1977; Poewe, 1999, 2005).

In many ways the problem of Tradition relates to the classic philosophical paradox of divinity and morality: Is that which is Good thus because it has certain qualities of goodness or is the Good thus because God deems it be so. Our question is whether that which is Traditional is valuable because it concurs with an Odian view or is the Odian view valuable because it can be shown to concur with Tradition and secondarily if the latter were to be subject to change would Odian positions change to retain that identification? It could perhaps be argued that the shaping of the world from the dismembered body of Ymir (the first entity in the Northern cosmogony) represents a Tradition in which the new is constructed from that which precedes it (Flowers, 1997) and that this is the Tradition in which Odianism places itself.

5.2 The Perennial Tradition:

There is an on-going relationship between individuals involved in Odianism and contemporary Traditionalism. Tyr is an occasional publication that promotes Radical Traditionalism, is edited by members of the Rune Gild and contains contributions from significant Odian figures and contemporary traditionalist thinkers such as Benoist (2004), Flowers (2002), Godwin (2002), Moynihan (2004), O'Meara (2007) and Read (2007). The alignment between the so-called Radical Traditionalist movement and Odianism can be seen in values expressed by Tyr:

1. Resacralization of the world versus materialism.
2. Folk/traditional culture versus mass culture.
3. Natural social order versus an artificial hierarchy based on wealth.
4. The tribal community versus the nation-state.
5. Stewardship of the earth versus the “maximization of resources”.
6. A harmonious relationship between men and women versus the “war between the sexes”.
7. Handicrafts and artisanship versus industrial mass-production. (Buckley, Cleary & Moynihan, 2002)

The re-sacralisation argued for by Traditionalism is not akin to the increasing provision of so-called sacred spaces in public institutions despite arguments that this facilitates a more informal and direct approach to the sacred (Gilliat-Ray, 2005). It could in fact be argued that the demarcation of certain public spaces as available for sacral activities is at odds with the Traditionalist perspective whereby there is no distinction between the sacred and the profane since the sacred is at the heart of lived existence.

The notion of Traditionalism in relation to Odianism is problematic in that the Traditionalist or Perennialist movement is a modern phenomenon (Evola, 1995a, 2002; Guenon, 2001; Schuon, 1996; Sedgwick, 2004; Versluis, 2002). Inevitably, the Odian can only hope to reconstruct what they believe to be a fair reflection of Traditional culture. It may be better to simply recognise that Traditionalism is, ironically, a movement that can only exist within a modern context since it is predicated on a yearning for that which is past. At the same time as being inescapably modern it is vehemently anti-modernist, for instance in its rebuttal of the myth of progress (Evola, 1995a; Flowers, 2002; Sedgwick, 2004).

Another fundamental problem arises when we consider the basis on which Tradition is valued. If we value Tradition simply because of its age then at what point do we stop reaching further and further back in time. If we value tradition because its values accord with our own, then we are only Traditionalist in the most contingent of senses, in that a new discovery about the nature of our chosen Tradition may reveal values at odds with our own leading to a rejection of the Tradition. There is also the problem of

simplification by distance: It may seem that one can talk of a homogenous Northern Tradition within a given historical period, but the more closely any social setting is examined the more we discover conflicts and complexity. Flowers (2007) divides the concept of Tradition into two separate elements: ‘Arfr’ which indicates content, artefact or data and ‘Siðr’ which indicates a mode of doing. Both these elements are seen as necessary to the life of Tradition, but it is the mode of doing (Siðr) that connects to Tradition and produces content (Arfr) which can then be said to be ‘Traditional’(ibid, p.147). When Tradition is understood as being dependent on Siðr it becomes possible to regard Traditionalism as a methodological approach and not an attempt to replicate anachronistic content. In practical terms we can see this in the approach taken to divination within Odianism, where divinatory meanings relevant to the contemporary world are extracted from the established meanings and associations of the rune staves (Thorsson, 2003, pp.80-82).

Critics of Traditionalism can point to the amorphous nature of the inheritance on which Odianism seeks to draw, is it an Indo-European heritage, a Pan-Germanic heritage, a Mithraic heritage or some convenient melange of these? However, this is to miss the function of the Traditionalist approach. At the heart of the Odian Traditionalist paradigm is an acceptance of both the numinosity of Mystery and the imperfection of any attempt to grasp at a fully completed map or route of how to locate its totality. Flowers (2007) makes the point that traditional occultism involves self-transformation and this negates any sense of Tradition as representing certainties and stasis (p.57).

5.3 Hierarchy and Tradition:

Dumézil in *Gods of the Ancient Norseman* (1973) argues that the ‘Rigsthula’ [Rig’s Tale] (Larrington, 1999, pp.246-253) demonstrates a tripartite understanding of social order at work. The God Rig sets about bringing into being the three classes of human: Thrall (Serf class), Karl (productive artisan class), and Jarl (warrior/ leader class with access to the runes). Although later critics have attacked the tripartite theory there are remain many supporters of the inherently tripartite nature of Indo-European culture (Allen, 1987; Lyle, 2004; Miller, 2000). At an appropriate level of granularity almost any attempt to systematise social relations will break down under the evidence of observed complexity. The fact that the actuality of any social organisation does not precisely map onto a

tripartite structure does not affect the validity of the model as an ideal or aspiration (Thorsson, 2003, p.109).

As a magical path Odianism is focused on the symbolic significance of structures and patterns; it is not necessary to archaeologically demonstrate that our ancestors lived according to a strict tripartite division. Thorsson notes that the hierarchical nature of Dumézil's tripartite structure could be misinterpreted as indicating a hierarchy of relative value (2005, p.31), but that since all functions are equally needed there is no inherent devaluation of the thrall class. In Old Norse the concept of holiness was represented by the term 'heill', which also means 'whole' or 'complete' (Thorsson, 1984, p.78). Thus the Northern Tradition linguistically associates the holy with a state of completeness rather than a reified separation from the normative life of the individual. This sense of completeness extends to the need to include the whole of society and no group is excluded from its mythic structure and so any stratification, tripartite or otherwise, should not be understood as a rank ordering, by group, of value to the social order.

The hierarchical values of Odianism extend to its approach to knowledge, but there is again no moral component in this stratification. The individual who knows the world entirely through the non-reflective triad of sense data and Troth does not represent a less valuable level of epistemological engagement, but only a different level of exposure to the totality of possible ways of knowing. In fact the presence of those who remain troth-ful rather than doubt-ful is regarded as of great importance within the context of Odianism's broadly Traditionalist values.

This thesis is focused on contemporary Odianism and this leaves the question of how a traditional social structure can be re-interpreted for the twenty first century. One immediate problem is that Odians function as a micro-society within a macro-society and so there are no constraints or requirements in the lived experience of any individual that would prevent them from assuming the role of Jarl whether or not they have the qualities to merit such a claim. Anyone seeking to be an Odian must regard themselves as belonging, at least potentially, to the Jarl class:

Only the true sovereign leader is in the position of living constantly in a position of conscious action (Travers, 2009).

Consequently, the act of committing to Odianism places both an obligation and provides a sense of entitlement to the individual. Unlike the radical individualism of strictly Left Hand path groups such as The Temple of Set, an Odian is laying claim not only to the pursuit of Rûna, but also to the role of leadership and teaching. Moreover, like Óðin s/he occupies a liminal position in relation both to the mores of contemporary society and the law of his/her ancestors. This liminality is not a new aspect as in the source literature Óðin is, 'both the lord of light and the prince of darkness' (Flowers, 1997, p.44). When Óðin murders or beguiles or breaks oaths it is ultimately for the good of the folk. Thus the Odian is in the unenviable position of having no absolute ethical boundaries, but with an obligation to ensure that where those boundaries are breached it is for the benefit of his folk or in pursuit of greater wisdom and understanding (Thorsson, 1996). There may be situations, in theory, where the pursuit of greater wisdom conflicts with the Odian's loyalty to the folk. In such circumstances the individual Odian would need to resolve the course of action s/he should take. In practice, from an Odian perspective, any growth in the Odian's wisdom will lead to a greater understanding of how best to work in ways that will benefit the wider folk.

Odianism suggests that the act of Self-becoming leads to a state where life is 'play' (Thorsson, 1994). This may seem to stand in a problematic relationship to the notion of Traditionalism since it suggests a transience of value for all concepts and states of being including the concepts learned from Tradition. However, it could be argued that such a state of being is itself proposed by Tradition and the example set by Óðin.

5.4 The Social Role of Tradition:

Odianism regards itself as distinct due to its emphasis on the reclamation of a narrowly specific tradition as opposed to the broad range of esoteric cultures that make up the Western Mystery Tradition (Eliade, 1988). However, the extent to which Odianism can evidence this claim of specificity and historical accuracy is open to significant challenge as indeed is the Odian conceptualisation of Tradition.

The commitment in Odianism to the importance of the world as experienced leads to an acceptance of the world as it is, a quasi-Nietzschean 'Amor Fati'. We take upon ourselves the responsibility for our own destinies and must also commit ourselves to seeking out

the bare truth. The rejection of salvation carries with it the recognition that pain and struggle are necessary elements of the Good Life for their own sake and the lessons they bring rather than in the hope of some future good fortune. However, this individual responsibility does not imply total individual freedom. Instead, the individual who takes on this role carries a responsibility for those of his/ her folk who have not made this commitment.

Poewe (1999) associates this notion of folk responsibility with fascism and the writings of Mathilde Ludendorff. However, it is not a late addition to the Northern Tradition, but is implicit in both the sagas (Scudder, 2004, 2005) and the sayings of Óðin. The ‘Hávamál’ (Larrington, 1999, pp.14-38), as Flowers notes, demonstrates that ‘the virtue of loyalty to the group and solidarity with it was paramount in ancient Germanic culture’ (Flowers, 2006, p.25). The concept of Troth is complicated in the context of Odianism since the individual must balance an absolute commitment to the freedom of consciousness to seek Rûna with an equal commitment to seeking the good of the Folk. The example of Óðin indicates that this may result in a variety of seemingly unethical activities and places the liminal nature of the magician in the foreground. The absolute freedom that is claimed by the magician is just one element of the liminality of magic and cannot be dismissed as a simple claim to privilege. Liminality is essential to the efficacy of magic and so the magician must be free of the bounds of ordinary folk structures in order to work his/her magic for the benefit of the folk.

There is no moral component implied by the division of society into a stratified order. The ethics of Odianism stem from a perception of innate patterning within the Universe. The Priest or Goði has no innately higher moral value or standing than the Karl, it is simply his/her nature to be such. The injunction within Odianism is not to strive towards a single mark of attainment, but to strive towards Self-becoming.

5.5 Meta-Genetics and the Biological Inheritance:

According to Thorsson, knowledge of the runes is to some extent carried meta-genetically in our collective unconscious (Thorsson, 1984, p.xiv; 1987). The concept of ‘meta-genetics’ is a controversial one (Plowright, 2006) and is not shared by all those who have an esoteric interest in the runes. Meta-genetic theory (Gardell, 2003, pp.269-283;

Thorsson, 1994a, 2003) proposes the existence of an innate connection to culturally specific mysteries that is possessed only by members of that culture group. This innate connection is not carried biologically, but in the collective unconsciousness of the group. Meta-genetic theory is not necessarily reliant on a shared ethnicity but on a long established set of shared values and beliefs that are sufficiently powerful to exist as a kind of matrix of values and beliefs that exists within a collective field of consciousness. Each member of the culture-group has a potential ability to bring this latent shared consciousness to full awareness. The Odian approach is not shared by all proponents of practical Runology, particularly in relation to concepts such as meta-genetics.

The commitment to meta-genetics reflects the desire to promote a resurgence of Northern European pre-Christian cultural values and traditions. While many would argue that Christianisation, industrialisation and the waves of mass immigration experienced in recent decades renders such a task virtually impossible, Thorsson counters with the fact that there remains a ‘continuously identifiable ethnic unit’, that ‘we hold to many of the old ethical traditions’ and that our language remains directly derived from that of our ancestors (Thorsson, 1994, II, p.11). Tradition is important to the Odian partly because, ‘once you understand how a people view the world you have gone a long way toward understanding the very soul of the people’ (Thorsson, 1994, II, p.15). However, there is a problem inherent in any attempt at reconstructions of previous cultural experiences in that the contemporary practitioner is operating in a liminal position relative to the culture s/he inhabits and the cultural expressions will be inevitably partial and artistic constructs rather than organic expressions of folk values.

We can see the significance of the meta-genetic inheritance in the Odian view of innovation. In *Green Rûna* (1996) Thorsson argues for the validity of the Younger Futhark as an effective tool for use in rune magic. Thorsson’s argument is that since the Younger Futhark developed ‘organically’ (*ibid*, p.7) it can be seen as an authentic continuation of the Tradition. There are some immediate problems with this claim: If the Elder Futhark represents a timeless hoard of esoteric lore graphically represented then we would not expect any of its mysteries to be subject to change. However, the Younger Futhark misses out eight of the staves from the Elder. Consequently, we might legitimately wonder what has happened to the mystery represented by Wunjo which is in

the Elder Futhark but not the Younger Futhark. Do we take the view that the mysteries of harmonious balance, Frith and plenty (The mysteries of Wunjo) are no longer valid, or that the creators of the Younger Futhark were unaware of them, or that the mutual validity of both rows indicates a fundamental flaw in any attempt to adopt both an Odian and a Traditionalist philosophical perspective?

One response to these questions is to recognize that at the heart of the Odian approach is the recognition of the ultimately unknowable nature of Rûna. Consequently, any rune row will by definition only ever be partial reflecting both that which has been experienced by the Rune Masters of that time and that which has been inherited from those who went before. The development of the Younger Futhark reflected a combination of magical experience, received tradition and a response to the state of affairs in Midgard at the time of its construction. No individual or group can ever fully internalise the totality of Mystery (Rûna), since to fully understand the Mystery of the Universe would place the individual above even the Gods. However, while it cannot be known in its totality, this does not mean that Mystery is infinite in the sense that anything and everything becomes part of Rûna. We uncover more about the nature of Mystery by working from what is believed to already be known about its nature.

6. Conclusions

Within the Occult Tradition the acquisition of magical abilities is understood as being bound up with the inner development of the occultist. The exclusive nature of occult practice has been discussed above. Occultism and Odianism in particular regard the possession of this exclusive ability as a confirmation of the magician's entitlement to engage in magical praxis. Having achieved a degree of mastery over the Mysteries it behoves the individual to give something to the realm of Midgard. There are two key points to note here: Firstly, that unlike the radical individualism of a Setian or Satanic approach the Odian retains an ethical obligation to others and to the manifest world. Secondly, in direct contrast to the mysticism of the Right Hand Path in which the redemption of the Self requires no contribution to the world or direct engagement with it, the Odian virtues require that some kind of material consequence results from the Work. Moreover, while the mystic derives their moral or ethical imperatives from an

externalised wholly transcendent deity, the Odian derives the specific imperatives that drive their behaviour from their own experience in exploring the runic mysteries. The creation of the magical self requires a focus on the ethical principles by which the Odian intends to live. There is no specific set of ethical positions that must be adopted, except that they must arise authentically from the pre-existent Self-complex and represent the most powerful development of that which already exists in the individual.

Odianism is anti-progressive, in that it does not subscribe to a mythic narrative of human history in which each new generation's discoveries, claims and values represent an improvement and a movement towards a 'better world'. In keeping with other Traditionalist positions, Odianism proposes an alternative narrative in which changes in human social structures or intellectual commitments to do not alter the fundamental purpose of humanity or the nature of reality which by its nature transcends the merely human perspective. Increasing secularisation, over simplification of the limits of the Real and the unrelenting dominance of merely economic concerns are regarded within an Odian context as evidence of decline rather than progress.

In many contemporary groups that can be located within the Western Mystery Tradition, such as those magical orders inspired by the Golden Dawn, the practitioner attempts to 'climb the Tree of Life' from Malkuth (Physical realm) to Kether (The Crown or the Divine). The implied ethical obligation is to seek to transform the self through a form of henosis; the practitioner gradually approaches an understanding of or even a union with 'The One'. However, the Odian regards Midgard (Physical realm) as the place from which s/he explores the Universe with the aim of glimpsing the nature of Rûna (Mystery) in order to fully self-become. While the metaphorical location of the exploration may differ, the aim of the Odian is not necessarily in conflict with the broad aims of many manifestations of the Western Mystery Tradition:

The Odian challenge is . . . to step up into the stead of the gods and win for yourself the highest knowledge (Thorsson, 1994, III, p.14).

Odian ethical values do not operate around a duality of Good versus Evil, but of Consciousness versus Unconsciousness (Thorsson, 1994, IV, p.3). Consciousness is the gift of Óðin and since the Universe as manifested is a construction of consciousness

through Óðin's own magical processes. Consequently, the Odian regards consciousness as the highest Good and unconsciousness as something to be opposed. The Odian individual strives to achieve a state of being in which his or her consciousness is able to act freely rather than in accordance with a presumed external and higher intentionality.

Since Óðin himself begins his existence in a state of ignorance and must obtain knowledge and wisdom through intellectual and magical exploration (Thorsson, 1994 VI p.2), there is no sense within Odianism of an absolute morality. An understanding of the Universe relies upon exploration and experiment as well as by attending to the wisdom that can be gained through magical means. The Truth in its absolute sense cannot be attained and so the Odian seeks Rûna or 'Mystery' in order to glimpse something of, but never the totality of Truth. This places any inherent or absolute values, patterns and ethical structures as products of the particular structure of the Universe and not the will of any particular deity. Consequently, any ethical framework, being built on the basis of inevitably partial glimpses of that innate structuring must always be contingent and subject to change. Moreover, Óðin is fundamentally a symbol of active consciousness, even his primary name derives from words relating to willed consciousness.

In typically paradoxical fashion the Odian must both seek Rûna, but must also always be willing to make willed choices, to use Óðin's gift of consciousness in an active manner. While the precise patterns of the latent fundamental structure of reality are necessarily hidden within the veils of Rûna, the Northern Tradition does commit to a tension between the forces of consciousness and the entropic forces of non-consciousness (Thorsson, 1994, VI p.2). Even if it were possible to reveal all the inherent structures of reality the Odian would still be obliged to create their own ethical structures. Since the inherent structure of the Ur-reality is unconscious, without the intervention of consciousness there would be no form or pattern to prevent an entropic falling back into the void of Ginnungagap (the content-less space which precedes the manifest Universe in the Northern Tradition). The Odian seeks to access hidden truths in order to understand the deep structures of the Universe and then deploy the knowledge of those deep structures to consciously develop his or her Self-complex as a creative and active shaping force in the Universe.

8. Odian Self-Development

‘Nine mighty magical powers I learnt from the famous son
of Bolthor, Father of Bestla,
and I won a drink of the holy mead,
poured out from Oðroerir’ (Hávamál st.140 – my own translation)

1. What is Odian Self Development?

Self-development, properly understood as Self-becoming, is fundamental to work within the Rune Gild and to Odianism:

Every guild works in some *substance* or another . . . In the Rune-Gild
the complex essence in which we work is the Self, the ultimate
product of our work is the Erulian (Thorsson, 2003, p.22).

The term ‘Erulian’ is used within the Rune Gild to refer to an individual who has achieved a high level of mastery in terms of understanding and working with the Northern Mysteries. It is, in the broadest sense, analogous to the term ‘Adept’ within ceremonial magical orders in the Western Mystery Tradition.

The development of the Self-complex is recognised within the Rune-Gild through a Craft-Gild inspired hierarchy. One moves from being an Associate to acceptance as an Apprentice within the Gild, subsequently one is recognised as a Fellow and at that point becomes a member proper. The Fellow must then work towards Mastery of the intellectual, practical and magical aspects of rune work. There are other titles within the Gild that may be achieved, but these relate to obligations of office and recognition of authority within the Gild and are not directly linked to the development of the Self-complex and are not necessary to the individual’s progress in Self-becoming. The *Gildisbók* (1994, V, pp.3-6) describes the requirements of each grade, both in terms of internal development and the obligations to the Gild associated with holding a given title. The association of external recognition and testing with the engagement of an individual in a search for Mystery is difficult to justify even when the number of grades has been reduced to three. That said, the recognition of a distinction between a Master and a Fellow can definitively indicate whether an individual has completed a significant study of runic matters and the extent of their experience of magical work. However, it cannot

hope to indicate with any certainty the degree to which an individual has progressed along the path to Self-becoming.

The texts of the Rune Gild are peppered with references that might appear to support the association of Self-development with a movement towards passivity:

The more one *is*, the less one seems to *do* (Flowers, 2007, p.145).

However, the key term here is ‘seems’ and this needs to be understood in the context of the Odian injunction often used in discussion within the Gild to ‘be more than you seem’ and to ‘be more than just seeming’ (‘mehr sein als scheinen’). This leads to an interesting distinction which rests on the idea of agency within the Odian Tradition. According to Odianism an increasing connectedness to transpersonal wisdom does not diminish one’s agency. Instead Odianism proposes the emergence of an individual whose personal agency is greatly increased in direct proportion to their ability to maintain a fully conscious state of being:

. . . moving from inspiration (Óðr) to objective thought (Hugr) to awakening of inner forms (Minni) and . . . by doing this we *become who we are* (Flowers, 2007, p.147).

Odian Self-becoming is distinctive in that it aims towards the full awakening and potential persistence after death of individual consciousness rather than the achievement of union with, or absorption by a hypothesised Godhead. It is the full awakening and potential persistence of an individuated consciousness that constitutes Self-Deification. The notion of Self-deification needs to be considered in the context of an ontological model which does not regard immortality, omniscience or omnipotence as necessary aspects of deity. Consequently, the persistence of consciousness for an Odian does not necessarily mean persistence in perpetuity. Deities can only be conceptualised by humans as a complex of ideas and feelings. As the relationship to the complex of ideas represented by a given deity changes over time the nature of the deity as conceptualised will also change. Potentially, the changing nature of the deity may reach a point where the coherence and thus the existence of the deity can no longer be maintained. List, a key figure in modern Germanic esotericism, argued that there is no undifferentiated cosmos with which an individual might unite and so any inner development would by definition be a development of the individual as an agent (List, 1988). An interesting question that

could only be answered by experience is whether the development an individual consciousness over a very long time could lead to such significant changes in the Self-complex that, like the example above of a deity ceasing to exist, the surviving Self-complex can no longer be sensibly regarded as the same individual consciousness as that which began the journey. This leads to a perennial problem, to which Odianism does not yet have an answer, of how we determine the fundamental core of the individual and the point at which significant changes implies the emergence of a new individual rather than the development of an individual.

The path towards Odian Self-becoming is a solitary one (Travers, 2009) and ‘no “grace” is forthcoming from Óðin’ (Thorsson, 1987). However Óðin does provide ‘an exemplary model for the expression, development and transformation of human consciousness’ (Thorsson, 1987, p.190). This individualist approach to Self-becoming can be seen as continuing a theme within the Northern Tradition:

The exalted introspective awareness [Innerlichkeitsgefuehl] . . .was their consciousness of their own godliness, for “internity” is just “being-with-one’s-self,” and to be with one’s Self is to be with God (List, 1988, p.52).

In all of this individualism it is important to note that one of the key goals of the Odian is the sharing of results and insights with fellow Odians (Thorsson, 2003 p.2).

Odianism recognises the pragmatic possibilities of magical functionality and there are many exercises within the key texts of the Rune Gild that detail magical workings designed to bring about changes in the immediate environment of the individual (Thorsson, 1987, 1994, 2003; Rune Gild, 1992). The notion of magical Self-becoming can only be fully understood by entering, at least temporarily, into the framework of reality in which the power of magical work is accepted. In such a framework while cognitive processes or physical actions may effect certain changes, it is the mysterious and all-encompassing nature of magical effects that allows transformation to occur at a genuinely holistic level. This does not mean that Odianism denies the possibility of Self-becoming to those systems that do not incorporate magical praxis, but that the structure of Odian methodologies for Self-becoming are such that the Odian does need to develop a skill in magical praxis. A fundamental aspect of polytheism and anti-universalism is a

recognition that ‘my way’ is not necessarily the only way; there are many possible forms of Self-becoming both in terms of the path taken and destination to which the chosen path leads. This acceptance of other systems does not mean that any approach must be treated as necessarily valid.

The interpretation placed upon first person declarative rune carvings such as, ‘I the Rune-Master’ or ‘I the Raven’ and so forth by the Rune Gild (Flowers, 2009; Thorsson, 1996) has been to emphasize the nature of self-development within the Northern Tradition as being a process of self-enlargement rather than one of self-abnegation or a movement towards the absorption of the Self by some extra-human presence. Since the ultimate aim of the Odian is Self-becoming magic for other purposes is regarded as subsidiary:

“Sorcery” is a beginner’s exercise. Those who have talent in that area will discover this early on and use it in a progressively wiser fashion under the guidance of self-development (Flowers, 2007, p.141).

However, it should be noted that Self-development can never be a wholly internal process within Odianism. In my own experience, I have found that engaging in external magical work has also been helpful in developing the general skills that are used in all forms of magic. Moreover, the question of whether a material matter warrants the use of magic helps to focus the mind as to what events in the material world have genuine importance. The Rune Gild’s texts are clear that a necessary aspect of Self-becoming is the desire to work *in* the world and the ability to make changes in Midgard (Thorsson, 1994). The changes made in the world need not be overtly magical in themselves. However, the determination of which changes to strive towards should be informed by the development, through magical work, of the individual’s understanding. Over time and at a certain level of development of the Self-complex it is possible to do away with much of the ritual associated with magical workings and project the will more or less directly onto both the subjective and objective world (Thorsson, 2003, p.77).

Many contemporary magical orders that are influenced by the Golden Dawn and other fin de siècle magical groups set great store by the importance of initiation in an individual’s magical development (Barcynski, 2001; Cicero & Cicero, 2003; Regardie, 1994). There are various theories that emphasize the importance of a physical transfer of magical potential from the adept to the initiate following carefully guarded lineages. By contrast

the Odian approach does not involve any ritualised process of initiation by a third party but does share the commitment found in all Mystery Traditions to self-transformation. Within Odianism self-transformation can never be catalysed by a third party:

Neither the Gild nor any Rune-Master has the power to convey to you – all Odian power must be born from within the self (Thorsson, 2003, p.5).

2. Traditional Sources of the Odian Model of Self-Development

The nature and aim of the quest for Self-becoming within the Odian Tradition is amply described in the Eddaic sources and specifically within the ‘Hávamál’ stanzas 138-149 which details Óðin’s experience hanging on Yggdrasil (Larrington, 1999, pp.14-38). The goals of the Odian are the same as those of Óðin as expressed in the source materials: Knowledge, power, pleasure, understanding of Mystery, Self-becoming and persistence of Self (Thorsson, 1994, VI, p.4). These goals are clearly very different to those expressed by many forms of mysticism and seem quite Faustian (a relationship which deserves further research) on first reading. It should be noted though that, for instance, the power that the Odian seeks is not power to be wielded over others, but the power to live consciously and freely (Thorsson, 1994, VII, P.3). The relative nobility or virtue of these goals is entirely contingent on the a-priori moral framework that one applies. It could be argued that a magical system which seeks only to open up the practitioner to the will of a Divine figure is fundamentally non-magical: The agency involved in any seemingly magical act rests not with the practitioner, but with the divinity for whom the practitioner acts as a mere container or instrument. Once the individual functions as an expression of divine will rather than Self-will, it would seem reasonable to regard the process that leads to such a state of affairs as one of Self-destruction rather than Self-becoming.

The World Tree, Yggdrasil, serves as a model of self-development from traditional source materials. The various symbolic elements of Yggdrasil are described in Chapter Five above. In the Yggdrasil model the primal power and desire represented by the coiled serpent Niðhoggr is essential to the development of the power of consciousness represented by the Eagle that perches at the top of the tree. Ratotöskr the squirrel carries messages of disagreement between the serpent and the eagle. It is the circulating tension

between the instinctual and the reflective consciousness, enabled by Ratötöskr, which causes the serpent to rise up in anger and unite with the eagle. This process is observed by the Hawk, 'Veðfölnir', who is perched between the eyes of the eagle, indicating the observing and analytical aspect of the Self-complex.

The role played by Niðhoggr attests to the value, in the Northern Tradition, of the most primal aspect of consciousness. The rousing of Niðhoggr can be usefully compared to the raising of Kundalini energy. Kundalini energy is found in Hindu philosophy and praxis and describes a latent, primal, unconscious power that is often imaged as a coiled serpent (Irving & Krishna, 1995; Pandit, 1993; Peters, 1987). Kundalini, like Niðhoggr, represents an energy that is both visceral and trans-physical in nature and effect. To be used magically, this primal serpentine energy must operate in partnership with the conscious Will (the Eagle).

The harmonious balancing, symbolised by the Yggdrasil model, of ecstasy/frenzy and control as a means to effective Self-becoming, mirrors the relationship between Tyr and Óðin as understood within the Rune Gild. Óðin represents the ecstatic active function of the Magician, War-Chief or Poet, that which initiates and innovates. Tyr represents the Kingly or Priestly function, that which conserves and controls. Without the order of Tyr, Óðinic actions would lead to chaos, while without Óðin the universe of Tyr would be stagnant. The Eddaic tale of Óðin's winning of the mead (Sturluson, 1987, pp.62-63) describes how the functions of the Serpent and the Eagle combine within a single individual. The balance implied by this traditional allegory of Self-becoming is one that retains both 'high' and 'low', the 'chthonic and the heavenly' (Travers, 2009). We can find evidence in the primary sources to support the importance of an active use of magical powers. The 'Sigdrifumal' (Larrington, 199, pp.166-173) details the teaching of rune charms to Sigurd (Thorsson, 1987), while the 'Grogaldr' (Sveinsson, 1971) tells the story of Groa the seeress who sings a number of rune charms in order to protect her son.

Thorsson (1987) identifies three key elements in Óðin's process of Self-becoming: The Yggdrasil working, the sacrifice of his eye to Mimir's well, and the winning of the mead. These need to be thoroughly analysed to understand how an Odian should approach the process of Self-becoming. The mead consists of three elements: Óðrœrir, which implies

the rousing of inspiration; Són, which can be translated as ‘blood’ and Boðn which references a container or vessel. Specifically, this complex image suggests that the ecstatic inspiration represented by the Mead requires not only the raising of our Woð, but also the presence of a felt meta-genetic connection to the source of the inspiration. The importance of the container reference is that it reminds us of the necessity of the physical manifestation of Self.

The importance of the physical Self and the manifest world is a common theme in the Northern Tradition (Flowers, 2009; Goodrick-Clarke, 1992; Larrington, 1999; List, 1988; Thorsson, 1984, p.82; 1987; 1996). Thorsson details the application of ‘Staðagaldr’, the use of the body to form rune shapes, as a means of further internalising the runes and developing the physical and mental control necessary for effective magical praxis (1984, pp.124-8). Thorsson stresses that the aim is not that of the ascetic who seeks to punish and deny the body, but to develop the most effective understanding of the body as the lík aspect of the Self-complex. The Odian model aims at a holistic recognition and re-possession of the totality of the Self-complex through one’s own efforts (Thorsson, 2003, p.23).

The Odian model of Self-development is a heroic one in which ‘the Word of another is an affront to the Self’ (Flowers, 2007, p.96). In this context a ‘Word’ represents a particular injunction regarding the approach to magical work or a phrase summarising a specific magical system (Flowers, 2007). On the face of it this appears to argue for the antinomian approach of materialistic Satanism. However, while the Odian model regards the construction of one’s own ‘system’ as a significant goal, this achievement must be achieved through ‘total dedication’ (Thorsson, 2003, p.xii) within the framework of Tradition. It is important to remember that Tradition provides a guide to how an individual should set about Self-becoming, but the experiences and growing understanding is particular to each individual. The argument against the words of others is not an argument against scholarship or reliance on Tradition for guidance, but an argument against the acceptance of another’s words as a means of obviating the need for the individual to engage in their own process of Self-becoming.

The Odian, in this dedicated commitment to the Work is seeking to emulate the Traditional example of Óðin who wins the Runes (Mysteries) through a rite of self-hanging culminating in a state of inspired frenzy (Larrington, 1999, p.34 [st. 138-139]). The importance of this quasi-shamanic ordeal is such that the related verses form part of the daily ritual practice of the Odian (Thorsson, 2003, p.9). We must also bear in mind that the ‘Tradition’, so described within Odianism, is primarily a contemporary reconstruction from a mixture of primary and entirely modern sources.

It is not just Óðin’s ecstatic approach that must be emulated. The Odian must also follow Óðin’s insatiable curiosity and concern with Truth, Wisdom and Power in all aspects of his/her life:

Remember your Gild-Work is manifold – it is intellectual, it is numinous, it is emotional, it is physical (ibid, p.41).

The concept of Self-transformation may appear to contradict certain fundamentals of the Northern Tradition: The role of the Ørlög, the layers of influence and destiny that we both inherit and create over the course of our life; or that of the Hamingja, our innate strength of fortune or luck. However, while the Odian may experience truly transformative effects through his/ her magical praxis, these transformations are part of the process of Self-becoming. Odianism is particular in its use of the term ‘Self-becoming’ and in its attention to the need to sacrifice self to Self. This sacrifice requires that attention to the interests, desires and thoughts of the ‘Ek-Self’ (our day-to-day, less than fully conscious Self) is replaced by a total focus on the quest for Rûna (Mystery). It is only through this sacrifice that the Woð-Self (the inspired, ecstatic self) can be fully realised and Self-becoming emerges as a possibility. The sacrifice of self to Self can be summarised as the total devotion of the individual (self) to the manifestation of the holistic fully awakened individual (Self). Self-becoming as a goal within Odianism derives directly from the example of Óðin who is described as giving ‘self to Self’ (Larrington, 1994, p.34). This suggests that Odianism proposes a unified self rather than a model in which there are many competing selves. While it is committed to a single intentional self, Odianism recognises both the complexity of that Self-complex and that a unified self is only possible after significant internal work. It is the nature of the Ek-self (day-to-day self) to be splintered and conflicted, hence the need to sacrifice this self to

the Woð-Self (inspired self). On-going critical self-analysis combined with appropriate magical work is intended to stimulate a quasi-alchemical process of dissolution allowing the Self-complex to be reconstructed free from influences that may hinder its purpose.

3. Manifesting the Self-Complex

The Odian begins with the recognition that any connection to the extra-human or transpersonal requires and depends upon the work of the individual and not the descent of divine grace. As the Odian progresses the sense of personal responsibility grows and develops. Again we find the paradoxical nature of the Northern Tradition that is encapsulated in the rune Dagaz: The more the Universe is understood, the more it becomes a co-creation of the practitioner rather than as an external object to be understood; the more the individual consciousness develops beyond day to day concerns the more the responsibility for the lived experience of the Folk grows; the more the inherent patterns of the Universe are recognised the more the practitioner seeks to write new patterns with the power of an awakened consciousness.

Thorsson (1994, VI, p.3) proposes six stages to the development of the Self-complex that uses the Eddas and other sources as an inspiration for a contemporary modelling of Odian Self-becoming:

- Rebellion against established order (the slaying of Ymir)
- Re-ordering of one's environment (dismemberment and deployment of Ymir's corpse)
- Seeking the Mysteries (Óðin's quest for knowledge and occult wisdom)
- Giving self to Self (the Yggdrasil ordeal)
- Absorbing runic knowledge (Óðin 'taking up' the runes)
- Deploying runic knowledge (Óðin beginning to carve and stain the runes)

These six steps can be contrasted to the developmental steps described by transpersonal psychological approach of Wilber et al. Rather than a gradual turning away from the concept of self-hood and a developing passivity or inactivity (in terms of one's creative agency) what we find in Odian Self-development is a gradual strengthening and enlarging of the Self-complex and a developing focus on actively seeking to make conscious

changes in the world. Wisdom is not understood contemplatively as a state of passive understanding, but actively and instrumentally as a state of dynamic and shaping being.

In keeping with the importance attributed to three-ness within the Northern Tradition we can also consider the nine elements of the Self-complex as existing within three levels of Self-hood. Within each individual there is a bio-chemical self, a physical animal, the corporeality of Self-hood. Secondly, there is the Ek-Self, the psychological self, formed by both one's own choices and values and the socio-cultural environment. The Ek-Self is conscious but only partially. It is in the Woð-Self that full consciousness becomes possible and in keeping with the paradoxical nature of all things Odian, it is the element of the Self of which we are for the most part unaware. The physical self is all that is needed in order to exist, the psychological self allows us to question and reflect on the nature of that existence, but it is the Woð-Self that allows us to experience reality beyond the apparent boundaries of physical existence.

The Woð-Self is a combination of the Woð that is latent within the individual or which has been inherited and the Woð that the practitioner is able to create through working with the Mysteries (Thorsson, 1994, IX, p.21). This is not to suggest that all humans are born with the same potential Woð-Self either in type or in intensity, but that many of those who feel compelled to work within the Northern Tradition find that as they develop a sense of the Woð-Self, the process is as much an uncovering as it is an act of creation. As with all aspects of the Self-complex it is important not to allow the process of sub-categorisation to suggest that any aspect of the Self-complex can be treated as a discrete object rather than as a process element of a greater holistic process.

Honesty is crucial to Self-becoming within the Northern Tradition (Thorsson, 1987; Travers, 2009). One way in which the individual develops that honesty is through regular critical personal analysis. As a Learner within the Gild each person must create a simple analytical list detailing their Bright (positive) and Murk (negative) qualities (Thorsson, 2003, p.47). Inevitably this process will only be as valuable as the honesty brought to bear on the task by the individual and in keeping with the ethical framework of Odianism it is entirely the responsibility of each individual to maintain the discipline needed to both maintain such a list and analyse it through intellectual, emotional and runic frameworks.

It is the aim of the Odian to achieve a sovereignty of the consciousness. However, to assume the presence of this level of attainment before it has been achieved can be profoundly damaging. The primary example of Odian magical work on the Self is given in the Hávamál (Larrington, 1999, pp.14-38), which describes Óðin hanging on the world tree for nine days before he falls screaming or roaring into a new space in which he accesses the Mysteries. It is the internalisation of these mysteries that allows Óðin to work magic and to develop as a holistic being (Larrington, 1999; Thorsson, 1987). Fundamental to Óðin's winning of the runes is the experiential nature of his ordeal, Óðin does not learn the Mysteries through study or thought, but by plunging himself into a completely 'other' space as a result of an intense physically demanding ritual.

The Odian model of esoteric self-development differs from the ascetic approach expressed in some forms of mysticism such as the *Phylokalia* (Ware, 1979), the mitigated dualism of Sethianism or the Valentinian gnostic view (Kaler, 2007) in that the development of the Odian Self-complex is intrinsically linked with an active life in Midgard. The aim is not to free the Self-complex from the chains of matter, but rather to awaken the holistic Self-complex into a world of agency and instrumental causative power. In *Rûnarmál* (1996) Flowers describes Mastery as requiring three components; that one awakens, that one sees clearly and that one acts:

We are here to ACT, and in acting to elevate our BEING. Real knowledge leads to Action, and Action to evolution of Self (ibid, p.28).

The developed Self does not honour Óðin by reverencing the runic magic of the High One, but by developing that same power themselves and crucially deploying that power through their own magical acts. In the Northern Tradition the material that serves as the basis for magical operations such as Taufr work is not an inert object but a living entity, albeit of limited capacity, in its own right. Philosophically, this derives from the ontological position in which consciousness co-constructs reality and consequently the qualities of an object such as whether it is alive are partly dependent on the consciousness which encounters and engages with that object. It is a radically animistic position in that life and consciousness are not only extended throughout all existence but the totality of

life and consciousness within the Universe can be expanded by the actions of those already inhabiting the Universe. The recognition and respect for life is indicated by the requirement to honour and thank those natural sources from which the materials used in magical works are obtained (Thorsson, 1984, p.110).

In *Rûnarmál* Flowers argues that the Odian needs to, ‘awaken the rulership of the ginnregin (“magical gods/ advisors”) in Midgard’ (1996, p.17). On first reading this seems to be suggestive of the ‘Hidden Masters’ of theosophy or the ‘Secret Chiefs’ of the Order of The Golden Dawn and other late nineteenth century expressions of the Western Mystery Tradition (Küntz, 2005; Regardie, 1994). The term ‘rulership’ refers to the state of being in which the individual’s consciousness is ‘ruled’ by the inspired or Woð-Self aspect of the Self-complex: It is the culmination of the sacrifice of self to Self that is symbolically represented by the central image of Óðin hanging on the world-tree. In the Odian model the Self-complex strives towards a state of complete Self-actualisation. However, although Odianism locates the ‘ginnregin’ within the Self-complex, it also affirms the existence of transpersonal non-human entities such as land-wights and so forth. Consequently, we might argue that this ‘rulership’ may also be accessed through contact with transpersonal non-human entities in a manner almost identical to the way in which wisdom is revealed by ‘Hidden Masters’ and ‘Secret Chiefs’.

In Chapter Five above we considered the ontological status of Time within an Odian paradigm and noted that individuals experience only Verðandi (the present). The Odian concept of temporality is important to any understanding of its approach to Self-development. The act of Self-becoming implies within it a reaching back into the layers of Órlög (destiny) that have been established before one’s physical manifestation within Midgard and an integration of these elements into a consciously functional Self-complex (Flowers, 2007, p.148). An individual who has awakened the rulership of the Ginnregin (Holy forces) may be regarded as possessing the ability to reliably investigate Urðr (the past) with relation to their own actions and access the implied Wyrd (future experiences) that Urðr (the past) has seeded in Skuld (future). This would represent a form of divination, but one that is based on Self-knowledge and the uncovering of that which is hidden from view but nonetheless works in the lives of all individuals (Flowers, 1996, p.43).

Grambo (1975) proposes a semiotic theory of magic in which the frame of reference of the magician is central to the construction of any given magical communication. Flowers draws significantly on Grambo's work in the construction of his own semiotic model. It has elsewhere been noted that the aim of the Odian is both to self-become and to achieve a state of consciousness where life becomes 'a kind of play' (Thorsson, 1994). The closer one moves to a state of 'play' the less one is bound by constraints such as gender, socio-economic position and so forth. Since Grambo argues that these factors are obstacles to magical efficiency, the weaker these factors become in the life of the Self-complex, the weaker become any barriers to magical operations.

In approaching an Odian ontology it was noted that the ontological status of Óðin is both complex and contingent on the work of the individual. Óðin can be regarded as a complex that exists in potential within each person who, by virtue of their *Ørlög* (destiny), has a meta-genetic connection to that Óðin-complex. Consequently, the process of Self-development is one of awakening an inherent and partially dormant Óðinic Self rather than the construction of a wholly new identity (ibid, p.40). Since the development of the Self-complex is a process of Self-becoming, the development of magical ability and the experiences that come with it are often experienced with a sense of returning and familiarity in many ways rather than as a shocking revelation of otherness (Thorsson, 1984, p.98). The experience of 'coming home' that occurs for many who engage with Odianism, including myself, is shared by many other contemporary pagans (Harrington, 2004; Reid, 2009; Rountree, 2011; Vincett, 2009) and seems to arise from a felt-sense of having found one's personal authentic spiritual expression.

The Yggdrasil model discussed above presents a view of development that is rooted in friction as the driver for growth. However, between the Eagle's brows sits an un-named Hawk. The hawk does not participate in the circulation of friction and energy driven by the messages of Ratotöskr, instead the hawk sits silently observing. Ontologically, this represents a concept of Self that retains the principle of a unified observational self, while recognising the fluctuating nature of the self as experienced. It is important to note that the Hawk is essentially *of* the Eagle and represents a function of the sovereign Self rather than an alternative Self. This sovereignty emerges through consciousness, but can only

exist when carried within a body that is stimulated by the various forces represented by Niðhoggr. This argues against an abstract notion of Self and in favour of a radically embodied understanding of consciousness.

One key indicator of an individual's developing mastery of the Odian mysteries is, 'an absolute Need to teach' (Thorsson, 1994, V, p.4). Unlike the wholly individualist approach of Satanic Left Hand Path Traditions, the Odian retains a commitment and an obligation to the Folk that intensifies as his or her mastery of the mysteries develops. The achievement of insight and practical skill with the Mysteries cannot be hoarded since to do so would be to break with the message of the first rune-stave in the Elder Futhark (Fehu) (Flowers, 2002, p.15); the rune stanzas linked with Fehu talk of the need for all wealth (informational or physical) to be shared fairly.

4. The Role of Wyrd

The process of Self-becoming can be understood as a form of alchemy of the soul (Evola, 1995, 2001; Flowers, 1996 pp. 35-36; Travers, 2009). It is quasi-alchemical in the sense that the individual is working to reveal a state of being that is already innate within them since s/he is Self-becoming rather than transforming his/ herself into something wholly other. This necessity of a predisposition (arising from one's *Ørlög*) to act on the latent potential suggests that there are a finite number of possible Odians who may or may not go on to realise this potential (Flowers, 2007, p.35; Thorsson, 2003 p. xi). The need for some predisposition for this sort of work is indicated by the Gild's view of how one makes the transition from being an Associate of the Gild to becoming a Learner within the Gild:

The Associate Member works on his or her own until a certain something happens within them (Flowers, 2007, p.160).

Self-Becoming is an 'imperative' (Thorsson, 1994, p.1) since the Odian is called by their Wyrd and their inherited *Ørlög* (destiny). While the decision to act on this hard-wired impulse remains a matter of choice there is an ethical obligation to accept the responsibility that is implied by this calling. The goal of Self-Becoming rather than Self-Overcoming carries with it an implicit element of pre-destination and in this it follows the Listian model (List, 1988. p.55). Without some element of pre-destination, whether

inherited, divinely ordained or biologically seeded, it would be theoretically impossible for one to Self-become. In fact the notion of becoming would itself be moot, since in order to 'become' there must be something latent within the individual waiting to unfold. Moreover, 'Self-becoming' rather than simply 'becoming' implies that there is a particular process associated with each individual rather than a generic process of becoming without any particularity.

The role of fate is explored by Thorsson (1996) and he suggests that the perception of the Northern Tradition as 'fatalistic' is to misunderstand a process that recognises the uncertainty of the future and the importance of an individual's actions, along with other environmental factors, in determining future events. The future is not fixed in Odianism or in the Northern Tradition more generally, but is a probabilistic function that is resolved anew in each passing moment of *Verðandi* (the present). The argument against strict fatalism is also borne out by the interaction between *Ørlög* and *Wyrd*. In a sense we might understand the *Ørlög* as shaping the tools of Self with which we approach those events which our *Wyrd* brings into our lives. Similarly the concept of *Wyrd* refers to those key events and choices that we will face and should not be understood, in most cases, as indicating a necessary outcome. *Wyrd* points to the series of metaphorical cross-roads that our *Ørlög* has generated. Perhaps most important to an understanding of *Ørlög* is that the Odian is obliged to recognise their own responsibility for his/her *Ørlög* and for the *Ørlög* s/he hands on to descendants and the Folk.

To the extent that Fate does play a role in the Northern Tradition it stands outside the shaping force of temporality. Fate is never anthropomorphised as a God, cannot be entreated and has a nature which would not invite a pledging of troth. Fate is seen as generally a negative influence: If a Fate awaits us then no amount of manipulation of *Skuld* through the passing moments of *Verðandi* will remove that Fate. One of the heroic aspects of the Odian approach is the willingness to meet one's Fate head on rather than seeking to avoid its negative impact. Fate is sometimes represented as being determined by the Norns (Larrington, 1999, p.6), but these are never seen as divine figures and importantly they are never depicted in any determinate form.

Wyrd is often confused with Fate in some discussions of traditional temporality. However, while Fate is external to Man, Wyrd is central to and largely determined by Man. We can choose whether or not to meet our Wyrd, whereas we cannot avoid our fate. The Wyrd represents the combined result of our intentions, our actions and our initial potential as well as influences that extend beyond our own life. These extra-personal influences combine to form what is known as the *Ørlög*. The key concept behind *Ørlög* is that there are a number of antecedent elements of Wyrd, which inform the individual's Wyrd and fate. The actions of our ancestors, our wider family, tribe and clan as well as the Wyrd of our homeland all combine together to form the *Ørlög* with which we must work. Importantly, our own actions and our response to our Wyrd will lay down layers that will inform the *Ørlög* of our descendants (Thorsson, 1996, p.29).

In many forms of mysticism the desire to transcend the limitations of normative consciousness is associated with either a sense of being called by the Divine or an individual's intent of reaching some form of union with divinity. However, in the Odian Tradition the driving force is seen as coming from within the individual. This is in keeping with the primary sources and in particular the meaning of Naudhiz (ᛇ), which both pictorially and linguistically refers to the kindling of the 'need-fire' (Flowers, 2002, p.14). The Need-Fire does not descend from above in the manner of the flaming tongue of spirit but grows within the Self-complex as a result of the experiences, thoughts and Wyrd of that Self-complex. As a symbol, Naudhiz indicates the way in which the individual is drawn to magical work and is driven to continue in the quest for Rûna. It needs a combination of narrow focus and vigorous action for a traditional fire-bow to effectively start a fire and similarly it is a combination of precision and passion that allows the individual to progress within the Odian Tradition.

5. The Polarian Model of Self Becoming

The Odian approach may have similarities to Left Hand Path models but it also differs from them in that it does seek to achieve a type of balance. In the Right Hand Path we achieve balance by occupying a position that is visualised as being neither one thing nor the other, but occupies the Middle Pillar of 'Mildness' rather than the Pillar of Severity (Geburah) or Mercy (Chesed) (Cicero & Cicero, 2003; Crowley, 1991; Fortune, 2000; Regardie, 2000). However, in Odianism the concept of balance is linked closely with the

idea of paradox as represented by the rune Dagaz. Odian balance is a dynamic rather than a static position where one oscillates at will between extremes. This is best understood by reference to the Polarian nature of Odianism.

Polarianism, as a term, refers in part to the concept of the 'North'. In the Germanic family of languages the etymological root for 'North' also refers to the concept of being 'underneath' or 'below' (Thorsson, 1987). This is significant in terms of the Odian focus on mutually occupying opposing extremes and draws attention to the need to 'go below' in order to go above. Within the Northern Tradition more broadly there are numerous references to the need to go below in order to develop the Self-Complex (Eliade, 2005; Evola, 2001; Frazer, 1995). The individual working within the Rune Gild must undertake a process of self-analysis that should be 'absolutely brutal' (Thorsson, 2003. p.11) in that it must look as deeply as is possible within the individual.

An acceptance of the ultimately paradoxical nature of the Universe is essential to the development of the Odian and this paradox is experienced by occupying both poles of the implied extremes co-incidently. For example an Odian would be neither committed to the perfect harmony of the Universe as it is nor to the dynamism of chaos and change, but would seek to occupy both those positions at one and the same time. Graphically and symbolically the commitment to the mutual occupation of extremes is represented by the rune Dagaz (ᛞ). Within the rune row Dagaz is the penultimate stave before the individual reaches the enclosure or homestead of Othila.

In terms of self-development the Yggdrasil ordeal represents a singular quasi-shamanic moment in which enormous progress is achieved (Thorsson, 1984, p.5). However in keeping with the Polarian nature of Odianism Óðin must undertake further more methodical work before he begins to grow in power and understanding (Larrington, 1999, pp.34-35). This is a clear injunction from the primary sources of Odianism that Self-development is not exclusively a gradual process nor one of sudden moments of ecstatic insight following ritualised actions. In order to follow the example of Óðin the individual must apply both approaches to Self-development.

The Polarian approach is also reflected in the mythology of Kvasir's blood (Crossley-Holland, 1993; O'Donoghue, 2008; Sturluson, 1987). In order for Óðin to win the mead of poetry (Kvasir's blood) it is essential that Kvasir himself is first killed and mead brewed from his blood. At the point of the murder this can only be regarded as a negative act, driven by greed. However, without that negative act the mead would not be available to be utilised by the Master of Consciousness (Óðin). In terms of self-development this indicates that we have as much need of our 'lower' or more primal non-reflective impulses as we do of our analytical consciousness if we are to Self-become.

Elsewhere in the thesis it has been argued that Odianism cannot be understood as wholly belonging to the Left Hand Path as currently understood in the study and praxis of magic (Ezzy, 2006; Granholm, 2007, 2010; Petersen, 2009; Sutcliffe, 1996). This is because the Odian is committed to the good of the Folk at the same time as being radically liminal in terms of his/her relations to the Folk. When we consider Odian Self-becoming, we have to consider both the transformation of the individual and the intended transformation of the world in which the Odian finds him/ herself and by implication the transformations that this brings to the Folk. The awakened Self works towards what Thorsson describes as the true function of re-ligion (or re-connection) in seeking to bridge the gap between that which is deemed to be mundane and that which has the quality of 'Wihaz'. In sharing and promoting a sacralised vision with others it is hoped that they too may find a state of 'Oegi' or awe and recognition of the presence of the sacred (Thorsson, 1996).

The notion of life as 'a kind of play' (*ibid*) does not imply an easily achieved disinterestedness in the world, but an awareness that while we are inevitably embodied and interested in that embodied life and all that it entails, we also recognise that its function is to enhance the freedom of consciousness. Within this awakened state one sees oneself as 'existing in a space of Runic interaction' (Ristandi, 1998). Emotional hardships will still be felt keenly, but are also recognised as a means of working one's Wyrd and feeding one's consciousness. Odianism does not seek to despise the material world, or to transcend it, or even to place it in an inferior qualitative category. Instead it seeks to understand and value it through the lens of an awakened consciousness.

The Odian is not following a teleological path; flux and change are good and desirable aspects of Self-development (Thorsson, 2005). Self-becoming through an engagement with Rûna may appear to be teleological in that the completion of the process of Self-becoming can be regarded as a fixed end point to which the individual is working. However, while the journey towards Self-becoming can be described as a process, it is not possible to describe or even identify the end point of this journey. The Odian path is a walk into the unknown. The process is cyclical, following a pattern of 'Manifestation – Being- Dismanifestation – Remanifesation ad infinitum' (Flowers, 1996, p.52). There are obvious links here with both the Nietzschean concept of the 'Eternal Return' (1969) and also the possibility of the 'Übermensch' (1969) that would merit future research. The fact that Rûna can never be attained points to its status as a Universal category that will always exceed any given instantiation of a particular Mystery or Mysteries. As Thorsson states:

The power of the Runes lies in the ability to spur seekers onward.
Because no end is thirsted for . . . success is gauged by the ground
you cover, not the goals met. (Thorsson, 2005)

This quote demonstrates the distinction between the Odian concept of Self-becoming and the predominant discourse around self-development within trans-personal psychology. In contrast to Wilber and others who hypothesise a staged journey towards a fixed goal, Odianism advocates an open ended process whose purpose is the development of a dynamic relationship to and with Rûna, rather than a vain attempt to grasp and limit the nature of Mystery. This anti-teleological approach is also a departure from the Listian position which seeks to retain a notion of the will of God (List, 1988).

List's position inevitably leads to a problematic conclusion in which either all individual processes of Self-becoming are only ever pseudo-individual in that they must all arrive at the same terminus or perhaps that the will of God is itself subject to change and consists of infinite potentially contradictory positions. In Odianism a chosen God serves as an archetypal model for behaviour rather than a necessary determinant of an individual's will.

The notion of redemptive progress is alien to the Northern Tradition and indeed most paganisms, ancient and contemporary alike. Without a myth of sin there is no over-

arching culture narrative in which individuals or society as a whole moves towards some perfected state. Moreover, the ‘forn siðr’ or ‘Old Ways’ were focused on the seasonal and astronomical cycles, which support a culture of repeated cycles rather than linear movement forwards or upwards. Self-development in this context is not a process of transformational improvement so much as a return to the centre. We can understand the goal of Self-Becoming as referring to the ability to inhabit this centre through a mutual occupation of extremes. Óðin’s mastery of both active Galdor and passive Seiðr, for example, reflects this Polarian understanding of Self-becoming.

Through magical praxis the Odian begins to internalise the mystery represented by Dagaz and is able to experience the Polarian approach to non-dualism in which, rather than denying difference, oppositional extremes are embraced and mutually experienced by the practitioner.. It might seem contradictory to talk in terms of more than one form of non-dualism. However, to reduce the complexity and multiple models of non-dualism (Ferrer, 2011) to a simple binary opposition between dualism and monism is ironically to fall back into reductive dualism. The Odian form of non-dualism is suggestive of a move to a triadic understanding in which the binary opposition of say ‘0’ and ‘1’ is not transformed to a state in which the opposition itself is obviated by an act of transcendence, but rather that the a third possibility arises without denying the continuing existence of the original opposition. This third possibility rests in the Polarian approach whereby oppositional states are mutually accepted, giving rise to a third state of affairs in which both the reality and illusory nature of such oppositions are present. In the historical sources of the Northern Tradition the role of triads is often associated with a structure in which there are two similar states (albeit oppositional such as Heat and Cold) and a third state that is connected and dependent on the continuation of the initial pair, but is radically different in function and significance. Thus the meeting of the totality of Fire and Ice in the Ginnungagap did not lead to the annihilation of Fire and Ice by a mutual cancelling out, but gave rise to the creation of the Universe.

6. Holism and Odianism

The act of creating a state of ‘Hailagaz’ is a process of rendering something both ‘holy’ and ‘whole’. In fact we could better say that ‘whole-ness’ is ‘holy’ by nature. Odianism follows the traditional understanding of the importance of a holistic approach to Self-

development. Self-Becoming cannot be achieved through solely intellectual exercises, but requires the total immersion of the holistic Self-complex in the web of reality represented by the Nine Worlds and the World Tree, Yggdrasil (Thorsson, 1994, IX, p.25). There is a creative tension that is heightened as the Self-complex develops, an opposition between Chaos (the forces of diversification) and Order (the entropic force) (*ibid*, Appendix E, p.2).

The need for the Odian to develop the totality of his/ her Self-complex extends to challenging the notion of fixed categories of masculinity and femininity. Thorsson (2003, p.123) notes that Óðin and Freya are both principal deities within the Odian Tradition, not least because Óðin is said to have learned the art of Seiðr magic from Freya. The primary source literature also refers to Óðin as being ‘Ergi’ which can be broadly translated as ‘unmanly’ or as suggesting an open-ness to being penetrated. This latter interpretation can be understood on a number of levels. The Odian who seeks to Self-become also needs to emulate this ambivalence and open-ness in order to create the possibility of maximal Self-understanding.

The aim of the Odian is to create a ‘whole’ Self and also to assist in the holistic development of the Folk and the land to which the Folk is connected. This is not simply an adjunct to the work on the Self, but is an essential aspect thereof since the holistic foundation of Odianism implies an inherent connection between Self, Folk and Ancestry such that to work on one to the exclusion of any other would be to fail. Thorsson argues that we are fundamentally cultural animals and that it is the creation and development of cultural structures that separates us from other animals. While it could be argued that with sufficient understanding we might be able to perceive evidence of culture generation in other animal communities, the point that as humans we are driven to experience ourselves and others through the lens of a group culture is nonetheless valid. The Odian Tradition regards magic as an intrinsic part of its cultural context rather than as an anomalous or disconnected aspect of human behaviour. In order to develop as an Odian the individual cannot simply focus on a purely personal model of development without reference to the wider Folk. In so doing the individual would be rejecting one of the fundamental elements of what it means to be human and would move away from a process of holistic Self-becoming towards a reductive narrowing of the Self. Thus, while magical praxis is a

necessary feature of Odian Self-development, a necessary aspect of valid magical development within the Odian Tradition is the retention of cultural commitments.

The Odian Tradition is vehemently anti-Universalist and at the same time recognises the immanence of Mystery in all things and in all places:

The theos or god involved must, however be understood on the impersonal level of the rún rúnanna – the mystery of mysteries. All is god, god is all – so when seeking god seek that which you are (Thorsson, 1996, p.55).

In recognising this mystery it is also necessary to give up any notion of the Self as an easily circumscribed entity. In fact it may be more helpful to think of Self-becoming as a process of Selves-becoming were it not for the fact that the tension between the Self as a sovereign function and its multivalent nature is one of the many paradoxes that mark out the Odian understanding of the Self and the multiverse. List refers to this multi-valency as a, ‘multifidic-multiune multiplicity’ (List, 1988. p.21). It is an admittedly clumsy term, but one which nonetheless indicates that the holism of Odianism is drawing on a tradition.

It has been argued earlier in this thesis that Tripartism is fundamental to an Odian ontology and Flowers (2006) applies a tripartite structure to the relationship between humanity and the trans-human based on the Odian epistemological triad: For those who know the world non-reflectively the world is understood euhemeristically, while analytical knowledge is concerned with external personalised deities. However, the wise are focused on ideas and principles. In the context of Odian Self-becoming, this suggests a movement away from the ‘truth’ or ‘Troth’ of the Folk towards a more nuanced understanding of Mystery. However, for those who are not driven to seek Rûna the value of being ‘troth-ful’ is retained. The epistemological engagement with the trans-human is not regarded as a substitute for, or as a superior perspective to an experiential engagement. Once again we see the holistic nature of Odianism in that the individual absorbs and increases the breadth and depth of the means by which they interact with the Universe rather than adopting one particular perspective over another.

One of the many paradoxes that are fundamental to the Odian approach to Self-becoming is the recognition that constraints both limit our perception and are essential to the

possibility of perception and consciousness. Without any distinction between experienced phenomena it would be impossible for us to encounter the world cognitively; thought itself would be impossible since the absence of difference would prevent the emergence of distinct symbolic representations of those different experiences that might then be compared and weighed against each other through the process of thought. The Odian Tradition emphasizes the importance of both Minni (Memory and Mind) and the Hugh (Thought or Cognition) and while it is the loss of memory that is most feared by Óðin the presence of cognition is still essential to an Odian existence. However, having accepted the need for distinctions and boundaries between experience, the Odian also must recognise the potentially contingent and non-essential nature of some of those boundaries. The process of Self-becoming requires that the individual challenge and destroy many of these distinctions or at least come to internalise their temporary and relatively arbitrary nature. Wilber's model of Self-development does not recognise that in turning the self into an object (Wilber, 2006) the practitioner has merely engaged in a sleight of mind which disguises the fact that the Self complex remains the subject and that which is worked upon is simply an object projection by the Self complex of what it currently understands to be the totality of the Self complex. By definition the creation of a new separation between the presumed Self-complex and the 'other' which observes it, as proposed by Wilber, prevents the observed Self-complex from being the totality of the Self complex.

The holistic nature of Odian Self-becoming is emphasized in its magical praxis where we see a combining of posture, sound, breath and mental contents working towards the same specified end. This holistic or integral approach to the Self-complex is well illustrated by the complete Yew Working which is discussed at length in Chapter Six above. The Odian model of magical praxis requires that the individual incorporates into the holistic Self-complex a microcosmic reflection of the runic macrocosm:

The ultimate aim of this combination of workings is the construction of an operative sphere fully arrayed with the Runes in the objectified walls of the sphere and fully alive in the subjective Tree of Yggdrasil within the sphere. This includes the Yew-column down the vertical centre of the Runer. The building of this operative body is one of the greatest Runes of the Gild (Thorsson, 2003, p.73).

In the development of the Self-complex the individual is building up an internal Futhark, such that over time working with runes incorporates more than a linguistic or conceptual engagement. The chanting of a rune's Galdor and the tracing of its shape with the appropriate posture and movement comes to initiate an internal shift such that the whole of the practitioner's consciousness is identified with the rune in question and consequently that the practitioner at every level can be said to be embodying that rune. It is the concept of a runic physiology (Thorsson, 2003, p.115) that allows for the movement of runic power around the body and ultimately to its projection beyond the subjective world.

7. Conclusions

Within the Odian approach, albeit following substantial and demanding work, it is the individual themselves who manifests a higher form of consciousness or 'Woð-self' (Thorsson, 2003, p.25). Unlike secular forms of self-development the end for the Odian is not simply the authentication of self-integration. Self-becoming is a means for the ultimate Odian end, which is to know Rûna, to seek Mystery (Thorsson, 1994, III, p.16).

Wilber (2000), perhaps the predominant writer in transpersonal psychology, argues that a systematic structure is needed to chart self-development. Wilber's focus on the superiority of spiritual development contrasts with the view taken by Zohar (1997) who focuses on the functioning individual and sees spiritual intelligence as subsidiary to the totality of the functioning individual. Fontana argues against the progressive model of spiritual experience (2001) suggesting that the power of experiential spirituality is equally powerful at any stage in the life of the individual. Nonetheless Wilber's views are mirrored by many others (Noble, 2000; Orr, 2001; Thomas, 2000). These authors share a flaw in that they assume the end point of the spiritual journey is known before the journey is undertaken which suggests that the spiritual experience is no more than an exercise in emotionally fulfilling a predetermined intellectual construction.

As a non-progressive philosophy it is entirely in keeping with the overall thrust of Odianism that Self-becoming should not be understood as analogous to self-improvement.

A key part of the Self-complex that must be brought to consciousness in order to progress in the act of Self-becoming is the Woð-Self, of which Thorsson writes:

It is not necessarily smarter, wiser or more moral than your mundane persona. It is just more powerful (1994, IX, p.20).

Although Thorsson talks in terms of an individual's 'true will' (ibid, p.32), within the Odian system the recognition of one's true Will is only one aspect of Self-becoming rather than being the primary goal as advocated by those aspects of the contemporary Western Mystery Tradition that are inspired by Crowley's writings or his Thelemic philosophy. Odianism aims at the achievement of a state of being rather than the fulfilment of certain goals. Teleological models inevitably reduce the role of individual agency in the process of Self-becoming. There is no point within Odianism where an individual can regard their work as complete. Odianism is not apocalyptic in its mysticism and is non-teleological in its concept of the purpose of the Self-complex. The Odian is focused on seeking Mystery rather than answers and consequently, 'the end of the journey is unknown' (Thorsson, 1994, V, p.6).

Within Odianism it is through our facticity in the world that Self-becoming may be achieved. In teleological transcendent models both the cause and the aim of Self-becoming are placed outside the Self-complex and often outside the world itself. A model of deep self-development that retains a transpersonal dimension, but which also assigns the power to manifest this aspect of the Self-complex to the individual could be applied positively outside of a purely Odian context.

One of the key issues for future consideration is whether shifts in one's felt sense of self are changes in meaning or changes in being. We can look at a shift in felt identity as being primarily one that alters how we know the world and ourselves as part of that world, or as a shift that alters not how we know or what we know but what it is that we are knowing, both in terms of the world and ourselves. In other words identity shifts can be seen as epistemological or ontological movements, or indeed, as I suspect from my own experience, that when it comes to our self-understanding the two are inextricably entwined.

The Odian does not seek to become Óðin, but to emulate his approach to the Mysteries of Rûna (Thorsson, 2003, p. 128). Óðin does not give himself over to any higher being in his ordeal on the World Tree, but gives himself to himself. In this sense the Odian approach to Self-becoming may be regarded as having some affinity with Left Hand Path approaches. However, while Odian Self-Becoming is led by the individual's consciousness it is not anti-nomian in the fullest sense. Odianism does not claim that a person may literally become a God, Self-deification may be an ultimate aim, but like the pursuit of Mystery it is a journey whose value lies in its process and not in the possibility of a final arrival at the desired destination. However, while humans are expressly not Gods (Thorsson, 1994, VI, p.5), they may become 'Einherjar'; immortalised individuals whose persistent existence rests on their own power and understanding rather than divine intercession. The rare human who achieves this feat does not pass into a state of dissolution, or undifferentiated union with a God-head, but retains a discrete identity and consciousness. The fetter of the Valknútr (Valgard, 1998), Óðin's triple triangular knot, not only constrains and contains us within a certain matrix of existence (en-fleshed, temporal, personal and so forth), but also grants us the gift in potentia of a unique existence as a particular consciousness.

The ultimately unachievable nature of Rûna might seem to lend a certain melancholic aspect to the Odian quest. However, this perception is dependent on a valuing of ends over means. Odianism recognises that the Self-complex, like Rûna, should not be considered as a static object, but as a process with no definite end. Consequently, it is the process itself that has value and the experience of the process. When existence is perceived primarily as an experience of a process rather than as an attempt to achieve specific final ends it becomes possible to understand what is often regarded as the fatalism of the Northern Tradition in a more positive light. Fatalism is not a grim acceptance of our inability to shape our ends, but a positive and life-affirming recognition that the end is not what most matters, but how we approach and experience such ends.

9. Conclusion

‘Science always opposes the discovery of new Truths, and it is wrong every time!’ (Dr Alfred Russel-Wallace quoted in List’s *Das Geheimnis der Runen*)

1. Approaching an Odian Philosophy:

Research in the broad field of esotericism has significantly increased in recent years, but it remains a relatively under-researched dimension of the human experience. Magical praxis that might be regarded as either Left Hand Path or belonging to the Northern Tradition constitute minority interests within what is an already small proto-discipline. Consequently, I felt it important to ensure that my thesis provided a sufficient breadth of detail so that a reader, new to this area of enquiry, might be able to engage with my research. The unfortunate corollary is that word limit constraints prevented the preferred depth of investigation in all areas of the thesis. The tension between sufficient breadth to allow understanding of a largely unknown corner of a marginal discipline and sufficient depth to allow a significant exploration of the philosophical framework being proposed was an area of constant reflection throughout my period of study.

Notwithstanding the concern expressed above, I think that in my close reading of the key Odian texts and supporting material it has been possible to derive the fundamental aspects of what might be regarded as an Odian philosophical framework: The realities that we experience as necessarily embodied individuals are the contents of consciousness, those contents are known through three possible epistemological modalities of Truá (Loyalty to commitments), Analysis and Wisdom; there is an external reality that we experience as the material world, but this is an inter-subjective construction of consciousness; not only is what we know limited to what appears to consciousness, but the manifest world is a creation of consciousness; there are a range of states of consciousness that determine the way in which the world can be known and the extent to which we can deliberately manipulate the inter-subjective manifest world; there is a level of reality that transcends the human and which has an objective reality; this ultimate reality is not a construction of matter but a patterning of fundamental principles; these principles are ‘runes’ or mysteries and their totality constitutes the ultimate Mystery Rûna.

My intention was not to try and produce a definitive Odian philosophical framework, but to begin the process by which one might be developed. At a personal, as well as an academic, level the aim of the research to demonstrate that occultism need not only be studied in a sociological or historical manner but that its various Schools or Traditions are sufficiently coherent that they may be considered as philosophies of the human condition in their own right. Moreover, by proposing a philosophical credibility for the occult paradigm of reality, it was hoped that this might lay the very earliest of foundations for a process whereby magical praxis may ultimately come to be recognised as a valid form of research into the limits and capacities of the Self-complex; that magical praxis stands not only as an object of enquiry but as a means of enquiring; magical praxis as methodology. My own practice employs the magic of Odianism as a means of examining the nature of reality, but it would be equally possible to engage in a similar philosophical exploration of any number of other occultures.

2. The Relevance of the Thesis in the Wider World:

Raymond Lee (2003) argues that post-modern Western society is approaching a period of re-enchantment having become dissatisfied with the material benefits of a dis-enchanted paradigm of reality. A new appraisal of occult practices provides a basis for this re-enchantment. Specifically, it returns the locus of experiential spirituality or non-normal consciousness to the experiencing individual. In addition, the Northern Tradition along with other paganisms offers an, albeit speculative, link with a period in our history where enchantment was still the normative paradigm. Odianism is not a life style addition or peripheral accessory to the rest of our lives, but is in itself an approach to life. A Traditional approach to practical occultism such as that advocated by Odianism also avoids the error of Romanticism noted by Lee (*ibid*), in which the search for enchantment or Rûna is subverted by a quest for novelty. This quest for the new as opposed to the True is correctly identified by Lee as a result of capitalistic culture.

A revival of awareness amongst the folk of their cultural heritage and the radical diversity between different culture groups is one means by which the homogenizing forces of globalisation can be resisted. An awareness of the Odian Tradition alongside other traditions provide a means by which the dominance of a paradigm within which

economic power is the primary determinant of status and economic growth the only valid social and individual goal can be side stepped and opposed.

It could be argued that Paganism, Wicca and the Northern Tradition offer ideal systems to be followed by those culturally European seekers wishing to avoid any involvement in cultural misappropriation. Much has been made, quite rightly, of the tendency of European and American esotericism to appropriate tools, rituals and symbols from other indigenous cultures (Welch, 2002; York, 2001). Such appropriations often lack any deep interest in the historical or cultural context of the traditions being strip mined by the New Age publishing industry (Welch, 2002). Despite the fears of some, a re-awakening of European folk-culture need not lead to a totalising ideology:

Rûna implies the absolute necessity of plurality and multiversality:
From the Rune came the Runes and the Runes show the ways back to
Rûna (Flowers, 1996, p.53).

Odianism does not offer egalitarianism, but it does challenge the dominant socio-economic structure that regards all as mere consumers and which reduces the encounter with Mystery as a matter of product satisfaction. Flowers unequivocally answers his own question, 'Is Rûna for All?' (1996, p.37) with a resounding 'No!' (ibid). However, the philosophical framework within which Odian praxis is located does consider and value those who are not actively seeking Rûna through magical or esoteric praxis. The triadic approach to epistemology, the inter-subjectivity of Odian ontology and its interpretation of Traditionalism in its ethics all combine to create a view of the wider society in which each individual has a relationship to the mysterious and a vision in which society may be enriched by a process of 're-enchantment'. In addition the animistic Universe of Odianism positions humanity as just one of many conscious entities in the overall ecology of reality and sees us in communication with the world rather than separate from it.

3. Magical Praxis and Research Methodology:

The notion that we might regard occult praxis as a form of research in its own right remains a potentially valid avenue for further exploration. Certainly within the Odian Tradition there are many parallels that can be drawn with extant research approaches. For

example, the immersion in magical praxis as part of the on-going work of the Odian has obvious similarities with the immersion approach found in many heuristic research methodologies (Moustakas, 1990).

I would argue that if we set aside the scientific paradigm of reality that is given by the increasingly flawed Standard Model of Physics then there is no reason why occultism generally and Odianism specifically should not be regarded, in terms of the magical methodology, as forms of research with the same academic validity as any other form of enquiry. The Odian epistemology differs in the most general sense from contemporary ethnography only in its willingness to truly inhabit that which it studies. One can even see a direct link to Action Research in its advocacy of, ‘knowledge-insight-action’ (Thorsson, 2003. p.6) as an unending process of discovery and manifestation.

The view that, ‘It should be in the very essence of the Odian to seek the hidden principles of everything’ (Thorsson, 2003, p.35) can certainly be usefully applied as a way of engaging with the world without working within a specifically Odian or even magical praxis. In fact, while it is fundamental to Odianism, the urge to seek the ‘hidden principles’ is fundamental to all Mystery Traditions and many if not all contemporary expressions of paganism. In a world where enquiry is increasing specialised and consequently decontextualized the holistic vision that we find in Odianism and which is reflected in many other forms of esotericism has much to offer.

The role of mystery cannot be over-estimated in the Odian approach to magical praxis. As a route to Self-becoming the primary injunction is that the Odian should ‘Reyn Til Rûna’ or ‘Seek The Mysteries’. It is in being fully open to the Mysteries and yet retaining the ability to discriminate between experiences that appear to offer a glimpse of their nature that the Odian most emulates the example of Óðin. The act of Self-becoming is not strictly instrumental in the psychological sense, the individual must desire more than an ability to function adequately and congruently within the apparent world. To follow the Odian path of Self-becoming the individual must be driven in the fullest sense of the word to internalise the wonder and mystery of the Universe. It is my contention that this commitment to both wonder and fundamental Mystery has not prevented the articulation of a coherent framework of reality, or at least the scaffolding on which one may be

developed through future research. This might suggest that there is scope for a re-valuing of the role of the numinous and how we engage with and incorporate its presence into other research that examines the human condition.

The combination of Art and Mystery are at the heart of Odian praxis. Inevitably, they are both slippery concepts to define partly because of the individual manner in which they are experienced and partly because it is precisely in their nature to be categories that elude our attempts to capture them in words. Odianism is not only comfortable with, but requires an acceptance of ‘fuzzy’ boundaries, but the inability to fully capture and fix reality does not prevent coherent frameworks of this shifting and intertwined reality from being established. The valuing of taxonomical precision and certainty is perhaps best regarded as a product of the Enlightenment (Foucault, 1989) and not as an essential aspect of a valid theory of knowledge. It could be argued that taxonomies act to limit and stifle our epistemic desire by setting boundaries around categories of reality that we might seek to know in different ways from those which the structure of that categorisation allows.

When we question the structures that frame the way in which we come to know things we are freed up to approach our embodied experience of the world in a more open way. This in turn allows the immanence of Mystery to become more apparent and reveals the way in which all our experiences (which must be symbolically rendered to be consciously and reflectively experienced) are the products of a co-creation in which we play a role. Rejection of established taxonomic categories allows us to create far more freely and more in tune with the intentions of our Self-complex rather than in tune with the thinking chains of the current cultural paradigm. This may well be a step forward (or indeed into the past) in terms of the extent to which research can slip the reins of hegemonic academic discourse.

It has been noted elsewhere in the thesis that Odianism has tended to resist the label of ‘occultism’. However, I would argue that Odianism should embrace the term ‘occult’ as an accurate description of its aims and praxis. Occultism refers to the pursuit of that which is hidden from our understanding and which underpins the foundations of our experienced reality. This is also precisely the aim of Odianism. Taking back the term

occult and using it in its correct sense would allow a greater recognition of the similarity of approach and crucially the equivalence of intention across different occult traditions. This should not be read as supporting the de-sacralising effect of universalism, but as an argument that if occultism as praxis is to be correctly recognised as a form of research in its own right it would be useful to recognise the connections between Traditions while also recognising their cultural specificity.

4. Future Research Possibilities:

As noted above the study of occultism and esotericism are still very new fields of exploration, or rather very old fields that have lain fallow for some time and which are gradually being re-discovered. Within the developing discipline of esotericism and occulture, the Northern Tradition remains largely unexplored. Consequently, there remains a wealth of unexplored material and this thesis in many ways could only ever hope to scratch the surface of the Northern Tradition generally and Odianism in particular.

The most immediate area of future research that I hope to undertake is a more detailed exploration and testing of the relationship of Odianism to other groups within the ‘Northern Tradition’. This thesis is not intended to attempt a comparative study of other groups or esoteric systems within the Northern Tradition. However, there are a number of such groups, in addition to the major groups such as the Odinic Rite and the Odinist Fellowship mentioned elsewhere in the thesis and I am keen to explore the extent to which other members of the Northern Tradition share common characteristics with Odianism.

In my research I have attempted to recognise that in committing to the validity of practical occultism an individual is not taking on an additional side interest in their life, but is implicitly adopting an overarching paradigm of reality. For occultism to be more than mere fancy the occultist cannot believe in the causal power of magic ritual on a Saturday afternoon but discard it in favour of deterministic scientism the rest of the week. Academic research has applied pre-existing philosophical models to occultism, but very little work has been done to date to facilitate the expression of the philosophical positions that exist within occultism. The attempt to construct an Odian philosophical framework was grounded in the belief that occultism can be approached as a sufficient and complete

alternative model of reality. I believe that this same approach could be usefully applied to other discrete occult traditions and systems.

In my own future research, as well as taking the method applied in this thesis and exploring the philosophical frameworks implied in other occult traditions, I hope to delve more deeply into Odianism in particular. The relationship of Odianism to the Left Hand Path and particularly the Temple of Set; the application of Gentile's 'Actualism' to magical models of reality; the development of a more fully articulated semiotic theory of magical causality; the cultural influence of Odianism and related magical groups are all particular themes that I am already planning to explore further. In addition, I hope to test and develop the philosophical framework outlined in this thesis by moving into a more empirical phase of research working with other Odians exploring their praxis and interpretation of the key texts of Odianism. This will allow a comparison between Odianism as written and Odianism as experienced by its adherents. My abiding academic interest remains the attempt to adequately represent in philosophical language the complexity and multivalent nature of consciousness and I intend to continue my exploration of Husserlian theories of Eidetic perception alongside other philosophical models that may help unlock an understanding of various states of non-ordinary consciousness.

To my knowledge this is the first extended academic study of Odianism and as well as providing a springboard for my own future research it may provide sufficient detail to allow the inclusion of Odianism in future comparative studies of contemporary esoteric praxis. It is my hope that this thesis will also provide a useful ground of data regarding Odianism that may be of use to future research in a range of disciplines such as transpersonal psychology and studies of non-ordinary consciousness. Odianism is an area of magical praxis that deserves continued and extensive study; ideally my research will encourage researchers in the field of esotericism to apply their particular methodological tool-kit to the detailed exposition of Odianism theory and practice provided in the thesis. In closing I would support Thorsson's call for a merging of methods both mundane and mysterious in the pursuit of the best possible access to wisdom and knowledge:

Scholarship and science can reach a higher state of development if the possibilities of including the intuitive process and unorthodox procedures are given an institutionalised place in the work. . . The true scholar should function now – as he did in the Odian past – as a “shaman of the rational”! (1996, p47)

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