

projective poem can come into being'. This law or principle, was formulated by Robert Creeley, Olson's Black Mountain friend and fellow poet. Here it is. FORM IS NEVER MORE THAN AN EXTENSION OF CONTENT. I don't want to waste too much time over this. Once upon a time, a good many critics were happy to speak about the 'organic form' of a poem; I suppose they meant that the shape and the movement of a poem were analagous to those of a living creature, one of a kind but unique in itself. They weren't thinking of sonnets, villanelles, ballads, ballades, or whether the metre and the stanzas were more or less regular; they were thinking of the poem's unique and original character and *not*, as it were, classifying it by formal attributes which it could share with any number of other poems. I frankly don't see that Olson's 'extension of content' adds anything significant to this idea. Possibly some people can feel a bit happier, a bit more *cosy*, if they think of something inert being extended, rather than something alive which grows. Perhaps it *sounds* more philosophical. The trouble is that the formula leaves the terms 'form', 'extension' and 'content' as ambiguous, as unspecific and unhelpful as they ever were: on examination, the so-called principle collapses into its ambiguities; as a dogma—'dogma' is a favourite word of Olson's—no doubt it is not meant to be examined.

Having presented us with the *principle*—'There it is, brothers, sitting there, for USE'—Olson goes on to instruct us in how to apply it; his language now has the beguiling tones of physical science and engineering technology: '(3) the *process* of the thing, how the principle can be made so to shape the energies that the form is accomplished.' One wakes up hopefully; if the principle makes no sense of itself, perhaps the *process*, about to be described, will help to make sense of it. In a way, it does. At least we begin to see what it is that Creeley/Olson wish us to understand by the term 'content'. Perceptions—the poet's perceptions, that is. Olson says it 'can be boiled down to one statement'. Here is the statement: ONE PERCEPTION MUST IMMEDIATELY AND DIRECTLY LEAD TO A FURTHER PERCEPTION.

Now, if we're not to get intolerably confused among the ambiguities of this further term *perception*—if ever a word were slipping and sliding and decaying with imprecision, *this* one is—we have to assume, I think, that what is meant here is 'sense-perception', the way colours, sounds, tastes, smells, tactile qualities become recognisable objects for the mind; and we can't (can we?) separate such perception from cognition, because the mere sensations on their own are simply *not news* about anything either subjective or objective. When Pound talked about 'direct treatment of the "Thing"', it wasn't bad advice to a poet—at least, to an