

imagist poet. Olson, however, is talking about what he calls a *process*; not the thing, but the perception of the thing leading 'to a further perception'. He says it *must* do this, as if a perception could possibly be followed by anything else. We just don't stop perceiving, one way or another, one thing or another, so long as we are conscious. Saying a perception *must* lead to a perception evidently means something quite different from the simple observation that it *does*. What precisely is Olson up to? Can it be simply said that he is trying to expound a new poetic in the terms of an old psychology, and producing only a muddle of truisms and tautologies? But perhaps we can find the answers in his own words:

ONE PERCEPTION MUST IMMEDIATELY AND DIRECTLY LEAD TO A FURTHER PERCEPTION. It means exactly what it says, is a matter of, at *all* points (even, I should say, of our management of daily reality as of the daily work) get on with it, keep moving, keep in, speed, the nerves, their speed, the perceptions, theirs, the acts, the split-second acts, the whole business, keep it moving as fast as you can, citizen. And if you also set up as a poet, USE USE USE the process at all points, in any given poem always, always one perception must must must MOVE, INSTANTER, ON ANOTHER.<sup>3</sup>

You may notice that this author has a message to deliver, which concerns not only the way we write poems, but 'our management of daily reality'. He urges, he demands, he admonishes—'USE USE USE', 'must must must'. There is a philosophy at work here, and a doctrine. The philosophy may well have something to do with Husserl, the phenomenologist. Not having studied Husserl—but not being ignorant, either, of the phenomenological positions—I recall Camus's remark about 'the shimmering of phenomenological thought'. Olson's perceptions, 'perceptions', 'speed', 'as fast as you can', 'one after another', 'instanter'—all this takes me back to Camus's comment that

Husserl and the phenomenologists, by their very extravagances, reinstate the world in its diversity and deny the transcendent power of the reason. The spiritual universe becomes incalculably enriched through them. The rose petal, the milestone, or the human hand are as important as love, desire, or the laws of gravity. Thinking ceases to be unifying or making a semblance familiar in the guise of a major principle. Thinking is learning all over again to see, to be attentive, to focus consciousness; it is turning every idea and every image, in the manner of Proust, into a privileged moment . . .<sup>4</sup>

Now, you don't have to read much about Olson to find that phenomenological thought has a lot to do with his teachings about poetry. There's an instance that sticks, rather disturbingly, in my memory: somebody writes about poets 'inhabiting the phenomenal welter making up the world'; Olson is said to have provided 'techniques . . . [for] making experience direct and unmediated for the poet who plunges fully into the phenomena around him'. Certainly, if we agree to regard the world as 'a phenomenal welter',