Musical Thinking: Hegel and the Phenomenology of Prosody

Does 'musical thinking' exist? Is there a thinking, that is to say, which is not thinking about music, or thinking which accompanies music, but a thinking which takes place in music; a thinking which is made up of music itself? Perhaps even to put the question in this way seems strange. Yet if we can imagine that in written texts a thinking may take place which is not precisely the same as what their authors may have thought, in the sense that in every writing 'we meant something other than we meant to mean'; and if we remember that there is nothing in the letters, words, and sentences of our languages, considered as material, which of itself must inevitably signify anything at all; then it may be possible to wonder why, in so many circles, the idea that musical works have meanings, or that they are cognitive acts, the idea that music is a form of thinking, has come to be understood as a piece of 'metaphysics' or of 'ideology'.[1] My interest in this question develops partly out of my work on philosophers who have themselves been interested in it, partly out of my own amateur acquaintance with music, and partly out of my professional interest in the question of prosody: in how to reawaken an enquiry into the philosophical foundations of the study of that aspect of language, an enquiry which has long slumbered; in how to put prosody back at the centre of the way in which we think about poems and poetry; in how to understand prosody's elusive yet undeniable cognitive character. I want to take as my occasion for these reflections an examination of some aspects of the relation between language, music and thinking in Hegel's thought, because the idea of the relation between these terms which is given there provides an unusually careful examination and elaboration of a series of presuppositions which have for us to some extent become a kind of unexamined common sense. The apparently marginal topic of versification takes us, it will be suggested, to some central problems in Hegel's way of conceiving subjectivity. Hegel was capable, after all, of using the emergence of 'rhythm' from 'metre' and 'accent' as a figure for the speculative proposition itself (*PhG*, 38); this paper seeks, in particular, to develop with reference to a Hegelian example Henri Meschonnic's insight that 'There can be no theory of rhythm without a theory of the subject, and no theory of the subject without a theory of rhythm.'[2]

If, then, we admit the question of whether there is a thinking which is made up of music itself as a possible question, much in any answer will depend on the sense which is given to the word 'thinking'. One way of understanding that word, a way which at first appears to rule out the idea that there could be a thinking which is made up of music, is to take thinking as defined by the kind of 'making-explicit' which depends upon referentiality. From this point of view one might be likely to employ *music* as a figure for just that moment in any shape of spirit at which thinking had ceased or failed, and so to arrive at a pejorative sense for the idea of 'musical thinking'. Just such a moment is described by Hegel in part of his account of a so-called 'unhappy consciousness' in the *Phenomenology of Spirit*:

> In this first mode, therefore, where we consider it as pure consciousness, it does not *relate* itself as a *thinking* consciousness to its object, but, though it is indeed *in itself*, or implicitly, a pure thinking individuality, and its object is just this pure thinking (although the *relation of one to the other is not itself pure thinking*), it is only a movement *towards* thinking, and so is devotion. Its thinking as such is no more than the chaotic jingling of bells, or a mist of warm incense, a musical thinking that does not get as far as the Notion, which would be the sole, immanent objective mode of thought. This infinite, pure inner feeling does indeed come into possession of its object; but this does not make its appearance in conceptual form, not as something comprehended, and therefore appears as something alien. What we have here, then, is the inward movement of the pure heart which *feels* itself, but itself as agonizingly self-divided, the movement of an infinite yearning which is certain that its essence is such a pure heart, a pure *thinking* which *thinks* of itself as a *particular individuality*, certain of being known and recognized by this object, precisely because the latter thinks of itself as an individuality. At the same time, however, this essence is the unattainable *beyond* which, in being laid hold of, flees, or rather has already flown. (...) Where that 'other' is sought, it cannot be found, for it is supposed to be just a *beyond*, something that can *not* be found. (*PhG*, 131)

That last note, indeed, may to our ears only confirm the possibility that 'musical thinking' may really be a kind of thinking properly so called, because the attempt to think an other which is none the less imagined as radically heterogeneous to thought has been the explicitly avowed project of many of the most significant thinkers of our time; although, for Hegel, that would only confirm the extent to which the powerful reach of the kind of devotional consciousness analysed here stretches far into putatively secular life. The idea of 'musical thinking' here is prefaced by some props from the repertory of fantasized Papism: 'the

chaotic jingling of bells, or a mist of warm incense'. In the background of this passage we may perhaps hear the echo of a suspicion which had often been voiced in the century preceding Hegel, the suspicion that music in church might be a kind of superstition or even of idolatry. The passage joins several others in Hegel's work in which what appears to be fearful is the possibility that the material which accompanies thinking might take over; that a language which is in any case all too likely to resemble a chaotic jingling of bells should actually become mere ringing or glossolalia. Why does this musical thinking 'not get as far as the Notion'? Because its making-explicit is blocked. It comes into possession of its object only as stolen goods, as it were, since the object does not make its appearance in conceptual form, not as something comprehended. This is musical thinking rather than thinking proper, for Hegel, therefore, to the precise extent that there is a twinned failure of making-explicit: from one point of view, and most obviously, the object is not properly thought *about* but only felt in thought; from another and no less important point of view, this musical thinking fails to make explicit *for itself* the way in which its own devotional agonies are grounded in a situation which it has itself brought about, so that unhappy consciousness takes the division which it has inflicted upon itself as though it were a sheer fact about the world. Musical thinking, then, is not so much not thinking at all as a preliminary movement towards thinking, a thinking which has left so much implicit as to leave in question whether it deserve the title of thinking.

If 'musical thinking' here, then, is thinking which differs from thinking proper by lacking referential explicitness, a critical role is clearly played in differentiating musical thinking from thinking proper by the idea of language.

> Language is self-consciousness existing *for others*, self-consciousness which *as such* is immediately *present*, and as *this* self-consciousness is universal. It is the self that separates itself from itself, which as pure 'I = I' becomes objective to itself, which in this objectivity equally perceives itself as this self, just as it coalesces directly with other selves and becomes *their* self-consciousness. It perceives itself just as it is perceived by others, and the perceiving is just *existence* which has become a self. (*PhG*, 395)

Musical thinking nurses its own singularity, as it were, and does not learn the lesson which language performs for thinking-proper, the lesson that, just as everyone calls themselves 'I', so this supposed singularity is ubiquitous. Language, in this view, does not merely

name a subject which is already there: to be a subject is to enter, as a later follower of Hegel put it, into the symbolic order. Language is the necessary form which explicitness takes, and it is the more emphatically so for Hegel in view of his rejection of the empiricist account of language. 'We *think* in names', as he trenchantly puts the matter in the *Encylopaedia Philosophy of Spirit*.[3] We do not first inductively assemble a series of impressions for which we then cast around for a word; rather, language is, in so far as we may be said to be thinking at all, always already available to us.

If language does all this for thinking, though, what do languages, in the plural, do? For languages' plurality confronts us with one of those potentially unsettling moments in Hegel's writing at which a universality (here, the universality of self-consciousness) is temporarily yoked by the copula to some forlorn particular. The comically bathetic objection that in fact everyone does not call him or herself I, but rather *ego*, *ich*, *je*, *io*, to restrict oneself only to a few European languages in which there happens to be some single word, rather than an inflection or a tone, corresponding to the English word 'I', misses the point as thoroughly as it could do, yet must also raise a problem for a thinking which points out as tirelessly as Hegel's does that 'contingency' is just a name for the point at which enquiry gives up. It is the problem which J.G. Hamann's *Metacritique of the Purism of Reason* had already raised, with the same impertinence, with respect to Kant's account of 'reason'.[4] A letter of Hamann's develops this metacriticism:

> Tradition and language are the true elements of reason. Sounds and letters are the necessary condition of all relations, in which concepts can be intuited and compared. All signs of language and writing have therefore in terms of their matter only empirical reality; in terms of their form and meaning however a transcendental ideality, and their universality as well as their necessity depend upon tradition, as their accidental delimitation is arbitrary.[5]

Whether or not one shares Hamann's theological approach, the questions raised by his metacritique are hard to forget once they have been pointed out. Thinking about language remains 'musical', in Hegel's, pejorative, sense, to the extent that it fails to be thinking about *languages*: to the extent that it surrenders the body of language, the mere chaotic jingling of these letters and sounds, to a sphere of sheer 'arbitrariness', and thereby converts a legitimate 'we do not know' into a resigned and consoling 'we cannot know'.

With this it becomes clear that it is more difficult than might appear to separate thinking proper from musical thinking, and that it is so

partly because language is always threatening to become music or worse. An especially sensitive area in this respect (and one which remains sensitive today) is versification. Hegel's treatment of it begins by vigorously contesting the idea that verse is a fetter. It is untrue, he remarks, that 'versification is a mere hindrance to the free outpouring of inspiration. A genuine artistic talent moves always in its sensuous element as in its very own, where it is at home; it neither hinders nor oppresses, but on the contrary it uplifts and carries.'[6] The words appear to allude to Kant's reminder in the introduction to the *Critique of Pure Reason* that what we think of as external restrictions upon reason may instead be the conditions of the possibility of experience: 'The light dove, in free flight cutting through the air the resistance of which it feels, could get the idea that it could do even better in airless space.'[7] Yet, Kant points out, the air's resistance is what supports the bird in flight. Resistance may be all that holds us up. This implies a rather different way of thinking about language's materiality. The body of language, which must be to say the bodies of languages, we must now conclude, is not that set of otherwise chaotic and meaningless contingencies which must simply be made to serve poetry, but rather poetry's elements or mediums, something like poetry's conditions of possibility. The problem clearly occurs to Hegel, since he argues that despite the way in which authentic artists move in a sensuous medium which bears them up, it nevertheless is the case that *this* sensuous medium is more arbitrary than most (*HA* II, 1012). What is more, a further problem supervenes, because the initial characterization of the poet who is borne up and sustained rather than merely imprisoned by the limitations of verse comes to look rather different in the light of the changing historical conditions which Hegel himself sets out. Here Hegel's discussion is remarkable, like so much of his work, for his inability to allow any particular problem to be treated as something too minute for philosophy to enquire into.

In this case the refusal of mere contingency is most strikingly manifested when Hegel comes to deal with the problem of the origin of rhyme, or rather, of the origin of rhyme's dominance in medieval and modern European versification. In a way wholly characteristic of Hegel various 'external' explanations — Arabic influence, the collapse of the Roman empire through barbarian invasion — are offered and then set aside in favour of an explanation which will carry the right sense of necessity: 'The more inward and spiritual the artistic imagination becomes, the more does it withdraw from this natural aspect which it cannot any longer idealize in a plastic way; and it is so

concentrated in itself that it strips away the, as it were, corporeal side of the language and in what remains emphasizes only that wherein the spiritual *meaning* lies for the purpose of communication, and leaves the rest alone as insignificant by-play' (*HA* II, 1023). The advent of rhyme, it turns out, is part of a structural historical mutation which shares the shape analysed in the 'unhappy consciousness' section of the *Phenomenology*. The opening up of an unprecedented kind of interiority, an interiority which takes the world set over against it for the inessential, means that the side of nature, the bodily aspect of language, is now experienced not as the natural habitat for the ideas of poetry, but rather as something either unimportant or at least important only in so far as it emphasizes the intellectual content of poetry. Indeed Hegel thinks that what is often thought of as the shift from classical quantitative to accentual metre can be understood as part of this process of interiorization, as a result of which 'the chief meaning acquires so much weight that it draws the impress of the accent entirely on to itself alone; and since the emphasis and the chief meaning are linked together, this coincidence of the two does not make conspicuous but drowns the natural length or shortness of the other syllables.' (*HA* II, 1021) This has the effect of completely changing the relation between the intellectual and the material in verse. 'If now, as is the case in full measure with our modern mother-tongue for example, these roots lay claim to the accent almost exclusively for themselves, this is throughout a preponderating accent on the meaning or sense; but it is not a feature which involves freedom of the material, i.e. sound, or could afford a relationship between long, short and accented syllables independently of the idea contained in the words.' (*HA* II, 1021) What Hegel is elaborating is something like a dialectic of our mastery over linguistic material. The weight which interiority gives to intended meaning performs an instrumental recruitment of sound, so that accents now serve, in Hegel's view, to emphasize meaning, rather than allowing, in his very striking expression, the material to remain free — rather, that is, than allowing accent and quantity to be patterned in a way which is in direct service to no particular meaning but instead as what we might think of as a kind of 'free' beauty. What makes this a dialectic is that, as with many of Hegel's powerful contrasts between what he called 'classical' and 'romantic' art, meaning by these terms something quite different from whatever may be meant by them now (meaning, that is, something which is closer to the complex structural distinction between 'heteronomous' and 'autonomous' art made in

Marxist aesthetics than it is to any classification of styles or tendencies), the transition is neither lamented nor celebrated but understood as a mutation in which losses and gains are intimately co-dependent. From one point of view 'a rhythmic figuration of time-movement and accentuation, divorced from the root-syllable and its meaning, can no longer exist; and there is left, in distinction from the above-mentioned listening to the richness of sound and the duration of longs and shorts in their varied combinations, only a general hearing entirely captivated by the emphasized chief syllable which carries the weight of the meaning.' 'This compels us, as if fettered, not to go beyond the sense of each word' (*HA* II, 1021). From this angle the collapse of quantitative metre is a radical deafening of the prosodic ear. The hearkening to free material, possible when that material was thought of as thinking's natural dwelling, goes deaf when it is imagined as the sensuous and habitually sinful body of language (for Hegel closely associates the rise of rhyme with the rise of Christianity).

The emphasis on interior intentionality thus results in a peculiar fixation or imprisonment. Yet at the same time, this process could not be less like the rise of a sheer indifference to the body of language. It is rather an obsessive investment of it with a new kind of power. In a strange way the diminished plasticity of post-classical versification in fact results in a newly intensified focus on sound in verse: 'because *romantic* poetry as such strikes more strongly the soul-laden note of feeling, it is engrossed more deeply in playing with the now independent sounds and notes of letters, syllables and words, and it proceeds to please itself in their sounds which, now with deep feeling, now with the architectonic and intellectual ingenuity of music, it can distinguish, relate to one another, and interlace with one another' (*HA* II, 1023). Hegel seizes, as so often in his thinking about Christianity, something of that pattern analysed by Peter Brown, in which the deep suspicion of the body in early Christian thinking by no means results in regarding the body as something indifferent, but rather transforms the body into a privileged place in which the signs and traces of the divine or the demonic are gloriously or terrifyingly manifested.[8] In this connection we may see that Hegel is very far indeed from regarding the advent of rhyme merely as a relatively unimportant result of the tearing-open of interiority. Since its origins are *necessary*, rather than external, we may view rhyme, even, as one aspect of the conditions of possibility of that interiority — and this because, as becomes clear, it can in a certain sense be said that the *subject* rhymes, for Hegel. Since it is of course not at all the case for Hegel that there are no subjects

before Christianity or Roman law, but only the case that the particular conception of individual interiority which accompanies those social formations needs them to develop in the way that it does, it is already the case that the shape of versification in general, whether quantitative or accentual, answers to a need of the structure of human subjectivity as such: 'The I requires self-concentration, a return to self out of the steady flux of time, and this it apprehends only through specific time-units, struck just as markedly as they succeed one another and end according to a rule' (*HA* II, 1016, translation modified). The subject is a self-exteriorization and a return, a recollection after an excursion, for which language furnishes the most eminent model, but which is also seen, for example, in the structure of human labour. Only this excursion and return can convert the merely indifferent flow of time into the shaped and understood duration which makes subjectivity intelligible.

These requirements become both more acute and more problematic when the rupture of interiority associated with Christianity and Roman law takes hold. Rhyme is part of what allows a subjectivity thus conceived to sustain itself: 'The need of the soul to apprehend itself is emphasized more fully, and it is satisfied by the assonance of rhyme which is indifferent to the firmly regulated time-measure and has the sole function of bringing us back to ourselves through the return of the same sounds. In this way the versification approaches what is as such musical, i.e. the sound of interiority, and it is freed from the materiality, so to say, of language, i.e. that natural measurement of longs and shorts' (*HA* II, 1023, translation modified). If all versification satisfies the subject's need to collect itself out of any mere flow of dimensionless points of time, rhyme does this in a way peculiarly adapted to this historically individual shape of interiority: the *Gleichklingeln* of rhyme rings us back to ourselves in a way which is indifferent to firmly regulated measurements of time. Rhyme marks off the time of innerness against the world's time. Rhyme, through the return of similar sounds, does not merely lead us back to those sounds. It leads us back to ourselves. Rhyme is part of what makes Christian and ultimately modern subjects possible. The musical thinking of the 'unhappy consciousness' here chimes with the approximation of verse to the musical as such. And at this point we are given a striking definition of what the musical *as such* might be: the sound of interiority.

Yet what *is* the interiority which is to sound? The analysis of the 'unhappy consciousness' may already have warned us that interiority

can be thought of as being 'nothing at all' without its objectifications. Since music is incapable of the kind of referentiality or representation offered not only by language but also by painting and sculpture, it becomes a question whether its proper field is anything at all either:

> Stone and colouring receive the forms of a broad and variegated world of objects and portray them as they actually exist; sounds cannot do this. On this account what alone is fitted for expression in music is the object-free inner life, abstract subjectivity as such. This is our entirely empty self, the self without any further content. Consequently the chief task of music consists in making resound, not the objective world itself, but, on the contrary, the manner in which the inmost self is moved to the depths of its personality and conscious soul. (*HA* II, 891)

It is hard not to be aware of a clash of emphases in this passage. On the one hand what music expresses is something 'entirely empty', something which has no content. On the other hand this entire emptiness is 'the inmost self', 'moved to the depths of its personality and conscious soul'. Since it is hard to imagine in what sense a purely *abstract* subjectivity, or an entirely *empty* one, may possess such innernesses, depths, and chasms, it is hard to escape the implication that there is something constitutively illusory about what it is that music attempts to express. Insofar as it must express abstract subjectivity, there is nothing at all to express. Yet the illusion of pure interiority is a real illusion, a shape of feeling which is really present, and for this reason it is not the case that it has no cognitive content, but that, like 'musical thinking' in the *Phenomenology*, it is a movement towards which does not 'reach as far' as cognition. Because Hegel's phenomenology is one in which any cut and dried opposition between feeling and knowing comes undone, the apparent non-existence of what music is to express comes undone too.

This is evident in Hegel's account of the connection between music and time. Time offers the ideal occasion for the negative nature of subjectivity to be explicated:

> The inner life in virtue of its subjective unity is the active negation of accidental juxtaposition in space...The similarly ideal negative activity in its sphere of externality is *time*. For (i) it extinguishes the accidental juxtaposition of things in space and draws their continuity together into a point of time, into a 'now'. But (ii) the point of time proves at once to be its own negation, since, as soon as *this* 'now' is, it supersedes itself by passing into another 'now' and therefore reveals its negative activity. (iii) On account of externality, the element in which time moves, no truly *subjective* unity is established between the first point of time

and the second by which it has been superseded; on the contrary, the 'now' still remains always the *same* in its alteration; for each point of time is a 'now' just as little distinguished from the other, regarded as merely a point of time, as the abstract self is from the object in which it cancels itself and, since this object is only the empty self itself, in which it closes with itself. (*HA* II, 907)

The impossibility of imagining real duration coincides with the impossibility of imagining a reality proper to the subject. Both, for Hegel, can only be conceived as acts of negation, as negativity itself. Yet what follows? This emptiness upon emptiness is shaped in just the right way for music to take a powerful grip. Nothing moves nothing, inexorably. 'Now since time, and not space as such, provides the essential element in which sound gains existence in respect of its musical value, and since the time of the sound is that of the subject too, sound on this principle penetrates the self, grips it in its simplest being, and by means of the temporal movement and its rhythm sets the self in motion'. It is with a sense of disbelief that we read the single-sentence paragraph which concludes this section. 'This is what can be advanced as the essential reason for the elemental might of music' (*HA* II, 908). It is apparent that it strikes Hegel too as insufficient, because he immediately goes on to qualify the 'essentiality' of this 'reason': 'If music is to exercise its full effect, more is required than purely abstract sound in a temporal movement. The second thing to be added is a *content*, i.e. a spiritual feeling felt by the heart, and the soul of this content expressed in notes' (*HA* II, 908).

The extent to which the apparent nothingness of abstract subjectivity, a nothingness which music is to express, always and necessarily spills over into a rich, moving and complex 'something' in Hegel's account of music is reinforced by the extent to which, as the analysis of 'musical thinking' in the 'unhappy consciousness' section has already suggested, Hegel thinks of musical and religious feeling themselves as being deeply kindred shapes of spirit:

What constitutes the real depth of the note-series is the fact that it goes on even to essential oppositions and does not fight shy of their sharpness and discordance. For the true Concept is an inherent unity, though not a merely immediate one but one essentially split internally and falling apart into contradictions. On these lines, for example, in my *Logic* I have expounded the Concept as subjectivity, but this subjectivity, as an ideal transparent unity, is lifted into its opposite, i.e. objectivity; indeed, as what is purely ideal, it is itself only one-sided and particular, retaining contrasted with itself something different and opposed to it, namely objectivity; and it is only genuine subjectivity if it enters this opposition and then

overcomes and dissolves it. In the actual world too there are higher natures who are given power to endure the grief of inner opposition and to conquer it. If music is to express artistically both the inner meaning and the subjective feeling of the deepest things, e.g. of religion and in particular the Christian religion in which the abysses of grief form a principal part, it must possess in the sphere of its notes the means capable of representing the battle of opposites. These means it gains in the so-called dissonant chords of the seventh and ninth, but what these indicate more specifically is a matter on which I cannot enter further here. (*HA* II, 927–8)

This presents a substantial elaboration, and perhaps a modification, of the view which Hegel has initially advanced, that the entirely empty self is what music expresses, because it works from an opposition between abstract and 'genuine' subjectivity. The modification becomes clearest at the point at which Hegel suggests that, in dissonance, music actually possesses the means of *representing* a battle of opposites. What music is representing in such dissonance is implicitly regarded as more than a merely subjective set of feelings; it is implicitly compared to the capacity of, for example, the *Science of Logic* to make the necessity of undergoing contradiction, rather than the abolition or evasion or deletion of contradiction, the principle of its own organization. There are subjects who can live through contradiction without going under; and, it is further suggested, there is music which can give expression to this ability to undergo contradiction. The passage resonates contrastively with the pejorative account of 'musical thinking' in the analysis of the 'unhappy consciousness', because it appears to suggest that music can in a certain sense represent and thus *know*, rather than symptomatizing, the contradictory character of unhappy consciousness.

This, then, is where this particular conception of thinking and, with it, this particular conception of subjectivity, has brought us on the question of 'musical thinking'. Music has served as a figure both for the failure of thinking to become fully explicit, and for an interiority which misrecognizes its imprisoned or sheltered innerness as a natural fate. It has been able to serve in this fashion because what is meant by thinking here is this excursion and return; because the subject, in other words, must objectify itself even in order to be a subject. It is nothing at all without recognition: no cognition without re-cognition! In so far as music begins to take on an implicit cognitive content, it can do so only to the extent that it too follows this pattern. There could be musical thinking which is thinking proper only in so far as music can in some way become representation.

If music cannot become reflection, recognition, and representation, there can be no musical thinking. One of the reasons for following this train of interconnections through at such length has been that, far from being an untypical or exotic way of thinking about the subject, this aspect of Hegel's work chimes with the default mode of modern anti-metaphysical metaphysics. That is to say, wherever thinking and subjectivity are still appealed to all, it is usually with a series of precautionary defences against the least hint of a supposedly 'metaphysical' soul talk. What must above all be made clear when we talk about the subject is that we are not designating anything which has any being: we are rather talking of a form, an activity, a negativity, or a linguistic position or trope. Otherwise we are worshipping that worst of idols: the thing which thinks.

Let us now consider, however, whether this is what thinking must mean, and whether this is the way in which subjectivity must be conceived.

It is true that no one can be certain that he is thinking or that he exists unless he knows what thought is and what existence is. But this does not require reflective knowledge, or the kind of knowledge that is acquired by means of demonstrations; still less does it require knowledge of reflective knowledge, i.e. knowing that we know, and knowing that we know that we know, and so on *ad infinitum*. This kind of knowledge cannot possibly be obtained about anything. It is quite sufficient that we should know it by that internal awareness which always precedes reflective knowledge.[9]

Here, then, thinking does not at all mean the same as making-explicit.

9. What is meant by thought. By the term 'thought', I understand everything which we are aware of as happening within us, in so far as we have awareness of it. Hence, *thinking* is to be identified here not merely with understanding, willing and imagining, but also with sensory awareness. For if I say 'I am seeing, or I am walking, therefore I exist', and take this as applying to vision or walking as bodily activities, then the conclusion is not absolutely certain. This is because, as often happens during sleep, it is possible for me to think I am seeing or walking, though my eyes are closed and I am not moving about; such thoughts might even be possible if I had no body at all. But if I take 'seeing' or 'walking' to apply to the actual sense or awareness of seeing or walking, then the conclusion is quite certain, since it relates to the mind, which alone has the sensation or thought that it is seeing or walking.[10]

As the phenomenological strand of French Cartesian scholarship has been energetically pointing out over the last couple of decades,

passages such as these do not fit comfortably with the usual maps of what Descartes did to us all.[11] Yes, the opposition between mind and body is every bit as sharp as is generally lamented. But what counts as 'mind', what counts as thinking is, as soon as one begins to enquire closely into it, strikingly bodily. Heidegger's belief, for example, a belief so influential for all our subsequent anti-Cartesianisms, the belief that the cogito is a model of reflection, of representation, of recognition, is in fact a fundamentally mistaken one. What grounds my being is not reflection, knowing that I know, thinking that I think, and it is thus not at all anything emptied of affectivity; it is rather the primordial fact of affectivity itself in so far as I am affect. The feeling of thinking, as the feeling which *I — am*, and not thinking about thinking. Insofar as I am my body, rather than having it, this body is part of thinking.

Without judging at all, for the moment, whether such an idea of thinking is legitimate, one thing which we can notice is the impossibility, within such an idea, of identifying thinking with making-explicit, or with that aspect of language which is identified with such making-explicit. The block upon offering any content at all to subjectivity, on pain of a relapse into soul-talk, has in fact left us with a much more idealist notion of the subject and of thinking as our default model. And it is perhaps this kind of idealism — a sober, non-metaphysical, indeed an anti-metaphysical, almost, it may be thought, a *materialist* kind of idealism — which forms the most serious obstacle, currently, to recognizing the thinking that goes on in prosody. What this essay must end by invoking, therefore, could in no way be a series of solutions to questions about the nature of prosodic cognition, but rather some suggestions about how the questions themselves might be realigned. First of all, there need not be any reason why the possibility that prosodic aspects of poems be bearers of meanings in their own right should depend upon the possibility of establishing a close analogy with *linguistic* meaning. If we can imagine forms of thinking and knowing which are not linguistic, and which do not rest upon linguistic modes of making-explicit, then we are also in that act imagining meanings and ways of meaning which are not like the relation of a signifier to a signified. So fully has a certain pan-linguisticism become the element within which cultural enquiry takes place, and within which it shelters from militant scientistic naturalisms, that the very notion of meaning without signifiers and signifieds may seem alien to us. But its ground is simple. In the meaning borne by the experiences of pain, fear, desire or hunger — those experiences which I cannot

pretend I am not having, however hard my scepticism tries to help me — is grounded the possibility of any meaning whatever. Secondly, this then frees enquiry to explore the significance of prosodic aspects of language from a different perspective. Such exploration will surely have much to learn from a phenomenological approach, provided that phenomenology can be conducted in such a way as to register, rather than wrongly to bracket out, everything in my musical or prosodic experience which constitutes its real concrete complexity; everything, that is to say, which criticism, calling it personal, idiosyncratic, or unrepresentative, usually takes pains to strike out first off as a preliminary step towards the securing of objectivity. Only if we start from those musical and prosodic experiences which we actually have, rather than from their publicly respectable stuffed replicas, may we hope to find a less pejorative sense, not only for 'musical', but also for poetic, thinking.

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NOTES

1 'We learn by experience that we meant something other than we meant to mean'. G.W.F. Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit* (henceforth *PhG*), translated by A.V. Miller (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1977), 39.
2 Henri Meschonnic, *Critique du rythme: anthropologie historique du langage* (Lagrasse, Editions Verdier, 1982), 71.
3 Hegel, *Philosophy of Mind*, translated by William Wallace and A.V. Miller (Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1971), 220.
4 Translation in Gwen Griffith Dickson, *Hamann's Relational Metacriticism* (Berlin and New York, Walter De Gruyter, 1995), 523–4.
5 Dickson, 272.
6 *Hegel's Aesthetics*, translated by T.M. Knox (henceforth *HA*) (2 volumes, Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1975), II, 1012–13.
7 Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, edited and translated by Paul Guyer and Allen Wood (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1998), 129 (B140).
8 Peter Brown, *The Body and Society: Men, Women, and Sexual Renunciation in Early Christianity* (New York, Columbia University Press, 1988).
9 René Descartes, 'Author's replies to the sixth set of objections', in *The Philosophical Writings of Descartes*, translated by John Cottingham, Robert Stoothoff, Dugald Murdoch (3 volumes, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1984), II, 285.

10 Descartes, 'Principles of Philosophy. Part One', in *Philosophical Writings*, 1: 195.

11 Cf. in particular, Michel Henry, *Genealogy of Psychoanalysis*, translated by Douglas Brick (Stanford, Stanford University Press, 1993); Jean-Luc Marion, *Cartesian Questions. Method and Metaphysics* (Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 1999).