Editor's Introduction: Thinking Verse

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The first thing to strike one about the phrase 'Thinking Verse' is that 'verse' can take the place of either object or subject, can be that which demands thinking, or alternatively the agent of such thinking. This grammatical indeterminacy is central to the aims of the journal *Thinking Verse*, and the kinds of discussion and debate for which it will provide a forum. We will ask what kinds of thinking—be it aesthetic, linguistic, philosophical—verse, as a generic fact of poetry, engenders, activates, dynamises, demands, constrains, facilitates. In so doing the journal seeks to reconcile a close attention to the technical aspects of verse art with these broader stakes, not least given that it is through an engagement with technical minutiae that these stakes are articulated, and that without an understanding of these stakes the focus on such minutiae cannot grasp the object it purports to discuss.

Thinking Verse will in this respect serve ostensibly as a resource for scholars who are developing critical approaches to how we read verse. This also informs a commitment to the contemporary writing of verse, which commitment will be evident not only in the poets whose work is discussed by contributors, but also in

the 'poets' section, where contemporary poets are invited for each volume to read and discuss a poem that has proven important for their own work. This interest in the contemporary possibilities for verse art will not, however, be at the expense of studying the long history of verse forms, and the way in which these forms have been conceptualised by poets and critics alike. We are particularly aware that earlier poets and theorists will have conceived of versification, of rhythm, and of the broader relation between language and paralanguage, in ways far removed from those conceptions held today, and that, in particular, poets' and readers' intuitive relations to language and verse art have altered throughout history; we are equally aware that the 'thinking' of verse (and, for that matter, *in* verse) neither can, nor should, be wholly extracted, or abstracted, from such intuition. One of the continual aims of the journal will thus be to see how critical and poetic practice can transform the ways in which we hear and attend to verse, no matter of what period or language.

For the inaugural issue, contributors were invited to take the phrase 'thinking verse' in whatever way they thought appropriate. The variety of approaches, focal points, and problematics, bears witness to the breadth and diversity of questions this phrase opens up, regarding both how verse exacts thinking—of itself and of its critics—and what kinds of thinking are at issue. For these opening remarks, I wish first to introduce the seven articles one by one, and then to identify certain faultlines and points of contact thus opened up, which will no doubt continue to be elaborated upon in the issues which follow.

Simon Jarvis's essay on 'Why rhyme pleases' (pp. 17-43) examines this single feature of verse. In so doing, Jarvis is responding a critical denigration of rhyme that, if expressed most vehemently in eighteenth century Britain, 'is not just ancient history but also part of our history'. Particularly pressing for contemporary practice and criticism, he suggests, is the way a poet's employment of rhyme is

ostensibly interpreted as 'a socially symbolic act' or marker of 'poetical party affiliations' whose 'metacommunicative hyper-saturation threatens altogether to blot out their prosodic coloration'. His essay is concerned precisely with restoring our capacity to hear this coloration, specifically through the way it pleases the ear, or provides—in his striking translation of Roland Barthes's *jouissance*—'bliss'.

Jarvis aims to contest a 'Platonic consensus' regarding rhyme, in which thinking is toneless, far removed from sensual experience; the sonority of poems can only be either 'cocoon or stimulant' to the thinking they contain. This leads to what he terms 'a *metricalization* of rhyme', that is, the '*logicization* of rhyme's role' in poetry: rhyme is distinguished from mere assonance by its organisational significance within a poem. In freeing rhyme from any particular metrical or logical motivation, he wants to undermine the implicit value judgement of 'good' and 'bad' rhyme, where 'Good rhyme has to be serious rhyme which does work; it must not be evasive, it must not jingle and tinkle'. Rather, he asks, might there 'not be a musical or a prosodic thinking', in which prosody is not simply surface effect but rather the 'medium' through which thinking can take place? The reading of a passage from Alexander Pope's *The Rape of the Lock* with which his essay finishes, attending to how Pope's rhyming 'pulls sometimes against, rather than always with, the semantic organization of the argument', sketches an account of the modes and means of such a thinking.

The question of pleasure and our attentiveness to prosodic coloration is also central to Lacy Rumsey's close reading of J. H. Prynne's poem 'The Stony Heart of Her' (part of the 1994 sequence *Her Weasels Wild Returning*) in 'The Obstinate reader: Prynne, prosody and degrees of engagement' (pp. 44-66). Rumsey aims to redress a wider lacuna he identifies in analyses of Prynne's work, and of non- or para-metrical experimental poetry more generally: the reticence of critics to discuss the decisions readers will take in performing these poems and reading them aloud. If this is due in no little part to how Prynne's poetry complicates any attempt to

read aloud, Rumsey contends that for this very reason 'we need to start to talk about those decisions, and about the performances that may arise from them'. Instead of seeing Prynne's much-remarked upon difficulty in terms of interpretation alone, we should consider moments of difficulty as 'cruxes of performance'; to this end he turns to pragmatics-based accounts of the degrees of engagement we employ when reading a text aloud. This, he suggests, is particularly fruitful terrain for reading Prynne: on the one hand, Prynne's work 'encourage[s] us to avoid the construction of viewpoints and discourse contexts' which would permit maximal engagement; on the other, its rhythms serve to invite the kinds of intonation patterns that would imply such engagement. Two different degrees of engagement are thus continually being brought into confrontation.

Rumsey's close reading points to the determinative role played by *metre* in this confrontation of differing degrees of engagement. He notes how 'bursts of metricality' are used 'to propel the reader over points of intonational indeterminacy', particularly those moments when intonation is used 'to disambiguate syntax'. Prynne's poetry allows his readers, through the performance of reading aloud, to derive pleasure in articulating these metrical, syntactical and rhetorical intonations 'while having no real confidence in the deixis whose mastery they imply'. In turning to this category of 'pleasure', Rumsey wishes to highlight a feature of Prynne's poetry that is rarely remarked upon—that the challenges his poems pose might elicit pleasure in a reader, and that this pleasure might motivate our continuing to read him. It also grounds Rumsey's broader claims about the importance of reframing questions of rhythm and difficulty around the pragmatics of reading aloud and performance.

In his 'Free Verse and the translation of rhythm' (pp. 67-101), Clive Scott like Rumsey argues that our 'account of the metrico-rhythmic nature of verse [should] not merely describe what the language of the printed text makes available, but … take[] into consideration the readerly experience of text'; he then pursues this

problematic through the specific challenges of the translation of rhythm. It is because rhythm comprises 'a negotiation of dialectical inputs between text and reader', rather than simply constituting a series of 'metrical givens', that it becomes germane for a broader reflection on translation. This entails that *metrical* poetry should be translated *rhythmically*, for it is 'by translating the metric into the rhythmic that the text is opened up to readerly input'. This is particularly important in translations from French to English given that one is translating from a syllabic metre, characterised by periodicity, into an accentual one, characterised by rhythmicity.

To grasp this rhythmic negotiation between text and reader, Scott proposes that translation, irrespective of what kind of verse it is translating, should always opt for free verse in the translated text, and stages two translations to develop this thesis, firstly of a line from Charles Baudelaire's 'Chant d'automne', and secondly of a stanza from Valery Larbaud's 'Ode'. Striking in each translation is how the original text is transformed by its contact (Scott appositely terms it a 'collision') with the language into which it will be translated: Scott offers 'a complex rhythmic portrait…, a gradual rhythmic sedimentation, or sedimentation of rhythms, rhythmic impulses, rhythmic re-configurations'. Whilst Scott's translation of an *alexandrin* into English employs free verse, his translation of French free verse makes use of typography as one further means of 'conveying voice quality and phonetic values'. In both instances, translation is conceived of as 'a form of experimental writing'; if we are to articulate the kind of 'phenomenology of reading' his opening statements gravitate toward, he finishes by suggesting that such 'experimental writing offers us the best hope of finding one'.

If Scott proposes a 'phenomenological' approach to verse through an analysis of reading, and in particular of rhythm as an encounter between poem and reader, Ross Wilson's 'Shelley's sounds of air' (pp. 102-123) poses similar questions with regard to what is at work within the text itself. Wilson identifies a mode of

thinking taking place in the sonorous fabric of Shelley's poetry. Starting with Shelley's riposte, in the 'Defence of Poetry', to Thomas Love Peacock's denigration of poetry's propensity to 'enchantment', Wilson suggests that Shelley would salvage enchantment in thinking as that which resists the reduction of reason into 'mere reason' or 'reasonings'. Shelley's model of cognition thus coincides with that of Immanuel Kant in the *Critique of Judgement*, where 'cognitive judgement … is somehow prepared for or anticipated by aesthetic judgement'; yet Shelley goes further, to suggest that aesthetic judgement does not simply pave the way for cognition, but is integral to it: when cognition forgets to experience delight, so its cognitive powers are diminished.

It is in this context that Wilson broaches the much-debated question of Shelley's conception of language. Far from being 'a set of labels whose sonic material is only ever entirely subservient to—because at best a secondary reinforcement or decoration of—semantic sense', Shelley warns that such semantically-determined 'signs are a diminished version of all that words can be'. This is crucial for Shelley's poetic practice, as '[t]he sounds of words are part of what Shelley envisages as the way that verse thinks'. When Shelley depicts, in 'The Witch of Atlas', the 'dwelling' of the 'witch of Poesy', the phonic pattern he employs does not simply echo, or even contradict, the sense, but rather 'performs' this dwelling, thus constituting for the poem's reader or auditor a kind of knowledge irreducible to disenchanted reason.

Isobel Armstrong's reading of Hegel's account of prosody, 'Hegel: The time of rhythm, the time of rhyme' (pp. 124-136), also probes the question of how reason becomes extricated from sensuous experience. Of particular interest to Armstrong is temporal experience, specifically 'the temporality of both rhythm and rhyme and what was at stake in it'. Hegel makes a contrast between Classical rhythm and Romantic (or modern) rhyme: Classical rhythm could 'set the self into motion' because it was not simply sound appended to ideas, but the temporal movement of

these ideas: 'Metre means through the interplay of relationships it makes, not through any meaning intrinsic to it'. As a movement that is specifically linguistic, Classical rhythm can 're-make' time, and inhabit 'unalienated time'. By contrast, the Romantic tendency towards rhymed versification is index of its own alienation: 'Rhyme exemplifies the split between interiority and the material world on which Christianity is founded, or came to be historically founded'. This has two consequences, which might at first appear in opposition, but in fact point to the same phenomenon: 'the stripping away of language's corporeality appears to make rhyme simultaneously both *more* abstract and *more* material'.

If rhyme indicates the alienated consciousness of Romantic reason, then it also indicates a specifically *political* alienation; rhyme's temporality, she suggests, is 'the time of capital', not least because 'inherent in rhyme is the culture's readiness for exploitation and consumption'. That is: 'Once materiality is split off, isolated as a separate element, and experienced as an independent entity, it can be separately used and exploited'. But might Romantic poetry prove able to resist this politics that is inexorably internalised into its form? To this end, she turns to the question of caesura, both as Walter Benjamin approaches it as a historical rupture in his 'Theses on the Philosophy of History', and in the final sestet of Shelley's 'Ozymandias'. The latter's two caesuras would serve to break this 'time of capital', so that the 'alienated caesura' might allow for a 'revolutionary revaluation' of the alienated time that structures it.

In this Armstrong suggests that a rhythmic feature of verse—in this instance caesura—might have a significance beyond its local context within a line of verse. This is the question that David Nowell Smith poses in his 'The Poetry-verse distinction reconsidered' (pp. 137-160). Initially, he notes that the assertion that a piece of writing is poetry rather than 'mere' verse—that is, an ontological rather than a generic property—implies not only an evaluative judgement, but an assertion of power. This can be the power of poet over versifier, or of one critical

paradigm over another; the essay's central concern, however, is how this distinction is employed by philosophers who would appropriate poetry for their ends, and in so doing deem the technical specificity of verse itself 'inessential'. He identifies a movement by which 'poetry' is assimilated into philosophy as its 'other': this would allow poetry to retain an apparent autonomy, but is in fact a kind of subordination, as poetry is thematised as that which can perform a kind of thinking philosophy cannot, and which can thereby bring 'thinking to think its own unthought'. At the same time, it is philosophy that determines the nature of this 'otherness'; in which case, poetry cannot be quite as much an 'other' as philosophy would claim.

However, Nowell Smith argues, there is something in the poetry-verse distinction which, in spite of its instrumentalisation, should be salvaged. For this, he turns to Gerard Manley Hopkins's distinction between verse as a repeated figure of *sound*, and poetry as refusing to abstract such sound from its *words*. This he links to the young James Joyce's model of 'epiphany', Martin Heidegger's conception of a 'sounding' anterior to the split of language into sensuous and non-sensuous dimensions. This motivates Heidegger's critique of 'poetics': determinations of verse structure, Heidegger argues, are insufficient due to their abstraction of words' sound from this 'sounding'. But by the same token, it must be through an engagement with the generic constraints of verse that such a 'sounding' can take place—including a phonic patterning which must at least minimally derive 'spoken sounds' from 'spoken words'. This reversibility, Nowell Smith suggests, offers a way of philosophical poetics managing to do justice to both of its terms, where the local metrical significance of terms such as enjambment and caesura can attain a broader philosophical significance.

This concern is also developed in the final contribution, a translation of a late article by the French poet and poetician Henri Meschonnic, 'The Rhythm Party Manifesto' [*Manifeste pour un parti de rythme*] (pp. 161-173). Meschonnic aims to save

what he calls 'a poem' from its subsumption not into philosophy, but into 'poetry': an 'idolatry' and 'voiceless fetish' where the particularities of individual poems are flattened by a generalised 'poeticisation'. What characterises the 'poem' is its discursive specificity: 'there is a poem only if a form of life transforms a form of language and if reciprocally a form of language transforms a form of life'; what characterises poeticisation is its abstraction away from this engagement in a discursive context and in our dealings with the world we inhabit and transform. Language is in the first instance not a system of signs but a 'subject-form(er)' [*forme-sujet*]: at once that which forms the subject and the form a subject takes; crucially, he insists upon 'the decisive role for rhythm in the constitution of language-subjects'. This is rhythm not as 'the metronomic metrician' would have it, but as 'the language-organisation of the continuum of which we are made'.

This for Meschonnic has political implications, notably in 'the generalised semioticisation of society', which occludes the fact that it is not 'language' that uses us, but people who manipulate language in order to use us; similarly, it fixes oppositions between individual and collective, and between language and life, which fundamentally weaken poetry's own potential efficaciousness as a social and political act. And it also has technical implications for the practice of verse, through its institution of a 'sacralised' myth of naming, where the poet's saying affords a perfect correspondence of word and referent. Meschonnic, appealing to Mallarmé's distinction between 'naming' and 'suggesting', ripostes that 'words are not made to designate things … [but] to situate us amongst things'. It is only, he finishes, if we refuse the assimilation of poems into poetry, of rhythm as the former of subjectivity into the mere patterning of arbitrary sounds, of the suggestiveness of language into designation, that 'living [will] transform itself into a poem', or, conversely, that 'a poem [will] transform living'.

If the seven essays collected here diverge in their concerns, problematics, and approaches, they also clearly converge at several points, both regarding which aspects of verse demand thinking, and what kinds of thinking are demanded. In the following pages I wish briefly to indicate certain faultlines these essays, taken together, open up. To do so, I will remark one recurring theme in the essays: the continual insistence on the experiential aspects of verse. This extends not only to the reappraisal of individual generic features of verse, such as rhyme, the relation of metricality and non-metricality, or local effects like caesura and enjambment, but to the essays' philosophical concerns—with regards to the conceptions of language at work in our thematisation of verse meaning, the conception of time through which we grasp rhythm, and indeed the political questions that the analysis of verse opens up. In each instance, the essays are engaged with a wider project of enacting a recovery of experience, to which the authors included in the volume, despite differences in method, approach, and even basic assumptions, all appear to be committed.[1]

The focus on experience entails certain methodological choices. For instance, does an attentiveness to verse mean that we should approach questions of rhythm through a reader-oriented criticism? This is the suggestion made by Rumsey and Scott; both focus on performance as the nexus in which to understand poems' deployment of versification as something continually renewed and activated in the process and experience of reading. And yet even in Wilson's more avowedly text-centred approach, the experiential stakes of rhythm are clear to be seen—only now seen as a function of the poems' deployment of versification rather than the contact between text and reader.

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[1] This focus was by no means solicited by the editors, which indicates that many different critics are independently reappraising the role of experience in verse meaning; given that the volume only comprises seven essays, however, we would not wish to go so far as to claim that this focus is representative of contemporary research in verse as a whole.

It also impacts on how we approach the history of verse forms and the historical work of scholarship. Early in Scott's essay, we are warned against a bad choice where 'metrical analysis' either 'supposes that metrico-rhythmic perception is not historicized, that Marvell does not write with one conception of what is metrico-rhythmically desirable or permissible, while Tennyson writes with another', or it decides 'that all previous treatises on versification are misguided, of *only* historical interest, because linguistics has schooled us correctly in the facts of language'. This leaves various problems, not least that of how to reconcile the historicity of verse forms, and of the theory and practice of versification, with any truth claims we wish to make about, for instance, the relation between language and perceptual experience, or the meaningful value of rhythm. That is, how can this historicist focus avoid dissolving into an all-encompassing relativism? Scott's distinction between *metre* as historical artefact, and *rhythm* as the engagement of text and reader which is activated anew with each reading, seems particularly useful in this regard. But it also concerns how we can encounter features of poems whose significance is now only visible, if at all, as a historical peculiarity to which we have no immediate access. Jarvis, for instance, asks how readers today, living after the 'deafening of the prosodic ear', might once again hear the 'actual intensities of delight' that Pope's verse provoked in his contemporaries, and hints that the various responses these contemporaries had to Pope's verse might afford a means to our experiencing this delight first hand.

As well as opening up these methodological questions, the insistence on the experiential dimensions of verse leads the contributors to look at some of the 'metaphysical'[2] foundations for criticism, notably regarding language and temporality. Jarvis, for instance, wishes to challenge a 'Platonic consensus' whose model of linguistic meaning discounts rhyme because it has already decided in

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[2] I am not using 'metaphysics' in a pejorative sense, but in the broader sense of framing the way in which an entity can come to be considered as such.

advance what language can be. Similarly, Wilson sees the dismissal of enchantment from reason to have a linguistic corollary: the dismissal of verbal sound as a medium for thinking and meaning. Nowell Smith also takes issue with the sound-sense dualism, both in trying to articulate a notion of 'sounding' anterior to the split of the word into sensuous token and semantic content, and in his critique of Agamben's claim that poetry allows language 'finally to communicate itself'. For Agamben, this can happen insofar as the disjunction of sound and sense indicates the not-yet/no-longer structure that constitutes, or so he claims, language's ontological basis. Language is understood negatively in terms of a sound-sense dualism that cannot grasp it; and, by virtue of its methodological insufficiency, this dualism is transformed into ontological condition. Agamben would rather reify an insufficient model of linguistic meaning than bring its insufficiency into question. The metaphysics of this sound-sense split also motivates Meschonnic's manifesto, both in his critique of the sign, which would extract language from the context of human discourse which renders it meaningful, and in his polemic directed at the model of language as naming or 'nomination', which would overlook language's capacity to suggest, allude, provoke, by claiming dogmatically the perfect correspondence of word and referent. Finally, just as Meschonnic aims to return language from its 'semanticisation' to its discursive context, Scott argues: 'we do not inhabit language as a set of facts, but as a set of perceptions'; this not only shifts how we would experience linguistic meaning, but also how we would analyse the deployment of the most obviously perceptual aspects of language—paralanguage—in verse.

If we thus find a general opposition to the semanticisation of linguistic meaning, which would consider verse effects merely in terms of this meaning, then this also impacts on those aspects of verse that we might consider merely 'ornamental'. Rumsey notes, for instance, how metricality functions within Prynne's poetry in order to guide the reader over passages of incomprehension, and to create the

disjunction between intonational phrasing and discursive engagement which is a characteristic feature of much of his late verse. Instead of being ornamental or decorative, metricality becomes the vehicle for Prynne's demands of his reader, and conversely, the reader's pleasure in answering these demands. A similar argument is found in Wilson's analyses of Shelley, where motifs that might appear arbitrary, or at best decorative, such as cadences, assonances, and the like, are shown to play a central argumentational role not only in his verse but also in the prose of the 'Defence of Poetry'. Nowell Smith suggests that the very notion of 'ornament' would suppose that those features of the poem's medium that are most peculiar to it—its treatment of prosody, trope, and so on—are rendered extrinsic to its meaning; thus schematised, we are effectively deafened from hearing their 'sounding'. Jarvis is more tempered in his analysis. On the one hand, the ornamental must not be dismissed as 'mere' 'tinkling and jingling', and we must resist any temptation to salvage rhyme by opposing 'serious rhyme which does work' to that which tinkles and jingles; on the other, this surface texture must remain in some sense ornament if it is to delight in the potential of rhyme, and to demonstrate 'how deeply serious triviality is'.

If the essays force us to question the models of language through which we would normally approach verse, they also attend in detail to how verse transforms our experience of temporality. Scott offers an account of rhythm as 'a negotiation of dialectical inputs between text and reader, between the linguistic and the paralinguistic, between the metrical and the rhythmic, between chronometric time and the inner duration of reading', the last of which would echo Jarvis's assertion in his 1998 essay 'Prosody as Cognition': 'to the general economy of nihilism which is our experience of time as though it were an ob-ject prosody opposes the

reality of the duration of our experience'.[3] Striking in Scott's list is the implicit analogy between the metre-rhythm distinction and the distinction of chronometric time (time as an exterior object, what Jarvis terms 'nihilism') and an interior *durée* of readerly experience. Scott would suggest that whilst metre's measurement of time is necessarily chronometric, exterior and objectified, it can deploy this time in such a way as to bring the chronometer into contact with interior duration. That is, in the poem's activation of a dialectic between text and reader, its metre would demand to be experienced rhythmically.

We find a similar relation of poetic rhythm to the experience of time in Armstrong's essay. For Hegel, Romantic poetry's prioritising of rhyme ahead of rhythm/metre (Armstrong suggests that for her purposes the distinction between the two is not especially pertinent) reflects a shift in the metaphysics of language, as semantic meaning is abstracted from sensuous experience. However, Armstrong observes, this is registered *temporally*, most markedly in Romantic poetry's focus on the ictus, which contrasts with Classical poetry's 'measure' in that its division of time into metrical units is assigned a semantic function. In this respect, it is striking that Jarvis, in attempting to oppose such a subordination of the prosodic aspects of language to semantic meaning, should focus on *rhyme*.

Both Jarvis and Armstrong also attend to the crucial historical dimension to such questions. Above we noted the methodological aspects to this problem, but Armstrong makes explicit the political stakes at work here. Here account of caesura as historical rupture, drawing explicitly on Benjamin, also has striking resemblances to Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe's reading of Hölderlin 'counter-rhythmic interruption', discussed by Nowell Smith, where Lacoue-Labarthe offers

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[3] Jarvis, 'Prosody as Cognition', in *Critical Quarterly* 40:4 (1998), 3-15; 11. Jarvis does not, as Scott appears to, align this inner duration specifically with *reading*.

an analogy between Hölderlin's caesura and what Heidegger termed *Ereignis*.[4] But if these offer speculative accounts of history's rhythmic interruptions, other recent work on rhythm has forced a far more specifically empirical account of the relation between poetic rhythm and the more general experience of rhythm in modernity. This can be seen, for instance, in the mission statement to the French web-journal www.rhuthmos.eu, run by Pascal Michon, 'Note sur le renouveau des études rythmiques' (on the renewal of rhythmic studies):[5]

> En tant que « forme du mouvant », le rythme permet de penser ce qui jusqu'ici restait invisible : non pas tant les interactions entre les individus, ni celles entre les individus et les systèmes, que l'organisation générale, les « manières de fluer » de ces interactions.
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> [*As a 'form of what moves', rhythm facilitates a thinking of what had hitherto remained veiled: not so much the interactions between individuals, nor those between individuals and systems, as the general organisation, the 'manner of flux', of these interactions.*]

Rhuthmos approaches the question of rhythm not simply from the perspectives of poetics, linguistics, music, and dance, but those of biology, cognitive science, and psychology, and of economics, urbanism, and management. It is these latter questions that endow the renewal of rhythmic studies with particular timeliness: 'Cette transformation conceptuelle semble liée, par ailleurs, à la mutation qu'a connue le monde autour du point de bascule des années 1990' [*This conceptual transformation appears to be linked, moreover, to the mutation the world underwent in the shocks of 1990s*]. These shocks are both technological—notably the advances in information technology—and socio-economic, stemming from the shifts in social

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4 Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe, *La Fiction du politique: Heidegger, l'art et la politique* (Strasbourg: Association des publications près les Universités de Strasbourg, 1987), 46.
5 Rhuthmos, « Note sur le renouveau des études rythmiques », *Rhuthmos*, 21 juillet 2010 [en ligne]. http://rhuthmos.eu/spip.php?article134.

organisation brought about by the dominance of neoliberal capitalism, be it in the delocalisation of industrial labour to developing countries, the effects of managerial theory on employees' experience in the workplace, the increasing precariousness of labour, the increased regularity in financial crashes (the dotcom bubble, the credit crunch), or the broader individualism sustaining this ideology. Michon, as does Meschonnic in his manifesto, situates the historical significance of rhythm in the relations between the individual and the collective. The political focus given by Armstrong and Jarvis is somewhat different, pointing towards a specifically political valence inhering within poetry's use of prosody itself. As Jarvis puts it, the deafness to 'prosodic coloration' is one part of 'the attempted discursification and infrastructuralization of the entire perceptual field'; the ability to attune our ears to rhyme would constitute one small act of resistance against this process. The renewed interest in the questions of rhythm and prosody, and in particular the focus on the experiential dimension to these questions, is not only an imperative for literary criticism, but for understanding the changes our world is currently undergoing.

The present discussion by no means exhausts the seven essays collected together in the current volume, and less still the question of verse as a whole. But it does point to certain faultlines and levels at which debate takes place—both methodological, in particular concerning the role of readerly experience in the verse meaning, and philosophical, especially regarding the questions of language and temporality. Later volumes no doubt will not only pursue, develop, elaborate, and expand on these questions, but also offer new lines of enquiry, pose new problems, bearing witness once more to the sheer scope of the thinking which verse exacts and renders possible. We look forward to them immensely.