

CHIASMUS AND CULTURE

Edited by

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INTRODUCTION

The essays in this volume are concerned with chiastic inversion, and its place in social interactions, cultural creation, and more generally human thought and experience. They explore from a variety of angles what the unsettling logic of chiasmus has to tell us about the world, human relations, cultural patterns, psychology, artistic and poetic creation. They treat chiasmus not only as a figure of speech, but as a generative principle, an aesthetic idea, a method of composition, a tool of ideological manipulation, a matrix of social interaction, a philosophical problem, a metaphor, an elemental image or sign. At many points they engage in dialogue with one another as well as with key thinkers and authors who have written about or under the inspiration of chiastic logic.

The claims we are making for chiasmus may seem surprising in the light of the somewhat shadowy and far from distinguished status of this figure within traditional rhetoric. As Anthony Paul remarks in his essay in this volume, the history of chiasmus is easily told, since it was only in the late nineteenth century that some scholars began to think it could be anything more than a local decorative literary effect. Even today, anyone who has heard of chiasmus is likely to think of it as no more than a piece of rhetorical playfulness, a lively figure, at times challenging, useful for supplying a memorable sententious note or for performing a terpsichorean pirouette of syntax and thought.

It is the aspect most emphasised in handbooks of style and rhetoric. Surveying the figures of rhetoric in *The Arte of English Poesie* (1589), George Puttenham says of chiasmus (without naming it): ‘Ye haue a figure which takes a couple of words to play with in a verse, and by making them to chaunge and shift one into others place they do very pretily exchange and shift the sence.’ Chiastic patterning was indeed frequently and at times almost obsessively employed in this spirit in the courtly and ornamental poetry and prose of the English Elizabethan period, so it is entirely natural that Puttenham should have thus emphasised the playful and ornamental possibilities of the figure. But precisely four hundred years after the publication of his book Katie Wales (*A Dictionary of Stylistics*, 1989) defines chiasmus in essentially similar terms:

From Gk meaning ‘cross-wise’, **chiasmus** is a rhetorical term to describe a construction involving the repetition of words or elements in reverse order (ab : ba); also known as **antimetabole**. It is often used for witty or aphoristic effect: so Michelangelo is reputed to have said: *Trifles make perfection, and perfection is no trifle*. Syntactic inversion is common in the couplets of eighteenth-century [poets] *Renown'd / for conquest, and in council / skilled* (Addison: *The Campaign*).

The persistently restricted perception of chiasmus has meant that such attention the figure has received within literary and rhetorical studies has been narrowly focussed, failing, one might say, to participate in the spirit of chiasmic inversion and allow the questioner to be questioned by his own object of attention.

However, one area in which chiasmus has demanded and received a good deal of attention is that of Biblical studies. The large-scale chiasmic or concentric structuring of Biblical and other ancient and pre-modern texts (Homer, Beowulf) is well known (these texts make much use of sequences of the type: a,b,c,d,e → e,d,c,b,a usually termed ‘extended chiasmus’). Here, chiasmus is indeed linked to broader cultural, historical and anthropological considerations. In particular, the literature in this area raises the key question of the uses of chiasmus as a mnemonic device. The challenge here is to understand the place of chiasmus in forms of recollection that are different to our own, in the constitution of another kind of memory, principally an oral memory, which has its own supports and modes of functioning. Edwina Palmer (2000) has identified chiasmic features in a Japanese poem-song dating from around A.D. 714, belonging to the Fudoki genre of eulogistic provincial descriptions, features that she suggests are a vestige of Japan’s pre-literate oral heritage.¹ Through a sophisticated form of punning based on symbolic substitution and chiasmic reversal (Palmer 2000:., p.81) the place name of the Womë-no moor is transformed into a cryptic reference to a song for omi purification rites. Chiasmus, here, has a quite different status than in the western rhetorical tradition evoked above. It is an integral feature of an ancient poetics, albeit one unfamiliar to the vast majority of western readers. One is reminded here of Saussure’s hypothesis (which he was never able to prove) that Saturnian poetry, one of the oldest forms of Latin verse, concealed anagrams which designated keywords for the poet - that of a central theme, of an important object, or the name of a god, for example.

John A. Bengel, arguably the founder of the study of chiasmus in exegesis, had already noted how chiasmus, beyond its ornamental value, shaped reading practises and oriented interpretation. In the fifth volume of his *Gnomon Novi Testamenti*, or *Exegetical*

Annotations on the New Testament (1742) (p. 399), Bengel wrote: “Often there is the greatest use in the employment of this figure, and it is never without some use, viz, in perceiving the ornament, in observing the force of the language; in understanding the true and full sense; in making clear the sound exegesis; and in demonstrating the true and neat analysis of the sacred text.” Recently, Biblical scholars have gone further along the path indicated by Bengel. One other book-length work on the topic is Ian Thomson’s *Chiasmus in the Pauline Letters* (1995).² One of Thomson’s thought-provoking arguments is that Paul’s audience would have been more aware of chiasmic patterns in the *Letters* because of the ancient education system they received, which is steeped in classical rhetoric. As a result, in biblical times, reading from left to write was not a naturally enshrined phenomenon. The Greek texts that schoolchildren studied sometimes switched from left to right to the opposite in a matter of lines. Children were often taught to recite the alphabet from alpha to omega and omega to alpha. These same children may well have been brought up by parents who used scripts that were read in different directions, as was the case with the Greek speaking Hebrew or Hebrew or Aramaic speaking Greeks, Thomson points out. The readers – or listeners – for whom Paul wrote his letters, seem to have had a more ambilateral view of language and perhaps by extension of the world in general (mirror writing, apparently, was quite common). They pose, in this respect, an anthropological question: to what extent and in what ways do the institutions, technologies and practices of a given culture determine what one might think of as its ‘style’ – for there do seem to be cultures that are more chiasmically minded than others (the Brazilian Caduveo, for example), just as there are more chiasmically minded authors or thinkers.

The power of chiasmus as an instrument to shape and embody meaning, acting as a dialectical tool, is exemplified by Karl Marx, who in *The German Ideology* re-figures the relations between socio-economic infrastructures and ideology in terms that are essentially chiasmic. As he puts it: ‘Consciousness can never be anything else than conscious existence, and the existence of men is their actual life-process. If in all ideology men and their circumstances appear upside-down as in a *camera obscura*, this phenomenon arises just as much from their historical life-process as the inversion of objects on the retina does from their physical life-process. In direct contrast to German philosophy which descends from heaven to earth, here we ascend from earth to heaven.’ The principle of chiasmic inversion applies not only to the relations between ‘the phantoms formed in the human brain’ (ideology) and the ‘material life-process’ of which these phantoms are sublimates, but to Marx’s own method of approach: ‘we do not set out from what men say, imagine, conceive,

nor from men as narrated, thought of, imagined, conceived, in order to arrive at men in the flesh. We set out from real, active men, and on the basis of their real life-process we demonstrate the development of the ideological reflexes and echoes of this life-process.’ Philosopher Sarah Kofman in her classic study *Camera Obscura : of Ideology* (1999) has shown to what extent the texts of Freud and Nietzsche, like those of Marx, have also displaced traditional oppositions by means of mechanisms of inversion which are given form by the metaphor of the camera obscura common to all three. One might have cited other thinkers who proceed similarly. Lévi-Strauss, for example, uses the optical model to try to understand what happens at the limits of narrative transformations. In the final section of his famous essay ‘La geste d’Asdiwal’ he argues that as myths cross thresholds between linguistic and social groups, their structural features are initially weakened. However, as this, weakening reaches a certain threshold, the same myths may regain precision and coherence by inverting.³ Chiasmic inversion is mobilised, here, to understand the limits of communication. The model clearly has applications beyond mythical narratives.

There is doubtless a chiasmic dimension to Marcel Mauss’s refiguring of social relations through gift theory, although it is not expressed through an optical analogy. He roots the obligation to reciprocate in a certain assimilation of the gift to the giver and the giver to the gift (for example in his analyses of the turtle and pig eating ceremonies celebrated by the Andaman Islanders). Furthermore, if the principle of reciprocity is not respected, the good social relations created through gift giving may be inverted: friendship becomes hostility. The possibility of reversal, in other words, is what guarantees that gifts continue to circulate.

In each of these cases, chiasmus provides a powerful explanatory principle. Its dynamism is no doubt to be found, in part, in a contradictory feature of the rhetorical figure. In one sense, one may see it as a pattern or structure, one that is commonly expressed as ‘ABBA’. But the reversal this formula describes occurs in time. In other words it is also a process and a process of change. The models outlined above share and make use of this contradiction which is also a productive tension that may be mapped onto the world and used to explore phenomena that lie somewhere between diagram and force, system and movement.

A step in this direction was taken by a pioneering account of chiasmism or chiasmity as a psychological condition, Ralf Norrman’s study of the obsessively chiasmic late-Victorian writer Samuel Butler⁴. Norrman sees Butler as a ‘chiasmic personality’, that is to say a psychological, indeed psychopathological case. In his anatomizing of Butler, as in his comments on Henry James, Norrman understands the chiasmic personality as one who will be blocked and frustrated at every turn by his fatal insistence on balancing every statement or

argument with its opposite. Butler was a compulsive reverser rather than a systematic sceptic, a term that might be applied to Montaigne, for whom, as for the ancient Sceptics, the chiasmic aporia was not paralysing but, as Phillip John Usher shows us in this volume, a powerful instrument for opposing dogmatism and time-honoured nonsense. Yet another distinctly different kind of “chiasmic personality” was the Argentine poet-anthropologist Néstor Perlongher, whose interwoven life and work are discussed here by Ben Bollig.

Chiasmus is a thread, generally hidden from view but at moments emerging as an explicit conceptualization. This is the case for a number of 20th century thinkers notably Freud, Heidegger, Merleau-Ponty, Lévi-Strauss and Lacan, all of whom are present in this volume. The thinking of Heidegger – and of Hegel – underpins Stephen Tyler’s “thought pictures”, Merleau-Ponty’s analogy of chiasmus is scrutinized by Isabelle Thomas-Fogiel, Boris Wiseman identifies and explicates the chiasmic equation that is central to Lévi-Strauss’s understanding of mythical thinking, and uses it to uncover a mythical dimension to a story by Hans Christian Andersen, and Alain Vanier’s very compact account of “Chiasm in suspense in psychoanalysis” brings together Merleau-Ponty, Lévi-Strauss, Freud and Lacan, setting up resonances with the contributions of Thomas-Fogiel and Wiseman, while taking the discussion into an important new area.

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The present volume forms part of the ongoing International Rhetoric Culture Project (www.rhetoricculture.org) whose genesis and history is outlined in the Preface by Ivo Strecker and Stephen Tyler to the first volume of the series, *Culture and Rhetoric*. The stated aim of the project is ‘to rethink the concept [of culture] and locate culture in the domain where it ultimately belongs – that is, rhetoric’ (Strecker and Tyler 2009). Since its beginnings in the late 1990s the project has grown into a large and highly dialogical collaboration of scholars from a wide range of countries and disciplines in which rhetoric, anthropology, literary studies and philosophy interweave and interact. It is an ambitious project, and this volume is not the least ambitious part of it: its aim is to claim for chiasmus a prominent place on the map of discourse and culture as a figure and concept that plays a defining or shaping role in many areas of human experience and is endowed with meaning-making potentialities comparable to those of metaphor.

The contributors to this volume share an integrative, anti-dualistic and anti-mechanistic view of human culture, recognizing how linguistic expression is bound up with

experience, constitutive of experiential reality as well as responsive to it, and essentially rhetorical. In the words of the influential anthropologist Stephen Tyler, language is to be seen as ‘neither an objective form nor a formal object, but ... a rhetorical instrument which makes use of objective forms and formal objects only in the interest of getting the work of the world done (...)’⁵ So the bringing together of rhetoric and culture is a natural development. The participants in this project, while each being a specialist in his or her own field of research – be it literature, philosophy, ethnography, psychoanalysis, rhetoric, etc – have all agreed for the period of this collaboration to explore, not so much the research questions ahead of them, but those that laterally connect one discipline to the next, cutting across ordinary disciplinary boundaries. “Rhetoric culture” is best understood as not a restrictive category but a liberating one, the two terms more dynamically related than they would be in “rhetorical culture”, which would be pleonastically redundant in the same way as “bodily dance” would be. “Rhetoric culture” is more like “body dance”: instead of the two components of the term folding together easily with one subordinate to the other, a new and possibly awkward whole is formed of two equal halves that rub together, generating a creative friction. The body is what dances and the dance is what happens through the body. Each term enables the other, and just as we cannot easily tell the dancer from the dance, the medium from the performance, so we cannot easily tell the rhetoric from the culture.

The perception of the place of rhetoric in the panorama of the human and social sciences has undergone a significant transformation in recent years; the present volume represents both a response to this and a contribution to the ongoing process. A particular understanding of rhetoric has been central to modern critical theory and modern readings of literature. Marc Fumaroli in France and Paul de Man in America, although working in very different traditions, both illustrate well the shift that occurred in the early 80’s. It put rhetoric at the core of interpretative processes.⁶ The “linguistic” and “metaphoric turn” of the later 20th century paved the way for a new awareness of the foundational role of tropes in culture (addressed by James Fernandez in *Culture and Rhetoric*), for the emergence of figuration to the forefront in anthropology, and for broader and more powerful notions of rhetoric than had previously existed. Rhetoric has always, since Antiquity, been defined as the power of persuasion that, linked with speech (*logos*), distinguishes man from the animals and as a skilful refinement of speech most successfully deployed by an educated elite, boldly defined as “the most intelligent people” by Isocrates, 4th C. BC (quoted by Meyer 2009: 33)⁷. Modern thought about language and discourse - one striking and influential, if still controversial, instance being Derrida’s reversal of the priority of speech over writing, made possible by the

introduction of a new notion of “writing” or “arche-writing” - has helped open the way to understanding rhetoric (considered as a form of “writing” in Derrida’s sense) not as an advanced human skill found in highly evolved communities but as a condition of the possibility of meaning. We can now see the ancient Greeks as having appropriated and professionalized rhetorical practices that are inherent in language behaviour, whatever its forms, codifying them into a science and thereby reserving for the powerful, or any rate those who had received a specialist education, what properly belonged to everyone.

Another way of stating the aim of the Rhetoric Culture Project might then be “to return rhetoric to daily life and relocate it at the basis of human culture”; in rethinking culture, that is to say, we are also necessarily rethinking rhetoric. Chiasmus occupied from the first a privileged position within the whole Rhetoric Culture Project, Ivo Strecker and Stephen Tyler having long been aware of the way rhetoric and culture themselves stand in chiasmic relation to one another.⁸ For this reason Part One of the first volume in the series bears the title “The Chiasm of Rhetoric and Culture”. It was because of this realization of the importance of chiasmus that Ivo Strecker sought out our own investigations⁹ into ways chiasmus can operate within texts and systems of thought structurally and as a figure constitutive of meaning, something far more significant than a local stylistic effect, and we became involved in the budding project. Dialogue and correspondence ensued, some of which is recalled in Ivo Strecker’s contribution to this volume (pp...). Chiasmus is indeed strongly present in the first volume of the series, *Culture and Rhetoric*, as it was prominently represented at the conference in Mainz in February 2005, soon after which it became clear that the creative and hermeneutic powers of this figure and, as was gradually becoming apparent, its ubiquity in all areas of culture, demanded further investigation and that it would be a logical step to devote a whole volume to “chiasmus in the drama of life”. Our plan, which we have since followed, was to open up existing research on the figure to broader cross-cultural and cross-disciplinary considerations and in the process explore not only what we can say about chiasmus but what chiasmus can say about us.

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The four-stage structure of this book corresponds roughly to the stages of the collective project that began with a growing awareness that chiasmus was a figure whose power and possibilities had not been recognized, went on to chart this new and interesting terrain, and developed a sense of the timeliness of chiasmus, its relevance and usefulness as a key to

questions that are of particular concern to our own time, in such fundamental areas as those of epistemology, psychology and the understanding of the nature of lived experience.

The four sections into which this collection is divided represent general differences of perspective but in many ways overlap and are very much in communication with one another. The more theoretically oriented studies in the first two sections also at many points apply the figure to life, literary texts or ethnographic examples from the field. The essays in the third and fourth sections, concerned with the possibility of using the figure of chiasmus to model a broad array of phenomena, from human relations to artistic creation, in doing so also investigate the nature of chiastic thought.

The three essays in the first section, “**The pathos of chiasmus**”, investigate the mental and emotional impact that characterises chiasmus, the “vital, arrogant, fatal, dominant X” in the words of the American poet Wallace Stevens, quoted and dissected by Robert Hariman. They are concerned with defining and mapping chiasmus, and they explore how we try to cope with, and sometimes even manage to overcome the frustrations and constraints of human existence. Chiasmus emerges from these three studies as a figure whose various facets and applications include the philosophical, the social and the magical.

Anthony Paul’s “From stasis to ek-stasis: four types of chiasmus” provides a functional typology of the figure, identifying four basic modes of operation, represented as simple imagined shapes that correspond to the ways in which chiasmus is variously figured: as an X, as a mirroring, as a circle and as a spiral. Paul imagines the X as a sturdy piece of furniture as it were, standing firmly on its two feet: the chiasmus that asserts the balance and symmetry valued by, for instance, the Romans Quintilian and Cicero and by 18th century English neoclassical poets, the chiasmus that asserts a proper, ordered reciprocity. The mirror is seen as the chiasmus that confronts us with a baffling reversal, inducing various sorts of negative experience: the frustration of action, blockage of the will, the aporia found in the poetry of Rilke by Paul de Man in an influential study. The third type is the circle, in which there is movement but no escape, exemplified in Paul’s account by a sentence of Proust’s and one of Petrarch’s sonnets, both finding a formal equivalent for one of the most persistent obsessions of European culture, the inescapable and impossible nature of desire. The fourth type, the spiral, represents the power of chiasmus to embrace paradox and contradiction in an enlarging and possibly unending process which opens possibilities of transcending the ordinary constraints of our understanding of reality.

In “What is a Chiasmus? Or, Why the Abyss Stares Back”, Robert Hariman investigates the nature of chiasmus at a deeper philosophical level; his answer to his own

question involves him in reflections on the nature of language and the gap between language and reality represented by chiasmus, which by the end of the essay is seen as “an emblem of the pathos of human communication”. Hariman sees chiasmus as a figure that creates an absence at its centre, subscribing to the view put forward by de Man that “chiasmus... can only come into being as the result of a void, of a lack that allows for the rotating motion of the polarities”. Hariman puts forward two new ideas about chiasmus: that the figure involves the generation of a third term, which “grounds an ontological claim”, and “that it involves a guarded relation between self and other that nevertheless reflects the profoundly social character of human communication”. In arguing and illustrating these two theses a subtle reading of a poem by the famously elusive and philosophically complex Wallace Stevens forms a substantial centerpiece. Hariman’s analysis of Stevens’ poem, discovering in it chiasmic patterns and thoughts that are far from easily apparent or accessible, works, like the whole of his essay, to enlarge and extend our whole sense of what chiasmus might be, what makes it a philosophical figure, and one that is “profoundly social but perhaps disturbingly so”.

Ivo Strecker’s “Chiasmus and Metaphor” is a wide-ranging essay concerned with the dramatic nature of both metaphor and chiasmus, and itself given a dramatic liveliness by its generous dialogic engagement with a number of the other contributors to this volume. Strecker cites past exchanges and engages in new dialogue with Anthony Paul, Robert Hariman and Stephen Tyler, in particular. After a prelude describing the growth of the chiasmus project as part of the Rhetoric Culture project Strecker compares chiasmus and metaphor as essentially dramatic figures both of which involve the ‘reverberation’ identified in metaphor by I.A. Richards, “and a concomitant state of mental and emotional ‘confusion’”. Strecker shows how metaphor and chiasmus are alike in that “the internal organisation of tropes is dramatic”, but unlike in their internal dynamics, chiasmus being destabilizing while metaphor is stabilizing. The second part of the essay looks at what Strecker sees as the magical dimension of chiasmus, taking as an example the line in Shakespeare’s *Macbeth* “Fair is foul and foul is fair”, and differing from both Paul (in *Culture and Rhetoric*, 2009) and Hariman (in the present volume) by seeing the line as neither inducing stasis (Paul) or making any ontological claim (Hariman), but operating as a magical spell. Strecker then looks further into the ways in which “all well-formed tropes are magical”, drawing on his rich store of ethnological observations among the Hamar of southern Ethiopia.

The second section, “**Epistemological reflections on chiasmus**”, consists of the three contributions to this volume that are most directly concerned with philosophy *pur sang*, from

the foundational Aristotle to twentieth-century thinkers such as Heidegger and Merleau-Ponty whose continuing contemporary relevance is shown to be variously involved with, as it is illuminated by, chiasmus as a metaphysical and epistemic instrument.

As a thinker who made prominent use of chiasmic reversal both as a method of thinking and as a theoretical notion it is appropriate that Maurice Merleau-Ponty should have a prominent place in this volume. After a long period of his being out of fashion, new readings have transformed our understanding of this key figure over the past twenty years or so, both within the linguistic turn of modern philosophy and beyond, in such various areas as art criticism, neuroscience and, of course, anthropology, disciplines in which his notion of embodied cognition has been and is still being put to fruitful use. Partly because he died before he could elaborate on the ideas adumbrated in his last (incomplete) work, *Le visible et l'invisible* (The Visible and the Invisible), whose last completed chapter is entitled 'The Intertwining and the Chiasm', there is no clear consensus as to the status of the concept in his thought. As Alain Vanier reminds us, it was the anatomical meaning of chiasm or *chiasma*, the intercrossing of the optic nerves on the body of the sphenoid bone, that prompted Merleau-Ponty "to turn chiasm into a concept [...] but [...] without specifying or developing it in any way" (Vanier, this volume, page... .) One may feel that this does Merleau-Ponty less than justice: his thoughts in that last chapter may not be fully worked out, yet it is still a richly suggestive reflection on the nature of the body-world relationship, the "double and crossed situating of the visible in the tangible" and vice versa, and how the body's "double belongingness to the order of the 'object' and to the order of the 'subject' reveals to us quite unexpected relations between the two orders" (The Visible and the Invisible, 134, 137).

Isabelle Thomas-Fogiel sets out to defend Merleau-Ponty against the commentators who, whether hostile or admiring, tend to regard him as a "literary" thinker rather than a philosopher *pur sang* and his chiasm as merely a metaphor lacking in cognitive content and epistemic rigour. Thomas-Fogiel cogently puts the case both for the value and necessity of metaphor in all thinking, and for Merleau-Ponty as a thinker who uses chiasmus (and related concepts) "to subvert all the classical oppositions of modern metaphysics", rejecting not only the Cartesian conception of space but "the position of the subject in front of the world, introduced by perspective". In the chiasmic as opposed to the perspectival relation the subject is not separate from, but intertwined with the world. Merleau-Ponty's purpose is to reconfigure the relation as identity of opposites – or the crossing and reversibility of opposites - rather than an interface between distinct and separate entities.

Thomas-Fogiel's eloquent account of Merleau-Ponty affirms the vital importance of the "figure of encroachment" not only to the interweaving of various areas of thought, culture and science but to the very definition of philosophy, if, as Merleau-Ponty believed, all meditation aims at "concrete universality".

Stephen Tyler's essay is the only one not to have been specially commissioned but, in various ways, and despite its date (1998), it might be taken as a starting point of sorts, as an *entrée en matière*. It captures a critical moment in Tyler's thought that is as vital to the understanding of the productivity of the figure of chiasmus as it is for that of the anthropological endeavour.

In the space of a few short pages, and the six thought-pictures that accompany them, Tyler grasps, in a series of conceptual schemas, at once some of the key stages in the history of western thinking about difference, what is problematic with these approaches to difference and how one might overcome these problems.

Tyler's starting point is Hegel's dialectic, whose principle flaw is that it neutralises the difference between thesis and antithesis in its unifying synthesis. Heidegger's model of a same that is not identity but made up of continuously joining and separating differences seems to provide an alternative to Hegel's false unity of differences. But the oscillation between differences that is central to Heidegger's model misses the valuable creativity of the dialectic, lost to repetition.

Chiasmus provides Tyler with a series of intriguing alternative models, which are elaborations of and departures from the above ways of figuring difference. These explore something like a transformational group. The familiar and basic form of the chiasm is related, here, to a series of cognate figures, including various interlocking spirals. The feature of chiasmus that holds the key to the metaphysical efficacy of this figure is one that retains the attention of several other authors in this volume, and which rhetoricians have also put at the heart of their definitions of chiasmus, namely the point where the bars of the x cross, which is also the turning point upon which chiastic reversal occurs – a point that is presented here as one of simultaneous joining and splitting.

Phillipe-Joseph Salazar's essay exemplifies, itself, a chiastic toing and froing that belongs to a more general pattern in the movement of thought, which is constantly engaged in a work of construction and the critical examination of that work. His essay has its source in two 'scruples', stones in his rhetorician's shoes according to the Latin etymology of the word 'scrupule', which require a return to a seemingly small number of lines, a fragment of text, one whose brevity belies its import: the opening section of Aristotle's *Rhetoric*. The

significance of this text lies in its claim to be the foundational moment of the discipline of rhetoric. However, as Salazar shows, this foundational moment is highly problematic – no stable building ground is provided here. Aristotle’s gesture of foundation, Salazar shows, is one that presents us with a series of problematic choices – forks in the road – as well as a problematic crossing out of all that rhetoric needs to exclude (random, careless, spontaneous speech) in order to become itself. The gesture of foundation, for Salazar, is eminently chiasmic. And the chiasm it presents to us is one that simultaneously ‘binds and halts’. Ultimately, the question posed by Aristotle’s text is that of the ‘tense bond’ between method and theory, and it is by resorting first to Deleuze and then to an enigmatic sculpture, itself an X of sorts, Mirò’s *Fourche*, that Salazar will provide us, not so much with an answer to that question, but at least with a narrative about it. It takes the form of a new version of an old story, one pregnant with political resonances, that of Theseus’s slaying of the Minotaur and of his escape from the labyrinth.

The essays gathered under the third and fourth headings, “**Sensuous experience mediated by chiasmus**” and “**Chiasmic structure in ritual and mytho-poetic texts**” are, as the headings indicate, more concerned with applying chiasmus as a hermeneutic device, focussing on various texts: literary, philosophical, ritual, etc., which they inspect and illuminate by looking at them through the prism of chiasmus. But the essays don’t stop at an interpretation of the texts. These readings are the means of addressing a series of critical questions – that of aesthetic creation (via Lévi-Strauss and H.C. Andersen), the liberating potentialities of linguistic and conceptual reversal (as seen in Montaigne and in the work of the poet-anthropologist Néstor Perlongher), the nature and power of sacred and ritual language.

An instance of Merleau-Ponty’s fruitful “encroachment” is the interaction between philosophy, anthropology and psychiatry which is the subject of Alain Vanier’s essay on “Chiasm in suspense in psychoanalysis”. Although Freud never mentions chiasmus as such, the figure is, Vanier points out, of central relevance to psychoanalytic theory, which is to say the human condition as defined by Freud and his successors, with the central division of the figure corresponding to the division between conscious and subconscious. Vanier provides a compact and lucid account of the thinking of Lacan in this connection. For Lacan the chiasmic turning point or division is also the point around which revolves our predicament as beings cut off from a primordial totality, selves separate from the Other. The importance of chiasmus to psychoanalysis seems indeed sufficient to justify Lacan’s resonant declarations that the psychoanalyst is the sophist and the rhetor of our time.

Chiasmus as a philosophical instrument and concept is of course not a twentieth-century development; this is made clear by Phillip John Usher's "Quotidian Chiasmus in Montaigne". Montaigne's chiastic method and habit of mind is consistent with his admiration for Pyrrhonian scepticism, whose most fundamental principle is that of opposing to every proposition [λόγος] an equal proposition. In Montaigne's words: "Il n'y a raison qui n'en aye une contraire". Usher points out that chiastic reversal is a structural principle in those essays of Montaigne that earn him his reputation as "the inventor of cultural relativism", and shows us how in considering "quotidian" questions such as the possible causes of sexual impotence or the rights and wrongs of suicide Montaigne applies chiasmus to apply rationality in place of the magical dogmas of demonology. A man's impotence may be cured, says Montaigne, by a reversal of his thinking; the condition is not, as his contemporaries would have it, one inflicted by demons but psychological. It is striking that the aporetic aspect of chiasmus, as of Scepticism, does not condemn Montaigne to the paralysis found in Rilke by Paul de Man and in Samuel Butler by Ralf Norrman: chiastic thinking is in the *Essais* a means of liberation from stifling certainty, and, as later for Merleau-Ponty, a condition not for finding truth to be a delusive mirage but for embracing its pluriformity and perceiving at least the possibility of a transcendent viewpoint. Usher's account leaves one with a renewed sense of Montaigne's perennial modernity and a clearer view of his status as one of the key figures within a long tradition of chiastically informed thinking.

Like Ivo Strecker's essay, mentioned above, that by the Hispanist Ben Bollig bridges the literary-philosophical and the ethnographic components of this volume. The title of Bollig's essay is "*Travestis, Michês* and Chiasmus: Crossing and Cross-Dressing in the Work of Néstor Perlongher". Néstor Perlongher was an Argentine poet, anthropologist and gay activist, in all three capacities intensely involved in the sub-world of transvestites and homosexual prostitutes in Buenos Aires, where he was born in 1949 and Sao Paulo, where he died of AIDS in 1992. In Perlongher's border-crossing life and work chiasmus and chiastic thought, combined in his poetry with '*travesti* aesthetics', were a central strategy, used to attack and destabilize received perceptions of sex, gender, the body and identity, and to articulate a radical sexual politics. Both the poetry and the anthropological work take us into a sensuously luxuriant world of orgiastic sexual practises, glittering with reflected reflection: the *travesti* is compounded of ambiguities and contradictions, and the transactions between *michê* and client involve many reversals and counter-reversals of the binary polarities conventional society lives by. Perlongher celebrates and epitomizes this milieu as poet, while as anthropologist he analyses it and theorizes it in the destabilizing spirit of Deleuze and

Guattari. Bollig in turn evokes this Dionysiac world through his own sensuously alert response to ‘a text that is almost sticky to read’, inviting the reader to engage with his own text as much imaginatively as intellectually.

The magical potentialities of rhetoric and language are central to Douglas Lewis’s essay “Parallelism and Chiasmus in Ritual Oration and Ostension in Tana Wai Brama, Eastern Indonesia”. Lewis takes two cases of inversion in rituals performed in Tana Wai Brama in east central Flores, eastern Indonesia: the first inadvertent, the second deliberate. The first case concerns the death of a ritual specialist as a result of an unintended chiasmus inserted into a ritual narration; the second, a topsy-turvy funeral meal. The unexpected death of the unfortunate chanter took place during the rare and solemn public invocation of their deity, and was ascribed by all informants to his having misrepresented the order of the world: to speak an untruth in the sacred language was to violate cosmological axioms.

Lewis draws a contrast between quotidian and ritual speech. The one is fragmentary, unpredictable, creative, the other fixed and bound to the unchanging and unchangeable order of the universe. The error in question was ‘a verbal catastrophe that violated the order of the world’. The deity itself “did not seem to mind. But language and the world did, and Rénu died”. The essay reflects on the power and danger words may possess and the fundamental nature of ritual language. One challenging suggestion Lewis reports is that made by various neurologists, that ordinary and ritual language come from different hemispheres of the brain, the latter being stored in the right hemisphere and perhaps linked to the limbic system.

The second account is of a funeral meal prepared for the deceased in which all culinary procedures are reversed, since the dead are taken to inhabit a mirror world. So there is a “tension between the unchangeable oratory and the mutable ostension of Wai Brana ritual”, which may be evidence for the chiasmic interplay of rhetoric and culture – a notion that invites further investigation.

In the final contribution to this volume “Chiasmus, mythical creation and H.C. Andersen’s *The Shadow*” Boris Wiseman looks at echoes of mythical thought in a literary tale. The essay draws, in part, on the understanding of morphodynamic processes provided by Lévi-Strauss’s so-called “canonical formula”, $fx(a) : fy(b) :: fx(b) : fa^{-1}(y)$, and by the discussions by anthropologists, philosophers and mathematicians to which it has given rise. The structure described by this formula, that of a chiasmus followed by a sort of “double twist”, provides a revealing way into a text and its inner logic or indeed, here, mytho-logic. Far from using the formula as a sort of automatic reading grid, Wiseman’s aim throughout has been to seek out its echoes in a text whose flesh and bones in turn will hopefully give life

to a series of symbols which may otherwise seem dauntingly austere. Far from formalism, the essay uses this mathematical description of a structure, a canonical structure when it comes to myth if we are to believe Lévi-Strauss, as a sort of translating device. Somewhat in the manner that French composer René Leibovitz (1913-1972) once translated a similar mythical structure identified by Lévi-Strauss into a musical composition (the score for piano still exists and has been played on French radio). The essay is followed by a response from anthropologist and mathematician Lucien Scubla, which reveals a further series of mythical sources to Andersen's tale, this time Classical, and traces what it owes to them.

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The essays outlined above are the result of a broad cross-disciplinary collaboration, one that involves numerous researchers belonging to the human and social sciences. Perhaps one of the most remarkable attributes of the figure of chiasmus is its ability to traverse such a broad field, from one shore to the other as it were, while soliciting a multitude of responses, at once diverse and in relationship to one another. These responses in turn provide a thread linking up fields of thought seldom joined up in this way. Psychoanalysis is made to enter into dialogue with philosophy, philosophy with anthropology and rhetorical studies, each of these with critical theory, etc. Many permutations are possible.

In his account of his use of “colour-sound” montage, the great film director Sergei Eisenstein (1898-1948) invokes the synaesthesia of Japanese *kabuki* theatre. As with *kabuki* his ambition, he explains, is to allow the spectator to “perceive light vibrations as sound” and “hear tremors of air as colours”. He wants us to hear light and see sound. This provides a fitting metaphor for the view of the world we would like to invite our readers to provisionally adopt. Our ambition is, in the manner of *kabuki* or Eisenstein's colour-sound montage, to provide you with an opportunity to see and to hear crosswise.

Notes

¹ Edwina Palmer, 'The "Womē-No" Poem of "Harima Fudoki" and Residual Orality in Ancient Japan', *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies* 63 (1), 2000, pp.81-9.

² Ian Thomson, *Chiasmus in the Pauline Letters*. [Sheffield : Sheffield Academic, 1995.](#)

³ See also, 'Comment meurent les mythes' pp.304-5 (*Anthropologie structurale deux*)

⁴ Ralf Norrman, *Samuel Butler and the meaning of chiasmus*. Basingstoke, Macmillan, 1986.

⁵ Stephen Tyler, *The Said and the Unsaid*, London/New York, Academic press, 1978, xi.

⁶ Fumaroli held a Chair in Rhetoric and Society in Europe (16th and 17th century) at the [Collège de France](#) from from 1986 to 2002 and Paul de Man was to become one of the leading figures of the Yale School of deconstruction. See the former's *L'Âge de l'éloquence : rhétorique et "res literaria", de la Renaissance au seuil de l'époque classique* (1980) and the latter's *Allegories of reading : figural language in Rousseau, Nietzsche, Rilke, and Proust / Paul de Man* (1979) as well as the seminal essay 'Semiology and Rhetoric' first published in *Diacritics*, 3:3 (1973) 27-23, reprinted in Julian Wolfreys, ed. *Literary Theories: A Reader and Guide*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1999.

⁷ Christian Meyer, "Precursors of Rhetoric Culture Theory" in *Culture and Rhetoric*, eds. Ivo Strecker and Stephen Tyler. New York and Oxford, Berghan Books, 2009. Robert Hariman has pointed out to us that Isocrates' phrase must not be allowed to occlude "the fact that philosophy and other arts partook of the same elite habitus, and that rhetoric was at the same time valued by the middle classes as one of the very few means for social mobility upwards" (personal communication).

⁸ One might reasonably think it impossible for culture to belong in the domain of rhetoric (p.5) while at the same time rhetoric and culture stand in chiastic relation to one another. In a statically conceived reality one would exclude the other; but contradictory relations can exist side by side within the dynamic and paradoxical reality of chiasmus: at one moment one focuses on "how culture provides the tools for rhetorical practice, at another moment one focuses on how rhetoric provides the tools to create the institutions, values and aesthetics that we call culture". (Ivo Strecker, personal communication)

⁹ Anthony Paul, *The Torture of the Mind: Macbeth, Tragedy and Chiasmus*. Amsterdam, Thesis Publishers, 1992

Boris Wiseman, "Claude Lévi-Strauss, Chiasmus and the Ethnographic Journey" in *Arachnofiles: A Journal of European Languages and Cultures* 2, 2001.