

# Chiasma: A Site For Thought

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## Editor's Introduction

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## ‡ EDITOR'S INTRODUCTION

While it may be that an end can justify its means, in philosophy we are more often found with means in search of ends. Ends, of course, in two senses: of the (utopian?) terminus of the philosophical endeavour, and of that endeavour's goals. As this issue of *Chiasma* attests, the two senses of ending have more in common than their name, for often it is through an awareness that a mode of thought *can* end that we find the means to bring that end about. And, it is in believing that there is no end to come that we lose sight of our aims.

The initial call for this issue included a passage from Nietzsche's *Untimely Meditations* intended to lend our contributors so many Nietzschean arrows. Philosophy, says Nietzsche, is always "acting counter to our time, and thereby acting on our time, and, let us hope, to the benefit of a time to come."<sup>1</sup> For the essays in this issue – each of them responding to a call to think about the future and/of philosophy – this untimeliness often manifests as a question as to what "the future" is, or should be, and how we might relate to it. It is no coincidence then that two of the contributions deal directly with eschatology, and that two others discuss trauma and grief. Likewise, several texts discuss the future of philosophy both as a practice and a field of academic study, joining the analysis of the future as such with an attentive eye to the continued existence of its thought. Today the thought of the future is increasingly indistinct from the future of thought.

Nowhere in this issue does attention to the philosophy of the future better join that of the future of philosophy than in Thomas Sutherland's essay "Time-Without-Temporalization: Futurality in François Laruelle's Non-

1 Friedrich Nietzsche, *Untimely Meditations*, ed. Daniel Breazeale, trans. R.J. Hollingdale (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983), 60.

Philosophy,” in examining the relationship between Laruelle’s concept of “futurity” and his larger philosophical project. There Sutherland proposes, with Laruelle, that previous attempts to describe and understand the structure of time within a philosophical system have fallen prey to the assumption that “philosophy [is] capable of describing the essence of time (even if this manifests in a deconstructed form), and as such, maintains a philocentrism that implicitly views all possible temporalities as cognizable within the temporal horizon of philosophy itself.” The result amounting to a sequence of philosophically-imagined futures either “shackled to the past” which preceded them or “locked into a cycle of permanent revolution.” Laruelle’s non-philosophy emerges to sidestep this philosophical diode in favour of an essentially content-less future that escapes standard philosophical (temporal) registration.

Rossa Ó Muireartaigh’s essay, “Eschatology and Infinite Non-Linear Time on the Field of Absolute Emptiness,” likewise responds to an attempted evacuation of the future’s potential. Drawing from the work of the Japanese existentialist Keiji Nishitani, and framing her argument as a response to Francis Fukuyama’s “End of History” thesis, Ó Muireartaigh argues that the type of linear, finite models of historical progression that make theses like Fukuyama’s possible ultimately engineer their own negation. For Nishitani, on the other hand, the limitlessness of time necessarily obscures both the beginning and the end of any history. For Nishitani, writes Ó Muireartaigh, “to see oneself as moving along a line of time between past and future is to get raveled in finite linear optical illusions. When time is infinite there can only ever be now, never lines of time.” This infinite time can, Ó Muireartaigh argues, serve as an antidote to the grand historical narratives so often spun in defence of whatever ideological structure happens to be dominant at the time. A narrative, after all, requires a beginning and an end, and history has neither.

“Futurity, an Eschatological Methodology,” by Itzhak Benyamini, likewise focuses on the role of the future as a repository of potential. But for Benyamini, this potential is constraining. “Though,” he writes, “the Western subject’s core is eschatologically-progressive, always moving towards a future, it now seems that this futurity no longer permits any *being* in the subject beyond a structural servility to the future.” This type of looking-forward exerts a conservative force on thought and action, wherein the dread of an apocalyptic future leads to the dredging up of the past – the complete repurposing

of the old as a shield to guard against the new. Solving our anxiety over the future therefore requires inventing a past from which we might look upon it. As Benyamini writes, “thus we recreate our future, or the movement towards it itself, and maybe thus also the relation between our real present and our real future as well as this movement towards an imminent merger between the present and future.”

Our fourth essay, Rachael Bath’s “Anticipatory Grief and Perceptions of the Future,” brings the issue full-circle – from Laruelle’s empty future in non-philosophy to a future that is terrifyingly full. Drawing from Merleau-Ponty’s work on temporality, Bath examines how anticipatory grief – that is, grief experienced in anticipation of a loss that has not yet occurred – conditions one’s mode of perception. Anticipatory grief often leads to a breaking off from the person or thing being grieved, so that (in Bath’s example) someone awaiting the death of a loved one is driven by their love to emotionally disinvest from them prior to the actual moment of death. This *decathexis* evolves into a generalized closing off of possibility, and a withdrawal from the world and from experience. A subject in the throes of anticipatory grief thus becomes a subject in withdrawal, one driven by their attachment to the world, that which makes the world grievable, towards its abandonment. It is in this way that the grief’s anticipatory, future-oriented nature causes it to invade the present, forcing one to grieve for something one still possesses, and to regret a loss that has not occurred.

By contrast, we find a proponent of withdrawal (this time of the object instead of the subject) in Graham Harman – the founder of Object Oriented Ontology (OOO) – who has contributed “The Future of Continental Realism: Heidegger’s Fourfold.” The article begins by examining the recent interest in realism among several Continental philosophers, including himself and others affiliated with speculative realism, the Deleuzo-Guattarian realism of Manuel DeLanda, and the New Realism of Maurizio Ferraris and Markus Gabriel. Following a brief summary of his previous work on Heidegger’s tool-analysis, Harman then goes on to defend his own realist reading of Heidegger, in which tools do not simply exist purely in relation to Dasein (as in the conventional reading), rather their existence is independent of their use and apprehension. As Harman writes, “it is not only for us that the jug and wine withdraw from such explicit features, but *in their own right*. It is not the mere accident of my looking at the jug and wine that transforms them from

physical masses into strange, withdrawn residues.” Finally, Harman relates this object independence to Heidegger’s notion of the fourfold, which Harman schematizes as a pair of intersecting dualisms that together structure the relationships between real and intentional aspects of reality.

Following Harman’s realist reading on the fourfold comes another proposal for future directions of philosophy: an interview with Catherine Malabou on “The Future of Plasticity,” conducted by *Chiasma*’s interview editor Kate Lawless. The interview was conducted in early 2016 while Malabou delivered a keynote address of a conference dedicated to her philosophy held jointly by the Centre for Advanced Research in European Philosophy, and the Centre for the Study of Theory and Criticism at King’s University College, Western University. In the interview, Malabou discusses psychological trauma and its link to “the negative implications of plasticity,” the relationship between subjectivity and the environment, and the role of nationalism in movements for political autonomy.

Our third issue concludes with a new translation of Felisberto Hernández’s “A False Explanation of My Stories” by Jaime R. Brenes Reyes. Though Hernández – a Uruguayan writer whose work is still being translated into English – is little known in the English-speaking world, he has been quietly but widely influential for literature the world over, being read by such authors as Italo Calvino and Gabriel García Márquez. In this text, Hernández presents an allegorical description of his writing process, comparing the work to a delicate plant that, growing independently of its gardener, will die if tampered with.

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