



Szendy, P. and Syrotinski, M. (2023) Rumor, an anarchimedium.  
*Paragraph*, 46(2), pp. 145-159. (doi: [10.3366/para.2023.0426](https://doi.org/10.3366/para.2023.0426))

The material cannot be used for any other purpose without further permission of the publisher and is for private use only.

There may be differences between this version and the published version. You are advised to consult the publisher's version if you wish to cite from it.

<https://eprints.gla.ac.uk/304918/>

Deposited on 17 August 2023

Enlighten – Research publications by members of the University of  
Glasgow

<http://eprints.gla.ac.uk>

Peter Szendy

## Rumor, an Anarchimedius

Rumor is a challenge to thought. Its language and its names (peddling, slander, gossip, chatter, hearsay, fake news, the word on the street, urban legend, conspiracy theory...) constantly exceed or displace the limits we try to assign it. So much so that the concept-of-rumor is always on the verge of tipping over into a rumor-concept, as if the concept itself were something rumorous, its continually mobile extension blurring its intension, thereby introducing a kind of 'camera shake' (*un effet de bougé*) into its very understanding.

I would nevertheless like to try to put forward a number of hypotheses on rumor, more precisely on its undefinable and metamorphic nature. And I would like to do this in the form of a homage to a great thinker and also a friend, Jean-Luc Nancy, who left us recently.

Jean-Luc rarely used – that is, literally inscribed -- the word 'rumor', but if we listen closely, we can just make it out almost everywhere. Like a barely discernible noise never quite touching – or only exceptionally – the vigilant surface of his text, while rumbling continuously yet indistinctly somewhere behind it. Rumor is never far away when he talks of 'being-with', and of the *cum* of community: perhaps it is even the backdrop against which all being-together stands out.

The only pages Jean-Luc explicitly devoted to rumor, under this name and this heading, are in his response to an invitation by the art critic Hans-Ulrich Obrist, who had asked him to contribute to a collection of articles on what is sometimes called

'urban legends'. 'Rumoration', the title of Jean-Luc's response, was republished ten years later in 2011 in a volume entitled *La Ville au loin* (The Far Off City).<sup>1</sup>

We certainly are confronted with the most direct possible question concerning rumor ('What is rumor?'), but the question eludes our grasp, refuses to be arrested in a sentence or a stable utterance. No sooner is it spoken or alluded to than it immediately changes its appearance or consistency, as if it were transforming *even before it had time to assume a form*.

'Rumoration' indeed begins *in medias res*, like a travelling shot, or an ambulatory movement which carries rumor along with it (p.125): 'I am walking in the street in search of a phrase. To begin this text that I have to write I need this phrase. The text has to talk about rumor. What is rumor? I am thinking of the 'Slander' aria in the *Barber of Seville*. I hear the music, it plays in my head... *incomincia a sussurrar... piano piano, terra terra, sotto voce...*' No sooner has rumor been named in order to question its very essence ('what is rumor?'), than it slips away and becomes a sung aria from Rossini's opera. But since it is no more able to settle in the medium of music than in the medium of language, it already tends to move back towards the latter, to once again start to become articulated speech : '*piano piano, terra terra, sotto voce...* I walk while trying to find a phrase that matches the rhythm of the music or of my stride. I try to use walking and the well-worn familiarity of the city to isolate myself within my head and take advantage of walking as a means to progress my work.' Rumor oscillates in this way, it sways or staggers as it moves between enunciation and statement, between saying and what is said, between pure noise-making and spoken word striving to find a meaning.

Now we see this initial wavering, that nothing yet can stabilize, move from one language to another (from French to English to Italian and back again): 'I try to [...] take advantage of walking as a means to progress my work. I lose track of my question, I start to think about something else. The French sense of *rumeur* (the English sense of 'rumour') has been lost in the Italian sense of *rumore*, which means a noise. But in French, *rumeur* can also mean a murmur or a rumbling.' In the time it takes to make a detour through the music of Rossini's aria ('music orchestrates the noises of the street... *e le teste ed i cervelli fa stordire, e fa gonfiar...*'), rumor now seems to crystallize into an image before the eyes of a walker or *flâneur*: 'A poster catches my eye, on the side panel of a bus-stop'

A half-century earlier, during wartime, the poster in question might well have been one of those pasted up on walls to warn the public – the passerby, whosoever, those subjects *par excellence* of rumor (better still: those subjected to rumor) – of the risks inherent to the rumors that circulate. 'Listen..., Someone told me..., And I saw..., I hear that....' we read on the following poster archived in the Library of Congress: printed between 1941 and 1945, it was widely distributed, like so many others of the same genre, in order to prevent the spread of rumors that could be a danger to national security during wartime.



It was the time of 'rumor clinics', those columns that proliferated in the daily newspapers (they first appeared in the *Boston Herald*) to defuse rumors by analysing



them and testing them against known facts (we recognize them as precursors of the 'fact checks' in the *New York Times*, for example, or the *décodeurs* in *Le Monde*, or the *désintox* service in *Libération*). These 'rumor clinics' sometimes appeared alongside ads, as was for example the case in the pages of *Life* magazine, in which the ad for a bra echoed the explanation, in the right hand column, of how the rumors in question worked.<sup>2</sup>

*Discriminating Women*  
**BELIEVED THIS A \$1 BRASSIERE**

*Carole*  
 BRASSIERES

• **ACTUALLY IT'S ONLY 59¢**

Rumor Clinic (continued)



Insurance salesmen are the best morale wardens. Here William Novelline listens to lurid story from a client, then proves to her it is false, urges her never to repeat it.



Factory workers who are morale wardens help by discouraging and correcting gossip among the men. This is John O'Connell, union representative at local Ford plant.

There is much one could say about this page of *Life* from October 1942, about the ad's slogan, *Discriminating Women* (it sounds almost as a double entendre), and above all about the gendered division of roles, the man holding the book or the

groups of men who are represented as being enlisted on the front lines of the war against rumors, while the housewives listen and let themselves by turns be deceived or enlightened. This collusion between the will to master what one would nowadays call fake news, and patriarchal logic, has taken a singular and sinister turn in the wake of the Supreme Court's decision on 24 June 2022, which takes us back fifty years or more.

The poster which punctuates Jean-Luc's rumorously walking around in 'Rumoration' belongs to the same genre as the ad in *Life*: 'A poster catches my eye, on the side panel of a bus-stop. It is [...] an ad for women's underwear.' And it is this ad which, on the one hand, leads the walker back towards the thing that set his quest in motion (rumor), but also on the other hand, and at the same time, takes him on a detour, seduces or leads him astray once more, refusing rumor, as something polymorphous, the status or stance of a 'subject' in the full, stable sense of the term : 'The image is accompanied by a caption that states : 'Teach him how to meditate' As it happens, I think I am just trying to meditate the formation of a phrase. I come back to my subject. Perhaps I have not even yet made it my subject. It is still just a murmur in my head. I think rumor is more often than not malicious, mean, slanderous.'<sup>3</sup>

In this walking or strolling in search of a phrase that is the text 'Rumoration' ('I am walking in the street looking for a phrase'), in these phrases that themselves follow one another as they head towards this encounter with a phrase to come, rumor is fleeting and flowing, it rises, it 'rumors' (the verb *rumorer* is attested in Old French as meaning to 'make noise'), it rustles at every moment and yet it is endlessly evasive, and resistant to letting itself be subjected, to becoming the object of a discourse, its theme, that which would be the focus of interrogation of the walking thinker or thought ('Perhaps I have not even yet made it my subject'). Rumor rumors,

in short, but its rumorous rumoration goes from one medium to another, it never stops deforming, frustrating any attempt to take form, as if it consisted or insisted in its being between forms.

The power of rumor is often minimized, brushed aside, it is considered negligible, as if it were unworthy for thought to dwell on it. Jean-Luc also gave in at least once to this temptation. When asked in 2018 about ‘a kind of regime of lying which is becoming normalised with the proliferation of fake news, for example or lies being weaponised in the American elections,’ he replied : ‘I don’t really believe that. I can see it becoming quite widespread. [...] Fake news has always existed. In fact, I don’t really understand why there is so much focus on this frenzy of fake news. Of course we live in a world in which the quantity of information transmitted at every moment is so enormous that absolutely everything and its opposite circulates endlessly. From this point of view, social media are just as bad as they are good. They enable very rapid instantaneous communication, and at the same time they spread anything and everything.’<sup>4</sup>

Would it then simply be a question of quantity, of scale, or of mass? Between the *logopoiōs* (the one who puts fake news into circulation, whose trade is the ‘putting together [*sunthesis*] of fictitious sayings and doings [*pseudon logon kai praxeon*]’), as he is described in Threophrastus’ *Characters* (probably composed in the 4th century B.C.), and the conspiracy theory tweets and posts of today, is it just a matter of numbers, or of range and scope?<sup>5</sup>

‘I don’t really believe that,’ Jean-Luc said. Would the importance of rumors be of the same order as a rumor (‘becoming quite widespread’)? As if rumor were destined to secrete rumor, endlessly and since time immemorial.



If Jean-Luc in 2018 appears, then, to conflate all fake news that has been in circulation from Plato to the present day ('fake news has always existed', he says), in 'Rumoration' by contrast it seems that the rumor he is talking about and listening out for belongs to the modern city, and to a time when one can ask, as he does: 'What rumor do we hear in that photo?'<sup>6</sup> For this hearsay or word on the street which morphs into a sung aria or a poster or a phrase, is analogous to what Blanchot in *The Infinite Conversation* identified as 'everyday speech' [*la parole quotidienne*], whose rightful place is 'the street', where the 'dense presence of the great urban centers' gives rise to one of 'these admirable deserts that are the world's cities' (p. 241).<sup>7</sup>

Yet it hard to say how the rumorous street Blanchot evokes is different from the marketplace (*agora*), or the porch (*stoa*), or workshop (*ergasterion*), where the *logopoios* described by Theophrastus spends all day inventing urban legends. Hard to say too in what ways the street of the modern city would be different from the virtual *agoras* – discussion forums – on which fake news is spread nowadays. It is tempting to think that rumor in the Greek world circulated in streets which, like the ones where "the Arrogant man" characterized by Theophrastus delivered his judgements (103), belonged to a now forgotten world. A world Marc Bloch believed he has seen revived in 'the way false news almost always traveled' down in the trenches of the first world war: 'the soldier on the frontline', he recalled in 1921, was brought back to 'an age-old state of mind and means of obtaining information, before printed newspapers or broadsheets,' and condemned to an anachronistic isolation from before mass media.<sup>8</sup>

What we can hear in Blanchot's rumorous street – perhaps the same one Jean-Luc was walking along in 2001 when he began to write what would become 'Rumoration' – is what has not yet crystallized or assumed a form. It is a mere

propagation that is still not yet propaganda: ‘the irresponsibility of rumor – where everything is said, everything heard, incessantly and interminably, without anything being affirmed and without there being response to anything – rapidly grows weighty when it gives rise to ‘public opinion’. But only to the extent that what is propagated (and with what ease) becomes the movement of propaganda ; that is to say, when in the passage from street to newspaper, from the everyday in perpetual becoming to the daily transcribed [...] it becomes informed, stabilized’<sup>9</sup> (p.243). Blanchot here separates out and distinguishes what the ancient *fama* combined in a single word (*fama* meant both ‘rumor’ and ‘public opinion’). And perhaps this distinction could shed light, even today, on the way in which on social media the anonymity of the word on the street precipitates (in the chemical sense of the term) into a political discourse (witness the example of the sadly notorious extreme right wing movement QAnon, which is said to have begun with an anonymous message signed Q on the forum 4chan, before being a regular presence in Donald Trump’s retweeted messages).

But even if the movement Blanchot observes from daily formlessness to printed daily newspaper might lead us to think so, we would be wrong to believe that the discursive configuration or conformation which takes a hold of and gives shape to the rumors circulating on the streets would amount to their becoming mediated, that is, to the mediation of something immediate. For rumor is already medial. We should perhaps say, more precisely, that rumor is a pure mediation which mediatises absolutely – ‘a neutral movement wherein the relating [*rappor*t] seems reduced to its pure essence, a *pure relation* of no one and nothing’ writes Blanchot in a passage that merits closer reading (19-20).<sup>10</sup> ‘The power of rumor’, indeed, is not in the tenor or content of what it conveys, it is ‘not in the force of what it says’: it emanates

instead from 'what is related' (one is tempted, in the passive construction Blanchot uses, to accentuate the reflexive pronoun [*se rapporte* in French]: rumour does not relate or put into relation anything but itself), and 'its sole, its incontestable truth,' precisely, 'is to be related.'

In this sense, rumor is nothing but the pure rumoration of a medium as such, as Blanchot intimates when he listens out for what rustles or rumors in and of itself in the media<sup>11</sup> : 'How many people turn on the radio and leave the room, satisfied with the distant and sufficient noise. Is this absurd? Not in the least. What is essential is not that one particular person should speak and another hear, but that, with no one in particular speaking and no one in particular listening, there should nonetheless be speech, and a kind of undefined promise to communicate guaranteed by the incessant coming and going of solitary words.' (p.240)

So the question of the relation, or even of the complicity or collusion, of rumor with the media, becomes more complex. Should we see in the aforementioned media something like information highways, or channels, or infrastructures which facilitate the spread of rumors? And if so, should we include the street as a media infrastructure? Or the agora, whether real or virtual, or (discussion) forums? Or should we indeed think that rumor is itself an infrastructure (even its own infrastructure), which we could understand in at least two ways, according to two inflections or nuances of the prefix *infra-* : on the one hand, we could see it as an underlying base, a foundation to the being-with or the being-together of all those who share the act of saying rather than what is said; but on the other hand, it could be seen as an 'ultra-thin' structure (to borrow Marcel Duchamp's term <sup>12</sup>), imperceptible and ungraspable, beyond any objectifying thematisation or representation ('I have not

even yet made it my subject', Jean-Luc confided , as he tried to listen out for what is 'just a murmur in my head').

If its 'sole truth', as Blanchot writes, is the fact of 'being related', it is because rumor is pure self-relation as self-difference – or as Jean-Luc would no doubt say: pure referral [*renvoi*]. It is tempting consequently to superimpose rumor over myth, or vice versa, myth 'being immediate and mediated', being 'the murmur' or 'the speech of whatever speaks itself and itself alone': myth as what I will here call, in memory of Jean-Luc (and of our friendship, occasionally troubled by some rumor), a *rumemoration*. 'Myth', as he says elsewhere, 'makes – it makes by saying, it makes up – the *before* that has never come before'.<sup>13</sup>

So mythifying rumor (Jean-Luc also calls it *mything*) produces or secretes its antecedent, its precedent. that at the same time, insofar as it is not yet made, is still to come. And it is in this sense that mythopoietic rumoration has a texture that weaves together what one might describe as an anaphoric movement and a cataphoric movement.

What does this mean?

In his *Characters*, Theophrastus bases the authority or credibility of the purveyor of rumor on a series of guarantees that alternate, take turns, or refer to one another without us ever being able to attest to their validity, or establish it in any stable or definitive way: 'He has some soldier, or a servant of Asteius the flute-player's, or maybe Lycon the contractor, come straight from the battle-field, who has told him about it. Thus his authorities [*anaphora*] are such as no man could lay hands on.'<sup>14</sup>

We have to pause for a moment on the Greek term that Theophrastus uses to refer to those who appear as the unlocatable witnesses rumor claims each time to

attach or latch its veracity on to, namely *anaphorai*. They are literally those to whom one can refer (*anapherō*), those who give credit to, by supposedly stopping it, the movement (*phora*) of what one could call *referance* [*la référence*]<sup>15</sup>.

But *anaphora* is not just the recourse to someone or some thing that can guarantee authority. In the treatise on syntax (*peri suntaxeōs*) of the Greek grammarian Apollonius Dyscolus, the word also signifies a reference back to a name which was already mentioned earlier in the speech, so which is already known ('One can also say, that insofar as a pronoun is substituted for something previously said, in that respect it exhibits anaphora, since the defining characteristic of anaphora [*idiōma anaphoras*] is the second recognition [*deutera gnōsis*] of a previously mentioned entity' [*prokateilegmenou prosōpou*])<sup>16</sup> From so many possible examples of anaphora, this is one which could have been heard, or overheard in a rumorous conversation : 'He had already been told *it*' (the pronouns *he* and *it*, emphasized, refer respectively to the aforesaid rumor and to the person it was previously told to). In other words, as Emile Benveniste noted, 'the anaphoric... does not refer to the thing, but to the previously formulated notion of that thing', such that it 'is the sign of a sign.'

17

The fact that this grammatical or syntactical sense appeared much later than the time of Theophrastus (Apollonius Dyscolus lived in Alexandria in the second century A.D.) should not distract us from the essential point: which is that the autodeictic structure of the discourse (referring back to its previous occurrence) and the autotestimonial structure of rumor (just bearing witness to itself) share the same fundamental anaphoricity.

I would also note in passing: it is striking that when rumor, at the start of the 20th century, became the object of scientific experimentation in order to understand



its nature, the first of these attempts to analyse it tried to reproduce exactly its constitutive anaphoricity, in conditions which are practically those of a laboratory. The trial led by Ludwig William Stern in 1902 and described in an appendix to his seminal article on the psychology of testimony indeed followed a precisely codified scientific protocol so as to create ‘an experimental rumor [*ein experimentelles Gerücht*].’<sup>18</sup> Stern begins by explaining it as follows: ‘I imitated [*ich ahmte*] the conditions of rumor by asking each of the participants to pass on to the following person what they had heard from the previous person.’ But apparently without being aware of it, Stern immediately introduced into this sanitized imitation of the anaphoricity of rumor a major distortion, since instead of allowing it to spread from one person to the next in the manner of a contagion, he arranged it so that each time, every turn or iteration of the rumor was directed back to him. ‘The protocol was the following. I noted, as subject A [*als Person A*], a miscellaneous police news story which, slowly and distinctly, I read to a subject B [*welche ich langsam und deutlich der Person B vorlas*]. This was in the morning; B’s task was to write the story down in the afternoon of the same day, as he remembered it [*die Geschichte aus dem Gedächtnis niederzuschreiben*]. The following day in the morning, I read out [*las ich vor*] B’s deposition to a subject C; in the afternoon, C also wrote out a report of what he had heard [*des Gehörten*], which was then read out [*vorgelesen wurde*] to a subject D, and so on.’ The laboratory rumor thus always comes back to the person running the experiment, whose account is punctuated with ‘I read..., I read...’ (the last mention of reading out falsely adopts an impersonal mode, ‘which was read’, giving the impression of an anarchic spreading of rumor). And in so doing, the first person leading the experiment (the one who can say ‘I read’) ensures and asserts his mastery over the rumor, and those who spread it rumorously (‘all the subjects of the

experiment', we learn incidentally, 'were students', under the direction of the ringmaster, the professor).

As Blanchot writes in a passage from *The Infinite Conversation* that we read part of earlier, 'the power of rumor' – we could say equally: of myth, or of urban legends – is also 'in the fact that it belongs to the space where everything that is said has always already been said': this is what we might call the infinite anaphoricity of rumor. But Blanchot goes on (I resume the reading of his interrupted sentence, with my emphasis): '...it belongs to the space where everything that is said has always already been said, *continues to be said, and will not cease being said.*'<sup>19</sup> (pp. 19-20). Rumorous anaphora necessarily goes hand in hand, then, with what could be described, borrowing once again from a linguistic lexicon, as cataphora, namely, a forward deferral [*report*] or (re)ferral [*référance*]. The sentence by Blanchot I have just quoted uses both together (I am going back to its beginning): 'The power of rumor is not in the force of what it says [*it* is here an anaphoric pronoun referring backwards, to the rumor already at work in the sentence], but in this [*this* by contrast functions as a cataphora, announcing what is coming later in the sentence]: it belongs to the space where everything that is said...'

The simultaneously anaphoric and cataphoric formula, the anacataphoric formula *par excellence* of rumor, would look something like this: 'Yes, this I know, that I have heard, it's incredible [*this, that* and *it* are anaphoras], but you won't believe it if I tell you. . . [*it* here is a cataphora].' This is how rumor progresses, this is how it never ceases to be remembered [*se rumémore*], *both behind and in front of itself*.

Virgil famously evoked Rumor (*Fama* personified) in his *Aeneid*: "Speed lends her strength [*mobilitate viget*]," he writes, "and she wins vigour as she goes [*viresque*

*adquirat eundo*]:” she is “small at first through fear” but soon “mounts up to heaven [*sese attollit in auras*].”<sup>20</sup>

There is thus something automatic and self-propelling about the way rumor spreads in the *Aeneid*, insofar as she maintains, even increases, her force by her very movement. And even if she does not break off all contact with the earth (she “walks the ground [*ingrediturque solo*] with head hidden in the clouds [*caput inter nubila condit*]”), what is most characteristic about her movement is her flight, the way she tears herself away from being anchored to her earthly foundation : ‘By night, midway between heaven and earth, she flies through the gloom, screeching [*nocte volat caeli medio terraeque per umbram, stridens*].’

Rumor, then, grows or proliferates in between, in the gap separating one element from another, one living environment from another (sky and earth). One might say nowadays it is polymedial, since it always uses more than one medium at a time. This is why it is heterochronous with itself, as Plutarch’s tale of the victory of Timoleon at Syracuse in 343 B.C. testifies. What is striking in this tale is the heterochrony of the way rumour spreads, the contrasting speeds at which it works:

For rumor [*ἔ φῆμῆ*] not only filled at once [*euthus*] all Sicily and Italy, but within a few days [*ἡμέρων ὀλιγόν*] Greece echoed with his great success, so that the city of Corinth, which was in doubt whether his armament had got across the sea, heard at one and the same time [*homou*] that it had safely crossed, and that it was victorious..<sup>21</sup>

This asynchrony of the trajectory of rumour, its course, the way it reaches some without delay while it takes more or less time to reach others, is striking. The adverb *homou* ( ‘together, at once, at the same time’) that Plutarch uses to describe what reaches the ears of the Corinthians synchronically, is in reality subject to an extreme temporal disjunction : the news of the disembarkation of the troops on their way to

the battlefield is received in Corinth at the same time (in a sort of split simultaneity) as the news of the victory that has already happened.

Rumor as flight is an ancient tradition, that goes back a long way. After Virgil (but one could already find examples in Herodotus), the motif of taking off, and of the aerial or atmospheric character of rumor can be found for example in Shakespeare, who has Rumour herself say in Henry IV Part II: 'I, from the Orient to the drooping West,/Making the wind my post-horse, still unfold/The acts commenced on this ball of earth (ADD FN).<sup>22</sup>.

When Beaumarchais, in his *Barber of Seville*, takes up again this *topos* of the windlike noise of rumor, he gives it a hyperbolic twist in which polymediality and heterochrony are unleashed ; the passage – Bazile's tirade praising the force of slander in the eighth scene of Act II – is punctuated by musical indications of movement : 'First the merest whisper skimming the earth like a swallow before the storm - *pianissimo* - a murmur and it's away sowing the poisoned seed as it goes. Someone picks it up and - *piano piano* - insinuates it into your ear. The damage is done. It spawns, creeps, and crawls and spreads and multiplies and then - *rinforzando* - from mouth to mouth it goes like the very Devil. Suddenly, no one knows how, you see Calumny raising its head hissing, puffing, and swelling before your very eyes. It takes wing, extending its flight in ever-widening circles, swooping and .swirling, drawing in a bit here and a bit there, sweeping everything before it, and breaks forth at last like a thunder clap to become, thanks be to Heaven, the general cry, a public *crescendo*, a *chorus* universal of hate, rage, and condemnation.'<sup>23</sup> This is an admirable passage in which we see, in the middle of an increasing intensity that seems to follow a simple and linear development (*pianissimo*, *piano*, *rinforzando*, *crescendo*), a veritable firework display of verbs of movement which keep twisting

and bending the exponential linearity of this rumorous amplification, and introducing complex and entangled counter-movements : skim the earth, creep, crawl, swell, take wing, extend its flight, swoop, swirl, sweep, break forth...

Malicious rumor has rarely been so polyrhythmic and polymedial, following an agogic of bursts and fits that cause it to veer endlessly in its nebulous trajectory between earth and sky. Is this what seduced Rossini when he proposed an operatic adaptation of this passage, this slander aria of which Jean-Luc remembered – remembered – snatches, as he walked along towards a thought of rumor?

Rumor, in sum, as we saw with Blanchot, is a sort of archimedium : if it is true that it is this 'neutral movement wherein the relating [*rapport*] seems reduced to its pure essence, a *pure relation* of no one and nothing', if it is thus relation and nothing else – relation as such, independently of whatever or whoever it relates –, then rumor is absolutely medial : it is mediality itself.

An archimedium, then, as I said. But rumor as a pure medium (insofar as it is irreducible to its tenor, to its informational or disinformational content, to the news, true or fake, that it conveys), rumorous rumor always presents a differential character in the way it spreads it is distanced from itself in what we might call its amphimediality, if we think of its Virgilian flight between earth and sky.

This distance makes it a medium that never coincides with itself.

It is, in a word, an anarchimedium.

Translated from the French by Michael Syrotinski

---

<sup>1</sup>. « Rumoration » was first published – with a number of other responses by artists, architects, sociologists and philosophers -- in 'Urban Rumors : A Project Curated by Hans Ulrich Obrist', *Mutations*, Bordeaux, ACTAR, 2001, and later in Jean-Luc Nancy, *La Ville au loin*, Paris, La Phocide, 2011, p. 125-127.

<sup>2</sup>. On the *rumor clinics*, see Gordon W. Allport and Leo Postman, *The Psychology of Rumors*, New York, Henry Holt and Company, 1947, p. 18 ff.. The ad published alongside the images of the the aforementioned rumor clinics is taken from *Life*, 12 October 1942, p.94.

<sup>3</sup>. The poster in question was probably part of a publicity campaign for the Ingerie brand Aubade in 2000. The black and white photo of the body of a woman, kneeling and wearing the aforementioned underwear (with



---

her head outside the frame) has the following caption : 'Lesson no. 32 : Incite him to meditate [*L'inciter à méditer*]'

<sup>4</sup>. *La Vérité du mensonge*, Paris, Bayard, « Les petites conférences », 2021, p. 60 (this was a public talk for an audience of children given in April 2018).

<sup>5</sup>. See Theophrastus, *Characters*, VIII, 4. English translation by J.M. Edmonds (London: Heinemann, 1929, p. 61).

<sup>6</sup>. *La Ville au loin*, *op. cit.*, p. 126.

<sup>7</sup>. Maurice Blanchot, 'Everyday Speech', in *The Infinite Conversation*, trans. Susan Hanson (Minneapolis : University of Minnesota Press, 1993), p. 241.

<sup>8</sup>. Theophrastus, *Characters*, VIII, 4 et XXIV, 4; Marc Bloch, « Réflexions d'un historien sur les fausses nouvelles de la guerre », *Revue de synthèse historique*, tome XXXIII, n° 97-99, 1921, p. 32-33.

<sup>9</sup>. 'Everyday Speech', *The Infinite Conversation*, *op. cit.*, p. 243.

<sup>10</sup>. 'The Most Profound Question,' in *The Infinite Conversation*, p. 20

<sup>11</sup>. 'Everyday Speech,' in *The Infinite Conversation*, p.240.

<sup>12</sup>. As Marcel Duchamp said to Denis de Rougemont : 'The sound or the music that a pair of corduroy trousers like these makes when you move is an example of the infra-thin. The gap between the front and back of a sheet of paper' ('Marcel Duchamp mine de rien', *Preuves*, n° 204, 1968). In his *Notes* (Paris, Flammarion, 1999, p. 24), he used the following comparison : 'When tobacco smoke also smells of the mouth which exhales it, the two odours are married by the infra-thin'.

<sup>13</sup>. I have just quoted from *The Inoperative Community*, trans. Peter Connor, Lisa Garbus, Michael Holland, and Simona Sawhney (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1991), 49; and *Proprement dit. Entretien sur le mythe [Properly Speaking : Interviews on Myth]* (Paris, Lignes, 2015, p. 53, p. 72 et p. 75). See too *Listening*, trans. Charlotte Mandell (New York : Fordham University Press, 2007) where Jean-Luc talks about "the form or structure of self as such" as "movement of an infinite referral [*renvoi*] since it refers to something (itself) that is nothing outside of the referral" (9).

<sup>14</sup>. *Characters*, VIII, 4-7 (61); La Bruyère, who translated Theophrastus into French in 1688 (his own *Characters* was originally a sort of commentary or postface) proposes for this sentence : « il allègue pour témoins de ce qu'il avance des hommes obscurs qu'on ne peut trouver pour le convaincre de fausseté » [he gives as witnesses to what he is saying obscure people one cannot find to verify it] (*Les Caractères de Théophraste traduits du grec avec Les Caractères ou Les Mœurs de ce siècle par La Bruyère*, Paris, Bourdilliat et C<sup>ie</sup>, 1861, p. 84).

<sup>15</sup>. The verb *fero* (the infinitive of which is *ferre* while the supine, used to construct the participle, is *latum*) is the Latin equivalent of the Greek *pherō*. In 'Before the Law', Jacques Derrida proposes the term *férance* [*ference*] to express 'rapport, relation, reference' (*Acts of Literature*, ed. Derek Attridge [New York : Routledge, 1992], p.204). And in *Given Time. I. Counterfeit Money.*, trans. Peggy Kamuf (Chicago : University of Chicago Press, 1994, p 128), he writes : ' *Fero* also means 'I report', in the sense of recount, of relation (*latum*, the participle of *ferre*), relation as narrative [...] And we need not point out that this problematic [...] carries us back incessantly to the heart of the great questions of reference and difference.'

<sup>16</sup>. *The Syntax of Apollonius Dyscolus*, II, 10 ; English, trans and ed Fred Householder (Amsterdam : John Benjamins Publishing, 1981), p.90.

<sup>17</sup>. Emile Benveniste, « L'anaphorique prussien *din* et le système des démonstratifs indo-européens », *Studi Baltici*, n° 3, 1933, p. 124.

<sup>18</sup>. Ludwig William Stern, « Zur Psychologie der Aussage (experimentelle Untersuchungen über Erinnerungstreue) », *Zeitschrift für die gesamte Strafrechtswissenschaft*, vol. 22, 1902, p. 362.

<sup>19</sup>. Maurice Blanchot, 'The Most Profound Question,' in *The Infinite Conversation*, *op. cit.*, pp. 19-20. (my emphasis). Translation modified.

<sup>20</sup>. *Aeneid*, IV, 175-185; trans. H. Rushton Fairclough (London: William Heinemann, 1916), p.407-409.

<sup>21</sup>. « Timoleon », 21, 6 ; English translation by Bernadotte Perrin, Loeb Classical Library 98, *Lives*, Volume VI. Translation modified.

<sup>22</sup>. Shakespeare, *Henry IV Part 2, Prologue, ll.3-4*.

<sup>23</sup> Pierre-Augustin Caron de Beaumarchais, *The Barber of Seville*, trans. John Wood (London: Penguin Classics, 2005), p.61,