

Marc Angenot. *Dialogues de sourds. Traité de rhétorique antilogique*. Paris: Mille et une Nuits, 2008. ISBN 978-2-84205-992-7, 455 pp., 22.- Euro.

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Marc Angenot, a distinguished author/editor of more than 30 books, opens this learned treatise on miscomprehension, the inability to respond to reasonable argument and the frustration of not following a dialogue partner's arguments (p. 10) with an intellectual display of erudite fireworks. From Plato to the modern philosophical heights of the Adorno/Habermas "querelle," he advances to the broader issues of social deafness with regard to the past century's aberrations (p. 28) of "fascisme, racisme et antisémitisme, stalinisme, nationalismes et intégrismes divers." The book is a pleasure to read: both an intellectual roller coaster ride with learned references and picturesque illustrations from our contemporary word, and an excursion to rhetorical wonderland.

The rest of the treatise is structured into four broad chapters, carefully sub-titled, and a substantial conclusion. Chapter I offers Angenot's view of the last twenty-five centuries of rhetorical tradition as we know it. It opens with a history of a – mostly negative – history of reception of the sophists and their view of argumentation. A first tentative conclusion (p. 55) results in the statement that our modern concept of the discipline developed into two different views: that of an ornate style as opposed to an ordinary language, and an understanding of rhetoric as a series of instrumentalized techniques to persuade and convince on an *ad hoc* basis by means of suitable tropes and figures. With a flurry of key concepts – Topoi et entymèmes/Doxa, sens commun et probable, etc. - he ends this chapter with a reflection (having dealt with Habermas, Heidegger, Foucault and Derrida et al.) of *regressio ad infinitum* and the repercussions of absurdity.

Chapter II is devoted to a classification of argumentations of discord and miscomprehension. After a reflection on "discordance cognitive unsurmontable" (p.130) Angenot cites the two bestsellers on gender-related misunderstanding by Deborah Tannen as prime examples for his reasoning, namely that the rules and conventions of human discourse are primarily an ethical issue.

Chapter III with the sarcastic title "Les grands types de logiques argumentatives" has numerous examples of culture gone wrong! An example is the sub-chapter on "Les trois exclusion de la raison." Its sub-headings speak for themselves: *La pensée primitive/Les étapes logiques enfantines/La folie raisonnante*. But the author gets really going when reworking topics he has covered in the past like an analysis of "Connexité de la pensée conspiratoire et de la logique du ressentiment." It is an analysis of the rhetoric of false victimology.

Chapter IV, "Doxa et écart paradoxal" is an intellectual obstacle course on demythologizing and rejecting "vérités générales" and "simplistes platitudes." The main concern is conformity being disguised as *hybris*. The examples range from Angenot's mother selling the false iron nutrient value of spinach to her son (alas, the erudite scholar

failed to include the fictional canonization of this myth in comic book figure Popeye) to “le mythe de la Conspiration” surrounding 9/11 (p. 392). Angenot finds appropriate rhetorical solace in Aristotle’s distinction between apodictic and possible reasoning (p.409), ensuring a reasonable discourse.

The Conclusion remains somewhat inconclusive. The reader is instructed to distinguish between “le narrable” and “l’argumentable.” (p.417) To beware of the interference of the “cacophonie” of disinformation when coherence and rationality should be adhered to. And finally, the spectrum of “de la polémique politique à la querelle de ménage” is introduced for Angenot’s final conclusion that a humanistic argumentation should try to balance the individual’s quest to ‘justify’ and ‘situate’ oneself in the never-ending discourse of human life.

The one regrettable feature of the book is the absence of indices of names and terms.