



PROJECT MUSE®

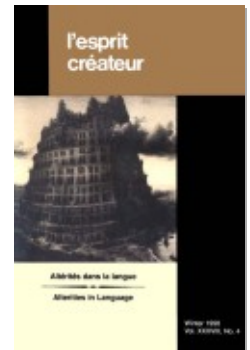
Phantasmic Radio (review)

Edward Scheer

L'Esprit Créateur, Volume 38, Number 4, Winter 1998, pp. 145-146 (Review)

Published by Johns Hopkins University Press

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1353/esp.2010.0266>



➔ *For additional information about this article*

<https://muse.jhu.edu/article/264845/summary>

poetic texts, in the illuminations of mystics and the delirium of logophiliacs or mental patients," an other side that Lecercle dubs "the remainder" and which may be said to be an instance of "language speaks" (5-6). Lecercle remains by method a linguist, yet reminds linguistics of its shortcomings relative to the "remainder being the 'other' of *langue*" (141). The central chapter of the book, "A Theory of the Remainder," devoted to Heidegger's tautology, "*die Sprache spricht*," puts forth the four rules not of *langue* but of the "remainder": flouting of rules, paradox, rhizome-work, corruption.

The Philosophy of Nonsense extends the analyses of *The Violence of Language* through a reading of the Victorian genre of nonsense literature. The book answers the question of why nonsense exists as a genre, first "anachronically" explaining how "the works of Lewis Carroll anticipate the main aspects of the current philosophical debate on language, or the discoveries of generative grammar," and second "diachronically" showing how the "genre attempts to solve by imaginary means a real contradiction in the historical conjuncture" (2). Ana- or synchronically, "nonsense is on the whole a conservative-revolutionary genre" (2), based on a dialectics between "I speak language" and "language speaks" that shows its status as *metasense* (a discourse on language). Diachronically, the nonsense genre is a by-product of normative knowledge-acquisition in educational institutions. Through readings of the *Alice* books, especially the "Humpty Dumpty" chapter in *Through the Looking-Glass*, Lecercle shows the naiveté in the works of J. Searle, in H. P. Grice's "Cooperative Principle" and J. Habermas's "consensus," against which he develops his "Principle of Struggle," one of the jewels of his analysis. Moreover, nonsense literature is governed by a dialectic Lecercle dubs *transversion*. Language in the genre is perverted. Perversion or subversion triumphs, yet is only inversion: the perverted world is the inverse of the idealized, cooperative world. Rather than convert to the inverted world, nonsense literature *transverts* or deconstructs. What interests Lecercle in nonsense literature is that "the philosophical programme of twentieth-century Anglo-Saxon philosophy of language is already present, *in nuce*, in Victorian nonsense" (115). Through the disjointedness of what I say and what I mean thanks to iterability, Lecercle pushes the dialectics of subversion and support towards radical non-sense within nonsense, discerning a radical saying without meaning, which the nonsense genre quickly represses. In such manner, "nonsense transverts, in advance, the analytic philosophy that stems from the same intellectual tradition" (163). Nonsense literature, finally, is an *institution*, an inscription of the social. It is a reflection upon Victorian education, a transversion of the ideological educational apparatus.

What remains most inspiring throughout Jean-Jacques Lecercle's investigations is precisely the unique blend of analytic with continental philosophy, Anglo-American linguistics with French linguistics and psychoanalysis, contemporary theory with literary analysis. We eagerly await his forthcoming *The Pragmatics of Interpretation*.

Thomas Dutoit

Université François Rabelais-Tours

Allen S. Weiss. *Phantasmic Radio*. Durham and London: Duke University Press, 1995. Pp. 122. \$13.95 paper.

It is 50 years ago this year that the events which gave rise to Allen S. Weiss's study of radical experimental radiophony "took place." In 1948 Antonin Artaud's obscene radio broadcast *Pour en finir avec le jugement de dieu* was banned by the very institution that had commissioned it to begin with. It was in 1948 that magnetic recording tape first became available. Artaud's unique broadcast/event became a tape-recording destined to find its true audience a generation later. In 1948 John Cage discussed plans for what would become his 4'33" (at that time referred to as "Silent Prayer") negating orchestration to release the latent music of the present moment. In 1948 Olivier Messiaen completed his *Turangalila Symphonie*, expanding the possibilities of

Western orchestration to include "Hindu and ancient Greek scales, Balinese sonorities, Gregorian plainchant" (43). In 1948 Pierre Boulez wrote that "music must be hysteria and collective bewitchment, violently present—following the direction of Antonin Artaud" (45). In May of 1948 the first piece of Pierre Schaeffer's *musique concrète* was broadcast. It was, as Weiss notes, a "pivotal year in the history of twentieth century music" (43).

Weiss uses moments such as these as markers in a history still listening to itself develop, for it is a history of radio arts. Weiss restores the specificity of the radiophonic dimension (still often considered a bastard form, derived from theatre, music and the written arts), while re-situating it, as a distinct cultural form, in the midst of current theoretical debates on the linkages between the physical and the technological, the psychological and the musicological, as well as the more familiar themes of textuality and subjectivity. Weiss's text presents the fragments of a grand narrative of noise spliced together, from Russolo's *Art of noise* to Artaud's glossolalia, to the more systematic linguistic distortions of Gregory Whitehead.

These sounds are homeless. Like Artaud's broadcast they do not "take place" but rather traverse space both public and private. Like Nietzsche's dream of "words in motion," they travel as if to keep up with our thoughts (60). They are not masterpieces but they correspond to what Artaud called "the crude and epileptic rhythm of these times" (*Le Théâtre et son double*, 1964 [1938]:116). *Phantasmic Radio* follows their hallucinatory journeys but repeatedly returns with them to the question of the body as if to coax unforeseen and unheard of voices from these figures. Weiss is particularly skillful in reading Artaud's glossolalia as a kind of material poetics in which the violence and pleasure of the experience of a physicalised sound assume precedence over the phatic, communicative aspects of linguistic production. This emphasis amplifies another aspect of Weiss's project here, apart from giving voice to the silent history of radical radiophony, which is precisely to analyse what lies beneath these nodal points of language (just as it was Artaud's project to bring them into being), and thereby to extend interpretative practice to its limits, to fine-tune the analytical ear to the sounds of the instinctual drives, like a textual ultrasound. This is academic writing at its vibrant best, reminding the reader of the voltaic potentials of thought to endlessly renew itself in making strange something as familiar to our lives as radio and to rediscover in the works of Artaud and Cage, as well as less celebrated artists such as Valère Novarina, Christof Migone and Gregory Whitehead, the inexhaustible versions, inversions, reversions and perversions of the human voice which offer to all who have eyes to hear, a massive expansion of sensuous receptivity.

Edward Scheer

University of Newcastle NSW, Australia

Molière mis en scène. Œuvres et critiques 22:2 (1997). Tübingen: Gunter Narr Verlag. Pp. 183.

This welcome volume of fifteen essays, plus a thoughtful introduction by David Whitton, gives a very wide range of information on the theory and practice of staging Molière that will be of interest not only to specialists of theatricality, but to all who study the plays, especially *Tartuffe*, which figures most prominently, *Le Misanthrope*, *Don Juan*, and *L'École des femmes*. While the offerings on Anglo-French productions are richest, there are five articles devoted to stagings in other countries. After a quick review of the American situation, Jim Carmody concentrates mainly on the Belgrader/Berc version of *Scapin* in New York and the Falls/Bartlett *Misanthrope* in La Jolla. Alain-Michel Rocheleau and Bruce Griffiths offer in-depth views of the historical evolution of Molière on the Québécois and Welsh stages. Bilha Blum contributes a summary of ten years of Israeli productions that begs for a more expanded treatment not only of the productions themselves, but of the fascinating reception phenomena accompanying Molière plays in the Middle East. Sonia Simkova provides just that sort of analysis of the significance of his theater in Slovakia in the post-Soviet era.