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Marc W. Redfield

DE MAN, SCHILLER, AND THE POLITICS OF RECEPTION

> Das der Furcht im Charakter der Bedeutsamkeit Begegnende ist etwas *Abträgliches,* wie *Aristoteles* sagt, ein κακόν, malum, und zwar ist dieses Abträgliche immer etwas Bestimmtes. Wir würden, wenn wir den Begriff hier schon hätten, sagen, etwas Geschichtliches, etwas Bestimmtes, das in die vertraute Welt des besorgenden Umganges hereinbringt.
>
> Heidegger[1]

Over the last ten years, the work of Paul de Man has not become any easier to assimilate. Frank Lentricchia could not have been more wide of the mark when in 1983 he predicted that the "war between traditionalists and deconstructors" would "draw to a close by the end of this decade", with de Man "rediscovered as the most brilliant hero of traditionalism"[2]. For even if de Man's youthful contributions to *Le Soir* had remained hidden a few more years in the archive, it is clear that Lentricchia would have lost his wager. The furor over de Man's wartime journalism has at least had the virtue of making manifest the extraordinary violence with which his mature work is resisted. Doubtless, a measure of institutional success continues to attend "de Manian" criticism. It would be astounding if this were not the case, given the visible rigor of the methodology, the prestige and relative power that de Man himself was able to achieve, the cultural force of certain notions of comparative literature, theory, European philosophy, and so on. As a rule, however, contemporary criticism quarantines and ignores de Manian theory by way of various hegemonic strategies of inclusive exclusion, supplemented by extravagant gestures of anthropomorphization and rejection. One could with considerable justice invert Lentricchia's formulations and claim that the most

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1 Martin Heidegger, *Prolegomena zur Geschichte des Zeitbegriffs* [1925], *Gesamtausgabe,* 20, Frankfurt, Vittorio Klostermann, 1979, p. 395.

2 Frank Letricchia, *Criticism and Social Change,* Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 1983, p. 39.

significant realignments of institutional power in literary studies during the 1980's amount to wholehearted approval of the rhetoric of *Criticism and Social Change*. Nothing, it seems, is more obvious than the political inadequacy of de Man's texts. The task of pursuing some form of "historicism" has taken on the self-evident necessity of an ethical imperative. "It is a fact", de Man wrote in 1972, "that this sort of thing happens, again and again, in literary studies"[3]. What happens perhaps a little more rarely in literary studies is the event of an exemplary figure such as de Man, capable of inspiring the most lurid gestures of monumentalization and ritual sacrifice.

The pages that follow seek to articulate de Man's theoretical text with the politics of his reception and with the question of politics. I shall be pursuing the notions of history and politics that inform de Man's late texts, mounting an argument for their credibility and political usefulness. However, my purpose is also to account, by way of the same vocabulary, for the resistance his writing inspires. This topic acquires interest when, like de Man, we understand "resistance" as a necessary component of any act of reading. Overt displays of "resistance to theory", in other words, should be understood as spectacular versions of the subtler problematic posed by theory's "resistance" to itself. Far from composing a frivolous exercise in self-reflexivity, this problematic defines the difficult necessity of a political criticism. The complement of fear and repression is idealization and identification: both are predicated upon a monumentalizing gesture without which no response to de Man seems able to come into being. The very act of commenting, favorably or unfavorably, on his work draws one into a network of effects characterizable in both institutional and libidinal terms. The politics of criticism and the politics of charisma intersect within the event of this fortuitously anthropomorphic proper name. One is thus led to pursue what might otherwise seem a needless complication: the relation in de Man's text between history,

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3 Paul de Man, *Allegories of Reading: Figural Language in Rousseau, Nietzsche, Rilke, and Proust,* New Haven, Yale University Press, 1979, p. 4. Subsequent references are indicated parenthetically in the text by acronym *AR* and page number. Quotations from de Man's other books are indicated by page number and acronym, as follows: *Blindness and Insight: Essays in the Rhetoric of Contemporary Criticism,* Second Edition, Minneapolis, University of Minnesota Press, 1983, *BI; Critical Writings, 1953-1978,* Minneapolis, University of Minnesota Press, 1989, *CW; The Rhetoric of Romanticism,* New York, Columbia University Press, 1984, *RR; The Resistence to Theory,* Minneapolis, University of Minnesota Press, 1986, *RT*.

politics, and pathos. Further reasons for privileging this cluster of issues will unfold as we negotiate de Man's theoretical propositions. But we can suggest the nature of this topic's interest, and open the question of de Man's "own" resistance to ("de Manian") theory, by considering, in the most naive and literalistic fashion possible, the affective career of the word "history" in his writing over thirty years.

De Man's essays have tended to address the question of history in an elevated tone. With surprising regularity they have sought closure in dramatic, aphoristic invocations of the historical. Occasionally the mood is neutral or upbeat, as when, at the end of his clearly essay on the theme of Faust, de Man writes that a genuinely thematic reading must "pass from myth to idea, and from idea to formal theme, before being able to become history" (*CW*, p. 88)[4]. More often, the tone is closer to that of the closing phrase of "The Dead-End of Formalist Criticism", as it invokes "the sorrowful time of patience, i.e., history" (*BI*, p. 245). The existential idiom of these early texts, their thematization of history in terms of a non-naturalistic, death-directed temporality, clearly favors but does not entirely explain the recurrence of such a tone in essays so frequently marked by a refusal of pathetic language[5]. The question is of interest because de Man's penchant for granting the word "history" rhetorical charge does not disappear as his attention shifts to rhetoric. His most famous, or infamous, aphorism on history is memorable partly because it is – and has the ring of – a closing sentence: "the bases for historical knowledge are not empirical facts but written texts, even if these texts masquerade in the guise of wars or revolutions" (*BI*, p. 165). An essay devoted to themes of political action in Rousseau ends with the dramatic

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4 The closing cadence is slightly less portentous in the original French: "... avant de pouvoir devenir *une* histoire". Paul de Man, "La critique thématique devant le thème de Faust", *Critique*, 120, May 1957, p. 404.

5 The refusal of pathetic language, of course, hardly impedes, and if anything encourages, the recurrence of a pathetic tone. I am drawing attention here to one thematic regularity among several in a general rhetoric of mourning that one encounters throughout de Man's work. For a study of the rhetoric of sacrifice in de Man, see Minae Mizumura, "Renunciation", *Yale French Studies*, 69, 1985, pp. 81-97. For a particularly rich thematization of the temporal pathos of history, see de Man's 1967 lecture "Time and History in Wordsworth", which has recently been recovered for the archive in a special issue of *Diacritics*, 17, 4, Winter 1987, pp. 4-17. The lecture holds special interest for critics interested in de Man's shift from existential to rhetorical terminologies, since he gave the lecture again in 1972, modified in ways that the *Diacritics* text records in footnotes.

dramatic proposition that "textual allegories on this level of rhetorical complexity generate history" (*AR*, p. 277). And in the late essays that principally concern us here, de Man's prose will often acquire extraordinary intensity at the very moment when he is repudiating the pathos made available by notions of historical time. In "Shelley Disfigured", an essay that bears on the historicity of an aesthetic object "that has been unearthed, edited, reconstructed, and much discussed" (*RR*, p. 93), de Man's tone, grimly elegiac throughout, rises memorably as he concludes the essay with a resurrection of Shelley's dead body – and finally, with a reintroduction of the charged word "history": "Reading as disfiguration, to the very extent that it resists historicism, turns out to be historically more reliable than the products of historical archeology" (*RR*, p. 123). But perhaps the most dramatic instance of such a deliberately pathetic renunciation of pathos occurs in the last sentence of "Anthropomorphism and Trope", where the work of "true 'mourning'" unrolls as a bleakly sublime list of deprivations: "The most *it* can do is enumerate non-anthropomorphic, non-elegiac, non-celebratory, non-lyrical, non-poetic, that is to say, prosaic, or better, *historical* modes of language power" (*RR*, p. 262, de Man's italics). The text performs what it denies, going to some length, in fact, to deliver a certain version of the elegiac satisfaction it is renouncing.

History is of course not by any means always, in de Man's work, the object of sibylline utterance or the cynosure of a concluding sentence. Essays such as "Literary History and Literary Modernity", which thematize history at length, are for that reason, in fact, more rather than less representative of an oeuvre that could with some justice be described as obsessed by the task of thinking Romanticism, and literature in general, as historical events. But when the question of "distinguish[ing] rigorously between metaphorical and historical language", between a mystified and an authentic perception of the historical, appears with its full force (*BI*, p. 164), de Man writes more elliptically, and at a significantly higher pitch, than is usually the case. Naive as it would be to imagine that de Man is "repressing" some entity called history, we should also not hasten to call such rhetorical performances self-reflexive. Certainly one of their – quite seductive – functions in the late essays is to exemplify the difficulty of rendering "true mourning"; but the persistence with which the word "history" has attracted rhetorical energy in de Man's writing over three decades suggests the pressure of a pattern irreducible to what we ordinarily call the self-consciousness of an author or text. To

interpret this disturbance in the de Manian text within the terms of the de Manian text – which is to say, within the logic of an interrogation that disqualifies for closure the "withinness" of logic or self-consciousness – is a compelling and perhaps impossible task.

For various pragmatic reasons, in much of what follows I shall be centering attention on de Man's late essays on Kant and Schiller. With Kant, the aesthetic definitively enters the institution of philosophical discourse, and, according to de Man, the question of Kant's reception composes not just the philosophical possibility of aesthetic judgment, but the political burden of critical thought. "For it is as a political force that the aesthetic still concerns us as one of the most powerful ideological drives to act upon the reality of history" (*RR*, p. 264). The late essays on German pre-Romantic and Romantic authors – on Kant, Schiller, Kleist, and Hegel – take as their target an understanding of Romanticism deriving from Hegel, which situates Schiller's *Über die Ästhetische Erziehung des Menschen* ("the wellspring of romantic criticism", as René Wellek claims) on a path leading from subjective to objective idealism, from the *Kritik der Urteilskraft* to the *Vorlesungen über die Ästhetik*[6]. De Man refigures this teleological commonplace into an economy of demystification and regression in which the name "Schiller" operates as a personification of aesthetic ideology[7]. Produced by, and yet incommensurate with the "historical" event figured in the *Kritik der Urteilskraft,* the "reception" of Kant takes its coordinates from Schiller's treatise, which in its turn figures the most disastrous of political possibilities: we are told at the end of de Man's late lecture draft, "Kant and Schiller", that Goebbels' misreading of Schiller in his 1929 novel *Michael* "does not differ essentially" from Schiller's misreading of Kant[8]. In less dramatic,

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6 René Wellek, *A History of Modern Criticism: 1750-1950,* London, Jonathan Cape, 1955, vol. I, p. 255. For Hegel's famous claim that Schiller broke through "die Kantische Subjektivität und Abstraktion des Denkens", see G.F.W. Hegel, *Vorlesungen über die Ästhetik,* I, *Werkausgabe,* 13, Frankfurt a.M., Suhrkamp, 1970, p. 89. For a critique of Schiller's contribution to nineteenth-century notions of "culture", see David Lloyd, "Arnold, Ferguson, Schiller: Aesthetic Culture and the Politics of Aesthetics", *Cultural Critique,* 2, Winter 1985-86, pp. 137-69.

7 Schiller's name appears with some regularity in de Man's work, usually signifying a certain misreading of Rousseau (see *RR,* pp. 20-6 *passim* and *AR,* pp. 137, 176, 208). However, Schiller only becomes a figure of emblematic stature when de Man begins to write explicitly on the reception of Kant's *Kritik der Urteilskraft*.

8 "Kant and Schiller" was delivered at de Man's penultimate Messenger lecture at Cornell University in March, 1983. This lecture and another unpublished talk to

but perhaps equally significant ways, "Kant and Schiller" and "Kant's Materialism" also yield what are pretty much the only explicit reflections in the de Manian corpus on gender politics.

In negotiating de Man's invocation of Schiller, therefore, we engage the question of political criticism as a question of reception. That question returns upon itself as one of our reception of de Man, and of "de Man's" reception of "himself". The genial but genuine tone of accusation de Man adopts in "Kant and Schiller" as he reiterates one of the more venerable commonplaces of Schiller criticism – that Schiller lacks philosophical rigor, has misunderstood Kant, and so on – is not simply a pedagogical device designed to animate a semi-improvised lecture[9]. This personification is substituting for the dense pathos of essays like those on Kleist, Baudelaire, or Shelley, and is ironically rehearsing the closure of reception: if Schiller anthropomorphizes the aesthetic, de Man anthro-

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which I shall be referring, "Kant's Materialism", are scheduled for publication in *The Aesthetic Ideology,* edited by Andrzej Warminski, forthcoming from the University of Minnesota Press. Since page references cannot be had at this time, my practice in what follows has been to restrict quotation as much as possible to relatively long, easily locatable excerpts. Where de Man's oral delivery occasioned uninteresting solecisms, I have edited them out.

9 Schiller, the vulgarizer of Kant, the overpragmatic dramatist or overidealistic poet incapable of genuine philosophical cogitation, is a stock character in German literary history from Schiller's own time onward. Schiller's patron, the Duke of Augustenburg, wrote apropos of an early version of the *Ästhetische Erziehung:* "Our good Schiller is not cut out for a philosopher; he needs a translator to elaborate his fine phrases with philosophic precision, and to transpose him from the poetic into the philosophic mode". Hans Schulz, *Schiller und der Herzog von Augustenburg in Briefen,* Jena, 1905, p. 153. Quoted by Elizabeth M. Wilkinson and L.A. Willoughby in their introduction to their translation of Schiller, *On the Aesthetic Education of Man,* Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1967, p. cxxxviii. For a summary of the main lines of Schiller's twentieth-century reception, and a glowing defense of Schiller, see Wilkinson and Willoughby pp. xlii-lxvii. – Finding fault with Schiller is also a gesture with a more specific history. Adorno's remarks on Schiller in *Ästhetische Theorie* are reminiscent of de Man's, and might constitute a useful point of entry for a study of the complex presence of Adorno in de Man's writings. "Die bei Kant beginnende Fetischisierung des Geniebegriffs als der abgetrennten, nach Hegels Sprache abstrakten Subjektivität, hat schon in Schillers Votivtafeln kraß elitäre Züge angenommen. Er wird potentiell zum Feind der Kunstwerke; mit einem Seitenblick auf Goethe soll der Mensch hinter jenen wesentlicher sein als sie selbst. Im Geniebegriff wird mit idealistischer Hybris die Idee des Schöpfertums vom transzendentalen Subjekt an das empirische, den produktiven Künstler zediert". Theodor W. Adorno, *Ästhetische Theorie, Gesammelte Schriften,* 7, Frankfurt a.M., Suhrkamp, 1970, p. 255.

pomorphizes the source of its error. The seductive promises of a certain monumental self-reflexivity are in place, as are those of more banal scenarios of naming and blaming. One will have no trouble imagining de Man exorcising his own Schillerian wartime journalism; and readers willing to repeat in full the Schillerian gesture will find in that image of human self-interrogation relief from other questions.

I.

One tends to speak easily of the essential or radical figurativeness of language. The assumption often seems to be that this insight is easily borne, or even fundamentally inconsequent. Having renounced all metaphysical and representational naiveté, including, of course, the naiveté of believing that we could ever utterly renounce representational logic, metaphors of grounding, notions of truth and lie, etc., we would, it seems, be in a position to forsake linguistic for other, more practical or obviously political topics. Versions of this pragmatic assurance surface repeatedly in comtemporary criticism. And yet, if the radical figurativeness of language is granted, or suspected, all else in the de Manian narrative follows.

It follows, first, that the paradigmatic condition of reading is a condition of suspense between a literal and a figurative meaning. Since any literal meaning is vulnerable to being read as a figure for another meaning, itself a figure, and so on, language as trope must be understood as a process of circulation devoid of external support. Since, however, a meaning, in order to be read, must be taken in isolation from the possibility of tropological displacement, the condition of reading is structured by a double possibility: that of figuration, and that of propriety of reference. This difference – the difference between the figural and the proper – is itself that of figure. No external principle can regulate this difference a priori, since no referent can definitively ground tropological displacement. This is why de Man writes at the beginning of *Allegories of Reading* that "the grammatical model of the question becomes rhetorical not when we have, on the one hand, a literal meaning, and on the other hand a figural meaning, but when it is impossible to decide by grammatical or other linguistic devices which of the two meanings (that can be entirely incompatible) prevails" (*AR*, p. 10). The figure that accounts

for and describes the possibility of the difference between literal and figurative meaning is the figure of this difference's undecidability. Radical figuration implies the radical undecidability of figure. This undecidability defines, finally, the "text" (*AR*, p. 10), because there is no linguistic vantage point external to it. Undecidability is what is given to us to read, though by definition it cannot necessarily be read. What is given to us to read is the possible impossibility of reading. This aporetic imperative generates the plot of de Man's theoretical text.

One consequence of rhetoric's radical suspension of meaning is that language can no longer be understood primarily as an intentional structure. The popular idea that deconstruction "makes no difference" because prejudices are irreducible and one has to make decisions anyway, etc., forwards the kind of complacency that might be underwritten by substituting for rhetorical undecidability a phenomenological notion of "suspension" (*Aufhebung*), in which the referent is bracketed through an intentional act[10]. But intention directs itself toward meaning; and if all meaning is implicated in an undecidability of meaning arising from a process of semantic substitution, then this *process of substitution* is possibly indifferent to meaning and intention. Language as figuration cannot be reduced to a play of intentions, because language's formal principle of articulation (or figuration) cannot be determinately motivated. We shall return to this problem in a moment, but consider first another implication of radical figuration: the narrative or cognitive dimension of its error.

In order to be read, a figure must figure forth an aberrantly literal meaning. Rousseau's primitive man, on his way to language, sees another primitive man and experiences fear: out of fear he exaggerates the other's size, and invents a primitive metaphor, "giant". Since this metaphor has a proper meaning – fear – it is a proper metaphor, for all its referential inaccuracy. But fear is not actually a proper meaning, being "the result of a possible discrepancy between the outer and the inner properties of entities" (*AR*, p. 150). Metaphor, in coming into legibility, imposes meaning on undecidability (for "it remains an open question, for whoever is neither a paranoiac nor a fool, whether one can trust one's

10 Edmund Husserl, *Ideen zu einer reinen Phänomenologie und Phänomenologischen Philosophie*, Erstes Buch, ed. Walter Biemel, *Husserliana*, III, Haag, Martinus Nijhoff, 1950, p. 64 (para. 31).

fellow man"): the metaphor "giant" "freezes hypothesis, or fiction, into fact and makes fear, itself a figural state of suspended meaning, into a definite, proper meaning devoid of alternatives" (*AR*, p. 151). This dense parable, which sets the stage for de Man's long and passionate engagement with Rousseau in *Allegories of Reading*, initiates figural narrative, the allegory of the (im)possible of figure. An a priori condition of uncertainty has generated metaphor ("giant"), a reading self (by virtue of the internalized propriety of fear), and the possibility of referential denomination (the "giant" will be domesticated as a conceptual metaphor, "man"). Figuration betrays itself, obliterating its own radical figurativeness. Put slightly differently, the consequence of referential indetermination is insistent referentiality. Language, de Man insists, *must* refer. Like Marcel driven away from his books and out into the garden by his grandmother, like the critics who at the beginning of *Allegories of Reading* "cry out for the fresh air of referential meaning" (*AR*, p. 4), language turns away from its own figurativeness to produce literal meanings always marked in advance by the process of figuration that has produced them. Reference cannot be "avoided, bracketed, or reduced to being just one contingent property among others" (*AR*, p. 207). Werner Hamacher has thus been led to organize a powerful account of the de Manian system around the notion of an impossible and categorical referential imperative. "Language is imperative. It is imperative because its referential function gives the directions for possible reference, even if no referential meaning answers to it and even though it corresponds to no referent"[11]. One could supplement the imperative "Reference must occur" with a variant characterization: "Intentionality must occur". And the correlate of such imperatives is that "Reading must occur". The same principle of error that produces these effects of reference and intentionality also marks them with the necessary possibility of being read as mere figures. Referential indeterminacy "generates the illusion of a subject, a narrator, and a reader", and "the metaphor of temporality" (*AR*, p. 162). But since these illusions are figures of a figure, they bear within them their own critique. In this sense they are self-deconstructive; but

11 Werner Hamacher, "Lectio: de Man's Imperative", in Lindsay Waters and Wlad Godzich, ed., *Reading de Man Reading*, Minneapolis, University of Minnesota Press, 1989, p. 185.

since the deconstruction cannot halt or avoid repeating the error it reads, "it engenders, in its turn, a supplementary figural superposition which narrates the unreadability of the prior narration" (*AR*, p. 205). This second-degree narrative is what de Man calls allegory. Of such narratives and their allegories "one should remember that they are the unfolding and not the resolution of the chaotic uncertainty which Rousseau calls fear" (*AR*, p. 162).

Consequently, it is possible to think of critical philosophy as the thematic equivalent of allegory: of a critique of trope that is enabled by the same spiral of error that produces referential illusion. The more rigorously the critique is pursued, the more surely it will reveal, unwittingly and to no epistemological profit to itself, the tropological process that enables it. And in the process, a certain limit to the notion of trope will appear. As de Man recapitulates in "Kant and Schiller":

> [T]he passage from trope to performative [...] occurs always, and can only occur, by way of an epistemological critique of trope. The trope, the epistemology of tropes, allows for the critical discourse, transcendental critical discourse, to emerge, which will push the notion of trope to an extreme, trying to saturate the whole field of language, but then certain linguistic elements will remain which the concept of trope cannot reach. [...]

The notion of the "performative" returns us to the topic we broached earlier: the possible indifference of substitutive pattern to semantic determination. Transcendental critical discourse is the critique of the possibility of trope: that is, of the figural structure that generates the epistemological field of truth and falsity as the task of judging literal and figural meaning. This narrative discovers undecidability as the condition of its possibility. Semantic undecidability implies the potential irrelevance of the principle of articulation to the meanings it articulates. Since "figure" names the conjunction of signification with a principle of substitution, the notion of figure must now be revised to signify "the alignment of a signification with any principle of linguistic articulation whatsoever, sensory or not [...] The iconic, sensory, or, if one wishes, the aesthetic moment is not constitutive of figuration". Thus "the particular seduction of the figure is not necessarily that it creates an illusion of sensory pleasure, but that it creates an illusion of meaning" (*RR*, p. 115). Since the principle of articulation is possibly arbitrary, it becomes necessary to consider the role of a *performative* imposition of meaning on random difference. A catachretic prosopopeia must "give face" to struc-

tural differences that can then be read as signs[12]. Figure must be figured. Such a collusion between figuration and positional power is not cognitively masterable, for it is radically inconsistent: "language posits and language means (since it articulates) but language cannot posit meaning; it can only reiterate (or reflect) it in its reconfirmed falsehood. Nor does the knowledge of this impossibility make it less impossible" (*RR*, pp. 117-18). The critique of trope finds its limit in its passage to a notion of language as performance. Twinned with that impossible performance, as we have seen, is the possible randomness of the articulative patterns that will be yoked to meanings. This randomness of articulative pattern is what de Man, in his late texts, calls "materiality".

De Man's most elaborately showcased parable of the materiality of language is worth examining in some detail, since it organizes his readings of Kant and, indirectly, his reading of Schiller. It is far beyond my means here to reproduce the dense argument of de Man's reading of the *Kritik der Urteilskraft* in "Phenomenality and Materiality in Kant" and in the shorter, unpublished lecture "Kant's Materialism". For our purposes it will suffice to note a few guiding themes; and "Kant's Materialism" holds particular interest for us, since in this text de Man sets out to correct a misreading of the role of the "empirical" in Kant by reevaluating the Kantian notion of affect. Kant does indeed attempt to resolve the divergence between form and content in the sublime by way of the affectivity of the subject. Thus, as Kant's rigorous transcendental critique of trope forces the emergence of a language of power (in his text's abrupt shift to a "dynamic" sublime), affective judgments take the place of rational judgments and we appear to reenter an empirical world of "assault, battle, and fright" – for in the dynamic sublime, mental faculties must struggle with nature, and an emotion such as admiration must do battle with another emotion, such as fear. However, this strategy is not entirely the "return of the empirical" it might seem. De Man claims that Kantian typologies of affect tend to take their organizing principle from the "dictionary" rather than from "experience", and that Kant is "often guided by external resemblances between words rather than by the inner resonances of emotion". The *Third Critique*'s elaborate contrast between

12 See for a rigorous treatment of this predicament, Cynthia Chase's chapter on de Man, "Giving a Face to a Name", in her *Decomposing Figures: Rhetorical Readings in the Romantic Tradition*, Baltimore, Johns Hopkins University Press, 1986, pp. 82-112.

surprise (*Verwunderung*) and admiration (*Bewunderung*), for instance, might well be underwritten by no better organizing principle than the accidental similarities and differences of signifiers. The dynamic sublime's concatenation of power and affect thus figures, as de Man reads it, language's performance of meaning.

The most sublime affect, Kant tells us, is in fact the absence of affect (*Affektlosigkeit*), a noble a-pathy linked in turn to the grandeur of architecture. This conclusion surfaces in the midst of a set of dictionary-discriminations between sublime, active, male affects and beautiful, langorous, female ones; and de Man remarks:

> the interpretation of the architectonic as a principle of masculine virility, as pure macho of the German variety (whatever the word may be), seems inevitable. But to quote Derrida: "When erection is at stake, one should never be too much in a hurry – one should let things take their course (il faut laisser la chose se faire)." [...] If erection is indeed "la chose", then it is likely to be anything but what one, or should I say men, think(s) it to be.

Eventually I shall be reinvoking these comments, but consider for now their ultimate object: an extraordinary paragraph in which Kant illustrates a general principle of aesthetic judgment: natural objects capable of producing sublime effects must be considered from a radically non-teleological viewpoint. Kant provides as examples two landscapes and a human body:

> Wenn man also den Anblick des bestirnten Himmels erhaben nennt, so muß man der Beurteilung desselben nicht Begriffe von Welten, von vernünftigen Wesen bewohnt, und nun die hellen Punkte, womit wir den Raum über uns erfüllt sehen, als ihre Sonnen, in sehr zweckmäßig für sie gestellten Kreisen bewegt, zum Grunde legen, sondern bloß, wie man ihn sieht, als ein weites Gewölbe, was alles befaßt; und bloß unter dieser Vorstellung müssen wir die Erhabenheit setzen, die ein reines ästhetisches Urteil diesem Gegenstande beilegt. Eben so den Anblick des Ozeans nicht so, wie wir, mit allerlei Kenntnissen (die aber nicht in der unmittelbaren Anschauung enthalten sind) bereichert ihn denken [...] sondern man muß den Ozean bloß, wie die Dichter es tun, nach dem, was der Augenschein zeigt, etwa, wenn er in Ruhe betrachtet wird, als einen klaren Wasserspiegel, der bloß vom Himmel begrenzt ist, aber ist er unruhig, wie einen alles zu verschlingen drohenden Abgrund, dennoch erhaben finden können. Eben das ist von dem Erhabenen und Schönen in der Menschengestalt zu sagen, wo wir nicht auf Begriffe der Zwecke, wozu alle seine Gliedmaßen da sind, als Bestimmungsgründe des Urteils zurücksehen [...][13].

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13 Immanuel Kant, *Kritik der Urteilskraft,* ed. Wilhelm Weischedel, *Werkausgabe,* X, Frankfurt a.M., Suhrkamp, 1974, pp. 196-97. Quoted by de Man in "Kant's Materi-

If one takes this passage at its word, following its (impossible) injunction to see non-teleologically, then "the only word that comes to mind" to describe it, de Man writes, "is that of a *material* vision" ("PMK", p. 135). The passage resembles but differs decisively from Romantic pairings of mind and nature: "No mind is involved in the Kantian vision of ocean and heaven. To the extent that any mind, any judgment, intervenes, it is in error – for it is not the case that heaven is a vault or that the horizon bounds the ocean like the walls of a building". The eye sees only what the eye sees, as the tautology of *Augenschein* indicates: this *Schein* is thus neither illusory nor real, and consequently Kant's architectonic figures, read aesthetically, are not figures: "Heaven and ocean as building are a priori, previous to any understanding, to any exchange or anthropomorphism. [...] Kant's vision can therefore hardly be called literal, which would imply its possible figuralization or symbolization by an act of judgment" ("PMK", p. 135). "It is in no way possible to think of this stony gaze as an address or an apostrophe", de Man adds in "Kant's Materialism". "The dynamics of the sublime mark the moment when the infinite is frozen into the materiality of stone, when no pathos, anxiety or sympathy is conceivable; it is indeed the moment of a-pathos or apathy, as the complete loss of the symbolic."

Aligning this materiality with the scene's optical and architectonic thematics, de Man thereby coordinates the "material" with the category it traditionally opposes, the "formal". A nonteleological consideration of the architectonic would not imply its total disintegration: "sea and heaven, as the poets see them, are more than ever buildings." However, "it is no longer certain that they are articulated (*gegliedert*)" ("PMK", p. 142). What is lost is not all definition, as would be the case in a classical postulate of matter without form, matter as pure potentiality; rather, what is lost is the possibility of establishing an internal necessity for the patterns of relations that allow signs to function as signs. The concatenation of matter and form in "aesthetic vision" produces, within the context of organic structure that informs Kant's critical enterprise, a narrative of dismemberment that ceases at minimal units of form: the vault of the heavens; the limbs (*Glieder*) of the body; the letters of a word. "To the

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alism" and in "Phenomenality and Materiality in Kant", in Gary Shapiro and Alan Sica, ed., *Hermeneutics: Questions and Prospects,* Amherst, University of Massachusetts Press, 1984, p. 133, 142. Subsequent page references to this latter essay are given in parentheses, preceded by "PMK".

dismemberment of the body corresponds a dismemberment of language, as meaning-producing tropes are replaced by the fragmentation of sentences and propositions into discrete words, or the fragmentation of words into syllables or finally letters" ("PMK", p. 144). To view a "letter" nonteleologically, of course, would not be to view it as part of an alphabet, or as the instrument of a sign. Kant's eye thus sees at the heart of the aesthetic "the absolute randomness of language, prior to any figuration or meaning" (*AR*, p. 299). If we graft on another of de Man's terms, we can say that this eye is seeing history.

II.

No word in the de Manian lexicon returns to us more altered and charged than the word "history". Earlier I had occasion to note the salience of the term's rhetorical career in de Man's oeuvre; and at this point we can appreciate what is at stake when, in two of his very last essays, he offers to align history with the "errancy of language":

> As such, history is not human, because it pertains strictly to the order of language; it is not natural, for the same reason; it is not phenomenal, in the sense that no cognition, no knowledge about man, can be derived from a history which as such is purely a linguistic complication; and it is not really temporal either, because the structure that animates it is not a temporal structure. Those disjunctions in language do get expressed in temporal metaphors, but they are only metaphors. (*RT*, p. 92)

In "Kant and Schiller" de Man defines the historical as the passage to performative and material notions of language that marked the exhaustion of figural, cognitive narration:

> [H]istory ist not thought of [here] as a progression or a regression, but is thought of as an event, as an occurrence. There is history from the moment that words such as "power" and "battle" and so on emerge on the scene; at that moment things happen, there is occurrence, there is event. History is therefore not temporal, it has nothing to do with temporality, but [rather it has to do with] the emergence of a language of power out of a language of cognition.

A far more exhaustive study of de Man's texts than I have been able to furnish would be necessary before any definitive interpretation of de

Man's notion of history could be attempted. What I propose to offer here, more modestly, is an argument for reading such definitions patiently.

Even in its most conventional sense, a "historical event" does not possess or produce a "meaning" in the same way that a sign does. However, a historical event must nonetheless stand in a certain relation to an ensemble of meaning-effects: i.e., a text. It is a banal but easily forgotten truth that death or pain or catastrophe "in themselves" do not possess the slightest historicity. One way to characterize the peculiar quality of what we call a "historical" event would be to say that it *disrupts* a text, in addition to helping constitute it. The event, as event, stands in a relation to the text that the text itself cannot control; only retrospectively will it acquire full status as a narrative event. Usually this historical characteristic is rendered in referential language as the irruption or "resistance" of the real. De Man employs terms that sound deceptively close to referential language: in "Kant and Schiller" he speaks of the "occurrence" as that which "has the materiality of something that actually occurs", that "leaves a trace on the world, that does something to the world as such". This notion of occurrence "is not in any sense opposed to the notion of writing". A specifically *inscriptive* violence is inseparable from historicity, as is a certain blank undeniablity: "by the fact that [the event] occurs it has truth, truth value, it is true". There must be a sense in which historicity resists figuration, which is one ground for de Man's notorious resistance to periodizations and genetic historicisms: "Such a narrative can be only metaphorical, and history is not fiction" (*BI*, p. 163). To resist figuration is to resist substitutive patterns of presence and absence that articulate what we call the phenomenal – and human – world.

This ascetic, "material" notion of history may be difficult to accept[14]. But there is a political thrust to de Man's thought that we are now ready to negotiate. The "political" is defined in "Hegel on the Sublime" as the prosaic "discourse of the slave", the "undoer of usurped authority"[15] – that is, as the enumeration of material, "*historical* modes of language power". The political in this sense takes as its object aesthetic ideology. Mystified, totalizing instantiations of aesthetic ideology make possible the most damaging of political consequences. De Man's paradigmatic

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14 For an informed and careful account of de Man's notion of history, see Kevin Newmark, "Paul de Man's History", in *Reading de Man Reading*, pp. 121-35.

15 Paul de Man, "Hegel on the Sublime", in Mark Krupnick, ed., *Displacement: Derrida and After*, Bloomington, Indiana University Press, 1983, p. 153.

case is, as mentioned earlier, the "reception" of Kant by Schiller, whose work "condenses the complex ideology of the aesthetic in a suggestive concatenation of concepts"[16], and thereby reveals the aesthetic as what it "primarily" is: "a social and political model" (*RR*, p. 264).

"Reception", in de Man's late texts, names the phenomenalization of "history" by way of aesthetic syntheses. Schiller, rewriting the Kantian sublime in his early essay "Vom Erhabenen", and subsequently elaborating the aesthetic into a full-fledged political system in *Über die Ästhetische Erziehung des Menschen,* domesticates and naturalizes the Kantian critique by reproducing it as idealist empiricism[17]. I shall be attempting a close reading of Schiller's text in the final section of this essay, and at this point wish only to recall the main lines of de Man's semi-improvised and relatively sketchy critique. The paradox that de Man addresses, and accounts for, is that an allegiance to the pragmatic or empirical makes possible the most thoroughgoing idealism. A pragmatic deflation of linguistic issues leads to ever more coercive linguistic structuration. The aesthetic renders language a property of the world; and in

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16 De Man's phrase is actually describing the achievement of Elizabeth M. Wilkinson and L.A. Willoughby's edition and translation of Schiller's *Ästhetische Erziehung* (see note 9). This extraordinary bilingual edition, with its two hundred page introduction and extensive commentary, constitutes one of the most monumental – and monumentalizing – gestures of canonization in recent scholarship. Quotes from the *Ästhetische Erziehung* in what follows are from this edition, and are indicated by letter and paragraph number: thus "1.1" for instance, means First Letter, first paragraph.

17 Readers who are not Germanists, and who intend to work through de Man's essay in greater detail, may benefit from a sense of the dates and occasions of the Schiller texts. Schiller began to read Kant's *Kritik der Urteilskraft* intensely in the spring of 1791, and wrote the relatively obscure essay "Vom Erhabenen" in the spring of 1793. Also in 1793, Schiller composed for the Duke of Augustenburg the letters that, massively transformed and elaborated, became the *Ästhetische Erziehung* of 1795. In 1801 Schiller discarded the first half of "Vom Erhabenen", and republished its second half under the title "Über das Pathetische" in *Kleinere prosaische Schriften:* the usual scholarly guess is that, eight years after its composition, Schiller found the essay's first half too dependent on Kant. Schiller revised the *Ästhetische Erziehung* for republication in *Kleinere prosaische Schriften* in 1801, but the changes were relatively minor: the significant transformations in Schiller's aesthetic theory had occurred between 1793 and 1795. De Man will speak of "Vom Erhabenen" as "early Schiller" for this reason. To avoid confusion, it should also be noted that in 1795 Schiller published another essay on the sublime, "Über das Erhabene", which de Man mentions but does not discuss.

doing so, it gives the world over to the indifferent cruelty of tropological structures fundamentally alien to the universe of meaning they articulate.

Schiller's strategy, which is that of aesthetic ideology, is twofold. On the one hand, he grounds figural pattern in the phenomenal world by understanding chiasmic oppositions and transfers as the expression of drives (*Triebe*). On the other hand, he polarizes Kant's argument, recoding Kant's troubled passage from a "mathematical" to a "dynamic" sublime, for instance, as a binary opposition between a "theoretical" and a "practical" sublime – an opposition that in Schiller's mature text, the *Ästhetische Erziehung,* becomes an opposition between a *Formtrieb,* allied with reason, law, and other totalizing imperatives, and a *sinnlicher Trieb* or *Stofftrieb,* which pursues the sensuous appeal of the moment. The *Formtrieb* and the *Stofftrieb* find a peculiar mode of synthesis in what Schiller calls *Wechselwirkung,* "reciprocal action": a chiasmus that, given its purely formal nature, lacks internal necessity, and is forced to derive its necessity from what Schiller takes to be the incontrovertible empirical facticity of the human. Language is thus grounded in the "human" with exemplary force; and out of this synthesis Schiller derives the most humanistic of drives, at once the sign, the cause, and the effect of the human, the play-drive or *Spieltrieb,* directed at the appearance, *Schein*[18].

In short, Schiller's text produces and polices a representational concept of language. The phenomenal world of "reality" appears to direct the mimetic exchange – even though binary oppositions such as that between "language" and "reality" are sheerly linguistic. This is to say that mimesis is a trope, and that the formal patterns that permit the polarization and valorization of terms such as empirical and ideal, particular and general, etc., are not natural – that is, self-evident and self-identical – but cognitive or tropological – that is, linguistic. A discourse that

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18 De Man is not exaggerating, though as I hope to show later – and as de Man would doubtless be the first to acknowledge – Schiller's text is more strained and complex than de Man's comments might suggest. It is certainly true that "the human" functions as a pragmatic, conceptually arbitrary principle of closure in the *Ästhetische Erziehung*. When complications grow troublesome Schiller is given to saying things like, "But enough! Self-consciousness is there" (19.11); and at a crucial point in the treatise, not far removed from the passages that concern us, we are told that Reason must posit humanity and beauty – i.e., the *Wechselwirkung* that defines the beautiful and the human – because Reason is Reason. "Wie aber eine Schönheit sein kann, und wie eine Menschheit möglich ist, kann uns weder Vernunft noch Erfahrung lehren" (15.4).

uncritically naturalizes linguistic structures will thus shuttle between opposites that imply each other. The initial privilege granted the phenomenal world can be – and is – revoked by chiasmic inversion: from a valorization of the empirical, one passes with ease to a celebration of the spiritual. Language, initially domesticated as a reflection of empirical drives or intentions, can now receive inverse valuation as a prefiguration of the ideal. Thus the aesthetic is both domesticated and granted exemplarity – in Schiller's case to the point of making aesthetic harmony the telos of individual and collective pedagogy, and a model for the State. The synecdochic power of trope guarantees the passage from individual to nation, artwork to culture, pedagogy to politics; and the logical end to the system is the aesthetic state, the *Staat des schönen Scheins,* which is for Schiller an ideal, realized only in a beautiful soul or within a circle of friends (27.12), but which is in its turn vulnerable to tropological reinforcement and empiricization. It is thus that de Man can claim that Goebbels's vulgarization of Schiller repeats, however crudely, the essential gesture of Schiller's own text:

> The statesman is an artist too. For him the people is neither more nor less than what stone is for the sculptor. [...] Politics are the plastic art of the State, just as painting is the plastic art of color. This is why politics without the people, or even against the people, is sheer nonsense. To shape a People out of the masses, and a State out of the People, this has always been the deepest intention of politics in the true sense[19].

The continuity between statesman and artist, life and art, human being and aesthetic object, so ferocious as to expunge any overt recognition of violence (there can be no politics "against the people" in a structure of such symmetry), violates every cautious, humanistic gesture to be found in the *Ästhetische Erziehung*. But it does not violate the treatise's deepest logic. The "human" names an effacement of violence, not least, as de Man remarks in closing "Kant and Schiller", when the "human" itself discovers the necessity of deriving its closure from binary valorizations: "Just as the sensory becomes without tension the metaphor for reason, in

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19 Joseph Goebbels, *Michael. Ein deutsches Schicksal in Tagebuchblättern,* München 1933 [1929], p. 21. Cited (and translated) by Wilkinson and Willoughby, p. cxlii. I have been unable to consult Goebbels's text in the original German. For an instructive account of Schiller's importance for the Nazi culture industry, see Georg Ruppelt, *Schiller im nationalsozialistischen Deutschland: Der Versuch einer Gleichschaltung,* Stuttgart, J.B. Metzlersche Verlagsbuchhandlung, 1979.

Schiller, woman becomes without oppression a metaphor for man". The cost of aesthetic ideology in real violence and actual oppression can be as enormous or as modest, as literal or as symbolic, as any particular context happens to permit. The tropological patterns that make such distributions of meaning possible are essentially indifferent to the notion of the human they enable. It is the spectre of such indifference that humanism seeks to exorcise by appropriating and naturalizing linguistic structures: a gesture that sustains itself only in the mode of violent repetition, since the principle of its success is also that of its disarticulation. A threat is being taken as a solution, and the meaning and the performance of such a constitutive act of expulsion must thus ultimately be at odds[20].

III.

The affect proper to the irruption of "historical modes of language power" ist more often than not, in the de Manian corpus, terror. Confronted with the possibility of the "uncontrollable power of the letter as inscription", Saussure proceeds with a caution that "supports the assumption of a terror glimpsed" (*RT*, p. 37). The vision of sea and heavens is "a terrifying moment in a sense – terrifying for Kant, since the entire enterprise of philosophy is involved in it" – though de Man hastens to discredit the idea of Kant "shuddering in his mind" as he scribbled: "Any literalism there would not be called for. It is terrifying in a way we don't know. [...]" ("Kant and Schiller"). However, "literal" affect does have its place in the de Manian allegory of reading: it derives, as we have seen, from the effacement of undecidability that produces the possibility of literal meaning, which is to say the possibility of trope. A rhetorical critique of language thematizes affect as a dimension of language's resistance to the random violence of its own inscription. Affect resists history, insofar as it manifests itself as a dimension of a referential imperative in flight from its own impossibility. Rousseau's parable of

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20 This essay was on its way to publication before I had the chance to consult Cynthia Chase's extraordinary essay, "Trappings of an Education", in *Responses: On Paul de Man's Wartime Journalism,* ed. Werner Hamacher, Neil Hertz, and Thomas Keenan, Lincoln, University of Nebraska Press, 1989, pp. 44-79. Chase's analysis of the historical and political dimensions of de Man's work constitutes to my knowledge the most far-reaching study of these issues to date.

primitive man, experiencing fear in the face of language's event, is indeed a paradigmatic text for the de Manian narrative. Fear is a privileged affect in a discourse about resistance. As an "empirical" affect, fear is an illusory effect of metaphor's need for a proper meaning. And prior to becoming properly affective, we recall, fear was an impersonal epistemological suspension of semantic determination (*AR*, p. 150-1): an allegorical personification of reading per se, and thus perhaps another figure for the "true mourning" or non-empirical "terror" that history occasions.

It is thus perhaps also no accident that this figure of "fear", so crucial to the narrative of *Allegories of Reading*, should provide the axis for one of the most densely intertextual negotiations in de Man's oeuvre[21]. A few years earlier, in "The Rhetoric of Blindness", de Man had taken issue with Derrida's reading of the covert propriety of Rousseau's originary "giant" metaphor – which professes non-referentiality, but actually denotes a proper and internalized meaning, fear. "Rousseau's text has no blind spots", de Man had claimed: Rousseau's text knows the truth of radical figuration, and if the spontaneous metaphor "giant" finds its proper meaning in fear, this is simply because Rousseau has made a "mistake" in selecting fear to exemplify metaphor. "The choice of the wrong example to illustrate metaphor (fear instead of pity) is a mistake, not a blind spot" (*BI*, p. 139n). When *Allegories of Reading* recodes fear as the exemplary affect, structured like a trope that defaces its own figurativeness, de Man recodes the "mistake" as the undecidability between "mistake" and "error": the metaphor *must* deface itself to compose itself – though its instantiation may also be a random mistake. De Man's reading of fear as mistake, by implication, was a mistaking of error spurred by an error of mistaking. "If 'mistake' is random and contingent

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21 This essay leaves aside, but wishes to recall and evoke, the Heideggerian subtext constantly legible in de Man's work, and especially prominent in this chapter of *Allegories of Reading*. Though de Man's terms are dictated by the task of interpreting Rousseau's text, it is not entirely coincidental that the operative, disputed term should be the inauthentic (that is, im-proper: *uneigentlich*) affect "fear" rather than the authentic *Angst* of a *Dasein* turning away from its own potentiality. De Man's intervention here should be read in tandem with his gesture to replace the Heideggerian (and Kantian) "consciousness in itself" with "rhetoricity" (see *AR*, p. 175 and note), and would ultimately have to be thought in relation to the occurrence or *Ereignis:* to history as *Geschichte*, as that which occurs, as in the line of Hölderlin's that encapsulates de Man's invocation and displacement of Heidegger: "Es ereignet sich aber das Wahre." For Heidegger's classic discussion of *Angst*, see *Sein und Zeit*, Tübingen, 1927, pp. 184-91.

[...] and 'error' is systematic and compulsive [...] then I have stated, in a variety of terminologies, the impossibility of ever coming to rest on one or the other side of this distinction", de Man remarks in a late text, recalling his "rash assertion" in "The Rhetoric of Blindness" as an example of mistaking error for mistake[22]. The (allegorical) nexus is fear, or at least the wishful possibility of fear. And the stakes of mistake are, of course, ethico-political as well as epistemological.

Ideology, "the confusion of linguistic with natural reality, of reference with phenomenalism" (*RT*, p. 11), is the mistaken error built into language: "It is true that tropes are the producers of ideologies that are not longer true" (*RR*, p. 242). "No degree of knowledge can ever stop this madness, for it is the madness of words" (*RR*, p. 122). We have no choice but to apostrophize the dead, monumentalize the text, phenomenalize the sign. And to the extent that the error is an error, its undoing is equally inevitable: an epistemological critique of trope is "in no one's power to evade" (*RT*, p. 69), even though the critique will discover nothing more than the possible mistakenness of its error. Since we as reading subjects are the products of this language machine, the exigent contingency of its operation is replayed on the level of ethics. We cannot, de Man tells us, halt the madness of prosopopeia; however, we do not have to delude ourselves into taking this process as a source of value: such a belief "leads to a misreading that can and should be discarded, unlike the coercive 'forgetting' that Shelley's poem analytically thematizes". But the discardable misreading then becomes difficult or impossible to discard: the "aesthetification of texts" describes also "their use, as in this essay, for the assertion of methodological claims made all the more pious by their denial of piety" (*RR*, p. 122). And so it goes: a spiral of error that draws within it our ethical selves and the consciousness in which we cannot help but believe; as the "product" of language's error, we have no choice but to continue to choose. The ethical tonality of de Man's writing reiterates the mistaken truth of error.

The rigor with which de Man stages this predicament is what makes his work so difficult to read. It is easy to make the mistake of not reading at all, as when Frank Lentricchia claims that de Man teaches political

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22 Paul de Man, "A Letter from Paul de Man", *Critical Inquiry*, 8, 3, Spring 1982, pp. 509, 510. For a rigorous study of de Man's shift in position with regard to Rousseau's "giant" metaphor, see Hans-Jost Frey, "Undecidability", *Yale French Studies*, 69, 1985, pp. 124-133.

quietism by projecting "all those paralytic feelings of the literary onto the terrain of society and history"[23]. A more attentive reading discovers, with J. Hillis Miller, that under the terms of de Manian thought, the reader "*must* take responsibility for (the reading) and for its consequences in the personal, social, and political worlds"[24]. To adapt Kafka's phrase: in the de Manian universe there is an infinity of "paralysis" – but not for us. We cannot dwell within undecidability; reading must take place, and to read is to judge: Miller is correct to extend the consequences of this model to the world of practical reason. Such is, for that matter, the entire burden of aesthetic judgment. But if Lentricchia is simply wrong, Miller is not simply right: he, too, domesticates de Manian theory by implying that language is an ethical entity[25]. We must take responsibility, but responsibility is not ours to be taken. We must act ethically, but we should not delude ourselves into thinking that such action can be genuinely said to have value.

The intense, bleak pathos of de Man's work, particularly of his late work, responds to the tenacity with which he pursues the impossible necessity of the ethical. In its full elaboration, the de Manian system – and in its inevitable error, it *is* a system, teachable and generalizable, "the universal theory of the impossibility of theory" (*RT*, p. 19) – is so thoroughly in control of the impossibility of ever being in control, that the critique's, and the critic's, ethical imperative, recognized and named as an impossible imperative of language, necessarily rewrites its intentionality in the mode of the pathetic. The system has accounted for this gesture long ago: such pathos repeats the illusory hypostatization of "the deconstructive passion of a subject" (*AR*, p. 199). And the subject whose passion could animate such a system would be a "giant" indeed: "as far beyond pleasure and pain as he is beyond good and evil, or, for that matter, beyond strength and weakness. His consciousness is neither happy nor unhappy, nor does he possess any power. He remains however a center of authority to the extent that the very destructiveness of his ascetic reading testifies to the validity of his interpretation" (*AR*, pp. 173-4). He would incarnate the pathos of a-pathy, the sublime *Affektlosigkeit*

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23 Lentricchia, *op.cit.*, p. 50.

24 J. Hillis Miller, *The Ethics of Reading: Kant, de Man, Eliot, Trollope, James, and Benjamin*, New York, Columbia University Press, 1987, p. 59.

25 I examine Miller's argument and develop my reservations in greater detail in "Humanizing de Man", *Diacritics* 19, 2, Spring 1989, pp. 35-53.

of a subjectivity that recuperates phallic interiority in the mode of invulnerable impotence. He would derive castration out of disarticulation, achieving thereby the funereal grandeur of an architectonic erection.

Thus to the pathos deriving from the power of de Man's thought corresponds the monumentalization of de Man as teacher, thinker and text. From a certain perspective it makes little difference whether this monumentalization occurs in the mode of celebration or defiance: whether de Man's text is fetishized and imitated, as in this essay, or whether it is castigated and ritually sacrified. From a certain perspective it is also relatively indifferent whether one speaks of institutional effect or libidinal investment: of the professionalization of de Manian theory, or the coercion of de Manian charisma. Both these modes of recuperation appear united with exemplary force in the grotesque, funereally monumental issue of *Yale French Studies* dedicated to de Man, and an essay in that issue by Carol Jacobs provides an exemplary trope for the paradoxes that control his reception. "[De Man] may offer us a mirror of sorts, but his writings [...] are an aegis to which the head of the Medusa is affixed and which we contemplate at our own risk"[26]. Jacobs is analyzing representations of the Medusa, and her remark is motivated and inspired by its context; but as is often the case with figures, this figure of decapitation cuts many ways. It freezes de Man's visage into stone, evading, monumentalizing, and gendering his text at a stroke. A similar gesture can be found in Schiller. Within the terms of a de Manian problematic, the Medusa's head is in essence a figure of reception[27].

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26 Carol Jacobs, "On Looking at Shelley's Medusa", *Yale French Studies,* 69, 1985, p. 166.

27 In pursuing such a connection between de Manian and feminist concerns, we rejoin the work of Cynthia Chase and Neil Hertz: see especially Chase's "The Witty Butcher's Wife: Freud, Lacan, and the Conversion of Resistance to Theory", *Modern Language Notes,* 102, no. 5, 1987, pp. 989-1013, and Hertz's chapters "Medusa's Head" and "Afterword" in his *The End of the Line: Essays on Psychoanalysis and the Sublime,* New York, Columbia University Press, 1985. For a sustained reading of what I have been calling de Man's "reception" of himself in terms of figurations of gender, see Hertz's "Lurid Figures" in *Reading de Man Reading,* pp. 82-104.

IV.

De Man's interpretation of Schiller, as we have seen, centers on Schiller's uncritical deployment of tropological structure as a defense against trope. Imposing rigid polarities that stabilize and naturalize differences, Schiller's text evades the perils of aesthetic *Schein* by relegating language to a mimetic role:

> [Kant's *Augenschein* is] certainly not in opposition to reality, but was precisely what we see and as such more real than anything else, though it is reality which exists on the level of vision. [...] And [in the case of both Kant and Hegel] there is a road that goes from this notion of *Schein* to the notion of materiality. Such a road cannot be found in Schiller, and that is why for Schiller the concept of art, which at that moment is mentioned and is stressed, will always and without reservation be a concept of art as imitation, as *nachahmende Kunst*.

That last claim, while quite correct, is vulnerable to the charge of not being sufficiently nuanced. Schiller's notion of *Schein* appears in the treatise's penultimate letter as the outward sign (*Phänomen*) of the psyche's aesthetic mode. As such, the object of the play-drive, aesthetic *Schein* is in one sense radically anti-mimetic: while Being (*Dasein, Wesen*) proceeds from nature, *Schein* proceeds from man. Any appearance that pretends to (natural) being or (referential) truth is not aesthetic *Schein*, or is not being perceived aesthetically: in this sense, *Schein* is non-referential, though in another sense it is the most referential of signs, since it refers to the Human. Obeying the classic manoeuvres of what Jacques Derrida has called "economimesis", Schiller's text thus recuperates mimesis by way of an analogical chain leading from *Schein* to Man to what Schiller sometimes calls "Nature" and sometimes "Absolute Being" or "the Godhead"[28]. This covert imitative chain incites the return of the very language of mimesis that the text denies. The binary opposition between *Schein* and *Wesen*, appearance and reality, is maintained with such enthusiasm in Schiller's text that the opposite of the real drifts implacably into its classical role of being an image of the real, and thus with no apparent sense of contradiction Schiller can indeed write that the *Spieltrieb* is followed by the "shaping spirit of imitation" (*nachahmender Bildungstrieb*) (26.7). De Man is not wrong, but the manoeuvres of

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28 Jacques Derrida, "Economimesis", in S. Agacinski et al., *Mimesis des articulations*, Paris, Flammarion, 1975, pp. 55-93.

Schiller's idealist empiricism are more complex than Kant and Schiller" allows for. If no road leads to the "material" in Schiller, what signs mark, at least, the road's closure?

One way to pursue the track of *Schein* would be to examine the origins of the drive proper to it, the *Spieltrieb,* which makes its appearance near the middle of Schiller's treatise under curious conditions. Schiller has just identified the principle of chiasmus, *Wechselwirkung,* with the principle of the human, and he is now moving from (what he, at least, calls) a transcendental critique to more empirical considerations. A pure *Wechselwirkung* between man's formal drive and his sensory drive exists only as an ideal, as "the Idea of Human Nature" (14.2); in the empirical world we can only approach this ideal asymptotically, through time. Schiller is then faced with the question of what enables the asymptotic approach. And though at other points in the treatise originary questions are dismissed as pre-critical distractions, here Schiller proposes a curiously empirical and ambiguous ontological fable. Its telling involves Schiller in his most extended recourse, in this text, to the subjunctive mood:

> [...] so lange [der Mensch] nur empfindet, bleibt ihm seine Person oder seine absolute Existenz, und, solange er nur denkt, bleibt ihm seine Existenz in der Zeit oder sein Zustand Geheimnis. Gäbe es aber Fälle, wo er diese doppelte Erfahrung *zugleich* machte, wo er sich zugleich seiner Freiheit bewußt würde und sein Dasein empfände, wo er sich zugleich als Materie fühlte und als Geist kennen lernte, so hätte er in diesen Fällen, und schlechterdings nur in diesen, eine vollständige Anschauung seiner Menschheit, und der Gegenstand, der diese Anschauung ihm verschaffte, würde ihm zu einem Symbol seiner *ausgeführten Bestimmung,* folglich (weil diese nur in der Allheit der Zeit zu erreichen ist) zu einer Darstellung des Unendlichen dienen.
>
> Vorausgesetzt, daß Fälle dieser Art in der Erfahrung vorkommen können, so würden sie einen neuen Trieb in ihm aufwecken, der eben darum, weil die beiden andern in ihm zusammenwirken, einem jeden derselben, einzeln betrachtet, entgegengesetzt sein und mit Recht für einen neuen Trieb gelten würde. (14.2-3)

The subjunctive, I think, is taking up the strain felt by a passage that does not entirely want to be what it is – the account of a revelation. Of Schiller's several, and often contradictory, accounts of the relation between ideal and real, this version, offered at a crucial point in the treatise, is coming close to proposing a *Schein* that precedes and incites the drive proper to it. Before man can become man he must experience an intuition of man, and such an intuition can only be had in the presence of

a *schönem Schein* that by the same token does not yet properly exist. Schiller's essentially theocentric system would counter here with the claim that the "human" exists always already *in potentia,* as a promise or prefiguration (*Anlage*) at the "origin" of humanity (4.2); that is the sense in which the "case" postulated in Letter 14 would merely "awaken" rather than "create" the *Spieltrieb*. For though the transformation of a mere *Gegenstand* into the specular, and spectacular, promise of a *Symbol* suggests a dramatic positional act on man's part, here as elsewhere Schiller's Fichtean gestures are actually being controlled by a more classic model of prefiguration and fulfillment. But the subjunctive mood of the passage is responding to the proximity of a threat. Either the prefiguration of the human is vulnerable, at the moment of its instantiation, to chance, or the "object" is already *Schein,* a *Schein* before *Schein* that would control the etiology of man's aesthetic education at the price of imagining a *Schein,* an instance of beauty, stripped, at the outset, of the "symbolic" character that defines it. Schiller's text is naturally dedicated to closing off either possibility, but enough de Manian – or, according to de Man, Kantian – burdens are borne by this "case" or "*Fall*" to require a ceremony of exorcism, which takes place in the treatise's next letter.

For if it can only be postulated that "cases of this sort" occur in experience, Schiller's text can at least offer a certainty on the level of its own engagement with the *Fall* of the aesthetic. In the wake of a long discussion of the beautiful, Schiller invokes the example of the Greeks, a people whose only error in the realm of the aesthetic was to "in den Olympus versetzen, was auf der Erde sollte ausgeführt werden" (15.9). In Olympus, at least, they gave face to beauty itself, and Schiller's letter closes with a vision that operates rhetorically, and to some extent thematically, as a "symbol of man's accomplished destiny":

> Beseelt von diesem Geiste, löschten [die Griechen] aus den Gesichtszügen ihres Ideals zugleich mit der *Neigung* auch alle Spuren des *Willens* aus, oder besser, sie machten beide unkenntlich, weil sie beide in dem innigsten Bund zu verknüpfen wüßten. Es ist weder Anmut, noch ist es Würde, was aus dem herrlichen Antlitz einer *Juno Ludovisi* zu uns spricht; es ist keines von beiden, weil es beides zugleich ist. Indem der weibliche Gott unsre Anbetung heischt, entzündet das gottgleiche Weib unsre Liebe; aber indem wir uns der himmlischen Holdseligkeit aufgelöst hingeben, schreckt die himmlische Selbstgenügsamkeit uns zurück. In sich selbst ruhet und wohnt die ganze Gestalt, eine völlig geschlossene Schöpfung, und als wenn sie jenseits des Raumes wäre, ohne Nachgeben, ohne Widerstand; da ist keine Kraft, die mit Kräften kämpfte, keine Blöße, wo die Zeitlichkeit einbrechen könnte. Durch jenes unwider-

> stehlich ergriffen und angezogen, durch dieses in der Ferne gehalten, befinden wir uns zugleich in dem Zustand der höchsten Ruhe und der höchsten Bewegung, und es entsteht jene wunderbare Rührung, für welche der Verstand keinen Begriff und die Sprache keinen Namen hat. (15.9)

Schiller's treatise has never strayed further from Kant's dry, abstract postulation of the "ideal of beauty" as a "human figure" capable of summing up "the visible expression of moral ideas": "Die Richtigkeit eines solchen Ideals der Schönheit", Kant continues, "beweist sich darin: daß es keinem Sinnenreiz sich in das Wohlgefallen an seinem Objekte zu mischen erlaubt, und dennoch ein großes Interesse daran nehmen läßt"[29]. The *Reiz* of Schiller's Juno, meanwhile, is similar to that of the "human figure" that Freud in his turn was to conjure up as an ideal of narcissism: the woman whose "self-contented" aesthetic closure produces her "great charm", which finds its "reverse side" in her "enigmatic being"[30]. Frozen into monumental stone, *schöner Schein* achieves its most radically formal figuration in the *Ästhetische Erziehung,* and could not be more proximate to or distant from the "material" vision in Kant's Analytic of the Sublime. Schiller's figure of affectless indifference substitutes its gendered countenance for Kant's architectonic erection of sea and sky, and its fetishistic rhythms of empirical "terror" and "ecstasy" for the terror of a disarticulation without meaning. The Medusa's head of aesthetic ideology soothes through the fear and bliss of the possibility of experiencing fear and bliss: it marks the assertion of an act of identification that would forget its figurativeness, and a dream of castration that would discover its own deluded possibility by mourning the hypothetical former existence of an erection that was not Kant's. At the considerable political cost of grounding figuration in the symmetrical asymmetry of gender difference, Schiller's text achieves the illusion of a desire forever safe from language.

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29 Kant, *op.cit.*, p. 154.

30 Sigmund Freud, "Zur Einführung des Narzissmus", *Freud-Studienausgabe,* III, Frankfurt a.M., S. Fischer Verlag, 1975, pp. 55-56. For a relevant reading of this passage, see Sarah Kofman, *L'énigme de la femme: La femme dans les textes de Freud,* Paris, Galilée, 1980.

For in naming the Juno Ludovisi, Schiller, miming and appropriating Goethe's desire, domesticates a less naturalizable chain of substitutions through a gesture of Oedipal rivalry[31]. Throughout the *Ästhetische Erziehung*, classical statuary has borne a heavy figurative burden, representing the intersection of form and matter, meaning and medium, or, most generally, reason and phenomenality, the articulation of which composes the text's philosophical and political task. The fact that the nobility of the past can be preserved "in bedeutenden Steinen" (9.4), "ein[ge]drück[t] in den verschwiegnen Stein" (9.6), means for Schiller not only that atemporal Form, phenomenalized in art, can intersect the temporal world, but that the aesthetic can underwrite and direct political history. The aesthetic support (*Stütze*) which will ensure the endurance (*Fortdauer*) of the political world as we know it while laboring (eternally) at its transformation into the Aesthetic State (3.4), supports itself upon figures that evoke and evade the inscription: the random event of meaning in "silent" stone. As a historical force the aesthetic may work all too well, but, at least in this text by Schiller, not quite to the point of effacing "the violence that makes it possible" (*RR*, p. 289). The evasion of aesthetic judgment, as de Man theorizes it, occurs as the imposition of the coercive fascinations of a language of fear and desire, naturalized by way of the binary polarizations of gender. Such scenarios reconfirm that the tax levied by aesthetic ideology is not only thoroughly "empirical", but that it is empirical because it is figurative, rather than vice-versa. To identify such a moment as a defense against the event of language is thus one way to begin to assess the violence characterizing the history of reception.

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31 Goethe's fascination with the Juno Ludovisi dates from his Roman sojurn; he installed a cast of the collossal bust ("my first sweetheart in Rome") in his rooms in 1787 and talked of taking it back with him to Weimar, but was eventually forced to leave it behind. In 1823, eighteen years after Schiller's death, Goethe obtained another replica, which dominates the "Juno-Zimmer" in what is now the Goethe Museum in Weimar. Schiller's invocation of the statue is tantamount to an explicit act of homage, and would of course take its place in the narrative of adulation, desire, insecurity and envy that constituted Schiller's side of what is perhaps the most ponderously canonized of literary friendships in Western literature.

Zusammenfassung

Ein Hauptaspekt von de Mans Text zeigt seine Fähigkeit, die Problematik seiner eigenen Rezeption zu theoretisieren auf. Dieses Voraussagevermögen konstituiert den epistemologischen und politischen Wert von de Mans Denken, verschärft aber zugleich die Versuchung, seinen Text als Autorität zu "fetischisieren". De Mans Einblick in den rhetorischen Charakter der Sprache kann nur gewonnen werden, wenn man denselben *als* Einblick (d.h. Anschauung) falsch wahrnimmt. Die de Mansche Sprachkritik hat – und voraussagt gleichzeitig – seine eigene Fehlanschauung als Darstellung des Erhabenen zur Folge. Die späten Texte de Mans über Kant und Schiller allegorisieren diese Problematik durch ihre Darstellung der Schillerschen Rezeption von Kants "Analytik des Erhabenen" in der *Kritik der Urteilskraft*. Wo die transzendentale Kritik Kants die echte Materialität der Sprache enthüllt, kehrt die idealistische Empirik Schillers zur ästhetischen Naturalisierung tropologischer Strukturen zurück. Indem er diese Problematik in seinen eigenen Texten wiederholt, läßt de Man die Gewalt erkennen, mit der die ästhetische Ideologie ihre Illusion stützt.