

## The Claims of Reference

In the wake of structuralist and poststructuralist developments in literary theory, a good deal of concern has arisen that these linguistically oriented theories of reading deny the possibility that language can give us access to history. The constant focus by poststructuralists on the linguistic devices by which meaning is produced, and by “deconstruction” on the difficulties these devices create for our understanding of a text, seems to amount to a claim that language cannot refer adequately to the world and indeed may not truly refer to anything at all, leaving literature and language, and even consciousness in general, cut off from historical reality. Responding to this concern, Paul de Man states, in his 1982 essay “The Resistance to Theory,” that linguistically oriented theories do not necessarily deny reference, but rather deny the possibility of modeling the principles of reference on those of natural law, or we might say, of making reference like perception.<sup>1</sup> De Man’s attempt to distinguish reference from natural law, which is tied to his understanding of the relation between constative and performative language, far from denying access to history, is a way, I will argue, of precisely keeping history from being swallowed up by the power of abstraction. This emphasis is to be read not only in de Man’s statements about language, however, but most concretely in a story he repeatedly tells: the story, specifically, of a fall, not just a figurative fall but also the story of a very literal falling. It is de Man’s unexpected association of theory with falling that, I will suggest, constitutes the original insight of his theory, a theory which does not eliminate reference but precisely registers, in language, the impact of an event.

The essay “The Resistance to Theory” is a good framework for this inquiry because it is specifically about reference, and it is also about falling. It begins by addressing the resistances, or objections, to theory made in the name of referential reality, or of an external world. It responds both by arguing conceptually for a resistance that stems from “within” theory, and by associating this referential “resistance” with the additional connotation of something concrete, something like the resistance one feels upon impact, the impact, for example, one feels falling down. Those who resist theory in the name of perceptual reality, de

Man seems to be arguing, are in fact resisting the force, or impact, of a fall.

In order to understand de Man's argument we can turn to a narrative that is not explicitly articulated but can be read, I would suggest, in de Man's essay, the story of how the problem of reference became, in the history of thought, inextricably bound up with the fact of literal falling. This story emerges when de Man compares contemporary problems of reference to problems arising in the traditional philosophical project of linking the sciences of language (logic, rhetoric, and grammar) with the sciences of the world in general (arithmetic, geometry, astronomy, and music). The example de Man offers of such a project is seventeenth-century epistemology, which attempted to link language with mathematics through a logic comparable to analytical geometry, a geometry which articulated number with the phenomenal, spatial figures of curves and lines. The use of analytical geometry as a model for language exemplifies, de Man implies, the attempt to assimilate language to phenomenal reality.<sup>2</sup> But the example of seventeenth-century geometry as an ideal model of language bears special weight because the phenomenal world that this geometry seemed to describe so successfully was a world thought to be governed entirely by motion, a world whose phenomenal coherence *as* motion would come to an end toward the close of the seventeenth century. De Man appears to allude to this end when he follows the example of the philosophical ideal with the example of a literary text which this philosophy cannot account for, the title of Keats' poem "The Fall of Hyperion." For the world of simple motion was ended, once and for all, with the discovery, by Newton, of gravitational force, or the revolutionary notion, introduced in Newton's *Principia*, that objects fall toward each other. Newton suggested that the motions of massive bodies separated in space can be explained by an attractive force pulling them toward each other. It could be said indeed, that with this assertion, the world of motion became, quite literally, a world of falling. I would suggest here that the history of philosophy after Newton could be thought of as a series of confrontations with the question of how to talk about falling. And similarly, the problem of reference, insofar as de Man implicitly associates it, in my interpretation, with this development in the history of philosophy, is: *how to refer to falling*.

If we step back for a moment, we can see how the problem of gravitation or universal falling could indeed be considered a problem of reference. Newton, in the story of his discovery of gravitation, sees an apple fall, and understands in a flash that the objects of the universe are all falling toward each other by the same force that pulls this apple,

invisibly, toward the ground. Insofar as this notion was made by Newton into a law, or was represented by a *mathematical formula*, it allowed mathematical science to explain aspects of the world it had not been able to explain previously. But insofar as gravitation was also a concept—represented by the *word* “gravity”—it remained philosophically incomprehensible, and seemed an “occult quality” or magical invisible entity that made no rational sense. That is, as a mathematical formula it could be applied perfectly to the world, but as a thing *referred* to by philosophical discourse, it seemed a pure fiction.<sup>3</sup> Thus, with the introduction of gravitation, the only thing that was adequate to the world was, paradoxically, that which didn’t refer (mathematics); and what did refer, language, could no longer describe the world. In a world of falling, reference could not adequately describe the world.

I would argue that de Man’s allusion to this moment in the history of philosophy suggests that it is a paradigm for a problem that is central to contemporary theory: the recognition that direct or phenomenal reference to the world means, paradoxically, the production of a fiction; or otherwise put, that reference is radically different from physical law. Many of de Man’s works indeed connect problems of theory with literary and philosophical scenes of falling,<sup>4</sup> but two in particular, his essay on Kant’s *Critique of Judgment*, and his essay on a story by Kleist, which also involves an implicit reading of Kant, can be seen as illuminating his arguments about theory, because Kant might be said to represent, in the history of philosophy, the attempt to deal rigorously with the referential problem by founding his theory on the very knowledge of its independence from empirical referents.<sup>5</sup> In the following pages I will sketch briefly how de Man’s readings of Kant and Kleist trace, first of all, the philosophical attempt to distinguish language from empirical law by making theory into a self-reflexive system. I will then show how de Man’s reading also uncovers a resistance to this project arising within the language of philosophy that emerges in its use of examples, a referential resistance de Man will associate with a performative dimension of discourse. Both the necessity of theory and the resistance to it will occur, in de Man’s analysis, in the transformation of a specific example—the example of falling—and through the appearance of a specific figure—the figure of a body. It is in de Man’s insistence on the centrality of the body, I would suggest, that we can best understand how his own theory both conceptualizes and enacts a mode of referential resistance.

De Man’s introductory discussion of Kant focuses on the definition philosophy offers of itself, and the example by which it illustrates this definition. Kant defines philosophy by distinguishing what he calls

metaphysics—basically an expansion of Newton’s laws of motion<sup>b</sup>—as an empirically determined set of laws, from the principles of pure or “transcendental” philosophy, which is entirely conceptual. Thus empirical law tells us facts about the world, while transcendental philosophy tells us the conceptual conditions of possibility for thinking about the empirical world in the first place. The importance of this distinction, de Man tells us, is that it distinguishes between an empirical discourse that depends on given empirical facts, and a philosophical discourse that is purely conceptual and hence does not depend on empirical givens. In other words, one might elaborate, pure philosophy defines itself as that which does not depend for its meaning on the empirical world; it knows itself *as* that which does not directly know the empirical object.

Just as significant as this conceptual distinction, however, is also, in de Man’s analysis, the way in which philosophy *uses* an example—the example of bodies in motion—to define its conceptual purity. Kant illustrates the distinction between metaphysics and transcendental philosophy with the example of how each relates the phenomenon of bodies in motion to causality. Thus for example, Kant says, a metaphysical law tells us that all changes in a moving body have an external cause (in Newtonian terms, all nonlinear motion is caused by external forces); the corresponding transcendental law tells us, rather, that all changes in bodies must have some cause. Remarking on this example, de Man notes its significance in relation to the definition of philosophy:

The example of bodies in motion is . . . more than a mere example that could be replaced by any other; it is another version or definition of transcendental cognition. If critical philosophy and metaphysics are causally linked to each other, their relation is similar to the relation, made explicit in the example, between bodies and their transformations or motions.

[PMK, 123]

If philosophy gives up direct reference to the body in its definition of itself, it nonetheless reintroduces it, figuratively, in the example, which becomes a kind of implicit or secondary definition alongside the conceptual one. The body becomes in this secondary definition a figure for the very knowledge philosophy has about its inability to refer to bodies. Indeed, later in the essay de Man points to the appearance of an explicit bodily figure in Kant’s description of the unified system of transcendental philosophy and metaphysics:

That this unity is conceived in organic terms is apparent from the recurring metaphor of the body, as a totality of various limbs and parts (*Glieder*, meaning member [sic] in all the senses of the word, as well as, in the compound *Gliedermann*, the puppet of Kleist’s *Marionette Theater*).

[PMK, 142]

When the body reenters philosophy as a figure for its own knowledge, it is not only a moving body but a moving organic body, and ultimately a moving *human* body: a body that is a series of articulated parts. The human body, as a figure for a self-knowing philosophy, is also the figure for the knowledge of a difference: the difference of pure philosophy from empirical discourse. The possibility of a self-knowing, self-referential system of discourse—the paradigm of theory as the knowledge of its independence from empirical referents—is contained in its self-representation as a human body. Philosophy, or theory, incorporates its loss of reference to the falling empirical body into the conceptual gain of the presumably upright body of the philosophical system.

The means by which philosophy would achieve this conceptual and linguistic freedom is suggested, in the lines quoted above, by de Man's surprising association of the limbs of the philosophical body—its *Glieder*—with the puppet—*Gliedermann*—of Kleist's story "On the Marionette Theater." In this story, the acclaimed principal dancer of a local opera admires the gracefulness of marionettes which he claims to be superior to that of human dancers, and suggests that, indeed, a dancer who wanted to perfect his art "could learn a thing or two from them." The perfection is purely mechanical: merely by manipulating, with his strings, the puppet's center of gravity, the puppeteer creates in the limbs of the puppets the perfect curving motions of a dance, without the clumsiness of the human dancer, because in the puppets, the limbs are "what they should be: dead, mere pendula, governed only by the law of gravity." While this unsettling vision of swinging mechanical limbs surpassing human grace seems an unlikely comparison to the serious rationality of Kant's philosophical project, de Man's linking of the two suggests an uncanny similarity. Indeed, in an essay he wrote directly on Kleist's *Marionette Theater*, de Man suggests that the puppet-dance can be read as the representation of a certain aesthetic model of self-knowledge in the tradition developing out of Kant.<sup>7</sup> De Man thus suggests that behind philosophy's own figure of its conceptual project, which would incorporate force, as an unknowable event, into the articulated body of philosophical thought, lies the ideal of a mechanism which lifelessly transforms the laws of force and motion into superhuman grace. The philosophical body, in other words, should not simply move upright, but dance: and dancing, its movements are no longer strictly human, but are rather the movements of lifeless, mechanical limbs. To understand Kant, de Man implies, is to grasp how the body of the system is both a human body and is at the same time the gracefully inhuman body of a marionette.

The superior gracefulness of the marionettes, de Man insists in the

Kleist essay, lies specifically in the transformations that occur between the puppeteer and the puppet. The gracefulness of the puppet body is the result of the union between the mechanical puppet and the particular agency who directs it:

The puppets have no motion by themselves but only in relation to the motions of the puppeteer. . . . All their aesthetic charm stems from the transformations undergone by the linear motion of the puppeteer as it becomes a dazzling display of curves and arabesques. . . . The aesthetic power is located neither in the puppet nor in the puppeteer but in the text that spins itself between them.

[AFK, 285]

De Man suggests that the dance of the puppets represents a particular model of a written text, a text created by the relation between the puppeteer and the puppets. As de Man's essay continues, the relation between puppeteer and puppet, figured as the transformation of puppeteer-held strings into puppet motions, appears to represent the relation between the author and his writing. This, we may conjecture, is what de Man sees as a primary referential relation behind the text, and the beauty of the marionette-dance is that it permits the difficulties of such referentiality to be lost, entirely, in a formal, quantified system that is as predictable, and ultimately nonspecific—or nonreferential—as a mathematics:

This text is the transformational system, the anamorphosis of the line as it twists and turns into the tropes of ellipses, parabola, and hyperbole. Tropes are quantified systems of motion. The indeterminations of imitation and of hermeneutics have at last been formalized into a mathematics that no longer depends on role models or on semantic intentions. . . . Balanced motion compellingly leads to the privileged metaphor of a center of gravity. . . . On the other hand, it is said of the same puppets, almost in the same breath, that they are *antigrav* [antigravitational], that they can rise and leap, like Nijinsky, as if no such thing as gravity existed for them. . . . By falling (in all senses of the term, including the theological Fall) gracefully, one prepares the ascent, the turn from parabola to hyperbole, which is also a rebirth.

[AFK, 285–86]

The exhilarating, graceful freedom of this movement lies in its elimination of any referential weight of a personal authorial self; the puppeteer is lost entirely in the movements of the puppets. The graceful image of the human body arises precisely, here, in the *loss* of any referential particularity. What makes this possible is indicated by de Man when he calls this a “transformational system” as well as a system of “tropes” or figures. For, as a transformational system, it is a grammar, a grammar conceived as a coded set of differences not based on any extralinguistic reality; what is at work here is the power of a

grammar which incorporates referential differences into nonreferential, intralinguistic ones. Yet at the same time this loss of referential particularity appears, surprisingly, in the very *figure* of a human being. The paradox of this writing system is that it produces the human figure of the author in the very elimination of authorial referentiality. Precisely when the text appears most human, it is most mechanical. And this autobiographical paradox is also the philosophical paradox, de Man implicitly suggests, underlying Kant's bodily figure of philosophy: when philosophy conceives itself as a human form, it is in fact dependent on the workings of a purely formal grammar.

The appeal and tempting power of this formalization is indicated, moreover, in what happens, specifically, to falling. For in this system, falling, as de Man remarks, is only a means of rising. And yet, if motion and force are easily assimilated by this system, de Man also notes a less easily assimilable element:

One must . . . have felt some resistance to the unproblematic reintegration of the puppet's limbs and articulations, suspended in dead passivity, into the continuity of the dance.

[AFK, 288]

The resistance one "must" have felt is not only a moral one but also the difficulty, arising within the formal system, of incorporating dead limbs into its phenomenal geometry, of turning death into life as falling was turned into rising.

Indeed, de Man points out that the dancer accompanies his example of marionettes with an example which is less easily formalized:

The passage is all the harder to assimilate since it has been preceded by the briskly told story of an English technician able to build such perfect mechanical legs that a mutilated man will be able to dance with them in Schiller-like perfection. . . . The dancing invalid in Kleist's story is one more victim in a long series of mutilated bodies that attend on the progress of enlightened self-knowledge.

[AFK, 288–89]

In the context of de Man's reading of the marionette-dance, this mutilated invalid can be nothing other than the reassertion of reference, which, from the perspective of the system, can appear only as a disruption and mutilation. Elsewhere in his essay, de Man makes it clear what figure, exactly, the dancing invalid comes to disrupt. It is the figure of the traditional autobiographical interpretation of Kleist:

The received opinion is that, in this late work, Kleist achieves self-control and recovers a 'naive form of heroism' by overcoming a series of crises, victories over 'Todeserlebnisse' [death-experiences] that can only be compared to as many deaths and resurrections. This is, of course, a very

reassuring way to read *Marionettentheater* as a spiritual autobiography and . . . it is not entirely compatible with the complications of the tone and the diction.

[AFK, 283]

The marionette–dance, it turns out, describes the very reading by which critics have found the story to be Kleist’s own spiritual autobiography. Believing they are finding, in *The Marionette Theater*, the moving human figure of Kleist himself, resurrected in his writing from the deaths of his experience, these critics have unknowingly described only the purely mechanical movements of a system that easily exchanges rising for falling, life for death, because all are equally free of referential weight. The dancing invalid disturbs this graceful, yet mechanical illusion of autobiography with the suggestion of another, less formally recognizable life story.

De Man himself offers an alternative autobiographical reading in his essay, one which is, in contrast to the traditional spiritual biographies, somewhat more difficult to integrate:

The only explicit referential mark in the text is the date of the action, given as the winter of 1801. Now 1801 is certainly an ominous moment in a brief life rich in ominous episodes.

In de Man’s reading the referential potential of the story thus seems to derive not from the figure of the dance, but from what he will later call an “innocuous–looking notation,” the innocuous number marking a date. If this date is to refer us to the referential Kleist, however, what we find most immediately is a series of crisis–ridden relations between Kleist and others with whose name he had become associated:

[1801] is the year when Kleist’s self-doubts and hesitations about his vocation culminate in what biographers call his “Kant crisis.” It is also the year during which Kleist’s engagement to Wilhelmine von Zenge begins to falter and during which he is plagued by doubts similar to those which plagued Kierkegaard in his relationship to Regina and Kafka in his relationship to Felice. Between the two events, the Kant crisis and the forthcoming breach of promise with Wilhelmine (the final break occurred in the spring of 1802), there seems to be a connection which, if only he could understand it, would have relieved Kleist from his never resolved self-desperation. To uncover this link would be the ground of any autobiographical project.

[AFK, 283–84]

As de Man reads Kleist’s “life” from the notation 1801, he produces a series, not of movements, but of breaks, or rather of proper names which name particular discontinuities in the life: the crisis of reading Kant, the breach of promise with Wilhelmine, not to mention the introduction of several new proper names in the status of biographical



analogues. The possibility of referential self-recognition becomes in de Man's story the possibility of providing a meaningful continuity between these breaks—a continuity presumably provided by the spiritual biographers when they speak of “death experiences” that will ultimately be redeemed through writing. The stakes of such autobiographical self-recognition are clear in de Man's reference to Kleist's self-desperation, which would eventually lead to a horrible suicide. But as de Man's story continues, Kleist's own attempts within his life to make meaningful links between events appear to be thwarted, precisely, in the bewildering displacements and substitutions that occur among the proper names attached to them, names which at times appear to take over the very reality of the unfortunate Kleist's life:

The link [between the Kant-crisis and the break with Wilhelmine] actually and concretely existed in the reality of Kleist's history, but it took a somewhat circuitous route. For when Kleist next met his bride-to-be, in 1805 in Königsberg, she was no longer Fräulein Wilhelmine von Zenge but Frau Professor Wilhelmine von Krug. Dr. Wilhelm Traugott Krug was Kant's successor in the latter's chair in philosophy at the University of Königsberg. Kleist, who had wanted to be, in a sense, like Kant and who, one might conjecture, had to give up Wilhelmine in order to achieve this aim, found himself replaced, as husband, by Krug, who also, as teacher philosopher, replaced Kant. What could Kleist do but finish writing, in the same year 1805, a play to be called—what else could it have been—*Der zerbrochene Krug* [*The broken Jug*]?

All this, and much more, may have been retained, five more years later, in 1810, when he wrote *Über das Marionettentheater*, in the innocuous-looking notation: winter of 1801.

[AFK, 284]

If there is indeed a link between the crises in Kleist's life, it is not one that Kleist could easily have grasped: where he apparently attempted to exchange one event for another—to gain Kant in his loss of Wilhelmine—he instead loses Kant *and Wilhelmine* precisely because *Wilhelm* gains them both. The figure for any Kleistian autobiography, de Man suggests, would thus be less appropriately the graceful and figurative falling and rising of dancing puppets, than the smashed pieces of “the broken jug,” a play which, incidentally, opens on the scene of a man who is injured from falling, not from falling figuratively, but from falling quite literally, and rather less exaltedly, out of bed. It would appear to be this unredeemable *literality* of the events of Kleist's life that emerges, then, in de Man's final insistence on the incomprehensible agency of the *letter* in Kleist's life:

To decide whether Kleist knew his text to be autobiographical or pure fiction is like deciding whether or not Kleist's destiny, as a person and as a

writer, was sealed by the fact that a certain doctor of philosophy happened to bear the ridiculous name of Krug. A story that has so many *K*'s in it (Kant, Kleist, Krug, Kierkegaard, Kafka, K) is bound to be suspicious no matter how one interprets it. Not even Kleist could have dominated such randomly overdetermined confusion.

[AFK, 284]

Read alongside the dancer's story of the marionettes, de Man's story of numbers and names, and their simultaneous connection and dispersal through names and letters, reveals a break, a mutilated limb, perhaps, in the continuity of the abstract, formal, philosophical dance of Kleist's traditional biographers. The proliferation of letters in *de Man's* story is less a denial of reference, indeed, than the active assertion of a literality, the disruption of any so-called autobiographical reading which would, in perceiving behind Kleist's writing the figurative face of his past, in fact reduce his referential specificity to a mere figure. It is paradoxically only through such a disruption, through such "randomly overdetermined confusion," or through the interruption of the marionettes by the falling of a broken body, de Man strikingly implies, that a shadowy autobiographical reality first begins to emerge.<sup>8</sup>

In the essay on Kant, similarly, de Man remarks on a break within the system, a system which also, as in the puppet theater, models itself as a formal articulation of phenomenal motions deflected by forces. The break occurs in Kant's text precisely in the attempt to integrate force into the system of motions. In his analysis of Kant, de Man identifies this break specifically as a disruption in the phenomenal self-representation of language, or in the appearance in language of a performative dimension:

From the pseudo-cognition of tropes, language has to expand to the activity of performance. . . . The *Critique of Judgment* therefore has at its center, a deep, perhaps fatal, discontinuity. It depends on a linguistic structure (language as a performative as well as a cognitive system) that is not itself accessible to the powers of transcendental philosophy.

[PMK, 131–32]

Knowing itself as a grammar or a system of tropes, philosophy must, and yet cannot, fully integrate a dimension of language that not only shows, or represents, but acts. Designating this moment as "fatal," de Man associates it, as in the Kleist story, with death. It is paradoxically in this deathlike break, or resistance to phenomenal knowledge, that the system will encounter the resistance, de Man suggests, of reference.

Indeed, just at that point in the *Critique of Judgment* that the figure of force is being integrated into the body of philosophy, de Man locates an oddly unassimilable model of reflection: the model of a vision, not

exactly a perception, which is not aimed at the unification of the whole, but is rather a vision of individual parts. This model is accompanied, again, by an example, the example of the human body, not however as a unified whole but as a system of nonpurposive parts, parts seen, as Kant says, “without regard for the purposes which all our limbs serve.” As de Man remarks, this example reflects on the self-knowledge of the philosophical system; but in this case we no longer perceive a unity but read a kind of disarticulation:

We must, in short, consider our limbs, hands, toes, breasts, or what Montaigne cheerfully called “Monsieur ma partie” [Mister Member] in themselves, severed from the organic unity of the body. . . . We must, in other words, disarticulate, mutilate the body in a way that is much closer to Kleist than to Winckelmann, though close enough to the violent end that happened to befall both of them.

[PMK, 142]

In de Man’s reading of this example the body does not represent philosophy figuratively as the *formalization of number*, but rather comes to have, in the list of individual body parts, the *force of enumeration*. This force disarticulates the system as it attempts to distinguish and unify empirical and conceptual discourse, that is, to know itself as independent of empirical referents. The disarticulation of the body is thus not something known or stated by philosophy, but something that occurs in its attempt to free itself from reference. While this can only appear, from the perspective of philosophy, as a mutilation, such mutilation also designates the reassertion of a referential moment, a referentiality that is not, however, to be understood within the phenomenal, formalizable opposition of empirical and conceptual knowledge. In terms of the example, we could say that while the force of enumeration mutilates the body as a whole, it at the same time establishes, in this disarticulation of limbs, or naming of parts, the very specificity of a human, as opposed to puppet, body. The reappearance, through de Man’s reading, of a body, while mutilated, is thus the paradoxical evocation of a referential reality neither fictionalized by direct reference nor formalized into a theoretical abstraction.<sup>9</sup>

We can only recognize such a referential force, however, if we take into account what happens in de Man’s own text when he introduces, as Kant before him, an example; that is when he compares the mutilation we “must” do in reading Kant to two very specific deaths, the “violent end” that “happened to befall” Kleist and Winckelmann. The names of Kleist and Winckelmann here—two prominent writers in the German aesthetic tradition—are not figures for their thoughts or writing, but are rather attached to the specificity of the two men’s actual deaths: the

death of Kleist, who, following a suicide pact contracted with Henriette Vogel, shot first her and then himself with a gun; the death of Winckelmann who, on the other hand, was murdered in Trieste, for a couple of gold coins, by an Italian named Arcangeli. The particularity of this double example is itself a referential moment in de Man's text, but it is not, however, a referentiality we can subsume or understand in either a purely conceptual, or in a purely phenomenal, way. Indeed, it is an example of the occurrence of a difference: the difference between living and dying—which resists being generalized into a conceptual or figural law. This is the difference that, we recall, appeared in, but remained unassimilable to, the formal system, a difference it could not know just as, we could add, the system was unable to know the event of falling. And this is also what de Man's text does not know when it refers to Kleist's and Winckelmann's deaths as something that "befalls" them; when it names, that is, a befalling. In de Man's text as in Kant's, the impact of reference is felt in falling: in the resistance of the *example of falling* to a phenomenal or perceptual analogy that would turn it into the mere figure of an abstract principle. In naming a befalling, de Man's text no longer simply knows what it says, but indeed does more than it knows, and it is in this that we can read the referential significance of his own theory.

This significance has the weight of a paradox: that reference emerges not in its accessibility to perception, but in the resistance of language to perceptual analogies; that the impact of reference is felt, not in the search for an external referent, but in the necessity, and failure, of theory. This theoretical knowledge, however, cannot be separated from the particular performance of de Man's own text, which always accompanies its theoretical lesson with a story. It is the originality and unique referential resonance of de Man's writing, I would suggest, to discover the resistance of theory in the story, it tells, of its own falling. What theory does, de Man tells us repeatedly, is that it falls; and in falling, it refers. To capture the reality of this falling is the crucial task de Man's theoretical work is engaged in, and it is the task that falls upon us as we read the very particular story of de Man's writing.

### Notes

- 1 Paul de Man, "The Resistance to Theory," in his *The Resistance to Theory* (Minneapolis: Univ. of Minnesota Press, 1986).
- 2 De Man says simply "geometry" but is clearly referring to analytical geometry; cf. his description of analytical geometry in his essay "Aesthetic Formalization in Kleist" as "an attempt to articulate the phenomenal particularity of a spatial entity (line or curve) with the formalized computation of number" (*The Rhetoric of Romanticism*

[New York: Columbia Univ. Press, 1984], 266), henceforth cited as AFK. Brackets within the quotations indicate my translations or interpolations.

- 3 For a discussion of the distinction between the law and the concept of gravitation, see Gerd Buchdahl, "Gravity and Intelligibility: Newton to Kant," in *The Methodological Heritage of Newton*, ed. Robert E. Butts and John W. Davis (Toronto: Univ. of Toronto Press, 1970).
- 4 See for example "The Rhetoric of Temporality," reprinted in *Blindness and Insight: Essays in the Rhetoric of Contemporary Criticism*, 2d ed., rev. (Minnesota: Univ. of Minnesota Press, 1983), and "The Epistemology of Metaphor" in *On Metaphor*, ed. Sheldon Sacks (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1978).
- 5 Paul de Man, "Phenomenality and Materiality in Kant," in *Hermeneutics: Questions and Prospects*, ed. Gary Shapiro and Alan Sica (Amherst: Univ. of Massachusetts Press, 1984), henceforth cited as PMK, and "Aesthetic Formalization in Kleist." The description of critical philosophy as a theory founded on the "independence of knowledge from empirical referents" does not imply the irrelevance of the empirical for Kant but rather the fact that critical philosophy is able to articulate its own transcendental rules for the *conditions of possibility of experience* as in some sense prior to the knowledge of empirical law.
- 6 See Kant's *Metaphysical Foundations of Natural Science*, trans. James W. Ellington, in *Immanuel Kant: Philosophy of Material Nature* (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1986). The *Foundations* is an elaborate conceptual system which is meant to be a reformulation of Newtonian law in terms of its combined conceptual presuppositions and material givens which link it to transcendental philosophy as the latter's "example." Metaphysics is partially empirically determined and is linked on its side to fully empirical laws.
- 7 Cynthia Chase offers an excellent reading of de Man's essay in relation to aesthetic theory and politics in "Trappings of an Education," in *Responses to Paul de Man's Wartime Journalism*, ed. Werner Hamacher, Neil Hertz, and Thomas Keenan (Nebraska: Univ. of Nebraska Press, 1989); see also Andrzej Warminski's fine essay "Terrible Reading," in the same volume.
- 8 We may understand this dynamic of autobiography also in terms of de Man's own writing/nonwriting on his past and the attempts to create autobiographical accounts of it.
- 9 On the figure of hanging and the appearance of other bodily figures in de Man, see Neil Hertz, "Lurid Figures," in *Reading de Man Reading*, ed. Lindsay Waters and Wlad Godzich (Minnesota: Univ. of Minnesota Press, 1989); on the function of reference as an "imperative" in de Man's writing, see Werner Hamacher, "LECTIO: De Man's Imperative," in the same volume.