

Praise for *Memoires for Paul de Man*

"Derrida is generous, and honest, and inconsolable. And that is exactly as it should be. He has too much respect for words and honest speech, and too much love for his friend, to accept any *pharmakon*. His mind joins his heart in the same motion of generous lucidity; and all he has come to think with, through, because of Paul de Man — and all he will go on thinking through de Man's books — helps him to face death bravely."

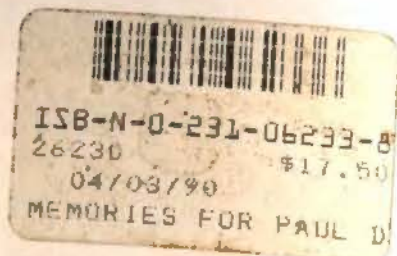
—*Journal of Aesthetics and Art*

"Derrida offers significant insights into de Man's understanding of Heidegger, Holderlin, Hegel, Austin, and Rousseau. A warm, personal, and at times touching account of the de Man/Derrida intellectual friendship and the existential experience of a friend's death, this work shows a very human side to a thinker whose humanity has been questioned by the critics. A welcome addition to any library already containing some writings of Derrida."

—*Choice*

Jacques Derrida is directeur d'études at the Ecole Pratique des Hautes Etudes en Sciences Sociales in Paris and holds a visiting appointment at the University of California, Irvine. His books include *Signeponge/Signsponge* (Columbia University Press), *Of Grammatology*, and *Dissemination*.

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The Wellek
Library Lectures

Jacques Derrida



MEMOIRES
for Paul de Man
Revised Edition

Jacques Derrida

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Revised Edition

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Jacques Derrida

MEMOIRES
for Paul de Man

Revised edition

*The Wellek Library Lectures
at the University of California, Irvine*

Translated by Cecile Lindsay, Jonathan Culler,
Eduardo Cadava, and Peggy Kamuf

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CONTENTS

Editorial Note	vii
Preface to the Revised Edition	ix
Preface to the French Edition	xi
In Memoriam	xv
Preface	xxi
1. Mnemosyne	1
2. The Art of <i>Mémoires</i>	45
3. Acts	89
4. Like the Sound of the Sea Deep Within a Shell: Paul de Man's War	155

Editorial Note

The Wellek Library Lectures are given annually at the University of California, Irvine, under the auspices of the Focused Research Program in Critical Theory and with the support of the Graduate Division. They are published with the generous assistance of Kendall E. Bailes, Dean of the School of Humanities, in conjunction with the Irvine Studies in the Humanities, which is under the general editorship of Robert Folkenflik.

These three lectures were translated by Cecile Lindsay, Jonathan Culler, and Eduardo Cadava, respectively. We are grateful to these translators, who worked independently of one another, and to Avital Ronell and Eduardo Cadava, who brought the translations of the individual lectures into conformity.

Since the original publication of these lectures, there has arisen a major controversy concerning Paul de Man's wartime journalism, which came to light only in 1987. It thus seemed appropriate, for this reprinting, to add to these lectures the author's more recent essay, "Paul de Man's War," which first appeared in *Critical Inquiry* (Translation by Peggy Kamuf; Vol. XIV, No. 3, Spring 1988). It is reprinted here with permission and incorporates changes made by Jacques Derrida for the version published in *Responses: On Paul de Man's Wartime Journalism*, edited by Werner Hamacher, Neil Hertz, and Thomas Keenan (Lincoln, Nebr.: University of Nebraska Press, 1989).

Focused Research Program in Critical
Theory
Murray Krieger, Director

Preface to the Revised Edition

THIS REVISED EDITION contains a certain number of modifications and additions. In conformity with the French edition (Galilée, 1988) published in the interim, it reproduces the preface of that edition which explains why it was necessary to add a fourth chapter, "Like the Sound of the Sea Deep Within a Shell: Paul de Man's War" (translated by Peggy Kamuf), as well as "In Memoriam: On the Soul" (translated by Kevin Newmark), the text of a speech delivered by Jacques Derrida during a memorial service for Paul de Man at Yale University, January 18, 1984.

Preface to the French Edition

MÉMOIRES, in the plural. Too many memories. Across a short fragment of autobiography, and in a book *on* autobiography, the plural might lead one to understand something else, for example the multiplicity or dissociation of memories. And first of all the meanings of the French word "mémoire," in the unstable crossings of its gender (masculine or feminine) or its number (feminine singular or plural).¹

What is recalled to memory calls one to responsibility. How to *think* the one without the other?

After the death of my friend Paul de Man in 1983, I devoted a series of lectures to his work, one of the most singular ones of our time. But it was not only a matter of literary theory or philosophy. It was not only a matter of the obsessive thematics of memory in a work that was too quickly interrupted. I also evoked what I had shared with Paul de Man since 1966, what brought us together and what distinguished us from each other in certain institutional or intellectual places, as well as in the theo-

retical situation of the last few years. Delivered in 1984, these lectures were published in the United States in 1986 with the title *Mémoires*.²

Then, last summer and in the circumstances that I recall here, it became known that Paul de Man, between the ages of 21 and 23, in Belgium where he was born in 1919 and lived until the end of the war, had maintained a literary and artistic column in a newspaper favorable to the German occupier. This he had done between December 1940 until December 1942. Absolute surprise, intense emotion among his friends and admirers who were in no way prepared for this news; hate-filled and expedited trials on the part of enemies who rushed to exploit an "advantage": against a person and, through him, they hoped, against others, and against currents of thought. In sum, lively debates, as the saying goes, by reason of the authority or the radiating influence of a great literary theoretician, one who had been a professor at some of the world's greatest universities: Johns Hopkins, Zurich, Cornell, Berlin, Constance, Yale, and so on. Since then, these discussions have been taken up in Europe, especially in Germany, and sometimes in places where people knew next to nothing of Paul de Man's work.

On the subject of these texts written between 1940 and 1942, as well as of the reactions to which they have given rise, the last chapter of this book, "Like the Sound of the Sea Deep Within a Shell: Paul de Man's War," proposes a narrative, some analyses, some hypotheses, and a few rules. It is once again a matter of memories and responsibility.

Translated by Peggy Kamuf

Notes

1. See below, "Mnemosyne," for these different meanings of "mém-oire."
2. I had planned to publish this French version only once the first French translation of a book of Paul de Man's would have appeared, that is to say next year when *Allegories of Reading* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1979) will be published by Editions Galilée (translated by Thomas Trezise). For the reasons I give in this preface and at a time when some are already speaking of the "de Man affair" or the "de Man case," I deemed it necessary to declare publicly what I think of this without waiting too long.

In Memoriam On The Soul

FORGIVE ME FOR speaking in my own tongue. It's the only one I ever spoke with Paul de Man. It's also the one in which he often taught, wrote, and thought. What is more, I haven't the heart today to translate these few words, adding to them the suffering and distance, for you and for me, of a foreign accent. We are speaking today less in order to say something than to assure ourselves, with voice and with music, that we are together in the same thought. We know with what difficulty one finds right and decent words at such a moment when no recourse should be had to common usage since all conventions will seem either intolerable or vain.

If we have, as one says in French, "la mort dans l'âme," death in the soul, it is because from now on we are destined to speak *of* Paul de Man, instead of speaking

"In Memoriam: On the Soul" appeared originally in *Yale French Studies*, No. 69 (1985), as "The Lesson of Paul de Man" and is reprinted by permission.

to and *with* him, destined to speak of the teacher and of the friend whom he remains for so many of us, whereas the most vivid desire and the one which, within us, has been most cruelly battered, the most forbidden desire from now on would be to speak, still, to Paul, to hear him and to respond to him. Not just within ourselves (we will continue, I will continue to do that endlessly) but to speak to him and to hear him, himself, speaking to us. That's the impossible and we can no longer even take the measure of this wound.

Speaking is impossible, but so too would be silence or absence or a refusal to share one's sadness. Let me simply ask you to forgive me if today finds me with the strength for only a few very simple words. At a later time, I will try to find better words, and more serene ones, for the friendship that ties me to Paul de Man (it was and remains unique), what I, like so many others, owe to his generosity, to his lucidity, to the ever so gentle force of his thought: since that morning in 1966 when I met him at a breakfast table in Baltimore, during a colloquium, where we spoke, among other things, of Rousseau and the *Essai sur l'origine des langues*, a text which was then seldom read in the university but which we had both been working on, each in his own way, without knowing it. From then on, nothing has ever come between us, not even a hint of disagreement. It was like the golden rule of an alliance, no doubt that of a trusting and unlimited friendship, but also the seal of a secret affirmation that, still today, I wouldn't know how to circumscribe, to limit, to name (and that is as it should be). As you know, Paul was irony itself and, among all the vivid thoughts he leaves with us and leaves alive in us, there is as well an enigmatic reflection on irony and even, in the words of Schlegel which he had occasion to cite,

on "irony of irony." At the heart of my attachment to him, there has also always been a certain beyond-of-irony which cast on his own a softening, generous light, reflecting a smiling compassion on everything he illuminated with his tireless vigilance. His lucidity was sometimes overpowering, making no concession to weakness, but it never gave in to that negative assurance with which the ironic consciousness is sometimes too easily satisfied.

At some later time, then, I will try to find better words for what his friendship brought to all of those who had the good fortune to be his friend, his colleague, his student; but also for his work and especially for the future of his work, undoubtedly one of the most influential of our time. His work, in other words, his teaching and his books, those already published and those soon to appear—because, to the very last and with an admirable strength, enthusiasm and gaiety, he worked on ever new lectures and writing projects, enlarging and enriching still further the perspectives he had already opened up for us. As we know already but as we shall also come to realize more and more, he transformed the field of literary theory, revitalizing all the channels that irrigate it both inside and outside the university, in the United States and in Europe. Besides a new style of interpretation, of reading, of teaching, he brought to bear the necessity of the polylogue and of a plurilinguistic refinement which was his genius—not only that of national languages (Flemish, French, German, English) but also of those idioms which are literature and philosophy, renewing as he did so the reading of Pascal as well as Rilke, of Descartes and Hölderlin, of Hegel and Keats, Rousseau and Shelley, Nietzsche and Kant, Locke and Diderot, Stendahl and Kierkegaard, Coleridge, Kleist, Wordsworth and Baudelaire, Proust, Mallarmé and Blanchot, Austin and Heidegger, Benja-

min, Bakhtin and so many others, contemporary or not. Never content merely to present new readings, he led one to think the very possibility of reading—and also sometimes the paradox of its impossibility. His commitment remains henceforth that of his friends and his students who owe it to him and to themselves to pursue what was begun by him and with him.

Beyond the manifest evidence of the published texts—his own as well as those that make reference to his—I, like many others, can attest to what is today the radiance of his thought and his words: in the United States, first of all, where so many universities are linked and enlivened by the large community of his disciples, the large family of his former students or colleagues who have remained his friends; but also in Europe at all the universities where I had, as I did here at Yale, the good fortune and the honor to work with him, often at his invitation. I think first of Zurich, where we came together so many times, with Patricia, with Hillis; and naturally I think of Paris where he lived, published, and shared editorial or academic responsibilities (for example, for Johns Hopkins or Cornell—and again these were for us the occasion of so many encounters). I also know the impression his passage left on the universities of Constance, Berlin, and Stockholm. I will say nothing of Yale because you know this better than anyone and because today my memory is too given over to mourning for all that I have shared with him here during the last ten years, from the most simple day-to-dayness to the most intense moments in the work that allied us with each other and with others, the friends, students, and colleagues who grieve for him so close to me here.

I wanted only to *bear witness* as would befit the sort of admiring observer I have also been at his side in the American and European academic world. This is nei-

ther the time nor the place to give into indiscreet revelations or too personal memories. I will refrain from speaking of such memories therefore—I have too many of them, as do many of you, and they are so overwhelming that we prefer to be alone with them. But allow me to infringe this law of privacy long enough to evoke two memories, just two among so many others.

The last letter I received from Paul: I still don't know how to read the serenity or the cheerfulness which it displayed. I never knew to what extent he adopted this tone, in a gesture of noble and sovereign discretion, so as to console and spare his friends in their anxiety or their despair; or, on the contrary, to what extent he had succeeded in transfiguring what is still for us the worst. No doubt it was both. Among other things, he wrote what I am going to permit myself to read here because, rightly or wrongly, I received it as a message, confided to me, for his friends in distress. You'll hear a voice and a tone that are familiar to us: "All of this, as I was telling you [on the phone], seems prodigiously interesting to me and I'm enjoying myself a lot. I knew it all along but it is being borne out: death gains a great deal, as they say, when one gets to know it close up—that '*peu profond ruisseau calomnié la mort*' [shallow stream caluminated as death]." And after having cited this last line from Mallarmé's "*Tombeau for Verlaine*," he added: "Anyhow, I prefer that to the brutality of the word '*tumeur*'"—which, in fact, is more terrible, more insinuating and menacing in French than in any other language [tumeur/tu meurs: you are dying].

I recall the second memory because it says something about music—and only music today seems to me bearable, consonant, able to give some measure of what unites us in the same thought. I had known for a long time, even though he spoke of it very rarely, that music

occupied an important place in Paul's life and thought. On that particular night—it was 1979 and once again the occasion was a colloquium—we were driving through the streets of Chicago after a jazz concert. My older son, who had accompanied me, was talking with Paul about music, more precisely about musical instruments. This they were doing as the experts they both were, as technicians who know how to call things by their name. It was then I realized that Paul had never told me he was an experienced musician and that music had also been a practice with him. The word that let me know this was the word "âme" [soul] when, hearing Pierre, my son, and Paul speak with familiarity of the violin's or the bass's soul, I learned that the "soul" is the name one gives in French to the small and fragile piece of wood—always very exposed, very vulnerable—that is placed within the body of these instruments to support the bridge and assure the resonant communication of the two sounding boards. I didn't know why at that moment I was so strangely moved and unsettled in some dim recess by the conversation I was listening to: no doubt it was due to the word "soul" which always speaks to us at the same time of life and of death and makes us dream of immortality, like the argument of the lyre in the *Phaedo*.

And I will always regret, among so many other things, that I never again spoke of any of this with Paul. How was I to know that one day I would speak of that moment, that music and that soul without him, before you who must forgive me for doing it just now so poorly, so painfully when already everything is painful, so painful?

Translated by Kevin Newmark

PREFACE

THESE THREE LECTURES were written a few weeks following the death of Paul de Man, between January and February, 1984. They were first delivered in French, at Yale University in March; and then, a few weeks later, they were presented as part of the René Wellek Library Lectures at the University of California, Irvine. The first lecture was delivered a second time in English at Miami University (in Oxford, Ohio) at a conference organized around the work of Paul de Man. The conference was set up by James Creech and Peggy Kamuf, bringing together Neil Hertz, Andrew Parker and Andrzej Warminski. I wanted to produce these details in order to thank all those who encouraged me to write these pages and emboldened me to do so at such a difficult moment; but also to stress another point: in view of the time that has since elapsed, discussions following these lectures, advice given me explicitly or implicitly by those named above, by the translators, by Cynthia Chase, and by Avital Ronell; in view, moreover, of the recent publication of texts by Paul de Man which

at the time I did not know (in particular the essays on Hölderlin collected in *The Rhetoric of Romanticism*, Columbia University Press, 1984), I ought perhaps to have refined, inflected, complicated some of my assertions—and in more than one instance. I left this undone. Except to indicate specific bibliographical references. I have had to justify to myself with a number of reasons, which I entrust to the reader's understanding, having left these lectures in their original if somewhat rough state. On the one hand, I felt pressed to leave these texts with the special accent of their date, commanded by the fervor of bereaved friendship. One will not give finishing touches to sentences written under such circumstances. And then, particularly as regards Hölderlin, I know that the exchanges emerging from my suggestions (whether in the mode of private letters or debates in the course of the colloquium at Miami University) will give rise to excellent publications by those whom I name above. They, to my view, will lend precision to what I here set forth.

To all those who have translated and edited these texts, to those who have heard and discussed them, I wish to express my profound gratitude.

J.D.

December 21, 1984

When first given in French at Yale University in the Bingham Hall library (Department of Comparative Literature), these lectures were preceded by these few words.

A PEINE

A *peine*—translation will continue to remain the subject of our seminar this year, as has been the case for the past five years. A *peine*: a scene is concealed within this French idiom, *à peine*, which already defies translation.

Rodolphe Gasché has spoken very well of Paul de Man's thought in terms of *Setzung* and of *Übersetzung* (*Diacritics*, Winter, 1981). But we would risk losing the essential point of that which he wished to say and Paul de Man wished to say if we translated *Übersetzung*. We would be overlooking the rapport between *Setzen* (the posing of the position, of *thesis* and *nomos*) and *Übersetzung* (trans- and superposing, sur-passing and over-exposing, passing beyond position). We would hardly be translating *Übersetzen* by translating if we translated it to translate.

But, already, how would one translate *à peine*? If one translated *à peine* by the equivalent of *presque* or rather *presque pas* (scarcely, hardly, almost not) or by the equivalent of "tout près de rien" (nearly not or nearly no) one would lose by the wayside the name or noun of *peine*, which virtually takes shelter, is hidden, almost disappearing, even for a French ear lulled a bit by that which we call "ordinary language." In the expression *à peine*, the French would hardly have heard the hard, the dash or the pain, the difficulty that there is or the trouble that one gives oneself. "Hardly" might be the best approximation. The French ear hardly perceives the sense of hardly.

To be able hardly to say something, hardly to begin this evening, hardly to recommence, repeat, or continue means to be able only with difficulty, with the pain of à peine—the affliction of hardly's hardship: hardly able, almost not to be able to, almost no longer able to say something, to begin, recommence and continue. This having trouble; with trouble, troubled and pained, it is hard even hardly to do, think or say that which however is said, thought, or done. Having trouble, being pained, as one would say in French, following.

This evening we can do hardly that which nonetheless we can—and must do. Not without going to pains. We speak and we think *here* for Paul de Man, with Paul de Man. But without him.

Here: a place, more than a library, something other than a classroom; we shall never be able to name, use, or recognize it without thinking of Paul de Man, his presence; his absence.

Each time, beginning so many years ago, when I spoke here he will have been there. And, for many among you, so many other times as well.

And it is hard for me to think that henceforth it should be otherwise. I can hardly think and speak otherwise henceforth.

I shall speak, therefore, of *Mémoires*.

Mémoires will be the title for this series of lectures. *Mémoires* in the plural, but also at once in the masculine and the feminine. The meaning of this word changes in French according to its generic determination (masculine/feminine) or its number (singular/plural). That is one of its singularities, and thus a theme of this seminar since, as we shall see confirmed, *Mémoires* is hardly translatable. That is why I prefer to speak

here in my language, as usual, but I shall soon deliver these lectures in English at the University of California, Irvine.

For tonight's lecture I have chosen as subtitle "Mnemosyne."

March 26, 1984

Translated by Avital Ronell

MEMOIRES

for Paul de Man

I.

MNEMOSYNE

Translated by Cecile Lindsay

I have never known how to tell a story.

And since I love nothing better than remembering and Memory itself—Mnemosyne—I have always felt this inability as a sad infirmity. Why am I denied narration? Why have I not received this gift? Why have I never received it from Mnemosyne, *tes tôn Mousôn metros*, the mother of all muses, as Socrates recalls in the *Theaetetus* (191b)? The gift (*doron*) of Mnemosyne, Socrates insists, is like the wax in which all that we wish to guard in our memory is engraved in relief so that it may leave a mark, like that of rings, bands, or seals. We preserve our memory and our knowledge of them; we can then speak of them, and do them justice, as long as their image (*eidolon*) remains legible.

But what happens when the lover of Mnemosyne has not received the gift of narration? When he doesn't know how to tell a story? When it is precisely because he keeps the memory that he loses the narrative?

I am not offering a rhetorical invocation to Mnemosyne.

Nor to a Remembrance (*Mémoire*) that one might naïvely believe to be oriented toward the past, a past whose essence one would learn through some narrative. My desire is to talk to you today about what is to come, about that future which, still to come, also comes to us from Paul de Man. Reading Proust, he said himself that "the power of memory" is not, first of all, that of "resuscitating": it remains enigmatic enough to be preoccupied, so to speak, by a thinking of "the future."

I had to commit to memory a proper name today.

With the proper name Mnemosyne, I also wanted to recall the title of a poem by Hölderlin. A poem of mourning, to be sure, and about impossible mourning; a poem in mourning's default: when mourning is required, when it is requisite. I quote here several lines from the second version of "Mnemosyne":

Ein Zeichen sind wir, deutungslos
Schmerzlos sind wir und haben fast
Die Sprache in der Fremde verloren
Un signe, nous voilà, nul de sens
Nuls de souffrance nous voilà, et presque
nous avons

Perdu notre langue au pays étranger. (tr.
Armel Guerne)¹

A sign we are, unreadable
We are without pain and have almost
Lost language in the foreignness.

. . . Denn nicht vermögen
Die Himmlischen alles. Nämlich es reichen
Die Sterblichen eh' an den Abgrund. . . .
. . . Ils ne peuvent pas tout
Eux-mêmes les célestes. Car les mortels ont
bien avant

Gagné l'abîme. . . . (tr. Armel Guerne)

. . . Because the heavenly ones
Are not capable of all. Namely mortals
Are closer to the abyss. . . .

. . . da ging
Vom Kreuze redend, das
Gesetz ist unterwegs einmal
Gestorbenen, auf der schroffen Strass
Ein Wandersmann mit
Dem andern, aber was ist dies?

. . . tout là haut,
Parlant de cette croix plantée
En souvenir d'un mort, une fois,
En chemin, sur cette haute route
Un voyageur s'avance, encoléré
Par son pressentiment lointain
De l'autre, or qu'est cela? (tr. Armel Guerne,
who seems to combine the second
and third versions)

Là-bas où s'en va sur la haute route, parlant
De cette croix au bord du chemin plantée
En souvenir des morts,
Un voyageur avec l'autre.
Mais qu'est-ce donc? (tr. Gustave Roud)
Remembering one departed, once,
On the steep path, a Wanderer advances
Moved by his distant premonition
Of the other—but what is this? (tr. A.
Ronell)

I prefer to conclude by citing the third version, for it
names Mnemosyne:

. . . . Und es starben
Noch andere viel. Am Kithäron
aber lag
Eleutherä, der Mnemosyne Stadt.
Der auch als
Ablegte den Mantel Gott das
abendliche nachher löste
Die Locken. Himmlische nemlich
sind
Unwillig, wenn einer nicht die
Seele schonend sich
Zusammengenommen, aber er
musse doch; dem
Gleich fehlet die Trauer.
Et tant d'autres encore
Sont morts. Mais sur le bord du Cithéron
Git Eleuthères, cité de Mnemosyne
Qui elle aussi, comme le dieu du soir lui
avait retiré
Son manteau, perdit ses boucles peu après.
Car les célestes sont
Indignés quand quelqu'un, sans préserver
son âme

Se donne tout entier, qui cependant devait le faire;

A celui-là le deuil fait défaut. (tr. Armel Guerne;

Gustave Roud has no translation for this version)

And many others died. But by

Cithaeron, there stood

Eleutherae, Mnemosyne's town.

From her also

When God laid down his festive cloak, soon after did

The powers of Evening sever a lock of hair. For the

Heavenly, when

Someone has failed to collect his soul, to spare it,

Are angry, for still he must; like him

Mourning is in default. (tr. Michael Hamburger; modified)

What is an impossible mourning? What does it tell us, this impossible mourning, about an essence of memory? And as concerns the other in us, even in this "distant premonition of the other," where is the most unjust betrayal? Is the most distressing, or even the most deadly infidelity that of a *possible mourning* which would interiorize within us the image, idol, or ideal of the other who is dead and lives only in us? Or is it that of the impossible mourning, which, leaving the other his alterity, respecting thus his infinite remove, either refuses to take or is incapable of taking the other within oneself, as in the tomb or the vault of some narcissism?

These questions will not cease to haunt us. Presently we will read what Paul de Man leads us to think concerning "true 'mourning.'"

But then why begin by quoting Hölderlin? For at least three reasons, which also belong to memories. Paul de Man was a great and fervent reader of Hölderlin, and his knowledge comprehended all the philological and hermeneutical debates which developed around both the poetic and the political history of German thought since the beginning of the century. Paul de Man's contribution makes up a part of these debates, notably through his contestation of a certain Heideggerian appropriation of Hölderlin's poetics. This duel is all the more striking since for Paul de Man, as for Heidegger, the figure of Hölderlin retains a sort of sacred singularity, even if Paul de Man does make the following accusation of Heidegger: "Hölderlin is the only one whom Heidegger cites as a believer cites holy writ" ("Heidegger's Exegeses of Hölderlin," *Blindness and Insight*, p. 250). Like a categorical imperative of reading, Hölderlin's voice commands from both Heidegger and de Man a sort of absolute respect, although not necessarily a movement of identification. It is precisely at the moment of the *law* that Paul de Man intends to rescue Hölderlin from appropriation-by-identification, from what might be called Heidegger's hermeneutic mourning. In *Wie Wenn Am Feiertage . . .*, Heidegger would have violently and unjustly identified "Natur" (*Die mächtige, die göttlich schöne Natur*) with *physis* and with Being, according to his familiar gesture, but also with the law (*Gesetz: "Nach vestem Geseze, wie einst, aus heiligen Chaos gezeugt"*). However, according to Paul de Man, on this point as well as on others, ". . . Hölderlin says exactly the opposite of what Heidegger makes him say" (pp. 254-55). The sentence is trenchant, direct, and courageous; moreover, it is underlined. I recognize its tone as that of certain judgments taking the form of defiance—what might be called de Manian provocation: "When he

states the law, the poet does not say Being, then, but rather, the impossibility of naming anything but an order that, in its essence, is distinct from immediate Being" (p. 261).

I do not know whether one ought to arbitrate here between Heidegger and Paul de Man. I will not take that risk, especially not within the limits of a lecture. The problem is approached from another point of view by Suzanne Gearhart in her rigorous and lucid study of Paul de Man, "Philosophy Before Literature: Deconstruction, Historicity, and the Work of Paul de Man."³ I shall refer you to it frequently. For my part, I shall simply stress one point here: the impossibility of reducing a thinking of the law to a thinking of Being, and the impossibility of naming without in some way appealing to the order of the law. As early as 1955, this is what Paul de Man felt he had to oppose to a certain Heideggerian reading of Hölderlin. This thinking of the law was always, with Paul de Man, a rigorous, enigmatic, paradoxical, and vigilant one. And I believe that this thinking runs through all his work, like a fidelity that was also a fidelity to Hölderlin. One can find signs of this in the altogether original meditations on the contract, the promise, and the juridical or political performative which are also readings of Rousseau and Nietzsche in *Allegories of Reading*.

The second reason why I wanted to begin by naming Mnemosyne and Hölderlin comes like an order I received from I don't know where, I don't know what or whom; but let us say from the law which speaks to me through memory. Forgive me for letting my own memory speak here. I promise not to do it too often, and I only give in to the impulse now because it again concerns Hölderlin, Heidegger, and Paul de Man. When

I was preparing these lectures, Avital Ronell sent me from California the copy of *Blindness and Insight* that I had lent her in Paris, the copy that Paul de Man had dedicated to me in October 1971. Opening the book—it was after Paul's death, then—I discovered two pages written in his hand, two fragments of Hölderlin's poems patiently transcribed for me. They returned to me from America, like a memory of Hölderlin in America. And I remember the circumstances in which this gift had been given to me. It was during the course of a seminar that lasted for three years, revolving around *The Thing (La Chose)*—this was the title of the seminar—and *The Thing* according to Heidegger. It was Paul de Man who reminded me or often made me aware of Heidegger's more or less open allusions to Hölderlin, those coded and barely disguised types of *topoi* that initiates or accomplices recognize easily, and which form at once the ordinary debt, the law, and the very environment of a certain Heideggerian diction. Thus it is for the "bridge" (in *Bauen Wohnen Denken*), which is the example of that "thing" which "has its way of gathering close by itself earth and sky, divinities and mortals." At the beginning of a passage on which I dwelt at length, Heidegger calls the bridge "light and powerful" (*leicht und kräftig*). He puts quotation marks around the words but cites no reference, since their origin is so transparent. He even omits the quotation marks around certain words that belong to Hölderlin. Heidegger writes: "The bridge swings lightly and strongly over the river" ("Die Brücke schwingt sich 'leicht und kräftig' über der Strom"). In the poem I received from Paul's hand and which returned to me from America, Hölderlin writes the following: "Over the river, where gleaming it passes your site/lightly and strongly the bridge vaults" (Friedrich

Hölderlin, *Poems and Fragments*, tr. Michael Hamburger, University of Michigan Press, 1967). Paul de Man had added to this poem, entitled *Heidelberg*, the transcription of another fragment, taken from the first version of *Patmos*: here there is another bridge, this time above the abyss (*über den Abgrund*). But above what abyss? This poem, whose opening is in every heart and on everyone's lips ("Near is/And difficult to grasp, the God./ But where danger threatens/ That which saves from it also grows."), can also be read as a poem of mourning: "After that he dies. Much could/ Be said of it. And the friends at the very last/ Saw him, the gladdest, looking up triumphant./ yet they were sad, now that evening had come, amazed,/ For the souls of these men contained/ Things greatly predetermined, but under the sun they loved/ This life. . . ." And in the fragment Paul sent me in his own hand, the quotation stopped with these words: "And the most loved/ Live near, growing faint/ On mountains most separate./ Give us thus innocent water,/ O pinions give us, of sense most faithful/ To go over there and to return."

Today I understand more clearly than ever why, almost thirty years ago, one of Paul de Man's friends had called him "Hölderlin in America." He confided this to me one day—and that was my third reason.

I have never known how to tell a story. Why didn't I receive this gift from Mnemosyne? From this complaint, and probably to protect myself before it, a suspicion continually steals into my thinking: who can really tell a story? Is narrative possible? Who can claim to know what a narrative entails? Or, before that, the memory it lays claim to? What is memory? If the essence of memory maneuvers between Being and the law, what sense does it make to wonder about the being

and the law of memory? These are questions that cannot be posed outside of language, questions that cannot be formulated without entrusting them to transference and translation, above the abyss. For they require, from one language to another, impossible passageways: the fragile resistance of a span. What is the meaning of the word "mémoire(s)" in French, in its masculine and feminine forms (*un mémoire, une mémoire*); and in its singular and plural forms (*un mémoire, une mémoire, and des mémoires*). If there is no meaning outside memory, there will always be something paradoxical about interrogating "mémoire" as a unit of meaning, as that which links memory to narrative or to all the uses of the word "histoire" (story, history, *Historie, Geschichte*, etc.).

Paul de Man often stresses the "sequential" and "narrative" structure of allegory.⁴ In his eyes, allegory is not simply one form of figurative language among others; it represents one of language's essential possibilities: the possibility that permits language to say the other and to speak of itself while speaking of something else; the possibility of always saying something other than what it gives to be read, including the scene of reading itself. This is also what precludes any totalizing summary—the exhaustive narrative or the total absorption of a memory. I have thus always thought that de Man smiled to himself when he spoke of the narrative structure of allegory, as if he were secretly slipping us a definition of narration that is at once ironic and allegorical—a definition which, as you know, scarcely advances the story.

Among the stories that I will never know how to tell, no matter how much I want to, is the story of all the journeys that have led me here. Not only those which have for a long time drawn me to America, but specifi-

cally those which bring me here today, after the invitation with which you honored me and the promise I made four years ago: to give three lectures in the Irvine Wellek Library Lecture Series.

Two problems arose for me concerning titles. First, the title of the lecture series itself; I had initially read it as the irony of defiance, without knowing precisely on which side the greatest insolence lay. Since then, reading a particular text by René Wellek, "Destroying Literary Studies,"⁵ might have prevented me from accepting such a patronage for these lectures. I am not at all referring to the way in which I am treated in the article, but rather to the judgments pronounced against Paul de Man and several others who are in my eyes, on the contrary, the honor and the chance, today, of those "literary studies." I will say nothing here about that text; I will discuss it in a long endnote (note 5) to the published version of this lecture. But I invite you to read that text. It seems to me one worthy of immortalizing its author, if indeed that remained to be done. Upon reflection, I decided to keep my promise, to accept the symbolic patronage of these lectures dedicated to the memory of my friends Paul de Man and Eugenio Donato, in order to demonstrate thereby on which side—their side—is situated not insolence but tolerance, the taste for reading and well-argued discussion, the refusal of arguments resting on authority and academic dogmatism. In short, to borrow Wellek's own words, the pursuit of "the very concepts of knowledge and truth" that he accuses us of destroying.

While the title of the series was not chosen by me, it nonetheless fell to me to choose one for these lectures. As of last summer, I had not yet found one. I discussed this with David Carroll and Suzanne Gearhart

in order to ask their advice. They appeared to approve emphatically, it seemed to me, the first possibility that occurred to me, which was to analyze the different modes in which I perceived, experienced, and interpreted what a work that has since been published has called "Deconstruction in America."⁶ This is the locus of a debate which is all the rage, as you know, at least in some academic circles. And, as you can imagine, the subject is of some interest to me. It is one worth taking up dispassionately, and should be approached from every analytical avenue possible, drawing on any available clue. Why did I then abandon the subject? For at least three or four reasons, but I will here indicate only their general nature.

In the first place, the clues are too numerous. I am not relating their excess to the limits imposed by three lectures of one hour apiece, but rather to the essential and thus uncontrollable overdetermination of the phenomenon. What is called or calls itself "deconstruction" also contains, lodged in some moment of its process, an auto-interpretive figure which will always be difficult to subsume under a meta-discourse or general narrative. And deconstruction can impose its necessity, if at all, only to the extent that, according to a law that can be verified in many analogous situations, it accumulates within itself those very forces that try to repress it. But it accumulates these forces without being able to totalize them, like those surplus values from which a victim of aggression always profits; for here totalization is exactly what an account, a story, and a narrative are denied. We recognize here one of the themes—which is also a gesture—of deconstructive discourse. How could a narrative account for a phenomenon in progress? This particular phenomenon

also proceeds like a set of narratives which could have no closure, and which would be exceedingly difficult to situate. Geopolitics does not suffice. Can we speak of "deconstruction in America"? Does it take place in the United States? First in Europe, and then in America—as some too quickly conclude, thereby raising the questions (which are themselves not without interest) of reception, translation, appropriation, etc? Do we know first of all what deconstruction represents in Europe? We cannot know without drawing out all the threads of a knot where we see tangled with each other the history of philosophies, the histories of "Philosophy," of literatures, of sciences, of technologies, of cultural and university institutions, and of socio-political history and the structure of a multitude of linguistic or so-called personal idioms. These entanglements are multiple; they meet nowhere, neither in a point nor in a memory. There is no singular memory. Furthermore, contrary to what is so often thought, deconstruction is not exported from Europe to the United States. Deconstruction has several original configurations in this country, which in turn—and there are many signs of this—produce singular effects in Europe and elsewhere in the world. We would have to examine here the power of this American radiation in all its dimensions (political, technological, economic, linguistic, editorial, academic, etc.). As Umberto Eco noted in an interview in the newspaper *Libération* (August 20–21, 1983), deconstruction in Europe is a sort of hybrid growth and is generally perceived as an American label for certain theorems, a discourse, or a school. And this can be verified, especially in England, Germany, and Italy. But is there a proper place, is there a proper story for this thing? I think it consists only of transference, and of a thinking

through of transference, in all the senses that this word acquires in more than one language, and first of all that of the transference between languages. If I had to risk a single definition of deconstruction, one as brief, elliptical, and economical as a password, I would say simply and without overstatement: *plus d'une langue*—both more than a language and no more of a language. In fact it is neither a statement nor a sentence. It is sententious, it makes no sense if, at least as Austin would have it, words in isolation have no meaning. What makes sense is the sentence. How many sentences can be made with "deconstruction"?

Deconstructive discourses have sufficiently questioned, among other things, the classical assurances of history, the genealogical narrative, and periodizations of all sorts, and we can no longer ingenuously propose a tableau or a history of deconstruction. Similarly, no matter what their interest or their necessity may be today, the social sciences (notably those dealing with cultural or scientific and academic institutions) cannot, as such, claim to "objectify" a movement which, essentially, questions the philosophical, scientific, and institutional axiomatics of those same social sciences. Even if, for the sake of convenience, we wanted to take an Instamatic photo of deconstruction in America, we would have to simultaneously capture all of its aspects. Its *political* aspects (they appear more and more clearly, both in the world and in political discourse itself, or at the frontier between the political, the economic, and the academic. This frontier is original to the United States; to envision the stakes involved, one need only read what is said about deconstruction in the *Wall Street Journal*, the *New Yorker*, or the *New York Review of Books*); its *ethical* aspects (it is in the name of morality and

against the corruption of academic mores that the most venomous—and sometimes also the most obscurantist—discourses are directed against deconstruction; which does not exclude the faith, the rigorous ethical sense, and even what we might call the Puritan integrity of certain partisans of deconstruction); its *religious* aspects (I think it is impossible to understand American forms of deconstruction without taking into account the various religious traditions, their discourses, their institutional effects, and above all their academic effects; while opposition to deconstruction is often made in the name of religion, we see at the same time the development of a powerful, original, and already quite diversified movement that calls itself “deconstructive theology”⁷; its *technological* aspects (without taking into account the obvious fact that deconstruction is inseparable from a general questioning of *tekhné* and technicist reasoning, that deconstruction is nothing without this interrogation, and that it is anything *but* a set of technical and systematic procedures, certain impatient Marxists nevertheless accuse deconstruction of deriving its “power” from the “technicality of its procedure”⁸); and its *academic* aspects (in the sense of “professionalization”—it is not by chance that deconstruction has accompanied a critical transformation in the conditions of entry into the academic professions from the 1960s to the 1980s—and also in the sense of the “division of labor” between departments, a division whose classic architecture has also been put into question; for deconstruction is also, and increasingly so, a discourse and a practice *on the subject of* the academic institution, professionalization, and departmental structures that can no longer contain it. And when professional philosophers feign concern over the progress of deconstruc-

tion in literature departments, even to the point of indicting the philosophical naïveté of the poor literary scholar, you can easily conclude—and immediately verify—that what makes Searle and Danto and others so nervous is what is happening all around them, to *their* colleagues, assistants, or students *in philosophy departments*). For the other aspects, I will simply say “etc.”: the schema remains the same.

The second reason why I decided not to talk about “deconstruction in America,” disregarding the advice of Suzanne Gearhart and David Carroll, is that one cannot and should not attempt to survey or totalize the meaning of an ongoing process, especially when its structure is one of transference. To do so would be to assign it limits which are not its own; to weaken it, to date it, to slow it down. For the moment, I do not care to do this. To make “deconstruction in America” a theme or the object of an exhaustive definition is precisely, by definition, what defines the enemy of deconstruction—someone who (at the very least out of ambivalence) would like to wear deconstruction out, exhaust it, turn the page. You can well understand that in this matter I am not the one in the greatest hurry.

The third reason: I will only state its form. As I will say tomorrow about memory and the word “*mémoire*”—and for exactly the *same reasons*—there is no sense in speaking of a deconstruction or *simply* deconstruction as if there were only one, as if the word had a (single) meaning outside of the sentences which inscribe it and carry it within themselves.

The fourth reason is that of a singular circle, one which is “logical” or “vicious” in appearance only. In order to speak of “deconstruction in America,” one would have to claim to know what one is talking about.

and first of all what is meant or defined by the word "America." Just what is America in this context? Were I not so frequently associated with this adventure of deconstruction, I would risk, with a smile, the following hypothesis: America *is* deconstruction (l'Amérique, mais *c'est* la deconstruction). *In this hypothesis*, America would be the proper name of deconstruction in progress, its family name, its toponymy, its language and its place, its principal residence. And how could we define the United States *today* without integrating the following into the description: It is that historical space which today, in all its dimensions and through all its power plays, reveals itself as being undeniably the most sensitive, receptive, or responsive space of all to the themes and effects of deconstruction. Since such a space represents and stages, in this respect, the greatest concentration *in the world*, one could not define it without at least including this symptom (if we can even speak of symptoms) in its definition. In the war that rages over the subject of deconstruction, there is no front; there are no fronts. But if there were, they would all pass through the United States. They would define the lot, and, in truth, the partition of America. But we have learned from "Deconstruction" to suspend these always hasty attributions of proper names. My *hypothesis* must thus be abandoned. No, "deconstruction" is not a proper name, nor is America the proper name of deconstruction. Let us say instead: deconstruction and America are two open sets which intersect partially according to an allegorico-metonymic figure. In this fiction of truth, "America" would be the title of a new novel on the history of deconstruction and the deconstruction of history.

This is why I have decided not to talk to you

about "deconstruction in America." As of December, I still did not have a title for these three lectures.

After the death of Paul de Man on December 21, a necessity became clear to me: I would never manage to prepare these lectures, I would have neither the strength nor the desire to do so, unless they left or gave the last word to my friend. Or at least, since that had become literally impossible, to friendship, to the unique and incomparable friendship that ours was for me, thanks to him. I could only speak *in memory of him*.

In memory of him: these words cloud sight and thought. What is said, what is done, what is desired through these words: *in memory of . . . ?*

I will speak of the future, of what is bequeathed and promised to us by the work of Paul de Man. And, as you shall see, this future is not foreign to *his* memory; it keeps to what he said, thought, and affirmed *on the subject of* memory. Yes: affirmed. And I see this affirmation of memory, without which the friendship of which I am speaking would never have taken place, in the form of a ring or an *alliance*. This alliance is much more ancient, resistant, and secret than all those strategic or familial manifestations of alliance that it must actually make possible and to which it is never reduced. In the said context of "deconstruction in America," there have certainly been several apparently strategical alliances between Paul de Man and some of his friends. To analyze these would be interesting, necessary, and difficult, but such an analysis could not be only a socioinstitutional one. And we would understand nothing about what *comes to pass and takes place* if we did not account for this affirmation which comes to seal an alliance. An alliance which is not secret because it would be protected behind some clandestine, occult "cause" in want

of power, but because the "yes," which is a non-active act, which states or describes nothing, which in itself neither manifests nor defines any content, this *yes* only commits, before and beyond everything else. And to do so, it must repeat itself to itself: *yes, yes*. It must preserve memory; it must commit itself to keeping its own memory; it must promise itself to itself; it must bind itself to memory for memory, if anything is ever to come from the future. This is the law, and this is what the performative category, in its current state, can merely approach, at the moment when "yes" is said, and "yes" to that "yes."

It is this affirmation from Paul de Man that I would attempt calling or recalling—recalling to myself—with you today. What binds it to memory, to a thinking through of thinking memory, is also the measure and chance of his future.

Such an affirmation is not foreign to that which, as I have so often repeated, resides at the heart of deconstruction. In speaking to you today of Paul de Man, in speaking in memory of Paul de Man, I will therefore not be entirely silent on the question of "deconstruction in America." What would it have been without him? Nothing; or something entirely different—this is too evident for me to insist on. But just as, under the name or in the name of Paul de Man, we cannot say *everything* about deconstruction (even in America), so I cannot, in such a short time and under the single title of memory, master or exhaust the immense work of Paul de Man. Let us call it allegory or double metonymy, this modest journey that I will undertake for a few hours with you.

It is a modest journey, but one that is magnetized by the alliance between memory and the seal of the "yes, yes," as well as by Paul de Man's signature. Or at

least by certain traits of such a paraph. The paraph is only a schematic and marginal countersignature, a fragment of signature; indeed, who can claim to decipher a whole signature? Re-reading this "yes" in memory of itself, I especially wish to denounce the sinister ineptitude of an accusation—that of "nihilism"—which so many major professors, following the example of minor journalists, have often made against Paul de Man and his friends. Underlying and beyond the most rigorous, critical, and relentless irony, within that "*Ironie der Ironie*" evoked by Schlegel, whom he would often quote, Paul de Man was a thinker of affirmation. By that I mean—and this will not become clear immediately, or perhaps ever—that he existed himself in memory of an affirmation and of a vow: *yes, yes*.

What does this mean? What do we mean by "in memory of" or, as we also say, "to the memory of"? For example, we reaffirm our fidelity to the departed friend by acting in a certain manner *in memory of* him, or by dedicating a speech *to his memory*. Each time, we know our friend to be gone forever, irremediably absent, annulled to the point of knowing or receiving nothing himself of what takes place in his memory. In this terrifying lucidity, in the light of this incinerating blaze where nothingness appears, we remain in *disbelief* itself. For never will we believe either in death or immortality; and we sustain the blaze of this terrible light through devotion, for it would be unfaithful to delude oneself into believing that the other living *in us* is living *in himself*: because he lives *in us* and because we live this or that in his memory, in memory of him.

This being "in us," the being "in us" of the other, in bereaved memory, can be neither the so-called resurrection of the other *himself* (the other is dead and noth-

ing can save him from this death, nor can anyone save us from it), nor the simple inclusion of a narcissistic fantasy in a subjectivity that is closed upon itself or even identical to itself. If it were indeed a question of narcissism, its structure would remain too complex to allow the other, dead or living, to be reduced to this same structure. Already installed in the narcissistic structure, the other so marks the self of the relationship to self, so conditions it that the being "in us" of bereaved memory becomes the *coming* of the other, a coming of the other. And even, however terrifying this thought may be, the first coming of the other.

Let us not again take up the discussion of mourning or the so-called work of mourning. We have all spoken, written, and argued a great deal about it, especially in these last few years. It will not surprise you when I say that all I have recently read and reread by Paul de Man seems to be traversed by an insistent reflection on mourning, a meditation in which bereaved memory is deeply engraved. Funerary speech and writing do not follow upon death; they work upon life in what we call autobiography. And this takes place between fiction and truth, *Dichtung und Wahrheit*. In "Autobiography as Defacement" (*MLN*, 1979, reprinted in *The Rhetoric of Romanticism*, p. 67), a discussion takes place on the undecidable distinction between fiction and autobiography. But of course this undecidability itself remains untenable:

... the distinction between fiction and autobiography is not an either/or polarity but ... it is undecidable. But is it possible to remain, as Genette would have it, *within* an undecidable situation? As anyone who has ever been caught in a revolving door can testify, it is certainly most uncomfortable, and all the more so in this case since this whirligig [the

"*tourniquet*" that Genette speaks of in relation to fiction and autobiography in Proust] is capable of infinite acceleration and is, in fact, not successive but simultaneous. A system based on two elements that, in Wordsworth's phrase, "of these [are] neither, and [are] both at once" is not likely to be sound. (p. 70)

Why this long quotation? Specifically, in order to announce that motif of infinite acceleration which, as we shall see, by gathering memory into a moment, by contracting the times of the "yes" into the point of an affirmation that wants to be indivisible, at times confuses two figures that Paul de Man judges at once inseparable and irreducible: *irony* and *allegory*. In this particular text, the problem of autobiography *seems* to elicit several concerns: that of *genre*, of *totalization*, and of the *performative* function. And these three concerns are linked to a certain relationship to memory or to memoirs. First concern, *genre*: "By making autobiography into a genre, one elevates it above the literary status of mere reportage, chronicle, or memoirs [my emphasis—J.D.] and gives it a place, albeit a modest one, among the canonical hierarchies of the major literary genres" (p. 67). After which it will be demonstrated that autobiography is neither a genre nor a mode, but "a figure of reading . . . that occurs in all texts" since a "specular structure" is always "interiorized" there. Second concern, *totalization*: far from assuring any identification with the self or any gathering around the self, this specular structure reveals a tropological dislocation that precludes any anamnestic totalization of self:

The specular moment that is part of all understanding reveals the tropological structure that underlies all cognitions, including knowledge of self. The interest of autobiography, then, is not that it reveals reliable self-knowledge—it does

not—but that it demonstrates in a striking way the impossibility of closure and of totalization (that is, the impossibility of coming into being) of all textual systems made up of tropological substitutions. (p. 71)

And, finally, the *performative* function: as soon as the gathering of Being and totalizing memory are impossible, we recognize the fatality of this tropological dislocation, which is another turn of memory, another twist of memory. And this fatality is the law, or let us say instead, the law of the law: the moment when the authority of the law comes to take turns with, as if it were its own supplement, the impossible gathering of Being. In terms of speech acts, the law takes the form of the performative, be it pure or impure. Whatever we may conclude on this subject, this is the reason that I began by situating a *différend* between Paul de Man and Heidegger concerning Hölderlin, Being, and the law. We have here a continuous trait that runs through all the mutations of the de Manian text, from 1955 to 1979, and, as we shall see, up to 1983. "Autobiography as Defacement" reveals—notably through a critical analysis of Philippe Lejeune's book—the necessity of a passage from ontological identity and knowledge to resolution, action, and promise; to legal authority and the performative function. But it also demonstrates the inevitable temptation to reinscribe the tropology of the subject in a specular mode of knowledge which displaces, without surmounting, another specularly:

For just as autobiographies, by their thematic insistence on the subject, on the proper name, on *memory*, on birth, eros, and death, and on the doubleness of specularly, openly declare their cognitive and tropological constitution, they are equally eager to escape from the coercions of this system. Writers of autobiographies as well as writers on autobio-

ographies are obsessed by the need to move from cognition to resolution and to action, from speculative to political and legal authority. Philippe Lejeune, for example . . . stubbornly insists . . . that the identity of autobiography is not representational and cognitive but contractual, grounded not in tropes but in speech acts. . . . The fact that Lejeune uses "proper name" and "signature" interchangeably signals both the confusion and the complexity of the problem. For just as it is impossible for him to stay within the tropological system of the name and just as he has to move from ontological identity to contractual promise, as soon as the performative function is asserted, it is at once reinscribed within cognitive constraints. (p. 71; my emphasis on *memory*—J.D.)

The rest of the argument, which I cannot trace here, reveals several types of specular pairs as well as the fatal necessity of "reentering a system of tropes at the very moment we claim to escape from it." I said a moment ago that this problem of memoirs or of the autobiographical memory was *apparently* informed by the three concerns of genre, totalization, and performative language. Beyond this preliminary appearance, what is precisely at stake is a tropology of memory in autobiographical discourse as epitaph, as the signature of its own epitaph—if something of this sort were possible other than through a figure, trope, or fiction. What figure? What fiction? What trope? *Prosopopeia*. The "autobiographical text" that de Man judges here as "exemplary" is Wordsworth's *Essays on Epitaphs*, which, from a discourse *on the subject of epitaphs*, comes to be *itself* an epitaph, "and more specifically, the author's own monumental inscription or autobiography." I prefer to let you read or reread these pages by Paul de Man on your own. They are magnificent, and are illumined by the dark light of the sun, ironically accomplishing in

their turn what they pretend to attribute simply, and precisely, to Wordsworth. They become in their turn, by doing what they tell of and by telling what they do, Paul de Man's epitaph, the prosopopeia that he addresses to us from an incineration all the more sublime for having no tomb—emblazoned spirit, glorious beyond the tomb and its sepulchral inscriptions. Here is the figure, the visage, the face and the *de-facement*, the effacement of the visible figure in prosopopeia: the sovereign, secret, discrete, and ideal signature—and the most giving, the one which *knows how to efface itself*. The whole scene is oriented toward this conclusion: "The dominant figure of the epitaphic or autobiographical discourse is, as we saw, the prosopopeia, the fiction of the voice-from-beyond-the-grave; an unlettered stone would leave the sun suspended in nothingness" (p. 77). This fiction of voice, this "fictional voice," Paul de Man will later say, takes the form of an *address*. From his demonstration, I only quote this sort of theorem of prosopopeia, which, figuratively addressed to us, looks at us, describes and prescribes to us, dictates to us in advance, with the voice and under the initialed signature of Paul de Man, what we are doing here and now: to be sure, making a prosopopeia, sacrificing to fiction—and what he reminds us of is that prosopopeia remains a fictive voice, although I believe that this voice already haunts any said real or present voice. But we are sacrificing to fiction through love for him, and in his name, in his naked name, in memory of him. In the movement of this trope, we turn toward him, we address ourselves to him, who addresses himself to us. And love's movement counts no less than its having arrived at its destination, at the right address:

... the epitaph, says Wordsworth, "is open to the day; the sun looks down upon the stone, and the rains of heaven beat against it." The sun becomes the eye that reads the text [here again, *en abîme*, is an example of what Paul de Man calls the "allegory of reading"; this allegory seems to me to hold all the privilege (which is itself allegorico-metonymic) of the sun, and, as Ponge would say, of the sun placed *en abîme*] of the epitaph. And the essay tells us what this text consists of, by way of a quotation from Milton that deals with Shakespeare: "What need'st thou such weak witness of thy name?" In the case of poets such as Shakespeare, Milton or Wordsworth himself, the epitaph can consist only of what he calls "the naked name" (p. 133), as it is read by the eye of the sun. At this point, it can be said of "the language of the senseless stone" that it acquires a "voice," the *speaking* stone counterbalancing the *seeing* sun. The system passes from sun to eye to language as name and as voice. We can identify the figure that completes the central metaphor of the sun and thus completes the tropological spectrum that the sun engenders: it is the figure of prosopopeia, the fiction of an apostrophe to an absent, deceased or voiceless entity, which posits the possibility of the latter's reply, and confers upon it the power of speech. Voice assumes mouth, eye, and finally face, a chain that is manifest in the etymology of the trope's name, *prosopon poiein*, to confer a mask or a face (*prosopon*). Prosopopeia is the trope of autobiography, by which one's name, as in Milton's poem, is made as intelligible and *memorable* [my emphasis—J.D.] as a face. Our topic deals with the giving and taking away of faces, with face and deface, *figure*, figuration and disfiguration. (pp. 75–76)

"Central metaphor," "tropological spectrum": the figure of prosopopeia looks back and keeps in memory, we could say, clarifies and recalls in Paul de Man's last texts, everything that he signed, from "The Rhetoric of Temporality" to *Allegories of Reading*. As if the scene of

the epitaph and of prosopopeia had imposed itself upon him in the last years of his life. But he demonstrates to us that this is a scene from which poetic discourse cannot escape. The prosopopeia of prosopopeia that I have just recalled dates from 1979. In 1981, in "Hypogram and Inscription, Michael Riffaterre's Poetics of Reading" (*Diacritics*, Winter, 1981), prosopopeia becomes "the master trope of poetic discourse" (p. 33), "the very figure of the reader and of reading." This admirable argument gives us much to think about concerning the hypographic signature and what we call "hallucination" ["prosopopeia is hallucinatory" (p. 34)]; it also situates the abyss of a "prosopopeia of prosopopeia" (p. 34).

Is it possible, when one is in memory of the other, in bereaved memory of a friend, is it desirable to think of and to pass beyond this hallucination, beyond a prosopopeia of prosopopeia? If death exists, that is to say, if it happens and happens only once, to the other and to oneself, it is the moment when there is no longer any choice—could we even think of any other—except that between memory and hallucination. If death comes to the other, and comes to us through the other, then the friend no longer exists except *in us, between us*. In himself, by himself, of himself, he is no more, nothing more. He lives only in us. But *we* are never *ourselves*, and between us, identical to us, a "self" is never in itself or identical to itself. This specular reflection never closes on itself; it does not appear *before* this *possibility* of mourning, before and outside this structure of allegory and prosopopeia which constitutes in advance all "being-in-us," "in-me," between us, or between ourselves. The *selbst*, the *soi-même*, the self appears to itself only in this bereaved allegory, in this hallucinatory prosopopeia—and even before the death of the other

actually happens, as we say, in "reality." The strange situation I am describing here, for example that of my friendship with Paul de Man, would have allowed me to say all of this *before* his death. It suffices that I know him to be mortal, that he knows me to be mortal—there is no friendship without this knowledge of finitude. And everything that we inscribe in the living present of our relation to others already carries, always, the signature of *memoirs-from-beyond-the-grave*. But this finitude, which is also that of memory, does not at first take the form of a *limit*, of a limited ability, aptitude, or faculty, of a circumscribed power. Nor does it assume the form of a limit which would move us to multiply testamentary signs, traces, hypograms, *hypomnemata*, signatures and epigraphs, or autobiographical "memoirs." No, this finitude can only take that form through the trace of the other in us, the other's irreducible precedence; in other words, simply the trace, which is always the trace of the other, the finitude of memory, and thus the approach or remembrance of the future. If there is a finitude of memory, it is because there is something of the other, and of memory as a memory of the other, which comes from the other and comes back to the other. It defies any totalization, and directs us to a scene of allegory, to a fiction of prosopopeia, that is, to tropologies of mourning: to the memory of mourning and to the mourning for memory. This is why there can be no *true mourning*, even if truth and lucidity always presuppose it, and, in truth, take place only as the truth of mourning. The truth of the mourning of the other, but of the other who always speaks in me before me, who signs in my place, the hypogram or epitaph being always of the other, and for the other. Which also means: in the place of the other.

It is perhaps for this reason, because there is no

"true" mourning, that Paul de Man puts quotation marks around the word "mourning" when he speaks of "true 'mourning.'" It is "mourning" that he places in quotation marks, not "true." But he does this in a text ("Anthropomorphism and Trope in the Lyric," also reprinted in *The Rhetoric of Romanticism*, p. 239) which begins with a quotation from Nietzsche: "Was ist also Wahrheit? Ein beweglicher Heer von Metaphern, Metonymien, Anthropomorphismen." ("What is truth then? A mobile army of metaphors, metonymies, and anthropomorphisms.") The "truth" of "true 'mourning'" is also part of the procession; it follows or precedes the theory of figures, and this rhetoricity is in no way a part of a consoling simulacrum. I would even say that in this procession mourning takes on the full gravity of its meaning: it is born from it; it endures and remains in sufferance there. Here are the last lines of the essay which opened with the quotation from Nietzsche; they conclude a very rich comparative analysis of Baudelaire's poems "Obsession" and "Correspondances":

Generic terms such as lyric (or its various sub-species, ode, idyll or elegy) as well as pseudo-historical period terms such as romanticism or classicism are always terms of *resistance* and nostalgia, at the furthest remove from the *materiality of actual history*. If mourning is called a "chambre d'éternel deuil où vibrent de vieux râles" [a chamber of eternal mourning vibrating with old death rattles—"Obsession"], then this pathos of terror states in fact the desired consciousness of eternity and of temporal harmony as voice and as song. True "mourning" is less deluded. The most it can do is to allow for non-comprehension and enumerate non-anthropomorphic, non-elegiac, non-celebratory, non-lyrical, non-poetic, that is to say prosaic, or, better, *historical* modes of language power. (p. 262)

I underlined in passing the words "resistance"

and "materiality of actual history." De Manian criticism or deconstruction is always, also, an analysis of "resistances" and of the symptoms they produce (for example, the "resistance to theory" in literary studies). As for history, that is another theme of these lectures, and I will return to it shortly.

What, then, is true "mourning"? Paul de Man does not say that it is possible in the traditional sense of truth; he does not say that it is truly possible or possible at present. True "mourning" seems to dictate only a tendency: the tendency to accept incomprehension, to leave a place for it, and to enumerate coldly, almost like death itself, those modes of language which, in short, deny the whole rhetoricity of the true (the non-anthropomorphic, the non-elegiac, the non-poetic, etc.). In doing so, they also deny, paradoxically, the *truth* of mourning, which consists of a certain rhetoricity—the allegorical memory which constitutes any trace as always being the trace of the other. I do not know if death teaches us anything at all, but this is what we are given to consider by the experience of mourning, which begins with the "first" trace, that is, "before" perception, on the eve of meaning, leaving no chance for any innocent desire for truth.

What, then, is *true mourning*? What can we make of it? Can we *make it*, as we say in French that we "make" our mourning? I repeat: "can we?" And the question is double: are we *capable* of doing it, do we have the *power* to do it? But also, do we have the *right*? Is it right to do so? Is it also the *duty* and movement of fidelity? We are back to the question of Being and the law, at the heart of memory. If this experience of memory, of the memorial, of the memorandum, and of memoirs encounters mourning, who could think that this would be accidental? This experience is mournful

in its very essence; it gathers itself together, it assembles itself to contract alliance with itself, only in the impossible affirmation of mourning. But this impossible affirmation must be possible: this singular affirmative affirmation *must* affirm the impossible, without which it is only a report, a technics, a recording. The impossible here is the other, such as he comes to us: as a mortal, to us mortals. And whom we love as such, affirming this to be good.

Earlier we asked the question: what do we mean by "in us" when, speaking at the death of a friend, we declare that from now on everything will be situated, preserved, or maintained in us, only "in us," and no longer on the other side, where there is nothing more. All that we say of the friend, then, and even what we say *to him*, to call or recall him, to suffer for him with him—all that remains hopelessly *in us* or *between us* the living, without ever crossing the mirror of a certain speculation. Others would speak too quickly of a totally interior speculation and of "narcissism." But the narcissistic structure is too paradoxical and too cunning to provide us with the final word. It is a speculation whose ruses, mimes, and strategies can only succeed in supposing the other—and thus in relinquishing in advance any *autonomy*. On the question of Narcissus and the aforementioned narcissism, it will one day be necessary to read (and I am sure that someone will) those infinitely complicated texts on narcissism; namely, Freud's "On Narcissism: An Introduction," together with all the numerous and inexhaustible texts in which Paul de Man puts Narcissus back in play. And if they both were to say that Narcissus is an allegory, this should not be taken as a scholarly banality.

Everything remains "in me" or "in us," "between us," upon the death of the other. Everything is entrusted

to me; everything is bequeathed or given *to us*, and first of all *to* what I call memory—to *the memory*, the place of this strange dative. All we seem to have left is memory, since nothing appears able to come to us any longer, nothing is coming or to come, from the other to the present. This is probably true, but is this truth true, or true enough? The preceding sentences seem to suppose a certain clarity in respect to what we mean by "in me," "in us," "death of the other," "memory," "present," "to come," and so on. But still more light (*plus de lumière*) is needed. The "me" or the "us" of which we speak then arise and are delimited in the way that they are only through this experience of the other, and of the other as other who can die, leaving in me or in us this memory of the other. This terrible solitude which is mine or ours at the death of the other is what constitutes that relationship to self which we call "me," "us," "between us," "subjectivity," "intersubjectivity," "memory." The *possibility* of death "happens," so to speak, "before" these different instances, and makes them possible. Or, more precisely, the possibility of the death of the other *as* mine or ours in-forms any relation to the other and the finitude of memory.

We weep *precisely* over what happens to us when everything is entrusted to the sole memory that is "in me" or "in us." But we must also recall, in another turn of memory, that the "within me" and the "within us" *do not* arise or appear *before* this terrible experience. Or at least not before its possibility, actually felt and inscribed in us, signed. The "within me" and the "within us" acquire their sense and their bearing only by carrying within themselves the death and the memory of the other; of an other who is greater than them, greater than what they or we can bear, carry, or comprehend, since we then lament being no more than "memory."

"in memory." Which is another way of remaining inconsolable before the finitude of memory. We know, we knew, *we remember*—before the death of the loved one—that being-in-me or being-in-us is constituted out of the possibility of mourning. We are only ourselves from the perspective of this knowledge that is older than ourselves; and this is why I say that we begin by *recalling* this to ourselves: we come to ourselves through this memory of *possible* mourning.

In other words, this is precisely the allegory, this memory of impossible mourning. Paul de Man would perhaps say: of the *unreadability* of mourning. The possibility of the impossible commands here the whole rhetoric of mourning, and describes the essence of memory. Upon the death of the other we are given to memory, and thus to interiorization, since the other, outside us, is now nothing. And with the dark light of this nothing, we learn that the other resists the closure of our interiorizing memory. With the nothing of this irrevocable absence, the other appears *as* other, and as other for us, upon his death or at least in the anticipated possibility of a death, since death constitutes and makes manifest the limits of a *me* or an *us* who are obliged to harbor something that is greater and other than them; something *outside of them within them*. Memory and interiorization: since Freud, this is how the "normal" "work of mourning" is often described. It entails a movement in which an interiorizing idealization takes in itself or upon itself the body and voice of the other, the other's visage and person, ideally *and* quasi-literally devouring them. This mimetic interiorization is not fictive; it is the origin of fiction, of apocryphal figuration. It takes place in a body. Or rather, it makes a place for a body, a voice, and a soul which, although "ours," did

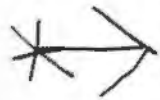
not exist and had no meaning *before* this possibility that one *must* always begin by remembering, and whose trace must be followed. *Il faut, one must*: it is the law, that law of the (necessary) relation of Being to law. We can only live this experience in the form of an aporia: the aporia of mourning and of prosopopeia, where the possible remains impossible. Where *success fails*. And where faithful interiorization bears the other and constitutes him in me (in us), at once living and dead. It makes the other a *part* of us, between us—and then the other no longer quite seems to be the other, because we grieve for him and bear him *in us*, like an unborn child, like a future. And inversely, the *failure succeeds*: an aborted interiorization is at the same time a respect for the other as other, a sort of tender rejection, a movement of renunciation which leaves the other alone, outside, over there, in his death, outside of us.

Can we accept this schema? I do not think so, even though it is *in part* a hard and undeniable necessity, the very one that makes *true mourning* impossible.

The chance of a single idiom has it that memory and interiorization coincide in *Erinnerung*. In German it means remembrance, and Hegel notes its motif of subjectivizing interiorization. In French, I would be tempted to propose a new usage of the word "*intimation*," whose artifice could signal, at once, the intimacy of an interiority and the open order or injunction (in French, we intimate an order, we give it: *il faut, one must*).

In the last few years, Paul de Man had worked, taught, and written on the subject of the opposition posited by Hegel's *Encyclopedia* between *Erinnerung* and *Gedächtnis*, between remembrance as interiorization and a thinking memory which can also be linked to

technical and mechanical hypomnesis. In an essay entitled "Sign and Symbol in Hegel's *Aesthetics*" (*Critical Inquiry*, Summer 1982), the analysis of this opposition (between *Erinnerung* and *Gedächtnis*) is articulated with that of the symbol and the sign, leading back in conclusion to the motif of allegory which was probably one of the most sustained in Paul de Man's thought. Both enigmatic and inescapable, this motif is like the unique and plural touchstone by which all readings and all literary and philosophical corpuses are measured. The allegory to which we are led again is, on the one hand, the Hegelian concept of allegory as it is presented in the lectures of the *Aesthetics*; on the other hand, it is also Hegelian philosophy *as allegory*, in the very special sense given to the term by Paul de Man: that of a sort of narrative (rather than historical) fable—or rather, that of a story which certain people know how to tell about something which, finally, is not historical. Taking this text as my point of departure, I will speak about this in my next lecture. For the moment I will say only that it is Hegelian allegory—that allegory which constitutes the grand final figure of philosophy and of the philosophy of history, that absolute memory and absolute knowledge—which will also be, in Paul de Man's paradox, the figure of every *disjunction* between philosophy and history, between literature and aesthetics, and between literary experience and literary theory. This conclusion may seem surprising as a conclusion, deprived as it is at present of its demonstration; but it also concerns the resistance to literary theory, a resistance which Paul de Man analyzes from the perspective of a politico-institutional concern to which we will return later: "No wonder that literary theory has such a bad name, all the more so since the emergence of thought and of theory is



not something that our thought [*Gedächtnis*, in contrast to interiorizing memory, *Erinnerung*] can hope to prevent or to control." These are the last words of that text.

An uncontrollable necessity, a *nonsubjectivizable* law of thought beyond interiorization, beyond the un-mourning thought of mourning: how can we accept that? And why should we affirm it? This can no longer even become a question.

When we say "in us" or "between us" to recall ourselves faithfully "to the memory of," of which memory are we speaking, *Gedächtnis* or *Erinnerung*? The movement of interiorization keeps within us the life, thought, body, voice, look or soul of the other, but in the form of those hypomnemata, memoranda, signs or symbols, images or mnesic representations which are only lacunary fragments, detached and dispersed—only "parts" of the departed other. In turn they are parts of us, included "in us" in a memory which suddenly seems greater and older than us, "greater," beyond any quantitative comparisons: sublimely greater *than* this other that the memory harbors and guards within it, but also greater *with* this other, greater than itself, inadequate to itself, pregnant with this other. And the figure of this bereaved memory becomes a sort of (possible and impossible) metonymy, where the part stands for the whole and for *more than* the whole that it exceeds. An allegorical metonymy, too, which says something other than what it says and manifests the other (*allos*) in the open but nocturnal space of the *agora*—in its *plus de lumière*: at once no more light, and greater light. It speaks the other and makes the other speak, but it does so in order to let the other speak, for the other will have spoken first. It has no choice but to let the other speak, since it cannot make the other speak with-

out the other having *already* spoken, without this *trace* of speech which comes from the other and which directs us to writing as much as to rhetoric. This trace results in speech always saying something other than what it says: it says the other who speaks "before" and "outside" it; it lets the other speak in the allegory. Whence the structure of the "rhetoric of temporality." But what defies the simple and "objective" logic of sets, what disrupts the simple inclusion of a part within the whole, is what recalls itself beyond interiorizing memory (*Erinnerung*), is what recalls itself to thought (*Gedächtnis*) and *thinks itself* as a "part" which is greater than the "whole." It is the other as other, the non-totalizable trace which is in-adequate to itself and to the same. This trace is interiorized *in* mourning as that which can no longer be interiorized, as impossible *Erinnerung*, in and beyond mournful memory—constituting it, traversing it, exceeding it, defying all reappropriation, even in a coded rhetoric or conventional system of tropes, in the *exercises* of prosopopeia, allegory, or elegiac and grieving metonymy. But this exercise lies in wait for, and technique always feeds off of, the true Mnemosyne, mother of all muses and living source of inspirations. Mnemosyne can also become a poetic topos.

We *think* this. To this thought there belongs the gesture of faithful friendship, its immeasurable grief, but also its life: the sublimity of a mourning without sublimation and without the obsessive triumph of which Freud speaks. Or still again, "funeral monumentality without "paranoid fear."⁹

In the strict and almost institutional domain of rhetoric, all figures, modes, or types—be they classifiable or unclassifiable—receive their (unclassifiable) pos-

sibility from these paradoxical structures: first, the inclusion in a set of a part that is greater than the set; second, a logic or an a-logic of which we can no longer say that it belongs to mourning in the current sense of the term, but which regulates (sometimes like mourning in the strict sense, but always like mourning in the sense of a general possibility) all our relations with the other *as other*, that is, as mortal for a mortal, with the one always capable of dying before the other. Our "own" mortality is not dissociated from, but rather also conditions this rhetoric of faithful memory, all of which serves to seal an alliance and to recall us to an affirmation of the other. The death of the other, if we can say this, is also situated on our side at the very moment when it comes to us from an altogether other side. Its *Erinnerung* becomes as inevitable as it is unliveable: it finds there its origin and its limit, its conditions of possibility and impossibility. In another context, I have called this Psyche: Psyche, the proper name of an allegory; Psyche, the common name for the soul; and Psyche, in French, the name of a revolving mirror. Today it is no longer Psyche, but apparently Mnemosyne. In truth, tomorrow, and the day after tomorrow, the "naked name" will be Paul de Man. This is what we shall call to, and toward which we shall again turn our thoughts.

Notes

1. *Blindness and Insight: Essays in the Rhetoric of Contemporary Criticism* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1983), p. 92.

2. I will also cite Gustave Roud's translation, which appears in the Pleiade edition of Hölderlin's work:

Un signe, tels nous sommes, et de sens nul
Morts à toute souffrance, et nous avons presque
Perdu notre langage en pays étranger

...
Car les Maîtres du ciel n'ont point
Toute puissance. Oui, les mortels avant eux atteignent
Le bord du gouffre.

3. Published in *Diacritics* (Winter 1983), vol. 13 no. 4. This is one of three texts on the work of Paul de Man with which, without being able to do them each time, I will, so to speak, dialogue obliquely but constantly throughout these three lectures. The discussion undertaken in this essay by Suzanne Gearhart concerns in depth all of Paul de Man's published work and raises notably, with great rigor, the question of the continuity or discontinuity between *Blindness and Insight* and *Allegories of Reading*. This essay is also a discussion with Rodolphe Gasché, whose two texts, "Deconstruction as Criticism," *Glyph 6* and "Setzung and Übersetzung: Notes on Paul de Man," *Diacritics* (Winter 1981), constitute undoubtedly today, to my knowledge, the most ample and penetrating reading of the de Manian text. As Suzanne Gearhart rightly remarks, a kind of displacement is at work in Gasché's perspective from one text to the next, and it is not without relation to what Gasché, as opposed to Suzanne Gearhart, interprets as a displacement within Paul de Man's work itself, between his two great books.

I want first of all to give credit to the authors of these three essential texts that any reader of Paul de Man will henceforth have to confront—that are therefore essential for me, and I here want to express my gratitude to their authors. But I will have to, in the course of the brief itinerary of the three lectures, refrain from quoting them and from taking part, at least directly, in the *explication* (debate) that is developed in them. By *explication* I do not mean "explication de texte" but rather *Auseinandersetzung*, a word that must be added as the measure of the other to the series *Setzung* and *Übersetzung*. *Auseinandersetzung* is to explain oneself to the other in a debate, a discussion, or even a *polemos*. If I refrain here from explicitly and literally taking part in this *Auseinandersetzung*, it is for several reasons.

(1) The *Auseinandersetzung* is too rich, too complex, too overdetermined for me to do it justice in lectures lasting only several hours. But what I will attempt to say on the subject of the de Manian text could afterward, I hope, from another point of view and without further detour, find the place in this *Auseinandersetzung*.

(2) This *Auseinandersetzung* is not only a debate with Paul de Man, but also a critical *explication* between Suzanne Gearhart and Rodolphe Gasché. They have neither the means nor in truth the desire today to play referee of the count points—especially not here, for, given the subtlety and overdetermination of the texts in question and the rigor and exactingness of their authors,

would be foolish to believe that one could be right or determine who is right here, to believe that the "true" is on one side or the other.

(3) Finally, the thing, *Die Sache*, of this *Auseinandersetzung* is even more complicated for them and for me given the fact that I don't have the natural position of an observer here. I am, one could say, party to the *Auseinandersetzung* even before having opened my mouth today. Not only because Paul de Man, Rodolphe Gasché, and Suzanne Gearhart are my friends, but because what I have written is part of the litigation. Neither am I able nor do I wish to act today as if I were in the position of being able to open or close the dossier of this case. The only lesson I wish to give today is the following: listen to what they say, learn to read Paul de Man, Rodolphe Gasché, Suzanne Gearhart.

4. Cf., for example: "Allegory is sequential and narrative, yet the topic of its narration is not necessarily temporal at all," in "Pascal's Allegory of Persuasion," *Allegory and Representation*, ed. by Stephen Greenblatt (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1981), p. 1. The logic of this proposition supports his recurrent critique of all historicisms, all periodizations, all narratives of origin. He always treats them as figures of rhetoric, as fables or fictions. Allegories are narrative and narrations are allegorical.

5. *The New Criterion*, December 1983. This article takes on its full meaning within a specific conjuncture. It belongs to a series or to what we might call a campaign: certain professors invested with a great deal of prestige, and thus also with a great deal of academic power, launch a campaign against what seems to them to threaten the very foundation of this power—its discourse, its axiomatics, its procedures, its theoretical and territorial limits, etc. In the course of this campaign, they grasp at straws: they forget the elementary rules of reading and of philological integrity in whose name they claim to do battle. They think they can identify deconstruction as the common enemy. I recall what Paul de Man said on the subject of one of these maneuvers, that of Walter Jackson Bate, Kingsley Porter University Professor at Harvard, which appeared in "The Crisis in English Studies" (*Harvard Magazine*, Sept./Oct. 1982). Paul de Man said that Professor Bate "has this time confined his sources of information to *Newsweek* magazine. . . . What is left is a matter of law enforcement rather than critical debate. One must be feeling very threatened indeed to become so aggressively defensive" ("The Return to Philology," *Times Literary Supplement*, December 10, 1982). I had pointed out elsewhere an essay belonging to the same series: "The Shattered Humanities" (*Wall Street Journal*, December 31, 1982) by the Chairman of the National Endowment for the Humanities. I did this last year in a lecture delivered in April ("The University in the Eyes of its Pupils," *Diacritics*, Fall 1983). Since then, the series has not stopped growing, and there is still the same refusal or inability in respect to a first task, the most elementary of tasks: that of reading. And the panicked dogmatism becomes more and more insulting; humor becomes increasingly rare; pieces of evidence are concealed. Philosophical

arguments are made on the basis of remarks reportedly heard at cocktail parties (for example, those attributed to Michel Foucault by John Searle in a recent piece in *The New York Review of Books*, October 27, 1983); adversaries or their "disciples" are labeled "moonies," for example by Arthur Danto in a recent debate in *Times Literary Supplement* (September 30, 1983). All of this is not very important, but it must be taken seriously. A careful and meticulous analysis of all these symptoms, in the United States and elsewhere, teaches us much—and not only about what deconstruction can illuminate or displace with respect to academic culture and institutional politics. Recalling the attacks which converged against Paul de Man in recent years, I will simply refer here to the analyses that he made of them in "The Resistance to Theory," *French Studies*, no. 63 (1982), and in the introduction to "Hegel and the Sublime" in *Displacement*, M. Krupnick, ed. (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1983). He must certainly not have read that passage by Richard Wellek (to whom he introduced me some ten years ago, to whom we ran frequently, occasionally, and of whom we sometimes spoke, always in happy moments of shared good humor) where he is called a "gloomy" existentialist. Did Wellek read Paul de Man? Was he capable of it? It does not suffice, in order to know how to read, simply to own a library and to know how to talk. In saying this I am referring to what can be inferred about non-reading from another assertion by Wellek, according to which I supposedly advanced "the preposterous theory that writing precedes speaking, a claim refuted by every child and by the thousand spoken languages that have no written records." I quote this "child" argument not only because it demonstrates that the condemned texts have not even been opened, but because it feeds, directly or indirectly, all the articles whose convergence I noted above. Will Wellek have the honesty to admit his haste and superficiality? Bate had this honesty (to a certain degree, for his "auto-critique" still remains quite superficial and casual) when he admitted that "[his] short paragraph [!] on deconstruction was admittedly testy and unfairly dismissive. But I hasten to say that a close study of Culler's recent book helped to change my perspective and encouraged me to consider the subject with a less prejudiced mind. Accordingly, I wish I had omitted that paragraph." Fine: but the paragraph in question was indissociable from the whole of the argument, while this remark was published elsewhere, in a completely different type of journal, with other addressees, other effects, and another politico-academic scope. Like everything that is published in *Harvard Magazine*, *The New York Review of Books*, or *Times Literary Supplement*. Bate, who wishes to belong to those "minorities" who "have strong voices," expresses his remorse in the form of a letter to the editor of *Critical Inquiry* (December 1983), after the publication of an excellent article by Stanley Fish ("Profession Despise Thyself: Fear and Self-Loathing in *Literary Studies*"). Fish accuses Bate, among other things, of setting himself up as the supreme judge on the subject of texts which he obviously had never read or which he knew only through *Newsweek* (Again! One day an account

ing will have to be made of the role that these publications now play in an apparently academic debate).

6. Jonathan Arac, Wlad Godzich, Wallace Martin eds., *The Yale Critics: Deconstruction in America* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1983).

7. T. Althizer, M. Myers, C. Raschke, R. Scharleman, M. Taylor, C. Winquist, *Deconstruction and Theology* (New York: Continuum, 1982); Mark C. Taylor, *Deconstructing Theology* (New York: Crossroad, 1982); *Erring, A Postmodern A/Theology* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984); and a special issue of *Semeia* 23, Robert Detweiler, ed. *Derrida and Biblical Studies*, etc.

8. John Brenkman, "Deconstruction and the Social Text," *Social Text* (1979): 186-88. "Deconstruction . . . mirrors the effacement of ideology under the mantle of technical rationality which is the principal feature of ideology under late capitalism. . . . Deconstruction is the specular image of the society of the spectacle." Michael Sprinker, "The Ideology of Deconstruction: Totalization in the Work of Paul de Man," paper delivered at the MLA Convention (1980), Special Session on "Deconstruction as/of Politics," quoted in "Variations on Authority: Some Deconstructive Transformations of the New Criticism," Paul A. Bové, in *The Yale Critics: Deconstruction in America*, p. 3. All this is not false; it can become true here and there, and it concerns at any rate only certain ideological exploitations of deconstruction—exploitations which must be analyzed as such, in the context of what is calmly called here and elsewhere "late capitalism." It also comes to cover certain stereotyped formalizations of "late Marxism." Fortunately all marxisms are not reduced to this.

9. Paul de Man: "the uneasy combination of funereal monumentality with paranoid fear that characterizes the hermeneutics and the pedagogy of lyric poetry." "Anthropomorphism and Trope in the Lyric," *The Rhetoric of Romanticism* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1984), p. 259.

II.

THE ART OF
MEMOIRES

Translated by Jonathan Culler

Yesterday, you may remember, we made each other a promise. I now recall it, but you already sense all the trouble we will have in ordering all these presents: these past presents which consist of the present of a promise, whose opening toward the present to come is not that of an expectation or an anticipation but that of commitment.

We had promised each other—but in truth I was the only one to do so—to call a name: Paul de Man: a “naked name”: Paul de Man. In saying (here let me quote myself in French) “le ‘naked name,’ ce sera Paul de Man. C’est *lui* que nous appellerons, c’est vers *lui* que nous tournerons encore notre pensée,” I deliberately took advantage of a language: my own. In French, at least, one cannot determine whether we would be turning our thoughts toward Paul de Man or toward his name. Was this merely indecorous play with a grammatical ambiguity? Or perhaps a magical incantation, uttered without many illusions, but as if, having become as one with his name in my memory, the departed friend would respond to the just call of his name, as if the impossibility of distinguishing Paul de Man from the name “Paul de Man” conferred a power of resurrection on naming itself, or better still, on the apostrophe of the call recalling “the naked name,” as if any uttered name resuscitated resurrection: “Lazarus, arise!”—this is what the apostrophe to the naked name would say or stage.

But what Paul de Man tells us about address, apostrophe, and prosopopeia, about its “tropological spectrum,” forbids us to give in to magic here. We must nevertheless consider that which, in the structure or the power of the name, particularly the so-called proper name, awakens, calls for, attracts, or makes possible such magic: not only the desire but also the experience of hallucination.

What constrains us to think (without ever believing in it) a "true mourning" (if such there be) is the essence of the proper name. What in our sadness we call the life of Paul de Man is, in our memory, the moment when Paul de Man himself could answer to the name, Paul de Man, and answer in and for the name of Paul de Man. At the moment of death the proper name remains through it we can name, call, invoke, designate, but we know, we can *think* (and this thought cannot be reduced to mere memory, though it comes from a memory) that Paul de Man himself, the bearer of the name and the unique pole of all these acts, these references, will never again answer to it, never himself answer, never again except through what we mysteriously call our memory.

I said yesterday that if I have chosen to speak to you of "memories" in memory of Paul de Man, it is doubtless to remain awhile longer near my friend, to keep watch over, take in, slow down, or annul the separation. But I do so also because "memory" was for Paul de Man a place (a topos or theme, as you wish) of original, continuing reflection, yet still generally hidden, it seems to me, from his readers. And since I wished not to discuss the entire oeuvre of Paul de Man but to follow, modestly, a single thread in it, a thread which would intersect in a modest, limited way with the thread of "deconstruction in America," I thought that the thread of memory could orient us in Paul de Man's thought and guide us during our passage in this allegorical labyrinth. Unless Ariadne's thread is also the thread spun by the Fates. Naturally, as you realize, "memories" here is not the name of a simple topos or identifiable theme; it is perhaps the focus, with no sacrosanct identity, of an enigma that is all the more difficult to decipher since it conceals nothing behind the

appearance of a word but plays with the very structure of language and some remarkable surface effects.

"Memory" is first the name of something that I shall not define for the moment, singling out only this feature: it is the name of what for us (an "us" which I define only in this way) preserves an essential and necessary relation with the possibility of the name, and of what in the name assures preservation. Not preservation as what conserves or maintains the thing named: we have just seen on the contrary that death reveals the power of the name to the very extent that the name continues to name or to call what we call the bearer of the name, and who can no longer answer to or answer in and for his name. And since the possibility of this situation is revealed at death, we can infer that it does not wait for death, or that in it death does not wait for death. In calling or naming someone while he is alive, we know that his name can survive him and already survives him; the name begins during his life to get along without him, speaking and bearing his death each time it is pronounced in naming or calling, each time it is inscribed in a list, or a civil registry, or a signature. And if at my friend's death I retain only the memory and the name, the memory in the name, if something of the name flows back into pure memory because a certain function is defunct there, (defuncta,) and because the other is no longer there to answer, this defect or default reveals the structure of the name and its immense power as well: it is in advance "in memory of." We cannot separate the name of "memory" and "memory" of the name; we cannot separate the name and memory. And this is not at all for the simple reason that the word "memory" is itself a name, although that, as we shall see in a moment, is not without interest.

But when we say that the name is "in memory of," are we speaking of every name, be it a proper name or a common noun? And does the expression "in memory of" mean that the name is "in" our memory—supposedly a living capacity to recall images or signs from the past, etc.? Or that the name is in itself, out there somewhere, like a sign or symbol, a monument, epitaph, stele or tomb, a memorandum, aide-mémoire, a memento, an exterior auxiliary set up "in memory of"? Both, no doubt; and here lies the ambiguity of memory, the contamination which troubles us, troubles memory and the meaning of "memory": death reveals that the proper name could always lend itself to repetition in the absence of its bearer, becoming thus a singular common noun, as common as the pronoun "I," which effaces its singularity even as it designates it, which lets fall into the most common and generally available exteriority what nevertheless *means* the relation to itself of an interiority.

With this we enter into the reading of the essay of Paul de Man's that I only mentioned in yesterday's lecture, "Sign and Symbol in Hegel's *Aesthetics*" (1982). It figures among the last that he published. I will cite several lines, somewhat mechanically, for memory's sake, for your memory; then we will distance ourselves for the time of a detour and return to them later. Should quotation make me hesitate—frequent and extensive quotation? Ultimately, at the very extremity of the most ambiguous fidelity, a discourse "in memory of" or "to the memory of" might even wish only to quote, always supposing that one knows where a quotation begins and where to end it. Fidelity requires that one quote, in the desire to let the other speak; and fidelity requires that one not just quote, not restrict oneself to quoting. If

is with the law of this double law that we are here engaged, and this is also the double law of Mnemosyne—unless it is the common law of the double source, Mnemosyne/Lethe: source of memory, source of forgetting. They tell, and here is the enigma, that those consulting the oracle of Trophonios in Boetia found there two springs and were supposed to drink from each, from the spring of memory and from the spring of forgetting. And if *Lethe* also names the allegory of oblivion, of death or sleep, you will readily recognize in Mnemosyne, its other, a figure of truth, otherwise called *aletheia*.

I must, then, quote but also interrupt quotations:

1. The first of two quotations I chose because it identifies a certain relationship between memory and the name. Paul de Man had just recalled the opposition between *Gedächtnis* and *Erinnerung* in Hegel's *Encyclopedia*. *Gedächtnis* is both the memory that thinks (and moreover preserves in itself, literally, through the echo in its very name, the memory of *Denken*) and voluntary memory, specifically the mechanical faculty of memorization, while *Erinnerung* is interiorizing memory, "recollection as the inner gathering and preserving of experience" (p. 771). What interests Paul de Man above all, what he emphatically underlines, is this strange collusion in memory as *Gedächtnis* between thinking thought and *tekhnè* at its most external, what would seem the most abstract and spatial kind of inscription.

The question remains, however, whether the external manifestation of the idea, when it occurs in the sequential development of Hegel's thought, indeed occurs in the mode of recollection, as a dialectic of inside and outside susceptible of being understood and articulated. Where is it, in the Hegelian system, that it can be said that the intellect, the

mind, or the idea leaves a material trace upon the world, and how does this sensory appearance take place?

The answer takes a hint from the same section (para. 458, p. 271) near the end of the *Encyclopedia* in a discussion on the structure of the sign, with which we began. Having stated the necessity to distinguish between sign and symbol and alluded to the universal tendency to conflate one with the other, Hegel next makes reference to a faculty of the mind which he calls *Gedächtnis* and which "in ordinary [as opposed to philosophical] discourse is often confused with recollection [*Erinnerung*] as well as with representation and imagination"—just as sign and symbol are often used interchangeably in such modes of ordinary discourse as literary commentary or literary criticism. . . . Memorization has to be sharply distinguished from recollection and from imagination. It is entirely devoid of images (*bildlos*), and Hegel speaks derisively of pedagogical attempts to teach children how to read or write by having them associate pictures with specific words. But it is not devoid of *materiality* altogether.

(I interrupt this quotation for a moment after having underlined the word *materiality*. There is a theme of "materiality," indeed an original materialism in de Man. It concerns a "matter" which does not fit the classical philosophical definitions of metaphysical materialisms any more than the sensible representations or the images of matter defined by the opposition between the sensible and the intelligible. Matter, a matter without presence and without substance, is what resists these oppositions. We have just placed this resistance on the side of thought, in its strange connivance with materiality. We might have associated it yesterday with death and with that allusion to "true 'mourning'" which makes a distinction between pseudo-historicity and "the materiality of actual history." Despite all his suspicions of historicism or historical rhetorics blind to their own rhetoricity, Paul de Man constantly contended with

the irreducibility of a certain history, a history with which all one can do is to undertake its "true 'mourning.'" Let us recall: "Generic terms such as 'lyric' . . . as well as the pseudo-historical period terms such as 'romanticism' or 'classicism' are always terms of *resistance* and *nostalgia*, at the furthest remove from the *materiality of actual history*." The materiality of actual history is thus that which resists historical, historicizing resistance. De Man continues: "True 'mourning' is less deluded. The most it can do is to allow for non-comprehension and enumerate non-anthropomorphic, non-elegiac, non-celebratory, non-lyrical, non-poetic, that is to say prosaic, or, better, *historical* modes of language power." Matter of this sort, "older" than the metaphysical oppositions in which the concept of matter and materialist theories are generally inscribed, is, we might say, "in memory" of what precedes these oppositions. But by this very fact, as we shall see later, it retains an essential relation with fiction, figurality, rhetoricity. *Matière et Mémoire* is the title I could have given to this long parenthesis. One more quotation before I bring it to a close:

Gedächtnis, of course, means memory in the sense that one says of someone that he has a good memory but not that he has a good remembrance or a good recollection. One says, in German, "sie" or "er hat ein gutes Gedächtnis," and not, in that same sense, "eine gute Erinnerung." The French *mémoire*, as in Bergson's title *Matière et Mémoire*, is more ambivalent, but a similar distinction occurs between *mémoire* and *souvenir*; *un bon souvenir* is not the same as *une bonne mémoire* [*ibid.*, p. 772].)

Closing this parenthesis, I take up once again my earlier citation where I left off, to offer now a justification for the title I have chosen for this lecture, "The Art of Mem-

ories," and to bring into view the crisscrossings of genitives or genealogies between the name of "memory" and the memory of the name.

. . . But it [memory] is not devoid of materiality altogether. We can learn by heart only when all meaning is forgotten and words read as if they were a mere list of names. "It is well known," says Hegel, "that one knows a text by heart [or by rote] only when we no longer associate any meaning with the words; in reciting what one thus knows by heart one necessarily drops all accentuation."

We are far removed, in this section of the *Encyclopedia* on memory, from the mnemotechnic icons described by Frances Yates in *The Art of Memory* and much closer to Augustine's advice about how to remember and to psalmodize Scripture. Memory, for Hegel, is the learning by rote of *names* [de Man's italics] or of words considered as names. . . .

De Man's stipulation seems crucial. It emphasizes not only that memory works better when dealing with lists of names learned by heart, but that everything that we know by heart and everything that strangely links memory as *Gedächtnis* to thought is of the order of the name. The name, or what can be considered as such, as having the function or power of the name—this is the sole object and sole possibility of memory, and in truth the only "thing" that it can at the same time both name and think. This means then that any name, any nominal function, is "in memory of"—from the first "present" of its appearance, and finally, is "in virtually-bereaved memory of" even during the life of its bearer.

. . . and it can therefore not be separated from the notation, the inscription, or the writing down of these names [Remember what we were saying yesterday about the *Essays upon Epitaphs*]. In order to remember, one is forced to write down what one is likely to forget. The idea, in other words, makes

its sensory appearance, in Hegel, as the material inscription of names. Thought is entirely dependent on a mental faculty that is mechanical through and through, as remote as can be from the sounds and the images of the imagination or from the dark reach of words and of thought.

The synthesis between name and meaning that characterizes memory is an "empty link" [*das leere Band*] and thus entirely unlike the mutual complementarity and interpenetration of form and content that characterizes symbolic art. (pp. 772–73)

2. The second quotation, from the same text, does not directly concern the memory of the name but what one might call—and it comes to much the same thing—the forgetting of the pronoun, singularly of the first pronoun, the *I*. The effacing of the *I* in a kind of *a priori* and functional forgetting could be related to what we said yesterday of "Autobiography as De-facement." But we should also bear in mind the consequence—one among many—of this effacement of the *I* for the classical theory of the performative. An "explicit" performative seems to require the absolute priority of utterances—in the first person singular (with a verb in the present tense of the active voice). This privilege of the *I* is even sometimes extended to so called "primary" (rather than explicit) performatives.¹ Now here is what Paul de Man concludes from an analysis of Hegel's famous and "odd sentence" "Ich kann nicht sagen was ich (nur) meine," where the final word, as many have noted, plays on the verb *meinen* (to mean, but also to have a *Meinung* or personal opinion) and the possessive pronoun, *mein*, *meine*, so that ultimately "what the sentence actually says is 'I cannot say I.'" It would take too much time to set forth the analysis itself, and in any case what interests me here is Paul de Man's move rather than Hegel's:

The mind has to recognize, at the end of its trajectory—in this case at the end of the text—what was posited at the beginning. It has to recognize itself as itself, that is to say, as I. But how are we to recognize what will necessarily be erased and forgotten, since “I” is, per definition, what I can never say? (p. 770)

And three pages further on:

In memorization, in thought, and, by extension, in the sensory manifestation of thought as an “art” of writing, “we are dealing only with signs [wir haben es überhaupt nur mit Zeichen zu tun].” Memory effaces remembrance (or recollection) *just as the I effaces itself*. (p. 773, my italics)

I emphasize the *I*'s effacement of itself and the *just as*, which does not in fact juxtapose two analogous possibilities. It is the *same* possibility. The same necessity as well, which makes the inscription of memory an effacement of interiorizing recollection, of the “living remembrance” at work in the presence of the relation to self. We suggested yesterday that this eclipse or ellipsis in the movement of interiorization is due not to some external limit or finite limitation of memory but to the structure of the relation to the other, as to the always allegorical dimension of mourning.

Paul de Man's thesis, if one may call it that (*we* will come back to this shortly), is that the relation between *Gedächtnis* and *Erinnerung*, between memory and interiorizing recollection, is not “dialectical,” as Hegelian interpretation and Hegel's interpretation would have it, but one of rupture, heterogeneity, disjunction.

Memory is the name of what is no longer only a mental “capacity” oriented toward one of the three modes of the present, the past present, which could be

dissociated from the present present and the future present. Memory projects itself toward the future, and it constitutes the presence of the present. The “rhetoric of temporality” is this rhetoric of memory. Paul de Man was less and less inclined to describe it in dialectical terms—and it remains to be seen whether the Husserlian and Heideggerian analyses of the movement of temporalization would provide any essential help (I deliberately leave this question open for the moment). The “dialecticizing” style seems more marked, for example, in a given passage of his reading of Blanchot reading Mallarmé (“Impersonality in Blanchot” in *Blindness and Insight*, pp. 70–71), though even there I have doubts. It is certainly not in this style that de Man writes here of memory as a tension toward the future, or even as a relation to the presence of the present. The failure or finitude of memory says something about truth, and about the truth of memory: its relation to the other, to the instant and to the future.

... Poulet had stated that “the major discovery of the eighteenth century was the phenomenon of memory,” yet it is the concept of instantaneity that finally emerges, often against and beyond memory, as the main insight of the book. The *instant de passage* supplants memory or, to be more precise, supplants the naive illusion that memory would be capable of conquering the distance that separates the present from the past moment. . . . Memory becomes important as failure rather than as achievement and acquires a negative value. . . . The illusion that continuity can be restored by an act of memory turns out to be merely another moment of transition. (*Blindness and Insight*, pp. 90–91)

The failure of memory is thus not a failure; we can also interpret its apparent negativity, its very finitude, what affects its experience of discontinuity and distance, as a

power, as the very opening of difference, indeed of an ontological difference (ontic-ontological: between Being and beings, between the presence of the present and the present itself). If this were the case, what would happen when this *ontological difference* is translated into the *rhetoric of memory*? Or vice versa? Can one speak in this case of a simple equivalence or of a correlation that could be read in one direction or the other? Let us allow this question the opportunity to remain open; it was never posed as such by Paul de Man.

If memory gives access to this difference, it does not do so simply by way of the classical (originally Hegelian) schema that links the essence of a being to its past being (*être-passé*), *Wesen* to *Gewesenheit*. The memory we are considering here is not essentially oriented toward the past, toward a past present deemed to have really and previously existed. Memory stays with traces, in order to "preserve" them, but traces of a past that has never been present, traces which themselves never occupy the form of presence and always remain, as it were, to come—come from the future, from the *to come*. Resurrection, which is always the formal element of "truth," a recurrent difference between a present and its presence, does not resuscitate a past which had been present; it engages the future.

In this memory which promises the resurrection of an anterior past, a "passé antérieur," as we say in French to designate a grammatical tense, Paul de Man always saw a kind of formal element, the very place where fictions and figures are elaborated. If one allowed oneself to hazard a summary no less unjust than economical, no less provocative than hasty, one could say that for Paul de Man, great thinker and theorist of memory, there is only memory but, strictly speaking, the past

does not exist. It will never have existed in the present, never been present, as Mallarmé says of the present itself: "un présent n'existe pas." The allegation of its supposed "anterior" presence is memory, and is the origin of all allegories. If a past does not literally exist, no more does death,² only mourning, and that other allegory, including all the figures of death with which we people the "present," which we inscribe (among ourselves, the living) in every trace (otherwise called "survivals"): those figures strained toward the future across a fabled present, figures we inscribe because they can outlast us, beyond the present of their inscription: signs, words, names, letters, this whole text whose legacy-value, as we know "in the present," is trying its luck and advancing, *in advance* "in memory of . . ."

Paul de Man was always attentive to this trace of the future as the power of memory, as he was to the fiction of anteriority. Reading Poulet reading Proust, he notes,

The power of memory does not reside in its capacity to resurrect a situation or a feeling that actually existed, but is a constitutive act of the mind bound to its own present and oriented toward the future of its own elaboration. The past intervenes only as a purely formal element. . . . The transcendence of time . . . has freed itself from a rejected past, but this negative moment is now to be followed by a concern with the future that engenders a new stability, entirely distinct from the continuous and Bergsonian duration of memory. (*Blindness and Insight*, pp. 92–93)

In speaking of a present that will never have been present, have I distorted de Man's thought, pushing it to an extreme? The passage I have just cited does not *literally* say this. It affirms that memory does not have to resuscitate what "actually existed" but it does not deny the

"actual existence." This is true, of course, but what if memory of this sort were *already* at work in the relation of the present itself to its own presence? What if there were a *memory of the present* and that far from fitting the present to itself, it divided the instant? What if it inscribed or revealed difference in the very presence of the present, and thus, by the same token, the possibility of being repeated in representation? Bringing together the Nietzschean and Baudelairean conceptions of modernity, Paul de Man cites "Le Peintre de la vie moderne," the text Baudelaire devotes to Constantin Guys: "Le plaisir que nous retirons de la représentation du présent tient non seulement à la beauté dont il peut être revêtu, mais aussi à sa qualité essentielle de présent" ("The pleasure we derive from the *representation of the present* is not merely due to the beauty it may display, but also to the essential 'present-ness' of the present." "Literary History and Literary Modernity," in *Blindness and Insight*, p. 156). By translating "qualité essentielle de présent" by "present-ness of the present," one makes the reader more attentive to the ontological difference, to the essence, to the difference between the simple present and the presence of the present. This difference is never by definition present; it arises only for memory, but for memory as "memory of the present." The passage continues:

The paradox of the problem is potentially contained in the formula "représentation du présent," which combines a repetitive with an instantaneous pattern without apparent awareness of the incompatibility. Yet this latent tension governs the development of the entire essay. Baudelaire remains faithful throughout to the seduction of the present; any temporal awareness is so closely tied for him to the present moment that memory comes to apply more naturally to the present than it does to the past:

Woe be to him who, in antiquity, studies anything besides pure art, logic and general method! By plunging into the past he may well lose the memory of the present (*la mémoire du présent*). He abdicates the values and privileges provided by actual circumstances, for almost all our originality stems from the stamp that time prints on our sensations.

(Malheur à celui qui étudie dans l'antiquité autre chose que l'art pur, la logique, la méthode générale! Pour s'y trop plonger, il perd la mémoire du présent; il abdique la valeur et les privilèges fournis par les circonstances; car presque toute notre originalité vient de l'estampille que le *temps* imprime à nos sensations.)

The same temporal ambivalence prompts Baudelaire to couple any evocation of the present with terms such as "représentation," "mémoire," or even "temps," all opening perspectives of distance and difference within the apparent uniqueness of the instant. Yet his modernity too, like Nietzsche's, is a forgetting or a suppression of anteriority.

In trying too hard to recall or plunge into the past, one forgets the present, says Baudelaire, who wants thus to save both memory and the present, that memory of the present which recalls the present to its own presence, that is to say, to its difference: to the difference which makes it unique by distinguishing it from the other present *and* to that quite different difference which relates a present to presence itself. Only a memory can recognize this differential "stamp," this mark or signature, this patent or trademark that "time prints on our sensations." Neither time nor memory is anything other than the figure of these marks. And this "memory of the present" only marks itself, and this mark arrives only to efface the anteriority of the past. Memory, and "Yet," de Man says, "a forgetting or a suppression of anteriority." The sentence beginning with "Yet" concerns, of course, "modernity"—Baude-

laire's or Nietzsche's—but it describes at the same time a figure whose necessity has imposed its law on the most diverse de Manian readings. I will never say on *all* his readings—on principle: never, but especially not in these three modest efforts, would I attempt totalization in the face of an oeuvre that has so often uncovered, analyzed, denounced, and avoided it.

Despite the interval (of time) that separates these two texts, we can now bring together this last formulation, memory as “a forgetting or a suppression of anteriority,” and the formulation previously encountered in the essay on Hegel, “Memory effaces remembrance.” We will come back to this after a detour to note several other motifs.

The first, which seems to me also very persistent, if not highly visible, in the most diverse movements of de Manian interpretation, is that of acceleration, of an absolute precipitousness. These words do not designate a particular rhythm, a measurable or comparable speed, but a movement which attempts through an infinite acceleration to win time, to win over time, to deny it, one might say, but in a non-dialectical fashion, since it is the form of the instant that is charged with the absolute discontinuity of this rhythm without rhythm. This acceleration is incommensurable, and thus infinite and null at the same time; it touches the sublime.³

Among many possible examples let me cite, from the same essay, the passage which seems to describe the Monsieur Guys of Paul de Man's Baudelaire. Here, where de Man says of Baudelaire that he says of Guys what in truth he says of himself, in his name and for himself, how can one avoid reading in this passage something Paul de Man is having said by these two others about himself, for himself, in his name, through the

effects of an irony of the signature? Irony or allegory of the trademark (stamp, *estampille*), perhaps? We shall come back to this. For the moment—and here is my second motif, which can also be pointed out in this passage—this allegorical story of the signature is not without its own “Lazarus, arise!”—its resurrection, and above all its “ghost” story.

. . . The final closing of the form, constantly postponed, occurs so swiftly and suddenly that *it hides its dependence on previous moments* (my italics) in its own precipitous instantaneity. The entire process tries to outrun time, to achieve a swiftness that would transcend the latent opposition between action and form.

In M[onsieur] G[uys]'s manner, two features can be observed; in the first place, the contention of a highly suggestive, resurrecting power of memory, a memory that addresses all things with: “Lazarus, arise!”; on the other hand, a fiery, intoxicating vigor of pencil and brushstroke that almost resembles fury. He seems to be in anguish of not going fast enough, of letting the phantom escape before the synthesis has been extracted from it and been recorded. . . . you may call this a sketch if you like, but it is a perfect sketch.

That Baudelaire has to refer to this synthesis as a “phantom” is another instance of the rigor that forces him to double any assertion by a qualifying use of language that puts it at once into question. The Constantin Guys of the essay is himself a *phantom, bearing some resemblance to the actual painter, but differing from him in being the fictional achievement* of what existed only potentially in the “real” man. Even if we consider the character in the essay to be a mediator used to formulate the *prospective vision* of Baudelaire's own work, we can still witness in this vision a similar *disincarnation and reduction of meaning*. (p. 158, my italics)

Let me recall that the quotation from Baudelaire and his discourse on the phantom comes from a text

entitled "Mnemonic Art." At the very beginning of *Le Peintre de la vie moderne*, the work to which "Mnemonic Art" belongs, the phantom makes its first appearance—as the very attraction or provocativeness of the past: "Le passé, tout en gardant le piquant du fantôme, reprendra la lumière et le mouvement de la vie, et se fera présent." ("Without losing anything of its ghostly piquancy, the past will recover the light and movement of life and will become present.")

Ghosts always pass quickly, with the infinite speed of a furtive apparition, in an instant without duration, presence without present of a present which, coming back, only *haunts*. The ghost, *le re-venant*, the survivor, appears only by means of figure or fiction, but its appearance is not nothing, nor is it a mere semblance. And this "synthesis as a phantom" enables us to recognize in the figure of the phantom the working of what Kant and Heidegger assign to the transcendental imagination and whose temporalizing schemes and power of synthesis are indeed "fantastic"—are, in Kant's phrase, those of an *art hidden* in the depths of the soul.

There is the art of memory and there is the memory of art.

Art is a thing of the past; remember Hegel's provocative declaration. Paul de Man offers an equally provocative reading of it in his essay on "Sign and Symbol in Hegel's *Aesthetics*." We now return to it after this detour, but in fact the interpretive debate with the Hegelian dialectic has not been interrupted. The theme of the fantastic and of the arts of "productive memory" is common, moreover, despite many differences, both to Kant and to Hegel. It is intrinsically a question of an *art* and of the origin of the arts, the productive source of symbols and signs.

Since he emphasizes the (non-dialectical) break between *Gedächtnis* and *Erinnerung*, Paul de Man reinterprets the famous adage, "art is a thing of the past." In the last three pages of his essay, the first moment of his displacement seems to me characteristic of a certain style of "deconstructive" reading. The second moment, at the very end of his text, is an analogous operation, this time on the subject of allegory. Between these two moments, Proust serves as a mediating phantom and symbolic example.

In this way we are slowly, carefully, timidly approaching a question concerning so-called "deconstruction in America." One will not understand it all, but certainly one will understand nothing at all of it, if one does not attempt to decipher the ways it has been marked or signed by de Man's idiom, by the singularity of his stamp.

If art is a thing of the past, this comes from its link, through writing, the sign, *tekhnè*, with that thinking memory, that memory without memory, with that power of *Gedächtnis* without *Erinnerung*. This power, we now know, is *pre-occupied* by a past which has never been present and will never allow itself to be reanimated in the interiority of consciousness.

We are quite close here to a thinking memory (*Gedächtnis*) whose movement carries an essential affirmation, a kind of engagement beyond negativity, that is to say also beyond the bereaved interiority of symbolist introjection (*Erinnerung*): a thinking memory of fidelity, a reaffirmation of engagement, but a memory that has done its mourning for the dialectic (which is mourning itself); and consequently memory without mourning, the rigorous fidelity of an affirmation that cannot be called an "amnesic" except in relation to the symbolic appropriation of interior recollection. We must

think at the same time the two sources: Mnemosyne, Lethe. Translate this, if you like, as: we must keep in memory the difference of Lethe from Mnemosyne, which we may call *aletheia*.

Yesterday I asked where to look for, and how to locate, the sort of affirmative thought that I have always sensed and appreciated in and beyond the most critical and "ironical" moments of Paul de Man's work. We find ourselves here in its vicinity.

Does not the most affirmative fidelity, its most concerned *act* of memory, involve us with an absolute past, not reducible to any form of presence: the dead being that will never itself return, never again be there, present to answer to or to share this faith? Some would immediately conclude that with the economy of interiorization, mourning, and dialectic, with this *fidelity to self*, Narcissus, who turns back to himself, has returned. No doubt this is true, but what of that if the self (*soi-même*) has that relation to itself only *through* the other, through the promise (for the future, as trace of the future) made to the other as an absolute past, and thus *through* this absolute past, thanks to the other whose survival—that is, whose mortality—always exceeded the "we" of a common present? In the present instant, the "living present" which brings together two friends—and this is friendship—this incredible scene of memory is written in the absolute past; it dictates the madness of an amnesic fidelity, of a forgetful hypernesia, the gravest and yet the lightest.

Of the two springs called Mnemosyne and Lethe, which is the right one for Narcissus? The other.

Art is a thing of the past because its memory is without memory; one cannot *recover* this past—as soon as the work comes into being—since the memory

(*Erinnerung*) of it is refused. The whole argument of the essay tends toward this conclusion: there is no *dialectical* passage from the symbol to the sign. Art, like thought or thinking memory, is linked to the sign and not the symbol. It thus has dealings only with the absolute past—that is, the immemorial or unrememberable, with an archive that no interiorizing memory can take into itself.

To the extent that the paradigm for art is thought rather than perception, the sign rather than the symbol, writing rather than painting or music, it will also be memorization rather than recollection. As such, it belongs indeed to a past which, in Proust's words, could never be recaptured, *retrouvé*. Art is "of the past" in a radical sense, in that, like memorization, it leaves the interiorization of experience forever behind. (p. 773)

The next sentence alludes once again to that materiality which I earlier emphasized is neither "metaphysical" nor "dialectizable": "It is of the past to the extent that it *materially* inscribes, and thus forever forgets, its ideal content."

It goes without saying—and thus I won't dwell on it—that this interpretation of the letter in Hegel, of its material inscription, is, precisely, strong thinking, taking a risk. It is easy to see what sort of reading of Hegel or theory of reading Hegel could lead one to set against it a quite different perspective. This has been done (Raymond Geuss, "A Response to Paul de Man," *Critical Inquiry* [December 1983] vol. 10), and it could be done in yet another way. But what concerns me here is what this strong interpretation challenges or displaces in the system of traditional, philological assumptions, in the normative theory of reading (that of Hegel in particular)

that is presupposed by both philosophical institutions and literary institutions, but also by the academic debates that sometimes oppose them to one another. Paul de Man shows this in his "Reply to Raymond Geuss," and I refer you to these few pages. They tell us more about the institutions and strategies of reading, about their implications and political effects, about their somnolence as well, their amnesia, than all the pious recitations or bits of revolutionary bravura, which only revolve in place. Here are just a few lines of this answer, to move us toward the question of a "deconstructive" strategy:

What is suggested by a reading such as the one I propose is that difficulties and discontinuities (rather than "vacillations," which is Geuss' term rather than mine) remain in even as masterful and tight a text as the *Aesthetics*. These difficulties have left their mark or have even shaped the history of the understanding of Hegel up to the present. They cannot be resolved by the canonical system explicitly established by Hegel himself, namely, the dialectic. This is why these difficulties have at all times been used as a point of entry into the critical examination of the dialectic as such. In order to account for them, it is indispensable that one not only listen to what Hegel openly, officially, literally, and canonically asserts but also to what is being said obliquely, figurally, and implicitly (though not less compellingly) in less conspicuous parts of the corpus. Such a way of reading is by no means willful; it has its own constraints, perhaps more demanding than those of canonization. (*Critical Inquiry* [December 1983] 10(2):389-390)

Such a strategy thus leads one to recognize and to analyze in Hegel's *Aesthetics* the strange corpus of a text whose unity and homogeneity are not guaranteed by the reassuring singleness of a meaning: a "double and possibly duplicitous text" which *intends* "the pres-

ervation and the monumentalization of classical art" yet which *happens to describe* "all the elements which make such a preservation impossible from the start."

This move induces another. Between the two, to move from one to the other, a quotation from Proust explains that a symbol is not represented symbolically, "non comme un symbole, puisque la pensée symbolisée n'[est] pas représentée, mais comme réel, come effectivement subi or *matériellement* manié" (not as a symbol, since the symbolized thought is not expressed, but as real, as actually experienced or materially handled). (For the same reasons as before, I italicize the word *materially* in Proust's sentence.) This sentence comes from a passage of *Du côté de chez Swann* which speaks of allegory in Giotto's frescoes. But once again, what is allegory? Hegel discusses it in passages which concern forms of art that are neither beautiful nor aesthetic. It is not by chance that these are the same passages in which, as de Man writes, "the theory of the sign manifests itself *materially*" (my italics). Allegory is "ugly" (*kahl*); it belongs to late symbolic modes, to the self-consciously symbolic modes characteristic of the "inferior genres" (*untergeordnete Gattungen*). But this servile inferiority, this mechanical instrumentality of the slave, can become or may have been the place of the master: *just as* much in what concerns the concept of allegory *in* Hegel's text as in what might constitute the allegorical structure or functioning of Hegel's own text. In the following passage I emphasize the *just as* which articulates the different moments of the analogy:

Before allowing Hegel's dismissal [of allegory] to dismiss the problem, one should *remember* [I emphasize the irony] that, in a truly dialectical system such as Hegel's [here one recalls the dialectic to its true self, but in order to make it "beside

itself"], what appears to be inferior and enslaved (*untergeordnet*) may well turn out to be the master. Compared to the depth and beauty of recollection, memory appears as a mere tool, a mere slave of the intellect, *just as* the sign appears shallow and mechanical compared to the aesthetic *aura* of the symbol, or *just as* prose appears like piecemeal labor next to the noble craft of poetry—*just as*, we may add, *neglected corners* in the Hegelian canon are perhaps masterful articulations rather than the all too visible synthetic judgments that are being *remembered* [my italics] as the commonplaces of nineteenth-century history. The section on allegory, apparently so conventional and disappointing, may well be a case in point. (pp. 774-75)

I have emphasized "neglected corners" and, twice, the verb "remember": "one should remember" something—the true dialectic—so as to oppose it to what is in fact remembered, "the synthetic judgments that are being remembered," the conventional Hegelianism, perhaps the dialectic itself. The forgotten dialectic must be recalled *against* the dialectic that persists in all memories, especially that of a tradition whose latent Hegelianism dominates the interpretation of English Romanticism. This is a lateral but significant target of the essay (cf. p. 771). One is always playing one memory against another, but here, by a supplementary paradox or chiasmus, Paul de Man *appears to be playing* a supplement of dialectic against the untrue dialectic; he seems to play at reminding us what *must be remembered*, must be recalled to vigilance, called to life, recalled to good memory against bad dozing memory, against the dogmatic slumbers of a tradition. One might recall here the implacable law that always opposes good (living) memory to bad memory (mechanical, technical, on the side of death): Plato's *anamnesis* or *mneme* to *hypomneme*, the good to

the bad *pharmakon*. But on the one hand, Paul de Man is manifestly playing when he invokes the "true" dialectic; and, on the other hand, by a reversal which ought in fact to displace the structure, what he ultimately wants us to recall is not the good-living-memory but on the contrary the essential mutual implication of thought and of what the tradition defines as "bad" memory, the technique of memory, writing, the abstract sign, and—in the same series—the figure of allegory. It is thus to the power of *forgetting* that his "one should remember" recalls us, to what the till-now dominant interpretation calls *forgetting* because it takes true memory to be that of "recollection" in the supposedly living interiority of the soul, *Erinnerung*.

We are here called to recall what we must *think*: thought is not bereaved interiorization; it thinks at boundaries, it thinks the boundary, the limit of interiority. And to do this is also to think the art of memory, as well as the memory of art. One more step before closing this parenthesis: these two memories are doubtless not *opposed* to one another; they are not two. And if this unity, this contamination or contagion is not dialectical, perhaps we should recall (recall ourselves to) a memory already "older" than *Gedächtnis* and *Erinnerung*. To what law and what memory of the law, to what law of memory would this "we should" then recall us?

In very traditional fashion Hegel makes the purpose of allegory pedagogical and expository. It must be clear, and personification is thought to have this expository virtue. But the subject, the "I" of allegory, must remain abstract, general, almost "grammatical." Yet the qualities of the allegorized abstraction (think of Truth or Memory, Vice or Virtue, Life or Death, Memory or

Oblivion) must be recognizable (*erkennbar*), says Hegel and thus beyond the abstract grammaticality of the "I." Here we come back to the reading of "Was ich nur meine ist mein" (paragraph 20 of the *Encyclopedia*) and the self-effacement of the *I* which eclipses itself "just as" "memory effaces remembrance (or recollection)" (p. 773):

What the allegory narrates is, therefore, in Hegel's own words, "the separation or disarticulation of subject from predicate (*die Trennung von Subjekt und Prädikat*)." For discourse to be meaningful, this separation has to take place, yet it is incompatible with the necessary generality of all meaning. Allegory functions, categorically and logically, like the *defective cornerstone* of the entire system. (p. 775, my italics)

We have here a figure of what some might be tempted to see as the dominant metaphorical register, indeed the allegorical bent of "deconstruction," a certain architectural rhetoric. One first locates, in an architectonics, in the art of the system, the "neglected corners" and the "*defective cornerstone*," that which, from the outset, threatens the coherence and the internal order of the construction. But it is a cornerstone! It is required by the architecture which it nevertheless, in advance, deconstructs from within. It assures its cohesion while situating in advance, in a way that is both visible and invisible (that is, corner), the site that lends itself to a deconstruction to come. The best spot for efficiently inserting the deconstructive lever is a cornerstone. There may be other analogous places but this one derives its privilege from the fact that it is indispensable to the completeness of the edifice. A condition of erection, holding up the walls of an established edifice, it also can be said to maintain it, to contain it, and to be tantamount to the *generality* of the architectonic system, "of the entire system."

Paul de Man's "deconstructive" moves do not all obey this logic or this "architectural" rhetoric. Nor do I think, but I will explain this elsewhere, that deconstruction—if there be such a thing and it be *one*—is bound by the link that the word suggests with the architectonic. Rather, it attacks the systemic (i.e., architectonic) constructionist account of what is brought together, of assembly. Before returning to the strange equivalence of the part to the whole, of the cornerstone to the generality of the system, let me just mark here, with a stepping-stone, perhaps, the location of a problem—of non-architectonic *Versammlung*—which I shall attempt to develop elsewhere.

As we have seen, the very condition of a deconstruction may be at work, in the work, *within* the system to be deconstructed; it may *already* be located there, already at work, not at the center but in an ex-centric center, in a corner whose eccentricity assures the solid concentration of the system, participating in the construction of what it at the same time threatens to deconstruct. One might then be inclined to reach this conclusion: deconstruction is not an operation that supervenes *afterwards*, from the outside, one fine day; it is always already at work in the work; one must just know how to identify the right or wrong element, the right or wrong stone—the right one, of course, always proves to be, precisely, the wrong one. Since the disruptive force of deconstruction is always already contained within the architecture of the work, all one would finally have to do to be able to deconstruct, given this *always already*, is to do memory work. Since I want neither to accept or to reject a conclusion formulated in these terms, let us leave this question hanging for a while.

If allegory is "the defective cornerstone of the entire system," it is also a figure for its most effective

cornerstone. As a cornerstone, it supports it, however rickety it may be, and brings together at a single point all its forces and tensions. It does not do this from a central commanding point, like a *keystone*; but it also does it, laterally, in its corner. It represents the whole in a point and at every instant; it centers it, as it were, in a periphery, shapes it, stands for it. Since in this case the cornerstone is the concept of allegory, one can legitimately conclude that allegory, this part of aesthetics, has the rhetorical value of a metonymy or a synecdoche (part for the whole). And since the concept of allegory (as a metonymy) means something other than what it says through a figure about the system, it constitutes a kind of allegorical trope in the most general sense of the term. If allegory is an allegory (a condition which, let us note in passing, can never by definition be definitively assured), if the prescribed concept of allegory is an allegory of the Hegelian system, then the entire functioning of the system becomes allegorical. To radicalize by accelerating this matter, one could say that the entire Hegelian dialectic is a vast allegory. Paul de Man does not put it in this way, but he sees in Hegelianism a specific allegory; not, as is often believed, the allegory of synthesizing and reconciliatory power, but that of disjunction, dissociation, and discontinuity. It is the power of allegory, and its ironic force as well, to say something quite different from and even contrary to what seems to be intended through it. And since this allegory is what made possible, before and after Hegel, the construction of even the concept of history, philosophy of history and history of philosophy, one should no longer rely on something like history (in the philosophical sense of the word "history") to account for this "allegoricity." The usual concept of history is itself one of its effects; it bears its mark and stamp (*estampille*).

Thenceforth the disjunction (*Trennung von Subjekt und Prädikat*) which divides the allegorical structure of allegory reproduces itself without check. This is Paul de Man's conclusion, and his diagnosis is not historical throughout; it is also presented as a diagnosis of a certain concept of history and of the *limits* of a certain historicism:

We would have to conclude that Hegel's philosophy which, like his *Aesthetics*, is a philosophy of history (and of aesthetics) as well as a history of philosophy (and of aesthetics)—and the Hegelian corpus indeed contains texts that bear these two symmetrical titles—is *in fact* [I emphasize this expression which bears all the weight of this de- or re-construction] an allegory of the disjunction between philosophy and history, or, in our more restricted concern, between literature and aesthetics, or, more narrowly still, between literary experience and literary theory. The reasons for this disjunction, which it is equally vain to deplore or to praise, are not themselves historical or recoverable by way of history. To the extent that they are inherent in language, in the *necessity, which is also an impossibility* [my italics], to connect the subject with its predicates or the sign with its symbolic significations, the disjunction will always, as it did in Hegel, manifest itself as soon as experience shades into thought, history into theory. No wonder that literary theory has such a bad name, all the more so since the emergence of thought and of theory is not something that our own thought can hope to prevent or to control. (p. 775)

Hegel's philosophy, reread from the most deficient and efficient cornerstone, is said to be—over its dead body—an allegory of disjunction. Over its dead body, in a kind of essential denegation, able to ventriloquize the entire dialectic, the "true" as well as the other; but it would be an allegory of disjunction through and through, over its entire body. But what can an allegory

of disjunction signify when the structure of allegory itself has as its essential *trait* this *dis-traction* from self that is disjunction? After "The Rhetoric of Temporality"⁴ Paul de Man never ceased to insist on allegorical disjunction and the history of its interpretation (Goethe, Schiller, Coleridge, and so forth). If allegory is disjunctive, an allegory of disjunction will always remain a disjoined reflexivity, an allegory of allegory that can never, in its specular self-reflection, rejoin itself, fit itself to itself. Its memory will promise but never provide a chance for re-collecting itself, for the *Versammlung* in which a thinking of being could collect itself.

Let us leave this thread trailing in the labyrinth. Its law will later make us double back on our tracks and once again cross those of Hölderlin and Heidegger. This labyrinth not only borders on the two sources, Mnemosyne and Lethe; it takes the form of a path which leads us back and forth from one to the other.

The disjunctive structure of allegory, as an allegory of allegory, compels us to complicate the schema I sketched earlier, and for this I must review the distinction between a keystone and a cornerstone. If the defective cornerstone of allegory has a certain relation to the cohesion of "the entire system," as de Man puts it, and if it is thereby the allegory of a system itself allegorical, it nevertheless cannot *count* for the whole. It is not placed in the center and at the apex of a totality whose forces all join at one point, the keystone—which in this case would be the sole key to interpretation, the major signified or the signifier for a reading. This is why Paul de Man does not say that the "defective cornerstone of the entire system" *counts for the whole*. In "The Rhetoric of Temporality" emphasis falls not just on the narrative structure of allegory but primarily on its disjunctive

structure. Consequently an allegory can never be reduced to a metaphor, to a symbol, nor even to a metonymy or a synecdoche which would designate "the totality of which they are a part" (p. 190). This disjunctive, de-totalizing quality no doubt explains why de Man never ceases to privilege the figure of allegory, setting it always against the tradition of the symbol, be it German or Anglo-American, in the domain of philosophy, literature, or literary theory, particularly that which in the United States has developed around Romanticism. One cannot understand this privileging of allegory—I was long puzzled by it for this very reason—if one is not familiar with the internal debates of Anglo-American criticism concerning Romanticism. The tour de force and special contribution of Paul de Man comes, no doubt, from his success in making the disturbing graft of a German tradition on an Anglo-American tradition. The novelty was not the graft itself but the incisions it required here and there. It was necessary, here and there, to cut short or cut off, to bring out the cut separating allegory from other figures. This explains his interest in Schlegel and Benjamin, in opposition, on this point, to a tradition running from Goethe to Gadamer.⁵

If Hegel's philosophy represents an allegory of disjunction, an allegory of allegories, one must conclude that it cannot itself be totalized by an interpretation, and above all that it is not a figure for anamnestic totalization, a great gathering together of all the figures of Western metaphysics, its completion and its limit, as it is often thought to be—whatever conclusions one then draws. And if the Hegelian concept of allegory, "like the defective cornerstone of the entire system" (an expression in which one must hear a certain irony, as

we did earlier in "truly dialectical system"), says something about the "whole" Hegelian text, what it says, while remaining in its limited, partial, circumscribed place, which could not symbolize the "whole," is that there is no "entire system": the whole is not totalized; the system is constructed with the aid of a defective cornerstone, despite or thanks to this stone which deconstructs it. The essential point of support this lateral stone provides is no more a foundation than a keystone. It is, and it says, the other; it is an allegory.

Hence allegory, despite a privileging one might judge exorbitant, still remains one figure among others. One could certainly play a game of substitution which would mobilize all the turns of rhetoric: allegory as the privileged figure would become the allegory of all the other figures. It would fill the role of metonymy or synecdoche, a part for the whole, or that of metaphor, etc., so that each of these figures could, in turn, take the place of allegory—each becoming the metaphor or metonymy of all the others, since the self-reflexivity of this process has no end. But in fact, it seems to me that for de Man allegory is only quasi-privileged: it is not simply what it assuredly is as well, a rhetorical figure. Nor is rhetoric simply rhetoric, if by that one means a determinable, "terminable" genealogy that gives rise to a masterable catalogue of technical possibilities. And yet, for good reasons, de Man does not wish to further efface or submerge these particularizing, restricting limits. To do this would be to revert to a transcendentalizing and homogenizing totalization (on the model of metaphor or symbol).

Now if allegory *remains* a figure, and one figure among others, at the very moment when, articulating the limit, it marks an excess, it is because it says in

another way something *about the other*. If one could establish an opposition (which I do not believe) or differentiate (something else again), one might say that between memory of being and memory of the other there is perhaps the disjunction of allegory. But let us not forget that a disjunction does not only separate, whether we are dealing with the Hegelian concept of allegory, the allegory of disjunction, or allegory *as* disjunction. Even if it is defective, the cornerstone supports and joins, holds together what it separates. We will come back later to the memory of being and the memory of the other. What these words say is no doubt not the same thing, but perhaps they speak of the same thing.

Since I have just alluded to Heidegger, of whom we will speak tomorrow, let me recall once more the passage in "Heidegger's Exegeses of Hölderlin" where Paul de Man resolutely determines, draws a line, even italicizing to sharpen the decisiveness of the distinction: "There is, however, another much deeper reason that justifies this choice: *it is the fact that Hölderlin says exactly the opposite of what Heidegger makes him say.*" He then continues:

Such an assertion is paradoxical only in appearance. At this level of thought it is difficult to distinguish between a proposition and that which constitutes its opposite. In fact, to state the opposite is still to talk of the same thing though in an opposite sense, and it is already a major achievement to have, in a dialogue of this sort, the two interlocutors manage to speak of the same thing. (It can be said that Heidegger and Hölderlin speak of the same thing.) (*Blindness and Insight*, p. 255)

What is "the same thing"? What if "the same thing,"

here, were the other? Is there a difference between Being and the other?

The "same thing," under consideration since yesterday, we have called "memory." Is this an appropriate noun, a proper name, a unique name? We recalled ourselves to the name Mnemosyne, and we recalled, in the name of Mnemosyne, that *one must not forget Lethe*, that is the truth (aletheia).

With the name Mnemosyne, do Hölderlin, Heidegger, and de Man say the same thing? Surely not. But do they speak of the same thing? Perhaps. This question will be raised again tomorrow. But it will never leave us; it will haunt us like the phantoms of all the prosopopeias or parabases which, in de Man's later writing, have been brought in simply to take up the idea of allegory, even irony.

All these figures, remember, are also ghostly figures. As we read in Baudelaire, they speak like phantoms in the text, certainly, but above all they phantomize the text itself. It remains to be seen what the phantom means or—this can have still other meanings—what the word phantom, the word "phantom," the "word" phantom means. In a phantom-text, these distinctions, these quotation marks, references, or citations become irredeemably precarious; they leave only traces, and we shall never define the trace or the phantom without, ironically or allegorically, appealing from one to the other.

Is it by chance that, in the very first steps by which he reopened the problem of allegory, Paul de Man convoked the ghost of Coleridge, and the phantom of which Coleridge speaks, precisely in relation to allegory? Allegory speaks (through) the voice of the other, whence the ghost-effect, whence also the a-symbolic disjunction:

Its structure [the symbol's] is that of the synecdoche, for the symbol is always part of the totality it represents. Consequently, in the symbolical imagination, no disjunction of the constitutive faculties takes place, since the material perception and the symbolical imagination are continuous, as this part is continuous with the whole. In contrast, the allegorical form appears purely mechanical, an abstraction whose original meaning is even more devoid of substance than its "phantom proxy," the allegorical representative; it is an immaterial shape that represents a sheer phantom devoid of shape and substance. (*Blindness and Insight*, pp. 191–92. The quotation is from Coleridge, *The Statesman's Manual*.)

But should we disjoin this ghostly disjunction called allegory from that other ghostly disjunction called irony? As the following example shows, Paul de Man insists on both moves at once: to bring out the distinctiveness of allegory, a particular figure whose particularity does not have metonymical or synecdochic value, but simultaneously to grant it the right of communication (if not non-symbolic, nontotalizing participation) with other figures, perhaps with all the others, not, precisely, by resemblance, through the voice or way of the *same*, but by the voice or way of the *other*, of difference and disjunction. Paul de Man is bent on demonstrating "the implicit and rather enigmatic link" (p. 208) for allegory and irony; we have already glimpsed it for synecdoche, prosopopeia, or parabasis. Irony too is a figure of disjunction, duplication, and doubling (pp. 212, 217, etc.). It often produces a disjunction by which "a purely linguistic subject replaces the original self" (p. 217), according to the scheme of amnesic memory of which we have spoken. And yet, precisely because of the disjunctive structure that they share, allegory and irony draw up between them this singular contract, and each recalls the other. Of course, the former is essen-

tially narrative, the latter momentary and pointed (*instantanéiste*), but together they form, in fact, the rhetoric of memory which recalls, recounts, forgets, recounts, and recalls forgetting, referring to the past only to efface what is essential to it: anteriority. At the beginning of this lecture I quoted a passage describing the modernity of Baudelaire or Nietzsche as "a forgetting or a suppression of anteriority." Now here, at the moment where the rhetoric of temporality finally brings together allegory and irony, after having separated them, we find the "same" structure, the most profound and the least profound: "an unreachable anteriority."

Our description seems to have reached a provisional conclusion. The act of irony . . . reveals the existence of a temporality that is definitely not organic. . . . Irony divides the flow of temporal experience into a past that is a pure mystification and a future that remains harassed forever by a relapse within the inauthentic. It can know this inauthenticity but can never overcome it. . . . It dissolves in the narrowing spiral of a linguistic sign that becomes more and more remote from its meaning, and it can find no escape from this spiral. The temporal void that it reveals is the same void we encountered when we found allegory always implying an unreachable anteriority. Allegory and irony are thus linked in their common discovery of a truly temporal predicament. They are also linked in their common demystification of an organic world postulated in a symbolic mode of analogical correspondences or in a mimetic mode of representation in which fiction and reality could coincide.

Then, beyond this provisional conclusion, here is the *link* between these two figures of memory: the one pretends to know how to tell stories—this is diachronic allegory—and the other feigns amnesia—this is synchronic allegory. But neither has a past anterior:

Essentially the mode of the present, it [irony] knows neither memory nor prefigurative duration, whereas allegory exists entirely within an ideal time that is never here and now but always a past or an endless future. Irony is a synchronic structure, while allegory appears as a successive mode capable of engendering duration as the illusion of a continuity that it knows to be illusionary. Yet the two modes, for all their profound distinction in mood and structure, are the two faces of the *same fundamental experience of time*. . . . Both modes are fully de-mystified when they remain within the realm of their respective languages but are totally vulnerable to renewed blindness as soon as they leave it for the empirical world. Both are determined by an *authentic experience of temporality* which, seen from the point of view of the self engaged in the world, is a negative one. The dialectical play between the two modes as well as their common interplay with mystified forms of language (such as symbolic or mimetic representation), which it is not in their power to eradicate, make up what is called literary history. (p. 226. My italics)

If, in concluding today, I underline several of the questions that these relatively early texts of Paul de Man address to us or pose for us, it is not because I find these texts old or problematical. On the contrary, I think I have brought them into resonance with the most recent. Nor is it by some rhetorical feint, as if I were holding back expressible answers to these questions, making you wait for them until at least tomorrow. No, tomorrow we shall doubtless encounter these questions, again in one form or another, but they will still remain open. What are they?

1. Is there a relation and, if so, what, between "the dialectical play of the two [rhetorical] modes," or this discourse on mystification, demystification, and "the authentic experience of temporality," on the one hand, and something like "deconstruction" on the

other—if there be such a thing and it be *one*—whether in the writings of Paul de Man or of others? And what relation is there between Paul de Man's and any other? I say "deconstruction" and not the problematic of deconstruction, as is sometimes said, nor deconstructive criticism, for deconstruction is not—for reasons that are essential—problematic; it is not a problematic (a brief deconstructive history of the word *problem* would quickly show this, as one for the word *criticism* would show that there cannot be a deconstructive criticism, since deconstruction is more or less, or in any case other than a criticism).

2. If one can join together in the "same" experience of time these two disjunctive forces of allegory and irony, does that promise us an anamnesis which goes back "further" than these two opposing sources (the allegorical Mnemosyne and the ironic Lethe which "knows neither memory nor prefigurative duration")? Would there be a "more ancient" figure, a more original, more "fundamental" experience of time than that of this rhetorical disjunction? Would this figure still be, would it still have a figure, or would it remain "prefigurative"? Is there a memory for this prefiguration? Is not this text of Paul de Man's moving toward (or, rather, moving *as*) this more ancient but still newer memory, turned like a promise toward the future? Is not *that* his practice, his style, his signature, the stamp of his deconstruction? I speak of the signature because this entire series of questions thrusts itself upon me at the moment where there appears a kind of hybrid of two memories, or of a memory and an amnesia which divide the same act. As if the ironic moment were signed, were sealed in the body of an allegorical writing.

A page further on Paul de Man speaks of a novel-

ist who manages to be at the same time an allegorist and an ironist. He would, in brief, know how to tell a story, but he would refrain from doing so, without one ever being able to know whether he were telling the truth. Such a novelist, says Paul de Man, "has to seal, so to speak, the ironic moments within the allegorical duration" (p. 227). "Irony of ironies"—thus would be stamped the permanent parabases of Paul de Man's Schlegel, for example.

3. Even if this memory of prefiguration were possible, we know that it would offer no "anteriority" that was not fictive or figural; it could only "suppress" or "forget" it. What follows?

4. Would a radical memory without anteriority, an anamnesis which would radically dispense with an anterior past, still be an experience of temporality? Do its figures belong to a rhetoric of temporality or a rhetoric of spacing? Is not rhetoric or figuration as an art of memory always an art of space? For what has no past anterior would swiftly be seen by some as nothing less than space. It cannot be as simple as that, but the interpretation of the essential relation between *Gedächtnis* (thinking memory *and* technical memory or act of writing) and spatial recording, the exteriority of the sign, etc. marks a kind of spacing, a gap that is not contradiction, between "The Rhetoric of Temporality" (1969) and "Sign and Symbol . . ." (1982).

5. What does a memory without anteriority recall, what does it promise? Is it a memory without origin, genealogy, history or filiation? Must one at each instant *reinvent* filiation? Some would see here the signature of a faithful memory, even its affirmation; others would denounce in it a concealment or betrayal, and dismiss it as a figure of the simulacrum.

Yesterday, you may remember, I began by telling you that I suffer from an inability to tell a story, without knowing whether I suffer from amnesia or hypermnesia. It is because I cannot tell a story that I turn to myth. But Mnemosyne, Lethe, Atropos or her two sisters are not only myths; they are also allegories in the strict sense, personifications of Memory, Forgetting, Death; and they are always family romances, stories of filiation, of sons and daughters. Mnemosyne, the mother of the muses, was also the wife of Zeus, with whom she was united for nine years. Do not forget the Moirai; Atropos, Clotho, and Lachesis, those who spin and cut the thread of life, are also daughters of Zeus—and of Themis. But I should also remind you of the character Mnemon: he who remembers but above all makes one remember. He is an auxiliary, a technician, an artist of memory, a remembering or hypomnesic servant. Achilles, whom he served, received him from his mother on the eve of the Trojan War. Mnemon had an unusual mission: an agent of memory, like an external memory, he was to remind Achilles of an oracle. This oracle had predicted that if Achilles killed a son of Apollo, he would die at Troy. Mnemon was therefore supposed to remind Achilles of the genealogy of anyone whom he was about to kill: Remember, you mustn't kill the son of Apollo. Remember the oracle. Now one day, at Tenedos, Achilles killed Tenes, the son of Apollo. He thus hastened toward the death to which he was destined, through this error or failure of memory, through this lapse of Mnemon. But before dying, in order to punish him, Achilles killed Mnemon with a single blow, with the point of his spear.

Notes

1. Cf. John L. Austin, *How to Do Things with Words*, Sixth Lecture (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1962), pp. 67–68.

2. This *inexistence* of the past or of death, in other words their *literal* non-presence, is also their fictive or figural value. It does not reduce mourning (before or after death) to the futility of an illusion. "Allegory," in this case, does not signify, at least in their traditional or usual meanings, the *imaginary*, *fantasm*, *simulacrum*, still less *error*. Allegory is not light and superficial, but it does not belong to a space in which one could calmly apprehend a simple *depth*. Since I do not know from whom I would now ask permission, of whom to ask pardon for such an indiscretion, if not the memory of Paul de Man within myself, I shall take the liberty of quoting, because I also feel an obligation to do so, the last letter I received from Paul de Man. Here, at least, are a few lines: "Tout cela, comme je vous le disais [on the telephone several days before] me semble prodigeusement intéressant et je m'amuse beaucoup. Je l'ai toujours su, mais cela se confirme: la mort gagne beaucoup, comme on dit, à être connue de plus près—ce 'peu profond ruisseau calomnié la mort.'" ["All this, as I was saying to you, seems exceedingly interesting to me, and I am greatly intrigued by it. I always knew it, but it proves to be so: Death repays, as they say, closer acquaintance—'this shallow calumniated stream called death.'"] This is the final line of Mallarmé's "Tomb of Verlaine." Yes, the tomb of Verlaine of Mallarmé, as if, as we have said, the signatory of the epitaph always writes on his own tomb: the tomb of Verlaine of Mallarmé of Paul de Man, etc. This genealogy of genitives cannot be broken by a cenotaph, or by cremation. After citing Mallarmé, Paul de Man adds, "J'aime quand même mieux cela que la brutalité du mot 'tumeur.'" (I certainly prefer that to the brutality of the word "tumeur.")

This letter was already "in memory," it was read in advance as what was *already reread* after the death of him who heard in this way the French word "tumeur," who heard it as a *verdict*, the future soon to follow the sentence, the terrible apostrophe and the "brutality" of familiar address: (*tu meurs*: you are dying, you must die, you shall die). But the order prescribing the future in the grammar of the present is already a description of a present, the calm statement, "tu meurs": since you must die, already you are dying; I see you and I make you die.

And *already* you are *in memory* of your own death; and your friends as well, and all the others, both of your own death and already of their own through yours. And from all these possible sentences nothing collects on the plane of a single surface or in the unity of some depth. It is "peu profond." Let us not speak ill of death, not speak badly or unjustly of death. Let us not calumniate it; let us learn not to do so. We would run the risk of wounding, in our memory, those whom it bears.

Tumeur: the act as inscription in the memory of an older trace, more

immemorial than the opposition between some performative act of the order given (*tu meurs*, I order you to die), and the statement of fact which takes cognizance (indeed, *tu meurs*, you are dying; I see it). A question of language and idiom, a memory untranslatable from the French, the word "tumeur" speaks in this way only to francophones. Paul de Man was one, and he wrote this to me in French.

3. And yet reading must find its rhythm, the right measure and just cadence. In the measure, at least, that it attempts to bring us to grasp a meaning that does not come through understanding. Let us recall the epigraph to *Allegories of Reading*: "Quand on lit trop vite ou trop doucement on n'entend rien." Pascal. (When one reads too swiftly or too slowly one understands nothing.) One should never forget the authoritative ellipsis of this warning. But at what speed ought one to have read it? On the very threshold of the book, it might be swiftly overlooked.

4. Reprinted in *Blindness and Insight: Essays in the Rhetoric of Contemporary Criticism*, 2d rev. ed. (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1983).

5. On all these questions (deconstruction, deconstruction and rhetoric, deconstruction and the American tradition) see, of course, Jonathan Culler's fundamental *On Deconstruction: Theory and Criticism After Structuralism* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1982). On the point discussed above, see in particular pp. 185 and 247 ff. Culler cites here a sentence of Paul de Man's which I think describes very well what one might call the "defective cornerstone" effect: "A deconstruction always has for its target to reveal the existence of hidden articulations and fragmentations within assumedly monadic totalities" (*Allegories of Reading*, p. 249). What is at issue here is nothing less than the concept of "nature" in Rousseau: "nature turns out to be a self-destructive term." But since allegory works or divides the self's relation to itself, since it plays while working it, as a "defective cornerstone" always does, one might conclude that the very term "self-deconstruction" is another allegory. Let me recall that in French one says of an element or stone that introduces a process of dislocation into an organic whole that *elle y travaille* or that *elle y joue*. The two words are not synonymous in this case, but they both describe a disjunctive force.

III.

ACTS

The meaning of a given word

Translated by Eduardo Cadava

I announced, as you will perhaps remember, that I would speak of memory.

Parler de mémoire: if a context, as we say, does not remove ambiguity, the expression "parler de mémoire" lends itself in French to phrases whose meaning can differ entirely one from the other. Je parlerai de "mémoire," this can mean that I will speak to you on the subject of what we call memory, on the theme or else on the word "memory." This I have already begun to do without succeeding in rendering this "thing" any simpler, any clearer, any more univocal; which was not, you may suspect, my primary concern. But in my language "je parlerai de mémoire" can mean, and if the context, as we say, lends itself to this, "je parlerai sans note," "I will speak without notes," as if I were able to cite a prior text "by heart," with only the assistance of my memory, here in the sense of *Gedächtnis* or, if you wish, of mnemonics. In the same way, you say "citer de mémoire," "to cite from memory," when you no longer even need a Mnemon who would come to whisper your text to you. Here I am not speaking of memory in this last sense, since I am reading what I have written, and if I have written this more than ever with my heart, I do not know my part "by heart."

But what is the heart? In *Was heisst Denken?* (1954), Heidegger meditates upon the mysterious co-appurtenance within which the thought (*Gedachtes*) of thought (*Gedanke*), memory (*Gedächtnis*), devoted thanks (*Dank*), and the heart (*Herz*) are interchanged. He insists upon the value of a recollection or a gathering (*Versammlung*)—something apparently quite different from a dis-junction—which rightly brings together all of these words. And the enigma of this gathering or of this dis-junction will no doubt be our focus (*foyer*) today, the enigma of a subtle and secret *Auseinander-*

setzung between Heidegger and Paul de Man. In order to suggest the tone of this discussion and by way of an exergue, I will begin with two quotations. The first, from Heidegger in *Was heisst Denken?*:

A thought (*Gedachtes*)—where is it, where does it reside? Thought is in need of memory (*Gedächtnis*). Thanks (*Dank*) belongs to thought and its thoughts, to the "*Gedanc*." But perhaps these assonances of the word "thinking" (*Denken*) in "memory" and "thanks" are superficially and artificially thought up. For in no way do they make apparent what is named by the word "thinking."

Is thinking a thanking? What does thanking mean here? Does thanks rest in thinking? What does thinking mean here? Is memory no more than a container for the thoughts of thinking or does thinking itself rest in memory? How are thanks and memory related? . . . Let us address our question now to the history of words. It gives us a direction, though the historical representation of this history is still incomplete and will presumably always remain so.

We hear the hint, echoing in the spoken aspect of the aforementioned words, that the decisive and originally speaking word is: the "*Gedanc*." But "*Gedanc*" does not mean, when all is said and done, what we currently mean when we today use the word "thought" (*Gedanke*). A thought usually means: an idea, a presentation, an opinion, an inspiration. The originary word "*Gedanc*" says: the gathered (*gesammelte*), all-gathering recollection (*alles versammelnde Gedenken*). "*The Gedanc*" says nearly the same thing as "the soul" (*das Gemüt*), "spirit" (*der Muot*), "the heart" (*das Herz*). Thinking, in the sense of this originally speaking word "*Gedanc*," is almost more original than that thinking of the heart which Pascal, centuries later and already as a countermove against mathematical thinking, attempted to recover.

And much further on: "The '*Gedanc*,' the bottom of the heart, is the gathering together (*Versammlung*) of all that

concerns us, all that comes to us, all that touches us insofar as we are, as human beings."¹

I will not analyze this text here: it would require an immense commentary. Let us content ourselves for the moment by underlining the motif of "gathering" (*Versammlung*) or "recollection." To speak to you of "memory," I have often argued, was also to speak of the future. Of the future of a thought, of what Paul de Man has bequeathed to us, but above all, and indissociable from what within this thought of memory thinks the future, of the experience of the coming of the future (*venue de l'à-venir*). And through this, we are not only made a promise, which comes forward and is written as a promise, but it also comes forward and is written as a thought of the promise, probably today the most profound, most singular, and most necessary thought; probably, too, the most difficult and most disconcerting. I do not know if I will today succeed—given the form and the limits of a lecture—in introducing this thought to you, but it is through Paul de Man's texts on the question of the promise (notably through his readings of Rousseau) that I will today struggle to approach it. These texts do not just present themselves as texts *on* the theme of the promise; they demonstrate—show and envelop at the same time—the performative structure of the text in general *as* promise, including that of the demonstrative text, that which Paul de Man signs. This structure never exists without disturbing—I might even say without perverting—the tranquil assurance of the subject of what we today call a "performative." But let us not anticipate too much; we always promise too much. What does it mean to say "promise too much"? A promise is always excessive. Without this essential excess, it would return to a description or knowledge of

the future. Its act would have a constative structure and not a performative one. But this "too much" of the promise does not belong to a (promised) content of a promise which I would be incapable of keeping. It is within the very structure of the *act* of promising that this excess comes to inscribe a kind of irremediable disturbance or perversion. This perversion, which is also a trap, no doubt unsettles the language of the promise, the performative as promise; but it also renders it possible—and indestructible. Whence the *unbelievable*, and comical, aspect of every promise, and this passionate attempt to come to terms with the law, the contract, the oath, the declared affirmation of fidelity. At the end of a remarkable demonstration, to which we will return later, Paul de Man writes the following passage—and this will be my second quotation in the form of an *exergue* (for the moment, I will simply emphasize a few words):

. . . it is impossible to read the *Social Contract* without experiencing the exhilarating feeling inspired by a firm promise, despite the *fact* that its impossibility has been established (the pattern that identifies the *Social Contract* as a *textual allegory* [*textual* is here emphasized by de Man]), does not occur at the discretion of the writer. We are not merely pointing out an inconsistency, a weakness in the text of the *Social Contract* that could have been avoided by simply omitting sentimental or demagogical passages. . . . Even without these passages, the *Social Contract* would still promise by inference, perhaps more effectively than if Rousseau had not had the naïveté, or the good faith, to promise openly. The redoubtable efficacy of the text is due to the rhetorical model of which it is a version. This model is a fact of language over which Rousseau himself has no control [remember here de Man's allusion to the uncontrollable at the end of his text on Hegel]. Just as any other reader, he is bound to misread his text as a promise of polit-

cal change. The error is not within the reader; language itself dissociates the cognition from the *act*. *Die Sprache verspricht (sich)*: to the extent that it is *necessarily misleading, language just as necessarily conveys the promise of its own truth*. This is also why *textual allegories* on this level of rhetorical complexity generate history.²

I have at first emphasized the words "*act*" and "*fact*": the *act* of language is that of a performative promise whose perverse ambiguity cannot be dominated or purified, but whose very *act* could not be annulled. A little before this passage, it had been demonstrated that the constative and performative functions within certain acts of language ("statements") could neither be "distinguished" nor "reconciled." This singular aporia, which divides the act, occurs, if no one can master it, if we are already committed before any active commitment on our part, and if we are trapped in advance, because the rhetorical structure of language precedes the act of our present initiative; it is, if we can say this, "older." It is a *faktum*, a fact of language which has established the impossibility of the promise and over which we have no control. This "fact" is not natural, it is an artifact, but an artifact which for us—and, primarily, in this example, for Rousseau—is already there, as a past which has never been present. We might say that it is historicity itself—a historicity which cannot be historical, an "ancientness" without history, without anteriority, but which produces history. Before the act, there is no speech; nor before speech is there an act. There is this *fact* to which we are recalled by a strange recollection which does not recall any memory.

In the course of this long *exergue*, then, I have placed this fragment from Paul de Man in relation to a fragment from Heidegger. Later on, I hope or I promise

that the reasons for this will become clearer. For the moment, let us recall that what I have done here again points toward the question of the gathering (*Versammlung*) of Being in its relation or non-relation to law. The day before yesterday, we began with this question, as it arises in Hölderlin, Heidegger, and de Man. We are here in the same place, then, between the promise and memory, thanks and fidelity, thought and the promise of truth ("the promise of its own truth"), probably not far from the heart, and from the heart of the heart. And Paul de Man has just mocked Heidegger a bit. This mockery is already a difference between Paul de Man and Heidegger: Heidegger does not laugh often in his texts; he would probably consider irony as a pose of subjective mastery and he would never have admitted an "exhilarating feeling inspired by a firm promise." Paul de Man smiles, then, and mocks Heidegger a bit by displacing or deforming a citation, by displacing or deforming the celebrated and so misunderstood *Die Sprache spricht*. Speech speaks, language speaks. Many—this is not the case with Paul de Man—have read this phrase with a sneer, as if they were before an empty and intransitive tautology which would have the supplementary weakness of hypostasizing speech (*la parole*), general language (*le langage*) or language (*la langue*). In truth, it is a question, guided by the most necessary movement, of taking note (*prendre acte*) of the fact that language is not the governable instrument of a speaking being (or subject) and that its essence cannot appear through any other instance than that of the very language which names it, says it, gives it to be thought, speaks it. We cannot even say that language is or does something, nor even that it "acts"; all of these values (being, doing, acting) are insufficient to construct a

metalanguage on the subject of language. Language speaks *of and by itself*, which is something quite different from a specular tautology. Now what does Paul de Man do here? He takes note of this necessity that *Die Sprache spricht*. He takes it with a certain measure of seriousness. But in miming it, in *its* language, in German, he replaces *spricht* with *verspricht*, "speaks" with "promises." This is another way of saying that the essence of speech is the promise, that there is no speaking that does not promise, which at the same time means a commitment toward the future through what we too hastily call a "speech act" and a commitment to keep the memory of the said act, to keep the acts of this act.

Would Heidegger have judged this transformation of *spricht* into *verspricht* to be inadmissible? We will soon see why the answer to this question is neither so certain, nor so simple. But he would certainly have sketched out the following objection: yes, but in order to promise, it is necessary to speak; in order to think the *versprechen*, the "promise," it is necessary at first to think the *sprechen*, the "speaking"; the *versprechen* is only a modalization—no doubt essential, but peculiar—of the *Sprache*. Now the discreet parody which complicates *spricht* with *verspricht* suggests, on the contrary, that there is no originary and essential *Sprechen* which is then modalized into a promise. Everything begins with this apparently post-originary and performative modalization of *Sprache* [a difficult word to translate simply by language (*langue*), general language (*langage*) or speech (*parole*)]. This is not to say that all of this performativity is of the type of the promise, in the narrow and everyday sense of the term. But this performative thereby reveals a structure or destination of the *Sprache* which compels us to say *Die Sprache verspricht (sich)* and no longer sim-

ply *Die Sprache spricht*. But this is not all. Paul de Man plays again—and this difference in tone perhaps tells us what is essential about this scene which is played with Heidegger—he implies that when the *sprechen* of speech is affected by a “ver-,” it not only becomes a promisor, but it also becomes unsettled, disturbed, corrupted, perverted, affected by a kind of fatal drift. You know that in German the prefix “ver-” very often has this meaning. And in fact the text on the *Social Contract* has just demonstrated (we will perhaps come to this soon) that aporetic structure which Paul de Man names an “allegory of unreadability” in which the performative can be neither accomplished nor distinguished from a constative, all the while remaining irreducible. The promise is impossible but inevitable. In a probably excessive formula and which is not that of Paul de Man, we could almost say this: even if a promise could be kept, this would matter little. What is essential here is that a pure promise cannot properly take place, in a proper place, even though promising is inevitable as soon as we open our mouths—or rather as soon as there is a text, in a sense precisely determined by this situation; and in fact, Paul de Man insists upon the textual character of this “allegory of unreadability” by underlining this word: “the pattern that identifies the *Social Contract* as a *textual* allegory.” This last phrase, moreover, says “This is why textual allegories on this level of rhetorical complexity generate history.”

This last sentence seems important to me for three reasons:

1. It assigns to textuality, as *versprechen* (the performative and generating perversion of the promise but also, if we can say this, the *Ur-sprechen*), the condition of the possibility and generation of history, and of historicity itself. No history without textual *versprechen*.

2. This last sentence can be read as an ironic signature, that is to say as a commitment and a promise which present themselves as a case of the law which this sentence states. Paul de Man knows that when we speak, we write *as* Rousseau, in the way he says the author of the *Social Contract* does, within this “misleading” of the *Versprechen* which nevertheless “conveys the promise of its own truth.” Such a “signature” confirms: this is the last confirmation of the demonstration, and everything that we can say of it, what I say of it here, is already engaged, committed within the fatality of this “fact.” As Rousseau, as Paul de Man, etc., and I will return to this “*as*.”

3. The *textual* allegory of unreadability comes almost at the conclusion of *Allegories of Reading*. As soon as allegory exists, these two expressions (allegory of reading, of the act of reading, of readingness (*lisance*), and allegory of unreadability *in the act*) are not contradictory. Their apparent contradiction is the *versprechen*, the promise at the origin of history.

We could play on the English word “lecture”: this is an allegory of lecture rather than an allegory of reading. Some have asked why Paul de Man always speaks of reading rather than of writing. Well, perhaps because the allegory of reading is writing—or the inverse. But perhaps also because every reading finds itself caught, engaged precisely by the promise of saying the truth, by a promise which will have taken place with the very first word, within a scene of signature which is a scene of writing. It is not enough to say, as we have so often done, that every reading is writing, it is necessary to demonstrate it: following, for example, this structure of the promise. *Allegory of Reading*—this means many things in the book which bears this title: the scene of reading represented in the abyssal structure of

a text, the allegory of "unreadability," "textual allegory," etc. You cannot read without speaking, speak without promising, promise without writing, write without reading that you have already promised even before you begin to speak, etc. And you can only take note of this, in other words, note as *acte*, before every act. You can only say and sign: yes, yes in memory of yes.

Paul de Man says that this allegory is "metafigural" since it is an allegory of a figure—for example, metaphor—"which relapses into the figure it deconstructs" (p. 275). The fact that this figural metafigurality, as the figure of deconstruction, is finally the very dimension of textuality at the same time that it is the upheaval of history is clearly what determines what happens to the *Sprechen* (let us say the Heideggerian *Sprechen*, that of *die Sprache spricht*) when it must, always already, give itself up to and be affected by the *versprechen*. This cannot not happen to it; from the origin on, it is destined to it; this is its destination, even though the *versprechen* threatens destination in it. And this threat comes to it as a text, as writing, through the event of signature, a signature which can only promise itself, and can only (inevitably) promise itself insofar as the path toward its destination is barred, within a no-exit, without end, a dead-end, the impasse of the *aporia*. These accidents are essential, they do not happen to the *sprechen* from the outside. Or rather, the outside does not accidentally come to the *sprechen* from the outside. Speaking affects itself from the outside ("La parole s'affecte du *dehors*"—I do not know if this sentence admits translation). This is why Paul de Man writes: *Die Sprache verspricht (sich)*. He puts the reflexive pronoun within parentheses. He adds the pronoun as that which speech must add to itself in order to speak. This addi-

tion only appears in the essay's second version. I do not know if it is the correction of a typographical error. There was another in the same line. But this first version, which I read in the offprint that Paul de Man had given to me in September, 1976, said only *Die Sprache verspricht*. The last version, in *Allegories of Reading*, adds the word *sich*; but as soon as it does so the *self*, the relation that speech has with itself passes, if we can say this, through the *aporia* of a promise which never occurs, which never happens, but which cannot not occur; in other words, being unable to come forward or take place, the "*sich*" is itself at the same time constituted and de-constituted, deconstructed, if you wish, by the very *act* of the promise. In truth, it is the value of the *act*—and of the truth—which thus deconstructs *itself*, the "*se*," the "*itself*" of auto-deconstruction does not escape what I will call the aporetic event. It is significant that Paul de Man has added, from one version to the other, or on his proofs, this *sich* between parentheses. But even if he had not done this, nothing would be changed, since the *sich*, this last-minute signature, is itself affected by the *Versprechen*. A necessary and impossible promise, the *sich* lets itself be effaced by itself; it is promised to the effacement that it promises itself. From one version to the next, the title of the text also changed. I had at first read it under the title "Political Allegory in Rousseau"; I have rediscovered it under the title "Promises (*Social Contract*)." I now close this very long *exergue*.

Can we make a promise in a foreign language? He who says "I" in Blanchot's *L'arrêt de mort* feels himself to be irresponsible when he commits himself, making a promise in the language of the other.

A title is a promise, but it aggravates the *sich ver-*

sprechen. In giving the French title *Mémoires* to this series of lectures, I wanted to make a promise in my own language, the promise would therefore be more serious, but this language is not yours—of course many among you speak French as if it were your native language—and I speak to you at this moment within that dimension of the *übersetzen* wherein Gasché has remarkably situated the stakes of Paul de Man's work. If I want, then, to at least pretend to keep an impossible promise, and to sign, it is necessary that I justify my title. The deleted article and mark of the plural lend to this noun, "Mémoires," within the contextual wilderness which surrounds a title, its greatest potential for equivocation. The perversion of language is at its peak here. You know that in French the word *mémoire* has different meanings according to whether one uses it in the masculine or the feminine form. It is very rare that the same word can have both a masculine and feminine form. In French, *mémoire* is hybrid or androgynous (which is not true of Mnemosyne or Mnēmē, nor of the nouns *Gedächtnis* or *memory*). And the mark of the number (singular or plural) does not concern number but the very meaning of the word. We say "une mémoire," *la mémoire*, in the feminine, in order to designate, in its most general sense, the faculty (psychological or not), the aptitude, the place, the gathering of memories or thoughts, but it is also the name of what we are seeking to think here and which we have so much trouble grasping. In any case, there are phrases which we can make only with the feminine singular form. And these phrases are always concerned with "memories" which have no essential need for writing in its everyday sense. As to the masculine form, it can have two meanings, each different from the other and different from *la mémoire*.

according to whether it is in the singular or the plural form. *Un mémoire* (masculine singular) is a document, a report, a "memo," a memorandum, a balance sheet recording what must be remembered; it is always short and supposes some writing, an exposition from the outside, a spatial inscription. The acts of a colloquium or a convention are of this kind. The word "mémoires" (masculine plural), if it does not simply designate a plurality of *mémoires* in the form of documents, reports, balance sheets or acts (that is, "mémoire" in the preceding sense), and in those cases when this word is used *only* in the plural, again has to do with writings but this time it refers to those writings which tell of a life or a history of which the author can bear witness. This word is what you translate by "memoirs" (dropping the "e" and the accent), and most often these are related to that enigmatic genre of which we spoke the day before yesterday, to that genre which, according to Paul de Man, is not a genre: autobiography. For example, *Mémoires d'Outre-tombe* or those "mémoires de ma vie" of which Rousseau speaks in a letter: "As to the memoirs of my life of which you speak to me, they are difficult to write without compromising anyone."³ For reasons that we have noted, these *mémoires*, which are not necessarily confessional, are always and structurally *mémoires d'outre-tombe*, memoirs from beyond the grave.

This strange noun or name therefore has semantic species or varieties marked by number and genre. The "same" name can be used in a certain sense only in the feminine, in another sense only in the masculine, and its third sense can be stated only in the masculine plural.

By leaving this word in the plural and without an article in the title of these lectures, I was giving a sup-

plementary and still more equivocal use of the "s" which would be able to cover or envelop the three uses of this word and mark-over the possible plurality of these uses, which would be able to cite them, as it were, in advance. As if I were promising you that I would concern myself with this very plurivocity and with covering the entire semantic or thematic field of *la mémoire*. The translation of this title remains therefore impossible, each English word would have amputated a meaning or a body of possible phrases from this name. Those who know me a little know that I was not announcing my "memoirs" under this title; but this already supposes a contextual determination which, because it cannot be printed on the cover of a book, we cannot be sure would not be open to misunderstanding. In fact would this really be a misunderstanding? Is not what I here dedicate to the memory of Paul de Man a mournful fragment of my own memoirs and of my own memory? I speak of the cover of a book because "memoirs," unlike *la mémoire*, also imply written exposition, in the everyday sense of this term.

This semantico-grammatical multiplicity is inscribed within the French idiom. Let us not hasten to consider it as a pure dispersion. There is perhaps a principle of organization within this heterogeneity; it orders itself around a diacritical rule, the discrimination between what can be said in the masculine and what can be said only in the feminine. The two masculine values (singular or plural) of *mémoire* always suppose a recourse to a spatial inscription, let us say to the written mark, in the everyday sense of the term. Whereas the feminine, *la mémoire*, even if it is pluralized, does not necessarily imply this graphical or technical recourse. We can traverse this discriminating line through a figure

(one could say "metaphorically") and speak of a writing of *la mémoire*, a writing of memory, as Montaigne does, for example, among many others, when he says: "Good memory is scriptural, it retains its figure." But here it is a rhetorical figure which poses all the problems that you can imagine, those of the transfer of the inside to the outside, of the soul to the body, and so on. And this figure is not the one of which Montaigne speaks, which here indicates written forms, marks engraved within memory *as* on paper.

If I have left the title, *Mémoires*, to its destiny as an untranslatable idiom, it is no doubt in order to say all of this, but also, and above all, in order to welcome what the signature of a promise keeps untranslatable by taking note of a proper name, that of Paul de Man. And I had to signal this tribute within the untranslatable idiom of my own language. Otherwise, I could have chosen another word, in English, also trembling in the body of its plurivocity. And it would be consonant with the "memorial" of this event (here I write the word "memorial" in two languages at the same time, the only difference being that of an accent, or of two accents, the one spoken, the other written). The English word, which I could have chosen for a title, would in my eyes have had only two inconveniences. Its French homonym has a very different meaning and, above all, I would have been unable to find it all alone, supposing that a word can be found and that one could ever find it all alone. The word, then, is *memento*, which in French primarily signifies an exterior mark destined to recall a memory (*souvenir*). My title was already announced and the first two lectures were written when a letter from David Carroll informed me that the breadth of this word would have been able to comprehend, under its folds, in

English, all that I meant to say and do here. I cite David Carroll citing the Oxford English Dictionary:

Memento pl. mementoes

1. Eccl. Either of the two prayers in the Canon of the mass in which the living and the departed are respectively commemorated [I verified, at least according to the *Littre*, that this usage is also possible in French: "A Catholic liturgical term. The memento of the living, the memento of the dead, two prayers of the Canon of the mass, the one for the living, the other for the dead. E. Lat. *memento*, remember, souviens-toi: as an order, an imperative. *Memini* is a perfect form coming from the radical *man*, sanscrit *manmi*, I think, I know, whence *memini*, I have known, I remember myself (see *mental*)."] The *Littre* thus inscribes, in the name of the radical, the name of *man*, the name de Man].

2. A reminder, warning, or hint as to conduct or with regard to *future events* [my emphasis, JD]. Obs.

b. concr. An object serving to remind or warn in this way.

3. Something to remind one of a past event or condition of an absent person, of something that once existed, now chiefly an object kept as a memorial of some person or event.

b. A memory or remembrance. Obs. rare

4. Humorously misused for: a) a reverie, a doze b) (one's) memory.

If a dividing line orders this multiplicity of usages, and if it passes through the supposed opposition between the interiority of memory and the (graphic, spatial, technical) exteriority of memory or of memories as archives, documents, acts, etc., we have just rediscovered—let us say, recalled—the redoubtable problem of *Gedächtnis* and *Erinnerung*. Where does the provocative force of de Manian interpretation reside? In at least this: that in order to distinguish *Gedächtnis* (thinking memory) from

Erinnerung (interiorizing memory), whether he does it in the name of Hegel or by focusing on some "cornerstone" of the Hegelian system, de Man marks the irreducible link between thought as memory and the technical dimension of memorization, the art of writing, of "material" inscription, in short, of all that exteriority which, after Plato, we call hypomnesic, the exteriority of Mnemon, rather than that of Mnēmē. In recalling this unity between thought and technology (that is to say, as well, between thought *and* the exteriority of the graphic inscription—de Man speaks of the "art of writing"—between thought and techno-science) through memory, de Manian deconstruction resembles, in the same act, a double decision. Very schematically: *on the one hand*, it in principle gives itself the means to not drive out into the exterior and inferior dark regions of thought, the immense question of artificial memory and of the modern modalities of archivation which today affects, according to a rhythm and with dimensions that have no common measure with those of the past, the totality of our relation to the world (on this side of or beyond its anthropological determination): habitat, all languages, writing, "culture," art (beyond picture galleries, film libraries, video libraries, record libraries), literature (beyond libraries), all information or informatization (beyond "memory" data banks), techno-sciences, philosophy (beyond university institutions), and everything within the transformation which affects all relations to the future. This prodigious mutation not only heightens the stature, the quantitative economy of so-called artificial memory, but also its qualitative structure—and in doing so it obliges us to rethink what relates this artificial memory to man's so-called psychical and interior memory, to truth, to the simulacrum and

simulation of truth, etc. Let it be quickly said in passing that, if we wish to analyze that nebula named "deconstruction in America," it is necessary *also*, not only, but also, to take account of this problematic under all of its aspects. There is no deconstruction which does not begin by tackling this problematic or by preparing itself to tackle this problematic, and which does not begin by again calling into question the dissociation between thought and technology, especially when it has a hierarchical vocation, however secret, subtle, sublime, or denied it may be. This leads me to the second point: *on the other hand*, in fact, the attention accorded to this link between *Gedächtnis* and hypomnesic writing no doubt leads to our no longer being able to subscribe (for my part, I have never done so) to Heidegger's sentence and to all that it supposes: *Die Wissenschaft denkt nicht*, science does not think. This is a phrase written and often reconsidered, meditated upon, and prudently explicated by Heidegger in the parts of the text of *Was heisst Denken* on *Gedächtnis* and *Gedanc*, which I quoted a little while ago. I would not want my treatment of this phrase to be a preterition and thus neglect its force or its necessity, but I cannot here retrace the path which has led to it or which supports it. Let us say very quickly, perhaps too quickly, that despite the precautions he takes, and that have the form of denial, Heidegger marks within this phrase the rigorous necessity of an essential exteriority and of an implicit hierarchy between, on the one hand, thought as memory (*Denken, Gedächtnis, Gedanc*) and, on the other hand, science, but also technology, writing, and even literature. We would be able to find numerous indications of this in *Was heisst Denken* itself. No doubt Heidegger defends himself by thus instituting a simple division ("on the one hand, on the other hand") and

by accompanying this with an anti-scientific, anti-technical evaluation which would lead us to subordinate or play down everything which is not "the thinking of the thinker": "Science does not think in the sense in which a thinker thinks. Still, it does not at all follow that thinking has no need of turning towards the sciences. The statement 'science does not think' does not imply a license under which thinking is free to set itself up, so to speak, offhandedly, by simply thinking something up" (Eng. 134; Ger. 154). This prevents neither Heidegger's division from persisting in all its rigor, nor hierarchy. What refers to science here also goes for technology ("Modern science grounds itself upon the essence of technology"). The Heideggerian argument which operates everywhere to justify this division and hierarchy, when it is reduced to its essential schema, has the following form and can be transposed everywhere: "The essence of technology is nothing technological." The thinking of this essence therefore is in no way "technological" or "technicist"; it is free of all technicity because it thinks technicity, it is not scientific because it thinks the scientificity of science. Heidegger would say the same thing of all determined sciences, for example, of linguistics, rhetoric, etc. The thinking of the rhetoricity of rhetoric (within the history of philosophy, a derived and belated technological knowledge) is in no way a rhetoric.

Perhaps we can measure the stakes of de Manian interpretation. It delineates a gesture quite different from that of Heidegger by recalling that the relation of *Gedächtnis* to technique, artifice, writing, the sign, etc., could not be one of exteriority or heterogeneity. This amounts to saying that the exteriority or the division, the dis-junction, *is the relation*, the essential juncture

between thinking memory and the so-called techno-scientific, indeed literary outside (for literature, literary writing, is, for Heidegger, in the same position as techno-science with regard to thought or poetry).⁴ I would say that this gesture is quite different from Heidegger's and that it gives rise to quite different intonations. This is undoubtedly so, but things are never so simple and we ought to give ourselves the time and have the patience outside of a "lecture" to follow all the folds of these thoughts. I must limit myself here to two indications. On the side of deconstruction, if this can be said, and in its de Manian form, a certain continuity (*within* the disjunctive structure) between thinking memory and techno-scientific memory does not exclude, but, on the contrary, permits a thinking of the essence of technology, a thinking which it is not within the logic of deconstruction to renounce. This is why this deconstruction, at the very moment when it puts in question the hierarchical division between thought and technology, is neither technicist nor technological. But on the other side, that of Heidegger, things are not any simpler. It is in fact difficult to reconcile precisely this hierarchical division with the principle of other propositions every bit as essential to Heidegger. For example: the affirmation according to which there is no "meta-language" (*Unterwegs zur Sprache*) should, in principle, undermine the possibility of this hierarchical division. It would be the same for that thinking of the *Gedanc*, for it also escapes a delimitation opposing the outside to the inside from the point of view of representation, that is to say, from a point of view determining thought as interior representation or as interiorizing memory (*Erinnerung*): "The *Gedanc* means soul, heart, the bottom of the heart (*Herzensgrund*), the innermost essence of man

which reaches outward most fully and towards the outermost limits, and so decisively that, rightly thought, the representation of an interior and an exterior does not arise" (Eng. 144; Ger. 157).

But all this does not proceed in Heidegger—and we have just recalled this—without decisive recourse to an originality of thinking, to the purity of the "pure thinker" (Socrates), of a *Sprache* which speaks (*spricht*) before promising itself or before going astray in an impossible promise (*sich versprechen*), without recourse, finally, to the originary meaning of names or words. Now what is it that distinguishes, in this respect, the style of de Manian deconstruction, as is indicated in an increasingly more accentuated way in the texts of *Allegories of reading*? Well, among other things, an unprecedented bringing into play and at the same time a subversive reelaboration of Austinian theorems and of speech act theory, which in de Man's work at the same time progresses and enters a crisis. We could show—at another time—why this movement was indispensable for a rigorous deconstruction. If, for the moment, we only wish to signal the change of style or tone with regard to the Heideggerian meditation on *Gedächtnis* or *Gedanc* (we will go further in a minute), we can rely on this indication: here the interest is in texts, in textual figures (*textual allegories*, for example) and not in the originality of a *Sprache* before any *Versprechen*; here the interest is in textualization or contextualization rather than the original meaning of the name. Let us take an example and let us cite Austin, since he represents here another pole and another style.

Since the day before yesterday, we appear, at the very least, to have been asking: what does memory mean? And from time to time we seem to have been

reducing this question to the following one: what does the word "mémoire" signify? In the same way we could have asked: what does the word "deconstruction" signify? It has even occurred to us to consult the dictionary, but in passing and without having too much confidence in it. Neither Heidegger nor Austin believe that the meanings of words are found in dictionaries, not even in etymological dictionaries. But for apparently different, even opposed reasons. Heidegger thinks that it is necessary *to think* the meaning of words in order to be able to read and examine a dictionary. Austin says, in no uncertain terms, that words do *not* have a meaning, and that it is absurd to look in a dictionary for something like the *given* meaning of a word. Only sentences have a meaning, and the dictionary can only help by informing us about the sentences wherein conventions authorize the usage of these words. This is practically what Wittgenstein says in the first words of the *Blue Book*. It would be very necessary, but I must renounce doing it here, to slowly and minutely question Austin's "*The Meaning of a Word*,"⁵ a text to which, it seems to me, de Man never refers. This essay was also a lecture. It was even given twice and I wonder how the essay's essential and constant recourse to quotation marks, italics and parentheses was transposed (or written on the blackboard).

This lecture had also a title which is not a sentence, "*The Meaning of a Word*." It does not begin with sentences, but with two tables, two lists of "specimens of sense" and "specimens of nonsense." At the head of the second list is the sentence "What-is-the-meaning-of-a-word?" After having written this double list, Austin declares that many readers probably already see all or part of what he will say. But he is going to say it anyway because not *everyone* sees the *totality* of what he

will say, some of them get it slightly wrong; and also, there is a "tendency to forget it." So much so that the author of the "paper" justifies his purpose and the *act* of his lecture through this empiricism and essential differentialism (not everyone understands everything to the same degree in the same way, there is no simple alternative between understanding and not understanding, only the complex relations between the whole and the part, etc.). But he also justifies the act of his lecture "*The Meaning of a Word*" by the "tendency to forget," and to forget what we know, what we see, what we understand, indeed, even what we love or approve of, to forget the "meaning" of all of this as well as to forget the sentences that we produce on this subject. The act of this lecture will thus also be an act of memory, a *memento*: remember, don't only agree with me; remember that you have understood what I have told you, that you have approved it; promise me and promise yourself to remember it. Now, what is it here that we have an irrepressible tendency to forget each time we open our mouths, to forget then even when we know it? The fact that a word does not have a "meaning." Only a "sentence" can have "meaning." Before making this "preliminary remark," Austin will have introduced this extraordinary scene of rhetoric, as naïve as it is cunning, cunningly playing with naïveté, through a battery of performative acts, primary or not, which would deserve a long study: promises and excuses. After having promised and *made* us promise (for example, not to forget), he excuses himself to those who are already converted. But at the same time he does not excuse himself, since the converts too have need of a *memento*:

I begin, then, with some remarks about "the meaning of a word." I think many persons now see [after reading the lists

of specimens, I suppose, on the blackboard] all or part of what I shall say: but not all do, and there is a tendency to forget, or to get it slightly wrong. In so far as I am merely flogging the converted, I apologize to them. (PP, p. 56)

Me too. This is perhaps the principal reason why I cite Austin here. Because of the promise, the memento, and the excuse—on the subject of a word, *Mémoires*, which perhaps has no “meaning.” But can we promise or excuse ourselves by citing the promise or excuse of another? Can we do this without citation?

Between the list of specimens and these excuses, followed by the “preliminary remark” according to which “properly speaking, what alone has a meaning is a *sentence*,” we find a short paragraph which could well be the most interesting part of the “paper”: nine lines which claim to summarize and describe what is going to follow:

This paper is about the phrase “the meaning of a word.” It is divided into three parts, of which the first is the most trite and the second the most muddled: all are too long [you see that he is in the process of describing my lectures and of excusing me for them, J.D.]. In the first, I try to make it clear that the phrase “the meaning of a word” is, *in general* [I emphasize *in general* as I had emphasized *properly speaking* a little while ago], *if not always*, a dangerous nonsense phrase. In the other two parts I consider in turn two questions, often asked in philosophy, which clearly need new and careful scrutiny if that facile phrase “the meaning of a word” is no longer to be permitted to impose upon us. (ibid.)

We can read this text as a text of law, the ethico-political project of a text of law interdicting or delegitimizing, at least among philosophers, the future recourse to a phrase, let us say a locution, which is some-

times “dangerous,” which is *generally* dangerous and which should, if we are convinced by Austin and if we do not forget his demonstration, “no longer . . . be permitted to impose upon us.” What he proposes to delegitimize here is the very thing he promises to speak to us about and which gives title to his lecture, not only the title to be pronounced (and twice rather than once), which would justify this act and its repetition “for memory,” but also, in the strict sense, his title, “*The Meaning of a Word*.”

A title is always a promise. Here the title does not constitute a “sentence.” It therefore has no “meaning.” It acts out a “promise” in a statement which “properly speaking” has no “meaning.” This title is therefore dangerous, especially for the community of philosophers; it has only an improper and figural “meaning.” Is this title not a literary parasite which, promising nothing philosophical, in the last instance, announces that we will hear for an hour or two a certain number of “sentences” in which, by playing with old and new philosophemes, the phrase, the locution “the meaning of a word” will be pronounced with a great number of variations, with or without quotation marks, italics or hyphens, with or without *meaning*? But this literary fiction, if it really is one, nonetheless would seek (and up to a certain point, successfully) to produce political effects and change conventions, to legitimize or de-legitimize, to constitute, through its very irony, a new right. In any case, this fiction cannot be *totally* grounded in existing conventions in order to define sentences in which a word has “meaning.” This is because everything depends upon contexts which are always open, non-saturable, because a single word (for example, a word in a title) begins to bear the meaning of all the potential phrases

in which it is to be inscribed (and therefore begins to promise, to violently ground its own right and other conventions, since it does not yet *totally* have the right to promise) and because, inversely, no phrase has an absolutely determinable "meaning": it is always in the situation of the word or title in relation to the text which borders it and which carries it away, in relation to the always open context which always promises it more meaning. What I am saying here goes for the words "mémoire" or "deconstruction" but also for so-called proper names.

One of the things I like in Austin's text is that at bottom he does not leave any properly philosophical thesis in place—and therefore any properly philosophical institution. This is the part of his legacy the least understood by his official, that is to say his presumptive, heirs. He speaks and finally confesses to speaking improperly, figurally, of the conditions in which a word could have a "meaning." But he speaks of and confesses these conditions improperly, he promises improperly, and he improperly remembers, has us promise to remember, in the least certain circumstances, and with as little assurance as possible. His sentences resemble those words which never have enough meaning or—like a title—they have too much. He is finally content with saying: there are dangers, there are "uncanny" (*unheimlich*) things, there are curious beliefs and odd views, *there is this*: for example "there is the curious belief that all words are names, i.e. in effect *proper* names [this is a gesture essential to deconstruction, it was perhaps its primary gesture: to wonder at that "curious belief"!], and therefore stand for something or designate it in the way that a proper name does. But this view that general names 'have denotation' in the same

way that proper names do, is quite as odd as the view that proper names 'have connotation' in the same way that general names do, which is commonly recognized to lead to error" (p. 61). Whereupon he speaks of a "more common malady . . ."

I do not have the time to devote to "*The Meaning of a Word*," neither the time nor analytic patience that it deserves. Before leaving it, provisionally, and by promising to return to it, I will again recall *two things*, two partial and particular things, within the exemplary figure of metonymy:

I. I will at first underline two *odd* examples with which Austin illustrates his purpose. Both, in a certain way, evoke, *on the one hand*, death and suicide, and, *on the other hand*, writing and the necessity of a new idiom. I quote here several lines without having the time to analyze them:

A. Now suppose I ask my third question "What is the point of doing *anything*—not anything *in particular*, but just *anything*?" Old Father William would no doubt kick me downstairs without the option [he has just patiently answered these odd, but "decidable," questions, leaving room for an "option"]. But lesser men, raising this same question and finding no answer, would very likely commit suicide or join the Church. (luckily, in the case of "What is the meaning of a word" the effects are less serious, amounting only to the writing of books). On the other hand, more adventurous intellects would no doubt take to asking "What is the-point-of-doing-a-thing?" or "What is the "point" of doing a thing." (p. 59) [I let you imagine Heidegger's questions, at least their style, in terms of what this supposes of a thinking of *doing* (*l'acte*) and of the *thing*].

B. Supposing now someone says "x is extended but has no shape." Somehow we cannot see what this "could mean"—there is no semantic convention, explicit or implicit,

to cover this case: yet it is not prohibited in any way—there are no limiting rules about what we might or might not say in *extraordinary cases* . . . we can only describe what it is we are trying to imagine, by means of words which precisely describe and evoke the *ordinary case*, which we are trying to think away. Ordinary language *blinkers* the already feeble imagination. It would be difficult, in this way, if I were to say "Can I think of a case where a man would be neither at home nor not at home?" and get the answer, "No" when certainly he is not at home. But supposing I happen *first* to think of the situation when I call on him just after he has died: then I see at once it would be wrong to say either. So in our case, the only thing to do is to imagine or experience all kinds of odd situations, and then suddenly turn round on oneself and ask: there, *now* would I say that, being extended it must be shaped? A new idiom might in odd cases be demanded. [Imagine questions of another style, for example, of a Heidegger: what is an odd case? what is an idiom, *eine Sprache*? Who will speak it and how, if not *die Sprache selbst*? But what happens if "Die Sprache verspricht (sich)"? What do you mean by all these words and names? Is death an "odd case" and am I not still in the process of evoking someone "after he has died" and of recalling him again. Is this an "ordinary case" or an "extraordinary case"? I close the parenthesis]. A little further on, Austin says: "Very often philosophers are only engaged on this task, when they seem to be perversely using words in a way which makes no sense according to 'ordinary usage.' There may be extraordinary facts, even about our everyday experience, which plain men and plain language overlook." (pp. 68-69)

2. Second reminder. "The meaning of a word" demonstrates for us—and this demonstration is also a reminder—the irreducibility of the structure of promise in every language, even in the language that would want to speak the truth of the promise or of those par-

ticular kinds of *speech acts* which are explicit promises. We have also just seen why this *arche-promise*, which promises truth and meaning, is finally neither true nor meaningful in its proper and originary moment: it is the moment of the name or of the word alone, of the title which promises and pledges out of its insignificance or its limited meaning. This is the moment of the given word, this before all else. This moment calls for new conventions which it itself proposes or promises, but which, for that reason, it cannot without artifice take advantage of or found its authority on at the very moment it calls, when it calls for new laws. And every theorem on *speech acts*, for example, any theorem on the distinction between performative and constative, and in particular on the promise, already proceeds as a promise, a promise of truth, with all the paradoxes and aporias which can attend such an approach. This ethico-juridical or historico-political dimension is not absent from *The Meaning of a Word*, since there it is a question of "dangerous" phrases, of "permission" to be given or refused, and conventions to be created. We are in fact at that place where the possibility is announced for political, ethical, juridical, historical language.

If I have chosen to touch briefly upon this text by Austin, it is for numerous reasons. I will note two of them. It is impossible to imagine a problematic or rhetoric more removed from those of Heidegger than Austin's. Now, Paul de Man's idiom, his "deconstructionist" style is neither Heideggerian nor Austinian even if it mobilizes and, above all, displaces, crosses, and decenters both traditions at the same time. Some might want to minimize the novelty of this scene by saying that he has translated the two traditions the one into the other; and as they both have their heritage and their institu-

tions in America, Paul de Man's work here is at once bold and useful. But such a translation is much more than a translation, it upsets (*dérange*) each of the two axiomatics which it appears to translate or transfer, it mobilizes others, it does not belong to either, and it writes a new text which therefore at first appears unreadable or unacceptable to both sides, at least in what in it is most new. It upsets everyone (*Il dérange tout le monde*).

I am perhaps wrong in speaking of axiomatics in relation to Heidegger and Austin. They both comment upon the subject of those promises which are axiomatics. Let us say that these commentaries are themselves promises; Paul de Man's makes another kind of promise on the subject of promise.

The other reason is that we perhaps get a better, more economical introduction to the idiom of de Manian deconstruction by asking what it has *done*, through its actions, to the Austinian theory of *speech acts*. Rodolphe Gasché has said something essential and incontestable about this. From another point of view, so has Suzanne Gearhart. I do not know if what I will suggest about it will be different but, in any case, it will not be, I believe, in contradiction with what they have already said.

If we were authorized to speak of a second period of de Manian thought, we might notice there, at first glance, a sort of acceptance and appropriation of the motif and word "deconstruction": the word appears more and more frequently in his work and it would be necessary to record and to analyze all its values, for I believe them to be multiple. And simultaneously, a first glance would detect the new insistence of an important debate (*Auseinandersetzung*) with the Austinian opposi-

tion between the performative and the constative; an opposition confirmed, developed, implanted, well beyond its original field—and then immediately undermined and made sterile in its very principle. This dispute is primarily a deconstruction, not only of the Austinian text, but of the axiomatics and theorems of the theory of *speech acts*: which does not mean that we can or that we should renounce them. But we must take note of the aporetic and allegorical structure of the act in a *speech act*.

I just said: "If we were authorized to speak of a second period . . ." This is a classic and inevitable question which will not, in this case any more than in others, receive a satisfying answer. On this question, again, Rodolphe Gasché and Suzanne Gearhart are no doubt right when they speak, the one of discontinuity, the other of continuity. Paul de Man has often criticized, or at least considered as fictions, all "periodizations." He says this already in "The Rhetoric of Blindness" (*Blindness and Insight*, p. 137). This commentary on "periods," whether it is a question of an individual work or of Western metaphysics, always has the value of a fiction or of a story we tell ourselves in order to dramatize, historically and teleologically, a non-historical argument. Must we in the same way prohibit ourselves from "periodizing" Paul de Man's itinerary? He does not himself say that we have no right to do this, but it is necessary to know that we are in this way undertaking a figurative and narrative interpretation.

I will not risk dwelling on this question for too long, only the time necessary to pose a suspended question on the subject of the motif of "deconstruction" in the interrupted work of Paul de Man. Even if it cannot resolve his work, this question is indissociable from that

of "deconstruction in America": from every possible point of view (I will try to enumerate these later), "deconstruction in America" would not be what it is without Paul de Man. Now what happens in the very inside of his work, if we can isolate this, between (1) the moments when he does not speak of deconstruction, (2) those when he speaks of it as an operation taking place in *other* texts, and (3) those when he presents his own work as a deconstruction? You know that he does this in *Allegories of Reading* and that he comments on his own periodized path: he does this a first time in his "Preface" to *Allegories of Reading* and another time in his "Foreword to the Revised, Second Edition" of *Blindness and Insight*. I refer you to these two texts which include an invaluable periodizing auto-interpretation, to be read also as memoirs or as a theoretical autobiography, with the fictive, ironic, or allegorical dimension that de Man's signature imprints on all his texts.

By letting you reread these "mémoires" in the form of a preface, I will be content to point out a few dividing lines. In the second "Foreword" to *Blindness and Insight*, Paul de Man declares his amnesia when he writes: "I am not given to retrospective self-examination and mercifully forget what I have written with the same alacrity I forget bad movies—although, as with bad movies, certain scenes or phrases return at times to embarrass and haunt me like a guilty conscience."⁶ Again, the return of the ghost as text, or the text as ghost, you will recall what we said of this two days ago. Another dividing line is that which the first "Foreword" to *Blindness and Insight* recalls. The author presents himself as someone "whose teaching has been more or less evenly divided between the United States and Europe" (vii). And finally the last division whose line traverses the very history of *Allegories of Reading* is one its author

himself periodizes; and it is here precisely a question of the "term 'deconstruction,' which has rapidly become a label as well as a target. Most of this book was written before 'deconstruction' became a bone of contention, and the term is used here in a technical rather than a polemical sense—which does not imply that it therefore becomes neutral or ideologically innocent. But I saw no reason to delete it."

Why this scene of deletion of the "I saw no reason to delete it," this "I will not erase" (further on there is an "I do not wish to erase" and the book's dedication also speaks to me of the "unerasable"), why this risk of erasure and this affirmation in the form of a signature, of a promise or commitment ("I will not erase")—do they have, well beyond biographies, through autobiographies, an essential relation with the text of deconstruction? I will not return to this problem in terms of generalities. Let us situate it within Paul de Man's singular trajectory. We cannot write what we do not wish to erase, we can only promise it in terms of what can always be erased. Otherwise, there would be neither memory nor promise.

Now the word "deconstruction" could have been erased in thousands of different ways. I will not speak of my complicated relations with the inscription and erasure of this word. But look at Paul de Man: he begins by saying that finally "there is no need to deconstruct Rousseau"⁷ for the latter has already done so himself. This was another way of saying: there is always already deconstruction, at work *in* works, especially in *literary* works. Deconstruction cannot be applied, after the fact and from the outside, as a technical instrument of modernity. Texts deconstruct *themselves* by themselves, it is enough to recall it or to recall them to oneself.

I felt myself, up to a certain point, rather in

agreement with this interpretation that I extend even beyond so-called literary texts—on the condition that we agree on the “itself” of “deconstructs itself” and on this self of “the recalling to oneself.” It is perhaps the reading of this little used word “itself” (“se”) which supports the entire reading of Rousseau, and displaces it from the first to the last texts, from *Blindness and Insight* to *Allegories of Reading*. I myself have often elaborated on this point; the interest of the question is not there. But what is happening then in Paul de Man’s work when the word “deconstruction,” which could have or should have been erased by itself, since it only designates the explicitation of a relation of the work to *itself*, instead of erasing itself inscribes itself more and more, whether it is a question of the number of times it occurs, of the variety or of the prominence of the sentences which give it meaning? I do not have an answer to this question. Always already, as Paul de Man says, there is deconstruction at work in the work of Rousseau, even if Rousseau abstained from saying a word about it, from saying the word. Always already, there is deconstruction at work in the work of Paul de Man, even during the period when he did not speak of it or during the time when he spoke of it in order to say that there was nothing new to say about it.

But what of this “always already” when we judge it both possible and necessary to say of what is said, that it goes without saying? Always already, it was said, there was deconstruction at work in history, culture, literature, philosophy, in short, in Western memory in its two continents. And I believe that this is true; we could show it in each discourse, each work, each system, each moment. But what of this “always already” when deconstruction receives this name, proper as it

may be and when—somewhere, at a given moment—it becomes not only a theme but also a “topos” of which we do not know whether or not it must produce a system, particular methods, a certain kind of teaching, institutions, etc., and which, in any case, produces conflicts? when these latter are not only theoretical, but also passionate, symbolic, political, etc? It is necessary to recognize that this happens (*es ereignet sich . . .*). In the case of Paul de Man, as much as in that of “deconstruction in America,” the “always already” which tends to erase the singularity of the event is erased in its turn before the signature of this word. As precarious as this signature is, it asserts itself as history insofar as the origin of its “taking-place” is unlocatable. I do not have a formalizable answer to this question. But it is posed to us by the history of deconstruction and by history as deconstruction.

Rousseau: this is not one proper name among others in de Manian deconstruction. This is why I recall it now. The first moment of the *Auseinandersetzung* with the word and motif of deconstruction traverses, as you know, Paul de Man’s reading of Rousseau. This is the important essay entitled “The Rhetoric of Blindness,” which proposes an original and new reading of Rousseau, defines that concept of the “rhetoric of blindness” which organizes all of the work in the book, and disputes a reading of Rousseau that I had proposed in a recently published book. I will not enter here into this debate, for many reasons. First of all, because it still remains a bit enigmatic to me. Next, because others, including Paul de Man, have themselves returned to this debate and have done so better than I could do it here. I again think of Rodolphe Gasché, Suzanne Gearhart, Richard Klein, David Carroll. Finally, and above all, if

there must be a last word on this debate, I want it to come today from Paul de Man. I can only, from now on, speak of him in the desire to speak to him, in the desire to speak with him and, finally, to leave to him the chance to speak. Our memories intersect here; I will not touch directly on this public debate, but speak indirectly of it for a very brief moment in order to make a few private remarks.

First remark. In Europe and in America, whether or not it is a question of deconstruction, I have had the luck or the bad luck, as Paul de Man did, and often conjointly with him, to provoke violent and numerous reactions: as we say, "Critiques." Now, never has any appeared to me as generous in its rigor, as free of all reactivity, as respectful of the future without ever giving way to complaisance, never has any criticism appeared to me so easy to accept as that of Paul de Man in "The Rhetoric of Blindness." None has ever given me so much to think about as his has, even if I did not feel I was in agreement with it; though I was not simply in disagreement with it either. I no longer remember, and it matters little, what I wrote in answer to Paul de Man, in order to thank him and probably to argue a bit, in a letter of which the only thing that I today remember is that I wrote it to him from Oxford. But in order to let Paul de Man have the say, I will permit myself to quote, if this is not too indiscreet—once will not make it a habit—a fragment from the letter that I received in answer to mine. This will, in this way, be much more interesting than what I was able to or would be able to say. Believe me, I have hesitated a great deal before doing this, and I hesitate again now: is it not abusive, violent, or indiscreet to quote from such letters, in however fragmentary a fashion? Is it sufficient to omit here,

for the moment, everything that comes from personal memory, whether his or mine, and to limit oneself strictly, if this is possible, to what concerns a public exchange, here a certain reading of Rousseau? What made me decide to decide, to take the risk of deciding, is something that happened on February 25 of this year at the moment when I was at this very point in the preparation of these lectures. I will tell you its little story. While stirring up so many, many memories, I said to myself that day that Rousseau has played a singular role for Paul de Man and for me. And from the very first day of our meeting, in Baltimore in 1966, when we had begun with this: by evoking *l'Essai sur l'Origine des langues*, a text then little read and on which we were both in the process of working. Beginning with this memory, of which the only thing that I retain is the name Rousseau, I passed to the following remark: the entire—interrupted—history of de Manian deconstruction passes through Rousseau. We could follow this history from the first essay on "The Rhetoric of Blindness" up to the six texts of the last part of *Allegories of Reading* where a deconstructive staging (*mise en oeuvre*) of speech acts is unfolded. But no, I said then, if this is true, and I believe that it is true, it is also necessary to name Nietzsche, whose figure and thinking have assisted and insisted and haunted Paul de Man in a way just as unerasable as that of Rousseau. It is Rousseau with Nietzsche, and the latter provides a very certain reference for the analysis of the auto-biographico-political promise in the *Social Contract*: "All laws are future-oriented and prospective; their illocutionary mode is that of the promise."²¹ [Note 21: "In *The Genealogy of Morals*, Nietzsche also derives the notion of a transcendental referent (and the specificity of 'man') from the

possibility of making promises" (*AR*, p. 273.) Rousseau-and-Nietzsche, then, and I said to myself that, curiously, this couple had always haunted me, me too, and well before I was in a position to refer to them in published works. Barely adolescent (here it comes, we are approaching the genre of "memoirs," in its worst form), I read them together and I confided my despair to a kind of diary: how was it possible for me to reconcile these two admirations and these two identifications since the one spoke so ill of the other? End of "memoirs" for today. Returning to Paul de Man, I said to myself then: yes, for him it had also been Rousseau and Nietzsche, all in all, the two bodies or two parts of *Allegories of Reading*. This is too obvious. I was then struck by another piece of evidence: there is a third figure in this, there is a third identification: Hölderlin. This time his and not mine. For reasons which here are of little consequence, my familiarity with Hölderlin remains a bit abstract, or it passes precisely through the family of Heidegger or the family of Paul de Man. Wait a minute, I said to myself then: Hölderlin between Rousseau and Nietzsche. What a trinity! But these are the three madmen of Western modernity! The three measurers of the immeasurable in terms of which Western modernity is measured. In this way, Paul de Man would have meditated all his life on the law and on the destiny of the West (the logos, rhetoric, promise, philosophy, literature, politics) in the company of these three madmen of the West (these "extraordinary cases," as Austin would perhaps have said), and by listening to their madness from a kind of American exile where one of his friends even nicknamed him "Hölderlin in America," etc. I daydreamed a bit on this theme of madness—the figure of de Manian thinking as a thinking of madness, a thinking memory

or a history of a Western and modern madness, of a madness of America, not in the sense that America would be mad but in the sense that it is necessary to think it from the perspective of mad lucidity, under the light of lunacy. I daydreamed in these realms without knowing where I was going, and without knowing if I ought to go ahead and publish such fragments from a letter; at least this would interest friends, readers, or students of Paul de Man and add a public contribution to the debate surrounding Rousseau. I told myself then that it was necessary for me at least to reread all of these letters before deciding. And it is because I reread this letter, which touches precisely upon madness, that I believed, rightly or wrongly, I could ignore the prohibition against quoting from private correspondence. I repeat, I only draw from it what, finally, does not concern me. Here is a first fragment. It is from a letter dated July 9, 1970, from Zumikon in Switerland, before the publication of "The Rhetoric of Blindness." I had received the manuscript and I had written to thank Paul de Man, who answered me thus:

The other day was neither the time nor the place to speak again of Rousseau and I do not know if you have any reason to return to the question. Your supposed "agreement" [This is a word I must have written in my letter] can only be kindness, for if you object to what I say about metaphor, you must, as it should be, object to everything. My essay moves through, for economic reasons, a whole series of questions and complications which, in my eyes, do not weaken the central proposition. I do not yet know why you keep refusing Rousseau the value of radicality which you attribute to Mallarmé and no doubt to Nietzsche; I believe that it is for hermeneutic rather than historical reasons, but I am probably wrong. The text will appear in October in *Poétique* in a translation which seems to me faithful.

The text having appeared in *Poétique*, I must have thanked Paul de Man anew, since a letter from Zurich, some months later, dated January 4, 1971, said the following, in its turn a form of acknowledgement (this is still an extract; I could not erase, within the very inside of certain phrases and under the pretext that they were addressed to me, all the gestures of generous courtesy):

Your commentaries are to me all the more invaluable since I am still in the process of working on Rousseau (and Nietzsche). There is no disagreement between us about the basis of your thinking but a certain divergence in our way of nuancing and situating Rousseau. This divergence is important to me for the notions that I had come to about the question of writing before having had the benefit of your thinking, above all, they were drawn from Rousseau (and Hölderlin) [Second parenthesis: "Rousseau (and Nietzsche)" four lines above, "Rousseau (and Hölderlin)" here]. The desire to exempt Rousseau (as you say) *at all costs* from blindness is therefore, for me, a gesture of fidelity to my own itinerary. Rousseau has led me to a certain understanding which, due allowance being made, seems to me near to that which you have had the force to begin. And as *l'Essai sur l'origine des langues* is one of the texts upon which I have been relying for such a long time, I must have put a certain ardor into my defense of the relative insight which I have benefited from. This having been said, I did not wish to exempt Rousseau from blindness but only wished to show that, on the specific question of the rhetoricity of his writing, he was not blinded. This is what gives to his text the particular status that we would both agree, I believe, to call "literary." That this insight is accompanied by a perhaps more redoubtable blindness—and which could be, for example, madness—I didn't feel myself obliged to say about this latter text, but I would say it in regard to the *Dialogues* and especially in regard to *Emile*, which seems to me one of the most demented texts there is.⁸

The rest of the letter concerns "specific points":

It is sometimes a simple question of formulation. I have not, for example, wanted to say that "sound" would be the referent of music but, paraphrasing Rousseau, that silence, as the negation of sound, can be. As to the principal question, that of signification as a void, as the failure or refusal of meaning, I do not believe that we are in disagreement on this. I admit that, within the polemical convention adopted in the essay, I have dialecticized too little, but this is because your version of Rousseau operates, in fact, from the opposite extreme. I incessantly return to this in what I am in the process of trying to do with Rousseau and Nietzsche and perhaps we can speak of this again later.

This was written in 1971 and I believe that we never again spoke of it, at least in the mode of conversation, direct discussion, or even of correspondence. And these silences belong to that vertiginous abyss of the unsaid, above which is situated, I do not say is grounded, the memory of a friendship, as the renewed fidelity of a promise. This unsaid is not always what goes without saying, but it is also erased in the incessant movement of a writing that remains to be deciphered. For in a certain way, that of which Paul de Man says "perhaps we can speak of this again later" and of which I have just said we never again spoke, in truth, is what we have never ceased writing about ever since, as if to prepare ourselves to speak of it again one day, in our very old age. All in all, a promise. As if we had "given our word to each other." "To give each other the word," that is, to come to an agreement about the secret code of a rendez-vous, for example, and to "give his word," this is not exactly the same thing but are they dissociable? What is a "given word"? What is the meaning of a given word?

We should perhaps speak of this again some other time. I have already imposed upon your time enough. I now have to hurry to the conclusion and tell you, more summarily than ever, what I would have wished to elaborate at length if we had all the time we needed.

I would have wanted to speak to you of the thinking of Paul de Man and of "deconstruction in America" from the triple point of view of history, literature, and politics. A promise not kept but you will understand why I have used Rousseau to introduce these questions; I mean here the Rousseau of the *Social Contract* interpreted by Paul de Man. What de Man calls a "textual allegory" powerfully brings to light the "literarity" or "fictionality" of political discourse or rather of the promise written on the "politicity" of the political. And this structure of textual allegories which "generate history" is also presented, in a very precise sense of the term, as an "allegory of unreadability," that is to say, as an aporetic structure: the madness of the promise and the madness of memory. The aporetic and madness. The word "aporia" recurs often in Paul de Man's last texts. I believe that we would misunderstand it if we tried to hold it to its most literal meaning: an absence of path, a paralysis before roadblocks, the immobilization of thinking, the impossibility of advancing, a barrier blocking the future. On the contrary, it seems to me that the experience of the aporia, such as de Man deciphers it, gives or promises the thinking of the path, provokes the thinking of the very possibility of what still remains unthinkable or unthought, indeed, impossible. The figures of rationality are profiled and outlined in the madness of the aporetic.

Now the aporetic always immobilizes us in the

simultaneously unsurpassable and unsatisfying system of an opposition, indeed, of a contradiction. The aporia is apparently, in its negative aspect, the negative contraction of the dialectic, a dialectic which does not find its path or its method, its grand methodical circle. A couple of examples used more than once by Paul de Man in order to describe this irreducible aporia: allegory *and* irony, the performative *and* the constative. It is above all in relation to the latter that the word "aporia" is indispensable to him. But each time, the aporia provokes a leap of memory and a displacement of thinking which leads us back not just toward an "older" unity than the opposition but also toward a new thinking of the disjunction, of a disjunction whose structure is wholly other, forgotten or yet to come, yet to come because forgotten, and always presupposed by the opposition. We have caught a glimpse of this through the couple allegory/irony in relation to "The Rhetoric of Temporality." It is clearer yet in the most recent texts in terms of the couple performative/constative. And aporicity evokes, rather than prohibits, more precisely, promises *through* its prohibition, an other thinking, an other text, the future of another promise. All at once the impasse (*the dead end*) becomes the most "trustworthy," "reliable" place or moment for reopening a question which is finally equal to or on the same level as that which remains difficult to think. The rigorous demonstration of "Rhetoric of Persuasion (Nietzsche)" no doubt ends in an aporia, precisely in terms of the couple constative/performative, but this aporia evokes (*fait appel*), in some way situates, the place of evocation through an act of memory. This act calls us back to a time and place "before" oppositions (before the performative/constative opposition but also before that of

literature and philosophy, and consequently many others); it therefore procures and promises a "somewhat more reliable point of 'reference' from which to ask the question." This "reliability" will no doubt be precarious and menaced by what renders all "promises" necessary and mad, but it will not promise itself any the less because of this. And what this *act* of memory promises is a thinking of the *act* which theorists of *speech acts* have never thought, not even suspected, even when they defined the performative as an *acting* word. After having analyzed the rhetorical structure of the "deconstruction of thought as act" in terms of Nietzsche (*AR*, p. 129), Paul de Man emphasizes fictionality and undecidability (another form of aporicity) in these terms:

The first passage (section 516) on identity showed that constative language is *in fact* [I again underline the singularity of this "in fact" in order to record it] performative, but the second passage (section 477) asserts that the possibility for language to perform is just as fictional as the possibility for language to assert. Since the analysis has been carried out on passages representative of Nietzsche's deconstructive procedure at its most advanced stage, it would follow that, in Nietzsche, the critique of metaphysics can be described as the deconstruction of the illusion that the language as truth (*episteme*) could be replaced by a language of persuasion (*doxa*). What seems to lead to an established priority of "setzen" over "erkennen," of language as action over language as truth, never quite reaches its mark. It under- or overshoots it and, in so doing, it reveals that the target which one long since assumed to have been eliminated has merely been displaced. The *episteme* has hardly been restored intact to its former glory, but it has not been definitively eliminated either. The differentiation between performative and constative language (which Nietzsche anticipates) is undecidable; the deconstruction leading from the one model to the

other is irreversible but it always remains suspended, regardless of how often it is repeated.

Such an undecidability is the *condition* of all deconstruction: in the sense of condition of possibility, indeed, efficacy, and at the same time in the sense of situation or destiny. Deconstruction is, *on this condition* and *in this condition*. There is in this a power (a possibility) and a limit. But this limit, this finitude, empowers and makes one write; in a way it obliges deconstruction to write, to trace its path by linking its "act," always an act of memory, to the promised future of a text to be signed. The very oscillation of undecidability goes back and forth and weaves a text; it makes, if this is possible, a path of writing through the aporia. This is impossible, but no one has ever said that deconstruction, as a technique or a method, was possible; it thinks only on the level of the impossible and of what is still evoked as unthinkable. One of the interests of the passage that I have just quoted, as of the conclusion of "Promises (*Social Contract*)," consists of its rigorous determination of the textuality of the *text*. Paul de Man has just reached the point of giving a definition of rhetoric *as text* by passing by way of a thinking of deconstruction, that is to say, necessarily of an auto-deconstruction in which the *auto-* or the *self* would not be able to be either reflected or totalized, not even gathered or recollected, but only written and caught in the trap of the promise. Here is the said passage:

Considered as persuasion, rhetoric is performative but when considered as a system of tropes, it deconstructs its own performance. Rhetoric is a *text* in that it allows for two incompatible, mutually self-destructive points of view, and therefore puts an insurmountable obstacle in the way of any reading or understanding. The aporia between performative

and constative language is merely a version of the aporia between trope and persuasion that both generates and paralyzes rhetoric and thus gives it the appearance of a history. (AR, p. 131)

It is thus necessary to think of rhetoric and history as this *text*, in terms of an aporia which, *because* it paralyzes, it also *engenders*, stimulates, makes one write, provokes thought, and confuses the limits between the realms of the text:

If the critique of metaphysics is structured as an aporia between performative and constative language, this is the same as saying that it is structured as rhetoric. And since, if one wants to conserve the term "literature," one should not hesitate to assimilate it with rhetoric, then it would follow that the deconstruction of metaphysics, or "philosophy," is an impossibility to the precise extent that it is "literary." This by no means resolves the problem of the relationship between literature and philosophy in Nietzsche, but it at least establishes a somewhat more reliable point of "reference" from which to ask the question. (ibid.)

The formulation remains very prudent ("a somewhat more reliable. . ."; rather ironically, the word "reference" is in between quotation marks, and it is caught in the movement of a reading of Nietzsche). It is nonetheless a question of a strong recasting of what deconstruction can and could be, in its strategy and even in its politics.

One could demonstrate the continuity *and* the discontinuity of the de Manian project, after *Blindness and Insight*, especially in terms of the relations between deconstruction, rhetoric, literature, and history. In any case, the necessary transformation of the concept of the text makes inevitable the passage through textual events

such as those whose memory and history we accumulate, for example, those accumulated under the name Rousseau or Nietzsche. They belong to the history or to the path of that singular aporia called "deconstruction."

There is no beyond-the-undecidable, but this beyond nevertheless remains to be thought from this "somewhat more reliable point of 'reference'"; and one can only be involved there in a promise, giving one's word on this subject, even if one denies it by signing ironically. There remains to be thought an other undecidability, one no longer bound to the order of *calculation* between two poles of opposition, but to the incalculable order of a wholly other: the coming or the call of the other. It must be unpredictable, aleatory beyond any calculation. *There is no* inside-the-undecidable, certainly, but an other memory calls us, recalls us to think an "act" or "*parole*" (speech), or a "speech act" which resists the opposition performative/constative, provoking at the same time the aporia and movement forward (*la marche*), the relation of one to the other, that is to say, history or the text. But we know, and we recalled it yesterday, that this singular memory *does not* lead us back to *any anteriority*. There never existed (there will never have existed) any older or more original "third term" that we would have to recall, toward which we would be called to recall *under* the aporetic disjunction. This is why what resists the non-dialectizable opposition, what "precedes" it in some way, will still bear the name of one of the terms and will maintain a *rhetorical* relation with the opposition. It will be figured, figurable. It will have the figure of opposition and will always let itself be parasited by it. We will call "act," for example, that act (of speech or not) which precedes the opposition between the language of act and the lan-

guage of truth, between the performative and the constative. We could say the same thing for positing (*Setzung*, indeed, *Übersetzung*): even if it remains (as Heidegger says) a metaphysical determination of Being, it will give its name to a movement which cannot be reduced to metaphysics. The *staging* (*mise*) of the promise is a committed *positing* (*position*). We could say the same thing for words like "deconstruction" or "memory": memory without anteriority, memory of a past which has never been present, a memory without origin, a memory of the future, it is without an accepted or acceptable relation to what we commonly call "memory." We will, however, keep this name which can, under certain conditions of writing, allow something to which it appears unrelated to be thought. Whence the irreducibility of allegory, of rhetoric, and of that essential "unreadability" of the text: for example, of that movement whereby the deconstructive schema of a text *must* let itself be contaminated, parasited, by "relapsing" into the very thing that it deconstructs. Paul de Man calls this structure an "allegory of unreadability" (*AR*, p. 275). If this allegory is "metafigural," it is not in order to escape figurality, but, on the contrary, because it *remains* a figure of figure: "Such an allegory is meta-figural: it is an allegory of a figure (for example metaphor) which relapses into the figure it deconstructs. The *Social Contract* falls under this heading to the extent that it is indeed structured like an aporia: it persists in performing what it has shown to be impossible to do" (*ibid.*).

Rhetoric no longer designates only a constituted discipline, a system of techniques or discursive laws; it is always that, but it is also something else insofar as it at the same time writes, pledges and diverts a promise, a signature, a text: "Rhetoric is a text . . ."

Let us proceed quickly, still more quickly, and far too quickly. Let us situate three points, let us not say of a dispute, but of an *Auseinandersetzung* between deconstruction and a certain voice of the Heideggerian text (less than ever I would say here all the voices and the entire text of Heidegger). But the voice in question often appears dominant.

1. In the same way that he says "science does not think," or "the essence of technology is nothing technological," Heidegger would say, within the same "logic": rhetoric is only a determined discipline or area, a belated and even "technological one," it concerns only a modality of speech; thinking speech, the thinking of rhetoricity itself is not rhetorical; he has said the same thing about linguistics or semiotics. Now in this, at least, deconstruction is no longer "Heideggerian": yes, science can think, the essence of technology and the thinking of this essence retain *something* technological, and the thinking of rhetoricity is neither above it, nor before it, nor elsewhere; it is not foreign to rhetoric. It is precisely this hierarchy, this limit, this purity, reclaimed by Heidegger, that is *deconstructed*, that deconstructs itself, that "deconstructs," as Paul de Man says in another context, "the very notion of the self" (*AR*, p. 173). From then on, each deconstructive thinking constitutes a text which bears its rhetorical singularity, the figure of its signature, its pathos, its apparatus, its style of promise, etc. Heidegger's text is *also* a rhetoric—a textual rhetoric—and we must be able to analyze it as such. There is no "deconstruction in America" without *this* relation to Heidegger. In terms of the thousands of ways imaginable, one can certainly not circumvent the necessity of all the Heideggerian trajectories, one cannot be any "nearer" to this thinking, but one cannot also not be any farther from it, nor can one be any more hetero-

geneous (this does not mean opposed) to it than by risking an affirmation of this type: the essence of this is this, the essence of technology is (still) technological, there is no gap or abyss between thinking thought or thinking memory (*Gedächtnis*) and science, technology, writing (mnemonics); or rather, this maintenance, in a Heideggerian manner, of a heterogeneity between the essence of technology and technology (which is, by the way, one of the most traditional of gestures), between thinking memory and science, thinking memory and technicist writing, is precisely a protection against an other abyssal risk, that of parasitic contamination, of an an-oppositional *différance*, etc. We cannot exaggerate the risk and the gravity of this brief sentence (for example): the essence of technology is not foreign to technology. Apparently very trivial, it can yet again put into question, with all of the entailing consequences, the scope of even the most fundamental philosophical gesture.

2. Can memory without anteriority, that is to say, without origin, become a Heideggerian theme? I do not believe so. With all the precautions that must be taken here, we cannot erase from the Heideggerian text an indispensable reference to originarity, even if we do not grant the latter any etymological status. We could give numerous examples of this; let us content ourselves with the following since it concerns memory: "The originary word (*das anfängliche Wort*) 'Gedanc' means: the gathered, all-gathering recollection (*das gesammelte, alles versammelnde Gedenken*). 'The *Gedanc*' says nearly the same thing as 'the soul' (*das Gemüt*), 'spirit' (*der Muot*), 'the heart' (*das Herz*). Thinking, in the sense of this originally speaking word (*im Sinne des anfänglich sagenden Wortes*) 'Gedanc,' is almost more original (*ursprünglicher*)

than that thinking of the heart which Pascal, centuries later and already as a countermove against mathematical thinking, attempted to recover." (. . .) "The original Being of memory rules (*waltet das ursprüngliche Wesen des Gedächtnisses*) in the originary word 'Gedanc' (*im anfänglichen Wort der 'Gedanc'*)" (Eng. pp. 139 and 141; Ger. pp. 91 and 93). By making the auto-deconstruction of the Hegelian "cornerstone" manifest, de Man again puts into question that originarism which would situate thinking memory outside of and sheltered from technology, science, and writing. Memory which thinks in terms of oppositions, even those which are dialectical, of allegory and irony, the performative and the constative, etc., does not lay bare any more secret origin. It continues to write and promises the rhetoric of another text.

3. Above all, it does not think itself as gathering; it never reduces the disjunctive difference. We have insisted enough upon the de Manian motif of *disjunction*; I will not return to it. On the other hand, how can we deny that, for Heidegger, the essence of memory resides primarily, originally, in gathering (*Versammlung*), even if we distinguish it from any synthesis, syntax, or composition? Here are some examples—already cited—among many others: "Initially (*anfänglich*), 'memory' (*Gedächtnis*) did not at all mean the power to recall (*Erinnerungsvermögen*). The word designates the whole *soul* in the sense of a constant, *interior* gathering (*innigen Versammlung*, I underline "soul" and "interior") . . . " Further on: "We have determined Memory as the gathering of devoted thinking (*Versammlung des Andenkens*)" (Eng. 140 and 150; Ger. 92 and 97). The degradation of this original meaning, its "wasting away," its "shrinking" and its "impoverishment" are attributed to

scholastic philosophy, as well as to "techno-scientific" definitions.

This interpretation—and this rhetoric—also determine a politics: not only in regard to history, to technology and science, but also in regard to rhetoric and politics, to writing and literary writing. We saw yesterday how Heidegger would have determined their appurtenance, outside of, at the "exit" of, and sheltered from thinking or poetry. It is at this point, if we had enough time, that I would have liked to speak to you of the politics of "deconstruction in America," in particular, of de Manian deconstruction. It cannot be deciphered, it seems to me, except in terms of the proximity and divergence whose enigma we have just perceived. Both inside and outside of academic institutions. Every reading proposed by Paul de Man, and recently rendered more and more explicitly, says something about institutional structures and the political stakes of hermeneutic conflicts. The characteristics of these readings are most often discreet, but always clear and incisive, and always directed not so much against the profession or the institution, but against the academisms of the right and the left, against the conservatism that apolitical traditionalists and activists share in common. The introduction to "Hegel on the Sublime" describes these "symmetrical gestures." "Reactionaries" and "political activists" in truth misunderstand, in order to protect themselves, the political stake and structure of the text, the political allegory of the literary text, no less than the allegorical and literary structure of the political text. More and more Paul de Man publicly took part in the politico-institutional debates surrounding deconstruction. The positions he took do not have the coded simplicity of well known oppositions, of predictable and

unpardonably tiresome predications. Paul de Man's "politics" cannot be separated, neither in its acts nor in what it leaves to be deciphered, from that thinking of the political and of the law which traverses all of his writings. Here again the reading of Rousseau, no less than that of Nietzsche, should be followed as one would follow a red thread. The word "political" is perhaps no longer only appropriate; it is also allegorical. "Political Allegory" was the first title of "Promises" and that essay begins by demonstrating the impossibility of rescuing the "referential status" of terms like "political," "religious," "ethical," "theoretical," etc. Each of these "thematic categories" "is torn apart by the aporia that constitutes it." But what this same text (for example) signs, announces, *promises* on the subject of law, the act and the promise, forms the best introduction, it seems to me, to what could be considered Paul de Man's relation to the "political," to what we tranquilly and commonly call politics, to his "experience" of the thing. Let us go further and, for want of time, even more quickly: the "definition" of the text which is formulated in *Promises* in an explicit and insistent fashion, even while leaving the word "definition" between quotation marks ["We call *text* any entity that. . . . The 'definition' of the text. . . ." (p. 270) announced by a "We have moved closer and closer to the 'definition' of *text*" (p. 268)], has a privileged relation to the political. The legal or political text makes more explicit and better reveals the very structure of the text in general. It "defines" it better than any other ext. And there is no "politics" without this text. To distort things in another way, as false as the inverse, certain people would say that there is nothing apolitical in deconstruction, but rather an excessive "politicism." Paul de Man writes, for example: "The

structure of the entity with which we are concerned (be it as property, as national state or any other political institution) is *most clearly revealed* when it is considered as the general form that subsumes all these particular versions, namely as legal *text*" (p. 267, de Man emphasizes the word "text," I emphasize the others). From this point of view, there is no contradiction between "revolution and legality": the text of law is, "per definition, in a condition of unpredictable change. Its mode of existence is necessarily temporal and historical, though in a strictly non-teleological sense" (pp. 266-67). Such a sentence makes precise a certain strategy of Paul de Man's most recent texts in terms of historicity: it is "defined" in terms of a new "definition" of the *text*, and it diverges from the dominant philosophical, that is to say, teleological, concept of history. We know that this concept still largely dominates the most "modern" political discourses (whether or not they pass themselves off as revolutionary). Further on, he writes:

There can be no text without grammar: the logic of grammar generates texts only in the absence of referential meaning, but every text *generates* a referent that *subverts* the grammatical principle to which it owed its constitution. What remains hidden in the everyday use of language, the fundamental incompatibility between grammar and meaning, *becomes explicit when the linguistic structures are stated, as is the case here, in political terms.* (AR, p. 269)

I also emphasize the word "generates" in order to draw attention to a perhaps less apparent but no less essential dimension of deconstruction, whether it is a question of effects of reference or effects of history. This same essay ends, we remember, with these words: ". . . textual allegories . . . generate history"].

There is no politics without "action" or without

an "active" text. And we rediscover here the same injunction: memory or promise, memory as promise of an *act* which, in order not to belong to the opposition act/non-act, action/theory, performative/constative, is nevertheless not *anterior* to them, neither in the mode of past anterior nor in the mode of future anterior. It is again the *definition of the text* which says this act beyond the act. I have already quoted a part of this passage, let us quote a little more:

A text is defined by the necessity of considering a statement, *at the same time* [and it is the time of this *same time* which evokes an other thinking of what is found in action here] as performative and constative, and the logical tension between figure and grammar is repeated in the impossibility of distinguishing between two linguistic functions which are not necessarily compatible. It seems that as soon as a text knows what it states, it can only *act* deceptively, like the thieving lawmaker in the *Social Contract*, and if a text does not *act*, it cannot state what it knows. The distinction between a text as narrative and a text as theory also belongs to this field of tension. (AR, p. 270, my emphasis)

This *same time* never is, will never have been and will never be *present*. De Man speaks later on of that "absence of an *état présent*" in the Rousseauistic aporia of the promise and in the legislator's imposture. There is only the promise and memory, memory as promise, without any gathering possible in the form of the present. This disjunction is the law, the text of law and the law of the text. The promise prohibits the gathering of Being in presence, being even its condition. The condition of the possibility and impossibility of eschatology, the ironic allegory of messianism.¹⁰

From the beginning of this trajectory, in terms of the debate surrounding Hölderlin concerning the law

and the gathering of Being, we have never been further from Heidegger. And, yet, Paul de Man himself says, an opposition never excludes, on the contrary, the most troubling affinities. For Heidegger's thinking is *not simply* a thinking of gathering. The end of *Was heisst Denken?*, for example, where we have followed the trace of memory (*Gedächtnis*) as originary gathering (*Versammlung*), also opens on to the *chorismos* of the *khora*, to the disjunction of the place (*Ort*), to the topical difference (*Verschiedenheit der Ortung*) between being (present) and Being, to duplicity (*Zwiefalt*), difference (*Unterschied*), etc. No doubt, thinking memory (*Gedächtnis*) is itself the gathering of this difference, and it could be the same for all disjunction as such. But this gathering does not gather in an "état présent." It does not even gather Being, it *calls* and *gives* us to thinking (*donne à penser*). Having reached this point and still much too schematically, it would be necessary to recall that for Heidegger, too, memory is, like the promise, and, again in the words of Paul de Man, "future oriented and prospective": memory also gathers near what "can come" (Eng. 140; Ger. 92), it also tends toward the "future" (*ibid.*). It thinks only by *giving* what is to be thought or in thinking what calls and *gives* to be thought. *Was heisst Denken?* is not only a meditation on memory, it is also, with the same step (*pas*), in the same march, that singular overflow of the question of Being by the question of the gift (of the *Gabe* of the *es gibt Sein*). "What calls us to think, gives us over to thinking" (*Was uns denken heisst, gibt uns zu denken*). And later, as in *Zeit und Sein*, the meditation on this gift (*Gabe*), gift of Being and gift of time, unfolds the question of Being and the calling of Being as the question of the gift. There is Being, but this "*es gibt*" never gives anything that is a "present" or that is

gathered in a present; it calls as a promise, it calls itself a promise, a commitment, an invitation. Heidegger names the promise in the same movement and at bottom we have never been nearer to Paul de Man's "*Die Sprache verspricht (sich)*." Heidegger never signed it, but who signs a promise? He wrote the following which speaks of the meaning of a given word:

"To call" (*Heissen*), in short, means "to command," presupposing that we hear this word, too, in its original sense. For, at bottom, "to command" means not: to give a command or an order, but: to commend, to entrust, to give over to the protection of, to keep safely (*einer Geborgenheit anheimgeben, bergen*). To call is to call out in the form of a commendation, to call into arrival by referring. . . . A promise (*Verheissung*) signifies: a word which calls and assures in such a way that what is said here is a commitment, a given "word" (*ein Versprochenes*). [The French translator uses the word "parole," which he places between quotation marks, to translate "*ein Versprochenes*": a given word, what is promised in a promise.] (Eng. 118; Ger. 83)

No path is possible without the aporia of the gift, which does not occur without the aporia of the promise. I have tried to show elsewhere, in a seminar on the gift (given at Yale on Paul de Man's invitation), that there is no gift except on the aporetic condition that nothing is given that is *present* and that *presents* itself as such. The gift is only a promise and a promised memory, here the future of Mnemosyne, I mean the future of the *Mnemosyne* of Hölderlin, of Heidegger, of Paul de Man in America. For after having recalled the gift and then responded to the question of this gift (*Gabe*), to the question of what gives us the most to think about: "What gives us the most to think about in our thinking

time is that we do not yet think," Heidegger then quotes "Mnemosyne":

When man is being drawn (*auf dem Zug*) towards what withdraws (*in das Sichentziehende*), he indicates (*Zeigt*) what withdraws. In this movement we are a sign (*Auf dem Zug dahin sind wir ein Zeichen*). But what we indicate in this way is something that is not translated (*übersetzt*), not yet translated, into the language we speak (*in die Sprache unseres Sprechens*). It remains without signification (*Es bleibt ohne Deutung*). We are an unreadable sign (*ein deutungsloses Zeichen*).

In his draft for the hymn entitled "Mnemosyne" (*Gedächtnis*), Hölderlin says:

We are a sign, unreadable,
 Ein Zeichen sind wir, deutungslos,
 We are without pain, and we have
 Schmerzlos sind wir, und haben fast
 Almost lost language in a foreign place.
 Die Sprache in der Fremde Verloren.

(Eng. 18; Ger. 6)

To lose one's language in a foreign place, this was certainly not a fate reserved for deconstruction in America, nor the destination reserved only for Hölderlin, Heidegger, or Paul de Man outside of their native languages. This experience, let us risk saying this perhaps against Heidegger's intention, is the terrible chance of the promise, of the given word in the *sich versprechen* of the *Sprache*.

I no longer know what I promised, nor to whom, in coming here, to the far West of America, to speak to you on memory in memory, in this memory where I shall always be, in this memory of Paul de Man.

It is always necessary to excuse oneself for appropriating to oneself this work of mourning. It is always

necessary to excuse oneself for giving, for a gift must never appear in a present, given the risk of its being annulled in thanks, in the symbolic, in exchange or economy, indeed, of its becoming a benefit. It is necessary to be forgiven for appearing to give. But if there is no gift, only the promise, it is also always necessary to excuse oneself for promising. For a promise is neither possible nor tenable. We have not read the last chapter of *Allegories of Reading*. Like all of Paul de Man's work, it still awaits us, in advance of us. The next-to-last chapter is entitled "Promises (*Social Contract*)," the last, "Excuses (*Confessions*)."

What is love, friendship, memory, from the moment two impossible promises are involved with them, sublimely, without any possible exchange, in difference and disymmetry, in the incommensurable? What are we, who are we, to what and to whom *are we*, and to what and to whom are we *destined* in the experience of this impossible promise? Henceforth: what is experience?

These questions can be posed only after the death of a friend, and they are not limited to the question of mourning. What should we think of all of this, of love, of memory, of promise, of destination, of experience, since a promise, from the first moment that it pledges, and however possible it appears, pledges beyond death, beyond what we call, without knowing of what or of whom we speak, death. It involves, in reverse, the other, dead *in us*, from the first moment, even if no one is *there* to respond to the promise or speak for the promise. What does "*in us*" mean if such an impossible promise is *thinkable*, that is to say, possible in its impossibility? This is, perhaps, what thinking gives us to think about, what gives us to think about thinking.

A promise cannot be kept, it cannot even be made in all its purity. As if it were always linked to the departed other, as if it were therefore not linked. But consequently, this is because a promise pledges only to what is mortal. A promise has meaning and gravity only on the condition of death, when the living person is one day all alone with his promise. A promise has meaning and gravity only with the death of the other. When the friend is no longer *there*, the promise is still not tenable, it will not have been made, but as a trace of the future it can still be *renewed*. You could call this an act of memory or a given word, even an act of faith; I prefer to take the risk of a singular and more equivocal word. I prefer to call this an *act*, only an act, quite simply an act. An impossible act, therefore the only one worthy of its name, or rather which, in order to be worthy of its name, must be worthy of the name of the other, made in the name of the other. Try and translate, in all of its syntactical equivocality, a syntagm such as "donner au nom de l'autre" or "une parole donnée au nom de l'autre." In a single sentence, it could mean in French, or rather in English: "to give to the name of the other" and "to give in the name of the other." Who knows what we are doing when we donnons au nom de l'autre?

Notes

1. *What is Called Thinking?*, trans. by Glenn Gray (New York: Harper and Row, 1968), pp. 138-39, 144. [Translator's note: in almost all cases I have retranslated the passages cited from this translation in order to have them conform more closely to the German. For the German see Martin Heidegger, *Was heisst Denken?* (Tübingen: Max Niemeyer Verlag, 1954), pp. 91 and 57. Subsequent references to this text will be to page numbers in these editions and will be cited parenthetically within the body of the essay by "Eng." and "Ger.," respectively.]

2. *Allegories of Reading: Figural Language in Rousseau, Nietzsche, Rilke, and Proust* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1979), p. 277. [TN: Further references to this text will be inserted parenthetically in the essay by AR and page number.]

3. Rousseau, *Correspondance générale* (Paris: Librairie Armand Colin, 1924), 12: 110.

4. Here is one example, among many others, of such an evaluation (it would be necessary to devote more than a note to it); I cite it here because it belongs to the same context:

... these poems are not properly literature. Literature is literally that which is written down and rewritten, and whose destination is to be accessible to the public for reading (*einer Öffentlichkeit für das Lesen*). In this way, literature becomes the object of widely diverging interests which, in their turn, are once again stimulated in a literary way—through criticism and publicity. That an individual may find his way out of the literary industry and find his way thoughtfully and even edifyingly to poesy is never enough to render to poesy (*Dichtung*) its essential place (*Wesensort*). . . .

Occidental poesy and European literature are two abysmally different, essential forces in our history. We probably still have only an entirely inadequate notion of the being and significance of literary phenomena.

However, through the literary, as their common medium, poesy and thought and science are mutually assimilated to one another (*Durch das Literarische und in ihm als ihrem Medium sind nun aber Dichten und Denken und Wissenschaft einander angeglichen*). When thinking is set off from science (*sich gegen die Wissenschaft absetzt*), it appears, from the point of view of science, as a failed poeticizing. When, on the other hand, thinking knowingly escapes from the proximity of poesy, it likes to appear as the super-science which would surpass all sciences in scientificity.

Still, precisely because thinking is not poetry, but an originary saying and speaking of language (*ursprüngliches Sagen und Sprechen der Sprache*), it must remain in proximity to poesy. But because science does not think, thinking must, in its current situation, insistently watch over the sciences, which is what they cannot do for themselves. . . .

... The essential relation is determined rather by a fundamental trait of the modern era, to which the literary phenomena mentioned above also belongs. It can be briefly characterized as follows: that which is appears today primarily in *that* object-materiality which, through the scientific-objectification of all regions and domains, is installed and maintained under domination. . . .

We do not notice *the* scientifico-literary objectification (*die wissenschaftlich literarische Vergegenständlichung*) of that which is, because we move within it (Eng. 134-5; Ger. 154).

I have chosen this passage and I have emphasized these words in it because they concern a sort of *negative privilege* of literature in the objectivist confusion denounced by Heidegger. It is the medium, the element of confusion, between science, poesy, and thinking, and it requires a scientifico-literary objectivation.

The division, evaluation, and subordination are incontestable. And they concern writing in general as well as literary writing. They *come out of* thinking, they leave it, and do so in order to fall, in order to protect themselves from it. While reserving the right to return to the following passage at another time, I shall here simply refer to it and cite it: "Socrates, throughout his life and right up to his death, did nothing else than place himself and maintain himself in the draft of this current. This is why he is the purest thinker of the West. This is why he wrote nothing. For he who begins to write on coming out of thought (*aus dem Denken*) will inevitably resemble those people who run to seek refuge against a strong draft. This remains the secret of an as yet hidden history: that all Western thinkers after Socrates, notwithstanding their greatness, had to be such "fugitives" [Heidegger does not, himself, place quotations around "Flüchtlinge"]. Thinking has entered into literature. And literature has decided the fate of Western science, which, by way of the *doctrina* of the Middle Ages, became the *scientia* of modernity. In this form, all sciences have sprung, in a double manner, from out of philosophy. The sciences come here out of philosophy in that they must leave it" (Eng. 17-8; Ger. 52).

5. Austin, *Philosophical Papers*, ed. by J. O. Urmson and G. J. Warnock (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1979), pp. 55-75. [TN: Further references to this essay will be cited parenthetically within the text by PP and page number.]

6. *Blindness and Insight: Essays in the Rhetoric of Contemporary Criticism* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1983), p. xii. [TN: Hereafter cited within the text by BI and page number.]

7. On the interpretation of this sentence, see Rodolphe Gasché's "Deconstruction as Criticism" in *Glyph 6* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1979) and his "'Setzung' and 'Übersetzung': Notes on Paul de Man" in *Diacritics* (Winter 1981), vol. 11, no. 4, and Suzanne Gearhart's "Philosophy Before Literature: Deconstruction, Historicity, and the Work of Paul de Man" in *Diacritics* (Winter 1983), vol. 13, no. 4; but also Richard Klein's "The Blindness of Hyperboles, the Ellipses of Insight" in *Diacritics* (Summer 1973), as well as David Carroll's "Representation or the End(s) of History, Dialectics and Fiction" [in *Yale French Studies* (1980), 59:220] and *The Subject in Question: The Languages of Theory and the Strategies of Fiction* [(Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1982), especially pages 197ff and 212], a book which debates with Paul de Man on other themes, especially around the reading of Lukács.

8. I ought to cite here a passage from De Man's early text, "The Rhetoric of Temporality": "Irony is unrelieved *vertige*, dizziness to the point of madness [we could play here on the French word "vertige": as we say in French, it makes one's head turn, and it is the experience of a turn—that is, of a trope which cannot stop turning and turning around, since we can only speak of a (rhetorical) turn by way of another trope, without any chance of achieving the stability of a metalanguage, a metatroupe, a metarhetoric: the

irony of irony of which Schlegel speaks and which De Man cites is still an irony: whence the madness of the regressus ad infinitum, and the madness of rhetoric, whether it be that of irony or that of allegory: madness because it has no reason to stop, because reason is tropic]. Sanity can exist only because we are willing to function within the conventions of duplicity and dissimulation, just as social language dissimulates the inherent violence of the actual relationship between human beings." And elsewhere in the same text: "... absolute irony is a consciousness of madness, itself the end of all consciousness; it is a consciousness of a non-consciousness, a reflection on madness from the inside of madness itself. But this reflection is made possible only by the double structure of ironic language" (BI, pp. 215-6). This, it seems to me, is another way of protecting the concept of irony from its German-Romantic determination, from what probably Schlegel and certainly Hegel ascribe to it; namely, a movement or structure of that mastering consciousness which rises above finite determinations.

9. "Hegel on the Sublime" in M. Krupnick, ed., *Displacement* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1983).

10. These lectures were written when Thomas Pepper gave me a copy of a text by Peter Szondi: "Hope in the Past: On Walter Benjamin" [translated and published in *Critical Inquiry* (Spring 1978), vol. 4]. I cite it here, because of its allusions to the messianism of all promises, but also because, aside from its *Auseinandersetzung* with Benjamin, Paul de Man argues with Szondi in "Sign and Symbol in Hegel's *Aesthetics* [in *Critical Inquiry* (Summer 1982), vol. 8]. I will cite, in English, only a few lines from this reading of Benjamin (and of Proust): "In the theses on the concept of history that Benjamin wrote shortly before his death, we again find the statement from the *One-Way Street* that 'memory points out to every one in the book of life writing which, invisibly, glossed the text as prophecy.' But this is embedded in a philosophy of history. 'The past,' writes Benjamin here, 'carries with it a temporal idea, according to which it is assigned to salvation'" (503).

IV.

LIKE THE SOUND
OF THE SEA DEEP
WITHIN A SHELL:
Paul de Man's War

Translated by Peggy Kamuf

Unable to respond to the questions, to all the questions, I will ask myself instead *whether responding is possible* and what that would mean in such a situation. And I will risk in turn several questions *prior to* the definition of a *responsibility*. But is it not an act to assume in theory the concept of a responsibility? Is that not already to take a responsibility? One's own as well as the responsibility to which one believes one ought to summon others?

The title names a war. Which war?

Do not think only of the war that broke out several months ago around some articles signed by a certain Paul de Man, in Belgium between 1940 and 1942. Later you will understand why it is important to situate the beginning of things *public*, that is the publications, early in 1940 at the latest, during the war but before the occupation of Belgium by the Nazis, and not in December 1940, the date of the first article that appeared in *Le Soir*, the major Brussels newspaper that was then controlled, more or less strictly, by the occupiers. For several months, in the United States, the phenomena of this war "around" Paul de Man have been limited to newspaper articles. War, a public act, is by rights something declared. So we will not count in the category of war the private phenomena—meetings, discussions, correspondences, or telephonic conclaves—however intense they may have been in recent days, and already well beyond the American academic milieu.

To my knowledge, at the moment I write, this war presents itself as such, it is *declared* in newspapers *and nowhere else*, on the subject of arguments made in newspapers, *and nowhere else*, in the course of the last world war, during two years almost a half century ago. That is why my title alludes to the passage from Montherlant

quoted by de Man in *Le Soir* in 1941. I will come back to it, but the double edge of its irony already seems cruel: "When I open the newspapers and journals of today, I hear the indifference of the future rolling over them, just as one hears the sound of the sea when one holds certain seashells up to the ear."

The future will not have been indifferent, not for long, just barely a half century, to what de Man wrote one day in the "newspapers and journals of today." One may draw from this many contradictory lessons. But in the several months to follow, the very young journalist that he will have been during less than two years will be read more intensely than the theoretician, the thinker, the writer, the professor, the author of great books that he was during forty years. Is this unfair? Yes, no. But what about later? Here is a prediction and a hope: without ever forgetting the journalist, people will relearn how to read "all" of the work (which is to say so many others as well) *toward that which opens itself up there*. People will learn to reread the books, and *once again* the newspapers, and *once again toward that which opens itself up there*. To do so, one will need in the first place, and more than ever *in the future*, the lessons of Paul de Man.

Elsewhere, having more time and more space, one will also analyze from every angle the significance of the press in the modernity of a history like this one, in the course of a war like this one: the one and the other would be impossible and inconceivable without journalism. Yet, whatever one may think of the ignorance, the simplism, the sensationalist flurry full of hatred which certain American newspapers displayed in this case, we will not engage in any negative evaluation of the press *in general*. Such an evaluation belongs to a code that one must always mistrust. It is not far removed from what we are

going to talk about. What is more, I think it is only normal that the American press does not remain silent about the emotion aroused by, I quote, the "pro-Nazi articles" or the "anti-Semitic articles" published in a "pro-Nazi newspaper" by a "Yale scholar," a "revered" professor, "Sterling Professor of Humanities" who "died in 1983 while chairman of Yale's Comparative Literature Department." Incidentally, what would have happened if Paul de Man had not been a great American professor or if, as a professor, he had not been at Yale? And what if one also did a history of Yale, or of the great Eastern universities, a history of certain of their past (just barely, very recently) ideologico-institutional practices having to do with certain themes that we are going to talk about?¹ Well, after having had to set aside the question "What is the press in the culture and politics of this century?" I will also have to postpone this other question: "What is Yale, for example, in American culture?"

If newspapers have the duty to inform and the right to interpret, would it not have been better if they had done so with caution, rigor, honesty? There was little of that. And the press' most serious lapses from its elementary duties cannot be imputed to the newspapers or to the professional journalists themselves, but to certain academics.

The fact is there: at the point at which I take the risk of writing on this subject, I have the sense of being the first, thus so far the only one to do so, still too quickly to be sure, but without journalistic haste, which is to say without the excuses that it sometimes gives the journalist but should never give the academic. It is a formidable privilege, one not designed to alleviate the feeling of my responsibility. For this deadly war (and fear, hatred, which is to say sometimes love, also dream of killing the dead

in order to get at the living) has already recruited some combatants, while others are sharpening their weapons in preparation for it. In the evaluations of journalists or of certain professors, one can make out strategies or stratagems, movements of attack or defense, sometimes the two at once. Although this war no doubt began in the newspapers, it will be carried on for a long time elsewhere, in the most diverse forms. There will be many of us who will have to take their responsibilities and who, at the same time, will have to say, in the face of what is happening to us today, what *responding* and taking a *responsibility* can mean. For what is happening with these "revelations" (I am quoting the word from a newspaper) is happening *to us*.

It is *happening* to all those for whom this event ought to have a meaning, even if that meaning is difficult to decipher and even if, for many, the person and the work of de Man still remain not well known. Let those in this latter category be reassured or still more troubled: even for his admirers and his friends, especially for them, if I may be allowed to testify to this, the work and the person of Paul de Man were enigmatic. Perhaps they are becoming more enigmatic than ever. Do you believe friendship or admiration ought to reduce everything about this enigma? I believe just the opposite.

Why do I now underscore that expression: "*what is happening?*" Because for me this belongs to the order of the absolutely unforeseeable, which is always the condition of any event. Even when it seems to go back to a buried past, what comes about always comes from the future. And it is especially about the future that I will be talking. Something *happens* only on the condition that one is not expecting it. Here of course I am speaking the language of consciousness. But there would also be no

event *identifiable as such* if some repetition did not come along to cushion the surprise by preparing its effect on the basis of some experience of the unconscious. If the word "unconscious" has any meaning, then it stems from this necessity.

With or without a *recognition of the unconscious*, today this is *happening to us*. I name thereby, in utter darkness, many people. But it is also the darkness of a blinding light: *us*, we are still the living and the survivors, however uncertain and incomprehensible such a phrase may remain. The said war, then, could only take place, if that is what certain people want, *among us*. For we must never forget this cold and pitiless light: Paul de Man *himself* is dead. If there are some who want to organize a trial in order to judge him, de Man, they must remember that he, de Man, is dead and will not answer in the present. This thing will always be difficult to think and perhaps it will become more and more difficult. He, *himself*, *he is dead*, and yet, through the specters of memory and of the text, he lives *among us* and, as one says in French, *il nous regarde*—he looks at us, but also he is our concern, we have concerns regarding him, more than ever without his being here. He speaks (to) us among us. He makes us or allows us to speak of us, *to speak to us*. *He speaks (to) us* [Il nous parle]. The equivocality of the French expression, because it is barely translatable, translates well the murkiness of the question. What do we mean, what do *us* and *among us* mean in this case?

However obscure this may remain, we have to register it: we still have responsibilities toward him, and they are more alive than ever, even as he is dead. That is, we have responsibilities regarding Paul de Man *himself* but *in us and for us*. Yes, it remains difficult to think that he is dead and what that can mean. How are we to know

about what or whom one is speaking when there are some who venture to exploit *what is happening* against others and for ends that no longer concern Paul de Man *himself*, that in any case will never reach him, while others will still try to protect *themselves* by pretending to protect Paul de Man against *what is happening*?

Is it possible to assume here one's own responsibility without doing one or the other, without using *what happens to us* in order to attack or to protect oneself? Without war, therefore? I do not know yet, but I would like to try to get there, to say at least something about it, and, this I do know, no matter what may happen.

So we have to answer [*répondre*] for what is happening to us. It will not be a matter only of the responsibility of a writer, a theoretician, a professor, or an intellectual. The act of responding and the definition of what "responding" means carry our commitment well beyond, no doubt, what may look like a circumscribed example, well beyond the limits of the literary and artistic column that a very young man wrote for a newspaper, almost a half century ago, for less than two years, in very singular private and political circumstances which we are far from fully understanding, before leaving his country and undertaking, in another country and another language, the story that we know, the only one that we knew something about until a few months ago: that of a great professor whose teaching and influence spread well beyond the United States, a fact that no one denies, whose work as a philosopher and as a theoretician of literature is admired or put to work by many scholars and students throughout the world, discussed or attacked by others, but dismissed by no one; that also of a man whose many friends, colleagues, students recognized what they owe

to his lucidity, his rigor, his tireless generosity. We will come back to this.

Which war, then? Paul de Man's war, in another sense, is also the Second World War. He began to publish during the war. As far as I know, none of the incriminated articles was written after 1942, that is, well before the end of the war and of the German occupation. The reconstitution and the analysis of what his experience was of that war and that occupation will require patient, careful, minute, and difficult research. Any conclusion that does not rely on such research would be unjust, abusive, and irresponsible—I would even say, given the gravity of these things, indecent. And will it ever be necessary to conclude? Is that what this is about? Is a measure, a fair measure, possible? We will come back to this.

Which war, then? Paul de Man's war is finally, in a third sense, the one that this man must have lived and endured *in himself*. He *was* this war. And for almost a half century, this ordeal was a war because it could not remain a merely private torment. It has to have marked his public gestures, his teaching and writing. It remains a secret, a hive of secrets, but no one can seriously imagine, today, that in the course of such a history, this man would not have been torn apart by the tragedies, ruptures, dissociations, "disjunctions" (here I am using one of his favorite words and a concept that plays a major role in his thought). How did he undergo or assume on the outside these internal conflicts? How did he live this unlivable discord between worlds, histories, memories, discourses, languages? Do we have the means to testify to this? Who has the right to judge it, to condemn or to absolve? We will come back to this as well.

If it is now a matter of *responding* and of taking *responsibilities*, then we do so necessarily, as always, in situations we neither choose nor control, by responding to *unforeseeable* appeals, that is to appeals *from/of the other* that are addressed to us even before we decide on them. Permit me to say a few words about certain recent appeals to which I thought I ought to respond and without which I would not be writing what you are reading here.

Two of them took the allegorical form of the telephone call. One took me by surprise in August, the other in December.

So this time I will have to tell. "Have I anything to tell?" is a question I have often asked myself in English during these last months. Do I have anything to tell that those interested in these things do not already know, those who discovered these "early writings," as the newspapers put it, at the same time I did? Do I have anything to analyze in a pertinent fashion, to discern, to distinguish (to tell) in the tangled fabric of this enigma, in order to account for it? I am not sure, I still cannot tell. At least I will have been obliged to recall the first words of the *Mémoires* that I dedicated four years ago to the one who was and remains my friend. (May I be forgiven these "self-centered" references; I will not overdo them.) "I have never known how to tell a story"; those were its first words (see p. 3).² How could I then have imagined that it would be from the friend, from him alone, singularly from him, that would one day come the obligation to tell a story? And that this injunction would come to me from the one who always associated narrative structure with allegory, that discourse of the other which always says something still other than what it says?

Mémoires speak especially, and often, of the future, that is, of that which cannot be anticipated and which

always marks the memory of the past as experience of the promise. I claimed to know what a future should be *in general*: the unforeseeable itself. But without foreseeing as yet, and precisely for that reason, *what* it would be, I named in effect a future that it was absolutely impossible for me to see coming. And what a future! And the future of what a past! A future and a past about which I have at least, consciously, this absolute certainty: I never shared them and will never share them with Paul de Man, *himself*, whether one is talking about what *he* might have written a long time before I knew him, or about what is happening *to us* after his death.

I have just quoted the first words of a book. I believed I was chancing them in utter darkness. The last words of the same book resonate no less strangely, uncannily for me today. Forgive me once again this last and long quotation:

A promise has meaning and gravity only with the death of the other. When the friend is no longer *there*, the promise is still not tenable, it will not have been made, but as a trace of the future it can still be *renewed*. You could call this an act of memory or a given word, even an act of faith; I prefer to take the risk of a singular and more equivocal word. I prefer to call this an *act*, only an act, quite simply an act. An impossible act, therefore the only one worthy of its name, or rather which, in order to be worthy of its name, must be worthy of the name of the other, made in the name of the other. Try and translate, in all of its syntactical equivocality, a syntagm such as "donner au nom de l'autre" or "une parole donnée au nom de l'autre." In a single sentence, it could mean in French, or rather in English: "to give to the name of the other" and "to give in the name of the other." Who knows what we are doing when we *donnons au nom de l'autre?* (p. 150)

"Who knows . . . ?" Who can tell? Not only did I not know it myself, neither this nor the ordeal the future held in store for my bereaved friendship, for that promise that friendship always is—a promise and a grief which are never over. I also did not know *what* I was promising. Yet, what was I saying about this non-knowledge? That it is the very thing that makes of the promise to the other a true promise, the only true promise, if there is any, an excessive and unconditional promise, an impossible promise. One can never promise in a halfway fashion, one always has to promise too much, more than one can keep. I could not know that one day, the experience of such a wound would have to include responding for Paul de Man: not responding *in his place* or in his name, that will always be impossible and unjustifiable (the promise of friendship even supposes the respect of this impossibility or the irreplaceable singularity of the other). Nor do I mean judging, and certainly not approving of everything he did, but speaking once again, of-him-for-him, at a moment when his memory or his legacy risk being accused and he is no longer there to speak in his own name. To speak in one's own name, moreover, is that ever possible? Would he have done it, would he have been able to do it if he were alive? What would have happened? Would all this have happened if he were still alive today? What does that mean "to be alive today"? These are just so many questions that I will also have to leave unanswered, like that of a responsibility which would never be cancelled, but on the contrary provoked by the experience of prosopopeia, such as de Man seems to understand it.

Well, when I received, in December, the telephone call from *Critical Inquiry* which proposed, singular generosity, that I be the first to speak, when a friendly

voice said to me: "it has to be you, we thought that it was up to you to do this before anyone else," I believed I had to accept a warm invitation that also resonated like a summons. Unable not to accept, I nevertheless wondered: why me? why me first? Why me who, by birth, history, inclination, philosophical, political, or ideological choice, have never had anything but a radically, explicitly, mistrustful relation to everything that is being incriminated with such haste about these texts? Why me, who did not even know of their existence until a few months ago? Why me, who knew nothing about the dark time spent between 1940–42 by the Paul de Man I later read, knew, admired, loved? I will have to try to explain the reasons for which I nevertheless accepted to respond *yes* to this appeal and thus to take such a responsibility.

But my account will begin with an earlier telephone call. In August, Samuel Weber calls me upon his return from Belgium. During a conference, he has met a young Belgian researcher, Ortwin de Graef, who informed him of a disturbing discovery: articles written by Paul de Man under the German occupation, between 1941 and 1942, in two newspapers, the French language *Le Soir* and the Flemish language *Het Vlaamsche Land*. This research assistant of the Belgian National Fund for Scientific Research at the Katholieke Universiteit Leuven is preparing a doctoral dissertation on Paul de Man. Sam Weber describes him over the phone: an intelligent young man who admires and knows well the work of Paul de Man. He can also foresee, therefore, what effects will result, especially in the United States, from the publication of his discovery. That is why he talked to Sam Weber about it and also hopes, the latter tells me, to get my advice. But—to an extent, under conditions, and in a form that I still today do not know—he has already commu-

nicated, by that time, his research and discovery, as well as his desire to make them public, to several persons in the United States, notably at Yale. Likewise, he has already sent to the British journal *Textual Practice*, along with the translation of four Flemish texts published by Paul de Man in 1942,³ an introduction⁴ that, he will subsequently tell me in a letter, "is not really to his satisfaction" but "he does not have the time" to write another text as he is about to begin his military service. All of this gives me the sense that this young man, whom I have yet to meet, is as worried about handling a dangerous and spectacular explosive as he is careful, for this very reason of course, not to let it get out of his hands (analysis interrupted).

After discussing it on the phone, we decide, Sam Weber and myself, to ask Ortwin de Graef to send us, if possible, copies of the articles published in French, which were the more numerous. Then we could advise him from a more informed position. Sam Weber writes to him to this effect on our behalf. A short while later, we receive copies of 25 articles in French, accompanied by a bibliographical notice concerning 92 articles published in *Le Soir* between February 1941 and June 1942. In a handwritten note, de Graef adds: "plus probably another 20–30 in the period July–December 1942."

I specify this point for two reasons. (1) First of all, I have still not understood why and how this selection of 25 articles was made from a set of about 125. But I have no reason to suspect the intention of he who wrote the following to me, in a letter accompanying the package and in order to forestall my anxiety: "Yesterday I received a letter from Mr. Samuel Weber in which he tells me that you are prepared to give me your opinion on the texts of Paul de Man that I have found. In this

envelope, you will find a bibliographical list as well as a not altogether arbitrary selection of these texts (it is difficult, for practical reasons, to send you all the articles now, but if you wish to see them, I will try to find a way—in any case, the present selection can give an impression of the general content of the first writings of Paul de Man as concerns the events of the war)."⁵ However neutral and honest the principle of this selection, however indispensable it may have seemed for technical reasons I know nothing about, it has perhaps privileged the texts that are politically and ideologically significant. Thus perhaps it has distorted a general configuration that would be better respected by an integral reading. It is for this reason, and I will come to this point later, that we decided to pursue systematically the research—which de Graef by that time had to interrupt for reasons of military service—and to publish *all* the accessible articles. (2) For the same reason, at the moment of this writing, I have still been able to read, besides the twenty-five articles from *Le Soir*, only the four articles translated from Flemish into English and introduced by the translator. I cannot even evaluate the effects of this limitation on what I may say here, but I do not want to exclude them. The important thing is not only the limitation on my reading at the moment in which I must write, whatever meaning that may have, but the fact that all the sensationalist "information" delivered in great haste by the newspapers and by those who fed them their information remains marked by this same limitation that was generally *undeclared*, just as there was no mention made of the as yet very insufficient state of our most elementary knowledge concerning the essentials of this affair. I insist on heavily underscoring this point. To be sure, in the course of the research and debates that will undoubtedly continue, I will per-

haps be led to complete or correct the first impressions that I am delivering here as such. I would have waited to do a more systematic job if the press had not pressed us to hurry.

What were these impressions after a first reading toward the end of August? As I said to Sam Weber, during the first phone call (and one may easily imagine this), I had first hoped to read less profoundly marked articles. I had hoped that the concessions to the occupier or the ideological contagion (which I already expected: one did not accept to publish in that context without paying the price, that is, without accepting what we know today to be unacceptable) would take minimal and some sort of negative forms: more those of omission or of abstention. This hope disappointed, I had to give in to this first appearance at least: things seemed serious and complicated. Paul de Man's discourse appeared to me right off to be clearly more engaged than I had hoped, but also more differentiated and no doubt more heterogeneous. The form of the engagement was even rather disconcerting. One could recognize very quickly in the writing, along with the traits of a certain juvenility, those of an extraordinary culture—a culture that was especially literary or artistic, already very international (French and German, especially, but also Anglo-American and Flemish), open to the great politico-philosophical problems that everything then made more dramatic and more pressing: the destiny of Europe, the essence and future of nations, the individual and democracy, war, science and technology, and most particularly the political meanings and importance of literature.

Rightly or wrongly, I believed I had to accept what could be in itself *contradictory* about this double impression. On the one hand, I perceived an intellectual matu-

rity and a cultivation which were uncommon at that age, and thus an exceptional sense of historical, philosophical, political responsibilities. There can be no doubt about this; it forms, rather, the theme, so to speak, of all these texts. To a very great extent, Paul de Man knew what he was doing, as they say, and he constantly posed questions of responsibility, which does not mean that his response to his questions was ever simple. Nonetheless, on the other hand, this extraordinary precociousness was sometimes paid for (it is not so surprising) by some confusion, perhaps as well a certain haste. Especially when they go together, youth and journalism are not the best protections against such confusion. No doubt flattered to see himself entrusted with the literary and artistic column of a major newspaper, even if he owed this fortune (or misfortune) to his uncle Henri de Man, a young man of 22 did not resist the temptation. All the more so since, as we now know, this former student of the sciences dreamed of nothing but literature. I will also come back to what was no doubt the determining role of that uncommon man, Henri de Man, and to the question of age in this story.

I believed I could acknowledge something right away: the relative heterogeneity of these writings, due in part to the often careful articulation of the argument, to the skill, indeed the cunning of the ideologico-political rhetoric, was also to be explained, to an extent that I still cannot measure, by other factors. On the one hand, it was no doubt necessary to take into consideration a personal inability to give to the argument all its coherence, but there was also the structural impossibility that prevented this argument (I am talking about the fund of coded and stereotyped arguments from which Paul de Man had to draw) from attaining coherence. On the other

hand, how can one avoid taking into account the mobility of a situation that, during this beginning of the occupation and however brief may be the period we are talking about, must have made things evolve quickly from one day to the next? The diachronic overdetermination of the context demanded that one proceed carefully in the reading of this series of articles. I will later spell out other necessary precautions, but first of all I want to go on with a story.

From the first reading, I thought I recognized, alas, what I will call roughly an *ideological configuration*, discursive schemas, a logic and a stock of highly marked arguments. By my situation and by training, I had learned from childhood to detect them easily. A strange coincidence: it so happens, on top of it all, that these themes are the subject of seminars I have been giving for four years as well as of my last book, on Heidegger and Nazism.⁶ My feelings were first of all that of a wound, a stupor, and a sadness that I want neither to dissimulate nor exhibit. They have not altogether gone away since, even if they are joined now by others, which I will talk about as well. To begin, a few words about what I thought I was able to identify at first glance but a glance that right away gave me to see, as one should always suspect, that a single glance will never suffice—nor even a brief series of glances.

And already, when I speak of a painful surprise, I must right away differentiate things.

A painful surprise, yes, of course, for *three reasons* at least: (1) some of these articles or certain phrases in them seemed to manifest, in a certain way, an alliance with what has always been for me the very worst; (2) for almost twenty years, I had never had the least reason to suspect my friend could be the author of such articles

(I will come back again to this fact); (3) I had read, a short while earlier, the only text that was accessible to me up until then and that was written and signed by Paul de Man in Belgium during the war. Thomas Keenan, a young researcher and a friend from Yale who was preparing, among other things, a bibliography of de Man, had in fact communicated to me, as soon as he had found it in Belgium, the table of contents and the editorial of an issue from the fourth volume of a Brussels journal in which de Man had published his first writings. He had been a member of the editorial committee, then director of this journal, *Les Cahiers du Libre Examen, Revue du cercle d'étude de l'Université Libre de Bruxelles*, founded in 1937. Now, what did this editorial say in February 1940, at the point at which de Man had just taken over the editorship, *in the middle of the war but right before the defeat?* Without equivocation, it took sides *against* Germany and *for* democracy, for "the victory of the democracies" in a war defined as a "struggle . . . against barbarity."⁷ This journal, moreover, had always presented itself as "democratic, anticlerical, antidogmatic, and antifascist."⁸ Here then are three reasons to be surprised by the texts dating from the following year and that I discovered with consternation.

But I said that right away I had to complicate and differentiate things, as I will have to do regularly. My surprise did not come all at once. Even as I reassured myself ("good, during his Belgian youth that I know nothing about Paul was, in any case, on the 'good side' during the war!"), what I had quickly read of this editorial left me with an uneasy feeling and an aftertaste. In passing, but in a clearly thematic fashion, I was able to identify their source. And here we approach the heart of the problems we have to talk about. They are not only

Paul de Man's problems, but those of the equivocal structure of all the politico-philosophical discourses at play in this story, the discourses from all sides. Today, yesterday, and tomorrow—let the dispensers of justice not forget that!

What, then, had already disturbed me in this editorial, in its opting so resolutely for democracy, and in its call for a struggle against barbarity in 1940?

1. First of all, an insistent reference to the West and to "Western civilization," a theme or lexicon whose careless manipulation has often slid over into rather undemocratic theses, as we know now from experience, especially when it is a question of a "decadence" of the said Western civilization. As soon as anyone talks about "decadence of Western civilization," I am on my guard. We know that this kind of talk can sometimes (not always) lead to restorations or installations of an authoritarian, even totalitarian *order*. Now, the decadence of Western civilization was indeed the central theme of the editorial. It spoke vigorously of the necessity of lucidly going beyond a "commonplace," not in order to overturn it but to clarify its presuppositions, to "render account" of it and "to take account," with "lucidity," thus *to answer for it* [en répondre]—not only as a "theoretician," but in practical, ethical, political terms.

But since it has become a *commonplace* to say that Western civilization is in a state of decadence and that it is crumbling everywhere, it is indispensable to take account of what exactly these values are that are being so directly threatened. And if one wishes to present oneself as champion ready to defend them, this lucidity no longer remains a pointless theoretician's game, but becomes a truly tactical necessity. (my emphasis; on which side is the *commonplace* to be found?)

2. I was also disturbed by a discreetly marked suspicion on the subject of the "individual" and the idea of the "liberation of the individual." We also know the constraints that this suspicion sometimes (not always) exercises whenever the program to which it belongs is not carefully engaged. Presenting the unity of this issue of *Les Cahiers*, the editorial of this resolutely democratic journal in fact said:

Western ethical principles seem, for almost all the authors, to come down in the final analysis to the idea of the liberation of the individual, thanks to which we are differentiated from neighboring civilizations. And if we think we are superior to them, we owe the belief to this concept.

This was a way once again of problematizing a "commonplace" at the same time as one seemed to be assuming it. The strategy of this brief editorial is thus already overdetermined, distanced, gravely ironic. It sets out at once positions of value (democracy, individual, Western civilization that must be saved from decadence) and the necessity of not simplifying, of not giving in to *doxa*, to orthodox and conformist opinion, to the "commonplace," to the feeling of superiority, at least as long as it remains unjustified or unanalyzed: "if we think we are superior to them [neighboring civilizations], we owe the belief to this concept," that is, to this concept of the individual which must be analyzed and of which an account must be rendered, an account taken. The author of this editorial, then, has no taste for simplification or received ideas, for commonplaces and easy consensus. Good democratic conscience and the ideology of the "liberation of the individual" can sometimes give in to such facileness. Nothing permits us to imagine that the

editorial was written by anyone other than the journal's editor, that is by Paul de Man who, as editor, would in any case have to be the first to answer for it.

3. But that was not all. Aware of the manner in which, discreetly but surely (perhaps not yet surely enough), it desimplified consensus and good conscience, I clearly saw already that, in order to avoid "simplifying dangerously," this calmly insolent editorial ran the risk of other dangers. It called for a new "order." This word is perhaps not diabolical in itself. No word means anything by itself, out of all context, and the same word appears sometimes in discourses that many, perhaps, would never think of suspecting today. But it was then, in 1940, known to be too often, too regularly associated with antidemocratic ideologies. An order to come, a new order is not necessarily the extreme right that we know under the name of "ordre nouveau"⁹ (an expression which, moreover, appears elsewhere), but the resemblance ought to have been cause for more vigilance. On the other hand, the paragraph I am going to cite refuses, precisely in order not to "simplify dangerously," to draw a simple line there where the war was, nonetheless, simplifying it in fact. It is as if it were causing the fronts to proliferate and asking the reader not to forget that war could cross over "to the inside" onto other fronts. And that finally there were always several wars going on at once. The editorial suggests that decadence is not only on the side of the enemy, and that the expression "struggle of the West against barbarity" comes down precisely to "dangerously simplifying the question." Here then is the passage that left me perplexed and that explains why, a little while later, my surprise may have been painful, as I said a moment ago, but was not an absolute surprise. Up to a certain point, it had been prepared or cushioned;

let us say rather it was divided by a kind of internal partition:

It has not explicitly been a question of the war in this issue. One senses, however, that its presence guides the thinking of all our contributors and it is certainly not by chance that two of them have chosen France as a symbol of Western culture. But one could not say, *without dangerously simplifying the question*, that the present war is a *struggle of the West against barbarity*. *Factors of decadence are to be found in all nations, all individuals, and the victory of the democracies will be a victory of the West only to the extent it succeeds in establishing an order in which a civilization like the one we cherish can live again.* (p. 2, my emphasis)

We can glimpse a certain "logic." It lies in wait for the calculation or the political consequence of political or rather any discourse. It is as if the possibility of its own overturning were ventriloquizing the discourse in advance, as if that possibility installed in it a quasi-internal war, or still more serious, an endless war, that is, both infinite and unconfined, a war that can never be totally internalized nor externalized. It consists, in effect, of multiple fronts and frontiers. A finite strategy can never formalize them totally, still less master them. Whence the effect produced by the incessant passage of these fronts or frontiers. It is a paradoxical effect because the very possibility of the passage seems to forbid any advance, it seems aporetic *in itself*. Now, it is precisely in this place and at this moment, I will even go so far as to say on this condition, that all decisions, if there are any, must be taken, and that responsibilities *are taken*.

Halfway reassured by this editorial in the *Cahiers*, but my ears still tuned to the uneasy rumblings within me, it is then that I discovered, several months later in

1987, a series of articles also written several months later, after February 1940, in *Le Soir* and *Het Vlaamsche Land*: this time, therefore, after the defeat and under the occupation. What had happened in those few months? What was it I thought I could identify on a first reading, through the sadness and consternation I have mentioned? First of all, this massive and irreducible fact: whatever may be the overdetermination of the content or the internal strategy, a "literary and artistic column" had been regularly supplied between 1940 and 1942. A rather large number of texts had been published in newspapers accepted by the Nazi occupiers. If anyone still had any doubts about this, it sufficed, even before reading de Man's articles, to look at what surrounded them, sometimes framing them immediately on the same page. The subjection of this newspaper¹⁰ cannot have escaped de Man for very long, even if the latter, let us suppose hypothetically, had let himself be blinded for several days or several weeks; even if, let us suppose hypothetically, he had thought he ought to benefit from the authority of a famous and influential uncle, Henri de Man, to whom he was very attached and whom he no doubt admired a lot;¹¹ and even if, let us also suppose hypothetically, de Man initially took advantage of things so as to see his unquestionable talent exercised and recognized—since the awarding of a prestigious literary and artistic column in a major newspaper cannot leave a young man of twenty-two indifferent, a young man who has things to say and who is longing to write once again, as he had already been doing in a brilliant way for several years, on all subjects: philosophy, sociology, politics, music, and especially literature.

Beyond this grave and undeniable fact, I would like to try to analyze now what I thought I was able to

detect at the moment of that first, painful reading. It will be difficult, I prefer to say that right away, and for a number of reasons. The first has to do with the hypothesis of a general law that I believed I was able to form, then verify, at least in a first analysis. Like any law, this law supposes a sort of invariant that in this case takes the form of a recurrent alternation, according to the disjunctive partition of an "on the one hand . . . on the other hand." But one of the difficulties I announced arises from this: the said alternation (that, out of concern for clarity, I will be obliged to harden into an *opposition* through the rhetoric of an "on the one hand, on the other hand") will be only the phenomenon or the form of presentation, the logico-rhetorical scheme, of this law—I will even say of the relation to the law in general. It would be necessary to go beyond the form of this schema and interrogate in its possibility that which thus sets limits on a complete binary formalization. No doubt I will only be able to sketch this movement with these examples and within the dimensions of an article. But I insist on showing the examples and on marking this necessity, even as I refer to other work, past or yet to come.

Let us say, then, "on the one hand . . . on the other hand," and what is more "on the one hand . . . on the other hand" on both hands. On both hands, both sides it would be necessary to pursue further the overdetermining division.

On the one hand, the *massive, immediate, and dominant* effect of all these texts is that of a *relatively coherent ideological ensemble* which, *most often and in a preponderant fashion*, conforms to official rhetoric, that of the occupation forces or of the milieux that, in Belgium, had accepted the defeat and, if not state and governmental collaboration as in France, then at least the perspective

of a European unit under German hegemony. A rigorous description of the conditions in which is inscribed what I am *massively* calling here the *massive* effect would suppose taking into account the extraordinary tangle of the political, religious, and linguistic history of Belgium, at least at that critical turning point of the constitutional monarchy when Henri de Man, after having been a socialist minister, decides, as the government is going into exile, to stay with the king whose adviser he will remain until November 1941, the date at which he in turn leaves Belgium. I cannot undertake this description here, but I believe it will be indispensable, in the future, for any serious interpretation of these texts.

But *on the other hand* and within this frame, de Man's discourse is constantly split, disjointed, engaged in incessant conflicts. Whether in a calculated or a forced fashion, and no doubt beyond this distinction between calculation and passivity, all the propositions carry within themselves a counterproposition: sometimes virtual, sometime very explicit, always readable, this counterproposition signals what I will call, in a regular and contradictory manner, a *double edge* and a *double bind*, the singular artifact of a blade and a knot. As a result, paradoxically, these articles and the attitude that seems to sustain them are not without a certain conformity to the editorial of the *Cahiers* that wanted to avoid "dangerously simplifying."

That is why, in the *three series of examples* with which my hypothesis will be put to the test, I will follow precisely the themes put into perspective by the *Cahiers* editorial: the destiny of the West, Europe and its outside, the nation, democracy and the individual. *And literature*: if it occupies more than just one place among others in this network, the reason is not only that, as in the *Cahiers*,

de Man had the responsibility, both official and statutory, to treat of literature in a privileged way.

1. *On the one hand . . . on the other hand*, then (*first series of examples*).

On the one hand, everything takes place as if, the German victory leaving no doubt and no exit, it was more imperative than ever to pose the question of Europe's destiny by analyzing the past, the present, and especially the future. For that reason, de Man approves of those who attempt a "critical exposé" in order to "deduce the responsibilities for the defeat."¹² One must "direct one's thinking toward the new problems that have arisen" and not give in to clichés (once again the critique of the "commonplace"): "it is not by spreading the belief that we are inept cowards that we will plan for a better future." It is not enough to accuse "the decayed political climate that provoked the defeat since that climate was not much better in 1914." When it is a question of the defeat, a certain Belgian nationalism, sometimes more precisely Flemish nationalism, seems just as obvious, even if the discourse on the nation and nationalisms often remains more cautious than the praise of the Belgian army whose defeat would have been more "glorious" than that of its allies (*ibid.*). De Man judges this reflection on the war, that many others—but not everyone, and that is the question—might also think was over, to be just as necessary for France. He is already in a "postwar" period.¹³ He praises the French who, by means of the "symptoms of what may be the future" "reveal the fruitful meditation of a people attempting to pull themselves together by understanding objectively how [the] blow that has been struck changes its historical destiny."¹⁴ As in the edito-

rial from the *Cahiers*, a big question cuts across all the articles: that of the future of Europe and of a European unity that, from now on, since the German victory seems irreversible and of profound importance, can only be accomplished around Germany.

Even if the form of his discourse is then more *descriptive* than *prescriptive*, even if it seems to call more for a realization and a knowledge than a commitment and an approbation, de Man permits himself no reservations (could he have done so in this newspaper?) when he defines, for example, what might "interest" the "visitors" on the occasion of an exhibition on the "history of Germany." One recognizes here the concern of someone who never ceased pointing to the necessity of posing the national problem, notably the German problem. And who can reproach him for that?

This is the first element that may interest visitors: to have a clearer vision of the very complex history of a people whose importance is fundamental to the destiny of Europe. They will be able to see that the historical evolution of Germany is governed by a fundamental factor: the will to unite the set of regions that have a like racial structure but that adversaries have incessantly endeavored to divide. The periods of weakness always coincide with a territorial parceling up. Each time there has been an attempt to react against a state of inferiority, it has taken the form of seeking to reconquer and assimilate the lost provinces.¹⁵

This paragraph echoes a concern whose traces may be found throughout the whole history and all the writings of Henri de Man. His nephew goes back to the treaties of Westphalia and Versailles, then he adds:

There is another reason for which Germany's historical destiny both past and future cannot leave us indifferent: depend on it

directly . . . no one can deny the fundamental importance of Germany for the life of the West as a whole. One must see this obstinacy that resists subjugation as more than a simple proof of national steadfastness. The whole continuity of Western civilization depends on the unity of the people who are its center. (Ibid.)

Likewise, although he assumes nothing directly to his own account, although his language is almost always that of a columnist-commentator, de Man does not openly criticize those who, like Jacques Chardonne, dare "to look in the face of the situation born of the German victory" and form "the hope of finding that the victor has projects and intentions capable of reconstructing a Europe with better social and political conditions."¹⁶ There seems to be no doubt in his eyes that Belgium and Europe are in the process of living a "revolution." That is his term. But this word is also borrowed: it is the rallying cry of all those who, notably in France, speak of "national revolution" in order to name the new Pétainist era. Revolution, which is to say, then, a social and national revolution of the right. It is, moreover, also in reference to France (which, as we shall see, he alternately praises and criticizes) that de Man speaks, as does his uncle during his Marxist and "beyond Marxism" phase, of a "political and social revolution." What is more, he diagnoses a fatality rather than assigning a duty and we ought always to pay attention to the mode of his utterances. On the subject of *Notre avant-guerre* by Robert Brasillach:

I can imagine that, for a cultivated Frenchman, *Notre avant-guerre* still evokes a lost paradise. But he will have to resign himself to completing a political and social revolution before he can hope to regain a similar paradise, one that would have more solid and, consequently, less ephemeral foundations.¹⁷

Thus the present moment is apprehended, in the then dominant code, as that of a "revolution": the "present revolution,"¹⁸ the "maze of the present revolution,"¹⁹ the "current revolution"²⁰ or the one to come (for Belgium that "has not yet had its revolution").²¹ This "maze," who can seriously see its outcome, the topological design, the essential plan? No one or almost no one, in de Man's eyes, the eyes of someone who, knowing he advances blindly see in a labyrinth, pricks up his ears:

For what must preoccupy the minds of those who wish to orient a reform or a revolution is not a search for the means of adapting themselves to new conditions. In the spiritual domain as much as in the political one, they find themselves confronted with new lines of conduct to be recast, with institutions to be recreated, with programs of organization to be elaborated. And one may remark that strictly none of the essays published in such great number in France and French-speaking Belgium since the war contain so much as a slight concern for tracing the givens of the different problems. ("SJM")

One can see that de Man is defining a *labyrinthine* task, to be sure, but an altogether new one, that of a revolution in thinking. One has to think the revolution and do something other than "adapt to new conditions." Does he not feel that he alone, at the time, is up to defining or approaching this task? I have that impression. This labyrinthine task would be both theoretical (abstract) and more than theoretical. It resists its own theorization and the massiveness of the schema I have just outlined.

On the other hand . . .

For, *on the other hand*, the same article speaks of the need for an abstract theorization of problems that have not yet been elaborated—in particular on the subject of

the "primordial question of European unity." De Man is politically cautious enough to specify that this theoretical elaboration must not be left to "technicians," even if caution can always (this is the double edge) be turned against itself (antitechnicism, demagogic populism—but this is not the dominant accent in the text):

Which does not mean that only technicians can participate in the debate. The postwar period brings with it philosophical and psychological problems of a *purely abstract* nature just as much as it does difficulties having to do with tangible realities. More than that, one may even say that the most important questions are situated on a *purely abstract* plane. Thus, to take just this example, the primordial question of European unity can only be envisioned from a *quasi-theoretical* angle. ("SJM"; my emphasis)

Why is that? We have just gone from the "purely abstract" to the "quasi-theoretical." That is why, immediately afterward, the "spiritual givens" of the problem, which are taken to be essential, "cannot be treated in a general and theoretical form." In the rather awkward phrase I am going to cite (and where I do not exclude the possibility of a typo having slipped in, since this wartime newspaper contains many such mistakes), it is difficult to know whether language does or does not belong to these "spiritual givens." Language is defined as "material and direct," an interesting notation that probably also concerns national languages and their diversity, but which no doubt should not be overinterpreted retrospectively in the light of what de Man has since said about materiality:

That which unites the European peoples are precisely those factors that escape all materialization: a similar political past, a common philosophical and religious thinking, an economic

and social organization that has gone through an analogous evolution in all countries. On the contrary, that which is material and direct (such as language, habits, popular customs) appears as disparate and variable. One may thus see that, in this case, it is a matter of spiritual givens that cannot be treated in a general and theoretical form. ("Sjm")²²

What is still more interesting, through the convolution of this remark, is its final aim within the article. The article is about a book by Montherlant. As far as I can judge at this point, the list of books, in particular of French books, reviewed by de Man can seem to speak loudly all by itself (Jouvenel, Fabre-Luce, Benoist-Méchin, Chardonne, Drieu La Rochelle, Giono, and so on). By what it retains as well as by what it excludes, the filter seems to correspond to that of the legitimization machine (thus the censorship machine) of the official Pétainist ideology. Is de Man letting these choices be imposed totally from without? Is he responding on his own to a demand? Does he assume responsibility for it? Up to what point? Does he consider that these books, having just appeared (and being authorized to appear with authorized publishers—an enormous French history that I have to leave aside here), were part of the current events about which it is the chronicler's duty to speak, even if, on the other hand, he has already indicated his interest in so many other authors, from Joyce to Kafka, from Gide to Hemingway, and so forth? As for me, I do not have the means to answer these questions. But what I can say, from reading this article on Montherlant, for example, and taking responsibility for this reading, is that the argument I mentioned a moment ago around "theory" seems destined, through de Man's clever and not particularly docile strategy, to discredit Montherlant's political

discourse at the point at which it proposes "a general view." How does this text operate when we look at it closely?

It begins by quoting, as if in epigraph and in order to authorize itself, a remark by Montherlant. Then it turns it against him with an irony whose pitiless lucidity, alas (too much lucidity, not enough lucidity, blindly lucid), spares no one, not even de Man almost a half century later. Writing by profession on current affairs, he deals with a current affair in this domain and he announces the oblivion promised those who devote their *literature* to current affairs. Do not these lines, that name "the worst," become unforgettable from then on? It is frightening to think that de Man might have handled so coldly the double-edged blade, while perhaps expecting "the worst":

In this collection of essays by Montherlant, there is a phrase that all those who have followed literary publication since August 1940 will approve. It is the passage that says: "To the writers who have given too much to current affairs for the last few months, I predict, for that part of their work, the most complete oblivion. When I open the newspapers and journals of today, I hear the indifference of the future rolling over them, just as one hears the sound of the sea when one holds certain seashells up to the ear." One could not have put it any better. And this just and severe sentence applies to all the books and essays in which writers offer us their reflections on war and its consequences, including *Solstice de juin* itself [the title of the book by Montherlant de Man is reviewing]. It is an odd distortion, belonging to our age, to demand from artists and writers, in particular, directives and judgments on political and historical circumstances. Because writers are capable of expressing commonplaces in an elegant way, they are made into oracles and one takes their words to be providential messages.

And the credit they enjoy in this domain is considerable. Gide's quarrels with communism exercised more influence over people's minds than would have numerous documented and serious works treating the same question. And yet there is no reason whatsoever to grant men of letters such authority in an area of human behavior which, manifestly, lies outside their competence. It is surprising to discover the naïveté and nullity of some of their sentences once they have been stripped of the brilliant varnish that a careful style confers on them. A whole side of the question—the economic, social, technical side—is totally alien to them, so that when they venture onto this terrain, in that offhand way that only the ignorant are capable of, one may expect the worst. ("SjM")

After that, one does not have to wait long for a condemnation of the individual and the individualist Montherlant "who likes to give lessons": his "meditations" are "conventional" and "insipid," "uninteresting" and "ineffective." By "practicing the political essay," Montherlant can only "echo official declarations" and "swell the ranks of those who talk to no useful purpose."

An analogous gesture, although more discreet, as regards Chardonne. After having quoted him ("Only Germany can organize the continent and that country provides us with the opportunity of an internal rebuilding that was necessary and that it is up to us to accomplish . . ."), de Man adds: "After such sentences, one may perhaps *debate* Chardonne's ideas, but one certainly cannot reproach them for a lack of sharpness (*netteté*)" ("VfC"). A double-edged sentence—on sharpness, precisely, and on the cutting edge itself. One may suppose, without being sure, that de Man judges these ideas to be very debatable.

Likewise, although de Man often insists, and rightly

so, on the riches of German culture, on the complexity of the national problem in Germany, on the fundamental role that it always plays and ought still to play in the destiny of Europe, at no point, to my knowledge, does he name Nazism, a fortiori in order to praise it. In all the texts I have been able to read and about which the least one can say is that they were turned in the direction of politics and current affairs, the word "Nazi," "Nazi party" appears only once or twice, if I am not mistaken, and then it does so in a neutral or informative mode. What is more, on one occasion it provides another opportunity to criticize a French writer who was then one of the most "authorized" by collaborationist France: Brasillach and his "lack of political sense"!

Brasillach's reaction faced with a spectacle like that of the Nazi Party Congress in Nuremberg, when he manifests a certain terror before the "strange" nature of this demonstration, is that of someone for whom the sudden importance of the political in the life of a people is an inexplicable phenomenon. ("NaB")

However overdeterminable this remark may be, it indicates not just a distance, but a very critical step back when it comes to writers or ideologues as marked as Montherlant, Chardonne, or Brasillach. As for what remains neutral or suspended in his approach, one must, it seems to me, find a supplementary explanation, and here again it will be a question of "responsibility." In an article titled "Sur les possibilités de la critique" (which will greatly interest those who would hasten toward a recognition of prefigurations in these "early writings"), de Man defines a certain autonomy of literature, but also of literary history. To be sure, there is a responsibility to evaluate the literary object, but it is a specific responsi-

bility. It is not to be confused, he says, with that of a moral and political judgment of the moral or political responsibilities of the writer.

Literature is an independent domain having a life, laws, and obligations belonging only to it and which in no way depend on the philosophical or ethical contingencies stirring at its side. The least one can say is that the artistic values governing the world of letters do not merge with those of the Truth and the Good, and that whoever borrows his criteria from this region of human consciousness will be systematically mistaken in his judgments. . . . One does not have the right to condemn Gide as a novelist because his moral life was debatable. . . . A writer can be attacked for the inadequacies of his style, for sins against the laws of the genre he practices, but never for weaknesses or lacks in his moral personality. The most beautiful pages in the world's literatures are often those that express a failure, a renunciation, a capitulation. And the worst platitudes have been written to exalt the most noble sentiments. All of this is quite obvious and it would be pointless to repeat it if we did not have to listen to reassertions of criticism's duty to "derive from a set of deductions, joined to a philosophy of broad humanism or better yet to a moral responsibility linked to the supernatural fidelity of man."²³

This is not the place for a substantive debate about all these formulations and about literature as an "independent domain"—which, moreover, de Man does not remove from history, any more than he ever did. This is very clear in the rest of the same article which even speaks of a "philosophy of literary history that is no less fruitful than the philosophy of history as such." It is also "quite obvious" that literary criticism, if it is *critical*, that is, if it is a judgment, an evaluation, an assignment of responsibility, could not be, insofar as it is *literary* criticism of *works*, a moral or political criticism of authors. That being the case, what does de Man do here?

1. If the responsibility of the *criticized* works can be acute in literary terms without that meaning it is a moral or political responsibility, then this is also true for criticism, for *criticizing* criticism of works. Some will be able to say, out of malevolence in my opinion, that de Man wants to subtract his critical activity from any future moral and political trial, even though some "capitulation" was readable there.

2. More significant seems to me to be the example of Gide, the "accused" author of the period. De Man disputes the validity of any moral and political trial that one might bring against Gide's literary work. He even formulates general principles invalidating such a judgment. He puts forth reasons for a radical resistance to the organization of such verdicts. He does it at a moment when moral and political trials, often carried out in the name of, precisely, "humanism," were common and had serious consequences. This seems to me to be a remarkable gesture. For if literature remains neutral in de Man's eyes or at least independent of morality and politics, it is not neutral, it is even an offensive and courageous gesture to recall this axiom and to resist the moralizing orthodoxy at a moment of great repression during which so many writers are being condemned for their moral or political opinions (present or past).

3. The logic of this argument anticipates, up to a certain point, that of Jean Paulhan (whom de Man was rediscovering during the last years of his life, no doubt in reference to other themes, but it is still not insignificant). Writing after the Liberation in *De la paille et du grain* (On the wheat and the chaff), this writer-resistant disputed the right of his "friends" on the National Committee of Writers to conduct, as writers, political trials of other writers known to have collaborated with the enemy. If there were grounds for such a trial, then it was the

province of other tribunals competent to judge political acts: there ought to be no literary "épuration" (purge), no writers' tribunals to judge the politics or morals of other writers *as writers*. Nor should there be "voluntary policemen," or "that supplementary force of gendarmes that Charles Maurras cried out for—and that you have invented."²⁴ My own thinking as regards Paulhan's discourse cannot be summed up in a few lines. Yet, it is remarkable in any case that an analogous logic was put to work several years earlier by de Man *and this time in an opposite context*, so to speak, when it was a matter of protesting against tribunals and purges on *the other side*. Thus, once again do not "dangerously simplify the question"!

In a like manner, finally, although he grants a lot of attention to the role that Germany or "German genius" has played or ought to play in the destiny of Europe, although he recalls constantly the necessity of understanding thoroughly the history of the German nation in order to understand Hitlerism, although he is vigilantly opposed to the commonplace and the "lazy and widespread solution" that comes down to "supposing an integral dualism between Germany, on the one hand, and Hitlerism on the other . . . the latter considered to be a strange phenomenon, having no relation to the historical evolution of the German people, but rather born of a momentary aberration and destined to disappear like a morbid symptom that would have merely upset the normal life of the nation for a little while" ("VfC"), although his analysis leads him to judge German "hegemony" in Europe to be ineluctable, this diagnosis seems rather cold and rather far removed from exhortation. And when, in the same text, he describes the "innovations of totalitarian regimes" and the "obligations" or "duties"

taking the place of "anarchy," he underscores that the "style that will result from this process is far from being definitively consecrated. It may appear crude and somewhat rudimentary" because of the "rigid and relatively narrow mold that is the war." Then he concludes by noting that enriching these possibilities may run the risk of "dangerous temptations" ("VfC"). The week before, in an article that was also, let us never forget, a commentary on Daniel Halévy, de Man recognized, admittedly, that in France "immediate collaboration" seemed compelling to "any objective mind," but he warned against an attitude that would be content to "strike out against the nearest guilty parties" or "to adopt the mystical beliefs from which the victors have drawn their strength and power."²⁵ Here once again, there is an appeal to historical, even the historian's, analysis of the past so as to rediscover the strengths and the patrimony of the nation, but also so as to draw "the lesson from events by means of theoretical considerations."

2. *On the one hand . . . on the other hand*
(second series of examples).

On the one hand, the question of nations dominates all these texts. It is approached in all its *theoretical* aspects (ethnic, historical, political, linguistic, religious, aesthetic, literary). Nothing could be more legitimate, one might say, especially at that moment, and I will add: still today. But this interest is not only theoretical. In certain of its forms, it resembles nationalist commitment: Belgian, sometimes Flemish. And there seems to be evidence of a great respect, in a privileged fashion, with regard to German nationalism. Most utterances of a "comparatist" style are made to the benefit of Germany

and to the detriment of conquered France. This interest for the nation seems to dominate in two ways: it outweighs interest for the state, notably in its democratic form, and outweighs still more interest for the individual, who constitutes the target of numerous critiques.

We have already seen how this interest was resonating in a muffled way in the editorial from the *Cahiers*. De Man, translator and commentator of A. E. Brinckmann's *Geist der Nationen, Italiener-Franzosen-Deutsche* (1938), speaks in this regard of "national grandeur." His commentary describes "a sober faith, a practical means to defend Western culture against a decomposition from the inside out or a surprise attack by neighbouring civilizations."²⁶ Looked on more or less favorably by the Nazis, Brinckmann's book is concerned especially with the arts. But de Man recalls that it applies to all domains: "what is true in the domain of the history of arts holds true for all domains. Europe can only be strong, peaceful, and flourishing if it is governed by a state of mind which is deeply conscious of its national grandeur, but which keeps its eyes open for all experiments and problems that touch our continent" ("AM"). This Western nationalism must adapt itself to the "contemporary revolutions" we spoke of earlier. De Man emphasizes that the aims of the book he is reviewing are not only theoretical. They have value as practical engagement. Does he subscribe to them in his name? It seems that he does, but he does not say so:

The aim of a work like this is not only to analyse the artistic activity from an aesthetic point of view, or to give an explanation of a practical nature. It originated out of an attempt to ensure the future of Western civilisation in all its aspects. As such it contains a lesson, which is indispensable for all those

who, in the contemporary revolutions, try to find a firm guidance according to which they can direct their action and their thoughts. ("AM")

The comparisons between the German and French cultures, notably as regards their literary manifestations, the one dominated by myth, metaphor, or symbol, the other by psychological analysis, the predilection for moderation, limit, and definition, thus for the finite (one thinks of many of Nietzsche's statements on the subject), seem often to be made to the benefit of the former. Does de Man assume to his own account what he says in commenting on Sieburg? It seems that he does, but he does not say so.

Instead of an artificial and forced denationalization that leads to a considerable impoverishment—such as we have seen happen in Flanders and Walloon Belgium as a result of France's force of attraction—a free contact among peoples who know themselves to be different and who hold onto this difference, but who esteem each other reciprocally guarantees political peace and cultural stability. It is no doubt in this domain that France must perform the most serious turnaround, or risk disappearing forever from the political scene.

As for the spiritual domain [*le domaine de l'esprit*], the forces that seem to have taken over the conduct of history are not very much in accordance with France's specific soul. To realize this, it suffices to examine the opposition pointed out by Sieburg between a certain form of French reason that everywhere seeks to fix limits and to establish the right measure, and the sense of grandeur and of the infinite that indeed seems to characterize present tendencies. We are entering a mystical age [let us not forget that elsewhere de Man speaks of his mistrust as regards the victor's mysticism], a period of faith and belief, along with everything that supposes in the way of suffering, exaltation, and intoxication. ("Pfs")

The Flemish nationalism is clearer, notably in "Le Destin de la Flandre," whose pretext was the "Germano-Flemish Cultural Convention." Paul de Man was born in Antwerp, and his family is Flemish. He recalls several times the "Flemish genius" and the struggle against "French influences that, through the intermediary of the complicitous Belgian state, were spreading rapidly." He supports a solution that would guarantee Flanders a certain autonomy in relation to Walloon Belgium and Germany, whether it is a matter of defense or of national, and first of all linguistic, patrimony: "that is to say, of the language before all else and of that form of freedom that permits creators to work in accordance with their impulses and not as imitators of a neighbor whose spirit is dissimilar."²⁷ This attention to national language appears throughout these first texts which also form a short treatise on translation. Literature is often examined from the point of view of the problems of translation by someone who was also a polyglot, a very active translator (especially in his youth) and an original interpreter of Benjamin's "The Task of the Translator." Resistance to translation is how one recognizes national roots and the idiomatic character of a literary work. From this point of view, one should read the column devoted to "Romans allemand" novels [German]. It begins thus:

There exists an excellent means that permits one to discover if a literary work either does or does not send its roots down into the depths of national feelings: it is to see whether it resists translation. When a novel or a poem carries within itself these somewhat mysterious and undefinable virtues that make up the particular genius of a people, the most careful translation will never succeed in rendering the original.²⁸

This problematic of translation is, moreover, in accordance with the "comparatism" and the hierarchies (which, by the way, are very unstable) that we were evoking a moment ago. Notably, and in what is all the same the most traditional fashion, between the Germanic spirit and the Latin spirit. If "the most conscientious and most faithful translation cannot render the accent of the original work," it is in particular because of

the divergence between the rational and constructive French spirit and the German tendency toward the visionary, that does not stop at an objective consideration [of the sort de Man does not fail to call for elsewhere!], but penetrates regions where the laws of reason no longer hold. Thus, the virtues of clarity and harmony are lost. The novel [*Léonore Griebel*, by Hermann Stehr] is much less finished and less even than the work of Flaubert. But one gains depth. . . . With the Latin, intelligence and rational reasoning prevail; with the Germanic, it is a stirring poetic intuition. ("Ra")

Although it has to efface itself before the original text, the translation ought not, therefore, to efface the fact that it is still a translation. One ought to "feel that it is a translation." Hence the reproach addressed to Betz, the translator of Rilke whom de Man already knew and appreciated, when he translated Jünger (another of de Man's favorites) "too well," to the point of making one forget that the original was written in German, "which, especially when he recounts the story of a German invading France, has something amazingly shocking about it."²⁹

Between Germany and France, between these two "cultural blocks," Flemish nationalism should endeavor to save "that core that has given humanity admirable products of an independent genius. The political status of

Flanders ought to be established in the new Europe in accordance with this destiny" ("F"). Despite obvious affinities, this independent genius cannot be reduced to the German genius, and it is sharply opposed to those ultra-French things that are "abstraction" and "cerebralness" (remember this latter word: it occurs frequently and in a moment we will see it applied to the Jew, not the Frenchman). Flemish genius manifests itself particularly in realist picturality, which does not mean only painting but colorful plasticity, even in literature, and shows less interest in "abstract content." This is the "principal opposition between French and Flemish art." But the "attachment to external forms rather than to cerebral analysis" has nothing "superficial" about it. That is what Hegel says in his own way in the *Aesthetics*. De Man will later study that text closely, perhaps he already knows it when he writes, in the service of Flemish genius—or any genius as it is traditionally called: "This mentality has nothing superficial about it since the external envelope of beings and objects, when it is seen by the careful eye of genius that discovers all its resources, can reveal their deep meaning" ("F").

But *on the other hand*, already clearly enveloped, as we have indicted, by the cautious modality (more descriptive than prescriptive) of the utterances, this nationalist demand is complicated, multiplied, inverted in several ways. First of all, because, through the practice of an abyssal logic of exemplarity, the national affirmation *in general* is caught up in the paradoxical necessity of respecting *the idiom in general*, thus *all* idioms, all national differences. Next, because Flemish nationalism must resist both the French influence and the German influence. Finally, because this young Fleming is also writing in French. If he is a nationalist, his language, his training,

and his literary preferences make of him as much a nationalist of French culture as a Flemish nationalist. This war and its fronts thus divide all the so-called "early writings."

Because de Man *also* praises French individualism: it is "more analyst than organizer" and it "survives even if it no longer intends to play an organizing role." It "remains a precious national character."³⁰ And in the very text that speaks of the necessity for France to open itself to "foreign influences" and to abandon "provincialism [*l'esprit de clocher*]" (which are in themselves and out of context excellent recommendations), praise of the "Latin spirit" compensates for and eloquently overcodes the strategy of motifs that we quoted earlier, like the play of forces that this strategy could serve. But let no one accuse me of "dangerously simplifying": it is true that things can be reversed again, a certain extreme right in France can also play the card of Latinity. Always the double edge. De Man has just spoken of "the lesson of a long humanist past that guards against any obscurantism" and he then continues, out of a concern, once again, not to "conform to the spirit of the day" and "the general orientation":

It is on this last point that one sees the considerable role French genius may still be able to play. It cannot for a moment be a question of wanting to destroy or overlook, on the grounds that they do not conform to the spirit of the day, the virtues of clarity, logic, harmony that the great artistic and philosophic tradition of this country reflects. Maintaining the continuity of the French spirit is an inherent condition of Europe's grandeur. Particularly when the general orientation goes in the direction of profound, obscure, natural forces, the French mission, that consists in moderating excesses, maintaining indispensable links with the past, evening out erratic surges, is

recognized to be of the utmost necessity. That is why it would be disastrous and stupid to destroy, by seeking to modify them by force, the constants of the Latin spirit. And it is also why we would be committing an unforgivable mistake if we cut our ties with the manifestations of this culture. ("PIS")

Likewise, there are abundant warnings against narrow nationalism and jealous regionalism.³¹ Will one say that these warnings can also serve German hegemony? Yet, in opposition to the latter de Man defines a concept of an autonomous Flanders that will let itself be neither assimilated nor annexed by Germany as it was occasionally a question of doing. A moderate discourse, a differentiated position that rejects the "anti-Belgian spirit" of certain Flemish and sees the allegation of an "artificial and forced denationalization" of Flanders as a relic and a "myth." Once again from "The Destiny of Flanders":

But the revisionist situation born of the present war causes various questions to bounce back again, questions that had been more or less skilfully settled before the conflict. And since the organizing force emanates from Germany, Flanders, for whom that country constitutes an eternal point of support, finds itself placed in a peculiar situation. The memory of activism, when Germany supported the Flemish in their legitimate claims, is still too much alive not to provoke certain stirrings in an analogous direction. Nevertheless, it should be pointed out that on this side as well the danger of assimilation exists and all the more clearly because affinities link the two races. As a result, the temptation is even stronger for the Flemish to let themselves dissolve into a Germanic community which risks effacing everything that constitutes their profound originality. It is for this reason that Mr. Elias, burgomaster of Ghent, felt he had to react "against those who wanted to extend the idea of

the Germanic State to the reabsorption of the Low Countries (Nederlanden) in an artificial German community." ("F")

It is true that the burgomaster's speech seems compelled to remain within a contradiction, if I have understood it correctly, unless it is signaling toward some confederation that, however, it does not name. As for de Man, he merely quotes him:

"Many no doubt fear that this would lead to the disappearance of the Flemish as a people and their leveling out as Germans. I have no hesitation about saying that such a conception could lead, in Flanders, to catastrophic results. . . . We can only be worthy members of a Germanic State as long as the State allows us to be worthy Netherlanders." ("F")

3. *On the one hand . . . on the other hand*
(third series of examples).

I will gather these examples around the article that appeared to me, as to so many others, to be the most unbearable. I mean the article titled "Les Juifs dans la littérature actuelle" (Jews in Present-day Literature).³²

Nothing in what I am about to say, analyzing the article as closely as possible, will heal over the wound I right away felt when, my breath taken away, I perceived in it what the newspapers have most frequently singled out as recognized antisemitism, an antisemitism more serious than ever in such a situation, an antisemitism that would have come close to urging exclusions, even the most sinister deportations. Even if, in the texts already quoted, no pro-Nazism was ever declared; even if the disjunctions, the precautions, the complications seemed to protect against any simple allegiance, is not what we

have here the most unquestionable manifestation of an antisemitism as violent as it is stereotyped? Does not this antisemitism take over from, so as to sharpen its coherence, the "racique" (rather than the racial) as it is frequently called in other texts? For example: the "historical, *racique*, and so forth, components that allow one to determine whether or not a people has a nationality worthy of being respected" ("F"), the "sensibility . . . intimately linked to the virtues of his race" ("Ra") (that of Hermann Stehr, author of *Léonore Griebel* that de Man is reviewing here). Does not the lack of vigilance regarding racism induce other articles to speak frequently of human "types," according to a familiar code which was not only that of Jünger (whom de Man admired and whom Heidegger criticized on this point in *Zur Seinsfrage*)? Whether or not he assumes it to his own account in the texts of commentaries, this vocabulary never seems to arouse suspicion when de Man speaks, rather pejoratively, of a "certain type of [French]man who was hearty and enterprising, sufficiently gifted to have been able to approach great problems without, however, being able to tolerate the demands made on true genius, a human type with an affection for friendship, irony" ("NaB"); or when he speaks, rather approvingly, of a "certain human type" or of a "personality-type" formed by "great renewals"; or the "creation of a new set of individual ideals" ("VfC"); or still again, paraphrasing Drieu La Rochelle, of "the creation of a radically new human type."³³ Even when he criticizes the individualist (French) conception of this "new type, human individual," de Man does not seem to distrust the constant reference to "type." Likewise, is not the logic of "The Jews in Present-day Literature," its praise for the "good health" and the "vitality" of a European literature that would keep its "in-

tact originality" despite any "semitic interference" ("Jla"), coherent with the very frequent valorization of "vitality," ("NpD"), of the "healthy" ("NaB"), of the "uncorrupted" ("Ra") as well as sometimes with the critique of abstraction and "cerebralness" here associated with Judaism? Is it not coherent with so many warnings against "outside influences" ("Ra")?

But let us now look more closely at an article that it will be better to quote *in extenso*.

On the one hand, it indeed seems to confirm the logic that we have just reconstituted. In effect, it describes the traits of what, according to some, are "degenerate and decadent, because *enjuivés* ["enjewished"]" cultural phenomena, or yet again an "enjuivé" novel; he mentions the "important role" that the Jews have played in "the phony and disordered existence of Europe since 1920." He has recourse, following a well-known tradition, to the stereotypical description of the "Jewish spirit": "cerebralness," "capacity for assimilating doctrines while maintaining a certain coldness in the face of them." He notes that "Jewish writers have always remained in the second rank and, to speak only of France, the André Mauroises, the Francis de Croissets, the Henri Duvernoises, the Henri Bernsteins, Tristan Bernards, Julien Bendas, and so forth, are not among the most important figures, they are especially not those who have had any guiding influence on the literary genres." And then, in a terrifying conclusion, the allusion to "a solution to the Jewish problem":

The observation is, moreover, comforting for Western intellectuals. That they have been able to safeguard themselves from Jewish influence in a domain as representative of culture as literature proves their vitality. If our civilization had let itself

be invaded by a foreign force, then we would have to give up much hope for its future. By keeping, in spite of semitic interference in all aspects of European life, an intact originality and character, it has shown that its basic nature is healthy. What is more, one sees that a solution of the Jewish problem that would aim at the creation of a Jewish colony isolated from Europe would not entail, for the literary life of the West, deplorable consequences. The latter would lose, in all, a few personalities of mediocre value and would continue, as in the past, to develop according to its great evolutive laws. ("Jla")

Will I dare to say "on the other hand" in the face of the *unpardonable* violence and confusion of these sentences? What could possibly attenuate the fault? And whatever may be the reasons or the complications of a text, whatever may be going on in the mind of its author, how can one deny that the effect of these conclusions went in the sense and the direction of the worst? In the *dominant* context in which they were read in 1941, did not their *dominant* effect go unquestionably in the direction of the worst? Of what we now know to have been the worst?

But one must have the courage to answer injustice with justice. And although one has to condemn these sentences, which I have just done, one ought not do it without examining everything that remains readable in a text one can judge to be disastrous. It is also necessary, when evaluating *this act, this text* (notice I do not say the life and work of its signatory which will never be reduced to this act, this text) to maintain a "certain coldness" and to take the trouble of that "work of lucid analysis" de Man associates with this "coldness" even as he attributes it, *in this very text*, to the Jews. As these traits are rules of intellectual responsibility rather than natural characteristics reserved to Jews and Frenchmen, does not the "work of analysis" have to be tirelessly pur-

sued with "a certain coldness"? Therefore, I will dare to say, this time as before, "on the other hand."

Yes, *on the other hand* and *first of all*, the whole article is organized as an indictment of "vulgar antisemitism." It is, let us not forget, directed against that antisemitism, against its "lapidary judgment," against the "myth" it feeds or feeds on. In the first two paragraphs, which I am going to cite, de Man proceeds unquestionably toward a demystification, not without certain risks, of this vulgarity, of its "myth," of an "error" and a "very widespread opinion." Once again, as in the *Cahiers* and as he will always do, he takes on the "commonplace." Immediately after this critique, he continues with a "But . . ." ("But the reality is different"). This will then lead us to ask ourselves which reality interests him especially—and we will have to talk once again about literature. Here then is the uncompromising critique of "vulgar antisemitism" and of the contradiction, even of the boomerang effect to which the latter is exposed or which perhaps it already translates. I have just used the word "boomerang"; I could have said that de Man also designates the double edges of the said "vulgar antisemitism." These are the first two paragraphs, in which I hear some mockery:

Vulgar antisemitism readily takes pleasure in considering post-war cultural phenomena (after the war of '14-18) as degenerate and decadent because they are *enjuivés*. Literature has not escaped this lapidary judgment: it has sufficed to discover a few Jewish writers behind Latinized pseudonyms for all of contemporary production to be considered polluted and harmful. This conception entails rather dangerous consequences. First of all, it condemns a priori a whole literature that in no way deserves this fate. What is more, from the moment one agrees

that the literature of our day has some merit, it would be a rather unflattering appreciation of Western writers to reduce them to being more imitators of a Jewish culture that is foreign to them.

The Jews themselves have contributed to spreading this myth. Often, they have glorified themselves as the leaders of literary movements that characterize our age. But the error has, in fact, a deeper cause. At the origin of the thesis of a Jewish takeover is the very widespread belief according to which the modern novel and modern poetry are nothing but a kind of monstrous outgrowth of the world war. Since the Jews have, in fact, played an important role in the phony and disordered existence of Europe since 1920, a novel born in this atmosphere would deserve, up to a certain point, the qualification of *enjuivé*. ("Jla")

Things are very serious. Rather than going too quickly, it would be better to run the risk of paraphrase and redundancy. What does this article say? It is indeed a matter of criticizing vulgar antisemitism. That is the primary, declared, and underscored intention. But to scoff at vulgar antisemitism, is that also to scoff at or mock the vulgarity of antisemitism? This latter syntactic modulation leaves the door open to two interpretations. To condemn vulgar antisemitism may leave one to understand that there is a distinguished antisemitism in whose name the vulgar variety is put down. De Man never says such a thing, even though one may condemn his silence. But the phrase can also mean something else, and this reading can always contaminate the other in a clandestine fashion: to condemn "vulgar antisemitism," especially if one makes no mention of the other kind, is to condemn antisemitism itself inasmuch as it is vulgar, always and essentially vulgar. De Man does not say that either. If that is what he thought, a possibility I will never exclude, he could not say so

clearly in this context. One will say at this point: his fault was to have accepted the context. Certainly, but what is that, to accept a context? And what would one say if he claimed not to have fully accepted it, and to have preferred to play the role there of the nonconformist smuggler, as so many others did in so many different ways, in France and in Belgium, at this or that moment, inside or outside the Resistance? And I repeat, what is that, to fully accept a context? Because this article, in any case, is nonconformist, as Paul de Man, as also his uncle, always was. It is not particularly conformist to denounce antisemitism, an antisemitism, whichever it may be, at that moment, in that place, and to attribute to vulgar antisemitism the recognizable and then widespread vocabulary of all antisemitism: "enjuivé," "degenerate," "decadent," "polluted," "harmful." At the very least, it is rather anticonformist to add in the same breath, in the same sentences, that this is a "lapidary judgment," that this antisemitism may have "dangerous consequences," that what we have here is a "myth," an "error," that these judgments turn back against the literature of those who pronounce them and who from then on would give themselves away by talking, finally, only about themselves. Already, in the second paragraph, the argument that would consist in making the Jews co-responsible for this antisemitic "myth" and this "error" is right away discredited. It was evoked merely as a rhetorical ploy: "But the error has, in fact, a deeper cause."

The logic of these first two paragraphs controls everything that follows: it is a matter of condemning antisemitism to the extent that it is vulgar (I leave this expression all its ambiguity, which is the ambiguity of the article) and of condemning this antisemitism as regards literature: its history, its own laws, its relations to history

in general. It is as regards literature that de Man wants to say something and obviously thinks he has something original to say. He especially wants to talk about literature, here as elsewhere, and it is moreover literature that is his domain at the newspaper. This is one of the early articles in *Le Soir*, where he began writing about two months previously. I have yet to find any allusion to the Jewish problem or any declaration of antisemitism in any of the other articles. Left to formulate hypotheses, I can imagine that, for a page devoted to Judaism, he was asked to treat the subject from a literary point of view. What one can read on the same page surrounding this article seems to me to support this hypothesis. One then notices that, if de Man's article is necessarily contaminated by the forms of vulgar antisemitism that frame it, *these coincide in a literal fashion, in their vocabulary and logic, with the very thing that de Man accuses*, as if his article were denouncing the neighboring articles, pointing to the "myth" and the "errors," the "lapidary judgments," and the "very widespread belief" that can be read just to one side, in another article on the same page. ("Freudism"—and not Freud—as the product of a "particularly keen Jewish intelligence," well received in "the intellectual and artistic milieu of a decadent and *enjuivée* society"), as well as the declaration no doubt falsely attributed to Benjamin Franklin: "A leopard cannot change its spots. Jews are Asiatics; they are a threat to the country that admits them and they should be excluded from the Constitution."

De Man wants especially to propose a thesis on literature that visibly interests him more here than either antisemitism or the Jews. But before getting to that, a few points about vulgarity. It is a word and a major motif in all the articles. An *ideology* dominated by a disdain

for vulgarity can be evaluated in diverse and contradictory ways. We know these programs very well, so I may be spared further development. But one must be aware that de Man rejects all kinds of conformism of the period as so much "vulgarity" (the word was also a favorite of his uncle).³⁴ Once again the double edge. In his view, there can be no salvation for any "vulgarity." Read his "Propos sur la vulgarité artistique" (Remarks on artistic vulgarity). Behind the word vulgarity, and on almost every line, it is "our age" that is condemned, always in a fashion that cuts both ways: what "the radio, the cinema, publishing," even "the press" "undertake to unload on us," and then there are "fake artists," "mechanized formulas that guarantee success with the masses," the "falseness of tone." That these are signs of aristocratism and aestheticism is not at all in doubt, especially since de Man says so himself. Still one must be specific: this aristocratism is more aesthetic than social, it is social *on the basis of* the aesthetic, an esthetic determined *on the basis of* literature, even if music and painting play a considerable role. Although it intends "French letters" in particular, the conclusion of this article is eloquent in its every word: "Henri Pourrat represents something very pure and very precious within French letters: that regionalism of a noble attachment to the native soil which is the index of an authentic literary aristocracy."³⁵

If his focus is on literature, what does de Man want to say about it? Why does he reproach vulgar antisemitism its mistake *as regards literature*? Why does he write "But the reality is different?" The following four paragraphs, which form the center and the thesis of the article, no longer contain the slightest allusion to Jews or to antisemitism. They speak only of literature, of its original historicity, and of the "very powerful laws" that govern

"aesthetic evolutions." There is a history of art and of literature. It is essential and irreducible, but it maintains its originality. It does not merge with sociopolitical history either in its rhythms or in its causal determinations. Historicism, and especially "vulgar" historicism, would consist in mapping one history onto the other, in ignoring the powerful structural constraints, the logics, forms, genres, methods, and especially the temporality proper to literary history, the duration of the waves within its depths that one must know how to listen for over and above the swirls and agitation of the immediate, to listen for the sounds coming from the "artistic life" there where it is "little swayed" by the waves of the present. Literary duration enfolds and unfolds itself otherwise, in a way that differs from the phenomena of sociopolitical history in the brief sequences of their events: it precedes them, sometimes succeeds them, in any case it exceeds them. This notion compromises all the ideologies of literature, even the opinions or the propaganda on the subject of literature whenever they would attempt to enclose themselves in a strictly determined context ("current affairs"). Whether they are revolutionary or not, on the left or the right, these ideological discourses speak of everything except literature itself. Sometimes, from "within" literature itself, manifest discourses of certain literary movements ("surrealism" or "futurism") are, precisely in the form of their "manifestos," ideological or doxical in this sense. They also mistake the historicity proper to literature, the ample rhythms of its tradition, the discreet convolutions of its "evolutions": in sum, a "vulgar" approach to literature.³⁶

There would be much to say in a closely argued discussion around this question: literature, history, and politics. Here I must restrict myself to *three points*.

1. Debatable or not, this interesting and consistent thesis concerns, then, first of all the historicity proper to literature and the arts. Forming the central body of the article which has no relation with any "Jewish question" whatsoever, it develops as a theoretical demonstration in three moments: (a) general propositions on art; (b) illustration using the privileged example of the novel; (c) "analogous demonstration" with the example of poetry.

2. In 1941, under the German occupation, and first of all in the context of this newspaper, the *presentation* of such a thesis (for precisely the reasons that some today would judge it to be "formalist" or "aestheticist" or in any case too concerned about protecting "literarity," if not from all history, as we saw that is not the case, then at least from a sociopolitical history and against ideology) goes rather against the current. One can at least read it as an anticonformist attack. Its insolence can take aim at and strike all those who were then, in an active and properly punitive fashion, undertaking to judge literature and its history, indeed to administer, control, censor them in function of the dominant ideology of the war or, as de Man puts it, of a "profound upheaval in the political and economic world."

3. The examples chosen (Gide, Kafka, Lawrence, Hemingway, surrealism, futurism) are troubling in this context. They are visibly invoked as great canonic examples on the basis of which, beyond any possible question, one ought to be able to say what literature *is*, what writers and literary movements *do*. We know from many other signs, his articles in the *Cahiers* for example, that these writers were already important references for de Man. The examples chosen are already curious and insolent because there are no others, because there is no German example, because the French example is Gide,

the American Hemingway, the English Lawrence, and because Kafka is Jewish, but especially because they represent everything that Nazism or the right wing revolutions would have liked to extirpate from history and the great tradition. Now, what does de Man say? That these writers and these movements were already canonical: they belong to tradition, they have "orthodox ancestors," whether one likes it or not, whether they recognize it themselves or not. Taking the risk of a certain traditionalism (always the double edge), de Manian genealogy reinscribes all of these "accused ones" in the then protective legitimacy of the canon and in the great literary family. It lifts them out of repression's way and it does so in an exemplary fashion since, he says, "the list could be extended indefinitely." I have said why I will cite this article *in extenso*. Here are the central paragraphs, where I have underlined the "buts," "But the reality," "in reality":

But the reality is different. It seems that aesthetic evolutions obey very powerful laws that continue their action even when humanity is shaken by considerable events. The world war has brought about a profound upheaval in the political and economic world. *But* artistic life has been swayed relatively little, and the forms that we know at present are the logical and normal successors to what there had been before.

This is particularly clear as concerns the novel. Stendhal's definition, according to which "the novel is a mirror carried along a highway," contains within it the law that still today rules this literary genre. There was first the obligation to respect reality scrupulously. *But* by digging deeper, the novel has gotten around to exploring psychological reality. Stendhal's mirror no longer remains immobile the length of the road: it undertakes to search even the most secret corners of the souls of characters. And this domain has shown itself to

be so fruitful in surprises and riches that it still constitutes the one and only terrain of investigation of the novelist.

Gide, Kafka, Hemingway, Lawrence—the list could be extended indefinitely—all do nothing but attempt to penetrate, according to methods proper to their personality, into the secrets of interior life. Through this characteristic, they show themselves to be, not innovators who have broken with all past traditions, *but* mere continuers who are only pursuing further the realist aesthetic that is more than a century old.

An analogous demonstration could be made in the domain of poetry. The forms that seem to us most revolutionary, such as surrealism or futurism, *in reality* have orthodox ancestors from which they cannot be detached. ("Jla")

Now let us look closely at what happens in the last paragraph of this central demonstration, that is in the conclusion of a sort of syllogism. No more than the central body of the article (the paragraphs just quoted), the *general* scope of the conclusion, I mean conclusion in its general and theoretical form, is not concerned with the Jews. It does not name them in this general formulation. This conclusion concerns—and contests—an "absurd" *general* theorem regarding current literature, an absurdity that is denounced, precisely, as the axiom of antisemitism inasmuch as it is vulgar. And this conclusion announces by means of a "Therefore . . ." what must be deduced from the preceding demonstration: "Therefore, one may see that to consider present-day literature as an isolated phenomenon created by the particular mentality of the 20s is absurd."

And so we arrive at the last paragraph of the article, the most serious and in fact the only one that can be suspected of antisemitism. There, the return to the question of "Jews in present-day literature" corresponds to the rhetoric of a supplementary or analogical example.

It comes to the aid of a general thesis or antithesis opposed to vulgar antisemitism. The demonstration that matters is considered established. De Man adds: "Likewise, the Jews. . . ." Next, and still without wanting to attenuate the violence of this paragraph that for me remains disastrous, let us remark this: even as he reminds us of the limits of "Jewish influence," of "semitic interference," even as, however, he seems to turn the discourse over to "Western intellectuals" by reconstituting their anxieties and then reassuring them, the manner in which he describes the "Jewish spirit" remains unquestionably positive. Even in its stereotyped, and therefore equivocal form, it is presented as a statement that no one is supposed to be able to question: a classical technique of contraband. For who, at that time, could dispense in public with *disputing* such praise? Who could publicly subscribe to it? Well, de Man does not dispute it; on the contrary, he assumes it. Even better, he himself underscores a *contradiction* that cannot go unnoticed and has to leave some trace in the consciousness or the unconscious of the reader:

one might have expected that, given the specific characteristics of the Jewish spirit, the latter would have played a more brilliant role in this artistic production. Their cerebralness, their capacity to assimilate doctrines while maintaining a certain coldness in the face of them, would seem to be very precious qualities for the work of lucid analysis that the novel demands.

One can hardly believe one's eyes: would this mean that what he prefers in the novel, "the work of lucid analysis," and in theory, a "certain coldness" of intelligence, correspond precisely to the qualities of the "Jewish spirit"?

And that the "precious qualities" of the latter are indispensable to literature and theory? What is coiled up and resonating deep within this sentence? Did one hear that correctly? In any case, de Man does not say the contrary. And he clearly describes what were in his eyes "precious qualities." (Was he then recognizing the qualities of the enemy or those in which he would have liked to recognize himself? Later, these were the qualities his American enemies always attributed to him.)

The last lines, the most terrible, begin with another "But in spite of that. . . ." They are attacking once again, let us not forget, the antisemitic obsession that always needs, that has a compulsive and significant need, to *overevaluate* the Jewish influence on literature. Here is the final paragraph:

Therefore, one may see that to consider present-day literature as an isolated phenomenon created by the particular mentality of the 20s is absurd. Likewise, the Jews cannot claim to have been its creators, nor even to have exercised a preponderant influence over its development. On any somewhat close examination, this influence appears even to have extraordinarily little importance since one might have expected that, given the specific characteristics of the Jewish spirit, the latter would have played a more brilliant role in this artistic production. Their cerebralness, their capacity to assimilate doctrines while keeping a certain coldness in the face of them, seemed to be very precious qualities for the work of lucid analysis that the novel demands. But in spite of that, Jewish writers have always remained in the second rank and, to speak only of France, the André Mauroises, the Francis de Croissets, the Henri Duvernoises, the Henri Bernsteins, Tristan Bernards, Julien Bendas, and so forth, are not among the most important figures, they are especially not those who have had any guiding influence on the literary genres. The observation is, moreover,

comforting for Western intellectuals. That they have been able to safeguard themselves from Jewish influence in a domain as representative of culture as literature proves their vitality. If our civilization had let itself be invaded by a foreign force, then we would have to give up much hope for its future. By keeping, in spite of semitic interference in all aspects of European life, an intact originality and character, that civilization has shown that its basic nature is healthy. What is more, one sees that a solution of the Jewish problem that would aim at the creation of a Jewish colony isolated from Europe would not entail, for the literary life of the West, deplorable consequences. The latter would lose, in all, a few personalities of mediocre value and would continue, as in the past, to develop according to its great evolutive laws. ("Jla")

Through the indelible wound, one must still analyze and seek to understand. Any concession would betray, besides a complacent indulgence and a lack of rigor, an infinitely culpable thoughtlessness with regard to past, present, or future victims of discourses that at least resembled this one. I have said why I am not speaking here as a judge, witness, prosecutor, or defender in some *trial of Paul de Man*. One will say: but you are constantly delivering judgments, you are evaluating, you did so just now. Indeed, and therefore I did not say that I would not do so at all. I said that in analyzing, judging, evaluating this or that discourse, this or that effect of these old fragments, I refused to extend these gestures to a general judgment, with no possibility of appeal, of Paul de Man, of the totality of what he was, thought, wrote, taught, and so forth. I continue thus to ask myself questions. If I persist in wondering how, in what conditions he wrote this, it is because even in the sum total of the articles from that period that I have been able to read, I have found no remark analogous or identical to this one. I did

not even find any allusion to the Jews or to some "Jewish problem." Or rather, yes: in May 1941, some remarkable and emphatic praise for Péguy the Dreyfusard.³⁷ How is one to explain this discordance? Who will ever know how, some months earlier, "Les Juifs dans la littérature actuelle" was written and published? Who can exclude what happens so often in newspapers, and especially during that period and in those conditions, when editors can always intervene at the last moment? If that was the case, Paul de Man is no longer here to testify to it. But at that point one can say: supposing this to have been the case, there was still a way of protesting which would have been to end his association with the newspaper. Yes, but he would have had to be certain that this rupture was a better idea than his ambiguous and sometimes anticonformist continuation on the job. He would also have had to evaluate the gravity of the last lines of this article as we are doing today. Now, in order to evaluate them correctly, we must understand what this allusion to "a Jewish colony isolated from Europe" meant at that moment. I admit that, in the present state of my information, I do not understand it. To which "solution," to which hypothesis that was perhaps current at the time was he making allusion? I do not know; perhaps to what was called the "Madagascar solution." As of that date (March 4, 1941), the word "solution" could not be associated with what we now know to have been the project of the "final solution": the latter was conceived and put into effect later. At the end of 1942, Paul de Man stops contributing to the newspaper *Le Soir* (to my knowledge, he publishes nothing else during the war and he explains this in a letter that I will cite later). The same year, Henri de Man had left Belgium and given up all public responsibility.

Last September, then, this first reading and this first series of questions led me to an interpretation that is itself divided by what I have called "double bind," "disjunction," and especially "double edge," each term of this division never coming to rest in a monadic identity. The experience of the double edge can be an ironic ruse on one side, a painful suffering on the other, and finally one and the other at every moment. But in what I have read of these texts, as in what I had learned to know earlier of Paul de Man and which it was difficult for me to abstract, nothing ever authorized me to translate this division into a hypocritical, cynical, or opportunistic duplicity. First of all, because this kind of duplicity was, to a degree and with a clarity that I have rarely encountered in my life, alien to Paul de Man. His irony and his anti-conformist burst of laughter took instead the form of insolent provocation—one which was, precisely, cutting. One feels something of that in these "early writings." Second, because cynical opportunism is another form of acquiescence; it is profoundly conformist and comfortable, the opposite of the double edge. Finally because all of that would have continued after 1942. And this was not the case; the rupture was unquestionably a cut. I have the sense that de Man, in whom a certain analytical coldness always cohabited with passion, fervor, and enthusiasm, must have, like his uncle, obeyed his convictions—which were also those of his uncle: complicated, independent, mobile, in a situation that he thought, incorrectly as did many others, offered no other way out after what seemed, up until 1942, like the end of the war.

So I will continue my story. For my own part, I was quickly convinced at the end of August that what had

just been discovered could not and should not be kept secret. As quickly and as radically as possible, it was necessary to make these texts accessible to everyone. The necessary conditions had to be created so that everyone could read them and interpret them in total freedom. No limit should be set on the discussion. Everyone should be in a position to take his or her responsibilities. For one could imagine in advance the effect that these "revelations" were going to produce, at least in the American university. One did not have to have second sight to foresee even the whole specter of reactions to come. For the most part, they have been programmed for a long time—and the program is simple enough to leave little room for surprises. I was also conscious of the fact that the serious interpretation of these texts and their context would take a lot of time. All the more reason not to delay. I discuss it, once again in Paris, with Sam Weber. I suggest that we take advantage of a colloquium that is supposed to take place a few weeks later at the University of Alabama in Tuscaloosa in order to discuss the matter with about twenty colleagues. It is appropriately a colloquium dealing with academic institutions and politics ("Our Academic Contract: The Conflict of the Faculties in America") and bringing together, *among others*, some former students and colleagues of Paul de Man. Sam Weber agrees, as does Ortwin de Graef from whom I request authorization to distribute to all these colleagues photocopies of the articles I have just described. Richard Rand, the organizer of the colloquium, also agrees and makes the necessary arrangements. On October 10, all the colloquium's participants having read these texts, we had a discussion that lasted more than three hours and touched on both the substance of things and the decisions to be made. I cannot summarize the discussion, all of which was tape-recorded.

Whatever may have been the remarks of the various people, no one, it seems to me, questioned the necessity of making these texts widely accessible and to do everything to permit a serious, minute, patient, honest study of them, as well as an open discussion. What remained to be decided was the best technical conditions in which to accomplish this. In the weeks that followed, broad exchanges led us to confide to Werner Hamacher, Neil Hertz, and Thomas Keenan the task of completing the collection of articles, of preparing their publication, as well as that of a volume in which as many as possible of those who wished to do so could communicate their reflections, whatever may have been their relation to Paul de Man and his work. A letter of invitation was addressed to this effect to numerous colleagues, known for their competence or for the interest they might have in the problem and, let me underscore this point, whatever may have been the extent, the form, or the premises of their agreement or their disagreement with the person or the work of de Man. These two volumes will appear soon. Even though they constitute merely the beginning of work that will have to be long term and opened to still more people, no one will doubt, I hope, the wish of those who took the initiative for it: to allow everyone to take his or her responsibilities in the clearest possible conditions. Nevertheless, as one could also foresee and as Werner Hamacher has since written to me, those who took this initiative have found themselves faced with a double accusation that is both typical and contradictory: on the one hand, of betraying Paul de Man, on the other hand, of protecting him; on the one hand, of exposing him in great haste to the violence of the most expeditious lapidary judgments, even to a symbolic lapidation and, on the other hand, of wanting to save his work and, at the

same time, defend all those for whom, in one way or another, it is important. I can understand this double accusation and the indications it alleges in support. But it seems to me perverse and inevitably unjust. First of all because one cannot do both of these things at once. You could not succeed in doing both of them even if you tried. Second, because those who launch one or the other of these accusations are themselves, necessarily, doing one or the other by obeying one or the other of these motivations. So as to explain how, as I see it, neither one nor the other of these intentions should enter into things, I will quote now, in its literal and integral transcription, what I tried to say at the outset of the discussion in Tuscaloosa. After an account that corresponds, for the facts although not for the reading of the texts, to the one I have just given, I added this in French (which, because it is part of the archive, I think I have to include in my narrative):

I insist on improvising. For the last two months, I have not stopped thinking in a quasi-obsessional fashion about this, but I preferred not to prepare what I am going to say. I think it is necessary this evening that everyone tell us, speaking personally and after a first analysis, what he or she thinks of these things. On the other hand, I wanted to tell you what my own feeling is. I have known Paul de Man since 1966. You know of the friendship that we shared since then. I knew that he had lived through some difficult times when he left Belgium for the United States. We never spoke of what happened during the war. We were very close, from a certain point of view, but because our friendship remained very discreet, I never felt indiscreet enough to ask him about what had happened then, even though, like many others, I knew that this had been a [singular? inaudible word] moment in

his personal, private but also public (professional, *et cetera*) history. But I want to begin there: never in the course of these fifteen or sixteen years did I read anything of his nor hear anything from him that leaves the least suspicion in my memory as to any persistence of, let us say—how to name it?—a certain ideology, readable for me in the texts I read with you, in the texts published in French, the only ones I have been able to read directly. On the contrary, everything I can remember of the texts he published afterward and of conversations I had with him, of all the evaluations of different sorts (social, political, *et cetera*) leave me with the certainty that he had in any case broken in a radical, internal, rigorous way with anything whatsoever that one might suspect in the ideology of the texts we are going to talk about. I wanted thus to begin by setting temporal limits on the things we are going to talk about. I wanted to set out that everything indicates, in any case for me, that along with what there may be that is shocking in these texts (and I do not hide that), he had broken radically with all that and there was no trace to my knowledge either in his life or in his remarks or in his texts that allows one to think the opposite. He broke with what happened when he was between twenty-one and twenty-three years old. I realize that we will now be able to read all his published texts, everyone will do so, us in particular, the texts we already know, while trying, some will do it with malevolence, with an unhealthy jubilation, others will do it otherwise, to find in the published texts signs referring back to that period.

Even as I improvise and in a somewhat confused way, I would like to say the following: I think there is a continuity and I would like to be specific. Paul de Man is someone who had that experience, who asked himself the questions that are asked in those texts, and who at twenty-one or twenty-three years old, brought to them the answers that are in these texts. He thus went through this experience which is not just any

experience, he read the texts you know about, he wrote what you now know.

It is out of the question to imagine that the rupture means all of that is erased. All of it is part of his experience. In my opinion, he must have drawn a certain number of lessons from it: historical, political, rhetorical, of all sorts; and besides the rupture, this lesson must in effect be readable in his texts. It is one thing to read it as a lesson; it would be another to amalgamate everything, as some, I imagine, will perhaps be tempted to do, calling it a continuity, in which nothing happens without leaving traces, from these texts to those that followed. Our responsibility, in any case mine, would be to analyze all these texts, those from *Le Soir*. We do not have them all and some of them are much more convoluted, complicated, others are simple and unfortunately readable, but others are convoluted, complicated. Those who are seriously interested in the question will have to take the time to work on, analyze those texts, then the texts published in the U.S., with the greater rigor and attention to detail. I have decided to improvise because I have taken as a rule to ally urgency with patience. It is urgent that we (perhaps I am forcing things by saying we, please excuse me), that some of us hasten to take their responsibilities as regards these texts, to be the first to show that there is no question of dissimulating them or of participating in any kind of camouflage operation. It is urgent that, in one mode or another, no doubt the mode of improvisation, we make the thing public but it is also urgent that, while doing this, we call upon ourselves and those who are interested in the thing, the well-intentioned and the ill-intentioned, to look at them closely, to undertake a reflection on the substance of what made this possible, for Paul de Man and for others, and of what the rupture with that means for someone like Paul de Man, only a part of whose work (or life) we know. We have a lot of work before us if we are to know

what actually happened, not only in the political, ideological fabric of Belgium at the time, but also in the life of Paul de Man.

Two more things, perhaps three. Rethinking about all of this in an obsessional way and with much, how to say, worry, consternation, the feeling that wins out over all the others in my bereaved friendship, bereaved once again, is, I have to say, first of all a feeling of immense compassion. Through these texts and through other things [inaudible] of what must have been Paul de Man's life during the ten years from 1940–50, through the ruptures, exile, the radical reconversion, what I begin to see clearly is, I imagine and I don't think I am wrong, an enormous suffering, an agony, that we cannot yet know the extent of. And I must say after having read these pages written by a young man of twenty-one or twenty-two (I do not mention his age in order to clear him or attenuate anything: at twenty-one or twenty-two, one takes responsibilities and, notably in that situation: people have pointed out, and they are right, that certain young men of twenty or twenty-one took adult responsibilities, in the Resistance, for example, or elsewhere. Thus, when I mention his age, it is not so as to say 'he was a child.') Nevertheless, what appears clearly is that, in a situation that we will have to describe, that of occupied Europe from which hope seemed banished except for a few, through a reflection on what might be the spirit [inaudible] we were talking about earlier³⁸ and under the influence of his uncle (about whom we will certainly have much to say, perhaps not tonight but later), a young man with clearly an immense culture, gifted, brilliant, exceptional, became involved in all that, we'll talk about this some more, and then found that he had to break with it and turn everything almost upside down, through problems that were also personal problems, indissociable from this whole story. This man must have lived a real agony and I believe that

what he wrote later, what he taught, what he lived through in the United States obviously carry the traces of this suffering. I want to say that whatever may be—how to say—the wound that these texts are for me, they have changed nothing in my friendship and admiration for Paul de Man.

One more thing: some of us might think that, having broken with what he said and did under his signature at that time, Paul de Man tried, in the United States at any rate, to hide the thing. The fact is that we did not speak about it and that to my knowledge he did not speak about it very much. Perhaps he spoke to some people we do not know, but in any case most of those here never spoke with Paul about these things. If he did, then people will be able to say so.

But we do know, and Tom Keenan can confirm this in a moment, that in 1955 while de Man was at Harvard, there was an anonymous denunciation concerning his activity in Belgium during the war. And de Man explained himself at that moment, in a letter of which we have at least the draft, to the Head of the Society of Fellows.³⁹ This is a public act with which he explained himself on these matters. It is a long letter from which we can extract at least this: in effect during the German occupation, in 1940–42, he maintained a literary column, but when the pressure of German censorship became too much—Tom will read this in a moment—he ceased writing and did what decency demanded that he do. Naturally, we are not obliged to give credence to this presentation of the thing, his version of the facts, in this letter. I don't know. We are, for those who are interested in it, at the beginning of a long movement of approach. But whatever the case may be, whether or not this letter speaks the whole truth about what happened then, about the reasons for which he wrote and then stopped writing, about these texts, what they are or are not, that is less important for the moment and for what I want to say, than the fact in any case (1) that he did explain

himself publicly; (2) that he indicated what his evaluation of the thing was, that is, that he wished in 1955 never to have done anything that could be suspected of Nazism or collaboration. He explains himself, he broke with that and there can be no doubt about the kind of look he himself casts at that time at least on the period in question and on the ideological implications that one may read in these texts. He explained himself publicly and in my opinion that is a reason, whatever we might do from now on, not to organize today a trial of Paul de Man. I would consider it absolutely out of place, ridiculous, strictly ridiculous, to do something (I am not saying this for us but for others) that would look like a trial, after the death of Paul de Man, for texts, whatever they may be (we will come back to this) that he wrote when he was between twenty-one and twenty-three years old, in conditions with which he absolutely and radically broke afterward. I think that anything that would look like such a trial would be absolutely indecent and the jubilation with which some may hasten to play that game ought to be denounced. In any case, personally, I plan to denounce it in the most uncompromising manner.

These are the preliminary things that I wanted to say to you. On the texts you read, there will be much, very much to say, but I do not want to keep the floor any longer. I will take it again when the time comes on the subject of the texts. I already have an extremely complicated relation to these texts. There are things that are massively obvious to me and that seem to me to call for a denunciation whose protocols are rather clear. But these things are woven into a very complex fabric, one that deserves, not only this evening, but beyond this evening the most serious and careful analyses.

Before going to the end of my story, I want to be more specific about certain points touched on in this im-

provisation. First, about Paul de Man's silence. Although, as I mentioned, it was not absolute, although it was publicly broken on at least one occasion and thus cannot be understood in the sense of a dissimulation, although I have since learned that it was also broken on other occasions, in private, with certain colleagues and friends, I am left to meditate, endlessly, on all the reasons that induced him not to speak of it more, for example to *all* his friends. What could the ordeal of this mutism have been, for him? I can only imagine it. Having explained himself once publicly and believing he had demonstrated the absurdity of certain accusations in the Harvard letter, why would he himself have incited, spontaneously, a public debate on this subject?

— Several reasons could both dissuade and discourage him from doing so. He was aware of having never collaborated or called for collaboration with a Nazism that he never even named in his texts, of having never engaged in any criminal activity or even any organized political activity, in the strict sense of the term, I mean in a public organization or in a political administration. Therefore, to provoke spontaneously an explanation of this subject was no longer an obligation. It would have been, moreover, an all the more distressing, pointlessly painful theatricalization in that he had not only broken with the political context of 1940–42, but he had distanced himself from it with all his might, in his language, his country, his profession, his private life. His international notoriety having spread only during the last years of his life, to exhibit earlier such a distant past so as to call the public as a witness—would that not have been a pretentious, ridiculous, and infinitely complicated gesture? All of these articles, whose disconcerting structure we have glimpsed, would have had to be taken up again

and analyzed under a microscope. He would have had himself to convoke the whole world to a great philologico-political symposium on his own "early writings," even though he was only recognized by a small university elite. I would understand that he might have found this to be indiscreet and indecent. And this modesty is more like him than a deliberate will to hide or to falsify. I even imagine him in the process of analyzing with an implacable irony the simulacrum of "confession" to which certain people would like to invite him after the fact, after his death, and the auto-justification and auto-accusation quivering with pleasure which form the abyssal program of such a self-exhibition. He has said the essential on this subject and I invite those who wonder about his silence to read, among other texts, "Excuses (*Confessions*)" in *Allegories of Reading*. The first sentence announces what "political and autobiographical texts have in common"⁴⁰ and the conclusion explains again the relations between irony and allegory so as to render an account (without ever being able to account for it sufficiently) of this: "Just as the text can never stop apologizing for the suppression of guilt that it performs, there is never enough knowledge available to account for the delusion of knowing" (A, p. 300). In the interval, between the first and last sentences, at the heart of this text which is also the last word of *Allegories of Reading*, everything is said. Or at least almost everything one can say about the reasons for which a totalization is impossible: ironically, allegorically, and *en abyme*. Since I cannot quote everything, I will limit myself to recalling this citation of Rousseau, in a note. The note is to a phrase that names the "nameless avengers." Nameless? Minus the crime, (almost) everything is there, the count is there and it is almost correct, I mean almost the exact number of years: "If this crime

can be redeemed, as I hope it may, it must be by the many misfortunes that have darkened the later part of my life, by forty years of upright and honorable behavior under difficult circumstances" (A, p. 288).

Even if sometimes a murmur of protest stirs in me, I prefer, upon reflection, that he chose not to take it on himself to provoke, during his life, this spectacular and painful discussion. It would have taken his time and energy. He did not have very much and that would have deprived us of a part of his work. Since it is at the moment of his greatest notoriety that this "demonstration" would have had some legitimacy, we do not know what price he would have had to pay for it. We do not know to what extent it would have weakened him or distracted him from his last works, which are among the most remarkable, when he was already ill. So he did the right thing, I say to myself, by leaving us also with this heavy and obscure part of the legacy. We owe it to him and we will owe him still more since what he leaves us is also the gift of an ordeal, the summons to a work of reading, historical interpretation, ethico-political reflection, an interminable analysis. Well beyond the sequence 1940-42. In the future and for the future, I mean also the future of philosophico-political reflection, this will not do anybody any harm. Especially not those who, if they want still to accuse or take revenge, will finally have to read de Man, from A to Z. Had they done so? Would they have done so otherwise? It is now unavoidable. You will have understood that I am speaking of transference and prosopopeia, of that which goes and returns only to the other, without any possible reappropriation, for anyone, of his own voice or his own face.

Permit me an ellipsis here since I do not have much more time or space. Transference and prosopopeia, like

the experience of the undecidable, seem to make a responsibility impossible. It is for that very reason that they require it and perhaps subtract it from the calculable program: they give it a chance. Or, inversely: responsibility, if there is any, requires the experience of the undecidable as well as that irreducibility of the other, some of whose names are transference, prosopopeia, allegory. There are many others. And the double edge and the double bind, which are other phenomena of the undecidable. Before answering, responding for oneself, and *for* that purpose, in order to do so, one must respond, answer to the other, about the other, *for* the other, not in his place as if in the place of another "proper self," but *for* him. My ellipsis here, my economical aphorism, is a thought for all these "fors" that make responsibility *undeniable: there is some, one cannot deny it, one cannot/can only deny it* [on ne peut (que) la dénier] *precisely because it is impossible.*

Yes, to read him, that is the task. How shall one do that from now on? Everyone will go about it in his or her own way, many paths have been opened, the work is spreading and becoming more and more differentiated, and no one has any advice to give anyone. Therefore, at the moment of beginning to read or to reread Paul de Man, I will mention only a few of the rules that impose themselves on me today.

First of all, of course, to take account of what we have just discovered, to try to reconstitute this whole part of the corpus (I have mentioned only a few articles) without overlooking any of the "internal" or "contextual" overdeterminations ("public" and "private" situation, if possible—without forgetting what de Man has said about this distinction), in the direction, for example, of "Belgium during the war" and everything that can be

transferred onto the uncle. But taking the 1940–42 articles into account does not mean giving them a disproportionate importance while minimizing the immensity of the rest, in a landscape that would, like those geographical maps of the Middle Ages or the territorial representations organized around a local, immediate, distorting perception. (I am thinking of those projections by Saul Steinberg where a New York street looks larger than the United States, not to mention the rest of the world.) How can one forget de Man's world, and first of all the United States? And the map of all his great voyages? The texts of 1940–42 can also be represented there as a minuscule point.

Next, without ever forgetting or overlooking these first articles (how could I?), I would try to *articulate* them with the work to come while avoiding, if possible, two more or less symmetrical errors.

One would consist in interpreting the rupture between the two moments of de Man's history and work as an interruption of any passage, an interdiction against any contamination, analogy, translation. In that case, one would be saying: no relation, sealed frontier between the two, absolute heterogeneity. One would also be saying: even if there were two moments, they do not belong to history, to the same history, to the history of the "work." There would have been a prehistory, some politico-journalistic accidents, then history and the work. This attitude would be giving in to defensive denegation, it would deprive itself of interpretive resources, including the political dimension of the work. Most important, by annulling the so-called prehistory, it would compound its own political frivolity by an injustice toward Paul de Man: what he lived through then was serious, probably decisive and traumatic in his life, and I will never feel I have

the right, on the pretext of protecting him from those who would like to abuse it, of treating the experience of the war as a minor episode.

I would also try to avoid the opposite error: confusing everything while playing at being an authorized prosecutor or clever inquisitor. We know from experience that these compulsive and confusionist practices—amalgam, continuism, analogism, teleologism, hasty totalization, reduction, and derivation—are not limited to a few hurried journalists.

So I would make every effort to avoid giving in to the typical temptation of a discourse that seeks to shore up this shaky certainty: everything is already there in the "early writings," everything derives from them or comes down to them, the rest was nothing but their pacifying and diplomatic translation (the pursuit of the same war by other means). As if there were no longer any difference of level, no displacement, a fortiori no fundamental rupture during these 40 years of exile, reflection, teaching, reading or writing! The crudeness of an enterprise guided by such a principle (that, precisely, of the worst totalitarian police) can seek to hide behind more or less honest tricks and take purely formal precautions on the subject of the too-obvious differences. But it cannot fool anyone for long. It is not even necessary here to recall de Man's own warnings against such foolishness or such trickery, against the models of a certain historicism, or against the forms of causality, derivation, or narration that still crowd these dogmatic slumbers. When one is seeking, at all costs, to reconstruct in an artificial way genealogical continuities or totalities, then one has to interpret discontinuity as a conscious or unconscious ruse meant to hide a persistence or a subsistence, the stubborn repetition of an originary project (what this is is

good old existential psychoanalysis of the immediate postwar period!). Why is this totalitarian logic essentially triumphant? Triumphant? And made strong by its very weakness? Why is it recognizable by its tone and its affect? Because it authorizes itself to interpret everything that resists it in every line, in Paul de Man's work or elsewhere, and resists it to the point of disqualifying or ridiculing it, as the organization of a defensive resistance, precisely, in the face of its own inquisition. For example, when de Man demonstrates theoretically (and more than just theoretically, beyond constative or cognitive logic, precisely) that a historical totalization is impossible and that a certain fragmentation is inevitable, even in the presentation of his works, the detective or the chief prosecutor would see there a maneuver to avoid assuming the totalizing anamnesis of a shameful story. With a clever wink and while poking you each time with his elbow, he would find damning evidence everywhere. He would draw your attention to sentences as revealing, from this point of view, as the following, among many others: "This apparent coherence within each essay is not matched by a corresponding coherence between them. Laid out diachronically in a roughly chronological sequence, they do not evolve in a manner that easily allows for dialectical progression, or, ultimately, for historical totalization."⁴¹ This modest statement is relayed, everywhere else, by a critical or deconstructive discourse with regard to historical totalization in general. It would thus suffice to extend the scope of these sentences through analogy to all de Man's writings and to conclude confidently that this preface confesses what it hides while declaring it inaccessible. The trap would be sprung, the amateur analyst could rub his hands together and conclude: "de Man does not want to sum up or assume the totality of his

history and his writings. He declares that it is impossible in principle in order to discourage in advance all the policemen, and to evade the necessary confession." Now, one could find examples like this on every page. Before leaving this example, I will quote only the end of this preface to *The Rhetoric of Romanticism*: "The only place where I come close to facing some of these questions about history and fragmentation is in the essay on Shelley's *The Triumph of Life*. How and where one goes on from there is far from clear, but certainly no longer simply a matter of syntax and diction" (*R*, p. ix).

And from there, I would invite whoever wants to talk seriously about de Man to read him, to read this essay on Shelley to its end or its final interruption (*R*, pp. 121, 123). I do not have the room to quote the pages where it is a question of "what we have done with the dead Shelley and with all the other dead bodies . . .," of the "suspicion that the negation is a *Verneinung*, an intended exorcism," of what "always again demands to be read," of "recuperative and nihilistic allegories of historicism" (*R*, pp. 121–22). Here is how the essay ends:

Reading as disfiguration, to the very extent that it resists historicism, turns out to be historically more reliable than the products of historical archeology. To monumentalize this observation into a *method* of reading would be to regress from the rigor exhibited by Shelley which is exemplary precisely because it refuses to be generalized into a system. (*R*, p. 123)

If I give up playing the policeman's petty game, is it only because the exercise is too easy? No, it is because its dogmatic naïveté will always fail to render an account of this unquestionable fact: a statement can never be taken

as a presumption of guilt or evidence in a trial, even less as proof, as long as one has not demonstrated that it has only an idiomatic value and that no one else, besides Paul de Man or a Paul de Man signatory of the 1940–42 texts, could have either produced the statement or subscribed to it. Or inversely, that all similar statements—their number is not finite and their contexts are highly diverse—could not be signed and approved by authors who shared nothing of Paul de Man's history or political experiences.

Even though I give up on this petty and mediocre game, I have at the disposal of those who would like to play it a whole cartography of false leads, beginning with what de Man wrote and gave us to think on the theme of memory, mourning, and autobiography. I have myself tried to meditate on this theme here. Since Paul de Man speaks so much of memory and of mourning, since he extends the textual space of autobiography to this point, why not reapply his categories to his own texts? Why not read all these as autobiographical figures in which fiction and truth are indiscernible? And, as de Man himself shows, is not this latter problematic political through and through? Did I not underscore that myself in this book, in a *certain way*? Yes, but in what way? Can one, ought one to take the reading possibilities that de Man himself offers us and manipulate them as arms, as a suspicion or an accusation against him in a "décision de justice," as we say in French, in a final judgment, authorizing oneself this time to decide in the absence of proof or knowledge? What would be the rule, if there is one, for avoiding abuse, injustice, the kind of violence that is sometimes merely stupidity? Before going any further into this question, here is the beginning of a list of themes that could become weapons in the arsenal of the

investigators. The list is, by definition, incomplete, and, one may say it a priori, it links up with the "whole" de Manian text in a mode that never excludes "disjunction."

There is "Autobiography as De-Facement," an "autobiography [which] is not a genre or a mode, but a figure of reading or of understanding that occurs, to some degree, in all texts" (R, p. 70); then there is the autobiographical aspect, *that is, also the fictional aspect* of any text, even if one cannot remain within this undecidability ("the distinction between fiction and autobiography is not an either/or polarity but . . . it is undecidable" [R, p. 70]); or else, speaking of Lejeune's *Le Pacte autobiographique*: "From specular figure of the author, the reader becomes the judge, the policing power in charge of verifying the *authenticity* of the signature and the consistency of the signer's behavior, the extent to which he respects or fails to honor the contractual agreement he has signed" (R, pp. 71-72); or else, that about which I myself said it "precludes any anamnestic totalization of self" (see p. 23):

The specular moment that is part of all understanding reveals the tropological structure that underlies all cognitions, including knowledge of self. The interest of autobiography, then, is not that it reveals reliable self-knowledge—it does not—but that it demonstrates in a striking way the impossibility of closure and of totalization (that is, the impossibility of coming into being) of all textual systems made up of tropological substitutions. (R, p. 71)

Or yet again, the insistence on rhetoric and the irreducibility of the tropological substitutions can always be interpreted, by "the reader" as "judge" or "policing power," as a theoretical machine of the ruse meant to lead him

or her astray in advance and turn aside the police inquiry; especially the insistence on the hallucinatory prosopopeia, about which I said four years ago that it was "the sovereign, secret, discreet, and ideal signature—and the most giving, the one which *knows how to efface itself*" (see p. 26). Is it not de Man who speaks to us "beyond the grave" and from the flames of cremation? "The dominant figure of the epitaphic or autobiographical discourse is, as we saw, the prosopopeia, the fiction of the voice-from-beyond-the-grave; an unlettered stone would leave the sun suspended in nothingness" (R, p. 77); and yet again, the motif of "true mourning" and of the nostalgic resistance to the "materiality of actual history"; and then there is the major motif of disjunction, as well as what I called "an uncontrollable necessity, a *nonsubjectivizable* law of thought beyond interiorization" (see p. 37), the motif of thinking memory (*Gedächtnis*) beyond interiorizing memory (*Erinnerung*); and then the structure of allegory, even of memory itself, if not as amnesia, then at least as relation to an "unreachable anteriority,"⁴² a memory, in sum, without a past in the standard sense of the term. Ah ha! someone will say, is that not a maneuver meant to deny or dissimulate, even to repress say the cleverest ones, an intolerable past? The problem is that the maneuver being suspected, in other words, this *thought* of memory, can be, has been, and will be once again, in this form or in a nearby form, assumed by persons whose past has no relation with de Man's. To the accusers falls the obligation of proving the contrary. I wish them patience and courage.

So many false leads, then, for hurried detectives. The list is incomplete, as I said, the "whole" de Manian text is available as a boobytrapped resource for symptomatologists in training. The latter could even begin by

suspecting or denouncing the titles of "all" de Man's books! If they do not understand what I mean, they should write to me and I will point out a few tricks. Besides the pleasure (everyone gets it where he or she can), this exercise for late beginners may even procure a professional benefit for some. Especially if they take advantage of the opportunity to extend the trial, through contiguity or confusion, allusion, insinuation, or vociferation, to all those who are interested in de Man, to supposed groups or schools against whom it is advisable to wage war. I will come back to this in a moment.

As will have become clear, I see these two opposed errors as both intellectual and ethico-political errors, that is, both errors and falsifications. What would I do in the future so as to avoid them, if that is possible? Since it is a matter of nothing less than reading and re-reading de Man without simplifying anything about the questions (general and particular, theoretical and exemplified) of the context, I cannot show here, in an article, what I would do at every step of a reading that ought to remain as open and as differentiated as possible. But I can try to advance a few hypotheses and, for the formation of these hypotheses themselves, one or two rules. Even if the hypotheses remain hypotheses, I assume as of now responsibility for the rules.

First rule: respect for the other, that is, for his right to difference, in his relation to others but also in his relation to himself. What are all these grand words saying here? Not only respect for the right to error, even to an aberration which, moreover, de Man never tired speaking of in a highly educated and educating manner; not only respect for the right to a history, a transformation of oneself and one's thought that can never be totalized or reduced to something homogeneous (and those who

practice this reduction give a very grave ethico-political example for the future); it is also respect of that which, in *any* text, remains heterogeneous and can even, as is the case here, explain itself on the subject of this open heterogeneity while helping us to understand it. We are also the heirs and guardians of this heterogeneous text even if, precisely for this reason, we ought to maintain a differentiated, vigilant, and sometimes critical relation to it. Even those who would like to reject or burn de Man's work very well know, and will have to resign themselves to the fact, that from now it is inscribed, at work, and radiating in the body or the corpus of our tradition. Not work but *works*: numerous, difficult, mobile, still obscure. Even in the hypothesis of the fiercest discussion, I would avoid the totalizing process and trial [*procès*]: of the work and the man. And the least sign of respect or fidelity will be this: to begin, precisely, by listening, to try to hear what he said to us, him, de Man, *already*, along with a few others, about totalizing violence, thus, to lend an ear, and an ear finely tuned enough to perceive, between the Atlantic and the Pacific, something other than monotonous noise and the rumbling [*rumeur*] of the waves.

The *second rule* is still more demanding, as inaccessible as what is called a "regulating ideal." But it is no less important to me and has been for a long time. Since we are talking at this moment about discourse that is totalitarian, fascist, Nazi, racist, antisemitic, and so forth, about all the gestures, either discursive or not, that could be suspected of complicity with it, I would like to do, and naturally I invite others to do, whatever possible to avoid reproducing, if only virtually, the *logic* of the discourse thus incriminated.

Do we have access to a complete formalization of

this logic and an absolute exteriority with regard to its ensemble? Is there a systematic set of themes, concepts, philosophemes, forms of utterance, axioms, evaluations, hierarchies which, forming a closed and identifiable coherence of what we call totalitarianism, fascism, Nazism, racism, antisemitism, never appear outside these formations and especially never on the opposite side? And is there a systematic coherence proper to each of them, since one must not confuse them too quickly with each other? Is there some property so closed and so pure that one may not find any element of these systems in discourses that are commonly opposed to them? To say that I do not believe that there is, not absolutely, means at least two things: (1) Such a formalizing, saturating totalization seems to me to be precisely the essential character of this logic whose project, at least, and whose ethico-political consequence can be terrifying. One of my rules is never to accept this project and consequence, whatever that may cost. (2) For this very reason, one must analyze as far as possible this process of formalization and its program so as to uncover the statements, the philosophical, ideological, or political behaviors that derive from it, wherever they may be found. The task seems to me to be both urgent and interminable. It has occurred to me on occasion to call this deconstruction; I will come back to that word in a moment.

I will give some concrete illustrations of these two abstractly formulated rules. In many of the discourses I have read or heard in the last few months (and I was expecting them in a very precise way), whether they attack or defend de Man, it was easy to recognize axioms and forms of behavior that confirm the logic one claims to have rid oneself of: purification, purge, totalization, reappropriation, homogenization, rapid objectification, good conscience, stereotyping and nonreading, *immediate*

politicization or depoliticization (the two always go together), *immediate* historicization or dehistoricization (it is always the same thing), immediate ideologizing moralization (immorality itself) of all the texts and all the problems, expedited trial, condemnations, or acquittals, summary executions or sublimations. This is what must be deconstructed, these are a few points of reference (that is all I can do here) in the field open to this research and these responsibilities that have been called, for two decades, deconstructions (in the plural). I would not have pronounced this word here if all the newspaper articles and all the rumors that have reached me as of this day had not, in a way that is both so surprising and so unsurprising, associated deconstruction (in the singular) to this whole affair. By touching quickly on this problem, I will no doubt be able to go *from the rule to the hypothesis* and differentiate a little what I have meant since the beginning of this article by the word "rupture."

In spite of its discouraging effect, I have begun to get used to journalistic presentations of deconstruction and to the even more discouraging fact that the responsibility for them belongs most often not with professional journalists, but with professors whose training ought to require at least some attempt at reading. This time, finding as always its foothold in aggressivity, simplism has produced the most unbelievably stupid statements.⁴³ Some might smile with disabused indulgence at the highly transparent gesticulations of those who leap at the chance to exploit without delay an opportunity they think is propitious: at last, still without reading the texts, to take some cheap revenge on a "theory" that is all the more threatening to institutions and individuals because, visibly, they do not understand anything about it. One may also wonder, with the same smiling indulgence: but, after all, what does deconstruction (in the singular) have to

do with what was written in 1940–42 by a very young man in a Belgian newspaper? Is it not ridiculous and dishonest to extend to a "theory," that has itself been simplified and homogenized, as well as to all those who are interested in it and develop it, the trial one would like to conduct of a man for texts written in Belgian newspapers forty-five years ago and that moreover, once again, one has not really read? Yes, this deserves perhaps hardly more than a smile and most often I manage to shrug it off.

But not always. Today I will speak of my indignation and my worry. First, because the gestures of simplification and the expeditious verdicts have, yes, *in fact*, a relation to what happened around 1940–42, earlier and later, in Europe and elsewhere. When someone asking "not to be identified" sees himself quoted by an unscrupulous professor-journalist,⁴⁴ when he says he is "shocked" by the fact that certain people are gathering, if only in order to *discuss* these problems (he would thus like to forbid the right to assembly and discussion? What does that remind you of?), and when he says he is "shocked" in the name of a "moral perspective," you can see why I am indignant and worried; and why it is necessary to remain vigilant; and why more than ever one must guard against reproducing the logic one claims to condemn. Precisely from a "moral perspective." Be on your guard for morality and thus the well-known immorality of so many moralisms.

Second, because, paradoxically, I think deconstructions *do have a relation*, but an altogether other relation, to the substance of the problems we are talking about here. To put it in a word, they have always represented, as I see it, the at least necessary condition for identifying and combating the totalitarian risk in all the forms already mentioned.

Not only can one not accuse deconstruction (in the singular) in the expeditious trial some are dreaming about today, but without deconstructive procedures, a vigilant political practice could not even get very far in the analysis of all these political discourses, philosophemes, ideologemes, events, or structures, in the reelaboration of all these questions on literature, history, politics, culture, and the university. I am not saying that, *inversely*, one must organize trials in the name of (singular) deconstruction! But rather that what I have practiced under that name has always seemed to me favorable, indeed destined (it is no doubt my principal motivation) to the analysis of the conditions of totalitarianism in all its forms, which cannot always be reduced to names of regimes. And this in order to free oneself of totalitarianism as far as possible, because it is not enough to untie a knot through analysis (there is more than one knot and the twisted structure of the knot remains very resistant) or to uproot what is finally, perhaps, only the terrifying desire for roots and common roots. One does not free oneself of it effectively at a single blow by easy adherences to the dominant consensus, or by rather low-risk proclamations of the sort I could, after all, give in to without any risk, since it is what is called the objective truth: "as for me, you know, no one can suspect me of anything: I am Jewish, I was persecuted as a child during the war, I have always been known for my leftist opinions, I fight as best I can, for example against racism (for instance, in France or in the United States where they are still rampant, would anyone like to forget that?), against *apartheid* or for the recognition of the rights of Palestinians. I have gotten myself arrested, interrogated, and imprisoned by totalitarian police, not long ago, so I know how they ask and resolve questions, and so forth." No, such declarations are insufficient. There can still be,

and in spite of them, residual adherences to the discourse one is claiming to combat. And deconstruction is, in particular, the tireless analysis (both theoretical and practical) of these adherences. Now, today, from what I have read in newspapers and heard in conversation, I would say that these adherences are more numerous and more serious on the part of those who accuse de Man than in the latter's books or teaching. And this leads me to complicate or to differentiate still more (I warned that it would be long and difficult) what I have said so far about the "rupture."

By saying several times and repeating it again that de Man had radically *broken* with his past of 1940–42, I intend clearly an activity, convictions, direct or indirect relations with everything that then determined the context of his articles. In short, a deep and deliberate uprooting. But after this decisive rupture, even as he never ceased reflecting on and interpreting this past, notably through his work and a historico-political experience that was ongoing, he must have proceeded with other *ruptures, divergences, displacements*. My hypothesis is that there were many of them. And that, with every step, it was indirectly at least a question of wondering: how was this possible and how can one guard oneself against it? What is it, in the ideologies of the right or the left, in this or that concept of literature, of history or of politics, in a particular protocol of reading, or a particular rhetorical trap that still contains, beneath one figure or another, the possibility of this return? And it is the "same man" who did that for 40 years. My hypothesis is that this trajectory is in principle readable in what de Man was, in what he said, taught, published in the United States. The chain of consequences of these ruptures is even what is most interesting, in my view, in these texts, and whose

lesson will be useful for everyone in the future, in particular for his enemies who would be well inspired to study it.

Those who would like to exploit the recent "revelations" against deconstruction (in the singular) ought to reflect on this fact. It is rather massive. "Deconstruction" took the forms in which it is now recognized more than twenty years after the war. Its relation to all its premises, notably Heideggerian premises, was from the start itself both critical and deconstructive, and has become so more and more. It was more than twenty years after the war that de Man discovered deconstruction. And when he began to talk about it, in the essays of *Blindness and Insight*, it was *first of all in a rather critical manner*, although complicated, as always. Many traits in this book show that the theoretical or ideologico-philosophical consequences of the "rupture" were not yet drawn out. I have tried to show elsewhere (see pp. 120 and passim) what happens in his work when the word "deconstruction" appears (very late) and when, in *Allegories of Reading*, he elaborates what remains his original relation to deconstruction. Is it really necessary to recall once again so many differences, and to point out that this singular relation, however interesting it may seem to me, is not exactly mine? That little matters here. But since it is repeated everywhere, and for a long time now, that de Man is not interested in history and in politics, we can better take the measure today of the inanity of this belief. I am thinking in particular of the irony with which he one day responded, on the question of "ideology" and "politics": "I don't think I ever was away from these problems, they were always uppermost in my mind."⁴⁵ It is necessary to read the rest. Yes, they were "in [his] mind" and no doubt more than in the mind of those who, in

the United States or in England, accused him of distraction in this regard. He had several reasons for that; experience had prepared him for it. He must have thought that well-tuned ears knew how to hear him, and that he did not even need to confide to anyone about the war in this regard. In fact, that is all he talked about. That is all he wrote about. At moments I say to myself: he supposed perhaps that I knew, if only from reading him, everything he never spoke to me about. And perhaps, in fact I did know it in an obscure way. I heard it mutedly. "Like the sound of the sea. . . ." Today, thinking about him, about him himself, I say to myself two things, among others.

1. He must have lived this war, in himself, according to two temporalities or two histories that were at the same time disjoined and inextricably associated. On the one hand, youth and the years of occupation appeared there as a sort of prehistoric prelude: more and more distant, derealized, abstract, foreign. The "true" history, the effective and fruitful history, was constituted slowly, laboriously, painfully after this rupture that was also a second birth. But, on the other hand and inversely, the "true" events (public and private), the grave, traumatic events, the effective and indelible history had already taken place, over there, during those terrible years. What happened next in America, for the one whom a French writer friend, he told me, had nicknamed in one of his texts "Hölderlin in America," would have been nothing more than a posthistoric afterlife, lighter, less serious: a day after with which one can play more easily, more ironically, without owing any explanations. These two lives, these two "histories" (prehistory and posthistory) are not totalizable. In that infinitely rapid oscillation he often spoke of in reference to irony and allegory,

the one is an absolute, as "absolved," as the other. Naturally these two nontotalizable dimensions are also equally true or illusory, equally aberrant, but the true and the false also do not go together. His "living present," as someone might put it, was the crossroads of these two incompatible and disjunctive temporalities, temporalities that nevertheless went together, articulated in history, in what was *his history*, the only one.

2. After the period of sadness and hurt, I believe that what has happened to us was doubly necessary. First as a fated happening: it had to happen one day or another and precisely because of the deserved and growing influence of a thinker who is enigmatic enough that people always want to learn more—from him and about him. Second, it had to happen as a salutary ordeal. It will oblige all of us, some more than others, to reread, to understand better, to analyze the traps and the stakes—past, present, and especially future. Paul de Man's legacy is not poisoned, or in any case no more than the best legacies are if there is no such thing as a legacy without some venom. I think of our meeting, of the friendship and the confidence he showed me as a stroke of luck in my life. I am almost certain that the same is true for many, for those who can and will know how to make it known, and for many others, who perhaps do not realize it or will never say so. I know that I am going to reread him and that there is still a future and a promise that await us there. He will always interest me more than those who are in a hurry to judge, thinking they know, and who, with the naïve assurance of good or bad conscience, have concluded in advance. Because one has in effect concluded when one already thinks of staging a trial by distributing the roles: judge, prosecutor, defense lawyer, witnesses, and, waiting in the wings, the instru-

ments of execution. As for the accused himself, he is dead. He is in ashes, he has neither the grounds, nor the means, still less the choice or the desire to respond. We are alone with ourselves. We carry his memory and his name in us. We especially carry ethico-political responsibilities for the future. Our actions with regard to what remains to us of de Man will also have the value of an example, whether we like it or not. To judge, to condemn the work or the man on the basis of what was a brief episode, to call for closing, that is to say, at least figuratively, for censoring or burning his books is to reproduce the exterminating gesture which one accuses de Man of not having armed himself against sooner with the necessary vigilance. It is not even to draw a lesson that he, de Man, learned to draw from the war.

Having just reread my text, I imagine that for some it will seem I have tried, when all is said and done and despite all the protests or precautions, to protect, save, justify what does not deserve to be saved. I ask these readers, if they still have some concern for justice and rigor, to take the time to reread, as closely as possible.

The story I promised is more or less finished for the moment. As an epilogue, three more telephone calls, in December. The first is from Neil Hertz. He passes along the account of a certain Mr. Goriely, former Belgian resister. He knew de Man well; they were friends during those dark years. Throughout the whole period of his clandestine activity, Mr. Goriely communicated in total confidence with de Man. He gives the same testimony to *Le Soir*, in an article dated December 3, 1987: according to this "university professor," de Man was "ideologically neither antisemitic nor even pro-Nazi . . . I have proof that de Man was not a fanatic from the fact that I saw

him frequently during the war and he knew I was a *clandestin*, mixed up with the Resistance. I never feared a denunciation." The same professor has no memory of an antisemitic article, of that article that *Le Soir* claims it cannot find in its archives!⁴⁶ And he adds: "What is more, I believe I know that our man also gave texts to a Resistance publication: *Les Voix du silence* [The voices of silence]!" Intrigued by this latter testimony and by the Malraux title, Werner Hamacher calls me and asks me to try to learn more from Georges Lambrichs, a Belgian writer who for a long time was the director of the new NRF for Gallimard, and who, while in the Resistance, would have had some part in this episode. De Man had told me they knew each other well. I call him. His response is very firm, without the least hesitation: One must take into account the history and the authority of the uncle. Even though de Man did not belong to an organization of the Resistance, he was anything but a collaborator. Yes, he helped French resisters publish and distribute in Belgium a journal that had been banned in France (with texts by Eluard, Aragon, and so forth). The title of the journal was not *Les Voix du silence* but *Exercice du silence* (to be continued).

Although my ear is glued to the telephone, I am not sure I have heard him clearly. Lambrichs repeats: "*Exercice du silence.*"

January 1988

Notes

1. See Marcia Graham Synnott, *The Half-Opened Door: Discrimination and Admissions at Harvard, Yale, and Princeton, 1900-1970* (Westport, Conn.:

Greenwood Press, 1979), and Nitza Rosovsky, *The Jewish Experience at Harvard and Radcliffe* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1986). I remember the indignation with which certain student newspapers at Yale, while I was teaching there, manifested surprise when learning of the antisemitism that had reigned in their university. I do not recall that there was any echo of this in the major press or among the majority of our colleagues.

2. Publisher's note: In chapter 4 of the revised edition, Jacques Derrida points to observations he made in the earlier edition. Page references, of course, are the same.

3. The four articles in *Het Vlaamsche Land* translated by Ortwin de Graef are: "Art as Mirror of the Essence of Nations: Considerations on *Geist der Nationen*, by A. E. Brinckmann," March 29–30, 1942; "Content of the European Idea," May 31–June 1, 1942; "Criticism and Literary History," June 7–8, 1942; "Literature and Sociology," September 27–28, 1942; hereafter abbreviated by title followed by *HVL*.

4. De Graef, "Paul de Man's Proleptic 'Nachlass': Bio-bibliographical Additions and Translations," manuscript.

5. De Graef, letter to Derrida, August 21, 1987.

6. Derrida, *De l'esprit: Heidegger et la question* (Paris, 1987); forthcoming in a translation by Geoffrey Bennington and Rachel Bowlby.

7. "Editorial," *Les Cahiers du Libre Examen* (February 1940), 4(5):1.

8. "Editorial," *Les Cahiers du Libre Examen* (April 1937), 1:2, as cited by de Graef in his introduction.

9. Translator's note: *L'Ordre nouveau* was the title of a journal founded in 1933 by Robert Aron and Arnaud Dandieu. From the first, it proclaimed a broad sympathy with the National Socialist regime in Germany and was considered a principal forum of extreme right wing thought. Subsequently the phrase "ordre nouveau" became a favored means for certain political discourse in the occupied countries to indicate sympathy for the goal of a unified Europe under German rule without, however, naming Nazism.

10. In an article about the story as reported in the *New York Times* ("Yale Scholar's Articles Found in Pro-Nazi Paper," December 1, 1987), *Le Soir* recalls that de Man was "neither arrested nor tried in Belgium" and then adds: "It should be noted that, as regards *Le Soir*, the *New York Times* article is far from a model of journalistic rigor. *Le Soir* is described as 'an anti-Semitic Belgian newspaper that collaborated with the Nazis.' What our American colleague obviously does not know is that *Le Soir* was stolen and controlled by the occupiers, the directors and editorial board of our newspaper having, on the contrary, decided not to collaborate. Likewise the *New York Times* is completely wrong when it states that Paul de Man's uncle, Henri, was 'a minister in the collaborationist Belgian government that tried to protect Belgian autonomy against Nazi domination.' Need one recall that, except for the Vichy government in France, there was no collaborationist government in occupied Europe?" *Le Soir* is certainly correct to remind another newspaper of "journalistic

rigor." But then what must be said of its own rigor when it blindly reproduces the nonsense published in certain American newspapers that are getting their information, in every case, from university professors? I won't bother to comment. Here's what one may read in the same article: "Considered at Yale to be one of the most brilliant lights of the university, says the *New York Times*, he was the author of a controversial theory about language, some seeing in him one of the greatest thinkers of the age. This theory, 'deconstructionism,' sees in language an integrally false means of expression which always reflects the prejudices of the user." It is true that after reading such stupidities over and over again, one might end up believing them. (F.U., "Indignation aux États-Unis: un professeur [belge] de Yale avait été un *collaborateur*," and Michel Bailly, "L'ahurissante équipée d'un *brilliant opportuniste*" [Indignation in the United States: A (Belgian) professor at Yale had been a collaborator. The astounding adventure of a brilliant opportunist] *Le Soir*, December 3, 1987, p. 4.)

11. The influence of Henri de Man, Paul's uncle and godfather, was no doubt powerful and determining. One must approach this extraordinary European figure in order to understand anything of these dramatic events. During a half century, his reputation radiated through his actions and his writings. Among the latter, all of which are more or less autobiographical, two titles provide brief self-portraits, but also a prefiguration of Paul: *Cavalier seul* (Lone horseman) and *Gegen den Strom* (Against the current). Here, in a telegraphic style, are a few significant traits, for which I have relied on: Henri de Man's *Au delà du marxisme* (French translation of *Zur Psychologie des Sozialismus* [Jena, Diederichs, 1926]; reissued by Seuil in 1974 with a very useful preface by Michel Brelaz and Ivo Rens, the foreword to the first French edition [Paris: Alcan, 1926], and a preface by the author denouncing the "nationalist imbecility" and the "prestige of race or nationality"); Henri de Man, *A Documentary Study of Hendrik de Man, Socialist Critic of Marxism*, comp., ed., and largely trans. Peter Dodge (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1979); Dodge, *Beyond Marxism: The Faith and Works of Hendrik de Man* (The Hague: M. Nijhoff, 1966); and Jules Gérard-Libois and José Gotovitch, *L'An 40: La Belgique occupée* (Brussels: Centre de Recherche et d'Information Socio-politiques, 1971).

Freemason father, tolerant anticlerical: "one of the purest incarnations of stoic morality," says his son of him. Henri was born in 1885, the year that the POB (Belgian Labor Party) was founded, of which he will become vice-president in 1933. 1905: expelled from the Ghent Polytechnic Institute for having demonstrated in support of the Russian revolutionaries of 1905. Moves to Germany, "the native and the chosen land of Marxism." Meets Bebel, Kautsky, Liebknecht, Rosa Luxemburg. Intense militant and theoretical activity in Germany. First Secretary of the Socialist Youth International. Dissertation on the woolen industry in Ghent in the Middle Ages. In London in 1910, joins the Social Democratic Federation (radical Marxist group). Returns to Belgium in 1911, provokes a crisis in the POB by criticizing its reformism.

First doubts about Marxism as the war begins, after having served as translator in talks between Jaurès and the future chancellor of the Weimar Republic to preserve the peace. Official mission to Russia after the Revolution in 1917. Publishes "La Révolution aux armées" in Emile Vandervelde's *Trois aspects de la révolution russe, 7 mai-25 juin 1917* (Three aspects of the Russian revolution). In "La grande désillusion" (1919; The great disillusion): "It is not for this reason, it is not so that the Europe of tomorrow will resemble the Europe of yesterday that we fought. It is not for the destruction of the German and Russian nations, it was for the independence of all nations and in order to free Europe of militarism." Plans to immigrate to the U.S., two trips there (1918-20). Finds a system of worker education in Seattle. Professor of Social Psychology at University of Washington. Dismissed from his position after intervening in a local election campaign in favor of the Farmer-Labor Party. 1919: *The Remaking of a Mind: A Soldier's Thoughts on War and Reconstruction*. 1922-26: lives in Darmstadt and teaches at the Akademie der Arbeit in Frankfurt. 1926: publishes his best-known work, *The Psychology of Socialism* (trans. Eden and Cedar Paul, New York: Allen and Unwin, 1928). 1929-33: lives and teaches in Frankfurt (newly created chair in social psychology). 1933: publishes *Die sozialistische Idee*, confiscated by the Nazis. Director of the Office of Social Studies of the POB (1932) which issues the famous *Plan du travail* (Labor Plan) and the doctrine of planism (socialization of financial capital, credit, monopolies, and large landed property). Minister of Public Works and of Unemployment Reduction (1935), Finance Minister in 1936 in tripartite governments that reduce unemployment and fight back rexism (the extreme right). Appointed by the king to secret missions to preserve peace in 1938. Minister without portfolio for several months. Appointed to a post in the queen's service, during the war, in the final days before the defeat perhaps advises the king, who was already inclined in that direction, to share the fate of the army rather than to follow the government into exile. Like many others, believes the war is over. President of the POB, considers the political role of the party to be finished and that the war "has led to the debacle of the parliamentary regime and of the capitalist plutocracy in the so-called democracies. For the working classes and for socialism, this collapse of a decrepit world is, far from a disaster, a deliverance" ("The Manifesto," in *Hendrik de Man, Socialist Critic of Marxism*, p. 326). Dissolves the POB, creates a central labor union in 1940. His relations with the occupiers go downhill quickly. From June 1941, considers the pressures untenable, goes into exile in November 1941 in Savoie (France). Already in July 1940, his program had been considered by the German command, "because of its spirit and its origins" and despite elements that are "formally 'pseudo-fascist,'" to be incapable of ever "being really integrated into a European order, such as Germany conceives it" (quoted in Brelaz and Rens, *Au delà du marxisme*, p. 16). Writes his memoirs (*Après coup*). His *Réflexions sur la paix* (Reflections on peace) banned in Belgium in 1942. Maintains relations with Belgian "collaborationists," unorthodox Germans as

well as French resistants (Robert Lacoste). Informed of the conspiracy and the failed plot against Hitler. 1944: escapes to Switzerland where he is taken in by a Swiss socialist leader who helps him to win political asylum. At the time of the Liberation, severely condemned by a military tribunal "for having, while in the military, maliciously served the policy and the designs of the enemy." Third marriage. *Au-delà du nationalisme* (1946). *Cavalier seul: Quarante-cinq années de socialisme européen* and *Gegen den Strom: Memoiren eines europäischen Sozialisten* are two reworked versions of his 1941 autobiography. *Vermassung und Kulturverfall: Eine Diagnosen unserer Zeit* (1951). On June 20, 1953, his car stops "for unknown reasons" on the railroad tracks at an unguarded crossing near his home. He dies with his wife when the train arrives. It was, they say, slightly behind schedule. (Suicides and allegories of reading: some day we will have to talk about suicide in this history.)

In 1973, in an article whose lucidity seems to me after the fact to be even more admirable and striking, Richard Klein was to my knowledge the first to take the figure of the uncle seriously into consideration. Paul de Man having pointed out to him that he (that is, Richard Klein!) had taken Henri de Man to be the former's father, Klein's postscript closes with the best possible question: "what, after all, is an uncle?" The rereading of this article, "The Blindness of Hyperboles, the Ellipses of Insight," *Diacritics* (Summer 1973), 3:33-44, seems to me urgent for whoever is interested in these questions.

12. De Man, "Les livres sur la campagne de Belgique," *Le Soir*, February 25, 1941.

13. De Man, "Le Solstice de juin, par Henri de Montherlant," *Le Soir*, November 11, 1941; hereafter abbreviated "SjM."

14. De Man, "Témoignages sur la guerre en France," *Le Soir*, March 25, 1941.

15. De Man, "L'exposition 'Histoire de l'Allemagne' au Cinquantenaire," *Le Soir*, March 16, 1942.

16. De Man, "Voir la figure, de Jacques Chardonne," *Le Soir*, October 28, 1941; hereafter abbreviated "VfC."

17. De Man, "Notre avant-guerre, de Robert Brasillach," *Le Soir*, August 12, 1941; hereafter abbreviated "NaB."

18. De Man, "Content of the European Idea," *HVL*.

19. De Man, "Sur les falaises de marbre, de Ernst Jünger: deux ouvrages d'actualité," *Le Soir*, March 31, 1942.

20. De Man, "Le Problème français: Dieu est-il française, de F. Sieburg," *Le Soir*, April 28, 1942; hereafter abbreviated "Pfs."

21. De Man, "La littérature française devant les événements," *Le Soir*, January 20, 1942.

22. On "matter" in de Man, see essay 2. On the lexicon of "spirit" that is so manifest in these texts of 1940-42, as in the writings of so many others in the period between the wars, see my *De l'esprit: Heidegger et la question*. I wish to make it clear, however, that the number and nature of differences

between Heidegger and de Man would render any analogism more confused than ever.

23. De Man, "Sur les possibilités de la critique," *Le Soir*, December 2, 1941.

24. Translator's note: Jean Paulhan, *De la poille et du grain* (Paris: Gallimard, 1948), p. 55. The principal ideologue and organizing force of the *Action Française*, Maurras was a prolific and much-admired writer.

25. De Man, "Trois épreuves, par Daniel Halévy," *Le Soir*, October 14, 1941.

26. De Man, "Art as Mirror of the Essence of Nations," *HVL*; hereafter abbreviated "AM."

27. De Man, "Le Destin de la Flandre," *Le Soir*, September 1, 1941; hereafter abbreviated "F."

28. De Man, "Romans allemands," *Le Soir*, February 10, 1942; hereafter abbreviated "Ra."

29. De Man, "Jardins et routes, par Ernst Jünger," *Le Soir*, June 23, 1942.

30. De Man, "La littérature française devant les événements," *Le Soir*, January 20, 1942."

31. "Art as Mirror" rejects "sentimental patriotism" and "narrow-minded regionalism."

32. De Man, "Les Juifs dans la littérature actuelle," *Le Soir*, March 4, 1941; hereafter abbreviated "Jla."

33. De Man, "Notes pour comprendre le siècle, par Drieu La Rochelle," *Le Soir*, December 2, 1941.

34. Henri de Man speaks, for example, of "pure Marxism and vulgar Marxism" in *The Psychology of Socialism*. The first is a "dead truth," the second is a "living error." Elsewhere, he writes: "I despise all forms of vulgarization, of truth put within reach of those who prefer ersatz goods, radio and phonograph music, champagne for democratic banquets. . . . This confession might sound strange coming from the pen of a socialist, especially a former director of worker education programs. But socialism is not demagoguery; and educating the people is not bringing science down to their level, but raising them to the level of science. Truths exist only for those who seek them." (Henri de Man, foreword, *Au delà du marxisme*, Paris: Seuil, 1974).

35. De Man, "Propos sur la vulgarité artistique," *Le Soir*, January 6, 1942.

36. This is a remarkably constant de Manian concern up until the final articles, and notably the article titled "Continuité de la poésie française: À propos de la revue 'Messages'" (Continuity of French poetry: On the journal "Messages"), *Le Soir*, July 14, 1942. The journal *Messages*, which was banned off and on in France, was published and made known in Belgium with Paul de Man's help. See below concerning *Exercice du Silence*, which was the title of the fourth issue of this journal for 1942 (February 1988).

37. De Man, "Charles Péguy," *Le Soir*, May 6, 1941. The unmitigated praise for this "genius" who was "notoriously independent and undisciplined" is organized completely around the Dreyfus affair. In the portrait of Péguy the Dreyfusard, and in the history of (Péguy's) *Cahiers*, one cannot fail to remark all the quasi-autobiographical traits that de Man seems to take pleasure in proliferating (February 1988).

38. This is an allusion to the lecture I had given the same afternoon on Heidegger (questions of spirit, of Nazism, of nationalism, of language, of the destiny of Europe, and so forth).

39. De Man, letter to Renato Poggioli, Director of the Harvard Society of Fellows, January 25, 1955 (from a draft dated September 1954). Here is an extract from this draft that no doubt will be published: "In 1940 and 1941, I wrote some literary articles in the newspaper *Le Soir* and I, like most of the other contributors, stopped doing so when Nazi thought-control did no longer allow freedom of statement. During the rest of the occupation I did what was the duty of any decent person." According to Charles Dosogne, a contemporary and friend of de Man, "beginning at the end of September 1940, preliminary censorship by the Propaganda Abteilung was limited to important political articles. Literary columns were thus exempted from this, at least until August 1942—date at which censorship was reestablished. It was at this moment that Paul de Man's activities as a journalist ceased" (letter to Neil Hertz, January 11, 1988). It seems, however, that they continued a few months longer.

40. De Man, *Allegories of Reading: Figural Language in Rousseau, Nietzsche, Rilke, and Proust* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1979), p. 278; hereafter abbreviated A.

41. De Man, *The Rhetoric of Romanticism* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1984), p. viii; hereafter abbreviated R.

42. De Man, *Blindness and Insight: Essays in the Rhetoric of Contemporary Criticism*, 2d rev. ed. (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1983), p. 222.

43. I will have neither the room nor the patience nor the cruelty to cite them all. I merely recall that they often appear in university campus newspapers and are generally passed along to the journalists by professors.

44. Quoted in Jon Wiener, "Deconstructing de Man," *The Nation*, January 9, 1988, p. 24. From its title to its final sentence, this spiteful and error-ridden article gathers within its pages more or less all the reading mistakes I have evoked up until now. It is frightening to think that its author teaches history at a university. Attempting to transfer onto deconstruction and its "politics" (such as he imagines them) a stream of calumny or slanderous insinuation, he has the nerve to speak of de Man as an "academic Waldheim," practices dogmatic summary without the least hesitation, attributes to me, for example, the foundation of deconstruction even as he also describes me as attributing its paternity to the "progenitor" Heidegger, about whom it would

have been shown that his "commitment to Nazism was much stronger than has previously been realized." Now draw your own conclusion. Having explained myself at length elsewhere, again recently but for a long time already, on all these questions (notably on what the deconstruction that interests me receives from but also deconstructs of Heidegger, on Heidegger and Nazism, and so on), I can here only refer the interested reader to these numerous publications.

For Wiener and others like him, it is once again a matter of grabbing a long-awaited, in fact, an un hoped-for opportunity. There is no more resisting the temptation to exploit *at all costs* a windfall. The dream goes something like this: "What if this very singular sequence in the life of a young man allowed us to rid ourselves today at a single blow of Deconstruction [in the singular] and put a final end to its worrisome proliferation? Are we going to let this chance go by?"

The answer is "no," of course, even though the path followed might appear rather extravagant. It will seem incredible for those who have not yet been witness to the spectacle. The logic of the compulsion produces a quasi-somnambulistic acting out. The rush into action is all the greater in that, this time, people think they can finally point to "facts" as a justification for doing what they have always done: taking shortcuts around reading, analysis, or interpretation. It is as if people said to themselves: "We have never understood anything about deconstruction, moreover everyone says it is too complicated; we will never read it; so quick, here are some 'facts' that are going to save us the trouble. They do not even need to be interpreted, so we can skip the analysis; so what if the above-mentioned 'facts' are part of an individual experience and if they took place during the war, 25 years before this damned deconstruction even began complicating things, putting twists in everything, poisoning the waters of our certainties and our good conscience."

To achieve this liquidation at all costs (that is, at the cost of the most amazing inductions, of crude manipulations and denegations), they are not even afraid of ridicule, they think they can count on finding accomplices everywhere (and in this they are not wrong). It is true that the anger of these prosecutors feeds on and exasperates itself. Endlessly, of course, because it necessarily produces—one had to be very naive not to have foreseen this—effects that are just the opposite of those counted on. Look at the example of Heidegger in France. Only yesterday there were those who advised, very loudly, that we ought no longer to take any interest in him. The result? Students are more interested in him than ever and there have been seven books devoted to Heidegger this year in this country alone. The confusions I have just mentioned were never taken seriously, if I may use that euphemism, by those who are really working. The signs of this work are, fortunately, proliferating, even if they do not benefit from the immediate visibility of the media and pass unnoticed on certain screens. This will all be borne out in time. The same will be true, I am convinced of it, for Paul de Man. As for work of the deconstruc-

tive type which some would like to reduce quite simply to Heidegger (to "Heideggerianism"! or to "Heideggerians"! or to de Man or else to their direct filiation ("orthodox" filiation in the terms of those for whom thinking can be divided from now on into two camps: the "orthodox" and the "dissidents"), not only must we recognize that this work is more than ever developing in a diverse and differentiated fashion, in directions and according to styles that often have no relation to the places within which the same inquisitors would like to contain it (academic deconstruction, "Heideggerian" reading). Do we have to recall (I would find it too distasteful to do so), by citing authors' names and titles, that most of the so-called "Heideggerians" are doing many other things—against or without Heidegger, in places and forms that have nothing to do with Heidegger? But people would rather not be told of these many other things; they try to efface them from memory or to render them inaudible by chanting endlessly, magically "Heidegger, Heidegger," etc. Actually, it is in desperate opposition to this very development that so many worried and reactive discourses have arisen.

All of this acquires meaning in a very determined theoretical historical, and political situation. One may say without exaggeration that it is the situation of all of Western European culture, I mean from Japan to West Berlin passing by way of the two shores of the U.S.A. There is thus nothing surprising in the fact that Jon Wiener's article has provided a model. The author of this article is, however, famous for his mistakes in *The Nation*: on more than one occasion, this journal has had to publish strongly-worded and overwhelming rectifications after the contributions of this collaborator, who has thus proved to be something of a liability [*malencontreux*]. Yet, no matter, his latest exploit immediately inspired, or one should say programmed, other such articles in the United States or in Europe, notably in Germany. Some of these journalists have been content merely to borrow hurriedly his errors, confusions, defamatory insinuations. Others have added their own. That is the case of Mr. Frank Schirmacher in two articles in the *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* (February 10 and 24, 1988). Like Mr. Manfred Frank (who, for his part, worries that young Germans have fallen "into French hands" [*sic*], and extends the suspicion of fascism or of "neo-darwinian" "pre-fascism" to the whole "French International," to the "neufantösische Kritik am 'Logo-zentrismus'" of "Derrida, Deleuze, and Lyotard" [*sic!*] in *Frankfurter Rundschau*, March 5, 1988), Mr. Schirmacher intimates that deconstruction (about which it is clear, in every line, he too knows nothing) has affinities with fascism and other such things, nothing less than that. Then, he takes the reply from Werner Hamacher (which he began by shortening so as to have more room for his own reply, without worrying about the political significance of such a practice in a newspaper for which, I am told, he is in charge of the cultural section) as a pretext to repeat his offense while pretending to retract his insult. Claiming to be interested in the "meaning" [*Bedeutung*] of the "de Man case" "for a theory that has extraordinary influence in the domains of aesthetics and politics," he

has the nerve to write the following: "Deconstructionism is too diverse [*vielfältig*] to be destroyed by the Paul de Man case [another way of admitting that this ought to be the question, more precisely the barely disguised desire]. We would have been misunderstood if it was thought that we had qualified deconstructionism as 'fascist.' Deconstructionism undeniably represents a valuable analytic method for a modern comprehension of literature and a modern comprehension of oneself. But this school already finds itself today confronted with the equation: 'deconstructionism is fascism' and it must therefore come up with a response."

Who is dreaming here? And why should a "school" have to respond to these stupidities and to this defamatory equation, one which, apparently, no one can or wants to answer for, not even Mr. Schirmacher? (Not even Mr. Frank anymore, if I can be allowed a reference to a private letter.) Should one have to defend oneself against this senseless accusation because Mr. Schirmacher, or other Schirmachers, found it necessary to invent it and then let it resonate while pretending to retract it or to attribute it to others? And what would Mr. Schirmacher do if someone said to him, after having called him a fascist: "Things are more complicated than that. I did not say you are a fascist, I did not even say your methods are fascist, despite appearances, I never said that, certainly not me, and to think that is what I said would be to misunderstand me; but now this accusation has been launched, it is in the air, you have to respond to it"?

Polemics will not suffice. Whenever one can overcome one's repugnance in face of bad faith, resentment, obscurantist confusion or ignorance, even arrogance—which is often difficult to do—then, to be sure, one must reply. But one will have to go much further than that, without limiting oneself to the American or German contexts, to the "cases" (as one now says in the language of psychiatry or criminality) of Heidegger or of Paul de Man. If it is impossible and unjustified to assimilate them to each other or to reduce to their "simplest expression" the work of Heidegger or of Paul de Man, and a fortiori all the work or those who read them, interpret them, often to disagree with them, why, all the same, does this homogenizing totalization take place? How does what appears impossible and unjustified get produced? Why, in any case, does it emit so many signs of its existence—signs whose abundance and recurrence are too typical to be fortuitous? For these signs cannot be explained only by the individual; mediocrity of the readers, however obvious it may be. Why is there today the attempt to exploit these "cases"? Why the attempt to discredit hurriedly, by means of amalgamation, *current* questions, analyses, problematics which, on the other hand, one knows very well are being employed (and not by limiting themselves to appeals to right thinking, good conscience, or demagogic consensus) precisely to deconstruct the foundations of obscurantism, of totalitarianism or of Nazism, of racisms and authoritarian hierarchies in general? (And since on this point people refer to the French context, must I once again recall, for example, the work of Lacoue-Labarthe or Nancy on this subject? May I permit myself to cite also my own work?)

Why do people overlook the fact that the exercise of (theoretical and ethico-political) responsibility prescribes that nothing be a priori exempted from the deconstructive questions? Because, in my view, deconstruction consists in nothing less than putting this responsibility to work, especially when it analyzes traditional or dogmatic axioms concerning the concept of responsibility. Why do people pretend not to see that deconstruction is anything but a nihilism or a skepticism? Why can one still read this claim despite so many texts that *explicitly, thematically, and for more than twenty years* have been demonstrating the opposite? Why the charge of irrationalism as soon as anyone asks a question about reason, its forms, its history, its mutations? Or the charge of antihumanism, with the first question put to the essence of man and the construction of its concept? I could go on citing examples of this sort, the same thing occurs whether it is a matter of language, literature, philosophy, technicality, democracy, of all institutions in general, and so forth. In short, what are people afraid of? Whom do they want to make afraid? Which homogeneity are they trying to protect behind this barrier? Whom do they want to silence in the name of consensus, or any case its "rallying cry" [*mot d'ordre*]? To what order, precisely, are we being recalled by these sinister disciplinary counsels with their gravely intoned litanies? Is it merely to the order of boredom? No, I fear it is more serious than that.

No doubt I will come back to these questions elsewhere, of course—and once again, because I have done so often. But I want at least to note, here and now, the most general trait of this philosophico-political conjuncture. There is a kind of law here, an invariant whose necessity has to be pondered. It is *always* in the name of ethics—a supposedly democratic ethics of discussion—it is always in the name of transparent communication and of "consensus" that the most brutal disregard of the elementary rules of discussion is produced (by these elementary rules, I mean differentiated reading or listening to the other, proof, argumentation, analysis, and quotation). It is *always* the moralistic discourse of consensus—at least the discourse that pretends to appeal sincerely to consensus—that produces in fact the indecent transgression of the classical norms of reason and democracy. To say nothing of elementary philology. Why? What is this a sign of today, in the actual state of our political, academic, or mediatic institutions?

The most visible example of this—and no doubt the most influential, particularly in Germany and France—is Habermas. If one wants an indication of this (but I could cite many such indications, in France as well; I deal with this elsewhere ["Toward an Ethic of Discussion," in the expanded edition of *Limited Inc.*, to be published by Northwestern University Press]), look at one of the two chapters that are devoted to me in the latest book by this theoretician of communication (*The Philosophical Discourse of Modernity*, trans. Frederick Lawrence, Cambridge: MIT Press, 1987 [*Der Philosophische Diskurs der Moderne*, Frankfurt-am-Main: Suhrkamp Verlag, 1985]). A whole fabric of counter-truths is stretched over twenty-five pages (pp. 161–84) *without a single reference to any of my texts* although I am designated by name, from one end to the

other, almost in every sentence, as the author of theses supposedly being discussed. Here is how Habermas justifies his procedure: "Since Derrida does not belong to those philosophers who like to argue, it is expedient to take a closer look at his disciples in literary criticism within the Anglo-Saxon climate of argument in order to see whether this thesis [which is claimed to be mine] really can be held" [*Da Derrida nicht zu den argumentationsfreudigen Philosophen gehört, ist es ratsam, seinen im angelsächsischen Argumentationsklima aufgewachsenen literaturkritischen Schülern zu folgen, um zu sehen, ob sich diese These wirklich halten lässt*] (p. 193 [p. 228]). Such, then, is the effective practice of a great professor and a famous advocate of communication, one who, however, reproaches me for my "performative contradiction" (p. 185 [p. 219]). Is there a more serious, flagrant, significant "performative contradiction" than the one that consists in claiming to refute in the name of reason but without citing the least proof and first of all without even reading or quoting the other? Habermas makes a very causal use of the notion of contradiction and especially of "performative contradiction." It is with something of a smile that I place myself for a moment within such a self-assured logic in order to point out the "performance contradictions" of someone who defends discussion and promises communication, but without respecting the elementary rules of such practices: to begin by reading or listening to the other. However, I think I have shown, a long time ago and again in this book (especially in chapter 3), why a performative is never pure, never works well or only works, so to speak, on contradiction. A certain contradiction. Which one? How? In which case? Those are in my view, more serious questions. What is called deconstruction is the taking up of these questions. It is also, it seems to me, a strategy—as formalized as possible (but absolute formalization is impossible and this impossibility recognized as such, hence the "contradiction")—for assuming the necessity in which any discourse finds itself to take account of the rules and of the *determined* forms of *this or that* rationality which it is in the process of criticizing or, especially, of deconstructing. Without *this* "performative contradiction," one might even say that (among other consequences) there would no longer be critique, discussion, communication, progress of knowledge, history of reason, nor perhaps any history at all. It does not suffice to denounce this, formally and loudly, in order to escape it. Purely formal denunciation is doubtless the most sterile repetition or confirmation of the said contradiction. So, I would not reproach Habermas for having neglected to quote or even to read me if his objections still had some pertinence. For, of course, it is not enough to quote in order to prove that one has understood or even in order to prove anything at all. No more than writing the word "argumentation" in every sentence suffices to produce in fact a convincing argumentation; the other chapter that Habermas devotes to me does include, in fact, several references, but it seems to me to proceed from the same non-reading and from an equivalent non-argumentation. To say nothing of the foreword (by C. Bouchindhomme and R. Rochlitz) to the French translation (*Le discours philosophique*

de la modernité, Paris: Gallimard, 1988). The latter goes even further and ends up giving an example of the most grotesque, as well as the most violent, forms of dogmatic assurance and philosophical simplism. Since examples of this kind are proliferating, and precisely for the reasons I have just mentioned, we risk seeing readers taken in by them or getting accustomed to them. (May 25, 1988. Completed after the publication of this text in *Critical Inquiry*, April 1988, this note remains naturally interminable. I offer my apologies to all the authors of texts analogous to the ones I criticize here; space and time are lacking, as well as my taste for such things. July 1988. All the same, one exception, in a more Parisian context and in order to recall again something well-known: edifying discourse is often a comedy of morals. Tzvetan Todorov has multiplied, over several years, venomous but always moralizing attacks against those whom he thinks he can identify, in the greatest confusion, under the name of deconstruction. Now, he has just published in the *Times Literary Supplement* [June 17–23, 1988] and in *La Lettre Internationale* ["Correspondance," Summer 1988] an article against de Man—and some others, of which one could fairly show that the mistakes, lies, and falsifications number about three out of every four allegations. [Cynthia Chase, at the end of her rectification (*ms.*, July 8–14, 1988), emphasizes rightly, I would say rather charitably, that "these distortions are unworthy of the critic Todorov once was."] With less charity, one could charge to his account still more counter-truths, manipulated with assurance and good conscience by someone who goes so far as to state, for example, that de Man was "an influential propagator of Heideggerean philosophy." Now Todorov, co-founder and co-director of the journal *Poétique*, of which Paul de Man was a member of the editorial committee up to his death, ought at least to know that de Man was always critical with regard to Heidegger's thought. And that, having written about this topic only in a limited and indirect way, he was certainly not an "influential propagator" of it. And "propagator," what a word! Make no mistake—the fact is that it often smacks of the code of censorship, even to that of the police, and of denunciation. Earlier, and more than once, we could just as well have recalled that the accusation of "nihilism," often directly helter-skelter against de Man or against deconstruction in general, not only testifies both to the non-reading of texts and to a massive lack of sensitivity to the great question—still open and still redoubtable—of nihilism and of metaphysics. This accusation bespeaks either political amnesia or a lack of political culture. Those who toss around the word nihilism so gravely or so lightly should, however, be aware of what they're doing: under the occupation, the "propagators" of dangerous ideas were often denounced by accusing them of "nihilism," sometimes in violently antisemitic tracts, and always in the name of a new order, moral and right-thinking ["nihilist acid-bath . . ." "literary, spiritual, human nihilism!"—see, for example, Pascal Fouché, *L'édition française sous l'Occupation*, Paris: Bibliothèque de Littérature française contemporaine de l'Université Paris (1987), 1(7):92.]

45. Stefano Rosso, "An Interview with Paul de Man," *The Resistance to Theory. Theory and History of Literature* (Minneapolis, 1986), 33:121; rept. from *Critical Inquiry* (Summer 1986), 12:788-95.

46. I had already been intrigued by *Le Soir's* remark in the article of December 3 (see n10) that it could not find in its archives what was perhaps a separately printed special issue, and by the claim of the person (later identified as Mr. Goriely) interviewed—who "knew de Man well and saw him frequently at that time"—to have no memory of such an article. The same surprise is marked by Charles Dosogne in his letter to Neil Hertz (see n39). Dosogne, who was the first director of the *Cahiers du Libre Examen* (whose contributors included "a certain number of Israelites"), recalls first of all that Paul de Man "found himself at twenty years old, with a young wife and a baby, without a university degree, during a period of governmental disorganization, all of which did not permit him to aspire to a paying job. All he had going for him was his vast culture and his great intelligence, which he was able to take advantage of by accepting what some connections of his proposed to him: an association with *Le Soir* and the *Vlaamsche Land*." Then, drawing from the experience of his long friendship (1938-47), Charles Dosogne adds this: "I can confirm that never, neither before nor after the war, did Paul de Man's remarks or attitudes permit one to suspect an antisemitic opinion—which, let me say in passing, would have ended our relations. Racism was in fundamental contradiction with his profoundly human nature and the universal character of his mind. That is why I remain deeply skeptical concerning the remarks 'with antisemitic resonances' cited by the *New York Times* that could be imputed to him. Is there not room to ask certain questions concerning a document that does not figure among *Le Soir's* own collection, and, on the copy to be found at the Bibliothèque Albertine, is marked by three asterisks. Why??"

(July 1988:) While all these phenomena remain puzzling, the authenticity of this exceptional article has in the meantime unfortunately been verified. But the numerous testimonies which have come to confirm the rest of what Charles Dosogne said about Paul de Man must also be emphasized. Many of them are included in Werner Hamacher, Neil Hertz, and Thomas Keenan, eds., *Responses: On Paul de Man's Wartime Journalism* (Lincoln, Nebr.: University of Nebraska Press, 1989), others in the proceedings of a conference which was held recently (June 24-25, 1988) in Antwerp, Paul de Man's birthplace. Jean Stengers, historian, and Georges Goriely, both professors emeriti at the Université Libre de Bruxelles, judged the published accusations of antisemitism and collaborationism levelled against de Man to be simply ridiculous. Goriely insisted on emphasizing that he did so with all the more vigilance in that he spoke both as a Jew and a resister. In the same line, one of the most impressive testimonies, in my eyes, thanks to the richness of its information and the precision of its details, remains today that of M. Edouard Colinet

(included in *Responses*), who was the last president of the "Cercle du Libre examen" and fought in the Resistance (in France) throughout the war. Henri Thomas, who knew Paul de Man in the United States, from 1958-1960, tells me that the image he keeps of his friend "will never be that of a *collabo*."