

Paul Valéry, *Étude de mains* (Study of Hands), no date. Wax crayon. Reproduced in: Paul de Man, *Les Dessins de Paul Valéry* (Paris: Les Éditions universelles, 1948), page XLVII.

Withdrawings: Paul de Man on Paul Valéry's Art

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My right hand is generally unaware of my left.
- Paul Valéry

Paul de Man's essay of 1948 introducing a selection of Paul Valéry's *dessins* or drawings is singular in more ways than one. It is his only extended writing on visual art.¹ It is his only publication in his own voice in the near aftermath of World War II and his only publication from 1943 to 1952, aside from his translation into Flemish of *Moby-Dick*, published in 1945. It comes in the middle of a nine-year hiatus in a writing life that spanned forty-five or so years. The Valéry project seems related to a failed venture of de Man's after the war to start a publishing concern specializing in art books. The firm collapsed in shady circumstances—with de Man appearing to be the main culprit—without a single publication. The book of Valéry's drawings may have been planned first for that company but was published independently by Les Éditions Universelles in Paris. De Man had no formal training in art history or art. He had been an undergraduate student of science before his studies were interrupted by the war, and he then became a literary and cultural critic for collaborationist publications in wartime Belgium. Little in his formation would seem to have prepared him to write something substantial or authoritative about art in the 1940s. The Valéry essay seems to come almost out of nowhere. But it has some fascination as a telling text, a way station between the prewar and collaborationist writings of his youth and the various later phases of his academic career, which might be summarized, in sequence, as phenomenological critique in a roughly Heideggerian mode; rhetorical reading in the mode of what would come to be called deconstruction; and a final set of inquiries, still deconstructive, under the rubric of a critique of "aesthetic ideology." The wartime writings arguably haunt the whole later trajectory, most of all the late essays on aesthetic ideology. The itinerary begins with the essay on Valéry, a fraught instance of ideological work trying hard not to be ideological. The essay is also striking as a charged encounter of an amateur writing about an amateur. De Man and Valéry were both intense intellectuals for whom art (in the broad sense) and its understanding were of great moment, including at times of and in relation to severe historical turbulence. The question was and is how to address art.

¹ Some years after (1952) the Valéry essay, de Man published a short piece on Jacques Villon, the cubist and abstract painter who was also a brother of Marcel Duchamp. The Valéry and Villon essays are found in *The Paul de Man Notebooks*, ed. Martin McQuillan (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2012).



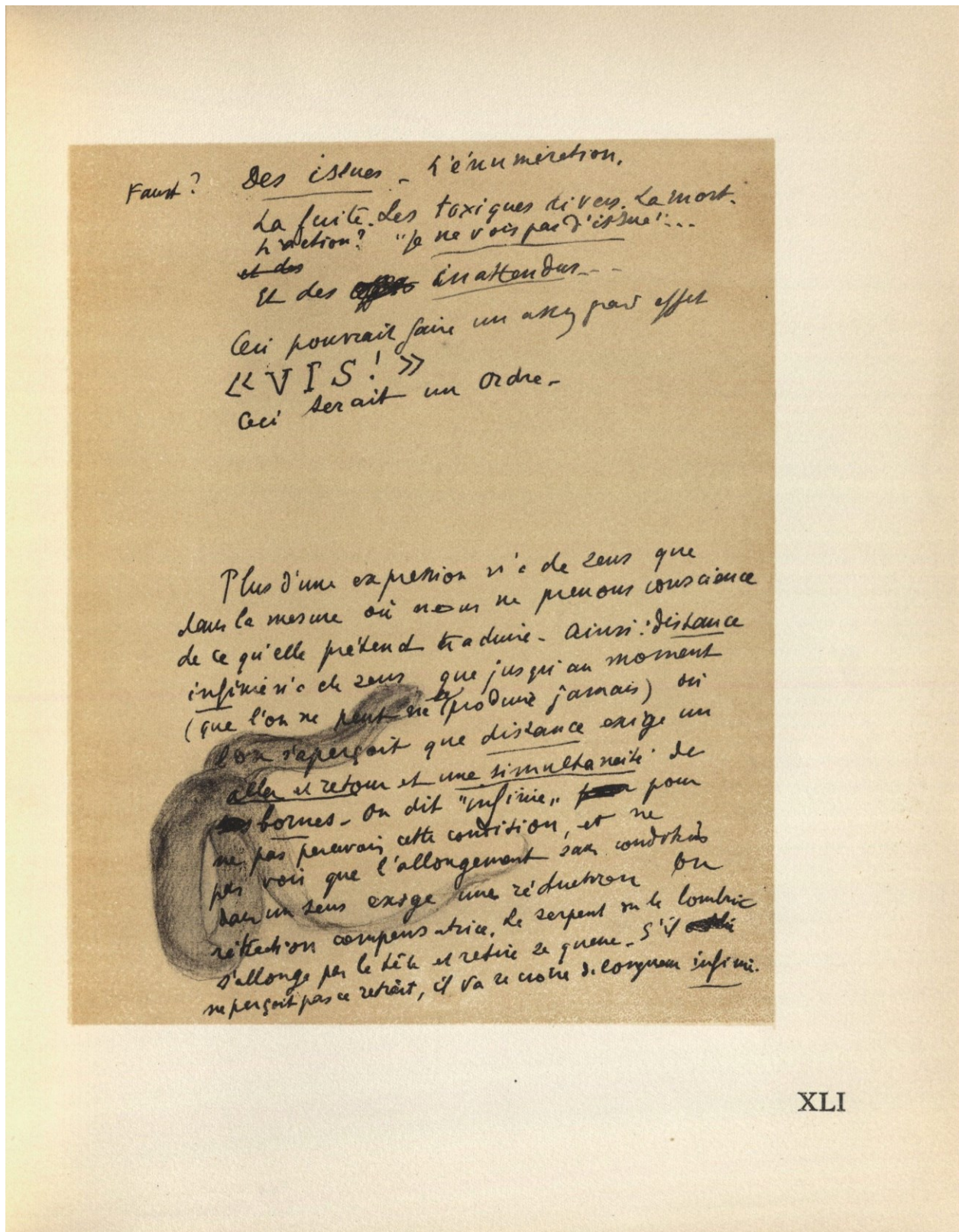
LXIX

1. Paul Valéry, *M. Teste à l'Opéra* (M. Teste at the Opera), no date. Watercolor. Reproduced in: Paul de Man, *Les Dessins de Paul Valéry* (Paris: Les Éditions universelles, 1948), page LXIX.

De Man's introduction to Valéry's drawings seems calculated for the general, educated reader, not an audience of people with a professional or specialized interest in the history of art or the art of the twentieth century. The essay includes no historical apparatus and no footnotes. De Man is concerned to articulate the texture of Valéry's aesthetic practice and the conceptual coordinates of his discursive world, weaving back and forth between the two. His account tries to do justice not just to the content but to the textures of the work, to the drawing and to the thinking proximate to it. As it happens, what counts most, in a world dominated by chance and unforeseeable occasions, is the restless seeing, thinking, reflecting, and drawing where mind and hand attend to forms that appear. Seeing is, for Valéry, literally thought-provoking. Thinking emerges as the necessary supplement to or a by-product of seeing. And what does Valéry see? De Man singles out some of the prominent things that repeatedly catch Valéry's eye: harbors and all they contain, opera houses, hands, and serpents, these last taking the form of a serpentine line and sometimes functioning as charged but enigmatic symbols. In his obsessive (de Man's word) preoccupation with drawing, Valéry resolutely promotes and gravitates to form over content and design over color, even if these traditional, inherited binary oppositions seem sometimes precarious for and impertinent to the actualities of Valéry's protean artworks and accompanying writing. (Fig. 1) Their impertinence is partly legible in or visible through the attention to process and practice, to experiment and improvisation, to the registering of *natura naturans* in a mode commensurate with it. In all of this, de Man in his turn mimics somewhat the procedural practice of Valéry, trying to convey something of his subject matter in the form and drama of his own phrasing and sentences, conjuring his own fluid objects in the prose of analysis. This pertains as well to the affinity, in Valéry, between drawing and writing that the writer-artist thought of as parallel activities, not least when conducted in their respective blacks and whites. (Fig. 2) De Man offers, in effect, a phenomenological account of Valéry's practice that is itself practiced and conceived of as phenomenological. De Man does so in a way that by and large brackets history (aside from relating things to a tradition of writers who also draw) and ascribes, in effect and sometimes in theory, a relative autonomy to the work of art. In this way de Man withdraws, as it were, from the kinds of writing he did in the wartime years, rife with preoccupations of history and nation and ideology. We should recall briefly the outlines and circumstances of those wartime writings, not least as the Valéry essay sets itself against or in relation to those texts and their overarching project.

De Man's wartime collaborationist work easily counts as "reactionary."² Prior to the war de Man had written for and served as one of the editors of the *Cahiers du libre examen*, a left-liberal publication explicitly anti-Fascist in its program, to which he contributed until the

² The revelations of de Man's wartime writings, and a few prewar ones, initially prompted a flurry of journalistic and quasi-journalistic articles, followed in short order by a substantial array of more considered, researched essays, a large number of which were gathered in *On Paul de Man's Wartime Writings*, ed. Werner Hamacher, Neil Hertz, and Thomas Keenan (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1989). Among the most illuminating and judicious essays are those by Hamacher, Samuel Weber, Cynthia Chase, William Flesch, Richard Klein, and Alice Kaplan.



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2. Paul Valéry, Page de manuscrit (Untitled manuscript page), no date. Graphite drawing. Reproduced in: Paul de Man, *Les Dessins de Paul Valéry* (Paris: Les Éditions universelles, 1948), page XLI.

spring of 1940.³ The German occupation began at the end of May, but de Man's uncle, Henri/Hendrik de Man, a premier theoretician of socialism and head of the Belgian Labor Party throughout the 1930s, had publicly advocated, in late April in advance of the occupation, a policy of appeasement. In December 1940 de Man published the first of scads of short articles, mainly literary and some musical, engaging grand themes of nation and history, oozing with official and unofficial ideology and ideologemes.⁴

Exactly what de Man thought and believed in the wartime years—when his voice was to be read only in the pages of collaborationist newspapers—remains difficult to ascertain. Though he did not absolutely toe a party line—his writing in these years includes numerous ambiguities and signs of departure from what would have been expected of him were he simply a mouthpiece for the occupier—there is zero doubt that the articles he wrote, including one with pronounced antisemitic content published together with articles by others displaying even fiercer, balder antisemitism, participated squarely in explicit ideological work on behalf of the occupier's regime. The historical record, taking the prewar and wartime years into consideration, suggests the profile of an opportunistic collaborator far less than that of an ideologue committed to the agendas of the occupier; that is, someone who took the easy way out rather than the difficult or heroic path of resistance.⁵ But de Man's attitude, even if less committed to the occupiers than is usually suggested, hardly negates the altogether negative force of the articles soliciting the hearts and minds of those living in occupied Belgium.

Only once in a blue moon in the wartime writings does visual art come up. When, unusually, de Man reviews something on the order of Pierre Daye's biography of Peter Paul Rubens, his "study" turns out to avoid Rubens's art production and concentrates instead on the artist's life as a diplomat. (Daye was a Rexist—that is, extreme right wing and nationalist—and a collaborator sentenced to death in 1946, though he did not die until 1960 in Argentina.)

³ See the helpful account in Lindsay Waters, "Introduction," in Paul de Man, *Critical Writings 1953–1978* (Minneapolis: University of Minneapolis, 1989), ix. Some few articles from that period signed by de Man include advocacy of resistance to "Hitlerism," as it was known, and a resistance to its imperialism, positions that would have been anathema to the collaborationist publications for which de Man later wrote.

⁴ The wartime *and* prewar writings are collected in Paul de Man, *Wartime Journalism*, ed. Werner Hamacher, Neil Hertz, and Tom Keenan (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1988). For a sense of the relative degree of collaboration among the leading newspapers in the war years, see Jean Stengers, "Paul de Man, a Collaborator?," in *(Dis)Continuities: Essays on Paul de Man*, ed. Luc Hermans, Kris Humbeeck, and Geert Lernout (Amsterdam: Rodopi; Antwerp: Restant, 1989), 43–50. (Stengers, the father of the well-known philosopher and historian of science Isabelle Stengers, was a historian of Belgium who lived and studied in Brussels during the war. He was a few years younger than de Man.)

⁵ As many have noted, there is evidence of some resistance activity on de Man's part, including the sheltering of Jews during the occupation. As far as we can tell, there is no evidence of any antisemitic behavior or rhetoric between World War II and his death in 1983. Nor is there evidence of it before the occupation of Belgium. If there were such evidence, one would think someone would have called attention to it, as, say, in the biography by Evelyn Barish, *The Double Life of Paul de Man* (New York: Liveright, 2014).

But the wartime writings—as also the later ones of the mature, well-known literary critic—are bereft of sustained attention to art. One small enigma regarding de Man's activity and thinking in the postwar period is, Why art, visual art, all of a sudden?

What is happening in de Man's essay on Valéry, a figure who today might come across as a rather conservative or centrist thinker, poet, and artist, somewhat precious or fussy, a modernist without jagged edges? Theodor Adorno, ventriloquizing one strain of criticism, could invoke him as “the notorious artiste and aesthete,” an artist with his own claim to being a reactionary.⁶ “On m'a toujours traité du réac” (They've always treated me as a reactionary), Valéry observed, with an air of having suffered an injustice.⁷ It's complicated. This artist/reactionary, if that is what he is—*concesso non dato*—is someone, Adorno also discerned, “granted a deeper insight into the social nature of art than is the doctrine of art's immediate utilitarian application in practical politics.”⁸ Moreover, he is, along with Marcel Proust, as Adorno observed in another essay, “one of the two most knowledgeable men to have written about art in recent times.”⁹ Valéry, for Adorno, turns out to be something like the poetic and essayistic version of Honoré de Balzac as the latter functions for much Marxist criticism; that is, as someone whose official politics were at odds with the more dialectical and even progressive presentation of the world that emerged in his writing.¹⁰ And, closer to Adorno's

⁶ Theodor W. Adorno, “The Artist as Deputy,” in *Notes on Literature*, vol. 1, trans. Shierry Weber Nicholsen (New York: Columbia University Press, 1991), 116.

⁷ Quoted in a section titled with this phrase from Benoît Peeters, *Paul Valéry: Une vie d'écrivain* (Paris: Les impressions Nouvelles, 2019), 75. The phrase comes from a letter of December 1, 1915, to André Fontainas in Paul Valéry, *Lettres à quelques-uns* (Paris: Gallimard, 1952), 111. Valéry is not invoking the political sense of *reactionary* in the first instance. Here it has, for him, primarily to do with other people's sense of his resistance to any calculation of the immediate that does not account for what might follow from it.

⁸ Adorno, *Notes on Literature*, 103. Adorno's original German title uses the non-German word *Artist*, not *Künstler*. “Der Artist als Statthalter.” *Artist* here for Adorno likely carries some of the negative connotations captured in the phrase translated in English as “artiste and aesthete.” Adorno is preceded somewhat in the usage of *Artist* by Friedrich Nietzsche. We are grateful to Arnd Wedemeyer, Sascha Wolters, and Silke Weineck for thoughts about this usage.

⁹ Theodor W. Adorno, “Valéry Proust Museum,” in *Prisms*, trans. Samuel Weber and Shierry Weber (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1983), 173–86. For a searching reading of this essay and a savvy analysis of the stakes involved, including the status of the amateur, see Catherine Liu, “Art Escapes Criticism or, Adorno's Museum,” *Cultural Critique* 60 (Spring 2005), 217–44. (“Liu” is misspelled as “Lui” in the initial publication.) Valéry was suspicious of museums. For him a work of art in a museum dies an unnatural, premature death, not the way an artwork, participating in what Foçillon calls “the life of forms,” should die: subject to chance, decay, decline of interest, or indifference.

¹⁰ Valéry notes in a letter to Gide that in his “re-reading” of Karl Marx's *Das Kapital* he found remarkable and “splendid” (*épatant*) things. See André Gide, Pierre Louÿs, and Paul Valéry, *Correspondances à trois voix, 1888–1920*, ed. Peter Fawcett (Paris: Gallimard, 2009), 803. The letter dates from May 11, 1918. Valéry observes that he is one of the rare people to have read the book, which implies that his “re-reading” would have been even rarer. Adorno suggests that the name of Marx is one that “would hardly have crossed Valéry's lips.” Adorno, *Notes on Literature*, 150. Adorno opines this while observing of a passage from Valéry that it is something one could have found in

home, Valéry, like a good many of the literary modernists, stood as a complicated example of someone (sometimes) conservative or downright right wing in their politics and (sometimes) progressive in their poetics.

Valéry is widely acknowledged to have written distinctively and with distinction on visual art, especially on Edgar Degas, and he provided a highly influential study of his semifictional construct of Leonardo da Vinci as artist, thinker, and scientist.¹¹ Valéry's writing regarding art inscribes itself in the formidable tradition of great literary figures in France who wrote about art in nontechnical or public-intellectual fashion: Denis Diderot, Charles Baudelaire, Stéphane Mallarmé (idolized by Valéry), Joris-Karl Huysmans, and more. Some of these writers were also credible practitioners of drawing, sometimes in the mode of illustration but not necessarily usually or simply that. For some of them, their drawings often went literally side-by-side with their writings, inhabiting the same pages, or even with one sort of inscription superimposed over another.¹²

De Man notes the obvious in his introduction: that Valéry draws and paints as an "amateur."¹³ But that it not to say that drawing was not of considerable moment, even crucial for him. De Man observes apropos this amateur status that, for Valéry, it was characteristic of "everything he did" (xx, 30): thus, amateur poet, amateur thinker, amateur drawer of drawings. That judgment is not as negative as it might at first sound: it points to the nonprofessional, not-so-technical manner in which Valéry conducted any number of endeavors, numerous of

Marx. We are grateful to William Marx (!) for helping us locate the precise reference in the letters. See also the final chapter, devoted to Valéry, in Todd Cronan, *Against Affective Formalism* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2013). Cronan, despite being primarily an art historian, attends to matters of writing and poetics in Valéry, at times distancing himself further from Adorno's take on Valéry than we do.

¹¹ Maurice Blanchot records how his generation understood the glory of Leonardo da Vinci through Valéry and only that way. See the extravagant opening claims for the authority and influence of Valéry's reading in Maurice Blanchot, "The Notebooks of Leonardo da Vinci," in *Faux Pas*, trans. Charlotte Mandell (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2001), 71. The first version of Valéry's Leonardo book was finished in 1894, when the author was twenty-three, but was later expanded with the original text accompanied by marginal, self-critical, and clarifying comments.

¹² *Les dessins de Paul Valéry*, ed. P. de Man (Paris: Les Éditions Universelles, 1948), xxiv, 32. An English version of de Man's essay is available in *The Paul de Man Notebooks*, ed. Martin McQuillan (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2012), 30. (In the body of our article, references to de Man's introduction are given first by the page number of the French, followed by the page number of the English translation, expertly done by Richard Howard. Passages and words quoted are presented in English unless the French seems to be required.) De Man distinguished sharply the procedure of Victor Hugo from that of Valéry. For the former, the drawings tend to be "illustrations" of the written work, whereas for Valéry there is usually no such obvious or mimetic link with the text next to or around it (xxiv, 32). In 1932 Valéry examined Hugo's papers in the Bibliothèque Nationale de France and noted, "Ces pages-là sont magnifiques. énorme écriture. C'est le demi-brouillon de grand appareil. Rien de plus beau qu'un beau brouillon." Paul Valéry, *Cahiers*, vol. 2, ed. Judith Robinson (Paris: Gallimard [Bibliothèque de la Pléiade], 1974), 1,118.

¹³ *Les dessins de Paul Valéry*, xx. The title page refers to a "Texte de P. DE MAN," but no designation anywhere in the book calls the essay an "Introduction" or "Preface."

which were formidable. Valéry by no means thought everything should be left to the professionals and experts, even though he could, for example, admire to no end the professionalism and attention to technique of a Degas, an almost one-track mind capable of greatness. He does not hesitate to call Degas a “specialist,” and it carries no negative connotations, despite his general preference for generalists.¹⁴ Valéry is highly complementary of Degas’s foray into the writing of sonnets and his high achievement there, though he records how, when Degas was having problems getting his “ideas” into sonnet form, Mallarmé had to advise the artist that sonnets are a matter of *words* not ideas, implying that the dedicated writer of sonnets (and so much more) understood better the matter of form.¹⁵ De Man’s judgment of Valéry as a pan-amateur may also point to the way in which the latter operated a little along the lines of his much-admired Leonardo, the very model of the so-called Renaissance man, one much given to the occupations of drawing, sketching, and writing so prized by Valéry.¹⁶ If one thinks of Valéry principally as a poet, one has nonetheless to recognize that the writing of poetry, too, was a relatively minor occupation for him, in terms of the time and energy devoted to it. (For whole decades he did not write poems.) That said, the *dessins* were decidedly executed in the mode of the autodidact, however serious and even intense an occupation and preoccupation—with the small sketches, almost daily—it was for Valéry.¹⁷

The tracing of words or lines seem to be parallel or related activities for Valéry, as de Man makes clear. Valéry the writer and Valéry the drawer encounters a blank, usually white page on which he comes to inscribe, more often than not, black things.¹⁸ Those “things” can be very different—words are in some respects so different from images—but de Man contends that for Valéry, “Drawn [*Tracés*] with one and the same ink, with one and the same pen, and the same impulse, word and image complement each other” (xxii, 31). This seems of a piece with what de Man characterizes as Valéry’s preference for black-and-white over color, a

¹⁴ Paul Valéry, *Degas Manet Morisot*, vol. 12 of *The Collected Works of Paul Valéry*, ed. Jackson Matthews, trans. David Paul (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1960), 64. The full, remarkable passage reads, “The sheer labor of Drawing for him had become a passion, the object of a mystique and an ethic all-sufficient in themselves, a supreme preoccupation which abolished all other matters, a source of endless problems in precision which released him from any other form of inquiry. He was and wished to be a specialist, of a kind that can rise to a sort of universality.”

¹⁵ On this, see the section “Degas the Sonneteer,” in *ibid.*, 61–63.

¹⁶ From a certain distance the pages of Valéry’s notebooks resemble those of Leonardo, except that the latter tend to be considerably more precise.

¹⁷ Yet he was an amateur artist whose achievements were recognized by nonamateurs. Valéry was elected president of the Société des Peintres Graveurs, though when he addressed that society in 1933 he spoke to the audience as if they were the real craftspeople and he was not. His prints were shown in a group show in 1942. See *Gravures, orfèvreries, estampes, planches originales, dessins et objets décorés par 29 graveurs contemporains, exposition en la galerie de l’Orfèvrerie Christofle* (Paris: Galerie Christofle, 1943). In 1923, Valéry won the Ambroise Vollard Prize for painting.

¹⁸ De Man, in an early essay (1955), glosses Mallarmé as “poet of sterility and the blank page.” Paul de Man, “Poetic Nothingness: On a Hermetic Sonnet by Mallarmé,” in *Critical Writings, 1953–1978* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1989), 18.



3. Paul Valéry, *Page de manuscrit* [Untitled manuscript page], no date. Pen and ink drawing. Reproduced in: Paul de Man, *Les Dessins de Paul Valéry* (Paris: Les Éditions universelles, 1948), page XLV.

predilection conveniently suited to the medium of the *cahier*.¹⁹ One could shift at will from writing to drawing, from drawing to writing, without so much as changing one's instrument. (Fig. 3) Valéry himself comments on the kinship between the literary art of the pen and the graphic art of the burin:

But then I compare our two arts: I discover, in engraving as in literary work, an intimate bond between the nascent work and the artist who applies himself to it. The plate (or stone) is quite comparable to the page the writer works on: both fill us with dread; both occupy our zone of *distinct vision*; we take in the whole and detail in a single glance, the *mind*, the *eye*, and the *hand* concentrate their expectation on this small surface; we stake our destiny on it... Is this not the height of creative kinship, experienced identically by the engraver and the writer, each glued to his desk, where he reveals *all he knows* and *all he is worth*?²⁰

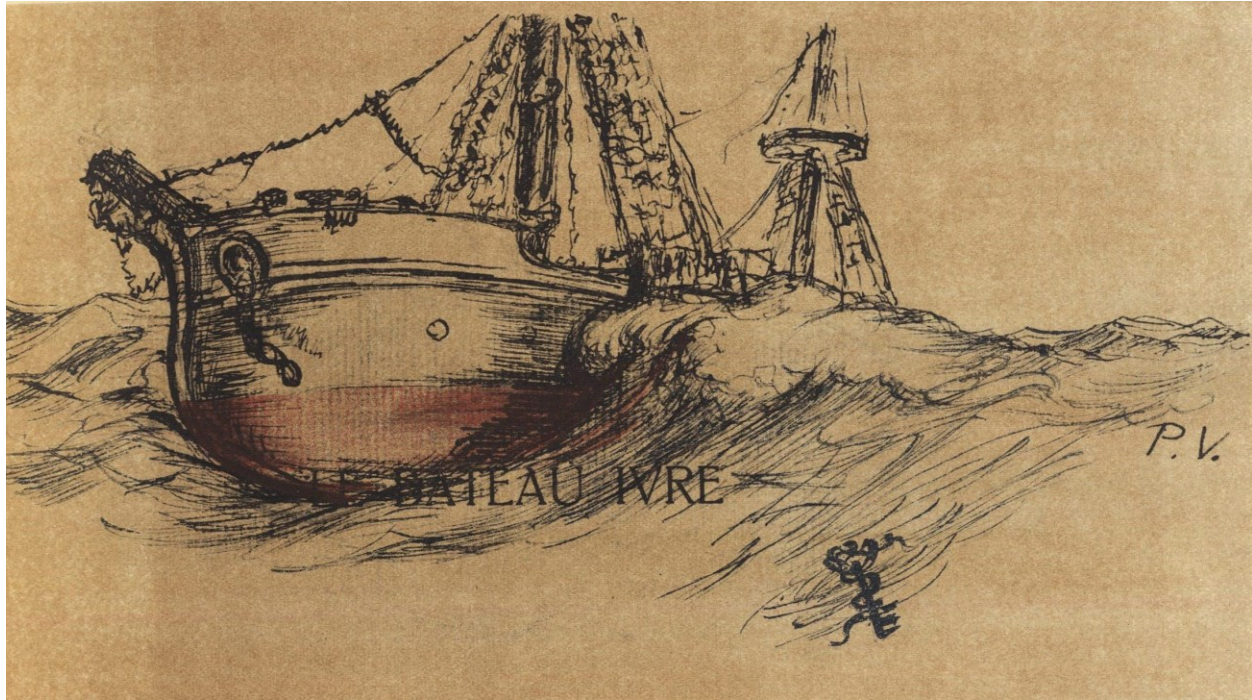
The paradigm of the trace, common to writing and art, is consistent with the primacy of form in Valéry's visual aesthetics, as he adopts a broadly Kantian stance on the primacy of *Zeichnung* (Immanuel Kant determines this to be "the essential" in paragraph 14 of the *Critique of Judgment*), taking up the side of "design" in the contest between proponents of the primacy of *disegno* over *colore* or vice versa.²¹ The proximity of the two modes is palpable and pertinent for Valéry, not least insofar as his interests and concerns in both lie far more with production, with the act and process of production, than with the product.

For Valéry, both writing and drawing can be understood as forms of what he calls, in a crucial section of *Degas, danse, dessin*, "tracing." (The section is called "Voir et tracer," which is less than ideally rendered in the English translation as "Seeing and Copying.") So often in

¹⁹ The not-so-colorful colors of black and white seem better suited to the conveying or foregrounding of form as form. In an interesting passage from Walter Benjamin's account of Naples, he seems to suggest that gray (which splits the difference between black and white) is the color most conducive to form being registered as form: "Fantastic reports by travelers have touched up the city. In reality, it is gray: a gray-red or ocher, a gray-white. And entirely gray against sky and sea. It is this, not least, that disheartens the tourist. For anyone who is blind to forms sees little here." Walter Benjamin, "Naples," in *Selected Writings*, vol. 1, 1913–1926, ed. Marcus Bullock and Michael W. Jennings (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1996), 415–16.

²⁰ Paul Valéry, "A Brief Address to the Society of Engravers," in *Aesthetics*, vol. 13 of *The Collected Works of Paul Valéry*, ed. Jackson Matthews, trans. Ralph Mannheim (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1964), 186–87. Emphasis in translation and original.

²¹ Testaments to the primacy of form are all over Valéry's work, as is true for a good many thinkers of the aesthetic, but Valéry even contends the following for the singularity of France: "France, I reflected, is the only country in modern times where form is held in high repute, where there is a demand and a concern for form itself." Paul Valéry, *Occasions*, vol. 11 of *The Collected Works of Paul Valéry*, ed. Jackson Matthews, trans. Roger Shattuck and Frederick Brown (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1970), 34. The analogue to form in language and literature is rhetoric, which Valéry calls, in the section on "rhetoric" in *Tel Quel*, "l'essentiel." See Paul Valéry, *Œuvres complètes*, vol. 2, ed. Jean Hytier (Paris: Pléiade, 1950), 551. For Kant's dictum on design being the essential [*das Wesentliche*], see Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Judgment*, trans. Werner Pluhar (Indianapolis and Cambridge: Hackett, 1987), 71.



4. Paul Valéry, “*Le Bateau ivre*” [“The Drunken Boat”], no date. Pen and ink drawing heightened with colored pencil. Reproduced in: Paul de Man, *Les Dessins de Paul Valéry* (Paris: Les Éditions universelles, 1948), page LXXXIII.

Valéry, as in the notebooks, writing—the making of traces—occurs with drawing, drawing with writing.²² Along these lines, Jacques Derrida, in a resonant essay, cites a long passage from the end of Valéry’s major, youthful work on Leonardo:

Today, in a number of truly remarkable cases, even the expression of things by means of discrete signs, arbitrarily chosen, has given way to lines traced by the things themselves, or to transpositions or inscriptions directly derived from them. The great invention that consists in making the laws of science visible to the eyes and, as it were readable on sight has been incorporated into knowledge and it has in some sort *doubled* the world of experience with a visible world of curves, surfaces, and diagrams that translate properties into forms whose inflexions we can follow with our eyes, thus by our consciousness of this movement gaining an impression of values in transition. The *graphic* has a continuity of movement that cannot be rendered in speech. Doubtless it was speech that commanded the method to exist; doubtless it is now speech that assigns a meaning to the graphisms, and interprets them; but it is no longer by speech that the act of mental possession is consummated. Something new is little by little taking shape under our eyes; a sort of ideography of plotted and diagrammed

²² On the conjunction of these two modes in the notebooks, see Serge Bourjea, “Écriture et dessin dans les premiers ‘Cahiers’ de Valéry,” in *Forschungen zu Paul Valéry / Recherches Valéryennes* 14 (2001): 97–120.

relations between qualities and quantities, a language that has for grammar a body of preliminary conventions (scales, axes, grids, etc.).²³

The essay from which Derrida quotes is the third and final section of the Leonardo study: “Leonardo and the Philosophers.” In this section Valéry is attentive, much as Derrida would later be, to the writing of philosophy, to the problematic of philosophy being dependent on natural or given languages, and more generally to the precarious project of a philosophical aesthetics, for which Kant is Valéry’s prime exemplar. Valéry is suspicious of a too metaphysical aesthetics that would be at odds with its subject matter of art and the experience of art.²⁴ The affinity of Derrida for Valéry along these lines is elective, even if one imagines the former might demur regarding the claim that “lines are traced by the things themselves.” But Derrida is, atypically, speechless after quoting this long, rich passage. He has no comment. The paragraph ends, and he proceeds to a new, short paragraph, making a different if related point. Why does Derrida say nothing? Perhaps because the passage articulates so well a grammatological posture *avant la lettre*? Valéry follows Mallarmé his “master”—Valéry’s term for him—in resisting the preponderant promotion in the West of a hierarchy of speech over writing. Valéry’s argument is not itself a philosopheme but a pointed historical observation: it is about what was happening with the graphic “today,” but that, too, might correspond to the historical analysis in *Of Grammatology* of the specificity of the end of the book and the influx of a new regime of writing in the expanded field.

One aspect of Valéry’s category of the graphic, so congenial to Derrida, is that it entails both writing and drawing, each of which is, in Valéry’s hands, a mode of tracing, something that, again, cannot be reduced simply to copying. Tracing in its mode as drawing is often, for Valéry, mimetic in some straightforward sense of phenomenal representation: some black lines can be configured to present a picture of something that can conjure, say, an actual or plausible boat, drunken or not, or a person or an opera house with opera-goers. (Fig. 4) A sketch, though, is usually sketchy: it gives little of the relative plenitude of photographic presentation or of paintings where every bit of the field is saturated, even if only by unformed paint. Valéry’s lines are often just (or substantially so) outlines, not as extreme as, say, the drawings of John Flaxman, but still tending to the sketchy. (Fig. 5)

²³ Quoted in modified fashion from Paul Valéry, *Leonardo, Poe, Mallarmé*, vol. 8 of *The Collected Works of Paul Valéry*, ed. Jackson Matthews, trans. Malcolm Cowley and James R. Lawler (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1972), 152–53. Valéry’s final sentence continues a little longer than as presented in the quotation and translation. We quote from Alan Bass’s translation from Derrida’s text which is more precise than the Princeton Valéry edition. The key term *graphique* is italicized in Valéry’s original and, moreover, is misleadingly translated in the Princeton edition as *graph*, which is quite another and less general thing. Also, where the Cowley/Lawler translation has for Valéry’s *double* (already italicized in the original) *overlaid*, Bass restores it with *doubling*. Derrida cites this in his wide-ranging, suggestive essay, “Qual Quelle: Valéry’s Sources,” in *Margins of Philosophy*, trans. Alan Bass (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1982), 292–93.

²⁴ For a good account of the stance of “antiphilosophy” in Valéry, see Jacques Bouveresse, “Philosophy from an Antiphilosopher: Paul Valéry,” *Critical Inquiry*, vol. 21, no. 2 (winter 1995), 354–81.



5. Paul Valéry, *Femme couchée s'appuyant sur le coude* [Reclining Woman Resting on Elbow], no date. Graphite sketch. Reproduced in: Paul de Man, *Les Dessins de Paul Valéry* (Paris: Les Éditions universelles, 1948), page XCVII.

The primary mode of tracing, Valéry maintains in the Degas book, is mimetic. (He praises Degas for his peculiar gift for mimicry tout court.²⁵) But the eye also already traces, Valéry contends, in advance of the hand—and between these two tracings lies a gap. De Man makes plain what is surely also the case: that Valéry's line and other drawings are sometimes more thetic or hypothetical than mimetic, inventions in the sense of things made up.²⁶ They pose and expose. Expositions.

...

²⁵ Valéry, *Degas Manet Morisot*, vol. 12 of *The Collected Works of Paul Valéry*, 54–57.

²⁶ On the general status of the mimetic in the arts and which arts, according to Valéry, are paradigmatically mimetic and which not, see the well-informed thesis by Raoul Pelmont, *Paul Valéry et les Beaux-Arts* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1949). Valéry has a capacious, roughly Aristotelian sense of mimesis, the principal nonmimetic art being architecture.

How does de Man proceed in this essay in the face of Valéry's writing and drawing, the two tracings that co-exist and sometimes overlap? His *modus operandi* is largely immanent and phenomenological, with the prose leaning toward the lyrical—admittedly a more common trait in French critical writing than in its Anglo-American analogues. Phenomenology was much in the air and on the page in the years de Man was at work on Valéry. It was even—and at a high level—on the air waves. In 1948, the same year de Man published his edition of Valéry's drawings, Maurice Merleau-Ponty delivered a series of six radio talks (seven were written) on "Le monde de la perception," the sixth of which was devoted to art and perception and invoked Valéry at several points.²⁷ Art, in one of Merleau-Ponty's earliest treatments of a subject that would much preoccupy him later on, comes across as not paradigmatically imitative but as constructive, as constituting and responding to a world rather than reproducing it. Art is also often, for Merleau-Ponty, itself a kind of phenomenology, a heightened mode of perception. As he maintains near the outset of his major book that took shape at the end of World War II, *The Phenomenology of Perception*, "Phenomenology is as painstaking as the works of Balzac, Proust, Valéry, or Cézanne—through the same kind of attention and wonder, the same demand for awareness, the same will to grasp the sense of the world or of history in its nascent state."²⁸ Thus, a phenomenological inquiry into such art would be structured as a phenomenology of a phenomenology, a (meta-)perceptual account of perception. This last point is proposed by Maurice Blanchot in comments on the proximity of Valéry's work to the practitioners of phenomenology: "there is in Valéry, as in the phenomenologists, the same use of immediate observations, a similar effort to grasp existence through a fundamental description and a shared concern to escape the antagonisms of traditional philosophy by deeming them characteristic dispositions of human reality and not problems that must be resolved. It is even possible that certain remarks by Paul Valéry on art find their analogues in studies of phenomenology."²⁹ To the extent that phenomenology effects an *epoché*, a bracketing or suspension of received ideas and habituated perceptions in an effort to attend to sheer, unencumbered perception, one effect of the ravages and manifold traumas of then recent history and histories—different ones and differently felt—could be seen as prompting a renewal or furthering of endeavors in the mode of phenomenology. One can understand the desirability at the time for a kind of *tabula rasa*, for which phenomenology offered a methodological medium. In principle, phenomenology was not political, except perhaps in a loose or broad sense, in that it programmatically went against inherited tradition and was thus literally not "conservative." In practice, phenomenologists leaned to the left or, a little less commonly,

²⁷ A slightly expanded version of the radio talks was published in French that year as *Causeries*. It was reprinted as *Causeries 1948* (Paris: Seuil, 2002) and is available in English as *The World of Perception*, trans. Oliver David (New York: Routledge, 2004). Jacques Lacan, in a memorial tribute to Merleau-Ponty, contends that Merleau-Ponty's phenomenological explorations and critique of the aesthetic were far more than a codicil to the understanding of how consciousness works. See Jacques Lacan, "Maurice Merleau-Ponty," *Les temps modernes* 17 (1961), 184–85.

²⁸ *Phenomenology of Perception*, trans. Donald Landes (New York: Routledge, 2012), 22. De Man invokes Merleau-Ponty in his essays from the early 1950s.

²⁹ Maurice Blanchot, "Poetics," in *Faux Pas*, 121.

to the right.³⁰ In the hands of a Merleau-Ponty it tilted decisively left, even if not every aspect of phenomenological inquiry has or had a political valence. In Martin Heidegger it leaned the other way, with the proviso that the political was not usually, much less always, clearly articulated with the phenomenological. Heidegger would be robustly received, even transformed, on the Left, broadly speaking, in the aftermath of the war; for example, in the work of Jean-Paul Sartre, Herbert Marcuse, and René Char, to say nothing of the host of intellectuals, especially French, who would turn to him in the 1960s. To maintain that aspects or elements or methodological procedures found in or derived from Heidegger could not usefully be taken up by left-wing or left-leaning thinkers is empirically false. Heidegger's reactionary politics hardly permeate every aspect of his thinking.

The texture of de Man's essay has affinities with the emergent strains of phenomenology in literary criticism, then just recently in full swing, as with (fellow Belgian) Georges Poulet and Jean-Pierre Richard, whose work had its precedents in the writings of Albert Béguin and Marcel Raymond.³¹ Jean Starobinski, who also has affinities with this group of critics, some of whom would be dubbed members of the Geneva School, was de Man's exact contemporary. Like these critics—many of them weaned on Henri Bergson, Edmund Husserl, and Heidegger—de Man tried to get at the texture of what went on in Valéry's written and artistic production from within, a production that was so attentive to attending to itself. These critics tended to want to (re)construct the perceptual and conceptual universe of a writer's oeuvre, sometimes the whole of what came to be called the mythological universe, or a world as channeled through some organizing principle such as Poulet's master category of time.³² The capitalized abstractions (Chance, Appearance, Self...) in de Man's account, reproducing those of Valéry, are some of the conceptual coordinates that organize this universe and, in effect, unfold in the proliferating series of reflections and sketchy graphic works under scrutiny. Literary phenomenologists also often want to convey somehow the feel of an author's work or of individual texts as well as the experience of reading them, for which some kinds of critical writing are more apt than others.

³⁰ On the conjunction of phenomenology and Marxism in French thought of the postwar period, Derrida notes the importance of Trần Đức Thảo's *Phénoménologie et matérialisme dialectique* (Paris: Éditions Minh Tan, 1951). See Jacques Derrida, "The Time of a Thesis: Punctuations," trans. Kathleen McLaughlin, in *Philosophy in France Today*, ed. Alan Montefiore (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1983), 38. On the spectrum of phenomenologists from left to right, perhaps some—Paul Ricoeur?—can be said to have occupied a center.

³¹ De Man reviewed Marcel Raymond's landmark *De Baudelaire au surréalisme* in the pages of *Le soir (volé)*. It is one of relatively few critical texts—as far as we can tell—that are invoked in the wartime writings and then later in those of the established literary critic writing from the mid-1950s to the early 1980s.

³² Excellent examples of this kind of work in American literary criticism are to be found in the early work of J. Hillis Miller; for example, his *Charles Dickens: The World of His Novels* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1958); and the various chapters, but perhaps most thoroughly so in the one on Thomas De Quincey, of *The Disappearance of God: Five Nineteenth-Century Writers* (New York: Schocken, 1963).

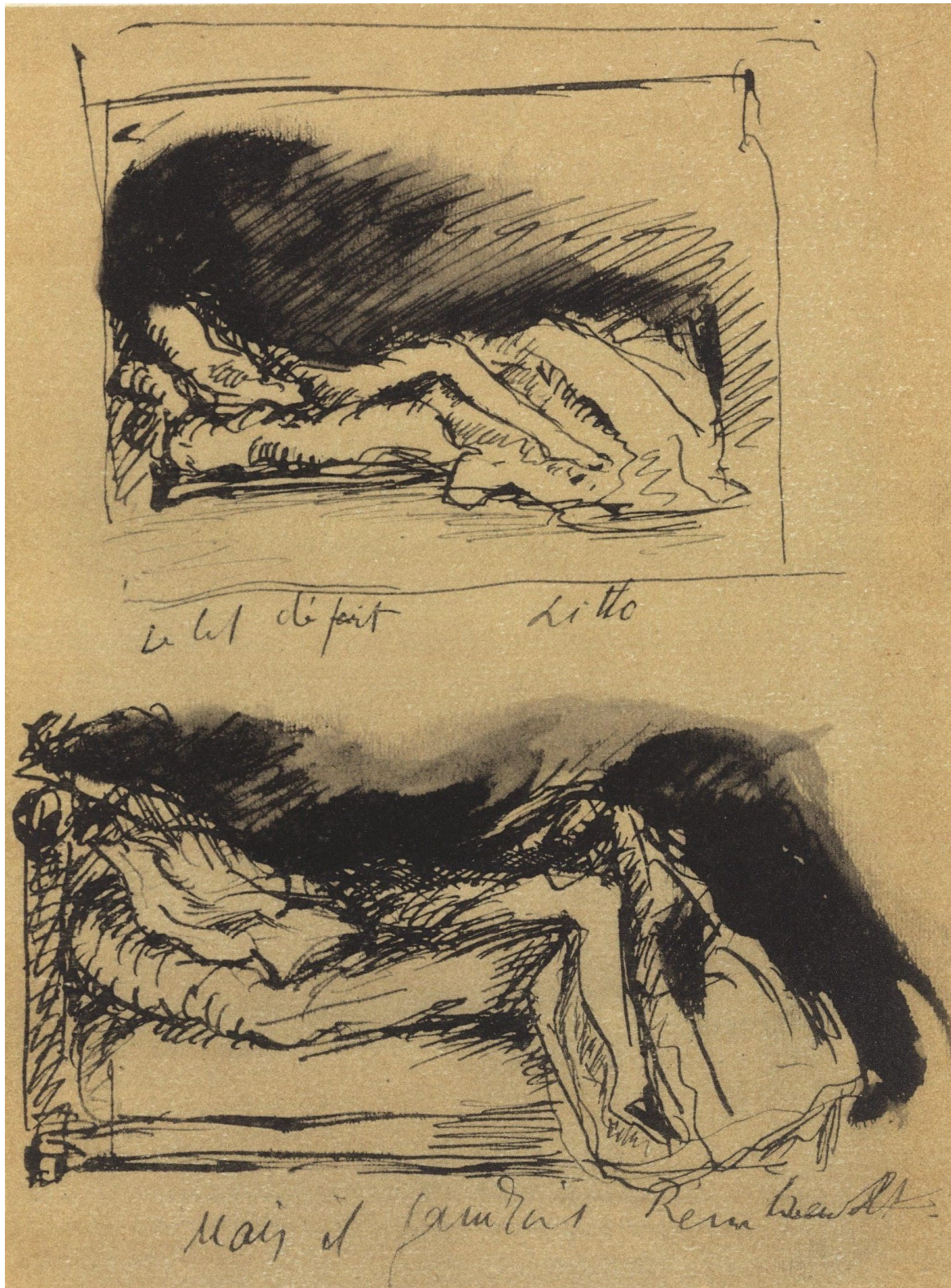
The young or youngish de Man (from his twenties into his thirties) learned a lot from Heidegger. When he started writing essays again in the early 1950s, de Man in general tended to “bracket” the political as a matter for analysis or discussion, which is, in its content and texture, a marked departure from the sorts of writing he did during and even before the war. In the essays of the late 1940s onward, history (other than literary history) is not much broached, or, if so, it is invoked abstractly, as in the powerful end to the essay on “Anthropomorphism and Trope in the Lyric.”³³ In the early essays, when de Man confronts history as such, he pauses to express skepticism about activism and the possibilities for political action more generally, as in an essay on William Wordsworth, not least within the orbit of the French Revolution. Or, in a general account (somewhat phenomenological) of John Keats, de Man comments, likely in ventriloquizing fashion, on Keats’s sense of the relentless negativity of history.³⁴

Primarily a literary intellectual, de Man draws on the resources of phenomenological thinking first and foremost as it regards temporality. He mobilizes temporality as a not-so-blunt instrument to counter complacent and totalizing sorts of literary criticism, a tendency that would culminate in his landmark “The Rhetoric of Temporality,” where temporality, as constitutive of literary allegory, corrodes any claims on behalf of the symbol—allegory’s opposite number—to totality and the organic. More generally, the appeal to temporality works as a kind of lever to critique this or that entity that proposes itself as, or is thought by readers to be, free from the vicissitudes of time. De Man was equally suspicious of a good many treatments of literary or poetic modalities, such as narrative and allegory, which he thought could not be considered aside from temporality, even when not historically referential.³⁵ But the concern is specifically, especially in the late 1940s and 1950s, with temporality not history. Much of de Man’s Valéry essay—as befits a phenomenological approach that depends on a certain bracketing of history and what one has inherited from tradition—is conducted in the

³³ The key notion is “historical modes of language power.” The final paragraph of the essay reads, “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,’ (room of eternal mourning where old death-rattles resound) 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.” Paul de Man, *The Rhetoric of Romanticism* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1984), 262.

³⁴ See, for example, the following in an essay on Wordsworth: “This history is, to the extent that it is an act, a dangerous and destructive act, a kind of hubris of the will that rebels against the grasp of time.” *Ibid.*, 56–57. De Man also notes how history takes for Keats the form of a tragedy without redemption and describes Keats’s sense of “a historical consciousness that recognizes and names the full power of negativity.” De Man, *Critical Writings*, 188.

³⁵ On the relation of history and allegory in later de Man, see the opening pages of “Pascal’s Allegory of Persuasion,” in *The Resistance to Theory* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1996), 51–69.



6. Paul Valéry, *Le Lit défait* [The Unmade Bed], no date. Pen and ink sketch with ink wash. Reproduced in: Paul de Man, *Les Dessins de Paul Valéry* (Paris: Les Éditions universelles, 1948), page LXIII.

present tense, in keeping with the usually present-tense mode of Valéry's notebooks. De Man would write a few years later, in an essay on "Montaigne and Transcendence," "His tense is exclusively the present: he moves unceasingly on the narrow ridge where no temporal destiny can accumulate... have we sufficiently understood the extraordinary fact that Montaigne never refers to his previous declarations?"³⁶

Though temporality is virtually by definition far less germane to static, non-time-based works of visual art, Valéry's thinking in general (and specifically about art) displays a relentless emphasis on process and procedure over product. It presumes and tries to do justice to the fluidity (sometimes literal) of things, to what is not fixed. *Idée non-fixe*, as it were.³⁷ And *non-idée non-fixe*. De Man's attention to temporality, even somewhat in his earliest postwar writing, seems congenial to the texture of Valéry's artistic production and shares the ethos of his thinking. Valéry is sensitive to the gap between the process of drawing—consuming the passage in and of real time—and what issues from it: a "fixed" object on paper. He understands that drawing's phenomenological immediacy determines its resistance to temporality at the moment a drawing, particularly a figurative drawing, takes on the more rigid structure of a tableau.

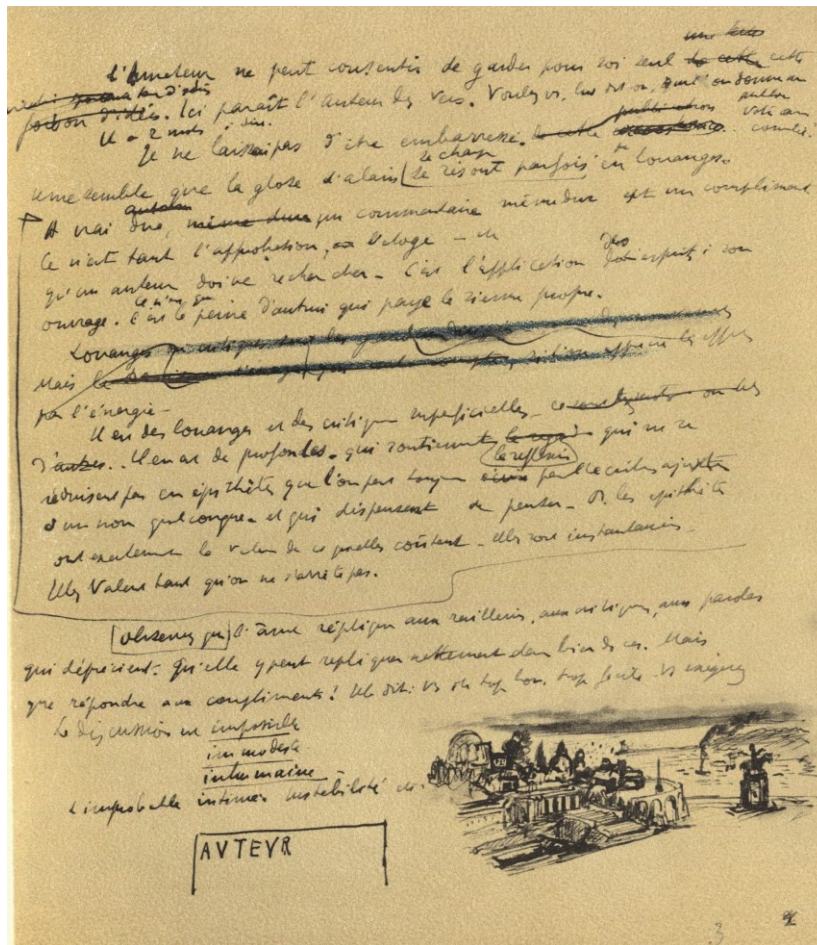
Valéry is sensitive to the difference between traces on paper forming a word and making a figurative form. Yet both remain importantly incomplete or underdetermined for Valéry. Cognizant of the procedures of his great predecessors such as Leonardo and Degas, he was primed to be acutely aware of the temporality of figuration. Figure drawings by Leonardo, as Alexander Nagel makes clear, carry identifiable yet transferable allusions to their thematic referents and as such "lent themselves to recombination because they were, so to speak, naturally underdetermined."³⁸ This underdetermination is fitting to Valéry's ethos and practice of drawing, as well as to his sense of how such works can function for those contemplating them. Valéry claims in the opening proposition of *Choses tues* (1930): "L'objet de la peinture est indécis" (The object of painting is undecided). (Fig. 6)

In his introductory essay, de Man by and large accepts and endorses a good many of Valéry's procedures, with which he appears to be broadly in sympathy. He, once again, takes on Valéry's practice, one that subtends so much of his discourse, of capitalizing certain grand nouns (Appearance, Chance, and the like). These nouns can come across as allegorical forces—as concrete as any virtue or vice in Edmund Spenser. In part they can be personified (if that is the right term for it), because Valéry hardly considered these huge abstractions really to be (mere) abstractions, like *esprit*, a word that in translations of Valéry suffers by being rendered as either *spirit* or *mind*, rather like George Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel's *Geist* or the *Geist* of Leo

³⁶ De Man, *Critical Writings*, 11.

³⁷ One of Valéry's books was entitled *Idée fixe*.

³⁸ Alexander Nagel, "Structural Indeterminacy in Early-Sixteenth-Century Italian Painting," in *Subject as Aporia in Early Modern Art*, ed. Alexander Nagel and Lorenzo Pericolo (Farnham, UK: Ashgate, 2010), 24.



7. Paul Valéry, *Page de manuscrit, "Le Cimetière marin"* [Manuscript page, "The Graveyard by the Sea"], no date. Pen and ink drawing. Reproduced in: Paul de Man, *Les Dessins de Paul Valéry* (Paris: Les Éditions universelles, 1948), page LXXI.

Spitzer's *Geistesgeschichte*.³⁹ The capital is a little sign of material informing spirit, a crucial category for him, not least as *esprit* kept undergoing one crisis after another, with the world wars he endured being only the most spectacular and far-reaching of them.

Aside from the immense hiatus from publication after the death of Mallarmé, Valéry was indefatigable in drafting texts, including the voluminous *cahiers*, on which he worked apparently for fifty or so years, rising every day at 4 a.m. to write, draw, and think in solitude. What good are notebooks? For Valéry, as for his polymath predecessor Leonardo, the notebook was a medium to float an idea, outline a hypothesis, sketch a thing one had seen, or to set out reflections that would be complete in themselves or left hanging. In Valéry's case, the notes tend not in the first instance to be designed to be recalled or elaborated in the future.

³⁹ Fredric Jameson proposes that one translate Hegel's *Geist* as *collectivity*. Fredric Jameson, *The Hegel Variations* (London: Verso, 2010), 75. On the more general, not-so-abstract character of abstraction, see Paul Valéry, "Poetry and Abstract Thought," in *The Art of Poetry*, vol. 7 of *The Collected Works of Paul Valéry*, ed. Jackson Matthews, trans. Denise Folliot (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1989), 52–81. De Man makes clear in his essay how, in the spirit of Valéry, abstraction can, in its giving of contours and form, distill a thing or idea to its essence. Such abstraction is not at all opposed to the presentation of the concrete (xxii, 31).

They trace lines of reflection and self-reflection.⁴⁰ They record ideas, observations, speculations. They are not really prolegomena to anything. (Fig. 7)

De Man tries to capture some of the feel of Valéry's aesthetic, writerly, graphic production—all in keeping with the latter's notion of an "infinite aesthetic"—by writing in a way that suggests something of the proliferating mode of Valéry's thinking via a figure of speech that would much later be an object of scrutiny in de Man's reading of Baudelaire: enumeration, especially of a sort that suggests things going on and on.⁴¹ The following example unfolds after de Man's invocation of the harbor that had so captivated Valéry during his youth: "The spectacle's unpredictability, its apparent chaos, the gestures and operations of machines, the bustle of traffic, the movements and maneuvers of the ships—everything distracted him, amused him, gave him pause" (xv, 27–28). The sentence has a characteristic Valéryan/de Manian list punctuated by a dash. For a moment one does not know where things will go or end, but then the word *everything* summons just that, conjuring a totality that cannot be spelled out, after which the sentence about unpredictability goes on—and off—in unpredictable fashion. Or regarding the figure of the serpent that riddles and shapes so many of Valéry's drawings, de Man asks of the "artist," "Did he himself see anything here but a living line which breathes, expands its loop of flesh, winds, unwinds, stretches, embraces a column, enlaces a torso, rears back and darts its tongue?" (xvii, 29).

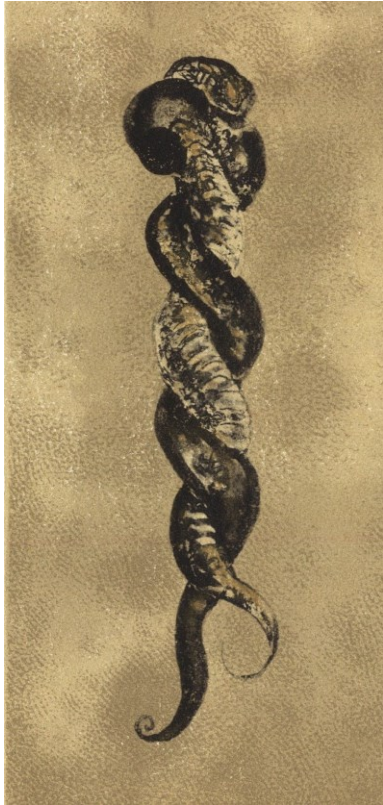
These enumerating sentences do not set things out in relation. They are discontinuous lists, with little or no articulation. They rely on the classic figure of *accumulatio*, and these accumulations are not totalized.⁴² This sort of enumeration conveys something of the improvised, speculative, hypothetical character of Valéry's graphic production. Once again, they pose rather than impose. Expositions. Of the exposed.

De Man does not explain to the reader the art-historical or phenomenological reasons for a persistent presence of serpents nor of the coiling organic forms in Valéry's notebooks.

⁴⁰ Despite the real and announced priority for process over product, Valéry came to be much preoccupied with organizing, retroactively, the notes into thematically grouped sections and enlisted other people in the effort.

⁴¹ See de Man's analysis of how the word *comme* (like, as) functions in Baudelaire, in Paul de Man, "Anthropomorphism and Trope in the Lyric," in *The Rhetoric of Romanticism*, 248. De Man notes that this uncommon *comme* is "the most frequently counted word in the Baudelaire canon" and is in some cases linked to "the expansion of infinite things" (*expansion des choses infinies*), a nonrestricted, open-ended set of possibilities of relation, consistent with Baudelaire's pronounced interest in infinity and something congenial to Valéry's "infinite aesthetics." Baudelaire was among the handful of Valéry's most prized predecessors.

⁴² The much older de Man's "Shelley Disfigured" virtually concludes with just about the most radical positing of nonrelationality (albeit couched as if it were a point made by Shelley's "The Triumph of Life") anywhere in literary criticism: "*The Triumph of Life* warns us that nothing, whether deed, word, or thought, or text, ever happens in relation, positive or negative, to anything that precedes, follows, or exists elsewhere, but only as a random event whose power, like the power of death, is due to the randomness of its occurrence." See Paul de Man, "Shelley Disfigured," in *The Rhetoric of Romanticism*, 122.



8a (left). Paul Valéry, *Serpents*, no date. India ink heightened with gold. Reproduced in: Paul de Man, *Les Dessins de Paul Valéry* (Paris: Les Éditions universelles, 1948), page XCI.

8b (below). “Un noir serpent...” [“A Black Serpent...”], no date. Watercolor. Reproduced in: Paul de Man, *Les Dessins de Paul Valéry* (Paris: Les Éditions universelles, 1948), page LXXXIX.



On the one hand, the generic links of the serpentine forms in the poet's sketches accompanying his poems, such as "La jeune parque" or "Le serpent," charged with biblical symbolism of temptation and sin, feminine or otherwise, might have been obvious for those who purchased or browsed this album from 1948.⁴³ (Fig. 8a and Fig. 8b) On the other hand, any allusion to the paramount role of the *figura serpentinata* in Renaissance theory of art and of the deliberate appropriation by Valéry of the serpentine line's power as an energy-giving mechanism of two-dimensional form might have been lost on de Man. Starting from Giovanni Paolo Lomazzo's *Trattato dell'arte della pittura, scoltura et architettura* of 1584, which considered the extreme contortion of the human figure associated with its pinnacle in Michelangelo's work as corresponding to the exuberance of the artist's energy and a departure from the rational system of representation based on proportions, the *figura serpentinata* became a formal device and means of demonstrating emotional states of characters. Through the Italians, Rubens, and Rembrandt, it passed to the eighteenth-century classicists and some artists of the romantic era, yielding to some groundbreaking moments in aesthetic theory, such as Gotthold Ephraim Lessing's treatise on the ancient, rediscovered Laocoön and William Hogarth's articulation of the serpentine line in *The Analysis of Beauty*.⁴⁴ Valéry draws on this rich tradition for his *dessins*, ranging from the roughly representational to the downright allegorical. (Fig. 9)

Most of Valéry's drawings are figurative and representational. Prompted by experience—but not to the exclusion of powerful models such as Degas, Édouard Manet, and, explicitly, Rembrandt—Valéry discerns and produces figuration(s), figuration(s) that in the process of drawing or etching may dissolve in abstraction. Yet consider the intriguing suggestion in the long passage from Valéry's *Leonardo* quoted by Derrida above; namely, that the tracing of the graphic takes the form of *doubling* what already takes the form of forms: "curves, surfaces, and diagrams that translate properties into forms." It is as if nature, anticipating the aesthetic, is a world of Kantian forms in advance of its doubling in art.⁴⁵ And this is what the eye traces in advance of the hand's nonidentical tracing.

⁴³ In the same year as de Man's Valéry publication, *La revue Française* dedicated to Valéry a special issue. Pierre du Colombier's essay "Paul Valéry et les arts d'imitation" situated Valéry's work under the rubric of amateur art-making by a writer, comparing Valéry's polymath attitude to the arts to that of Goethe, another amateur draftsman. Citing Poussin's statement that there was no reason for a work of art without some "volonté," Colombier also linked Valéry to the classical French tradition of an intellectual and intentional approach to the art of painting, one exemplified by Nicolas Poussin. See Pierre du Colombier, "Paul Valéry et les arts d'imitation," *La revue Française*, 10 (July 1948), 59–63.

⁴⁴ See particularly David Summers, "Maniera and Movement: The Figura Serpentinata," *Art Quarterly* 35 (1972), 269–301.

⁴⁵ Kant was officially more concerned with the beauty and sublimity of nature not art, but his examples belie that ambiguously announced position. Moreover, he does think systematically of art and nature in analogical relation.



9. Paul Valéry, *Homme lisant près d'une fenêtre ouverte*, Extrait de "*Poésie*" Paris 1928. [Man Reading by an Open Window, Excerpt from "Poetry" Paris 1928.], no date. Etching. Reproduced in: Paul de Man, *Les Dessins de Paul Valéry* (Paris: Les Éditions universelles, 1948), unmarked page [CVII].

Writing and drawing (with which de Man says Valéry was obsessed) are both executed—one could almost say driven—by the hand. And the hand is far from being, for Valéry, one body part among others. De Man observes, in signature, enumerative fashion, "Hands haunted him. How many he drew: nervous and muscular, with knotty joints, with prominent veins, outstretched hands, clenched hands, hands lying flat, palm open, relaxed; hands with fingers pressed together between which threads a wisp of smoke" (xviii, 29). The hand is the bodily instrument of the mind's tracing. Jacqueline Lichtenstein reminds us, in a talk on the occasion of the Musée d'Orsay's exhibition revolving around Valéry's book *Degas, danse, dessin*, of the pertinence, for Valéry, of Leonardo's dictum that painting is a *cosa mentale*, a mental affair.⁴⁶ De Man observes how "Drawing, with its abstract means, seemed to him [Valéry] the mode of expression most likely to obtain a fusion of a form, a substance, and a thought" (xxii, 31).

The hand is hardly, for the history of art and for art history, one body part among others. From Albrecht Dürer's praying hands, to Hendrick Goltzius, to all the pointing fingers of so many John the Baptists, the hand is often singled out for special scrutiny.⁴⁷ And this was

⁴⁶ See Jacqueline Lichtenstein, "Valéry-Degas: Une poétique du dessin," YouTube video, 47:48, from a lecture on February 20, 2018, posted by "Musée d'Orsay," February 22, 2018, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=c6_fS5gsbdY (accessed July 13, 2020). Lichtenstein died a little over a year after delivering the lecture. We do not know if a print version of the talk is forthcoming.

⁴⁷ Among the many good studies of the phenomenon, see, for example, Leo Joseph Koerner, *Dürer's Hands* (New York: Council of the Frick Collection Lecture Series, 2006).

unusually so for Valéry.⁴⁸ He lamented the lack of a proper “treatise on the Hand,” though he would no doubt have known of *Éloge de la main*, by one of the era’s major art historians, Henri Focillon, who articulated a kind of study that would have been congenial to Valéry on the life of forms. (Valéry even worked directly with Focillon on one project, coauthoring the introduction to a collection of texts.)⁴⁹ In Valéry, the hand responds to the “dictates” of the conscious and unconscious mind, prompted by the tracing of the eye and/or speculation and the supplement of memory. The hand is the subject of drawing in more senses than one. It becomes, via the pervasive reflex in Valéry to reflexivity, the object of representation. The hand comes to draw hands.

Several of the plates in de Man’s selection of Valéry’s drawings feature just hands: sheer, autonomous, detached from any body that might accompany them. This is common enough in drawing exercises, but in Valéry such detachment corresponds precisely to his (phenomenological) sense of the body:

The thing itself is formless: all we know of it by sight is the few mobile parts that are capable of coming within the conspicuous zone of the space which makes up this *My Body*, a strange, asymmetrical space in which distances are exceptional relations. I have no idea of the spatial relations between “My Forehead” and “My Foot,” between “My Knee” and “My Back.” [...] This gives rise to strange discoveries. My right hand is generally unaware of my left. To take one hand in the other is to take hold of an object that is *not-I*. These oddities must play a part in sleep and, *if such things as dreams exist*, must provide them with infinite combinations.⁵⁰

Here Valéry repurposes, in Brechtian or Hegelian fashion, verses from the Gospel of Matthew (6:3), which in the King James Version read, “But when thou doest alms, let not thy left hand know what thy right hand doeth.” The Biblical injunction is recast as a basic phenomenological hypothesis, even if an enigmatic one. How exactly is any body part “aware” of another, especially ones as anatomically noncontiguous as the right hand and the left? Valéry transposes a somatic allegory for different states of ethical consciousness to the awareness of body parts as distinct, thus running counter to the sense of the body as a unified whole, often the very paradigm of organic unity, not least for a good deal of aesthetic theory, as in Plato and Longinus.

⁴⁸ On Valéry’s preoccupation or near obsession with hands and the hand, see the extensive analysis in Jean-Philippe Biehler, *Le goût de la main dans l’œuvre—Valéry*, with a preface by William Marx (Paris: L’Harmattan, 2017).

⁴⁹ Valéry cowrote, with Focillon, the introduction to *Correspondance I: Pour une société des esprits* (Paris: Institut International de Coopération Intellectuelle, 1933). The volume was published in both French and English. The joint introduction is reproduced under the title “Toward a Correspondence,” in *History and Politics*, vol. 10 of *The Collected Works of Paul Valéry*, ed. Jackson Matthews, trans. Denise Folliot and Jackson Matthews (New York: Bollingen, 1962), 347–53.

⁵⁰ Paul Valéry, “Some Simple Reflections on the Body,” in *Aesthetics*, vol. 13 of *The Collected Works of Paul Valéry*, 36. Emphasis in the original.

In this leaf from Valéry, does the right hand know what the left hand is doing? Is it aware or not? Each is free of any body. The one is poised to draw or to write. The other holds a cigarette, a time-honored accompaniment to writing and thinking, a serpentine wisp of smoke rising from it.⁵¹ One is designated “the one.” The other is labeled “the other,” articulated with its other by a slender, perhaps tenuous “et” (and). This is how the body, for Valéry, typically appears to the mind: that is, the putatively organic whole is disarticulated.⁵² In effect, perception—in its phenomenological mode—detaches and disarticulates: because, in principle, it registers the things of the world and the mind in advance of their articulation or composition as parts of putative wholes. De Man would return to such an insight in his reading of the “Blessed Babe” passage in Wordsworth’s *The Prelude*. Wordsworth is there outlining, de Man suggests, a baby experiencing the parts of the mother’s body, in the first instance, as separate or detached, after which the baby must compose, as it were, the mother into a unified totality that one might call “mother.”⁵³ That is, for Wordsworth, the primal poetic activity.

...

What did it mean to take up Valéry and present his drawings in the early postwar era? Valéry at the time cut a huge figure on the intellectual and cultural scene in France and beyond. Upon Valéry’s death in 1945, Charles de Gaulle saw fit to hold national obsequies for the famous *homme de lettres*. This stature came only partly from his being a poet of much note, already part of the canon and soon to be the subject of countless *explications de textes* by generations of young students. Somewhat like T.S. Eliot, Valéry’s poetic output was circumscribed in terms of numbers of texts and even lines, but several of his poems became highly canonical. Like Eliot, he wrote a robust array of essays of an intellectual but not-so-technical sort, fitting for the role of a public intellectual. Like Eliot, he was well versed in the history of philosophy without writing in a philosophically technical mode.⁵⁴ Like Eliot, he cut a figure as a modernist whose political positions could lean to the right, even if Valéry was usually more progressive in his politics and less adventurous in his poetics.⁵⁵

⁵¹ On some of the relations between smoking and writing, see the pointed analysis by Richard Klein in his *Cigarettes Are Sublime* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1995), beginning with the reading of Italo Svevo’s *The Confessions of Zeno*.

⁵² This motif/insight will be of recurring importance for the later literary criticism of de Man, in essays such as “Aesthetic Formalization: Kleist’s *Über das Marionettentheater*” and “Autobiography as De-facement.” Both essays are collected in *The Rhetoric of Romanticism*, 263–290 and 67–82, respectively.

⁵³ Paul de Man, “Wordsworth and the Victorians,” in *The Rhetoric of Romanticism*, esp. 90–92.

⁵⁴ On the twin or parallel forces of Valéry and Eliot, see William Marx, *Naissance de la critique modern: La littérature selon Eliot et Valéry* (Arras: Artois Presse Universitaire, 2002). Eliot’s major statement on Valéry is his introduction to *The Art of Poetry*, vol. 7 of *The Collected Works of Paul Valéry*.

⁵⁵ For a provocative juxtaposition of Eliot and Benjamin, showing them to be rather closer than is usually supposed, see Robert S. Lehman, *Impossible Modernism: T.S. Eliot, Walter Benjamin, and the*

And what sort of figure, in broadly political terms, was Valéry for de Man to be writing about in these postwar years, given the differently checkered pasts of each and given that only a small, but not inconsiderable, portion of Valéry's writing was directly political?⁵⁶ It is not clear in what detail the positions and opinions Valéry held would have been familiar to de Man. The sprawling mass of the *Cahiers*, the record of Valéry's daily writing and sketching that occupied his mornings for decades, had not been published in anything close to their full form, but de Man clearly knew his way around some of them.⁵⁷ He would certainly also have known Valéry's major essays and numerous of his books of prose (including some of prose *and* drawings, such as the *Choses Tues* of 1930), likely without knowing some of the poet's more problematic pronouncements in the letters.⁵⁸ The full historical record available to us reveals a fraught past—from Valéry being in his early(ish) years on the wrong side of history as an anti-Dreyfusard; to his lamentable praise of Cecil Rhodes; to the admirable and perhaps gutsy eulogy for Bergson, delivered in 1941 while under Nazi occupation, Bergson having had to bear a yellow star up until his death. There is also the outrageous letter to André Gide from May 8, 1891, in which he expresses his hindsight envy of those in a position to fire on a group of demonstrating strikers.⁵⁹ Valéry was pointedly opposed to Adolf Hitler's regime and its destructive practices, but many think Valéry did not do enough to distance himself from the Vichy government. Adorno notes the more than passing nods to Benito Mussolini in Valéry's

Critique of Historical Reason (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2016). Benjamin is also, in his turn, much closer to Valéry than is acknowledged. He quotes Valéry a fair bit and prominently, foremost in the "Work of Art in the Age of its Technical Reproducibility." He completed, though, only one essay altogether focused on Valéry: Walter Benjamin, "Paul Valéry, on His Sixtieth Birthday," trans. Rodney Livingston, in *Selected Writings*, vol. 2, 1927–1934, ed. Michael W. Jennings, Howard Eiland, and Gary Smith (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1999), 531–35. Material from that essay is reprised in Walter Benjamin, "The Present Social Situation of the French Writer," trans. Rodney Livingston, in *ibid.*, 744–67. In Adorno's opinion, Benjamin, with respect to aesthetics, "probably learned more from Valéry than from anyone else." Adorno, *Notes on Literature*, 158. Benjamin describes himself in a letter to Gisèle Freund as someone who had long advocated for the work of Valéry and Gide. *The Correspondence of Walter Benjamin*, ed. Gershom Scholem and Theodor W. Adorno, trans. Manfred R. Jacobson and Evelyn M. Jacobson (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994), 617. Valéry was one of the prominent intellectuals who signed affidavits in support of Benjamin's bid for French citizenship in the last years of his life (before the bid became moot).

⁵⁶ The essays of Valéry that most directly address this topic are in *History and Politics*, vol. 10 of *The Collected Works of Paul Valéry*. Many of them have to do with the status of Europe.

⁵⁷ The *Cahiers* were soon to be fully available in mimeographed form. De Man had had dealings with Mme. Valéry and knew some people in Paul Valéry's circle(s). De Man had interviewed Valéry himself in 1942 in Brussels.

⁵⁸ *Choses Tues* (1930) seems to be one the texts de Man is referring to when talking of the ones punctuated by engravings that constitute a "relief" to the writing without illustrating it.

⁵⁹ *Correspondance André Gide—Paul Valéry* (Paris: Gallimard, 1955), 82–83. On the context, see Peeters, *Paul Valéry*, 76. Peeters is also illuminating and succinct on Valéry and the Dreyfus affair.

writings.⁶⁰ Régis Debray says with a bit of relief that Valéry “was not a collaborator,” but that is hardly a ringing endorsement of the wartime politics of a figure whom Debray otherwise finds so admirable and provocative.⁶¹ William Marx observes, to Valéry’s credit, that he managed to wrest the *Nouvelle Revue Française* from Vichy forces, though for the bulk of the war the journal partly founded by Gide was replaced by the progressive *Arche* and found its multiple centers of gravity in Francophone cities outside France.⁶² Valéry’s political history does not lend itself to a coherent, unified profile.

Still, the composite, if contradictory, picture of Valéry as a political animal is roughly that of a classicist near-aesthete with a predilection for aristocracy and a disdain for “the people,” together with a fierce individualism, some anarchistic tendencies, and a near-contempt for political parties.⁶³ Valéry himself notes, once again, how, “On m’a toujours traité de réac,” and maybe, again, in resisting this charge, he was protesting a little too much, even if that single appellation is peculiarly reductive and misleading.

De Man, in his introduction, “brackets” Valéry’s political history, despite the robust public record of Valéry’s thoughts on any number of charged topics, such as the nation, dictatorship, and the like. Such “background” or context might have been, in its outlines, plausible for an introduction, even if it might not explain much about the texture of the *dessins* presented in the book, but it stops short, probably, of being required for a book for the general reader. De Man was usually more concerned—and comfortable—with matters of temporality than of history. One of his earliest substantial postwar essays has the ringing title “The Temptation of Permanence.” In that essay and in another of the same era, “Montaigne and Transcendence,” de Man insists on the force of temporality (and thus nonpermanence) for human beings and their endeavors, including art. Like so many French intellectuals, de Man learned to think about temporality at least partly from the Heidegger of *Sein und Zeit*. What de Man knew of Heidegger’s political activity as, say, his service as rector of the University of Freiburg, is now impossible to ascertain. He likely knew the broad outlines of Heidegger’s posture, though it is striking that even some intellectuals with impeccable Resistance credentials, such as Char, or a fierce opponent of the Nazis such as Paul Celan, were not deterred from a serious engagement with Heidegger’s thinking. Celan, for one, could, sooner or later,

⁶⁰ Adorno, *Notes on Literature*, 139.

⁶¹ Debray notes this in a filmed conversation about his then recent book, *Un été avec Paul Valéry* (Paris: Éditions des Équateurs, 2019): “Régis Debray—Un été avec Paul Valéry,” YouTube video, 1:04:58, posted by “libraire mollat” on June 8, 2019, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kA2zVXRWnoc> (accessed July 13, 2020).

⁶² William Marx, “De quoi est Valéry le nom?,” *Valéry Kenkyu—Bulletin japonais d’études valéryennes* 7 (2017), 17–25.

⁶³ We find the best general account of Valéry’s aesthetic and political politics, as it were, to be Adorno’s, though there is much to recommend in the work of Peeters as well. Some of the dedicated Valéry scholars seem to be apologists in excess of the historical record. This seems to be the case even for someone who knows the Valéry corpus backward and forward. See Nicole Celeyrette-Pietri, “Politics, History and the Modern World,” in *Reading Paul Valéry*, ed. Paul Gifford and Brian Stimpson (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 236–50.



10. Paul Valéry, *Le Bureau de Valéry* [Valéry's Desk], no date. Pen and ink drawing. Reproduced in: Paul de Man, *Les Dessins de Paul Valéry* (Paris: Les Éditions universelles, 1948), page LIII.

be profoundly disappointed (or more) with the philosopher's politics even as *Sein und Zeit* became one of the most closely read (to judge from the markings) of the books in his library. Perhaps paradoxically, drawing on Heidegger to aid one's thinking was, in the postwar period, not nearly as charged a matter as it has become in recent decades.

Valéry himself often wants and claims to write in a mode above, beyond, and other than politics.⁶⁴ Though he takes countless explicit and implicit political positions throughout his voluminous works, published and unpublished—about women's suffrage, Poland, Quebec, the League of Nations, and especially Europe (including the very idea of it)—politics and even the political are often cast as a realm of naïveté and something rather circumscribed from which it makes sense to detach oneself. He sometimes describes himself as a monk, keeping to himself, even as one who knows the world is coming to an end.⁶⁵ He describes his as-if-

⁶⁴ De Man notes, in an essay from 1965, how in general Valéry “advocates a direct study of poetic creation, independently of historical and critical considerations.” See Paul de Man, “Modern Poetics in France and Germany,” in *Critical Writings*, 154.

⁶⁵ On Valéry's detachment and his relation to and thematization of history, see the searching essay by Werner Hamacher, “History, Teary: Some Remarks on La Jeune Parque,” *Yale French Studies* 74 (1988), 67–94. A perhaps inside joke lodged in the title of the essay is that *teary* approximates the

natural, as-if-fated regime this way: “J’étais crée pour m’amuser avec mes idées le matin, bavarder le soir, et point écrire” (I was created to amuse myself in the morning with my ideas, chat in the evening, and not to write at all).⁶⁶ This is rather a far cry from hunting in the morning, fishing in the afternoon, rearing cattle in the evening, and criticizing after dinner.⁶⁷ His most prized mode is solitary thinking, reflecting, writing, sketching. He withdraws to do so. He detaches himself. (Fig. 10)

One might have thought an introduction even just to Valéry’s drawings would include some sense of the broad historical context for Valéry’s relation to his surrounding world, not least regarding war-torn Europe of the preceding years and decades. Valéry had striking things to say on this last huge topic, such as one claim that would constitute a point of departure for some of Derrida’s reflections on Europe “today”: “What then is Europe? It is a kind of cape of the old continent, a western appendix to Asia. It looks naturally to the west. On the south it is bordered by a famous sea whose role, or I should say function, has been wonderfully effective in the development of that European spirit with which we are concerned.”⁶⁸ If in the phenomenological accounts of what the body feels or the eye sees (which is also to say, traces), the tendency is toward the absence of articulation, just sheer registering of what is or what appears, and the absence of a synthesizing intelligence to make sense of things, then in confronting what Valéry calls “the abyss of history” the opposite tendency prevails; namely, toward narratives small and grand (the state of Europe “today” is understood as framed by or folded into a teleological story) in which things make sense in the spirit of spirit. In Valéry’s phenomenological procedures, one begins with the material—or what the late de Man of the “aesthetic ideology” period calls “materiality,” a category summoned from a passage in Kant about registering things “just as we see it” (*wie man ihn sieht*) and merely “by what the eye reveals” (*was der Augenschein zeigt*).⁶⁹ But one leaps to the realm of spirit—

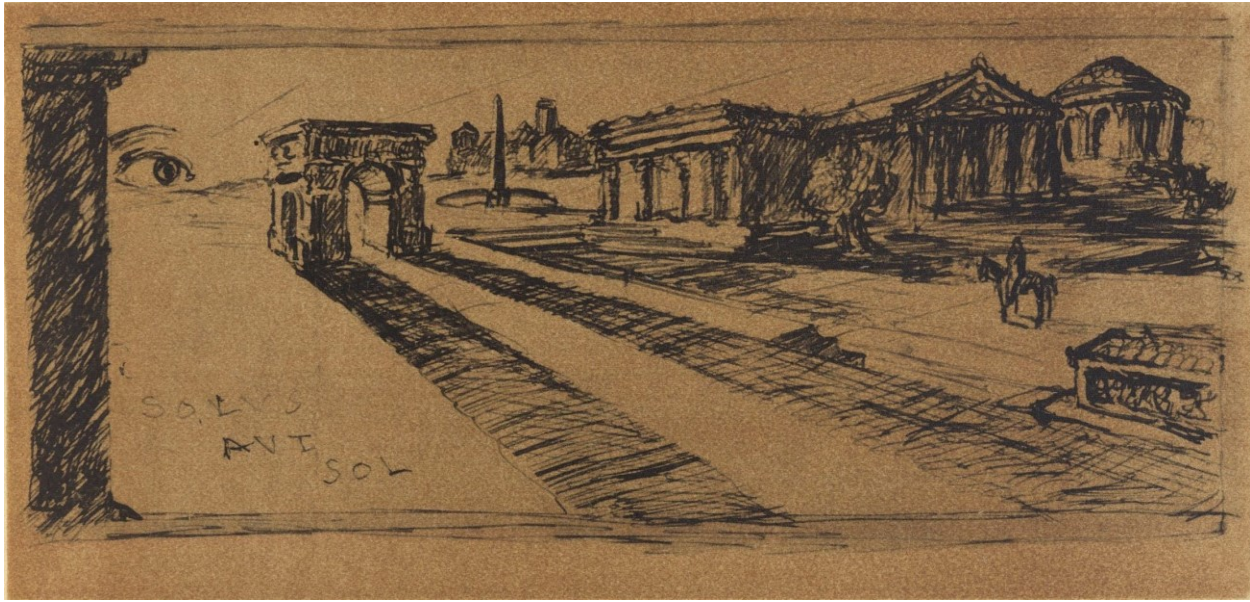
way de Man pronounced the word *theory*. But the word *teary* is massively motivated by the presence of tears, and the occasions for tears, in Valéry’s poetry.

⁶⁶ M. Bémol, *Paul Valéry* (Clermont-Ferrand: G. de Bussac, 1949), 308, quoted in Charles G. Whiting, *Paul Valéry* (London: Athlone, 1978), 9.

⁶⁷ This paraphrases Marx’s notorious characterization of the well-rounded, nonspecialist man on the far side of the capitalist division of labor. Karl Marx, with Friedrich Engels, *The German Ideology* (Amherst, NY: Prometheus Books, 1998), 53.

⁶⁸ Paul Valéry, “The European,” in *History and Politics*, 312. For Derrida’s thinking apropos this claim, see Jacques Derrida, *The Other Heading: Reflections on Today’s Europe*, trans. Pascale-Anne Brault and Michael B. Nass (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1992), 21. The *Heading* in Derrida’s title translates Valéry’s *cap* in the passage about to be cited and will then be related to the problematic of capital and the capital. Derrida executes a painstaking reading of the complicated ideologemes and presentation of ideas in Valéry’s pertinent texts.

⁶⁹ Kant, *Critique of Judgment*, 130 (para. 29, “General Remark”). For the translated phrases from Kant, we have quoted those de Man provides. Apropos this and other passages, de Man invokes the key notion of materiality to help make sense of the Kantian (and not only Kantian) aesthetic. T.J. Clark explores the pertinence of the category in relation to a certain materialism often invoked apropos Cézanne, in T.J. Clark, “Phenomenality and Materiality in Cézanne,” in *Material Events: Paul de Man*



11. Paul Valéry, *Ville déserte* [Abandoned City], no date. Pen and ink drawing. Reproduced in: Paul de Man, *Les Dessins de Paul Valéry* (Paris: Les Éditions universelles, 1948), page LV.

not that the passage is guaranteed—perhaps as a result of what Valéry termed his “perverse mania for trying possible substitutions.”⁷⁰ Reflection substitutes for and transforms perception, relentlessly. Sometimes it gives rise to a text or a drawing or both. (Fig. 11)

To what does Valéry withdraw? In January 1942 de Man met Valéry on the occasion of a lecture Valéry gave at the Palais des Beaux-Arts in Brussels. After the lecture and his interview with Valéry, de Man wrote the following in the pages of *Le soir (volé)*:

It is that, especially, in his private conversation, one feels in this writer a concern, not without anxiety, for his safeguarding of what is called the values of the spirit. His generation, he explained, witnessed a crisis the moment it found itself deprived of the principal points of support on which it had habitually based itself: science, religion, etc. But it managed to win its salvation in that it found a value which allowed it to concentrate its spiritual appetites. This value was art. For us, the same problem poses itself, but in a much more anguishing way. For instead of choosing values, we have preferred to hide this inner void behind a façade of factitious satisfactions and sterile occupations which mechanized civilization takes it upon itself to furnish us with in abundance. From this is born that nervous tension of the modern world, that grimacing and warped character of our life, the only remaining dynamism of which is that of an automatic agitation. One cannot without disastrous consequences lose all respect for certain forms of human intelligence which can only be exercised in calm

and the *Afterlife of Theory*, ed. Tom Cohen et al. (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2001), 93–113.

⁷⁰ De Man cites a foreshortened version of the phrase “perverse mania for substitutions,” generalizing the situation from a more circumscribed claim about Valéry’s resistance to the arbitrariness of history and novels when making truth claims. Gérard Genette discusses this in an excellent essay, “Paul Valéry: Literature as Such,” *Style*, vol. 33, no. 3 (fall 1999), 475–84, esp. 476.

and serenity. This respect Paul Valéry has preserved, and it remains the principal element of his preoccupations and acts. And this suffices to give this man, who [*sic*] some have tried to depict as frivolous and careless, a boundless gravity when he speaks of certain aspects of contemporary life. It proves that he remains in the service of what is best in man. It is also what gives his personality an irresistible and captivating attraction.⁷¹

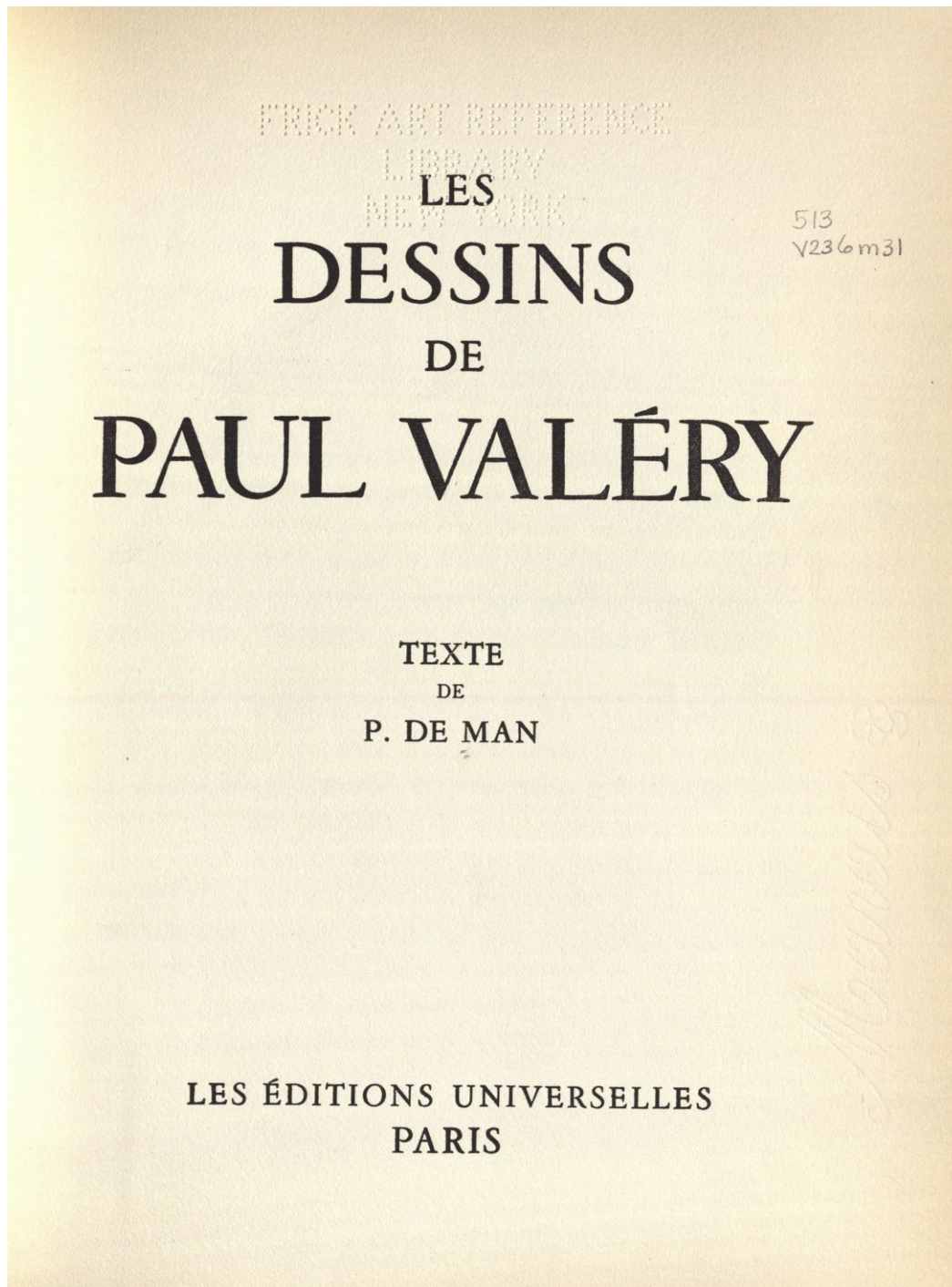
The principal moment de Man refers to in Valéry's itinerary is likely that of World War I and its aftermath and perhaps most particularly the historical conjuncture that prompted Valéry to draft one of his best-known essays, "The Crisis of Spirit," from 1919. Valéry, de Man is proposing, reacts to this crisis of the West and the decline of Europe by a turn to or a heightened engagement with art writ large and small. The elephant in the discursive room is the then current war, with Belgium and France occupied by the Nazis. De Man does not name the war as such, invoking instead the grander abstraction of "the modern world." But the argument is sharpened for de Man's audience: Valéry's problem is "our" problem, and "we"—de Man and his readers? compatriots? Europeans?—have done a bad job of things.

Even when de Man's wartime articles were not directly engaged with matters of history and politics, such as those devoted to musical concerts, they participated in the overarching ideological agenda of the occupier. The roughly phenomenological protocols of de Man's 1948 introduction to Valéry are a departure from the dominant modes of the wartime writings, so many of which had addressed politics, local and European, and especially the status of the nation. And the subject of de Man's one and only essay from 1943 to 1952 is art, visual art, the visual tending, in Valéry hands certainly, whose paradigmatic form was sketches of things around him, to be less directly or obviously or explicitly connected with the status of the occupied nation in wartime. The tendency in Valéry to perceptual registering and a certain abstraction in the drawings—without them being "abstract art"—is reprised in de Man's phenomenological account of the phenomenological.

Valéry, in his drawings and more, is a kind of escape artist. He escapes into art as a sort of resistance—though we do not mean this with anything like the weight of its contemporary political resonance—to any number of the deleterious and debilitating forces that produced the world wars, the rise and flourishing of Fascism, and more. De Man seems to have valued this tendency in Valéry and to have performed some critical version of it in his turn, dwelling on the life of forms, of contours, lines, and tracings, materialized but not historicized. The indefatigable activities of Valéry, emphatically subjective in their modalities, have nonetheless, if Adorno is right, through their very intensity and rigor (we are paraphrasing) a good measure of objectivity. To Adorno's mind, Valéry can virtually reconcile the two seemingly contradictory impulses that de Man characterizes at the outset as "a mind entirely oriented toward the exercise of itself, a mind which aspires to the universal" (ix, 25), performing something of a dialectic, a subject-and-object-oriented phenomenology that does considerable

⁷¹ Paul de Man, *Wartime Journalism, 1939–1943*, ed. Werner Hamacher, Neil Hertz, and Thomas Keenan (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1988), 182. The essay was published in the issue for January 10–11, 1942. We quote the English translation from Ortwin De Graef's fine study, *Serenity in Crisis, A Preface to Paul de Man 1939–1960* (Lincoln and London: University of Nebraska Press, 1993), 41.

justice to itself and even its world. No such grandeur or complexity can be ascribed to de Man's circumscribed project, which embraced a kind of phenomenology free of any attention to ideology or nation, even as he tried to do justice to Valéry's art. A good long while would pass—decades of relatively modest (if far-reaching) rhetorical analyses—before de Man would turn and return head-on to matters of aesthetic ideology, including readings of Kant, Hegel, and Friedrich Schiller, as well as ones of Søren Kierkegaard and Karl Marx forecasted. At long last he seemed to be, in his own terms, in a position to confront them again. In returning in 1948 to a public for publication, de Man turned to a writer and artist who had withdrawn into a world of an intense present preoccupied with perception and its subsequent tracings (drawing, writing) as provoked by the present, the traces of which then counted a world of forms and lines and thoughts into which de Man withdrew and wrote about—in the present—in his turn. (Fig. 12)



12. Title page for Paul de Man, *Les Dessins de Paul Valéry* (Paris: Les Éditions universelles, 1948).