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The Last Chapter of the History of the World

Puppet show

Heinrich von Kleist's *Über das Marionettentheater* is a text about the seductions and pitfalls of critical practice.¹ As Kleist's most well-known essay it has been variously interpreted, its enigmatic prose providing scope for numerous and mutually conflicting readings.² In itself, as a text, it is something of a curiosity. It cannot be easily assigned to any particular genre and is usually categorized separately from Kleist's fictional short stories, alongside his more obviously 'philosophical journalism' for the *Berliner Abendblätter*, where it was first published in 1810. If it is an essay, it is certainly an oddity. As an essay it follows a fictional structure and employs characters in a dialogue, the epistemological status of which is at best ambiguous. It would not be out of place in a novel and if it were not for the signposts offered by historical editing practices, it would be difficult to situate as a piece of writing. It is in fact, an example of precisely the sort of text that we are calling 'critical practice', another kind of writing, one that seems to present itself as both fact and fiction and neither fact nor fiction. It is every bit a theoretical text, Enlightenment philosophical writing looms large in the background, but one that uses that philosophy for another purpose, an end that is altogether different and ambiguous, even irresolvable in its uncertainty.

It is not that Kleist is a philosopher, although like Novalis, Schiller, or Rousseau, his writing ranges across different genres. Rather, Kleist is an artist who is immersed in philosophy as the wellspring of his writing. In fact, writing such as *Über das Marionettentheater* clearly demonstrates the historical specificity of the generic division between philosophy and its others. This segregation of genres is as much institutional as it is internal to the discursive resources of philosophy. The separation of philosophy from the idioms of literature is nothing other than the history of the becoming professional of a formalization of philosophy

as an academic meta-language. As such what is now thought of as normative philosophical writing is in fact a highly artificial, historical construction that contains within itself numerous aporia, elisions, expulsions, and contradictions. Philosophical writing did not always have such a seemingly clarity or purity that fenced it off from the other more obviously figurative, and so equivocal, genres of writing. In Kleist's texts there is no distinction to be made between the narration of concepts and the narration of characters, or between the exploration of a scene and the expansion of a thought.

We might read Kleist's short text as something of a philosophical puppet show. Kleist is by no means alone in this respect (one might think of Nietzsche's writing between aphorism and poetry, or, Plato's dialogical dramas). It could be said that the discursive division of philosophy and literature that begins in the eighteenth century with Kant and then Hegel is the struggle for the birth of a genre of writing that does not recognize itself as such. As we shall see, it is precisely Kant's failure to resolve pure and practical reason in an adequate understanding of aesthetic judgement that both ensures modern philosophy as a project is stillborn and simultaneously wins its future. The history of philosophy is the forgetting of its idiomatic status, and as such 'critical practice' is neither new nor to be easily distinguished from historic texts that elude the modern impulse for the designation of genres and vocabulary. This relatively recent mania for order betrays its own anxieties and ultimately provides the resources for the undoing of every such division, which is also an obfuscation. The relation between 'theory' and 'practice' is considerably uncertain and one should not assume too easily that such categorization is even in principle possible. Perhaps, such acts of conceptual enclosure are themselves merely the effect of particular moves within a motivated history of reading and misreading. Reading itself may be the only tool we have at our disposal to understand this partition by *going after* this diremption as both an affirmation of philosophy in its unique singularity and a shaking of idiomatic philosophy until it gives up its secrets and falls apart in our hands as another aporia of writing. While an understanding of critical practice will turn philosophy inside out, it is not an attempt to dissolve what lays claim to the 'properly' philosophical.

Kleist's text concerns a meeting between the narrator and Herr C, in the unidentified city of M, in the winter of 1801. C has recently been appointed as the first dancer at the city Opera, where he is enjoying great popular success. The narrator has spotted C several times at a puppet theatre in the marketplace. C tells the narrator that a dancer who wishes to improve his art can learn a lot from the marionettes. According to C, the movement of the puppets does not require the

puppeteer to pull or position every limb, rather every action is dependent upon the swing of weights, following the parabola of a pendulum, and moving of their own accord. Whenever the centre of gravity of the weight is moved in a straight line, the limbs follow a curve and if the strings are 'shaken by accident' the result is 'a kind of rhythmical activity similar to dancing'. The narrator wonders whether the puppeteer would have to be a dancer themselves to produce such results. C is of the opinion that, on the one hand, the line of the puppet's limbs was 'very simple' and would not require much skill on the part of the operator, but on the other hand, it could not be achieved 'wholly without feeling'. There is something 'mysterious' [*Geheimnisvolles*] about the line followed by the puppet because it is 'nothing other than *the way of the dancer's soul*' and by placing themselves in the centre of gravity of the marionette the operator was also dancing. The two friends discuss whether the production of movement in the puppet is not similar to the 'turning of a handle to play a barrel organ'. On the one hand, the movement of the puppeteer's fingers is said to be 'quite a subtle one, rather like that of numbers to their logarithms or the asymptotes to the hyperbola'. On the other hand, all 'intelligence' could be removed from the marionettes and their 'dancing' allotted entirely to the 'realm of mechanical forces'. The dancer asserts that if he could find a craftsman to make a puppet to his specifications it would be capable of feats unequalled by any trained dancer.

There is much more for us to take from this story (if that is what is) as the two friends continue their discussion and extend their theory of the marionette. However, it is worth commenting on this opening section of the text. The issue at debate here is whether the aesthetic effect of dance can be produced either by artistic means (by a puppeteer who dances) or by mechanical means (through the random generation of movement as a result of certain algorithmic potentials independent of a creator or author). The situation is multiple and complex. Firstly, the movement of the marionette is said to be the result of an 'accident' [*zufällige*, random] which results in 'a kind of rhythmical activity similar to dancing'. The narrator is concerned to make a distinction between what appears to be dancing, somewhere between accident and algorithm, and real dancing, which would be the outcome of a conscious effort on the part of a trained dancer. However, this text is entirely about putting into question any easy distinction between theory on the one hand and practice on the other, or at least the idea of practice as the conscious application of theory. In fact, what the two friends witness in the marketplace burlesque might not be dance at all, only the show of dance.

At the same time as Herr C suggests the movement of the marionettes not only provide the trained dancer with a theoretical means to improve their own practice,

but that in principle a suitably designed marionette would excel beyond anything 'any other trained dancer of the day, not even excepting Vestris himself, would be capable of equalling'. These are quite extraordinary puppets and this is no ordinary theory. The lines between theory and practice become remarkably blurred, as the puppets in the marketplace give rise to the speculation of a blueprint for a puppet to come, a machine that could outperform any human. This inquiry that the narrator sets up is independent of whether the description of the workings of the puppets would cut the muster in an engineering seminar. Experts might question the mechanical description of the operation of the puppets, but the accuracy or epistemological status of the account is not what is at stake here. Like the text that presents it, the description is somewhere, irresolvably, between fact and fiction, and theory and practice. As readers we are required to entertain both possibilities at once, holding them in a productive tension that makes it possible for us to accept the 'as if' scenario. It is as if such impossible puppets did exist for pursuing a line of argument that is itself never resolved as either an aesthetic theory or a good story. The line of the 'as if' is essential to both speculative thought in the form of philosophy and to the very possibility of fiction. In this sense both theory and practice are not temporal nodes in a line that moves from hypothesis to application, but are similar moments of risk in the presentation of impossibility as the grounds of the possible, in the form of the 'as if'.³

It is not so much a question of telling the dancer from the dance, as Yeats would put it, but telling dance from the appearance of dance through random mechanical interactions.⁴ However, if both produce the same aesthetic effect, who could tell the difference? The only difference that makes any difference for the narrator is that his friend plies his trade at the Opera while the puppets of the marketplace are 'for the entertainment of the common people'. As a true practitioner Herr C can see beyond the vagaries of taste as an aesthetic judgement that re-inscribes class divisions.⁵ Rather, he recognizes the potential of these puppets to upset all such hierarchies and distinctions by 'honouring this popularized version of a noble art [*Haufen erfundene*] with so much attention'. There is something of far greater significance at stake in the work of the marionettes than the narrator's facile concern with popular culture. The issue here is whether one can say with any certainty that there is any kind of bridge at all between theory and practice, and even if there were, what use would it be if the practical outcome could equally be achieved by the random chance of mechanical interaction. The movement of the marionette is not quite like the music that comes out of the barrel organ which is prescribed or programmed in advance by the perforated paper card or pimpled disk turned by

the cranking handle. There is said to be a subtlety and mystery in the operation of the marionettes, whose movements are parabolic and random rather than programmed. It is not a straightforward calculation, or at least it is something more than a computation. That excess appears in both the final outcome of the appearance of dance, and in the detachment of the puppeteer from the effect of their marionette. The little figure of the marketplace puppet, provides the friends and the reader with a puzzle that asks to be figured out, a puzzle that might be the very question of figuration itself. That is to say, the puzzle of the creation of meaning and its undoing, of all making and unmaking, of theory as the impossible condition of possibility of practice and equally as Novalis puts it the puzzle of how 'any theory that awaits practice would be impossible'.⁶

Kleist points to this difficulty in the even shorter, and in some ways more baffling, text 'Reflection: A Paradox' [*Von der Überlegung. Eine Paradoxe*] published in the same newspaper the week before *Über das Marionettentheater*.⁷ Here he questions the common assumption that one should spend a period of cool reflection before taking a particular course of action. Kleist suggests that the proper time for reflection 'is not *before* you act, but *after*'. Reflection in advance will only serve to inhibit and confuse, whereas reflection after the fact enables us to analyse our actions and to guide future behaviour. 'Life itself is a struggle with Fate', says Kleist somewhat melodramatically, and when in a struggle the wrestler cannot calculate in advance the use of their muscles and limbs, but must act as required in the moment. It is only afterwards that it might be useful to think back on which moves worked and which failed: 'A man must like that wrestler, take hold of life and feel and sense with a thousand limbs how his opponent twists and turns, resists him, comes at him, evades him and reacts: or he will never get his way in a conversation, much less in a battle'.⁸ The paradox of reflection is that it is only of use to us after we have acted, no theory can prepare us in advance for the moment in which we must act singularly, inventing as we go along in response to the unknown as it comes upon us. Another more successful Prussian soldier, general Helmuth von Moltke, later offered a similar perspective when he notes that 'no plan survives contact with the enemy'. Jean-Paul Sartre takes an analogous view of theory in a sporting context when he says 'in football, everything is complicated by the presence of the opposite team'.⁹ From soccer to wrestling or invading France, it would seem that theory has a complex relation to practice, as the boxer Mike Tyson puts it 'everyone has a plan 'till they get punched in the mouth'.

The relation of Theory to Practice is not one of calculation, application, or linear succession. Rather theory is at risk in every practice and the risk of every

practice. What the invention and improvisation of moments of practice risks is the truth of the theory that succeeds it. Theory by this reckoning is post hoc, an effect of, rather than the cause of, the practice it is said to prepare us for. The time of theory is the moment when the defeated wrestler lies flat on their back after a botched move. Theory is the reflection on the failures of practice, its errors and lacunae. As Kleist puts it, so that 'our powers of reflection may serve the purpose they were actually given us for, namely to bring to consciousness of what was wrong or unsound in how we acted and to regulate the feelings for other occasions in the future'. However, these occasions will not in themselves be future applications of a theoretical blueprint, rather they will further moments of invention and risk based upon the demands of an unknown future. In this sense theory is the future of practice, and simultaneously practice is the future of theory. Practice is only ever the theory of the future, while theory is only a preparation for its own risk and failure as practice.

If practice is the ruin of theory, it is because theory itself has always been ruined in advance by its constitutive relation to practice. The relation between theory and practice is beyond paradox; it is aporetic. No practice without theory and no theory without practice. But theory causes an impasse in practice. Kleist says it inhibits action, so theory must be ruined by action to be remade. Practice is what happens when theory gets punched in the mouth, but it is the repeated failure of practice that compels it to seek the advice of theory. No boxer, wrestler, football manager, or Field Marshal should stick their chin out without having theory in their corner. Theory is the result of its own repeated mauling as practice. There can be no future for theory without these defeats and no practice worthy of the name, one that is practising and learning from errors, without the necessary possibility of defeat. A practice without defeat is no practice at all, merely the mechanical fulfilment of an inevitable outcome. In such a situation there is nothing at risk and nothing that calls for reflection. There can be no theory under these circumstances. Victory produces no theory, for victory (absolute and without failure) would be the death of theory.

What is at issue in the discussion between the two friends in Kleist's text on the Marionettentheater is how far the appearance of dance on the part of the puppets can be attributed to algorithm and planning, and how much of it is independent of any such design and intention. Does the sweep of the dance imply the existence of a hidden hand directing the puppet show, or, are the marionettes the death and annulment of the puppeteer? In other words, what does the practice of the twirling puppets tell us about a theory of dance? Why does the Herr C, a primo ballerino, visit the marketplace over and over to

reflect on the art of the puppets as a means of improving his own craft? And in the example of the puppets, why does he foresee a future in which the perfect marionette would excel all human achievement in dance? While the dancer is human, the puppets are mechanical, they do not fear for the future, nor do they appreciate the aesthetic sweep of their exquisite parabolas. The inhuman dancer of the future would be the end of all human practice because they would have nothing to risk and nothing to learn. Their achievement would not depend upon the possibility of failure that defines the aesthetic judgement that Herr C cannot escape or avoid making. Only a god could be the Lord of this dance.¹⁰

The rest of Kleist's narrative goes on to outline three examples of the philosophical problems raised by the puppet show. Herr C tells the narrator of prosthetic legs made by English craftsmen for the limbless, allowing them to dance in a 'limited' way but with 'ease, grace and poise'. These craftsmen could, says C, construct the flawless marionette of his imagination. The super puppet would, however, be inhuman 'incapable of *affectation* [*Denn Ziererei*]' which occurs 'whenever the soul (*vis motrix*) is situated in a place other than a movement's centre of gravity'. In contrast the puppet would only respond to gravity and its limbs would be 'dead, mere pendula'. Herr C cites several examples of 'mistakes' [*Mißgriffe*] in notable stars of the ballet where the 'soul' [*die Seele*] is trapped in human contortion. What C means by this vaguest of metaphysical terms is not clear at this point, is he referring to the aesthetic effect of the dance on the viewer or the struggle to bring meaning to consciousness by the dancer? Does he mean the critical reflection of theory or the failures of practice? Can the two be so easily separated in this story? He says that such mistakes 'have been unavoidable ever since we ate from the Tree of Knowledge'. In other words, the fall from grace and innocence into a world of knowledge and questioning is the cause of both aesthetic dissatisfaction and practical failure, ever since Cherubs began to guard the locked gate to Eden, and to correct this 'we shall have to go all the way round the world and see whether it might be open somewhere at the back again'.

Herr C continues, that unlike human dancers the marionettes are 'resistant to gravity' [*antigrav*] pulled upwards by a force greater than the one attracting them to the earth, and when they 'glance' [*streifen*] the ground they are given 'a new impetus' [*augenblickliche Hemmung*] to rise to new heights. The human fall attaches us to the ground where we must 'rest' [*ruhen*] to recover from the exertion of the dance in 'a moment which clearly is not dance at all in itself'. That is to say what defines the human dancer is the impossibility of dancing. The human is weighted to the ground and in order to be human must interrupt

the dance with non-dancing. In fact, only the mechanical figure can truly dance. Herr C astonishes his interlocutor by suggesting 'it would be quite impossible for a human body even to equal the marionette. In dance, he said, only a god was a match for matter; and that was the point where the two ends of the round earth met' [*Nu rein Gott könne sich, auf diesem Felde, mit der Materie messen; und hier sei der Punkt, wo die beiden Enden der ringförmigen Welt in einander griffen*]. The restoration of the state of grace and innocence, or the perfect dance, cannot happen by sneaking in the back door to Paradise, but only in the impossible topology of an alternative universe in which the possibility of absolute knowledge without flaw or opening means that matter itself no longer matters. For humans as humans, the fall is permanent, and dance is impossible. Human dance can only ever be the failure of dance as choreography in ruins. One should not take the matter of practice too lightly, or, imagine that it as a simple restorative supplement to theory. Equally, no amount of theory will help us climb over the wall into Paradise. In fact, theory (questioning and the desire for knowledge) is the cause of our expulsion. The fall is merely an effect of theory. On these terms, the human condition would be one of fall, try again, fall again; and theory-practice would be a permanent parabasis not a sequential operation.¹¹ In a fallen state it would be increasingly difficult to distinguish theory from practice, the former protecting us from the banality of Paradise, the latter defining our aspiration to escape the inevitable limits of gravity. Success in this field would be inhuman, like the perfect marionette, and the end of theory, the last 'period of all human education' as Kleist's calls it.

The narrator tells the anecdote of a young man who loses his graceful ability to stand on one foot when he self-consciously repeats the action. In the end he becomes so critically aware that one by one he loses all his youthful charms within a year. Herr C responds with the story of a bear that had been trained to fence. The bear is able to parry any thrust with ease, while unlike a human fencer he makes no reaction to his opponent's feints designed to catch him off guard. Like the mechanical super puppet, the inhuman bear is said to excel any achievement, 'no fencer in the world can follow him in this – he did not even react: looking me in the eye, as though he could read my soul [*Aug in Auge, als ob er meine Seele darin lesen könnte*] in it'. The animal is more machine-like than the man, a reader without error, with an absolute knowledge of fencing. Fainting (falling to the ground) in dance and feinting in fencing are affectations only of the human, error and deception belong in the fallen state even if the human aspires to the dead perfection of the machine or the incorruptible instinct of the animal, as soul seeking to defy the uncircumventable law of gravity.¹² Even

if the human is also an animal and defined by their relation to the machine, the fencer is something other than the bear, and different from the marionette, both of which excel the human without ever achieving humanity. In this sense, the fallen state of theory-practice is neither purely machinic nor entirely instinctive. It is rooted to the ground just as it looks to the stars.

Herr C feels confident that he has defended his paradoxical position against the narrator's insistence that there is more grace in the human body than in a mechanical marionette:

You now have everything you need to understand me. We see that in the same measure as reflection in the organic world becomes darker and feebler, grace there emerges in ever greater radiance and supremacy – But just as two lines intersecting at a point after they have passed through infinity will suddenly come together again on the other side, or the image in a concave mirror, after travelling away into infinity, suddenly comes close up to us again, so when consciousness has, as we might say, passed through an infinity, grace will return; so that grace will be most purely present in the human frame that has either no consciousness or an infinite amount of it, which is to say either in a marionette or in a god.

This closing play to seal the argument with the narrator opens up as many questions as it shuts off. Herr C seems to suggest that it is true that the eclipse of reflection leads to the emergence of grace (like the question of 'soul' what are we to understand by this vague term? Is it cause or is it an effect?). However, that grace is never absolute. Perfection lies beyond infinity, in the supplement to the absolute, the room after the last chance saloon. In other words, it is a long way off and grace as it appears in the organic world can only ever be a semblance of grace, a parody of the absolute, which not even a journey to infinity will give us. Accordingly, grace lies where there is either no consciousness or in absolute consciousness, in the machine, the bear or in God. The fallen human has both consciousness and not enough of it, and can never be only a machine, must be other than the bear, and questioning of God's totalitarian wisdom. The being human of practice is then the failure of theory to close itself as absolute. Theory looks for the room after infinity in the knowledge that it will never find it. The feint of the aesthetic effect of the dancer or the artist is to persuade us that they have found it. But as Herr C says to the narrator only eating again from the Tree of Knowledge would allow us to fall back into the state of innocence and 'that is the last chapter in the history of the world'. A fall after the fall, a falling back that relinquished questioning, criticism and theory, would be the end of humanity,

the final chapter in history. This fall would be a more severe crash than the one that defined our humanity. A second fall into either non-knowledge or absolute knowledge would not be worth risking for the sake of the humanities, even if we could find a way into Paradise in the room beyond infinity. On earth we are condemned not to the unbearable lightness of being but to the weight of theory-practice as the fate of neither a god nor a marionette.¹³

The theoretical and the practical sublime

Kleist himself might be characterized as someone in free fall between theory and practice. The date attributed to the conversation of *Über das Marionettentheater*, the winter of 1801, carries some significance for Kleist. It is shortly after Kleist's so-called Kant crisis in which he declared that having familiarized himself 'with the new, the so-called Kantian, philosophy' he realized that as a striver towards a 'higher stage of culture' his '*highest and only* goal in life has sunk'.¹⁴ Biographers also attribute the Kant crisis with dissolution of his engagement to his fiancée Wilhelmine von Zenge.¹⁵ As excuses go for getting out of an unwanted relationship, the effects of reading Kant is surely one of the least acceptable in the history of romance. However, in terms of literary production it would seem to have constituted a considerable fall for Kleist, if not a terminal one, given that all his published work was written after his '*Kanterlibnis*'. If Kleist fell from the heights of a high-minded belief 'that attaining perfection is the purpose of Creation', it was only to land in the fallen world of literature and philosophy from which he never escaped. Crisis, it might be said, became the permanent condition for Kleist both personally and artistically. Crisis and critique emerge from the same Kantian abyss of judgement [*krinein*] which defines the problem of theory and practice.

Kleist wrote to Wilhelmine in Berlin in March 1801, that 'truth' and 'culture' had been 'holy' ideas to him, which had led him to make 'the costliest sacrifices'. However, he was now 'deeply and painfully shaken' by the insights of Kant, which he shared with his fiancée:

If people all had green lenses instead of eyes they would be bound to think that the things they see through them are green – and they would never be able to decide whether the eye shows them things as they are or whether it isn't adding something to them belonging not to them but to the eye. It is the same with our minds. We cannot decide whether what we call truth is truly truth or whether it only seems so to us. If the latter then the truth we gather here is nothing after

death – and all our striving to acquire something of our own that will go with us even into the grave, is in vain.¹⁶

As an explanation this summary may only tell half the story of Kant's understanding of '*Ding an sich*'. As an explanation of an annulled engagement the jilted one might think that this is also only telling half a story: 'Oh Wilhelmine, though your own heart may not be pierced by this thought do not think me ridiculous that I feel myself wounded deep in my innermost life by it.'¹⁷ The excuse of, 'it is not me, its Kant', runs a little hollow for those familiar with Kleist's more tender love letters to fellow Prussian soldiers.¹⁸ The conviction 'that no truth is discoverable here on earth' leads Kleist to give up reading and drives him 'to the cafés and tobacco houses' and 'even, to blot everything out, [I] did a very silly thing that I would rather Carl told you about than me'.¹⁹ That later sentence ought to have raised more concern on Wilhelmine's part than Kleist's eccentric take on Kant. Girl trouble aside we might note that this partial account is precisely the misprision of Kant that Kleist needs to drive him from personal religiosity, not into the arms of a bride, but to the embrace of writing.

Paul de Man identifies another move around Kant in Schiller, and we might add in passing Coleridge as a translator and adopter of Schelling to the list of those who find a reason to write in a misreading of Kantian philosophy.²⁰ De Man suggests that Schiller attempts 'to domesticate the critical incisiveness'²¹ of Kant in order to valorize a priori the aesthetic as an exemplary category and model for education, even for the state. De Man notes in his lecture on 'Kant and Schiller' that 'Kleist takes you back in a way to certain of the more threatening Kantian insights'.²² He identifies in Schiller's take on Kant a particular 'misreading' that will be of concern to us here, namely what happens in the passage from the cognitive to the performative: in other words, from theory to practice. De Man contends that the movement from conceptualization to occurrence, from trope to performance, is irreversible. This does not mean that the performative function is straightforward or can be accepted unproblematically. On the contrary, the performative is always recuperated within cognition. However, this relapse is not a reversal, it is a re-inscription that results in difference opening up the cognitive system as error is inscribed within it as a condition of its passage. We might say, that the fall of practice back into theory is its destiny and ruin. Given that practice also emerges from this fallen state we are only adding insult to injury the more we seek for clarity and truth. Practice as an event is neither progression nor regression, it is the reiteration of difference that makes meaning (its occurrence and reading) possible. This is neither dialectical nor a continuum, both of which

would imply the possibility and primacy of cognition over the performative. Rather, and importantly, the separation and irreversibility between cognition and performance, theory and practice, 'allows for no mediation whatsoever'.²³ Nor is it the case that theory and practice are antithetical to each other, they are just different. The difficulties arise in the various tricks of the light that cause us to misrecognize one for the other or to imagine either as something other than itself. This is not a relativist denial of the truth of art, or the truth of history, or truth *per se*. Rather, it is a somewhat challenging appreciation of how 'truth' works, as a case of mistaken identity in the relapse of practice into theory as the event of practice itself. If it was necessary to describe Kleist's understanding of Kant as partial it is because he neglects to appreciate this recuperation of meaning that is the means by which truth is made and unmade in the world.²⁴ It is not that Kleist, like the rest of us, cannot find truth, but that when he comes across it, truth just might not look like the thing he was looking for. In fact, it might look a lot more like literature than he was expecting. There is no obligation to choose the death of no truth. Rather, it is necessary to pursue the undecidable condition of the world from the point of view of a wearer of green glasses as the experience of truth itself. A fall into writing, into theory-practice, is to embrace the limits of this aporia.

In the lecture on 'Kant and Schiller', de Man equates the move from cognitive to performative, or the passage from the tropological or figurative dimension of language, to the materiality of the event, with the difference between the mathematical and dynamic sublime in Kant. It is Schiller who translates this Kantian distinction into an alternative dichotomy, what he calls the theoretical and the practical sublime.²⁵ In Kant the mathematical sublime is characterized by the inability to fully comprehend magnitude by means of extendable models, and so can be thought of as the failure of representation. In Schiller the theoretical sublime is therefore the failure of cognition to adequately represent the thing it desires to know. The dynamic sublime in Kant is characterized by a relation to the power of nature, in which we determine our own predicament when faced with magnitude and overwhelming force.²⁶ In Schiller the practical sublime therefore concerns the desire for self-preservation when confronted by that which is practically, empirically stronger than us. De Man wants to arrest a slippage from Kant to Schiller. He contends that what interests Kant in the distinction between the mathematical and the dynamic sublime is what the failure of both tells us about the structure of the imagination. The dynamic sublime tells us nothing about how to achieve self-preservation in the face of tempests but might have something to say about the compulsive failure of representation to account for the thing it imagines is before it.

The difficulty for de Man arises in Schiller's valorization of the practical over the theoretical sublime. While Schiller characterizes the situation as 'we are defeated by the attempt to represent in the first form of the sublime [theoretical]; we are defeated by the attempt to oppose in the second case [practical]';²⁷ de Man contends that Schiller goes on in his account of Kant to concentrate on the practical sublime at the expense of the theoretical. In this sense 'he adds something to Kant which is not in Kant',²⁸ overstating the importance of the practical in Kant's schema. It is after Schiller that an entire conceptual order that privileges the practical over the theoretical emerges, the former being associated with the business of existence and materiality, while the latter concerns the failure of thinking and modelling to deal with the real world. We can see how that false opposition plays out in everything from attitudes to academic work undertaken in Ivory Towers to the favouring of the intuitiveness of artists or strong politicians over critical analysis. This privileging of practice over theory is endemic in Western culture. It is quite a charge to lay at the door of Schiller's over reading of Kant. De Man often has it in for Schiller; he needs his exemplary misreading as the fulcrum of his own corrective gesture. One might suspect that equally de Man is adding something to Schiller that may not be in Schiller. Or, if it is in Schiller, it is there for a reason because Schiller is also a writer and artist. The question, we might ask about Schiller is do the Letters on the Aesthetic Education of Man help us to understand better *Mary Stuart*?²⁹ Or, perhaps more pertinently in the context of this book, does Schiller's misreading of Kant help him write *Mary Stuart*?

The conclusion that Schiller draws from Kant is that if the dynamic sublime is to be privileged over the mathematical sublime then the terror of nature is more suitable for aesthetic representation than the idea of infinity. De Man characterizes this as 'psychologically and empirically entirely reasonable':

If you think of them in terms of Schiller's own concerns as a playwright, if you don't ask the philosophical question, 'What is the structure of the faculty of the imagination?' but if you ask the practical question, 'How am I going to write successful plays?' which was partly and legitimately Schiller's concern – you will provoke a lot more effect on an audience by using terror or using scenes of terror, also using scenes in which Nature is directly threatening, than by using abstractions, such as infinity, which are not easily represented on the stage. So there is a total lack, an amazing, naïve, childish lack of transcendental concern in Schiller, an amazing lack of philosophical concern. He has no interest in it whatsoever. It doesn't bother him in the least that knowledge would be impossible, as long as he can fill his theatre.³⁰

Well that about wraps it up for *Turnadot* and *Don Carlos*, as far as de Man is concerned.³¹ Schiller's writing would seem to be just another case of the idealization of the practical at the expense of the theoretical. But what if this account of Schiller also carried within itself a certain blindness to the very gesture that de Man so readily wants to pin on Schiller. While de Man is attempting to recover the appropriate distinction and necessary balance that Kant finds in the equal failure of the mathematical and dynamic sublime, in doing so he might overly compensate and create a new idealization of his own, namely the privileging of the theoretical over the practical as one more example of the submission of art to philosophy. The practical in Schiller is equated with childishness and ignorance, even personal vanity and commercial gain: 'Schiller seems much more practically concerned ... well, I put it derisively, with his own success as a playwright.'³² One should not underestimate the Yale professor's capacity as a comic writer; he knows how to take down a straw man through rhetorical means as well as philosophical exactitude.

However, equally, while de Man needs to align Schiller's misreading with moral deficiency to prove a point, his own intent in reading Schiller is actually to show the complexity of thought in Kant that is ironed out in Schiller. Our own interest in reading this account of de Man's Schiller is to draw out precisely this question that arises from an encounter with Kant, namely the complex relation between theory and practice that are both examples of the failures of representation. Even if we were to take de Man's Schiller at face value, assuming that this is what Schiller actually says, there may be a value to the violence he inflicts on the theoretical in favour of the practical. De Man calls it 'a total idealism', which in privileging reality, loses touch with the reality of reality, and banalizes thought. If it were true, this would be something to hold Schiller to account for. However, we might note that Schiller's seeming effacement of philosophy takes the form of a philosophical essay. De Man is not reading *William Tell* or *An die Freude*, which he would have to account for in different terms than Schiller's reading of Kant in '*Vom Erhabenen*'.³³ This is a curiously compromised kind of idealism, if one not unique to Schiller. It might in fact be a move that Schiller cannot avoid making, a trap that he has no choice but to walk into as has everyone else who has followed him. As de Man says, 'don't decide too soon that you are beyond Schiller in any sense. I don't think any of us can lay this claim. Whatever writing we do, whatever way we have of talking about art, whatever way we have of teaching, whatever justification we give ourselves for teaching, whatever the standards are and the values by means of which we teach, they are more than ever and profoundly Schillerian. They come from Schiller, and not from Kant'.³⁴ In other words, liberal

humanities education depends upon a confusion between the practical and the pragmatic that privileges the aesthetic as a model by which we survive the magnitude of existence by the maintenance of reason. An alternative, Kantian, pedagogy would insist on the importance of the theoretical in the failure of the aesthetic to shelter us from the storm: 'And if you ever try to do something in the other direction [Kantian rather than Schillerian] and you touch on it you'll see what will happen to you. Better be very sure, wherever you are, that your tenure is very well established, and the institution for which you work has a very well-established reputation. Then you can take some risks without really taking many risks.'³⁵ For example, it would be a brave reader who found in Kant reason to call out the present academic discourse on practice-based research, and the distribution of funding that depends upon its protocols, as a domestication of practice through an idealization of the pragmatic that relies upon the effacement of theoretical thought in favour of the utility of practice. However, the Arts and Humanities Research Council might not be the only people who have misread Kant and the least that can be said here is that academic writing on art is based upon not only a collective failure of imagination but literally on a collective misunderstanding of the failure of the imagination.

Schiller's concern is psychological; Kant's interest is philosophical. De Man wishes to dispel the confusion that mistakes one from the other. Schiller institutes an empirical moment of practical coping with the danger of nature that, says de Man, is nowhere to be found in Kant's schema of the failed responses of imagination to magnitude. This slippage between Kant and Schiller is for de Man 'idealism as an ideology' (p. 146) because it both privileges an unreal reality and a perfect intellect, entirely separated from the material world and sensory experience, capable of understanding the world. What terrified Kleist the most was the impossibility of such a position. In this sense, on de Man's terms, Kleist is a better reader of Kant than Schiller. 'As fallen beings ... we are incapable of pure intellect' (p. 146) says de Man reminding us of the impossibility of theory as much as the paradise of reality. Ironically, it is Schiller's lack of transcendental concerns that leads to an idealist position in which the intellect transcends the aesthetic as a resolution for the threat to existence, while in de Man's Kant it is precisely imagination that is the symptom of a failure to achieve pure intellect, and it is the failure of the imagination that leads to aesthetic contemplation. The slip that Schiller makes between the aesthetic as an expandable model for education (the theoretical sublime) and what it teaches us about how to cope with the terrors of the world (the practical sublime) relies upon a dichotomization that simultaneously over privileges practice and provides a route to transcending

the practical in an idealized pure intellect. However, while Schiller is at risk of transcending the aesthetic, he also has a full theatre. We might say, that he seems to have the best of all possible worlds. Unfortunately, if we follow de Man, Schiller is as poor a philosopher as he is successful an impresario. Why does this matter?

Schiller is surely an exemplary case of the critical practice of a theory-practitioner that concerns us in this study. Does it matter if he is wrong as a philosopher, and what implications would this have for a staging of one of his plays? One is tempted to answer, practically none, or none in theory. As de Man suggests, 'whatever writing we do, whatever way we have of talking about art, whatever way we have of teaching ... they are more than ever and profoundly Schillerian' (p. 142). That is to say, 'in practice' we all tend towards the belief or accept the idea that it is indeed possible to transmit theory into practice. For example, the defence that is most commonly made of the humanities is that reading books and viewing art helps us to operate in the world as well-informed human beings, rather than the more radical defence that a Humanities education teaches us that a humanities education is impossible and at the same time should disabuse us of every such illusion about the humanities and teaching. Such a position is unlikely to go down well in the Dean's office or with the Arts and Humanities Research Council. The position that de Man assigns to Schiller is that of the unconscious levelling out of the complexity that is thrown up by the failure of representation, as a way of continuing to be able to accept representation as the only mode of understanding the world. De Man's Schiller's version of representation is a mimetic mode of understanding, whether it is through aesthetic models for education, or the belief that such models can be repeated in the world as a way of dealing with the chaos of magnitude. Mimesis persists as an effect even if the production of that effect (writing and reading, making or viewing art, teaching and studying) undoes the possibility of the efficiency of that effect. However, rather than reside in that moment of unmaking and disruption, we all make it to the other shore of the mimetic effect, living with an illusion rather than the critical interruption. The effect of closure is the outcome of the very failure of representation to fully represent in a complete transmission, and the impossibility of closure is the condition that makes closure both a formal trope and endlessly desirable.

In giving his lecture on Schiller, de Man is intent on convincing his audience of the true critical nature of representation, and so repeats the mimetic mode that he is attempting to undo. The idiom of the lecture would be, on de Man's own terms, Schillerian through and through. This does not mean that de Man

is a self-deluded dolt rather he is just a teacher and a writer, or simply, a human being operating in the world. There is no way of escaping the recuperation of the mimetic, no easy route outside of thinking as the success and failure of mimesis. It is the duty of critical philosophy to hold open the gap between disruption and closure as the condition of critical thinking and affirming that gap as a way of thinking through the difficulties of living in the world. However, there is no such duty beholden to writing or art, which works according to a different set of protocols, including aesthetic affect, formal complexity or simplicity, and so on. It is not just that Schiller is more concerned with filling his theatre than reading Kant, it is that Schiller like most us are more concerned with living in the world than affirming the constitutive aporia of representation. However, just as we cannot avoid falling back into the illusion of mimesis, we are saved from the deadening possibility of its efficiency by its own structural impossibility. That is to say, if the untroubled transmission of theory into practice were possible, we would always be up against the fencing bear, who pre-empts our every move with an unbeatable defensive parry, closing off any possibility of failure or injury. Transmitting theory into practice without risk or failure, would mean entirely predictable, programmed, and closed outcomes, like the bear's expert ripostes. It would be another version of the last chapter of the end of the world. Schiller's letters on aesthetic education, are on de Man's reading, the bear of Kleist's sporting nightmare: an impenetrable, sealed template that is the death of creativity and alternative futures. Fortunately, the bear is a creature of fiction, and an aesthetic education can never provide enough resources to counter all the thrusts and blows that come with living in the world. Theory is not a hermetically sealed armour against the rigours of the world, or the risks of art, and cannot communicate itself without failure of misreading.

However, despite the position that de Man would like to assign to Schiller, it is not quite true to say that Schiller is not a philosopher. Schiller is an artist and impresario but he is also a philosopher, what other designation might we attribute to the author of '*Von Erhabenen*'? It is not that Schiller is using philosophy to escape philosophy into some other material realm. He is straightforwardly attempting to write in a philosophical manner as one of the many idioms at his disposal. The fact that he is not as careful a reader of Kant as Paul de Man, does not preclude his text from being ascribed the name of philosophy. And whether we believe that Schiller has introduced into Kant something that does not exist in the text of Kant is strictly irrelevant to his identity as a philosopher-practitioner. Schiller is in a sense correct, if a bad philosopher. While reading Thomas Mann or Immanuel Kant may not help us get off the mountaintop, either somehow

we manage to get home safe or we die of exposure. The knowledge that reading Mann will not save you from exposure is no more use to you when faced with the oncoming storm than having appreciated the art of David Casper Friedrich. The mimetic illusion of Schillerian aesthetic ideology encourages the belief that you will get home alive. While the critical philosophy of Kant says whether you get home alive or not has nothing to do with the books that you have read. However, the motivation to put one foot in front of the other and find a path down the mountain is probably going to be more useful to you than the self-satisfaction of knowing that rescue is impossible and that impasse is inevitable. That is to say, one would rather be out in a storm with Schiller than with Kant. It is surely better to be armed with the mistaken belief that you know what you are doing than freeze to death exposed to the insurmountable elements. This is also to say that one would be better off trying to write a play or make a movie with Schiller rather than Kant. This is not to accept the ironing out of complexity in thought or to accept the possibility of a complete and closed mimetic model. Rather, it is to suggest that as a writer or maker of art (or philosophy for that matter) there is no escape from the desire to make it off the mountaintop alive. Setting off down the mountain without a map is no bar from making it home, nor a guarantee that you will not end up trapped on a precipice or even falling from a great height. The writing or the making is not the end result of finding a way home but the process by which the twists and turns of the path are improvised and invented. Making it out alive is not only a pragmatic psychological predisposition but the empirical ideological utilization of Kantian critical philosophy in a way that is entirely un-Kantian.

De Man recognizes this as his reading of Kant and Schiller develops. He notes that while the pragmatic principle of closure is not open to critical philosophy, he identifies in the Letters on Aesthetic Education, the introduction of the term 'free play' [*spieltrieb*] into Schiller's dialectic between the theoretical and the practical. Play in this sense is both the performance of closure from theory to practice 'as if' it were possible but also the give and flex between the two terms in order to prevent a dialectical collision. There may be rules to this play, like soccer, but like soccer those rules are arbitrary and rely upon the appearance of closure, even though they are open to interpretation and improvisation. De Man suggests 'the human is defined as a certain principle of closure which is no longer accessible to rational critical analysis. And we know from Kleist how this notion of balance between the human and what is not human can get out of hand' (p. 151). The super-marionette or the unbeatable bear are examples of what might happen when theory is achieved absolutely, while the young man

who falls from grace and loses his balance is an example of what can happen when the appearance of closure is denied to the human experience.

The play between the illusion of closure and its undoing is the play between appearance and reality. This is precisely the place of art or fiction as the site of a principle that holds the mutual compatibility of the real and unreal in a productive tension. What art and writing teach us is that appearances matter. De Man suggests:

Only people who are very stupid, says Schiller, or people who are extraordinarily smart, too smart, have no use for *Schein*, have no use for appearance. Those who are entirely stupid don't need appearance, they are unable to conceive it; those who are entirely rational don't have to resort to it (Letter XXVI, pp. 190–3). In that you could substitute – one who would be entirely stupid in those terms would be Kant, for example, when he describes the world as being completely devoid of teleological impact, as having no appearance but only reality. And one of those who are much too smart, who are smart through and through and can saturate the entire world with intellect, would be for example, Hegel, who would not, according to this assumption, need *Schein* anymore. (p. 152)

In other words, Kant is stupid enough to die on top of the mountain to demonstrate the truth of his critical philosophy, while Hegel is smart enough to think that what you see is what you get and that if you want off the mountaintop then playing, or imitating, a mountaineer is probably no bad thing. The task of de Man's Schiller is not to choose between the illusion of closure and the impossibility of closure, between practice and theory, art, and criticism, but to give the appearance of having done so and for the choice to somehow seem to matter.

De Man also addresses Schiller in the related text 'Aesthetic Formalization: Kleist's *Über das Marionettentheater*', given as the second Messenger Lecture at Cornell University in 1983 (the text 'Kant and Schiller' was given as the fifth and final lecture in the series).³⁶ In this extended reading de Man concentrates on Kleist's text as an allegory of teaching and the implications of Schiller's model of aesthetic education for the ideological reproduction of the state.³⁷ Here he characterizes the lesson of Kleist's text as 'a complication of the mimetic function of narrative' (p. 273). That is to say, the mimetic structure of closure 'asserts itself, by ways of the possibility, or the necessity of narrative formalization' (p. 273). Narrative completeness is the means by which the supposed adequacy of representation imposes itself as a seemingly natural event. However, it is the impossibility of ever closing off a story or exhausting its lacunae or retelling that undoes any claim that representation can make to be either complete or natural.

De Man comments on the way that Kleist's prose plays with mimesis in both a ludic and critical way. Rather, than recount the entirety of de Man's reading of Kleist, we might just note that he is identifying in the narrative structure of Kleist's essay the same play that we saw between the theoretical and practical sublime in Schiller's version of Kant, namely the inadequacy of both as a failure of representation itself and the necessity of both to present themselves as full and complete. We should note, following de Man, that the play between theory and practice is not a dialectic in classical terms but a radical and irreversible interruption that can only result in a forward movement of inscription and iteration, what we might call a process without conclusion, one that is exhausting rather than exhaustive.

Falling for Kleist

Towards the end of de Man's essay on 'Aesthetic Formalization' in Kleist he cites but does not dwell on another narrative text by the Prussian, 'On the Gradual Fabrication of Thoughts While Speaking' [*Über die allmähliche Verfertigung der Gedanken beim Reden*].³⁸ As in the short text on reflection, Kleist's essay offers a counter-intuitive take on thought and action.³⁹ He proposes that the best way to think through a problem is not solitary contemplation but to talk it through with another person: 'A man in the act of speaking finds a strange source of inspiration in the face of his listener; and a look that signals the comprehension of a half-expressed thought will often inspire us with the entire second half of that thought. I am convinced that many a great speaker, in that moment of opening his mouth to speak, has been unsure of what he was about to say. But trusting the circumstances to provide both the right line of ideas and the necessary mental stimulation, he is encouraged to make a beginning' (p. 219). Citing the example of the performative inauguration of the revolutionary assembly by General Mirabeau and the fable of the Lion in La Fontaine, Kleist suggests that thoughts are best formulated in the act of speaking rather in a moment of prior introspection, 'The lines of thought and expression move abreast, and both mental processes are congruent to each other. Speech is not a fetter, then like a drag chain on the wheel of the mind, but a second wheel running parallel to it on the same axle' (221). Kleist seems to have conceived of the Segway some two hundred years before it materialized as a mode of transport, or perhaps he is thinking of a wheelchair.

Kant was fond of thinking about wheelchairs as well but in his case he described examples as the *Gängelwagen* [wheelchairs] of philosophy, the means by which infirm thinking makes progress.⁴⁰ Kleist in contrast makes a positive virtue of thinking aloud, 'the situation is quite different when the mind has thought everything out before anything is spoken. In the act of pure expression speech must assume a secondary role, which, far from speeding it forward, will rather slow it down. It follows from this that an idea confusedly expressed need not have been confusedly conceived: on the contrary, the most confusedly expressed may have been the most clearly thought out' (p. 221). It is not so much that theory puts the brakes on practice, but that theory is no guarantee of success in practice. Rather, practice would seem to be a form of working out theory as one goes along, in which one is pushed to creativity by the limits and pressures of a given situation. Kleist's commentary here is more obviously a text on education that the Marionettentheatre essay, as he concludes by condemning the 'disagreeable' and 'distasteful' custom of oral examinations in which 'only very commonplace minds, which memorize a definition ... one day and forget it the next' (p. 222) can succeed. Thinking aloud is not necessarily a benefit in an educational system that values verbatim and rote learning. Such exams only ever assess the capacity of an individual to pass such exams, valuing a pure tautology over creativity and critical thinking. For Kleist the whole exercise is indecent, 'one would be embarrassed to ask someone to empty his wallet for our inspection, let alone the contents of his mind' (p. 222). It is a pity that the scruples of the Prussian officer class do not extend to certain Ministers of Education today, who mistake the reactionary practice of cramming and repetition for academic rigour.

The situation that Kleist describes here will be familiar to any writer up against an editor's deadline or a filmmaker faced with a fixed budget, necessity being the mother of invention. But even without the material pressures of a context for making, the act of creation itself cannot be programmed in advance. Even for the writer with a set commission it is never clear what will be written until the moment of writing, when thought and action work in tandem to produce what will come at that moment. In any good piece of writing, not only should the reader not know what is coming next but nor should the author. This applies equally to so-called 'creative' and so-called 'theoretical', academic, non-fiction, or journalistic writing. The greater the degree of uncertainty as to the outcome of the writing, the more one might want to claim for it the name of creativity, but in this sense, creativity is not restricted to genre or idiom. We might say that all writing is creative writing, and where we do not find creativity in writing we

do not have writing at all. The most functional of reports or *précises* may be less obviously creative and more easily determined according to the desire for a pre-set outcome, but they are distinguished by the degree of invention to be found in them, not by the complete absence of the creative. To use Kleist's term the articulation of the new requires fabrication, even when there is not much that is truly new about the end result. Fabrication (making or constructing) in its modern English usage comes from the verb to fabricate, which has the added sense of lying or storytelling. Making is also 'making up' and in the context of the process of writing we might add 'making up as you go along.'

Fabrication as a noun seems to predate the verb to fabricate. Fabrication, first used to mean manufacturing or construction derives in English from the Middle French *fabrication* and so from the Latin *fabricationem* (nominative *fabrication*) meaning a structure, construction or a making, declining from the verb *fabricare*, to make or construct.⁴¹ The sense of fabrication as lying or forgery appears much later in English, circa 1790. Fable, in contrast, comes from the Old French *fable* meaning story, tale, lie or falsehood, from the Latin *fabula* which means story or lesson, but is related to the verb *fari* meaning to speak or tell, giving *fabula* the sense of everyday talk or what we now call news, perhaps what Kleist as a journalist recognizes in conversations Moliere is supposed to have had with his maid when suffering from writer's block, or General Mirabeau's improvised foundation of a revolutionary constitution.⁴²

In the essay on aesthetic formalization, de Man comments on Kleist's use of German in this shorter text on the fabrication of thoughts. He notes: 'as we know... the memorable tropes that have the most success (*Beifall*) occur as mere random improvisation (*Einfall*) at the moment when the author has completely relinquished any control over his meaning and has relapsed (*Zurückfall*) into the extreme formalization, the mechanical predictability of grammatical declensions (*Fälle*)' (p. 290). Within the pages of Kleist's German there is a lot of falling, over and over again. De Man here wishes to suggest that not only can the success (*Beifall*) or a performative utterance such as the proclamation by the revolutionary general and its improvised status (*Einfall*) but that moment of invention is also a falling back (*Zurückfall*) onto the power of language to generate meanings independent of the intention of a speaker or author. The speech writes itself in the moment of its making, its grammar declining as it conjugates. That is to say, that the speaker is not quite in control of what is said. They are, in the moment of creation, in free fall in the abyss between theory and outcome. The stories of the Lion in Fontaine and General Mirabeau suggest

that at such moments of improvised public speaking the authors (fictional or historical) do not have the benefit of a safety net and their dive into the unknown is not without risks, without a harness or a parachute the sky might fall in on their heads at any moment.

However, de Man reminds us that *Fälle* in German also means trap, and the trap here is particularly cunning. On the one hand, there is assumption that the General's words are an adequate representation of a political or historical truth, rather than a form of words that runs away from him in the heat of the moment. This is Schiller's faith in the faculty of the imagination, a trap that imagines that the guide knows the way down from the mountaintop and is not just as lost as you. This, de Man would call, 'the ultimate trap, as unavoidable as it is deadly' (p. 290). On the other hand, there may be another trap door for us to fall through here, namely that of Kant, the one who is snared and unable to move, caught in the vice-like grip of criticality when faced with the knowledge of the incommensurability of speech and thing. With traps to the left and to the right, where is the faller to land to avoid injury or capture? Writing, and by extension all creative making, is a trap without escape, both lure and ruse, leading to secret passageways, necessarily part of the performance of staging the event of invention, whether the outcome is a magic disappearing act or the panic of the gallows. When the earth gives way beneath the feet of the artist, in the fall of writing, for a moment we are suspended in mid-air, not knowing if we are coming or going. It is this uncertainty that defines the moment of creation.

However, falling is all a matter of perspective, as Buzz Lightyear notes in *Toy Story*, while others may think that he is flying, he is in fact merely 'falling with style'.⁴³ Kleist comments in the *Marionettentheater* text that the blunders of human dancers are 'unavoidable, since we have eaten of the tree of knowledge... Paradise is locked and bolted and the Cherub is behind us'. It is not just that we inevitably fall when making the leap from theory to practice but that we have always been in a fallen state from the beginning and it is theory itself, questioning and the desire to know, the fruit of the forbidden tree, that is the permanent condition of humanity and of the Humanities. The fall of practice is not a tumble from security into uncertainty. It is the plunge from one state of incompleteness and not-knowing to another. This is a fall without guarantee of a soft landing or even of a known destination. The fall of creativity is a descent down the rabbit hole of process; theory is merely a series of ledges and outcrops that break our fall on the way down, no more secure or terminal than the fall itself. Theory is likely to give way beneath our feet like a trap door, suspending

us in a deathly grip or accelerating our descent. Theory is the fallen state of humankind, questioning never leads to answers only to further questions, which confirm how little we actually know. In this sense, theory is the resource that undoes its own ambitions, and it is the permanently fallen condition of theory that compels us to seek out an alternative ground through practice. One response to Kant and Schiller arguing on the mountaintop is to take matters into our own hands and jump head first off the cliff edge in the hope that it is as good a strategy as any for responding to the oncoming storm. However, it is no more likely to result in success than any other plan, it would simply be another experience of failing to descend without harm.

Jesus-Kleist

There is of course a difference between falling and having fallen. In the case of theory, the human condition is that of the fallen state with no way back to Paradise. In the moment of creation, we are experiencing a fall without prospect of reaching safety. The law of gravity dictates that there comes a point when everybody needs a place to rest. Falling only leads to the fallen state. This is not an experience of fallenness for the first time. It is not an original fall. We throw ourselves off the cliff edge in an attempt to escape the paralysis of our fallen state. Equally, while the expulsion from Paradise may lead to the fall of humankind, there is a fall before the Fall that creates the conditions for falling, namely the fall of Satan and his rebel angels. This is a pre-originary fall, a fall that proceeds falling. And it is spectacular:

... from Morn
 To Noon he fell, from Noon to dewy Eve,
 A Summers day; and with the setting Sun
 Dropt from the Zenith like a falling Star,
 On Lemnos th' Ægean Ile. (*Paradise Lost* I, 742–6)⁴⁴

Satan may fall like a shooting star and light up the evening sky as he blazes a trail but eventually he reaches his destination, namely Hell, or Greece. It is from here that he sets out to tempt humanity into a fall of its own, encouraging humanity to partake of his own vice: questioning. It is not vanity or pride that leads Lucifer to raise an army in the hope that heaven will fall to him, it is the questioning of authority, the refusal of predestination and the absolute decree.

Reason is the reason that Satan fell, but as Milton's God says in his own defence 'Reason also is choice' (II, 108). The angels were made 'sufficient to have stood, though free to fall' (II, 99) it was their choice to question rather than offer 'true allegiance, constant Faith or Love' (II, 104) to the almighty. Questioning the almighty and defying the omnipotent might be the very definition of the exercise of reason. If reason is a choice, in the context of Milton's poem, it is a choice between exercising reason or suppressing it. That is no choice at all since reason will always lead to a fall. God in his wisdom might argue that reason ought to have told Satan that it is unreasonable to 'durst defie th'Omnipotent to Arms' (I, 49) and the rational calculation would have been to sign up to eternal devotion. But there is seldom anything reasonable about reasoning. The problem for Satan is that there is just no career progression in heaven, 'better to reign in Hell, than serve in heaven' (IV, 263). Satan's error, the cause of his defeat, is the belief that having exhausted reason, the leap into practice will result in an outcome that reason tells him is impossible. The choice that he makes, his decision, is not the result of programmed rationality but of faith in the primacy of practice. There is no evidence base or ground to support his decision, it is a pure leap of faith. On this basis God ought to commend Satan for a belief in faith itself that supersedes his faith in the almighty. Satan is unquestioning of belief, which he considers something more worthy of allegiance than the highly questionable powers of the omnipotent. This leap from theory to practice, one which will inevitably fail, is a leap of faith, decision is never decisive and choice is not predestination. If the outcome of a decision could be determined in advance there would be no decision to make, the exercise of reason would be merely the running of a computational programme. Decisions require us to act unreasonably with respect to reason, without firm foundations in which to ground those decisions. Faith is not the opposite of reason, it is the condition for its operation, its ruin and wellspring.⁴⁵ It is surely unreasonable of God not to acknowledge that. However, without solid ground beneath our feet we are heading for a fall. Falling then is an inevitable consequence of reason, and there really is no choice about it. We might say that Theory comes before a fall.

If theory is the vice of Satan, then it is theory that gives rise to the fall of humanity. It is a primordial, structural fallenness that makes the fall of man and woman inevitable. There is a choice to be made between eating of the forbidden tree or not, but as a choice it is aporetic. Eve has to choose between knowledge and innocence, or to put it another way she has to choose between choosing and not choosing, and that is already a choice. In other words, insofar as Eve was

faced with the agony of choice, humanity was already in a fallen state before she ate the apple. The tree of knowledge is a trap, put there in the Garden of Eden to act as the cause of an effect that already precedes it. It is the trap door that gives way beneath the feet of Adam and Eve, as they fall out of Paradise. It is also the tree that humanity hangs itself from. The tree of knowledge was not put in the garden by Satan but by that unreasonable old tyrant God. Who creates an earthly paradise and then fences off part of it as forbidden? As soon as the tree was planted humankind was heading for a fall. Satan could quite easily claim constructive dismissal from heaven; the descendants of Adam and Eve could consider a class action suit against God for carelessly leaving temptation in their forebears' path. They could reasonably argue that the serpent was in the garden long before Satan turned up. God better have a good lawyer.

Falling then is not the aberrant outcome of an unsuccessful leap of faith, it is structural to the very possibility of action. Failure is what makes action possible. If practice guaranteed success, all practice would come to a halt. It may be the end of theory to believe in the end of theory but in practice this can never be the case. Practice itself can never close itself off; practice cannot complete itself or realize itself as anything other than process. In this sense, there no choice to be made between theory and practice, as if there could ever be a choice between choosing and doing, that was not already a choice. It is the originary fallenness of theory that makes the fall of practice possible, given that the fall of theory is itself already a practical matter. In practice Satan cannot escape the vice of theory, it is trap laid out for him in advance and his faith in theory is just as mistaken as his faith in practice. It is the fallen state of theory that is the practical condition of practice, a sort of 'felix ruina' that makes the process of redemption possible, given that on these terms redemption itself is impossible. Successful redemption would be the last chapter in the history of the world, the end of all theory and the termination of every practice. As long as we are unable to climb back through the trap door into Paradise, we are condemned to go on, in the long fall of process, 'we must make a journey around the world, to see if a back door has perhaps been left open' as Kleist puts it. However, even if it has been left unguarded that back door is merely another trap door that will send us tumbling out of Paradise once more. We are forever falling even if our faith in practice compels us to believe that the fall is perfectible. As habitual fallers we might choose to paraphrase Beckett: Ever tried? Ever fallen? No matter. Try again. Fall again. Fall better.⁴⁶

Satan may finally stop falling and land in Hell, but his project of the perpetual corruption of humankind is a practical attempt to 'awake, arise, or be for even

fall'n' (I, 330). In Milton's poem he fails once again, or, in succeeding lays the foundations of his subsequent failure, even if it took Milton another four years to write the sequel *Paradise Regained*.⁴⁷ This later poem ends not with death and resurrection but with another fall. It concludes with the scene from Matthew 4 (5-7) when Satan tempts Jesus to fall:

The devil took Him up into the holy city, set Him on the pinnacle of the temple,
and said to Him, 'If You are the Son of God, throw Yourself down. For it is written:
"He shall give His angels charge over you",
and,
"In their hands they shall bear you up,
Lest you dash your foot against a stone"'⁴⁸

Jesus' response is not to take up the challenge of falling and risk his angels letting him down once more, but instead he replies 'It is written again, "You shall not tempt the Lord your God"'. In other words, Jesus thinks a fall can be avoided by answering a quotation with a quotation, trumping one text with another. He avoids the temptation of a practical fall by a retreat into theory. God made human is not prepared to put the question of his omnipotence at risk by taking a fall that would demonstrate that he alone could survive such a descent. Perhaps only a God can resist a fall, we have no proof here either way whether he could survive one. Jesus instead puts his faith in theory; being both fully human and fully God, Jesus is the one character in textual history who can pull that off even if it seems an inadequate or impractical response. In this sense Jesus would seem to be more Kantian than Schillerian.

In Milton's version, the response is stunning, 'Satan smitten with amazement fell' (IV, 562). He is compared to the great comic faller of antiquity the wrestling giant Antaeus, who:

... oft foil'd still rose,
Receiving from his mother Earth new strength,
Fresh from his fall, and fiercer grapple joynd,
Throttld at length in the Air, expir'd and fell. (IV, 565-8)

Hercules crushes Antaeus to death in a bear hug, rather than seek two falls or a submission, so his final fall is final. In contrast this is just the latest in a long line of falls for Milton's Satan who 'Fell whence he stood to see his Victor fall' (IV, 571). There is a slight of foot and in a reversal of the theory, Satan falls rather than Jesus, bringing only 'Ruin, and desperation, and dismay' to one 'Who durst so proudly tempt the Son of God' (IV, 579-80). Once more putting theory into

action only results in a downfall for Satan, and practice is again the ruin of theory. Jesus in contrast is borne aloft by angels who take him to a celestial table to end his period of fasting with 'Fruits fetcht from the tree of life' (IV, 589) the second named tree in Genesis 2 alongside the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. Milton's Jesus, then, chooses life over knowledge, practice over theory, although he has the advantage of presumably already knowing the difference between good and evil, his heavenly Father having invented both. But the significance of Milton's ending here is that having resisted Satan and having refused to fall, this is said to be the moment of redemption of humanity. Jesus:

... by vanquishing
 Temptation, hast regain'd lost Paradise,
 And frustrated the conquest fraudulent:
 He never more henceforth will dare set foot
 In Paradise to tempt; his snares are broke:
 For though that seat of earthly bliss be fail'd,
 A fairer Paradise is founded now
 For Adam and his chosen Sons. (IV, 607-14)

This is quite a rewriting of the Bible by Milton. The refusal to plunge from the top of the temple in Jerusalem seems to be enough to redeem humanity; it is adequate simply to have set the example of overcoming temptation through banter or the exchange of bon mots. But in doing so, Jesus has not only done away with the traps, or snares, of Satan but has solved the entire problem of returning to Paradise by giving it up as a failed state and founding a new 'fairer Paradise', somewhere even more perfect than perfection, which presumably means this time he will not make the mistake of putting temptation in there by fencing bits of it off or by planting a tree of knowledge. The fairer Paradise is of course the new Jerusalem of earth, which in a dazzling sleight of hand replaces the old Paradise of Eden, now boarded up and written off as forever ruined by Satan's shenanigans. The solution to the fallen state then would seem to be to accept the fallen world as Paradise: it does not get any better than this. By resisting temptation, Jesus is said to 'vanquish' all temptation because he gives us the grace to overcome it. In this new Paradise, God has learnt from his past mistakes and will not attempt to fence off temptation but to embrace it as part of the deal of living in the world. Falling is part of life but it would seem Jesus is our bungee cord, and Paradise is not regained by moving back to Eden but by a new prospectus from God's estate agent that convinces us that we are better off where we are, now that Jesus has moved into the district.

Biblical scholars among you will note that the temptation in the desert occurs relatively early in Jesus' career, and there is a whole other set of events, some good some bad, that we have yet to pass through before theologically speaking we can claim that paradise has been regained. However, Milton has Jesus refreshed from his heavenly feast return quietly to his 'Mothers house' (IV, 639) in suburban Nazareth and he ends the poem here. That is to say, that the second poem is not actually about the story of human redemption, rather it is literally about regaining the plot of land where Adam and Eve lived in earthly bliss. The 'Paradise' in the title of both poems does not refer to a state of spiritual being, it refers ultimately to property. Jesus is said to regain Paradise by overcoming temptation at the top of the temple, and so his angels take him there to dine in the knowledge that Satan will never return there. The cost of regaining Paradise is that the old place has been turned into a restaurant and is now going to be written off as a home for humans who will be persuaded to accept their home on earth as the best of all possible worlds. The price to be paid for regaining Paradise is to lose Paradise all over again. It is just another fall passed off as a victory, or the attempt by God to convince humans that fallenness is prime real estate. There is no outside to the fallen condition, it was already there in Eden from the start, and it is still there after victory over Satan is proclaimed. Only a God can be exempt from falling, because he is too big to fall. As Kleist says 'only a god ... could prove a match for matter' because only he can defy gravity. The rules do not apply to the sovereign. His son on the other hand, thinks that an unquestioning faith in theory can cover over the cracks in any risky practice. In this sense he is close to the position of the narrator of the *Marionettentheatre* essay who also insists, until the rug is pulled from under his feet at the end, on keeping up the pretence that successful practice comes from the application of good theory and that theory derives from the detailed observation of impeccable practice. This countersignature, the one that we adopt all the time as the ultimate and unavoidable trap of writing, we can only give into temptation here and give the name Jesus-Kleist. However, only a celestial being like Satan can ever truly land; human beings contrary to the advice issued by Milton's estate agent are still falling in theory and in practice.