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Prometheus and Pygmalion

In the *Metamorphoses*, Ovid tells the stories of two possible models for the relation between philosophy and creativity.¹ They are two of the foundational myths of our understanding of art and civilization, the tales of Prometheus and Pygmalion. In this chapter, we will look at both stories with a view to better understanding the paradoxes of critical practice, each tale providing us with a different point of entry to the complexities of artistic practice and philosophical thought. The story of Prometheus has its fullest elaboration in Hesiod's *Theogony* and we will attend to this tale in the second half of the chapter.² The myth of Pygmalion also has several versions including many neoclassical and more contemporary re-tellings.³ The stories represent two different paradigms for creation, although they contain overlapping elements. The case of Prometheus is a model for creation that emphasizes theft and punishment, while the story of Pygmalion offers us an account of creation based upon illusion and misidentification. The former is a tale of inscription and disruption, the latter myth concerns representation and misreading. They both centre around moments of touching, blindness, and inauguration. In reading the Pygmalion complex and the Prometheus effect we can better understand the question of creation as a process. They are not competing tales, one offering us greater insights than the other. Rather, together, they combine to present us with a pathway through complexity, and in providing a critical account of both we are able to work through our own thinking on what it means to think about the creative.

The Pygmalion complex

In Ovid, Pygmalion is a sculptor and citizen of Cyprus, who is horrified by the shameless behaviours of the daughters of Propoetus who deny the divinity of Venus and in turn are said to have been the first prostitutes. Pygmalion in

contrast lives a celibate life and lacks 'the companionship of married love' (X 244). He carves his own 'snow-white ivory' with great artistry such that it is 'more beautiful/Than ever woman born' (X 247–8). He falls in love with his masterpiece, which to Pygmalion seems to be alive and he is not averse to indulging in agalmatophilia, 'his heart desired the body he had formed/With many a touch he tries it...' (X 235–6). He brings the statue gifts and lays her on a couch of purple silk, 'called her his darling, cushioning her head' (X 254). On Venus' festive day, noted for the sacrifice of heifers, Pygmalion makes his own offering at temple and prays not that his statue should live but for a bride that has 'the living likeness of my ivory girl' (X 264). However, Venus 'knew well the purpose of his prayer' (X 266) and reads Pygmalion's desires beyond his literal supplication. Blessed with an omen in the temple, Pygmalion returns home and kisses the statue where it lay only to find that she now seems warm:

Again he kissed her and with marveling touch
 Caressed her breast; beneath his touch the flesh
 Grew soft, its ivory hardness vanishing. (X 281–3)

The statue is said to 'yield' to the 'hands' of the sculptor just as the honey-wax found on Mount Hymettus is shaped 'by practiced fingers into many forms' (X 286). Pygmalion's reaction is one of 'wonder and misgiving/Delight and terror' (X 288–9). He thanks Venus and makes several passes over the body of the now living sculpture, who 'Felt every kiss, and blushed, and shyly raised/Her eyes to his and saw the world and him' (X 295–6).

Pygmalion has his bride, not named Galatea until Rousseau's poetic license of 1762⁴ gives the statue the sobriquet found elsewhere in Ovid's tale of 'Acis and Galatea', in which she is the sea nymph beloved by the Cyclopes Polyphemus, blinded by Odysseus. Pygmalion may get the girl but it is Venus who is the creator and 'the goddess graced the union she had made' (X 297) with a daughter Paphos. However, Venus' well-intentioned plan does not necessarily run according to design. The story of Pygmalion does not end happily ever after. In the *Metamorphoses*, we go on to learn of the terrible fate of the descendants of the union between Pygmalion and his statue. Cinyras, son of Paphos, becomes King of Cyprus and has a daughter Myrrha, who has a 'disgraceful passion' for her father. With the help of her nurse she tricks her father and sleeps with him; she becomes pregnant. She asks the gods to transform her into something beyond human or animal, 'by being, I offend the living, or, by dying, offend the dead, banish me from both realms, and change me, and deny me life and death!' (X 499) She is changed into a Myrtle tree, which gives birth to the child Adonis.

Venus, herself, accidentally injured by one of her son Cupid's arrows, falls in love with the mortal youth. After many years together, Adonis is killed hunting a boar 'that sank its tusk into his groin'. (X 709) According to Shakespeare, broken-hearted and 'weary of the world' Venus retires to Paphos 'to immure herself and not be seen'.⁵

Creation is never a straightforward thing. The story of Pygmalion and his legacy involves multiple cases of misplaced desire and unintended outcomes, from the paraphilia of the sculptor to his incestuous great-granddaughter and the sorrow of the bereaved Venus, who has all the circuits of eros routed through her and ultimately rerouted towards her in an everlasting mourning. These are touching tales of blindness. Pygmalion caresses the statue who sees the world for the first time with such a touch; Cinyras does not see his daughter as they touch one another in his bed; Cupid's arrow brushes Venus' breast and she is blinded by love; Adonis is warned of the dangers of hunting but misreads or ignores the advice of Venus, leading to his death. Episodes of paraphilia, incest, and deception define this creative genealogy. Perhaps, like any unhappy family, this history is unhappy in its own way, but as a creative process it demonstrates many of the characteristics we would identify with the complexity of making and thinking. The misfires and unplanned outcomes are in keeping with the experience of creative work; each attempt at fulfilment leading to a new turn towards dissatisfaction, and the creative inheritance that leads to the ruin of the original creation. Venus is both the creator god and the last person to see the ruin of her own heart. The process of creation and pro-creation that she initiates ends in the death of her mortal lover, the great-great grandson of Pygmalion, the descendant of a statue brought to life, and a literary by-word for the ruin of beauty, dead before its time, and the cause for infinite mourning. The work of mourning here providing the schema for the labour of creation, insofar as mourning is work itself, the overcoming of loss by carrying the absent through the world as a permanent condition of making that world.⁶

Like the tree that gives birth to Adonis, this is a labour of the wholly other. Myrrha wishes to be neither dead nor alive, neither human nor animal, but is transformed into the liminal vegetal other of a being without being.⁷ She becomes purely organic matter, whose last function is to reproduce itself, ensuring a process of blind dissemination. The misfires and displacements multiply as the genealogy proceeds, writing a blind history of creation and self-ruin. This is a family of misidentification that proceeds without necessarily knowing where it is going. Pygmalion thinks of himself as the sculptor-maker but his work is determined by Venus. In other versions of the story, the statue is in fact of

Aphrodite, the Greek metamorphoses of Venus. The goddess then brings to life a stone likeness of herself to share a bed with Pygmalion, initiating a chain of libidinal translation and transformation, that ends with her sharing the bed with the mortal descendant of her own likeness. The creative impulse ends in accident and ruin, with beauty impaled in the groin on the tusk of the unappreciative boar. Ciryas mistakes his daughter for a lover, Adonis never recognizes his lover as the likeness and creator of his great-great-grandmother. This family romance is not forged in the furnaces of Mars but is both the story and the effect of sexual difference, of Venus as the female deity, the creator god as woman, whose divinity is compromised both by her own proximity to mortals (her likeness as a living statue, her boy lover Adonis) and by her sacred remit as the deity of love. That is to say, she is the goddess of misrecognition, displacement, denial, blindness, unknowing, and unhappiness. She is the goddess of desire and so of misplaced attachment, misidentified, postponement, and deferral. Creation through Venus is a matter of gender and genre, of story and history, his story and her story, production and reproduction, genealogy and genesis, blindness and touching, and theory and practice.⁸

The case of Pygmalion is a question of the complexity of mimesis, of reproduction and likeness. In chapter 8 of his monumental *Allegories of Reading*, Paul de Man provides us with a reading of Rousseau's secular melodrama, *Pygmalion*.⁹ In this version of the story, Pygmalion brings the statue to life without divine intervention, and Galatea touches her own arm, saying 'me', and touches another sculpture, 'not me'. For de Man, Rousseau's contribution to the Pygmalion myth provides us with a diegesis concerning mimesis and the difficulty of separating the two. Narrative, says de Man, can only ever tell the story of its own inability to tell a story, what he calls 'denominational aberration' (162), the positing and undoing of sense, which endlessly engenders further texts. Pygmalion's creative dream in Ovid not only gives rise to the genealogy of the *Metamorphosis* but to other versions of the story, including that of Rousseau. There is little that is stable about this statue, and the complexity is only multiplied when it is brought to life, engendering its own literary genealogy. De Man contrasts Rousseau's version of Pygmalion with Rousseau's earlier dramatic account of Narcissus. In this play the lead character Valère falls in love with his own portrait, barely disguised as a woman.¹⁰ Like the Narcissus of Ovid, Rousseau's hero is compelled into an endless fascination with an image, in this case a creative work. Narcissus is then a victim of the mystification of mimesis, the misidentification of the image with the original, the self and the projection of the self, the production and the reproduction. In Ovid, Narcissus pines and withers

and it becomes impossible for him to tell the difference between the self and the substitution of the self. The loved object is also the self, or a displacement of the self, vacillating between the two just as the water of a pond ripples and disperses to the touch. The false consciousness of the mimetic image is both immediate and entirely out of reach. Love, *amour-propre*, is replaced by narcissism in the endless digress of a metamorphosis without progress. The consequence of love of the self, the confusion and substitution of the self with the other, is death. There is no future to be hoped for in the pool of Narcissus.

The complimentary stories of Narcissus and Pygmalion demonstrate that the experience of creation, like the experience of love, is complex and, to borrow a phrase from de Man, 'rooted in the quicksands ... which [govern] the relationship between the self and other' (p. 170). What is the situation of the self as creator in a moment of critical practice, or any form of practice come to think of it? Narcissus is deluded, Pygmalion is in denial, Venus is undone; if only a god can create, then even gods are ruined by creation.¹¹ As a writer, filmmaker, composer or artist, is the creating author in any more of a stable relationship as a self and to the self than either Narcissus or Pygmalion? Is that creating author any less deluded or in denial in relation to an empirical self-dispersed across the complexity and confusion of everyday life, as they are undoubtedly lost in the work and text of their creation? What is the nature of this work? Is it the work of mourning for an absent, displaced self or misidentified other? How shall we characterize the speculative labour of writing or making? Can it be separated from that other self that makes its way in the world, or, is one the reflection of the other in deep narcissistic waters? Or is the self-dispersed across the created work another rendering of the self that has a life of its own: a mimetic copy, plastic or warm to the touch? Is the labour of a critical practice doubled by the work of philosophy, which multiplies the distance between self and other? What is the economy of production and consumption between the effort and value of this labour and the selves involved? Might creation and in particular critical practice involve a work of the self that only serves to undo the stability of selfhood?

In the case of Ovid's *Pygmalion* and the many versions and transformations of the story in which the work of art takes on a life of its own, there is an element of 'wonder and misgiving/Delight and terror' (X 286–7) as the familiar and intimate is also radically different. It is not a question of a dichotomy between subject and object, creator and work, but rather as de Man puts it 'the work of art exists as a nondialectical configuration of sameness and otherness, sufficiently uncanny to be called godlike' (p. 177). That is to say, the self and its others cannot be reconciled in the work of art; there is no stability or resolution to be found in

speculative and creative labour. One does not make art in order to know oneself, rather making art tells us about the impossibility of the self. The work of art is sufficiently familiar and strange to be something both in the image of the human and irretrievably non-human. Art does work that humans are incapable of, this is why it is said to be godlike: Venus is the true creator in this history. However, that does not mean that the work of art or speculative labour is omnipotent or without error or deviation. If art is said to be divine, then it is a very human deity, one whose failures are as familiar to us as our own. Art is godlike rather than *Godlike*, the owl of Minerva always flies too late and Venus is the dupe of her own snares. Art knows that it is only work, process, and labour, producing inhuman effects, beyond the human and entirely bound up with the human and the human world.

Galatea-Aphrodite is a godlike work of art. The care and love of the statue is a full-time job for Pygmalion, he worships her as he does the goddess, making sacrifices of a different kind. However, in the statue the specular and the speculative combine, practice and thought, image and theory, whereby she represents the idea of perfect creation for the sculptor. There is then a discrepancy between the statue as a product of the work and labour of the self as creator artist in which Pygmalion's own self is reflected back by his art, and the status of the statue as cold stone, art as wholly other, as radically different from the self of Pygmalion as we can imagine. Further, this is a statue of the inhuman, immortal goddess that Pygmalion takes as his love object in a dynamic in which the self is the agent of its own production as radically other. And yet Pygmalion believes, wholeheartedly, both in the divine and in the possibility of selfhood for his statue, which he dearly wishes would come to life and take on an identity of its own. There is no persuading Pygmalion of his aberration but this is precisely because there is in fact little that is aberrant about it. The story of Pygmalion's delusion is an account of every creative and critical practice as a non-dialectical configuration across the dispersed economy of the self and other.

Pygmalion approaches his statue, *as if* it were human. The attribution of the *as if* is fundamental to our approach to art.¹² We act as if the suspended reference of the work of art referred to a real world.¹³ Equally, the *as if* is central to the philosophical hypothesis as a process of questioning; *as if* describes the very nature of Theory. However, it is not a matter of finding in art itself or in speculative thought aberrant moments of the *as if*, as strange and perverted as Pygmalion's love for his statue. Rather, art and philosophy are two instances of a wider schema in which the *as if* is always at play as the condition for selfhood in the world. We act *as if* we were coherent and stable selves but the pressures

of life and art repeatedly show us that this is as much a delusion as Pygmalion's paraphilia. Art is not a unique moment in which selfhood dissolves, rather it is merely exemplary of our wider experience in the world, in which we are constantly creating, engendering, speculating, and collapsing the self into and around the radically different others that give it meaning. This is the work of art, the labour of thought, critical practice. Galatea awakens and looks Pygmalion in the eye: what misrecognition and misidentification take place in that exchange? As de Man puts it with respect to the Rousseau play, 'the work reads the man and reveals his total insignificance except in his relation to the work' (p. 184). This is work both in the sense of art object and creative labour. This is where the importance of Pygmalion's self resides, dispersed across the work, giving life to the statue by its own reproduction as radically different from itself. The intentions and desires of Pygmalion are immaterial to Galatea, who as a work of art has a life of her own. Pygmalion only matters insofar as Galatea is a reflection of what remains of the selfhood of Pygmalion.

What would happen if Galatea did not love Pygmalion back? What if she did not take too kindly to being touched up while lying on the artist's couch? The answer, for Galatea, would be nothing. She would continue to exist, her selfhood located beyond Pygmalion and capable of its own irregularities and dissolution. For Pygmalion, the disappointment would matter as it would reach to his very sense of self, it would be crushing and ruinous. Ovid does not record what the domestic life of this odd couple involved. They seem to have had only one child, perhaps Galatea fell out of love with Pygmalion and they slept in separate rooms. She after all is godlike and he is only a sculptor. Equally, perhaps the reality of life with a real woman did not live up to Pygmalion's paraphilic fantasy. Having had his deepest desire fulfilled, how could reality possibly compete with Pygmalion's complex circuits of longing? Did Galatea find him late at night pining over the statues in the temple? Creative practice does not promise a happy ever after.

At the end of Rousseau's play Galatea awakens into life, and as the stage direction tells us, she 'touches herself and says: *'Moi'*. Pygmalion (transported) responds; *'Moi!'* (1:1230). They both assert their selfhood; Galatea in surprise, Pygmalion by way of differentiation as much as affirmation. 'Galatea takes a few steps and touches a marble stone: It is no longer I'. Touch is the insurance policy for phenomenology, in which the linguistic act of naming the material trumps the equally linguistic act of naming the self. In this way the linguistic, psychological and textual bundle of contradictions that make up the self earns the designation and assuring clarity of the material. The illusion of touch allows the slip from figurality into materiality, as if they were two different things and

not the effect of each other. Touch short-circuits the *as if*, turning hypothesis into permanence. Touch is at best slippery and while Galatea stroking the marble provides a guarantee, her next gesture (to touch Pygmalion) is far more ambiguous:

Galatea goes in his direction and looks at him. He rises precipitously, stretches out his arms toward her and looks at her ecstatically. She touches him with one of her hands: he trembles, takes her hand, presses it against his heart, then covers it with kisses. Galatea (with a sigh): *Ah! Encore moi.* (1:1230–1)

De Man comments on how equivocal this line really is, ‘the tone is hardly one of ecstatic union, rather of resigned tolerance towards an over assiduous admirer’ (p. 185). Pygmalion might interpret the line as an affirmation of the selfhood of his girlfriend, whose identity is that of love object and defined by Pygmalion’s affections. In this sense ‘*moi encore*’ means ‘*aussi moi*’ [me too/me as well]. However, the ‘Ah!’ and the sigh, for de Man, ‘suggests disappointment rather than satisfaction’ (p. 186) rendering the line as ‘*de nouveau moi*’ [me again]. As if to say, ‘so this is what it means to be alive and a woman.’

Pygmalion’s ardour is in sharp contrast: ‘It is you, you alone: I have given you my entire being: henceforth I shall live only through you.’ Such earnestness not only annuls the self of Pygmalion, defining itself through a dependency on the other, it also, perhaps, invokes a certain ennui in Galatea whose entry into the world now leaves the importance of Pygmalion’s drama behind (the sculptor’s psycho-sexual fantasy life is now the least interesting thing in the play). Galatea’s sigh of ‘is that all there is’ to being a woman, means that the union ends not so much in Paphos as pathos. So much comes into this scene to interrupt and relegate the creator Pygmalion; sexual difference creates a new dynamic in the relation between self and other, rendering the dichotomy irreducibly complex, as productive of future textual encounters as it is of the drama here. Galatea’s ‘Ah! *Encore moi*’ is not an affirmation of the self but an acceptance of the negation of the self, ‘the self-sacrificing negation of the subject’ (p. 186). It is one thing to be a sculptor, it is another to be a sculptor’s wife. However, it is Galatea’s story that comes to take centre stage at the end of Rousseau’s play, demonstrating that such a radical negation of the self is the result of the recuperative power of creative production, which offers both a disarticulation of the self across conceptual and diegetic boundaries and a formal structure for the representation of the metaphor of the self as if it were real. A similar case could be made for Ovid’s Venus who loses herself among the bowers and across the tales of Book X of the *Metamorphoses*, which compromise her deity and epseity, folding her creative

substitution of Pygmalion's statue into her own illusion and negation as a lover. She is left to mourn and to retire from the world, having inaugurated the creative acts that engender the textual progress of both Ovid's text and its creative legacy.

The story of Pygmalion in its many versions offers an exquisite allegory for critical practice. As with all art there is a significant investment of the self in the process of theoretically informed creative production. The introduction of theoretical writing into the creative moment is not an inoculation against the narcissism of the artist rather it doubles down on that narcissism, inflating its potential and pushing it towards new horizons. The theory-practitioner (the philosopher-novelist, the artist-writer, the theoretical auteur) has already made a commitment to identity and places their self and the self in the centre of their critical practice. There is nothing more autobiographical than Theory. To some, a creative art that emerged from an engagement with theoretical writing would be as perverted or as aberrant as Pygmalion's love of stone women. However, just as one should not judge Pygmalion's paraphilia (it is in fact a decisive instance that demonstrates the abnormal nature of the normative) one should not imagine that critical practice has a tangential relation to art in general. Rather, in the explicit formulation of a relationship between creative production and speculative thought, we can find a determining instance of the aporias that run across all making and creation.

The use of J Hillis Miller

In his study *Versions of Pygmalion*, which reads a number of literary texts that deploy the motifs of the Pygmalion story, J Hillis Miller offers an account of Kleist's '*Der Findling*'.¹⁴ Miller's reading of this Kleist short story is the jump-off point for an extended discussion of the performative nature of teaching critical theory. If we allow ourselves to follow Miller's argument for a few pages, it will afford us a significant insight into the question of critical practice. The Yale School critic is interested in what he calls 'inaugural acts of creation' (p. 8). The story of Pygmalion is that of the sculptor who literally releases the statue from the stone that hides it. Ovid describes the stone that holds Galatea as '*fit utilis usu*', made fit for use by being used. There is much that could be said about the uses of 'use', especially in this story where use borders on mis-use, abuse, and self-abuse.¹⁵ However, the relation between the sculptor and the stone is not merely utilitarian, just as the relation between practice and theory cannot be that of functional service. Rather, the stone or the wax begins by being not

fit for use but in being used becomes useful. The initial use of the material by the sculptor makes something not yet useful fit for use and does so by using the unusable. Utility here is not a relation of cause and effect, but rather use is both cause and effect.

As Miller would describe it, such acts of shaping are both constative and performative, i.e. they are both the created outcome and the act of creation that creates creation itself. The inaugural performative makes the useless useful by bringing something absolutely new into existence. The skill of Pygmalion's art is that he is able to disguise this manipulation and fabrication even from himself, collapsing cause and effect, and taking his statue for a real girl. This seeming aberration, of confusing the fabricated and the real, is not unique to Pygmalion. Rather, his sensational case points us towards a truth of all making or construction, namely the confusion between an experience of the material and experience itself. We might think of the material as the proof of experience itself, like Bishop Berkley's stone, but an experience of the material is no different from any other experience.¹⁶ It is the construction of sense that gives meaning to the material as matter. Experiencing materiality is the effect of a linguistic predicament not its anterior. In this sense, the thing that matters in the experience of the material is the linguistic. Perhaps, experience as such, this vaguest of phenomenological terms, is the ideological confusion that unavoidably mistakes a linguistic reality for a material one. This slip in the order of linguistic and material reality is the experience of experience. Of course, material effects are substantial but are only made so by the experience of them. Galatea is stone that lives as a result of Pygmalion's desire that it should. It takes an act of divine intervention to move beyond the confusion of reality with the experience of fabrication.

In his chapter on Kleist, Miller suggests that theoretical texts cannot be treated as secondary to reading literature or art. That is to say, theory cannot have a relation of utility to making. Theory, for Miller, has to be read in an inaugural and creative way, through a productive reading that brings something new into existence. Theory is dead when it is applied. Reading Theory must make something happen. At least this is a different kind of application for theory; theory that applies itself, or, is put to work in order to produce active, productive, performative readings. These readings are not passive or merely cognitive, rather they are creative and make Theory '*fit utilis usu*', made fit for use by being used. This is the place of theory in critical practice; it instigates something new through creative reading. Such inaugural reading, says Miller, is opposed to 'the vast enterprise of assimilative rationalizing' (p. 84) which he associates with the function of the university. A critical practitioner does not

read theory in order to categorize and incorporate its concepts and protocols. This is why a critical practitioner is not the same as a disciplinary philosopher. Rather, creative reading that is radically inaugural is said by Miller 'to propose a new 'contract'' (p. 84) with that disciplinary apparatus. A critical practitioner does not read theory as a philosopher but as an artist, and equally in doing so proposes a new relation to art, which is itself an impulsion within art that compels art beyond the frontiers of its established condition and proprieties.

At the same time philosophical texts are of the order of the constative. They are epistemological and aim to offer knowledge of the world through idiomatic or disciplinary conventions and vocabulary. 'Theory' names something different from philosophy. It should not be thought of as something like 'philosophy for art students', to be used in a utilitarian way. Philosophy cannot be held accountable to art because art, in the first place, is wholly a philosophical concept.¹⁷ Rather, 'Theory' names the performative dimension of reading, namely, it is not a parallel activity to reading literature or making art but is rather a reading act that is, what Miller calls, 'a productive event in the real world of material history' (p. 85). Theory in this sense is a practice; *reading Theory* inaugurates creativity. 'Reading' should be a redundancy in relation to 'Theory' because 'Theory' has no meaning outside of its productive and performative reading. Of course, the texts of Theory, the ones to be found on syllabi and on library shelves are also the works of the philosophical canon. These two characteristics of Theory cannot be resolved or reconciled. Critical Practice is not a dialectical synthesise between theory and practice. The constative and performative aspects of Theory are asymmetrical not harmonizable. This is why the relation between theory and practice is aporetic, lacunar and interminable. In the leap across the abyss of art, Theory and Practice miss one another, just as they hail each other from different sides, each having mistaken the position of the other.

Later in the chapter on Kleist, Miller suggests that 'teaching is practical not theoretical'. By this he means that what happens in the pedagogical space of the seminar or classroom cannot be controlled or predicted by the rational protocols of theoretical texts. The promise of theory is that of clear thinking and far-sightedness, and as such accords with the institutional role the university plays in a modern technological and rational society. However, teaching is like reading, or at least the creative and radically inaugural reading that Miller identifies with theoretical texts, in that its outcomes are unpredictable. Reading and teaching for Miller are performative because their effects cannot be known or programmed in advance; they are not an epistemological event to be defined as the transmission of received and codified knowledge. We should understand

reading here in its broadest sense, including the experience of art, or the affective encounter with theatre or cinema. This sort of reading happens when the lights go off and the projector rolls. What happens in that space cannot be programmed, it is a location of surprise and radical inauguration. This is not to say that reading is not theoretical. At the same time all reading, whatever its avowed status, can only be theoretical. Reading changes theory. What we are calling here Theory as a practice, is theory changing itself through its own reading as an act of its own disconfirmation. As Miller puts it, 'the interaction between theory and reading might be defined as a constant infinitesimal calculus in which reading informs and alters theory, along with the other vital and inaugural effects it has' (p. 94). Reading moves theory on, that is, reading as a practice, reading as the dynamic process of a critical practice, changes theory. It is this transformative aspect that distinguishes Theory from Philosophy. Theory is a metamorphoses; it is the dream of Pygmalion.

Of course, it would be naive to assume that the ways in which reading, or critical practice, changes theory are always a co-operative relationship. This is not a dialectical synthesis or a balanced give and take. Rather, it is a relationship of misunderstanding and on occasion violent appropriation. The point of reading philosophy to make art is to make art not to write philosophy. Critical Practice is another idiom of making, neither disciplinary philosophy nor craft-based art, but it is both philosophical and artistic. It must work as both art and philosophy simultaneously even though the impulse of each pulls in different directions or runs at a tangent to the other. Insofar as critical practice must work as art or a philosophical film must honour its obligations to cinema rather than provide a mere illustration of philosophy, it must stretch itself beyond a strictly theoretical horizon. At the same time theory is identified by its universal and totalizing ambition, assimilating within itself the idiosyncratic according to the principle of reason that is presupposed by philosophical study. Critical Practice is then double and contradictory. On the one hand, critical practice is unique and inaugural, starting from a singular position that it opens onto a radical otherness that transforms and displaces that position. On the other hand, as a theoretical act, it is rational and iterable, with the capacity to be assimilated within the disciplinary protocols of the institution, recorded, subject to commentary and interpretation, disseminated and taught. If it were not, the enterprise of this present book would be entirely futile. On the one hand, if we follow Miller's understanding of speech acts, we would say that critical practice is performative because it is a positing of thought that is radically unpredictable in its effects, whose outcomes cannot be programmed in advance.¹⁸ On the

other hand, and equally, critical practice, like any idiom of art, can always be interpreted and recuperated into a preconceived historical, causal, dialectical, or theoretical schema. It is only in the brief moment of creative reading that we can hold the tension apart long enough in order to push the aporia towards a productive re-inscription.¹⁹

Prometheus unzipped

The myth of Prometheus is distributed across a number of important texts, notably the *Theogony* of Hesiod, a dialogue by Plato, and four plays (not all surviving) by Aeschylus.²⁰ Just as we saw in the figure of Pygmalion, the case of Prometheus provides us with a rich allegory of the aporias of creativity. He is also in important respects a figure associated with Theory, and his punishment for crossing the streams between Theory and creative practice is eternal. Like the Satan of Milton's *Paradise Lost*, he is for the Romantics a character of heroic rebellion who durst defy the omnipotent, not to arms but to a challenge of wits. For Percy Shelley, the rebellion of Prometheus, the assertion of critical intelligence against a malign godhead defies 'power which seems omnipotent' to give 'hope till Hope creates/From its own wreck the thing it contemplates'.²¹ For Mary Shelley, the modern Prometheus would be a bricolage man, not so much an Adam as a fallen angel but unlike Satan who 'has his companions, fellow-devils, to admire and encourage him', her creature is 'solitary and detested'.²² The nuances in each retelling of the Prometheus story are subtle and accumulative but in every case the fate of Prometheus is closely bound to that of humanity. To understand the condition of Prometheus is to contemplate what it means to be human, and as we shall see is to appreciate the ways in which that condition is determined by tales of sexual difference.

In *The Theogony*, the most ancient of the Prometheus sources, he is one of four brothers born of the Titans Iapetus (son of Uranus and Gaia) and Clymene (daughter of Ocean). His siblings are Atlas, who carries the world on his shoulders, Menoetius (a god of violent anger and rash action, his name literally means 'doomed might', killed by Zeus for an act of prideful and impetuous rebellion), and 'scatter-brained' Epimetheus. With brothers like these Prometheus is required to distinguish himself as very much his own Titan, cunning and intelligent unlike Epimetheus, considered in contrast to Menoetius, but whose lasting penance mirrors the fate of Atlas who also challenged the capricious power of the Olympians. While Atlas and Menoetius side against

Zeus in war, Prometheus earns his punishment for outsmarting Zeus in a battle of wits. In a dispute between the gods and mortals over sacrificial rights, Prometheus intervenes to present before Zeus a division of the carcass of an ox. In one pile he placed all the edible meat and fat, disguised by the unappealing stomach of the ox; in another pile he dressed up the inedible and unwanted bones in shining fat. Hesiod records that Zeus is not taken in by the shiny object, seeing through the trick, but chooses the fatty bones anyway as an excuse to take revenge on mankind. Hesiod's excessive piety that attempts to paint Zeus in the best light, as one whose absolute wisdom cannot be tricked, in fact shows him to be even more unappealing than the oily bones he chooses. In this account the all-powerful deliberately chooses the deceitful package or inferior offerings in order to enact cruelty on humanity by withholding from them the power of fire.²³ Zeus' calculation seems somewhat petty here and lacking in foresight, accepting the holocaust of bones in perpetuity as an excuse to withhold fire from mankind. Who could resist taking down such a petulant ass of an omnipotent god? Hesiod notes that Prometheus further outwits Zeus and steals the 'unwearying fire' in a hollow fennel stalk before bestowing it on the Melian race of mortal men. Zeus, who may or may not have seen any of this coming, is so angry that he punishes mankind by sending them a woman to bring eternal misery into their lives. Prometheus, by contrast, seems to get off lightly, dodging the bullet of sexual difference, by being bound by 'inextricable bonds, cruel chains, and [Zeus] drove a shaft through his middle, and set on him a long-winged eagle, which used to eat his immortal liver; but by night the liver grew as much again everyway as the long-winged bird devoured in the whole day' (520-5). There would seem to be nothing less understanding than a god whose wisdom is everlasting.

The account of Hesiod presents us with a number of arresting provocations in an account of creative practice and theory. Here Prometheus is said to be 'kindly' and obviously has a soft spot for the race of men shivering on the earth below; he defies and tricks Zeus not once but twice. It is not so much that Prometheus is determined to help mankind, rather having been thwarted first time by Zeus (when fire was withheld following the trick at Mecone) perhaps Prometheus refuses to be outdone by the all-powerful god. Prometheus cannot help himself; surely he steals the fire as much to annoy Zeus as he does to assist cold humanity? It is the gift of fire that leads to creative acts on the part of humanity, making life as we know it possible, but this creativity is preceded by the act of theft and rebellion by Prometheus, one perhaps motivated by his own desire to exercise his own cleverness and wiles as it is by any sense of largesse or philanthropy. Prometheus is compelled into challenging the impossible. The

creativity of humanity is merely a side effect of a greater struggle against the pomposity of onto-theology. In this sense, Hesiod's Prometheus is a theorist who sees in advance the benefit of fire to man but who has a wider strategic goal of undermining the claims to authority of absolute wisdom. Theft and rebellion are two significant tropes here, the first a non-originary origin for creation, the second a permanent parabasis for theoretical critique.²⁴ Prometheus is both creator/initiator and thinker/tactician, a critical practitioner who cannot help but push the boundaries of his own possibilities.

However, none of this ends well for Prometheus. For the crime of mixing godhead with humanity, theory with practice, he is sentenced to eternal damnation, and not just any old damnation at that, a particularly cruel and unusual punishment – chained to a rock, while an eagle eats his liver by day only for it to grow back overnight: be eaten, sleep, repeat. Hesiod adds the particularly nasty detail of Prometheus also having a shaft driven through his middle, as if the absolute cruelty of the Absolute were not cruel enough already. However, Prometheus' impossible liver offers us another curious figure for the interminable task of theoretical practice. Love, or perhaps art as a substitute for love, may be the thing that eats your heart out. However, theory may be the thing that eats out your liver, only for it to grow back overnight. In the ancient world, it was thought that the liver, a store for the humours, rather than the heart was the source of blood. If to eat one's heart out is to yearn for something unattainable, perhaps, to have one's liver eaten out is to be confronted with the impossibility of thought, or the inadequacy of theory to practice, thinking to life. To have the liver restored and the process begin again on a daily basis is a particularly cruel trick, amnesia takes hold and the challenge begins again only to run up against the limits of the impossible once more, *ad infinitum*. It would seem a suitable metaphor for creative-critical practice that as a permanent condition compels itself into an impossible confrontation with its own limits. Like relations between men and women, that the impossible relation between theory and practice, as the human condition, should be mythologized as a punishment from the gods, also seems cruelly apt. As Kafka says of the Prometheus story that leaves behind only the inexplicable mass of rock in the Caucasus: 'the legend tried to explain the inexplicable. As it came out of a substratum of truth it had in turn to end in the inexplicable.'²⁵ Perhaps there is no amnesia and Prometheus remembers every single bite.

Freud comments on the Prometheus myth in his 1932 text 'The Acquisition and Control of Fire'.²⁶ Here he connects the story of Prometheus with the historic need of primitive communities to control the potential of fire, through

the introduction of a taboo on 'the homosexually-tinged desire to put it out with a stream of urine', the so-called Mongolian law (p. 187). For Freud, the important issues here are the manner in which Prometheus transported the fire, the act of outrage, theft and fraud, and the meaning of his punishment. The fennel stalk is an obvious penis symbol for Freud. However, the male genitals do not harbour fire but its seeming opposite, the water of his stream of urine, the means of quenching fire. It is not unusual, however, in analytic material for a symbol to take on its opposite meaning. The situation is complex, Prometheus has defrauded the gods, and in mythology 'the gods are granted the satisfaction of all desires which human creatures have to renounce' (p. 189). It is instinctual life, the free rein of the id allotted to the gods, which is defrauded when the quenching of fire is renounced. It seems clearer to Freud that the liver, the site of passion and desire, should be the locus for the punishment of Prometheus. The fate of Prometheus then concerns the demand for the renunciation of instinct and the enforcement of that demand. It is a story about guilt and the development of guilt in a psychoanalytic sense. At the same time, for Freud, the flame is also a symbol of the phallus and is connected with erotic desire. The quenching of fire with the penis carries 'the meaning of a pleasurable struggle with another phallus' (p. 190). This is doubled by the attack on the liver, which has a regenerative power like the male member. The mythopoetic content of the Prometheus story then points to sating and quenching of desire, and to its return and indestructibility. It is then a narrative of antithesis, between the genital function of an erect penis, and the quenching of that possibility during the detumescence of urination. Prometheus represents the instinctual and its punishment, the suppression of the libido and its return.

In the context of a discussion of creative theory and practice, this should not surprise us. Another way of reading the myth alongside Freud is to suggest that any instinctual practice is reined in by the theoretical law within, not as an interdict against practice but as a necessary stricture of tension that predicates the possibility of the conditions of practice. If we think of practice as the instinctual life, of what happens regardless or in spite of theory, then such a possibility is the god that is defrauded by renunciation of desire. In this sense, the human desire for practice is transformed into the transcendental privilege of theory. However, theory here does not take on the function of the super-ego, rather like Prometheus the rebel, it retains all the characteristics of an unchecked desire. Theory becomes the site for an idiom of practice that is denied to the world of mortal men. This antithesis is resolved in the eternal punishment of that theoretical impulse, even if it returns on a daily basis to express itself as a

desire for rebellion against the same authority it equally represents. That practice simultaneously stokes the proud flames of theoretical excitation and contains within itself the means to piss all over theory should not surprise us at all.

In *Prometheus Bound* by Aeschylus the initial punishment for the theft of fire is restricted to Prometheus being chained to a rock, the subsequent eating of his liver is an additional plague imposed by Zeus because Prometheus, who holds such knowledge, refuses to tell the Olympian the means by which Zeus will fall from power.²⁷ In the Aeschylus version, Prometheus had helped Zeus secure victory in the war of the Titans. This may explain why Prometheus (also the son of a Titan) has little time for the pomposity of Zeus and claims to absolute knowing. It also suggests that Zeus' torture of Prometheus is particularly cruel, almost as if he is overcompensating, acknowledging in some obscure way the threat that Prometheus poses to Zeus. For Aeschylus the compassion that Prometheus bears humanity is played up as motivation for the theft of divine fire, indeed Prometheus is said to have prevented Zeus from exterminating the race of men ('these schemes no one opposed except myself: But I dared: I ransomed mortals from being utterly destroyed' [180]). Prometheus sees himself as a hero against the 'malady' attached 'to tyranny' (180) and benefactor of humanity: 'all arts among the human race are from Prometheus' (309) including language and the Titanic gift of memory: 'I discover for them Numbers, the surpassing all inventions, the combinations too of letters, and Memory, effective mother-nurse of all arts' (285). However, Aeschylus' Prometheus is also an unrepentant rebel 'I knew all these things willingly, willingly I erred' (201). His good will to mortals is as much as slight to Zeus: in nurturing the fallible, his target is the Absolute. He is a god ill-treated by gods but he is still a god dedicated to undoing the omnipotent.

This Prometheus has the gift of prophecy; like Theory he has the predictive power to see the future unfold before him, even if he cannot escape the fate of his own failure. He predicts that one day Zeus will have a need for him – Zeus will need him to prevent his own overthrow but when that day comes he will refuse to compromise with the almighty. The second half of the play introduces the anachronistic figure of Io, a mortal pursued by the lustful Zeus, who in rejecting the god is destined to wander endlessly irritated by a gadfly. It would seem that the origins of creativity cannot be separated from the question of sexual difference, which in turn is bound up in a rejection of the absolute, showing it then to be an equivocal, jealous and petty form of omnipotence, where the boundary between the infinite and the mortal is crossed frequently, demonstrating the banality of the everlasting. Prometheus predicts that the descendants of Io will free him

from his bondage; Io will not be so lucky in escaping the sex pest Zeus who will make her pregnant with a touch of his hand. The Chorus of Oceanids express the hope that Zeus never takes an interest in them. Who could bear to be loved by the all-encompassing? In the second part of Aeschylus' cycle (*Prometheus Unbound*) it is Hercules who delivers Prometheus: the concluding, or perhaps the first, episode of *Prometheus Pyrphoros* (Prometheus the Fire-bringer) is lost to antiquity. The absent play, of which only one line remains, may have preceded *Prometheus Bound* by telling the story of the theft of fire, or, may have concluded the trilogy with the possible reconciliation of Prometheus and Zeus (who is warned not to marry Thetis whose son would overthrow Zeus just as he had deposed his own father Chronos). Instead Thetis marries a mortal king and gives birth to the hero of the Trojan War, Achilles, and to another literary form and epic tradition. There is then, something compelling in the ambivalence of Prometheus, as an immortal who saves mortality, a prophet who cannot escape necessity, a god whose secret knowledge threatens to end divine rule, and a literary figure whose fragments draw the arts of the divine into the fallen world of the human.

If hindsight is a wonderful thing then it would seem in the case of Prometheus foresight is something of a curse. The very sagacity of foresight must lead to the dissolution of the conditions that first gave rise to its predictive power. Thus as an allegory of theory and practice, the fate of Prometheus demonstrates the ways in which application of an anticipatory model can only ever lead to the risk of not just the insight of a single prediction but of the entire frame of the possibility of premonition. And in knowing this, the restless and sceptic creator persists in putting the exemplar and exemplarity itself at risk: 'I knew all these things willingly, willingly I erred'. It is the practice of wilfully erring that puts Theory to the test, compelling theory beyond itself to know more than itself. In *The Psychoanalysis of Fire*, Gaston Bachelard speaks of 'The Prometheus Complex', which names the problem of 'clever disobedience' (11) as 'a veritable will to intellectuality'.²⁸ Bachelard says, 'we propose, then, to place together under the name of the Prometheus complex all those tendencies which impel us to know as much as our fathers, more than our fathers, as much as our teachers, more than our teachers' (p. 12). Prometheus takes everlasting wisdom from Mt Olympus to the fallen world of humans, putting the infallible to the ultimate and ordinary test of the fallible. He does not stretch for a higher knowledge, rather he plunges knowingly into the empirical and in so doing creates something new that knowledge, even his own, could not foresee. He is the philosopher who reads the newspaper (as Hegel instructed²⁹), the theorist who practices art, his

rebellion is an intellectual one that tests the very boundaries of the intellectual. As Bachelard comments: 'If pure intellectuality is exceptional, it is nonetheless very characteristic of a specifically human evolution. The Prometheus complex is the Oedipus complex of the life of the intellect' (p. 12).

It is the desire to overthrow the authority of authority, to be the author of the undoing of authority, and in so doing authorize another authority beyond authority. This other authority is the expertise of experience. This is not an experience shorn of intellectuality or in any way separate from the intellectual life. Rather, it is a desire to make the intellectual more human by testing, breaking and so exceeding the authority of the transcendent. In the Prometheus complex, Theory breaks itself in order to continue its work enriched by an encounter with its own fallibility. In the knowledge that this encounter can only lead to lasting torment, theory proceeds, willingly. The Prometheus complex is contrasted by Bachelard to the Empedocles complex, named after the hero of Hölderlin's unfinished play about the philosopher who writes in verse and who ends his life by jumping into the volcanic flames of Mt. Etna.³⁰ Prometheus brings life, Empedocles chooses death, sacrificing himself on an intellectual funeral pyre to demonstrate the truth of his cosmogenic philosophy, sure of himself and convinced by his faith in his own certainty. But the universe is not reduced to nothingness along with the thinker, it lives on, and in the account of Diogenes Laertius,³¹ the volcano throws back one of the philosopher's bronze sandals to demonstrate to his followers that Empedocles has not ascended to the immortal gods but has instead met a grisly end attempting to maintain the deceit of a faith in the absolute. In this respect, the comic regurgitation of the classics is to be much preferred to the grandiloquence of Hölderlin's Romantic idealism. The fraud of Empedocles is a kind of psychosis while the intelligent disobedience of Prometheus is an everyday pathology.

The fault of Bernard Stiegler

Bernard Stiegler in the first volume of *Technics and Time*, in the chapter 'Prometheus's Liver', in the section entitled 'The Fault of Epimetheus', seems to rely on more contemporary philosophical accounts than the literary heritage of the ancients.³² In turn invocations of the Prometheus legend by the likes of Martin Heidegger and André Leroi-Gourhan take as their starting point Plato's *Protagoras* rather than Aeschylus or Hesiod (although he does cite Jean-Pierre Vernant's account of Hesiod, if not the text itself).³³ In the Platonic dialogue,

Protagoras recounts another myth of the origins of humanity. In this version, the two brothers are charged with a task by Zeus, to allot to every animal power for survival on the newly created earth. Epimetheus begs his brother to allow him to do this job, asking Prometheus to review his work on completion. Accordingly, Epimetheus equips every creature on the principle of compensation so that, for example, those without speed would be strong, and those who lacked strength would have speed in order to run away from other threatening species. Plato notes that 'Epimetheus was not a particularly clever person' and before long he had used up all the available powers, leaving the human race still unprovided for.³⁴ Prometheus noting this mistake, and knowing the time allotted to the task was nearly over and that Zeus would shortly expect to see the results, decided to steal 'the gift of skill in the arts' [*ten enteknen sophian*] and fire (without which the skills would be useless) from the workshops of Hephaestus and Athena. Protagoras says, 'in this way man acquired sufficient resources to keep himself alive, but he had no political wisdom [*sophia*]' (321d) which was an art in the keeping of Zeus. In the dialogue, Prometheus is punished for his theft but the blame is put on the failure of Epimetheus. Humanity benefits from a share in the portion of the gods, being the only creature that believes in gods, erects altars to them and makes images of them, but also by the arts given to them by Prometheus through which they 'soon discovered articulate speech [*phonen*] and names [*onomata*] and invented culture, agriculture and economics ('houses and clothes and shoes and bedding and got food from the earth' [322a]). It is curious that Stiegler cuts Plato's dialogue at this point before Protagoras explains that the legacy of Prometheus only brought war and destruction upon humanity, which forced Zeus to give mankind politics as well, so that humans could live without killing one another. We will return to this.

Stiegler contends that figure of Prometheus 'makes no sense by itself. It is only consistent through its doubling of Epimetheus' (p. 186). Such an argument might have some traction for us in an account of critical practice; accordingly, we should follow Stiegler's reading for a few pages. For Stiegler the story of Prometheus and Epimetheus points to a philosophical understanding of technics, but belongs to a moment when 'the tragic is still experienced in terms of (the astonishment at the fact that there is) technicity' (p. 185). However, Stiegler wants to argue that philosophy has forgotten Epimetheus in favour of its privileging of Prometheus: literally philosophy has forgotten his forgetting. Between them the two brothers share important aspects of human experience: Prometheus, literally 'forethought', and Epimetheus, literally 'afterthought'. Prometheus, we might say, represents Theory to Epimetheus' experience; Prometheus plans ahead and can

predict the future, Epimetheus is very much about learning through doing, that is to say, acquiring knowledge through mistakes. However, for Stiegler, this is the essential forgotten element of thinking. Epimetheus is not stupid, as Plato contends, but rather is the experience of experience, the rumination on things that have passed. We encountered a similar aporia in Kleist's formulation of General Mirabeau and La Fontaine's lion. In the case of Epimetheus we have a figure 'of deferred action, of the *après-coup*, of return through the failure of experience' (p. 186). It is surely only on the basis of such failure that foresight can make its plans for the future but just as theory cannot stand alone from practice, the truth of experience and forgetting, always arrives too late. It arrives in time to ruin theory, to spoil the party for theory by demonstrating its failings; forgetting experience cannot arrive on time to help theory land without error, but without this forgetting we would not insist on theoretical foresight in the first place.

Stiegler wants to argue that this forgetting is absent from the very centre of phenomenology itself and so his own re-inscription of technicity as a forgotten issue in metaphysics marks a radical disruption in the philosophical tradition.³⁵ This study is less concerned with the validity of Stiegler's claims for his own argument, but is more taken with this decisive aporia in the experience of experience itself, or, as it pertains to the relation, such as it is, between theory and practice. The fault of Epimetheus is to have forgotten humanity: 'Humans are the forgotten ones. Humans only occur through their being forgotten; they only appear in disappearing' (p. 188). That is to say, humanity is distinguished by its difference and supplementarity to the animality that exceeds it. To such a bold claim we might add that humans are the forgetting ones, in this respect the god Epimetheus is all too human. Like the question of the Fall of Adam and Eve, this story of origins relies upon a double fault, in this instance, forgetting followed by theft. The default origin of humanity is always fault, but mankind is innocent of Prometheus' crime, he is the one who will be punished for all eternity. His actions have their own origins in the fault of his brother; humans benefit from this forgetting but are not the ones who are punished for it, at least not in the text of Plato. Rather, unlike in Hesiod, Zeus himself forgets the fate of humans and so allows a gap to open between a world of mortals and the immortality of the gods. Humanity emerges, forgotten, as Zeus carries on a war among Titans as he takes revenge on Prometheus, whose gifts to man in turn become a cause for concern and the occasion of later intervention by Zeus to make humans more human. Politics is of course no less an ambiguous gift than fire or sexual difference.

The universe that develops after Prometheus' munificence, which is also a larceny, is divided between distant and withdrawn gods and forgotten humans

defined not by a fall or a fault but by death, their very mortality. The sacrifice of animals to the gods by humans is the mediation that connects the two realms, a sacrifice that exists through a fraud so that man might distinguish himself from the animals that were equipped with talents while he was forgotten. It is then the experience of finitude that separates humanity from the divine and in this space of mortality the gift of skill in the arts is indissociable from the faults of Prometheus and Epimetheus, from planning and forgetting, from theory and practice. It is under these circumstances that the social, religious and the political are established, whereby forgetting through finitude defines the play of theory ruined by practice in a political community founded in a cult of sacrifice. Equally, the failure of Prometheus has consequences in the world of the immortals, which is as equally divided as a political community as the world of men. In Plato, Zeus is just as petty as he is in Hesiod or Aeschylus, taking his revenge on Prometheus for having dared share ambiguity with humanity. Up until the moment that Epimetheus forgot about humanity, the race of men had not known hunger or cold or dissent or love, these were the preserve of the immortals, while man lived in a golden age of innocence in which they shared proximity to their gods. The fault of Prometheus is to have brought such ambiguity into the world of men, imagining that it was a gift from the gods. This share of the divine turns out to be the cause of all man's woes. In other words, the gift of Prometheus to the human race is humanity. Humanity, on these terms, is then a stolen divinity, one compromised by finitude, one that has its origin in amnesia and burglary.

Prometheus gives us *prométheia* within finitude, the experience of mortality. As Stiegler describes it, 'Prometheus attempted to mislead Zeus, as a result of which there emerged the human condition' (p. 192). The truth of this condition appears in the disappearance of humanity, its forgetting and death undone by disease and hunger. At the origin of this fault, for Stiegler, is the non-origin of technology or the prosthetic, the non-human: the fire of Prometheus that makes but precedes humanity. Our interest here is not so much with the question of technicity per se but with what comes with it, or even before it, namely, invention. Invention is then both a cause and effect of this default origin of humanity. Invention and imagination (*mékhané*) come with the prosthetic given to humanity by Prometheus, which is to say that they have an origin outside of themselves: a pro-synthesis that is beyond or placed in front of. This is the fault of Epimetheus, that the human must forever after be something other than itself. Unlike the animal that has scales or wings or fur or gills, the human's defining attributes must be something other than itself, the skills of the making and industry, technology and housing, agriculture and the arts. This is the way in

which Prometheus chooses to mitigate the error of his brother, defining the human experience as something beyond itself and a forgetting of the essential. The human is without essential qualities rather it is, after Prometheus, defined entirely using artifice and the ability to invent. Whether *techne* gives rise to *logos* (reason and language) is a moot point here, on Stiegler's reckoning both 'logos and *tekhne* are modalities of the same being-outside-oneself' (p. 193). To this list we might also add allegory, *allos agoria*, being the state of other speaking, the narrative that compels itself to mean something other than itself, like the story of Prometheus and Epithemeus, sharing with *logos* and *tekhne*, like *philos*, as both predicate and effect, this modality of being outside oneself. The gift to humanity, the gift of humanity, is not a positive one. It is an ambiguous inheritance that is offered as a compensation for having been forgotten, left out when all the qualities were being distributed throughout the animal kingdom. To be human then is to create, but creation is ruined from the start, from the default origin, by the failures of humanity as gifted to us by the gods.

In Plato, Zeus sends humanity politics, in Hesiod he sends sexual difference. In the *Theogony*, Zeus sends the race of men the first woman as the sower of discord; however, here she has no name. It is in *Works and Days* that Hesiod expands upon this myth, naming the woman trained by Athena and Aphrodite as Pandora.³⁶ Prometheus has warned Epimetheus not to accept any gifts from Zeus for fear that it might be something harmful to man. However, Epimetheus either forgets this advice or is just accident prone, accepting Pandora who brings with her a jar of woes. In this version, living in a golden age without knowledge of sorrow or hard work, the race of men are introduced to 'countless plagues', diseases and evils when Pandora opens the 'lid of the jar with her hands and scattered' its contents. Only hope remained in the jar before the contagion is stopped. Once again, the experience of what it means to be human is founded in a double fault: the vengeance of Zeus upon men as the receiver of Prometheus' stolen goods, and the negligence of Epimetheus, taken in by 'the beautiful bane' of Pandora. From these originary faults difference enters the world, producing both inequality and the permanent state of humanity, the experience of otherness, that is, being outside oneself. Thus, difference is both originary and non-natural, it is the result of the artifice of the gods who create the first female mortal as an act of revenge. In this sense, Zeus' vengeance on the race of men is to inflict upon them the difference that already exists among the Olympians, to bring discord and sorrow into the world is to make men more like the gods.

Stiegler does comment on Pandora and this second fault of Epithemeus (pp. 195–6) noting that the ultimate meaning of Pandora's jar is the introduction

of temporality into the world of men thought as mortality and birth through sexual difference. He is leaning heavily on Vernant's account of the story in terms of the question of *elpis* (expectation, time).³⁷ It is Vernant who notes that the fate of Prometheus is the misfortune that strikes the hero of prescience. The mistakes of Epithemeus are the result of a counterbalance and tension with his brother, the condition of comprehension after the event, *épimétheia*. In this sense, Prometheus is never surprised by what befalls him, unlike the mortals and Epithemeus who never see any of this coming. Insofar as, Stiegler is correct to want to reintroduce the faults of Epithemeus back into a philosophical account of the myth, we might say that the stricture between Prometheus and Epithemeus inserts a certain blindness into theory. A refusal or inability to see is the antidote to an unfolding of theory that would programme a future without failure. It is not a question of forgetfulness in the form of Epithemeus or difference in the guise of Pandora, providing a cure for mortality, for death and finitude is the condition of the human. Rather, the knowledge of death is balanced against a lack of understanding of the given moment and the manner in which life will play out and finally end. Thus creativity or invention enters the world as a necessity for human survival, as an effect of difference and finitude, but while it is predicated on the foresight of theory (*prométheia*) it is curtailed by the blindness of experience (*épimétheia*) which both ruins the ambition of theory and prevents us from fully grasping the extent of that ruin in the given moment. Hope is left inside Pandora's jar, the version of hope that enters the world instead is this structure of anticipation of the future (*Elpis*) that is a blind hope in the face of mortality. In the Aeschylus play, Prometheus tells the Chorus, 'I prevented mortals from foreseeing their doom ... I caused blind hopes to dwell within them' (180). There can be no hope for theory other than blind hope. The knowledge of its own failure is not sufficient to describe the human condition, rather theory contains within its operation a blindness to its own end, this is what makes it both possible to continue and impossible to conclude. This constant invention and re-invention of theory is the creativity that we call practice.

What Stiegler calls the 'primordial idiocy' of Epithemeus, his constitutive blindness and forgetting that doubles up and cuts through the ambition of his theoretically gifted brother is the cause of 'finite singularity and freedom' (p. 199). Theory with infinite foresight can never err and so no difference can ever affect it. Under such circumstances no event can ever take place; no act of invention is possible in a world of infallible foresight. Rather, to understand after the fact is to have a history; *épimétheia* says Stiegler 'comes too late to reflect upon its

passive mode, this very reflexivity lingering in the empirical, that is strewn with accumulated errors' (p. 199). This practice is constituted historically as a weave of differences, inequalities and failures; it is both structural and historic and no more historical than it is structural. It is this situation in which the mortal experience is constructed, always already preceded by the facts of failure and arriving too late to learn from its mistakes, inheriting all the faults of an ancient legacy that begins with the double default of Epithemeus and Prometheus.

Stiegler concludes his account of the myth by returning to the *Protagoras* to the moment when Zeus sends Hermes to deliver political skills [*ten politikhen tekhen*] to humanity. Hermes asks Zeus in what way should he distribute this skill: 'Shall I distribute these *tekhnai* as the arts were distributed – that is, on the principle that one trained doctor suffices for many laymen, and so with the other experts? Shall I distribute justice and respect for their fellows in this way, or to all alike?' (332c). Zeus lets it be known that all should share in these virtues as they do the arts. In fact, if anyone is unable to acquire their share of political virtue 'he shall be put to death as a plague to the city' (322d). Politics is then an art imprinted on every mortal as a result of the originary default of Prometheus and Epithemeus, provided as another compensation for forgetting, failure and theft. In this way, everything that pertains to theory and practice in creative invention also adheres to theory and practice in politics. The astute reader will be able to return to this book as a commentary not only on the critical practice of art but also on the political field. Stiegler calls politics 'an art that presupposes a *praxis* of the letter' (p. 201). That is to say, it is another re-inscription, doubling and disruption of the experience of being-outside-oneself that for us will define critical practice, structured between the anticipation of the future that worries for its own ruin in advance, and the wisdom of failure. The political moment, like the impossible event of critical practice, is a reflection that comes in advance (*prométheia*) and is never at peace (*épithémeia*). For Kant peace can only lie beyond finitude in the quite of the grave, on this occasion Stiegler suggests peace 'is the exclusive privilege of immortal beings' (p. 202).³⁸ That is to say, only a god can know peace. Politics and critical practice are interminably restless.