

Infrapolitical *ēpimethēia*:

A Wondrous Machineⁱ

Gabriela Méndez Cota

Universidad Iberoamericana Ciudad de México

To be an echo is more difficult and rarer than to have opinions and to represent standpoints. To be an echo is the suffering of thinking. This passion is a quiet sobriety. It is infinitely more difficult, because more endangered, than the highly touted objectivity of scientific research. To be an echo, namely of the claim of being, requires a carefulness with language that the technical-terminological style of language in the sciences knows nothing of at all.

(Heidegger, [1949]: 62).

This essay derives from a conference paper in Spanish titled *Figuras de Epimeteo*, which revisited interpretations of the Greek myth of Epimetheus, the forgetful brother of Prometheus and the forgotten husband of Pandora. Ivan Illich (1922-2002) and Bernard Stiegler (1952-2020) borrowed the figure of Epimetheus in the process of elaborating an existential approach to technology in the age of systems. This essay takes the general question of resonances between Illich and Stiegler as thinkers of technology and the human, capitalism and Christianity, politics and faith, towards a more specific question concerning figures and storytelling within infrapolitical reflection in the wake of the Anthropocene. What is left of Epimetheus, after being used as a metaphor of Christian love (Illich) and of originary prostheticity (Stiegler)? Do ethical/existential figurations of Epimetheus tell us anything useful about the task of thinking today, or does any insistence on figuration and storytelling amount to a denial of extinction scenarios at a time when ‘the end of man has generated a thousand tiny industries of new dawns’ (Colebrook, 2016: 86)?

Preamble

In the 1930s Walter Benjamin contrasted storytelling, as the ability to transmit *experience* –or ‘intelligence coming from afar’ –with *information*, ‘a handle for what gets the readiest hearing’ (2006: 365). Since novel readers and information consumers were no longer familiar with the enigmatic chastity of traditional folklore and fairy tales –that is, with the absence in them of logical explanations and psychological descriptions – their very obsolescence held the potential of something like a critical function, a distancing effect. The survival of storytelling in the age of mechanical reproduction was unlikely, however, as much as that of the storyteller who was, for Benjamin, a spiritual craftsman, one moved not so much by knowledge or interest as by some forgotten kind of wisdom. The storyteller was ‘the man who could let the wick of his life be consumed completely by the gentle flame of his story’ (377).

Nearly a century later, Alberto Moreiras has referred to Benjamin’s essay on storytelling while describing the dialectic of reactionary and utopian reason in *Infrapolítica [instrucciones de uso]* (2020). Storytelling would belong to the camp of ‘reactionary reason’ by virtue of working through affective repetition, as opposed to narrativity and conceptualization. From this it seems to follow that infrapolitical reflection, which purports to be neither reactionary nor utopian, could not be aligned with storytelling. And, yet, Moreiras concludes, enigmatically, that ‘[!]o que busca lo reaccionario, contra lo reaccionario mismo, es la entrada en escena de un discurso del amo que aniquile al amo, es decir, una política sin sujeto, una política del no sujeto, o una subjetivación sin cabeza: política o infrapolítica de la piel de lobo’ (2020: 57). Perhaps, since repetition is a powerful force of its own, with no ultimate sense or meaning, storytelling remains, as language for Heidegger, an essential medium for thinking. Hence, by the way, the use that Moreiras makes of Heidegger’s own storytelling when he describes the task of infrapolitical reflection, namely, an

impossible thematization of the absolute difference between life and politics. One of the most striking and memorable invitations to undertake such that task is precisely a story about Heraclitus refusing to do politics out of a seeming preference for children's play. After quoting Heidegger's mention of such a story, Moreiras reflects:

Nunca sabremos, podemos solo imaginar, lo que el viejo Heráclito tendría en la cabeza sobre esos canallas y bribones, kakói, que andan de pie a su alrededor y se sorprenden o hacen que se sorprenden, imitando la emoción del filósofo, de que el gran sabio juegue con los niños y pierda de tal manera el tiempo en lugar de sumarse a ellos para hacer negocio administrativo. Ahora bien, algo se traduce. Lo que me importa no es, justamente, recrear el momento heraclíteo, sino solo lo que puede traducirse, quizás trivialmente, a nuestra época; especialmente en los tiempos que corren, cuando el estrechamiento de la experiencia ha llegado a tal punto que a muchos no se les ocurre ya que se pueda hablar de otra cosa que de politizar o hacer otra cosa que política. ¡Politice Ud., siempre politice! Pero ¿es posible oír a Heráclito decir que a veces es mejor jugar a las tabas que politizar? (Moreiras, 2020: 113-114)

Whether it is possible today to hear the old Heraclitus is a question that clearly echoes Benjamin's critical preference for storytelling over information consumption. Benjamin's was, in turn, an infrapolitical preference as much as a critical desire, the difference being perhaps rather subtle, 'a matter of emphasis', either of 'how to look, how to see' (Moreiras, 2020: 120), or of *how to listen, how to hear*. My own emphasis here echoes, alongside Benjamin and Moreiras, a host of other storytellers who insist on creating a distancing effect within contemporary theoretico-political discourse. For some feminist storytellers, it is not just a matter of demonstrating the sexed/gendered structure of narratives in general, but more fundamentally, it is a matter of *thinking*, which is to say of *echoing*, though not necessarily in a nostalgic way, the

structural failure of representation, which belongs to being as such.

Within an Anglophone tradition of feminist figuration, the force of storytelling (or that in storytelling which disrupts gendered oppositions between orality and literacy, folktales and novels, and so forth) continue to affirm themselves performatively in at least some critical receptions of the Anthropocene (Kember 2016; Basset, Kember & O’Riordan, 2020). To cite just one example, Joanna Zylińska and Sarah Kember retell the children’s tale ‘The Three Bears’ in order to have its central character, Goldilocks, ‘make us aware of our own derangements when sliding up and down the historical or even geological pole all too smoothly, and to [let her] add some stoppage points herself’ (Zylińska, 2014: 31). A fictitious ‘Goldilocks principle’ is offered, in this case, as an interruption of the grandiose, redemption-seeking assessments of political philosophers regarding global capitalism, generalized stupidity, and now the Anthropocene. For, as Claire Colebrook also poignantly shows, in the current (post)critical climate the news of planetary catastrophe is routinely made into a resource: the latest means for the delirious self-aggrandizement and self-reproduction of (philosophical, or technological) Man. If, as Colebrook also pronounces (2014, 15), a feminist critique of ‘Man’ would be at this point ‘the most tired of gestures’ (since He has always ‘lived on by feminist critique’), what could be left for Goldilocks and the three bears? Is there a better way to think –that is, a way better than *politics* –about the *stoppage points* that the ‘little proto-feminist trespasser’ adds herself to the narrative framework of the Anthropocene?

As the Anthropocene frenzy in the Anglophone Humanities was being prepared a little more than a decade ago, philosopher Zenia Yébenes was in Mexico, patiently tracing mystic writing and contemporary literature's attempt 'to think the impossible to think' through the work of figuration. Like Benjamin, she foregrounded the ambiguity of figures, which are *nothing* apart from enigmatic words, images and phrases, the meaning of which only half-reveals itself in interpretation (2007: 23). While fragments of theory can be extracted from an interpretation, they never manage to form a total system, and that is because of the very capacity of figures to sustain a seemingly infinite desire. Figures, Yébenes insists, remain open to being questioned or rejected, selected or augmented by the intervention of others. Thus, like other feminist thinkers, Yébenes understands figuration not as menacing metaphorizing or semantic entrapment but as a

textual work that transforms what is transmitted, that suppresses or adds, that displaces times and places, that joins the commentary to the figure, while also elaborating a rhetorical or persuasive transformation of the figure for a religious and/or political cause, to exalt a doctrine of love, or emphasize a vision of human relationship, or an aesthetic experience (25).

Once causes reveal themselves as effects of figuration, it becomes a matter of attending to whether, *in each case*, figuration dissolves into an 'infantile, lactating, and in the last instance narcissistic' relationship with the text (Moreiras 2020: 15), or into a master discourse that kills the master and releases a headless subjectivation. A way to tell the difference here might reside in Benjamin's claim that '[d]eath is the sanction of everything that the

storyteller can tell. He has borrowed his authority from death. In other words, it is natural history to which his stories refer back' (2006: 369). If death or, rather, mortality, is the sanction of everything that the storyteller can tell, then the stakes of feminist figuration *too* pertain to something other, prior to human sex/gender politics as such.

Regarding 'natural history', Weinstein and Colebrook observe that the current scenario of *literal* extinction renders stories about the (self-producing) human 'enigmatic, if not null and void' (2017: x). They argue, on this basis, for a critical practice that raises 'a sense of human limits and require[s] thinking beyond the human conditions of existence' (x). This cannot be, however, a posthuman project of transcending the human, 'precisely because whatever has defined itself as human has always done so by distancing itself from any determined or specified humanity' (xv). Instead, what Weinstein and Colebrook describe as 'a single plane from which there are countless claims and dismissals as to what counts as a human or person' (xv) might be thought in terms of the force of figuration, its self-destructive potentiality, or what de Man called 'literature' (1979: 10). This connection suggests some resonances between infrapolitical reflection and critical life studies, two seemingly independent responses to the question: have the death-sanctioned forces of storytelling disappeared in the *disfigured* time of the Anthropocene and if so, what *difference* does that make?

Figuras de Epimeteo

The dawn awaits the hour when man will renounce his power to make things which shield him from the other. Prometheus taught us to shape iron. Epimetheus has but to learn to let his heart speak. The drama of Prometheus was a struggle with the gods. The drama of Epimetheus is the search for peace among men.

(Ivan Illich, 1970: 16)

Today, I have come to the point of saying that I defend capitalism against itself, or Christianity against itself, because we live in a terrible age of Christianity transformed into capitalism. As a result, we have the responsibility to revisit and re-evaluate all of this. It is not a question of saying: I am not Christian.

(Bernard Stiegler, 2008: 326)

Whether the God lives or remains dead is not decided by the religiosity of humans and even less by the theological aspirations of philosophy and natural science. Whether God is God, this takes place from and within the constellation of being. As long as we do not thoughtfully experience what is, we can never belong to what will be.

(Martin Heidegger, 1949: 72)

The secondary character Epimetheus comes down to us mainly from Hesiod, Aeschylus, and Plato. In Hesiod's version, which is the oldest, the clever titan Prometheus (meaning 'foresight') has three brothers, two of which choose to fight the hopeless war against the Olympians, while 'scatter-brained' Epimetheus (meaning 'hindsight'),ⁱⁱ follows Prometheus in his calculated decision to fight on the side of Zeus. At any rate, Prometheus attempts to trick and even mock Zeus, who punishes Prometheus by depriving his human friends of fire, which was their share in divine life.ⁱⁱⁱ As is known, Prometheus steals the fire back, provoking a second revenge by Zeus, who then issues instructions to have Pandora fabricated and sent to slow-witted

Epimetheus as a poisoned gift under the custody of Hermes.^{iv} As expected by Zeus, while Prometheus is chained to a pillar in the Caucasus Mountains, where a vulture eats his liver every day, Epimetheus welcomes the beautiful Pandora, and realizes what has really happened only too late. As prescribed by Zeus, Pandora opens an amphora in which the gods have trapped all evils affecting mortal beings: labour, madness, vice, passion, disease, age. The evils infest the couple, and the cycle of civilization begins. Only *elpis*, ‘fallacious hope’, does not escape from the amphora, convincing mortals, with her lies, ‘not to commit a general suicide’ (Graves, 2012: 214).

For Hesiod, Prometheus is an impious god, Epimetheus is a foolish one, and Pandora is a well-deserved punishment that explains humanity’s tragic condition. Mythographer Robert Graves claims, however, that such a version of the story is ‘not an authentic myth but an anti-feminist fable, probably invented by Hesiod himself’ (219-220). Pandora, he claims, was in fact the goddess of the Earth, who had been worshipped as Rhea in Athens and elsewhere. As we shall see, Ivan Illich shares Graves’s opinion, while the only thing certain is that if, according to Hesiod, the story of humankind starts with Prometheus and ends with Pandora, Pandora’s role in the drama was for a long time forgotten, overlooked, or downplayed. Rather than dismissing Hesiod’s version as patriarchal, Elissa Marder (2014) remarks that in Hesiod’s text, Pandora is referred to as ‘anti puros’ or ‘counterfire’, making it clear that Prometheus and Pandora are inverted figures of one another. This does not mean, however, that Pandora (‘the all-endowed’) represents Earthly Woman while Prometheus represents Technical Man. Instead, Marder argues that Pandora confounds the proto-metaphysical, *gendered* division of life and death, making human life ‘something radically other than human’ (397).

Marder suggests Pandora is less a beautiful woman than a *wonderful* creature that not only brings sexual difference to the life of men but simultaneously brings artifice and rhetoric. In

this sense, Pandora is for her ‘a figure of figuration itself’, ‘a figure of all other figures’, ‘a figure of rhetoric’ that ‘both incarnates the very possibility of human figuration and challenges the very foundation of the human’ (2014: 389). If Pandora, as Paul de Man wrote of rhetoric, ‘radically suspends logic and opens up vertiginous possibilities of referential aberration’ (1979: 10), Marder’s reading of it offers more complex and nuanced terms to think about Epimetheus, Pandora and the ways in which Prometheus persists as a reference point for ‘the most intractable and enduring patriarchal and androcentric paradigms regarding the place of man in the world’ (2014: 387).^v Beyond an idiosyncratic misogyny, it would be through the anthropological reduction of Pandora to Woman that the androcentric paradigm of Western metaphysics continues to forget both a dynamic, or aberrant ‘Earth’, and Epimetheus too.



Small sculptures of Epimetheus and Pandora (1600-1610) attributed to *El Greco* in Museo Del Prado’s collection. Image by Jvallmitja CC BY-SA 4.0
<https://commons.wikimedia.org/w/index.php?curid=84064250>

As the story goes, Epimetheus accepted the gift and stayed at home with it to be forgotten, while his brother Prometheus took off to a spectacular, unforgettable tragedy. Whereas for Aeschylus, Prometheus is a philanthropic titan that is proud to suffer for the benefit of mortals under the despotism of the tyrant Zeus,^{vi} in Plato's *Protagoras*, Prometheus appears as a well-meaning character, but not at all as the savior of mortals. More in accord with Hesiod's version, the savior there is a role that corresponds to Zeus. Upon seeing the incapacity of mortals to live together in peace, it is Zeus who saves them by giving them shame, decency, and justice. In fact Prometheus is not seen again, until Romanticism, as a hero. Goethe and Shelley, and later Marx, vindicate Prometheus as a figure of the self-affirmation of humanity, the very zeal for emancipation and progress that consciously met ecological catastrophe for the first time in the 1970s: a decade marked by the countercultural activity of both feminism and environmentalism.

Shortly before the publication of *Limits to Growth. A Report for the Club of Rome's Project on the Predicament of Mankind* (1972), the Austrian-born Catholic priest Ivan Illich moved from Puerto Rico to Mexico and established, together with Valentina Borremans, the Centro de Documentación Intercultural (CIDOC). There, in a ranch within the leafy resort city of Cuernavaca, Illich held widely-attended seminars and wrote his best-known political pamphlet, *De-schooling Society* (1971), the last chapter of which is titled 'The Dawn of Epimethean Man'. In it, Illich attempted to re-write the story of Epimetheus and Pandora as part of an anarcho-Christian indictment of modern Promethean society. It would be also in Cuernavaca that, three decades later, geochemist Paul Crutzen would warn about the geological impact of Promethean societies. Even if we took the geological scale of the Anthropocene as an indication of the hopeless belatedness of Illich's and so many others' countercultural politics, it may still be worthwhile to look at Illich's figure of Epimetheus in connection with that of Bernard Stiegler, a philosopher who lived long enough to

respond to Crutzen's warnings directly. Stiegler read the Anthropocene through the lens of a missing link between the thinking of technology and existential reflection that he began to elaborate in the first volume of the series *Technics and Time*, titled *The Fault of Epimetheus*. For Stiegler, Epimetheus is

the forgotten of metaphysics. The forgotten of thought. And the forgotten of oblivion when thought thinks itself as oblivion. Whenever one speaks of Prometheus, one forgets this figure of forgetting that, like the truth of forgetting, always arrives late: Epimetheus (1998: 186).

In what follows I suggest that the contemporary refiguring of Epimetheus harbors an infrapolitical promise of de-narrativizing not only Promethean modernity, but also the longer *gendered* history of metaphysics. Yet, rather than proposing to include Illich and Stiegler in an infrapolitical or a feminist theoretical canon, what I try to do is insert singular stoppage points in Epimethean storytelling: an infrapolitical *ēpimethēia* that, precisely by embracing its own finitude, and perhaps even its own extinction, eludes assimilation into a political or a theoretical discourse. Somewhat excessively, perhaps even *erotically*, such a gesture seeks, in Pandora's wondrous machine of referential aberration, another forgotten sense of forgetfulness, which resonates with several infrapolitical concerns, from the unconscious, the death drive and absolute singularity, to the materiality of writing, the complex dynamism of terrestrial systems, and being as such.

Illich's Epimetheus

Illich's re-telling of the myth of Prometheus, Epimetheus and Pandora was, according to José María Sbert (2009), a rhetorical intervention in the critical climate of a time that conceived the world in terms of political Left and Right, while Illich was reading it more and more in terms of the theological structure of economic modernity—the latter being, for him, a long-term consequence of the institutionalization of the Christian faith. In

the 1970s, Illich had not realized the full implications of his own diagnosis of Western civilization, and he sustained the political hope of a Christian-inspired reversal of modern economic thought. ‘The Dawn of Epimethean Man’, which was first published by CIDOC and later became the last chapter of Illich’s worldwide best-seller *De-schooling Society* (1971), remains exemplary of such a political phase in Illich’s intellectual trajectory, where Epimetheus reappears as a countercultural figure of Christian love.

For Illich, contemporary technological society amounts to the annihilation of freedom in a Christian sense, which is, in his interpretation, an absolute or incalculable freedom to love the other (or not). It is within a narrative of how such a civilizational destiny progressively unfolds that Illich places ‘Epimethean man’ after the figures of ‘primitive man’, ‘Apollonian man’, and ‘contemporary man’. All these figures stand for degrees of calculability or measurement. While primitive man lived in a world without measure, classical culture evolved as a process of increasing measurement of everything, until the emergence of contemporary who learns, from the start, ‘that he is measured by the same scale which can also be applied to things’ (1970: 1/10). The contrast between Epimetheus and Prometheus appears, in this narrative, as that between primitive man’s sense of *hope* –which, like Christian love, requires the incalculable –and classical and modern man’s investment in *expectation*, a demand of calculability. The classical fool of the story, Epimetheus, thus becomes for Illich a way to save what cannot be measured, beneath the prototype for a courageous post-contemporary ‘man’:

Prometheus is usually thought to mean “foresight,” (...). He tricked the gods out of their monopoly of fire, taught men to use it in the forging of iron, became the god of technologists and wound up in iron chains. (...) The brother of Prometheus was Epimetheus or “hindsight.” Epimetheus was infatuated when he beheld Pandora. The warnings of Prometheus could not stop his brother from taking Pandora to be his wife, and when the bride

opened her amphora, the cycle of civilization started. Promethean Man began to make this world. Epimetheus stayed with hope-ful Pandora, and the couple continued to “do their thing,” as one says today. (...) Except that his daughter was the second mother of mankind, Epimetheus was forgotten. Only now awakens the possibility that men of his boldness might survive the end of the promethean age (Illich, 1970: 14).

Like the mythographer Graves and many feminists, Illich regarded the Greeks of the classical period as ‘moralistic, misogynistic patriarchs who shied away from the first woman’, and who would remember her only for the evils she let escape from the amphora, forgetting that ‘the all-giver’ was also the custodian of hope. However, as Sbert notes, the most significant modern precedent of Illich’s eccentric reading of the Promethean myth is however found in *The Return of Pandora* (1810) where the old Goethe could apparently no longer identify so easily with Prometheus, and instead depicted Pandora as the prototype of the Ideal, of Beauty, of Peace and Poetry. Illich recycled this romantic reversal of preferences at the dawn of the environmental movement, when he *hoped* that a new sense of Earth’s finitude would awaken *reflection* and motivate contemporary man to ‘marry the Earth’ as Epimetheus had once *chosen* to marry Pandora. In this sense, Illich’s Epimetheus is ‘a figure of reform, in the sense of personal or spiritual renewal, in accordance with Christian values’ (Sbert 2009: 77).

To this day, the emphasis on spiritual and person-centered Christian values characterizes the most influential readings of Illich’s legacy in the Mexican context, which would seem to place ‘Epimethean man’ squarely within the metaphysics of the subaltern turn (Williams, 2017). At the same time, and since infrapolitics –like deconstruction –‘happens everywhere all the time’ (Moreiras, 2020: 81), one might at least *wonder* what exactly Epimetheus married after all, what kind of a *choice* it was to marry and be forgotten. If, as Marder suggests, Pandora is not a beautiful woman but a wonderful artifact that ‘radically

suspends logic and opens up vertiginous possibilities of referential aberration' (de Man, 1979: 10), the Epimethean reception of Pandora might count itself as *anti puros*, so much that even the gendered horizon of marriage –which Illich regards elsewhere as a fatal step towards the institutionalisation of faith, or technological society –is disrupted from within by the wonderful artifact's terrifying capacities. It is because those wonderful capacities *come from elsewhere* that they undermine any Promethean (or, in Illich's broader diagnosis, any *religious*) investment in measurement, planning, regulation, administration, or expectation, by contrast with 'hope' or 'faith'.

It might be trivial to say that Illich's position, like the Epimethean/Promethean myth, remains like any text ambiguous and open to interpretation. His understanding that 'the very essence of Christian faith is the renunciation of the use of power' (Sbert, 2009: 88) can be read as an ethico-political program, such as decolonial 'buen vivir', or as a decision of existence, such as infrapolitical reflection. Illich's life-long commitment to 'little acts foolish acts of renunciation' or 'self-chosen poverty', might be read as a culturally specific, gendered, normative 'love' for Mother Earth, or as a de-secularized, antiphilosophical attunement to being-towards-death. It might be difficult to embrace such an ambiguity of Illich's text especially when one reads the priestly injunctions of 'The Dawn of Epimethean Man': '*We need a name for those few who love the earth, and on whom the earth's survival depends*'; or '*Epimetheus knows he is the keeper of hope for others, and he can find hope only in the other he chooses for his neighbor*' (1970/15-16). While many echo such injunctions in the grassroots politics of 'intercultural' experiments (Esteva, 2019), many others might still hear plain reaction in Illich's attempt to 'stop progress' and get rid of all 'scientific utopias, of ideological diabolism, and of the expectation to give goods and services with some degree of equality' (13). My point here is neither to render Illich's position transparent, nor to claim his proper name for either a political-decolonial or a deconstructive-

infrapolitical canon, but rather to pay heed to figuration as a site of undecidability, incalculability, singularity and, thereby, infrapolitical thinking in the wake of the Anthropocene.

If we interpret Illich's Epimetheus not just in connection with the countercultural conjuncture –extending to contemporary Zapatista and decolonial politics –as by the way in which Anthropocene *rhetoric* de-narrativizes humanism in general and the emancipatory or redemptive narratives of the subaltern turn in particular, it might turn out that something insists/desists in the story, which could be infrapolitics or, perhaps, 'natural history'. Bernard Stiegler's Epimetheus might give some indications in this regard.

Stiegler's Epimetheus

In the first volume of *Technics and Time*, Stiegler's main concern is with the technical roots of time, the symbolizable experience of which would constitute the human as such (1998: 135). Acknowledging the difficulty of taking a leap between the empirical and the transcendental, his argument invokes, simultaneously, the paleoanthropological hypothesis that hominization began with the technical reliance of neurological evolution, and the phenomenological insight that thinking emerges as the experience of time. Thus, rather than assimilating technics to metaphysics Stiegler thinks it in terms of archi-writing, *différance* and the mutual composition of life and non-life, from which would derive the dependence of culture/memory on inscription/archives. As Derrida had already made clear, '[t]here is no archive without a place of consignation, without a technique of repetition, and without a certain exteriority. No archive without outside' (1996: 11). Similarly, Stiegler thinks the technicity of the human as an exteriorization with no preceding interiority, since any interiority could only be constituted in exteriorization (1998: 141).

Much of Stiegler's later thinking on the Anthropocene continues to revolve around the proposition that 'existential analytics must be interpreted in terms of the prosthetic question' (183), a prosthesis being 'what we put in front of us, that is, outside of us, in front of us. But if what is outside is neither more nor less than the being of that with respect to which it is outside, then this being is outside itself' (193). Significantly it is myth, rather than philosophical discourse alone, that allows Stiegler to establish that existence itself has a technical or prosthetic structure. It is the story of Epimetheus that allows Stiegler to foreground existence as a prosthetic question and thereby to create a distancing effect within both paleoanthropology *and* phenomenological discourse.

Stiegler draws on Vernant's readings of Hesiod to interpret the Platonic version of the Promethean myth. There, Socrates invites the sophist Protagoras to demonstrate that virtue can be taught, which Protagoras does by means of a story:

Well then, he said, I fancy the more agreeable way is for me to tell you a fable. There was once a time when there were gods, but no mortal creatures. [320d] And when to these also came their destined time to be created, the gods moulded their forms within the earth, of a mixture made of earth and fire and all substances that are compounded with fire and earth. When they were about to bring these creatures to light, they charged Prometheus and Epimetheus to deal to each the equipment of his proper faculty. Epimetheus besought Prometheus that he might do the dealing himself; "And when I have dealt," he said, "you shall examine." [320e] (...) In contriving all this he was taking precaution that no kind should be extinguished; (...). (...) Now Epimetheus, being not so wise as he might be, [321c] heedlessly squandered his stock of properties on the brutes; he still had left unequipped the race of men, and was at a loss what to do with it. As he was casting about, Prometheus arrived to examine his distribution, and saw that whereas the other creatures were fully and suitably provided, man was naked, unshod, unbedded, unarmed; and already the destined day was come,

whereon man like the rest should emerge from earth to light. Then Prometheus, in his perplexity as to what preservation he could devise for man, stole from Hephaestus and Athena wisdom in the arts [321d] together with fire—since by no means without fire could it be acquired or helpfully used by any—and he handed it there and then as a gift to man. (...) but Prometheus, through Epimetheus' fault, later on (the story goes) stood his trial for theft. (Plato, 320d-321d)

Stiegler begins by underlining that the theogony evokes a golden age in which humans took part in the divine banquet,^{vii} an age in which nothing had come to pass. Epimetheus would be the first feature of the theogony in the sense that things come to pass with him, for the mortality of humans appears through disappearing first from his memory, with the Promethean gift coming after as a compensation. Ultimately both mortality and technicity come from the gods, who are themselves technical experts, and therefore *incomplete*. What matters, then, is not to define the human in the anthropological terms of a technical capacity, but to do so in terms of a default in being, or what Arturo Leyte (2015) calls *el fracaso del ser*. As Leyte reminds us, the kernel of existential phenomenology is the insight that any ontological discourse is doomed to failure, since things appear only in a defective and refractory way. If the temporality of existence turns out to be a structural feature of being itself, then it is not human beings who are homeless and groundless; rather, it is being itself which is expelled from itself, and this is what makes room for thinking, which is for Stiegler *ēpimethēia*, a 'primordial idiocy', 'a source of infinite singularity and freedom' that allows reflexivity to *persist* in an error-plagued empirical realm (199). Hence it amazes Stiegler that Epimetheus, a 'figure of delayed reaction, of return through the failure of experience that gives its name to thought itself', is excluded from the phenomenology of existence (1998: 186). In this view, Epimetheus is not 'simply the forgetful, the figure of unknowing that constitutes all experience'; but also the forgotten (186) —precisely, we might add, to the extent that he

receives Pandora, the aberrant device that comes from elsewhere and, nevertheless, becomes essential to *ēpimethēia*.

Figuration, rhetoric, storytelling, becomes an indispensable medium for *ēpimethēia*, a matter of existence before being a matter of knowledge, only because it belongs to being. Hence Heidegger's own recourse to the allegory of the cave, in 'Plato's Doctrine of Truth' (1931). In Leyte's reading, what matters there is the structural ambiguity of the story, which allows for a mythical/metaphysical interpretation on the one hand, and a philosophical/existential interpretation on the other hand. The latter refers not to an ideal or conceptual 'beyond' but to an affective 'here' that remains hidden from theory or the reflective gaze (Leyte, 2015: 64). In the metaphysical interpretation, the prisoner's eye, directing itself from the inside to the outside of the cave, would become a figure of onto-theological truth, initiating a spatial journey in which dualities are first established (inside/outside, shadows/substances) and then reduced to an identity. The endpoint would be the totalization of logical truth, or nihilism. In the existential interpretation, by contrast, there would be no trajectory between two places, but rather 'a synchronic halt in diachronic reconstruction' (87). No more a gained position, or a position to be gained, the outside/inside would reveal itself synchronically as the loss of all position, which is to say the *existence*, or the non-place of being (71).^{viii}

Stiegler's Epimetheus, correspondingly, can be read not as an anthropological metaphor but as a figuration of the truth of being, or being's forgetfulness, which Stiegler re-thinks in terms of a pharmacological condition. In this existential perspective, Prometheus and Epimetheus are not successive but rather inseparable moments of an anthropogony that is, emphasizes Stiegler, also a thanatology, in which they together constitute the temporal structure linking mortals to (and separating them from) the divine (1998: 202). If metaphysics is constituted by forming two separate places for *logos* and *tekhnē*, *phusis* and *nomos*, the intelligible and the sensible, stars and disasters,

fortune and misfortunes, the myth, for Stiegler, conveys a *tragic* sense of their mutual constitution, their inevitable simultaneity. Only this ambiguity of existence –which links and separates humans from the divine –makes room for thought, in which *promethēia* would be ‘an essential and farsighted restlessness’, while *ēpimethēia* would be the kind of wisdom (hindsight) that only comes after the fact.

As for Pandora, if its ultimate meaning is *elpis* (what remains locked in the amphora), what turns out for Stiegler is that in fact, *elpis* has no stable, definite meaning. What Illich translates, with political intent, as (Christian) ‘hope’, refers here instead to a radical dimension of uncertainty, or indeed ‘the essential phenomenon of time’ (Stiegler, 1998: 198). I would suggest, then, that Pandora/*elpis* be associated with structural anxiety –generative of both hope and fear –which Epimetheus embraces and for which Prometheus can only precariously compensate.

Stiegler emphasizes that the Platonic version of the myth appears in a new horizon (with respect to Hesiod’s) where the *political* question (can virtue be transmitted?) has been already formulated as such. In this context, *elpis* coincides with the mark of sexual difference, the second punishment that originates *eris*: the spirit of competition, envy, hostility, an extension of the divine world that permanently threatens mortals with dispersion, war, *stasis* (191). The myth, which is for Stiegler about technical or pharmacological *existence* –the articulation of life with non-life, of mortals with the divine – configures a particular mode of being-together which is constantly threatened by its own activity (1998: 198). It is in this context that the appearance of Hermes makes sense, for it is a god of sacrifice and concealment, of enigma and aporia, of interpretation and translation, who brings Pandora to Epimetheus, and later on the resources for developing civic arts.^{ix} If, as Illich observed, ‘the drama of Prometheus was a struggle with the gods. The drama of Epimetheus is the search for peace among men’ (1970: 16), it is via Hermes that Zeus

distributes Shame (*aidos*) and Justice (*dike*) equally among mortals so that they become able to develop a political form of life. As happens with *elpis*, however, the meaning of such political gifts (or *figures*) is not given but, precisely, missing – which means that they are temporal, *incomplete* too –and must be, therefore, *reflectively* interpreted and translated each time.

Two types of claims about the human as a technical being, one of them ethical (Illich's Epimetheus as Christian love's renunciation of power, or 'self-chosen poverty') and the other one existential (Stiegler's Epimetheus as 'primordial idiocy', a source of singularity and freedom), seem to be what has been described so far. It was the very difference between those types of claims that intrigued me in the first place. Whereas it would be easy to follow along with identifying the metaphysical reading with (not yet rational) 'myth', and the existential reading with (proper) 'philosophy' (and to align Illich's Epimetheus with a metaphysical interpretation, leaving for Stiegler's Epimetheus the properly philosophical, or superior interpretation), I would suggest instead that the possibility of existential reflection emerges *first* from the Epimethean non-voluntaristic surrender to the other, that is, to Pandora's wondrous machine of figuration, a gift of time, in a foolish 'act' that is prior to any *gendered* sense of proper philosophy.

The ambiguity of figuration

What is left of Epimetheus, after being used as a metaphor of Christian love (Illich) and of mortality/original prostheticity (Stiegler)? Do ethical/existential figurations of Epimetheus tell us anything useful about infrapolitical *ēpimethēia*, or does any insistence on figuration, or storytelling, amount to negationism at a time when 'the end of man has generated a thousand tiny industries of new dawns' (Colebrook, 2016: 86)? As I proposed at the beginning, I perceive a resonance between this question and two other questions: one about the difference between ethics and infrapolitics, and another one about the difference

between critical life studies and infrapolitical reflection. Each of these could be formulated separately for a theoretical gaze that might reduce differences to conceptual distinctions, but given my primordial interest in figuration, I would rather try to formulate them for an infrapolitical ear that would hear the echoes of ‘natural history’ in the ambiguity of figuration, technics, or being ‘itself’.

Illich’s Epimetheus might appear as the mythical model of an ethical man, a virtuous character in a redemptive love affair, sharing with so much of contemporary anti-capitalist moralizing a ‘repetition of normative figures of life depicted through bounded and gendered distinction’ (Colebrook, 2012: 177). Illich’s ‘Epimethean man’ would be *he* who heroically decides to disappear, through ‘self-chosen poverty’ and ‘little foolish acts of renunciation’, hoping to bring about some kind of restitution. Yet it is still up to us facing extinction to interpret what the gesture of ‘hope’ could ultimately mean. Is Illich’s Epimetheus a normative figure of life, or can it work, at times, as a metaphor that points towards its own end (Moreiras, 2020: 91)?

In this second possibility, more than the figure of Epimetheus itself taken as a metaphor for a new hopeful politics, what would matter here is a de-narrativizing, de-metaphorizing operation at work within the Epimethean figure *qua* text. Moreiras exemplifies this operation with Oscar del Barco’s letter to the Argentine periodical *La Intemperie*, which concerns the legitimacy of political killings within left-wing guerrillas. There, Moreiras finds a negative injunction, a retrospective prohibition (‘thou shall not kill’), which exposes revolutionary narratives to an an-archic irruption of the (infrapolitical) sacred, killing *them* instead and their heliotropic metaphor or reified figure: the revolutionary subject (2020: 93). Through such an operation, del Barco’s letter would declare that *no habrá ya triunfo en la muerte del otro*, an infrapolitical (self-)interruption of the revolutionary will to power.

An instance of *ēpimethēia*, del Barco's de-narrativizing operation suggests the possibility of reading, against the grain, Illich's positive vindication of Epimethean 'love' for Pandora as a retrospective prohibition of the misogynous eco-ethnocide perpetrated by Western metaphysics and accelerated, as Illich repeatedly denounced throughout his life, by the *religious* missions of modernization, development and globalization. Illich's anarchist distinction between faith and religion was itself an attempt to de-narrativize religion, understood as the institutionalization of faith and the destruction of 'peace among men'. On the basis of that distinction, and taking it further or rather queering it a bit, we could take the 'love' for Pandora not as a heterosexual norm or reproductive injunction, but as the self-destructive affirmation of a wondrous *machine* that installs anxiety and conflict among men: an *anti puros* that signifies not merely the feminine opposite of the masculine Prometheus but the very aporia of life, which is 'a logic of necessary and positive extinction' (Colebrook, 2012: 177). Thus 'Epimethean man' would turn out to be not so much a 'man' as the infrapolitical *ēpimethēia* of a death-sanctioned storyteller, someone 'who could let the wick of his life be consumed completely by the gentle flame of his story' (Benjamin, 2012: 377).

Stiegler, however, would not agree with a Christian Epimetheus, since unlike Jean-Luc Nancy, he does not conceive of a tragic, existential faith inspired by the historical Jesus,^x but only of a metaphysical, or onto-theological, Christian religion (2008: 322). Nevertheless, and in a strikingly anthropo-political reversal of his own Epimetheus, Stiegler ends up saying that 'I defend capitalism against itself, or Christianity against itself, because we live in a terrible age of Christianity transformed into capitalism. As a result, we have the responsibility to revisit and re-evaluate all of this. It is not a question of saying: I am not Christian' (2008: 326). What Illich understood as the counterproductivity of modern, Church-descended institutions is, for Stiegler, the consequence of Christian and monotheistic noesis ('spirituality'), itself dependent on the pharmakon of the

letter. The letter would be ultimate explanation that the early Christian ‘faith’ advocated by Illich became, as part of the history of metaphysics, calculable trust, or capitalism. Whereas Illich turned to Epimethean self-renunciation (anarchist ‘faith’) after acknowledging that *it was too late* for any politics to save *elpis* (‘the essential experience of time’, which is to say existence, and freedom), Stiegler turned to neganthropic calculation, which is to say, Epimethean forgetfulness as human intergenerational care or ‘love’. That is, he turned to Epimetheus as a metaphor for *human* retentional finitude, and thereby to the renewed narrative of a technical/political (that is, self-fabricating) animal.

Along these lines, for Stiegler the Anthropocene emerges as the problem of technical entropy, of a counterproductive effect of technical evolution under capitalism, and of a threat to ‘libidinal economy’ as the *human* time of desire and reflection. Within this anthro-political reversal, Epimetheus becomes a metaphor of human finitude as the ‘destructibility of desire and, through desire, the destructibility of the unconscious, the super-ego and the id, that is, ultimately, of the intergenerational relationship’ (Stiegler, 2019: 318). Thus, for the later Stiegler the question of *elpis* will not have been one of existence –of being –but rather one of desire, as ‘the absolute expectation of an absolute future that contains all desires’. Existential questions will have been framed, just like religious questions, as therapeutic issues within a ‘general pharmacology’: a politico-theoretical framework, once again, to deal with the with the *pharmakon* of the letter and its entropic developments (324). And thus the Epimethean Stiegler, a *philosopher* after all, ends up offering to the United Nations ‘a new macroeconomic model, designed to struggle against entropy’, and even ‘new research methods’ that can ground effective ‘democratic solutions’ to the Anthropocene.^{xi} Within an infrapolitical register, the question for me is whether there might be anything else, besides a Promethean turn of the pendulum, that is left for *ēpimethēia* as such. At a time when literal extinction threatens to replace death, the sanction of

everything that a storyteller could tell, my purpose is not so much to promote a more active storytelling, or a more persuasive metaphorical use of Epimetheus in Anthropocene conversations (as, for example, Dillet & Hatzisaviddou 2022), as it is to introduce a slightly perverse shift of perspective within the infrapolitical register of thinking.

Anthropo-Political Figuration and Infrapolitical *ēpimethēia*

What if today's threatening conditions of volatility and disaster were to make anthropomorphism and the belief in nature increasingly impossible? What sort of politics would we be left in this disfigured world without face?
(Colebrook, 2016: 116)

Claire Colebrook reads the Anthropocene not primarily as a geological declaration, but as 'a series of diagnoses that generate imperatives' (2016: 82). Her own diagnosis focuses on the imperative to politicize, 'to offer a narrative, with narrative always generating a moral decision regarding scale' (83). Whether it is humanity in general or a part of it that is guilty of the crime of ecological destruction, the narrative generates *anthropos* as a relational agent within 'a living inter-connected system' (83). To politicize is to moralize in a Nietzschean sense, for '[o]nly by way of narrative metalepsis could one think of a certain type of humanity (capitalist man) causing the Anthropocene (...). And only then, once that "man" as an agent of destruction is posited, might one then find another agent, a force for good' (84). For Colebrook, the question that the Anthropocene poses is not moral or even critical in a political sense, and has instead to do with the existential implications of inscription, reading, and history. By way of geological inscription, the Anthropocene would offer 'a time of thought beyond ourselves, the recuperation of the infinite' (105). The question seems to be how to relate to the infinite in a non-recuperative or non-moralistic way, which has less to do with politics—as an administration of the given, a struggle for power

or a condition of survival—than with the aesthetic dimension of existence, which for her is inscriptive, textual and sublime (123). In this sense, an aesthetic emphasis would be ‘pragmatic’ (120), if only because of the way in which it exhibits the deconstruction, or de-narrativization of Anthropocene humanism.

What if the (reflective and critical) reading and theorizing we direct to ourselves were the outcome of an era of technologies of the eye, hand and industrialized relation to nature, with these in turn always borrowing from the earth’s reserves in an ongoing debt that can never be discharged? What if what we know as politics—the practice of tracing what appears as contingent, universal or natural back to human forces—were possible only in a brief era of the taming of human history? (115)

Colebrook contrasts between a recuperative, humanistic, political sublime on the one hand, with a disruptive, counter-political geological sublime on the other hand. She associates each with an interpretation of *dike*, a temporal gift as mentioned above. To the recuperative sublime would correspond the future as a Kantian moral imperative while to the geological sublime would correspond a Nietzschean conception of justice as ‘a play of forces that generates disequilibrium’ (85). The geological sublime would precisely address the forces that generate the recuperative sublime as ‘the critical, politically astute subject-reader’, including ‘a destructive network of technologies that generate power in a quite literal sense, including the depleting power of finite fuels, and the depleting power of the critical archive as individuals take on new modes of relating to texts and images’ (116). To remain on this *literal* level of inscription would be to confront the fact that *there is nothing to legitimate* a transition to sense, as politicizing does. If that could ‘help us with politics today’, that would be by undermining any sense or ‘unquestioned right to sustain the polity, or the political’ (116), so as to *let* a question be asked: what calls to be saved (121)?

Isn't such a 'letting be', precisely, an embrace of the negativity at work in figuration, its ceaseless call for interpretation? Figures can be read as either monuments or inscriptions. They can be made, illusorily, to stand for something (meanings, values, hopes, beliefs) or they can, by themselves, enforce a separation, a detachment from 'the world'. From detachment emerges sublimity, or the experience of an absence: 'we no longer live in a world populated by spirits' (Colebrook, 2016: 124). Shall the figure of Epimetheus be read as a monument or as an inscription? Is Pandora to be regarded as a Woman or as a writing machine? Is Prometheus condemned to be a Master or does it harbor, by virtue of its dependence on Epimetheus and Pandora, a Master Discourse that kills the Master and thereby releases a headless subjectivation? What calls to be saved? I end by suggesting that it is thinking what calls to be saved, paradoxically from itself.

Within the Anthro-political epoch, Illich's Epimetheus appears to be post-apocalyptic figure: an experience of loss, of losing the world. Rather than recuperating the world, as arguably the later Stiegler's Epimetheus sets out to do, Colebrook's geological sublime (and critical life studies) attempts to 'see' without sense or teleology (120). This is a kind of 'seeing' that resonates with infrapolitical de-presentation, a form of active nihilism that testifies to *la im-posibilidad de la emancipación de la condición mortal humana* (Aguilera-Mellado, 2022: 107). But we might also understand such a 'seeing' as a leap of faith into a more ordinary *blindness* that pertains to the truth of being as such.

In 'The Danger', Heidegger states that since concealment (*lethe*) and unconcealment (*a-letheia*) remain inaccessible to human perception and representation, human thinking is unable to hold on to them, and being

unable to thoughtfully remember, human thinking from the outset has forgotten the essence of being. But

human thinking is only in such a forgetfulness of the essence of being because this essence itself has taken place as forgetfulness, as a lapsing into concealment (Heidegger 2012 [1949]: 48).

In other words, forgetfulness is not merely a failure to remember something, but rather the necessity of such a failure in so far as it takes place in being. Heidegger writes, in 'The Turn', that another beginning, a change or a turn in being, would be similar to 'what happens when, in the human realm, one gets over grief or pain' (39, 65). Such an event could not be logically or historiographically predicted; it could only suggest itself as a task. The task would be to traverse the zone of 'the danger' in order to experience the forgetful essence of being. Heidegger does write of a 'conversion', yet not of man but of being, for which 'the modern human must first of all find his way back into the breadth of his essential space, which lies in its belonging to the essence of being', and therein 'consider the essence of being as thought-worthy' (66). Instead of rushing to calculate 'what are we to do?', we might first ask 'how must we think?'

As Heideggerian *figures* of the end of metaphysics, technology and nihilism do not merely express, says Leyte, a negative value ('there is nothing') but, on the contrary, they assert that 'everything is equivalent', without opposites or differences. This nihilism of being is nevertheless, or paradoxically, the very condition for thinking and naming being simply as *each thing* (Leyte, 2015: 104). Rather than positionality –constative knowledge, transdisciplinary or otherwise –thinking would be an Epimethean welcoming of *elpis*, Pandora's keep: the decision to remain 'the one waiting, the one who waits upon the essence of being by protecting it in thinking' (Heidegger [1949] 2012: 67). If infrapolitical reflection regards itself as an Epimethean task, what it welcomes is Pandora's wondrous machine: 'a not-all that comes down to a form of nothing from within the metaphysical question' (Moreiras 2020: 81). Enigmatic, null, and void: perhaps such are the qualities that suggest

Epimetheus as a figure not of life or even storytelling itself, but rather of a stoppage point, a transit, an infrapolitical event which could never be merely the expression of thinking, feeling, and willing, and instead evokes ‘the inceptual dimension within which the human essence is first capable of corresponding to being and its claim and of belonging to being through this correspondence’ (Heidegger [1949] 2012: 67).

For Moreiras the infrapolitical task is not –as ‘faith’ is not for Nancy –a matter of political ‘care’, but rather it is first a matter of exposing thinking to the absolute difference in each thing: *nadie es más que nadie. Y podemos añadir, gnómicamente, nada es más que nada* (2020: 111). If anything, the political challenge for infrapolitical reflection would be ‘to think an equality that is not general equivalence, not the levelling of everything on a single plane of exchange value, a reinvention of the thing itself’ (91). But to let such a reinvention take place, thinking must start by experiencing *elpis*, for which there is no content because it remains concealed. Hence *ēpimethēia*, an aberrant disposition to figural errancy, to storytelling’s echoing of the self-concealment of being. What calls to be saved are not the Epimethean metaphors of Illich or Stiegler, but the not-all, that *nothing* in them that prohibits a totalitarian closure of the Anthropocene.

References

Aeschylus. (1926) *Prometheus Bound*. Trans. H. Weir Smyth. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press.

Aguilera-Mellado, P. (2022) *Fines infrapolíticas. De la razón, la representación y la narrativa española moderna*. Valencia: Tirant Humanidades.

Bassett, C., Kember, S. & O’Riordan, K. (2020) *Furious. Technological Feminism and Digital Futures*. London: Pluto Press.

Benjamin, W. (2006) 'The Storyteller' in D. Hale (ed.), *The Novel: An Anthology of Criticism and Theory 1900-2000*. Malden: Blackwell Publishing.

Braunstein, N. (2012) *El inconsciente, la técnica y el discurso capitalista*. Ciudad de México: Siglo XXI.

Colebrook, C. (2012) 'Sexual indifference' in T. Cohen (ed.), *Telemorphosis. Theory in the Age of Climate Change*, vol. 1. London: Open Humanities Press.

Colebrook, C. (2016) 'What is the Anthro-political?' in T. Cohen, C. Colebrook & J. Hillis Miller (eds.), *Twilight of the Anthropocene Idols*. London: Open Humanities Press.

de Man, P. (1979) *Allegories of Reading. Figural language in Rousseau, Nietzsche, Rilke, and Proust*. New Haven & London: Yale University Press.

Derrida, J. (1996) *Archive Fever. A Freudian Impression*. Trans. E. Prenowitz. Chicago & London: Chicago University Press.

Dillet, B. & Hatzisavvidou, S. (2022) 'Beyond technofix: Thinking with Epimetheus in the Anthropocene', *Contemporary Political Theory* 21, 351-372. <https://doi.org/10.1057/s41296-021-00521-w>

Esteva, G. (2019) 'Post-Scriptum' in D. Cayley & I. Illich, *Los Ríos al Norte del Futuro. Conversaciones con David Cayley*. Trans. A. G. Blanco, J. M. Escamilla, H. González, M. Peña y J. Robert. México: Alios Ventos Ediciones.

Heidegger, M. (2012) *Bremen and Freiburg Lectures: Insight Into That Which Is and Basic Principles of Thinking*. Trans. A. J. Mitchell. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.

Heidegger, M. (2013) *Carta sobre el Humanismo*. Trans. H. Cortés & A. Leyte. Madrid: Alianza Editorial.

Hesiod. (1914) *Theogony*. Trans. H. G. Evelyn-White. Cambridge & London: Harvard University Press & William Heinemann Ltd.

Kember, S. (2016) *iMedia. The Gendering of Objects, Environments and Smart Materials*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.

Illich, I. (1970) *The Dawn of Epimethean Man and Other Essays. Cuaderno CIDOC No. 54*. Cuernavaca: Centro de Documentación Intercultural.

Illich, I. (2005) *The Rivers North of the Future. The Testament of Ivan Illich as told to David Cayley*. Toronto: House of Anansi Press.

Leyte, A. (2015) *Heidegger. El fracaso del ser*. España: Batiscafo.

Marder, E. (2014) 'Pandora's Fireworks; or, Questions Concerning Femininity, Technology, and the Limits of the Human', *Philosophy and Rhetoric* vol. 47, no. 4: 386-399.

Moreiras, A. (2020) *Infrapolítica [instrucciones de uso]*. Madrid: La Oficina.

Plato. (1976) 'Protagoras' in *Plato Twelve Volumes vol. 3*. Trans. W.R.M. Lamb. Cambridge & London: Harvard University Press & William Heinemann Ltd.

Sbert, J. M. (2019) *Epimeteo, Iván Illich y el sendero de la sabiduría*. J. Márquez Muñoz (ed.) Ciudad de México: Ediciones Sin Nombre.

Stiegler, B. (1998) *Technics and Time, 1. The Fault of Epimetheus*. Trans. R. Beardsworth & G. Collins. Stanford: Stanford University Press.

Stiegler, B. (2019) *The Age of Disruption. Technology and Madness in Computational Capitalism*. Trans. Daniel Ross. Cambridge: Polity Press.

Stiegler, B. & the Internation Collective. (2021) *Bifurcate. 'There is No Alternative'*. Trans. Daniel Ross. London: Open Humanities Press.

Yébenes Escardó, Z. (2007) *Figuras de lo imposible. Trayectos desde la mística, la estética y el pensamiento contemporáneo*. Ciudad de México: UAM-Cuajimalpa & Anthropos.

Weinstein, J. & Colebrook, C. (2017) *Posthumous Life. Theorizing Beyond the Posthuman*. New York: Columbia University Press.

Zylinska, J. (2014) *Minimal Ethics for the Anthropocene*. Ann Arbor: Open Humanities Press.

ⁱ My thanks to: the two reviewers of this essay, Jorge Álvarez Yagüez and Claire Colebrook, for helpful questions and minor editing suggestions; Peter Baker and Alberto Moreiras for attentive reading and overall feedback; Teresa Vilarós for drawing my attention to El Greco's figures of Epimetheus and Pandora; my former students at IBERO Ciudad de México, Ilya Semo Bechet (MA Philosophy) and Ana Sofía Herrera León de la Barra (BA Literature), for generous assistance at the beginning and the end of this project and, last but not least, to the DINVP of **Universidad Iberoamericana Ciudad de México**, for funding my trip to Vigo through the Apoyo para Actividades de Investigación en Verano 2023.

ⁱⁱ From Hesiod's *Theogony* (510-530): 'Now Iapetus took to wife the neat-ankled maid Clymene, daughter of Ocean, and went up with her into one bed. And she bore him a stout-hearted son, Atlas: also she bore very glorious Menoetius and clever Prometheus, full of various wiles, and scatter-brained Epimetheus who from the first was a mischief to men who eat bread; for it was he who first took of Zeus the woman, the maiden whom he had formed.'

ⁱⁱⁱ From Hesiod's *Theogony* (535-565): 'For when the gods and mortal men had a dispute at Mecone, even then Prometheus was forward to cut up a great ox and set portions before them, trying to deceive the mind of Zeus. Before the rest he set flesh and inner parts thick with fat upon the hide, covering them with an ox paunch; but for Zeus he put the white bones dressed up with cunning art and covered with shining fat. (...) But Zeus, whose wisdom is everlasting, saw and failed not to perceive the trick, and in his heart he thought mischief against mortal men which also was to be fulfilled. With both hands he took up the white fat and was angry at heart, and wrath came to his spirit when he saw the white ox-bones craftily tricked out: and because of this the tribes of men upon earth burn white bones to the deathless gods upon fragrant altars.'

^{iv} From Hesiod's *Theogony* (565-580): 'But the noble son of Iapetus outwitted him and stole the far-seen gleam of unwearying fire in a hollow fennel stalk. And Zeus who thunders on high was stung in spirit, and his dear heart was angered when he saw amongst men the far-seen ray of fire. Forthwith he made an evil thing for men as the price of fire; for the very famous Limping God formed of earth the likeness of a shy maiden as the son of Cronos willed.' From Hesiod's *Work and Days* (60-90): 'And he bade famous Hephaestus make haste and mix earth with water and to put in it the voice and strength of human kind, and fashion a sweet, lovely maiden-shape, like to the immortal goddesses in face; and Athena to teach her needlework and the weaving of the varied web; [65] and golden Aphrodite to shed grace upon her head and cruel longing and cares that weary the limbs. And he charged Hermes the guide, the Slayer of Argus, to put in her a shameless mind and a deceitful nature. (...) And he called this woman Pandora [the all-endowed] because all they who dwelt on Olympus gave each a gift, a plague to men who eat bread.' But when he had finished the sheer, hopeless snare, the Father sent glorious Argus-Slayer, [85] the swift messenger of the gods, to take it to Epimetheus as a gift. And Epimetheus did not think on what Prometheus had said to him, bidding him never take a gift of Olympian Zeus, but to send it back for fear it might prove to be something harmful to men. But he took the gift, and afterwards, when the evil thing was already his, he understood'.

^v From Hesiod's *Theogony* (585-615): 'But when he had made the beautiful evil to be the price for the blessing, he brought her out, delighting in the finery which the bright-eyed daughter of a mighty father had given her, to the place where the other gods and men were. And wonder took hold of the deathless gods and mortal men when they saw that which was sheer guile, not to be withstood by men. [590] For from her is the race of women and female kind: of her is the deadly race and tribe of women who live amongst mortal men to their great trouble, no helpmates in hateful poverty, but only in wealth. (...) so Zeus who thunders on high made women to be an evil to mortal men, with a nature to do evil. (...) and this evil cannot be healed. So it is not possible to deceive or go beyond the will of Zeus: for not even the son of Iapetus, kindly Prometheus, [615] escaped his heavy anger, but of necessity strong bands confined him, although he knew many a wile.'

^{vi} From *Prometheus Bound* (400-405), the Chorus laments: 'I mourn your unfortunate fate, Prometheus. Shedding from my eyes a coursing flood of tears I wet my tender cheeks with their moist streams. For Zeus, holding this unenviable power by self-appointed laws, displays towards the gods of old an overweening spirit.'

^{vii} From Hesiod's *Work and Days* (110-200): 'First of all the deathless gods who dwell on Olympus made a golden race of mortal men who lived in the time of Cronos when he was reigning in heaven. And they lived like gods without sorrow of heart, remote and free from toil and grief: miserable age rested not on them; but with legs and arms never failing they made merry with feasting beyond the reach of all evils. (...) It was like the golden race neither in body nor in spirit. A child was brought up at his good mother's side a hundred years, an utter simpleton, playing childishly in his own home. But when they were full grown and were come to the full measure of their prime, they lived only a little time and that in sorrow because of their foolishness, for they could not keep from sinning and from wronging one another, nor would they serve the immortals, nor sacrifice on the holy altars of the blessed ones as it is right for men to do wherever they dwell. Then Zeus the son of Cronos was angry and put them away, because they would not give honor to the blessed gods who live on Olympus.'

^{viii} One could follow along with identifying the metaphysical reading with (not yet rational) ‘myth’, and the existential reading with (proper) ‘philosophy’, but I would suggest instead that the possibility of existential reflection emerges first from the Epimethean surrender to Pandora’s wondrous machine of figuration, a foolish act (of self-renunciation, Illich would say) that is prior to any *gendered* sense of proper philosophy.

^{ix} From Plato’s *Protagoras* (320c-322d): ‘And now that man was partaker of a divine portion, he, in the first place, by his nearness of kin to deity, was the only creature that worshipped gods, and set himself to establish altars and holy images; and secondly, he soon was enabled by his skill to articulate speech and words, and to invent dwellings, clothes, sandals, beds, and the foods that are of the earth. Thus far provided, men dwelt separately in the beginning, and cities there were none; [322b] so that they were being destroyed by the wild beasts, since these were in all ways stronger than they; and although their skill in handiwork was a sufficient aid in respect of food, in their warfare with the beasts it was defective; for as yet they had no civic art, which includes the art of war. So they sought to band themselves together and secure their lives by founding cities. Now as often as they were banded together they did wrong to one another through the lack of civic art, [322c] and thus they began to be scattered again and to perish. So Zeus, fearing that our race was in danger of utter destruction, sent Hermes to bring respect and right among men, to the end that there should be regulation of cities and friendly ties to draw them together. Then Hermes asked Zeus in what manner then was he to give men right and respect: “Am I to deal them out as the arts have been dealt? That dealing was done in such wise that one man possessing medical art is able to treat many ordinary men, and so with the other craftsmen. Am I to place among men right and respect in this way also, or deal them out to all?” [322d] “To all,” replied Zeus; “let all have their share: for cities cannot be formed if only a few have a share of these as of other arts. And make thereto a law of my ordaining, that he who cannot partake of respect and right shall die the death as a public pest.”’.

^x Leyte (2015) describes existence as ‘a transit, which is to say an interruption’, and names ‘freedom’ the way in which it takes place (70). Far from being a human characteristic, freedom possesses the human, who experiences it in the way of ‘letting be’ (75). Analogously it seems possible to think ‘faith’, with Jean-Luc Nancy, not as a weak form of knowledge but as a constitutive exposition to radical alterity. For Nancy, faith, like the Hebrew word *amen*, means to affirm one’s trust, precisely where there is no assurance (in Stiegler, 2008: 320).

^{xi} Letter from Hans Ulrich Obrist and Bernard Stiegler to António Guterres, 11 November 2019, in Stiegler, B. & the Internation Collective. (2021) *Bifurcate. ‘There is No Alternative’*. Trans. Daniel Ross. London: Open Humanities Press, 11-13.