Interlude 5: Lascaux, Geophilia and the 'Cradle of Humanity'

The human litany of eternal and senseless can translate into a yearning for another state of being, a more stable ontology outside of the human condition of mortality and transience – an ontology without ontology in sum, outside of the animal and the vegetal, in a return to the mineral. Here are three very different examples:

> Tel est aujourd'hui l'apparence du globe. Le cadavre en tronçons de l'être de la grandeur du monde ne fait plus que servir de décor à la vie de millions d'êtres infiniment plus petits et plus éphémères que lui. Leur foule est par endroits si dense qu'elle dissimule entièrement l'ossature sacrée qui leur servit naguère d'unique support. Et ce n'est qu'une infinité de leurs cadavres qui réussissant depuis lors à imiter la consistance de la pierre, par ce qu'on appelle la terre végétale, leur permet depuis quelques jours de se reproduire sans rien devoir au roc.[1]

> Current suffering's unbearable because it no longer has an equivalent … For that reason, too, I'm more sensitive to non-human suffering, to the suffering of animals or trees (not to mention the suffering of stones! Let's think of the specific, silent, suffering of being a stone, or, in other words, in Heidegger's terms, of not even being-in-the-world!).[2]

> Do we have to be human forever? Consciousness is exhausted. Back to inorganic matter. This is what we want. We want to be stones in a field.[3]

What Francis Ponge, Jean Baudrillard and DonDeLillo's character Elster – despite their obvious differences – share is an interest in the ontology of stone – if such a thing exists. They also share this passion with Max Frisch's Geiser in *Man in the Holocene*, who seeks reassurance in the deep time of geology, in the face of his personal demise and the loss of his memory. It is the reassurance of 'time immemorial', the ancestrality of our origin, the solidity of the unchanging mineral substrate that has been supporting life on this planet (and out of which it arose), and which both Geiser and Elster are searching, nostalgically, in petrification or in (re)becoming inorganic; in short, they both suffer from, what Jeffrey Jerome Cohen calls, 'geophilia':

> To live long enough is to disbelieve the power we once thought that we possessed to keep the things we love. This is sad knowledge, melancholic knowledge, but it does not end the world. No blue planet or second Theia is in the telescope. We inhabit an ephemeral landscape. We love stone, and the marks we make upon stone, and the marks stone makes upon us. Stone insists not because it is so different from we who build families of whatever kind against cataclysm, but because of its deep affinity, its enduring tectonicity (movement, carpentry, making), its strangely inhuman (I don't know what else to call it) love. [4]

While for Cohen's early 21st-Century posthumanist-postanthropocentric ecological sensibility the love of stone (like for Elster to some extent) represents an opportunity to reconnect the human with the

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[1] Francis Ponge, "Le galet [The pebble]", *Le Parti pris des choses*, (Paris: Gallimard, 1942), 94.
[Such is the appearance of the globe today. The dead body in pieces of the world's greatness merely serves as background to the lives of millions of beings infinitely smaller and more ephemeral than it. Their crowd is so dense in places that it completely conceals the sacred skeleton that once was their sole support. And it is only the infinite number of their corpses that since have been successfully imitating the consistency of stone, in what we call top soil, which has enabled them, for a few days, to reproduce without owing anything to rock.]
[2] Jean Baudrillard, in Baudrillard and Enrique Valiente Noailles, *Exiles from Dialogue*, trans. Chris Turner, (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2007), 89.
[3] Don DeLillo, *Point Omega*, (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2010), 67.
[4] Cf. Jeffery Jerome Cohen, *Stone: An Ecology of the Inhuman*, (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2015), 72-3.

ancestral, Baudrillard's late 20th-Century millenarian antihumanist nihilism would see the contemporary ecological turn merely as further evidence that "the suffering of inanimate entities has become more moving, because they don't even have a destiny; they don't even have the right of moral retribution for their suffering". This turn to the fatality of the object for Baudrillard, in fact, coincides with 'us' (humans) "falling into the same inhuman condition, that of beings without consciousness that suffer for nothing".[5] To see *The Planet in a Pebble*, to echo the title of one of Jan Zalasiewicz's books on geology and deep history,[6] conjures up a similar scene to Hamlet's famous graveyard face-to-face encounter with Yorick's skull – the profound confusion of love and death in the context of human finality – this time seeing both our origin and end in stone: "To what base uses we may return, Horatio!" (*Hamlet* V.1.204).[7]

And, lo and behold, it is as if the stone replied: 'your origin is here; it is I who made you human'. At least this is where one could say Western thought has located its aesthetic beginnings: in rock art, metonymically condensed into one name: Lascaux.[8]

Bataille – The Neolithic 'Origin' of Art and Humanity

> So wurde der Mensch, beim Durchgang durch die Höhle, das träumende Tier.[9]

According to Jean-Luc Nancy: "Man began with the strangeness of his own humanity".[10] It is the 'encounter' with our (pre)human ancestors and the strangeness of their symbolic worlds, so close and so distant from our modern one, that makes prehistoric 'shrines' like Lascaux so captivating – at an aesthetic-ontological level, one might say. The question is one of unknowable origin, originality and 'originary humanicity':[11]

> Do we look there upon our origins? … What in us – our thought, our affect, perhaps our 'humanity' – is addressed by these decorated caverns, and how can we understand the address?[12]

Art, according to George Bataille, is the product of a 'transgression'. In transgressing the 'here and now', the human animal detaches itself from its animality and enters the state of consciousness. Art – Neolithic art, and the cave paintings in Lascaux in particular – for Bataille constitutes the 'cradle of humanity'.[13] In his *Lascaux, ou la naissance de l'art* (1955),[14] Bataille traces the (pre)history of art and

[5] Baudrillard, *Exiles from Dialogue*, p. 89.
[6] Jan Zalasiewicz, *The Planet in a Pebble: A Journey into Earth's Deep History*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010).
[7] William Shakespeare, *The Tragedy of Hamlet, Prince of Denmark* [1600], (New York: Signet Classic, 1963), 155-156.
[8] Cf. Christopher Fynsk, "Lascaux and the Questions of Origins", *Poiesis* 5 (2003): 6-19. Fynsk traces the originary 'enigma' of Lascaux by commenting on the readings of André Leroi-Gourhan (and his influence on Derrida and Stiegler), Georges Bataille and Jean-Luc Nancy. I will here follow Fynsk to some extent, but I will mainly focus on Bataille for reasons which hopefully will become apparent below.
[9] Hans Blumenberg, *Höhlenausgänge*, (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1989), 29. [Thus, in passing through the cave, man became the dreaming animal.]
[10] Jean-Luc Nancy, *The Muses*, trans. Peggy Kamuf, (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2001), 69.
[11] This is Vicki Kirby's phrase, in *Quantum Anthropologies: Life at Large*, (Durham: Duke University Press, 2011), 20.
[12] Fynsk, "Lascaux and the Questions of Origins", p. 6.
[13] See the fine collection of Bataille's writings on prehistoric art (however, excluding his main text, *Prehistoric Painting: Lascaux or the Birth of Art*) edited by Stuart Kendall, *The Cradle of Humanity: Prehistoric Art and Culture*, (New York: Zone Books, 2009).
[14] In Bataille, *Oeuvres Complètes IX*, (Paris: Gallimard, 1979). Further page references are given in the text.

develops a powerful metaphysics of the aesthetic as the primal force behind our hominization. In a quite paradoxical sense, therefore, art is *before* humanity: it is that which *makes* us human and it is also that which retains our link to the inhuman. It is both a humanizing and a posthumanizing force, so to speak; it is both the exit from and the connection to our animality.[15]

Bataille speaks of the 'miracle' of Lascaux (9) as that which, in a spectacular fashion, in its taking form, separates us from 'the animal' [la bête]. Bataille's aim is to show to what extent the work of art is intimately linked to the development of humanity (9). The 'strange inhumanity' that the Lascaux cave paintings represents with its almost exclusive depiction of animals lies in this paradox, namely that the depiction of such an "animality is nevertheless the first sign of our humanity *for us*, the blind but *perceptible* sign of *our* presence in the universe".[16] In depicting, in externalising, 'animality', we have become human, Bataille seems to suggest: "Not until Lascaux did we achieve such a reflection of inner life which art – and art alone – can communicate and of which in its warmth it is if not its imperishable impression … at least its durable survival".[17] The Lascaux people – our direct ancestors, fellow *homo sapiens* – display their humanness in the way they represent animality ("their human vision of animality"; 25). In depicting animality – and in doing so 'beautifully' and 'artfully' – modern humans have created a 'world', a *human* world. While Neanderthals, through their use of tools, might have created the world of 'work', it is only the birth of art (and play) that created the full transition from animal to human.[18] And this transition was, in fact, an act of (existential) revolt:

> Not only does art presuppose the ownership of tools and the ability acquired whilst making or using them, but it also has, in relation to a utilitarian application, an oppositional value: art is a

[15] The parallels (and profound differences) to Stiegler's (or Leroi-Gourhan's) approach are quite obvious here: whereas Stiegler reinscribes the technical trace as originary within the process of human evolution, Bataille sees the transgressive power of art (not in its purely technical but transcendental, spiritual or 'heterological' sense) as originary. See also Fynsk's evaluation: "To reduce the proto-history of humanity to the history of technics would be, for Bataille, to participate in the worst scientific or theoretical offense; it would be to restrict in a most unsovereign manner the play of (human) transcendence and the exposure to alterity that occurs there. It would be to miss the question of the human altogether" (Fynsk, "Lascaux and the Questions of Origins", p. 10). For the importance of 'heterology' for an understanding of Bataille's writings on prehistory see Michèle Richman, "Bataille's Prehistoric Turn: The Case for Heterology", *Theory, Culture & Society*, 35.4–5 (2018): 155–173. One might say that Bataille is thus neither strictly speaking a humanist nor an antihumanist (even less a posthumanist), but maybe simply an 'inhumanist' with a 'thirst for annihilation' (cf. Nick Land, *The Thirst for Annihilation: Georges Bataille and virulent nihilism (an essay on atheistic religion)*, (London: Routledge, 1992)). For a 'gnostic' reading of Bataille's fascination with the 'acephalic' in this regard, see Giorgio Agamben, *The Open: Man and Animal*, trans. Kevi Attell, (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2004), 5-8 and *passim*.

[16] Bataille, p. 12: "une animalité n'en est pas moins le premier signe *pour nous*, le signe aveugle, et pourtant le signe *sensible* de *notre* présence dans l'univers".

[17] Bataille, p. 12-13: "Jamais nous n'atteignions, avant Lascaux, le reflet de cette vie intérieure, dont l'art – et l'art seul – assume la communication, et dont il est, en sa chaleur, sinon l'expression impérissable …, du moins la durable survie". Bataille is unwilling to extend the aesthetic transcendence he sees at work in modern consciousness to the Neanderthal, who, for him, remains a mere *homo faber* as opposed to the 'creative genius' of 'Cro-Magnon man' (19 and *passim*): "As far as we can discern, the Neanderthal and his ancestors were only gradually able to detach themselves from the animal. *Homo sapiens*, however, is from the beginning a fellow man [*notre semblable*]. And he is so in the most distinct manner." ["Pour autant que nous en puissions juger, le Néandertalien et ses ancêtres ne se détachèrent que progressivement de la bête. Mais l'*Homo sapiens* dès l'abord est notre semblable. Il l'est de la manière la plus tranchée."], p. 24.

[18] Jean Rouaud, in *Préhistoires*, (Paris: Gallimard, 2007), 11-19, insinuates, however, that *homo sapiens sapiens* might have purloined its aesthetic origins (notably the use of 'ochre' for painting) from the Neanderthals (and their burial practices). Rouaud's hypothesis is that to cover up the modern humans' lack of originality the Neanderthals had to die, and cave art quite ironically is a testimony to this fratricide.

> protest against a world that existed, but without which the protest itself could not have taken shape.[19]

Tool use is a necessary stage on the way towards hominization because it gives rise to thought in the sense that it places the object of work in two different time spheres: the present (to be transformed) and the future (to be anticipated as the result of that transformation), which, in turn leads to the development of language:

> Language as such becomes possible, beyond the barking of desire, at the very moment when, naming the object, it implicitly relates to the manner in which it was made, namely through the work which suppresses its primary state and insures its usage. From here on, language situates the object durably within the passing of time. But the object uproots the one who senses this, when in his work he starts creating, beyond useful work, a work of art.[20]

The combination of futurity and leisure that the transformative character of art implies leads to the awareness of death and of prohibition [*l'interdit*]. What separates humans from animals is, for Bataille, "the prohibitions by which humans believe themselves to be bound" (33). To animals nothing is forbidden – nature limits animals but they do not limit themselves in any way (33).[21] Taboos relating to death, incest, menstruation or corpses are that which create the human world of work, whereas the objective of art is: "the creation of a perceptible reality by modifying the world in the form of a response to the desire for wonder that is implied in the essence of human being".[22]

Art – as the essence of modern humanity – for Bataille, is thus a yearning that calls for 'world transformation'. It finds its expression in the 'transgression' of the boundaries of the world of work it itself helped to create. A privileged example in this context is the feast [*la fête*] which, for Bataille is connected to the extactic perception [*sensibilité*] of religion.[23] For Bataille, Lascaux serves as evidence of an aesthetic anthropogenesis – the idea that we have become human not so much in opposition to animality but through a kind of estrangement, the consciousness of which produces art as both the celebration of 'extatic' transgression and the nostalgia of the 'inhuman'. This explains the curious combination of 'religious eroticism' that Bataille's work as a whole seeks to investigate – an eroticism that transcends 'animal' sexuality. As Akira Mizuta Lippit explains: "The knowledge of death is what distinguishes human from animal being, while the capacity to experience that knowledge as pleasure defines the erotic possibility of life".[24] *Eros* is in fact what separates humanity from nature

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[19] Bataille, p. 28: "Non seulement, l'art suppose la possession d'outils et d'habilité acquise en les fabriquant, ou en les maniant, mais il a, par rapport à l'activité utilitaire, la valeur d'une opposition: c'est une protestation contre un monde qui existait, mais sans lequel la protestation elle-même n'aurait pu prendre corps."

[20] Bataille, p. 30: "Le langage distinct est possible, au-delà de l'aboiement du désir, à ce moment où, désignant l'objet, il se rapporte implicitement à la manière dont il est fait, au travail qui en supprime le premier état et en assure l'emploi. Le langage à partir de là le situe durablement dans la fuite du temps. Mais l'objet arrache celui qui sensible si, par son travail, il crée, au-delà des œuvres utiles, une œuvre d'art".

[21] For an excellent summary of Bataille's notion of animality (and its relevance for contemporary animal studies) see William Pawlett, *Georges Bataille: The Sacred and Society*, (London: Routledge, 2016), 1-19 (chapter 1: "Animality").

[22] Bataille 37: "la création d'une réalité sensible, modifiant le monde dans le sens d'une réponse au désir de prodige, impliqué dans l'essence de l'être humain".

[23] As for example in the orgiastic scene in Golding's *The Inheritors*, where the 'new people' with the help of alcohol indulge in 'transgressive' rituals, including human sacrifice, while the Neanderthals look on in horror and disgust. As Jean-Claude Monod explains (in "L'art avant l'histoire, ou comment Bataille célèbre Lascaux", In *L'Histoire-Bataille*, eds. Laurent Ferri and Christophe Gauthier, (Paris: Ecole des chartes, 2006), 109): "Lascaux is thus read by Bataille as the striking testimony of a sexual and sacrifiial extasy" [… le témoignage éclatant d'une extase sexuelle et sacrificielle].

[24] Akira Mizuta Lippit, "*Arche*texts: Lascaux, Eros, and the Anamorphic Subject", *Discourse* 24.2 (2002): 21.

and thus humanity from itself, which produces a constant 'becoming-other', and which "Bataille identifies as an essential dimension of humanity's being recorded … in the artwork".[25] Art, which finds itself thus, *before* humanity, is therefore essentially a form of 'mourning':

> By forcing nature to reveal itself, humanity excludes itself from the field of that occurrence: in front of nature transformed into art, the human being becomes aware not only of the essence of nature, of the natural, but also of its own distance from it. Humanity as subject is born in the sorrow of that separation.[26]

That moment of separation – which calls for mourning – is also a moment of 'shame', a moment of self-awareness, of having betrayed one's animality (a possible explanation for the teriomorphic representation of the very few humans depicted in the caves), which arguably is a high price to pay for the attainment of consciousness and a sense of futurity.[27]

Baudrillard – Lascaux and Simulation

In *Simulacra and Simulation* (orig. 1981), Jean Baudrillard provocatively suggests that: "We require a visible past, a visible continuum, a visible myth of origin, which reassures us about our end. Because finally we have never believed in them".[28] Bataille's idea of Lascaux as the origin of art reveals a structural analogy between the originary duplication [*dédoublement*] of animality and humanity and Jean Baudrillard's claim that simulacra mask the disappearance of the 'reality' they 'replace'. Baudrillard used the first replica of the Lascaux cave (Lascaux II), designed to prevent the original from further microbial deterioration due to tourism,[29] as an example of the notion of 'hyperreality', or the simulacrum. The 'desert of the real' created by the simulacrum is characterised by a "liquidation of all referentials", [30] and thus challenges the differentiation between 'true' and 'false' and between 'real' and 'imaginary'. With reference to Lascaux, Baudrillard explains:

> In the same way, with the pretext of saving the original, one forbade visitors to enter the Lascaux caves, but an exact replica was constructed five hundred meters from it, so that everyone could see them (one glances through a peephole at the authentic cave, and then one visits the reconstituted whole). It is possible that the memory of the original grottoes is itself

[25] Lippit, "*Arche*texts", 24.
[26] *Ibid*.
[27] Cf. also Fynsk, on this point: "Bataille offers the intriguing thesis that the art of the tie of Lascaux is distinguished by an effacement of the human before the grandeur of the animal world (were animal and god intermingle). So thorough is this denial, in Bataille's view, that it must testify a form of shame. The 'first origin' saw a passage from animality to humanity via a denial of animality. The second retraces this passage, or feigns to reverse it" (p. 11).
[28] Jean Baudrillard, *Simulacra and Simulation*, trans. Sheila Faria Glaser, Ann Arbour: University of Michigan Press, 1994, p. 10.
[29] Cf. Pedro M. Martin-Sanchez, Ana Z. Miller, and Cesareo Saiz-Jimenez, "Lascaux Cave: An Example of Fragile Ecological Balance in Subterranean Environments", In *Microbial Life of Cave Systems*, ed. Annette Summers Engel, (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2015), 279-301. The authors of this microbial analysis of Lascaux conclude that: "the cave's ecosystem has been totally altered by all of the different interventions performed since the cave's discovery, from adaptation work, massive visitation numbers, different systems of climatic regulation, and continuous biocide treatments. … Human activities have selected microbial communities that are particularly difficult to fight and more competitive in successional processes" (p. 298).
[30] Baudrillard, *Simulacra and Simulation*, p. 3.

> stamped in the minds of future generations, but from now on there is no longer any difference: the duplication suffices to render both artificial.[31]

This logic can here be extended to any attempt to 'save' originality through its simulation. The necessary doubling involved in creating a replica destroys the illusion of the fundamental difference between the real and its simulation and engulfs both within the dialectic of pleasure and nostalgia that is also referred to, by Bataille above, in connection with the representation of the difference between animality and humanity at Lascaux. And it thus also concerns the very idea of *before humanity*. The (paleoanthropological, metaphysical) desire to retrieve an absolute origin (of the human) is constantly being undone by its own *dédoublement*: the impossible locatability in time and space of a break between human and animal and the curious strangeness, articulated in the pleasure of and nostalgia for the 'inhuman', that is its symptom.[32]

If Baudrillard was sceptical about Lascaux II, we can only imagine the bewilderment he would have expressed at Lascaux IV, which was opened in December 2016?[33] Lascaux III had already marked the transition from analogue to digital simulation, or towards 'virtual reality'. Housed by 'The Field Museum', a complete virtual tour of the paintings of the Lascaux Cave today can be taken online, which is described in the following terms: "thanks to the most advanced digital projection technology, you can take a virtual tour of the entire cave in 'Lascaux III'. … State-of-the-art computer animations and digital imaging techniques allow you to peel away the layers of paint to see how the images were created over time … cutting-edge laser mapping, high-resolution stereoscopic photos, and geodesic modelling have made it possible to produce incredibly accurate and life-sized replicas of five panels from two chambers – *The Nave* and *The Shaft* – which have never before been seen outside the original cave".[34]

The digitalization of Lascaux – 'the cradle of humanity', to recall Bataille's phrase – reaches its logical completion with Lascaux IV. Inaugurated by François Hollande on 10 December 2016, as the online version of the journal *Le Point* triumphantly reports,[35] this "life-size replica of the prehistoric cave of Lascaux" was hailed by Hollande as a veritable '*oeuvre*' rather than just a '*fac-simile*', and as a message of hope to the entire world that "we are able to safeguard the heritage of humanity and allow everyone access to its wonders [*émerveillement*]". This profoundly humanist vision of *émerveillement*, safeguarding humanity's (universal, but also uniquely 'national', i.e. French)

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[31] Baudrillard, *ibid*., p.9. This passage comes just a few pages before Baudrillard's famous analysis of Disneyland as "a perfect model of all the entangled orders of simulacra" (p. 12). The argument whether replication is an adequate "compensation for closing an archaeological site" is not without debate within archaelogy itself, as N. James writes – with reference to the more recent replication of the Chauvet Cave, see N. James, "Replication for Chauvet Cave", *Antiquity* 90.350 (2016): 519-24. James raises the question "Responding... to the replicas, do we 'consume' presentation of the past uncritically or without recognising its implications?" (p. 519).

[32] This, in essence, is Agamben's argument in *The Open: Man and Animal*, cf. above.

[33] The specifically "French" way of numbering (often with Roman figures) of technological projects (nuclear reactors, high-speed trains, car models etc.) and their different stages (*générations*) can be contrasted with the "Anglo-American" way of identifying different versions of digital systems and software by 1.0, 2.0, 2.1 etc. Lascaux is thus classified into Lascaux I – the "original cave as it was discovered in 1949; Lascaux II – the first (partial) replica; Lascaux III – a mobile and "virtual" replica in the form of a multimedia show; and Lascaux IV – a "complete 3D replica" of the entire "original" cave. For an interesting account of the importance of Lascaux for French post-WWII cultural politics see Douglas Smith, "Beyond the Cave: Lascaux and the Prehistoric in Post-War French Culture", *French Studies* 58.3 (2004): 219-232.

[34] See "Creating Copies of Lascaux – The Field Museum": http://lascaux.fieldmuseum.org/behind-the-scenes/the-reproduction (accessed 20 September 2018).

[35] "François Hollande inaugure 'Lascaux 4', réplique du chef d'œuvre", *Le Point* 10/12/2016; available online at: https://www.lepoint.fr/societe/francois-hollande-inaugure-lascaux-4-replique-integrale-du-chef-d-oeuvre-parietal-10-12-2016-2089495_23.php (accessed 22 December 2020).

'heritage' is made possible by the 'immersive', digitally-mediated experience of a total '*sanctuarization*' provided by a '100% reproduction at the actual scale'. This project of 8,500 square meters of rock art was unveiled in the presence of the eminent paleoanthropologist Yves Coppens, as well as that of the sole survivor of the four boys who first discovered the cave. It is housed in a concrete and glass complex of a 150 metres length, half underground, "which fits like a mere 'fault line into the landscape'":

> The beginning of the visit simulates the outside of the hill of Lascaux, even to the barking of the dog which had found the opening of the cave covered by rocks. Once inside, there is total darkness, then the track for the tourists, guided by explanations is kept to a minimum.[36]

As with many archaeological 'theme-park' scenarios, authenticity or its simulation is of utmost concern – an illusion that 'immersive' digital technologies have increasingly come to 'assist'.[37] The advertised aim of this combined scientific, artistic and touristic simulative venture is "to allow the visitor to relive the 'same sensations' as the four young teenagers who believed they had found the vault of a castle, and who discovered an exceptional prehistoric sanctuary".[38] It is probably safe to say that Baudrillard would have had a 'field day' – literally speaking – had he been invited to this inauguration as one of the 1500 select alongside the *Président de la République*.[39]

The digitalization of Lascaux IV continues a general trend of 'preserving' the 'human heritage' through new digital technologies that allow for archivization as well as for copying, simulation and thus increased 'accessibility'. In this specific context, *before humanity* also comes to designate a specific historical techno-cultural situation, namely that of the digitalization of culture under the conditions of neoliberal and global capitalism and its increasing demand for a translation (in the form of digital archivization) of our human 'origins', with all the ideological and technological implications this obviously has. What this process cannot alleviate, however technologically immersive the 'cradle' experience of a shared humanity might be, is the logic of self-estrangement with regard to 'our' originary inhumanity, which Bataille describes.[40] In fact, it can only add to it and thus, following Baudrillard, leads to an acceleration of hyperrealization – in other words, it becomes a 'fatal strategy'.

In this respect, Howard Caygill's "Digital Lascaux" – published in 2002, and thus long before Lascaux IV – anticipates some of the implications at work in the digitalization of "the geometrical figures and

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[36] *Ibid*. For a more detailed account of the technical procedures involved in producing the 'fac-simile', see the special issue of *Le Monde* on "Les Merveilles de Lascaux" (*Le Monde hors-série* (March-May 2017), esp. 56-65).

[37] It is certainly noteworthy that at the heart of the immersive technological and simulative experience a simulated animal(ity) also returns in the form of the barking of the 'original' dog who is said to have alerted the boys to the hidden opening and thus to the existence of the cave. Maybe without this nameless dog the 'cradle of humanity' would still be awaiting its discovery. What is maybe even more intriguing is that the dog was apparently called 'Robot' … even if this entire story was probably made up for the press, as Brett Buchanan claims (in his "Painting the Prehuman: Bataille, Merleau-Ponty, and the Aesthetic Origins of Humanity", *Journal for Critical Animal Studies* 9.1-2 (2011), 17).

[38] "François Hollande inaugure …", *ibid*.

[39] Apart from the preservation aspect of the project, the economic implications are equally impressive: "For the operator of the site, Sémitour, the aim of this new replica is to attract nearly 400,000 visitors a year, compared to only 270,000 a year who usually visit 'Lascaux II'". *ibid*.

[40] It is in this context that I would read Stuart Kendall's strangely 'nostalgic' comment on Bataille's "Impossible identification, an identification with the impossible", also maybe recalling Geiser's solitude in *Man in the Holocene*, being about to forget his own humanity: "But what would it be to forget, in the silence and isolation of the cave, one's solitude? Can there be, today, a community of the cave?" (see Kendall's "Editor's Introduction: The Sediment of the Possible", *The Cradle of Humanity*, p. 28).

images held to mark the aesthetic 'origin' of the human species".[41] In a sense, the digitalization of the 'origin' at the same time also marks the 'end' of the human:

> The evocation of an archaic aesthetic origin in order to assert the unity of the human species by means of a technology that is sublimely inhuman in its scale and power provokes a number of questions regarding not only the place of the aesthetic between the beginning and the end of the human but also, and inseparably, the broader set of relations between the human, the pre-human and the post-human.[42]

Caygill is thus a strong ally for my investigation into the complex of questions the phrase *before humanity* continues to raise. Digitalising the origin might merely change the 'scale' of the problem as far as our 'strange inhumanity' is concerned, and which returns as soon as the origin (and the end) of the human and its 'animality' is at stake. The *before* opens up again and causes to resonate both beginning and end.[43]

Caygill's strategy is to pitch Bataille and Leroi-Gourhan against each other and to end by showing how their apparent opposition relies on shared (mis)conceptions of the human and its aesthetic origins: "For Bataille, the aesthetic origin of the human to which rock art bears witness consists in the excess of creativity over labour and the technology of perception, while for Leroi-Gourhan it bears witness to the inauguration of the human in the technological mastery of perception".[44] What is at stake, therefore, is "the definition of the human and its future … an argument whose parameters anticipate the current digital celebration of archaic creativity".[45] In a cunning move, Caygill reveals a division between the roles that Bataille and Leroi-Gourhan respectively ascribe to technology in the process of hominization: "For Bataille, the aesthetic origin of the human lies in the inscription of the image of the animal through which the human marks its distance from inhuman animality …".[46] This constitutes, according to Caygill, a "refusal to consider technology as a central feature in the emergence of the human. … Technology is not the source of the powerful affect that Bataille calls the 'inner life' or 'inner experience' and which for him is witnessed for the first time in Lascaux".[47] Instead, Bataille locates the origin of the human in the 'transgression' of 'the aesthetic event' that lies in the emergence of the consciousness of death. The transgressive 'affect' that results from the awareness of a distinction between human and object or animal world and which leads to the aesthetic event of the paintings (i.e. the 'Lascaux miracle') is "far more significant than the magical power of the world provided by technology".[48]

This goes against Leroi-Gourhan (and, following him, Derrida's and Stiegler's accounts of the 'originary technicity' of the human) and the understanding that "technology is crucial for the definition of the human; for [Leroi-Gourhan] *Homo sapiens* is *Homo faber* and the works of archaic art are called up as evidence for the continuity".[49] This means that technology becomes the 'central protagonist' in the process of hominization: "The technical control of the world is celebrated in the

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[41] Howard Caygill, "Digital Lascaux: the beginning in the end of the aesthetic", *Angelaki* 7.1 (2002): 9.
[42] Caygill, *ibid*.
[43] Cf. Bataille, *The Cradle of Humanity*, p. 22: "Light is being shed on our birth at the very moment when the notion of our death appears to us".
[44] Caygill, p. 9.
[45] *Ibid*.
[46] *Ibid*., p. 21.
[47] *Ibid*. Cf. also the argument Ivan Callus and I made with regard to the possibility of a 'posthumanism "without" technology' in our, "Critical posthumanism, or, the *inventio* of a posthumanism without technology", *Subject Matters* 3.2/4.1 (2007): 15–30.
[48] Caygill, p. 22.
[49] *Ibid*.

art as the magical power over the world, the ability to give shape and figure to an alien environment".[50] What both Bataille and Leroi-Gourhan share, according to Caygill, however, and what I already referred to above, is the 'excess of imagination', the desire and nostalgia for, as well as the anxiety of, the 'inhuman other'; and this inhuman takes either the shape of 'the animal' (Bataille) or 'the technical' (Leroi-Gourhan, Derrida, Stiegler): "The more than human or inhuman is related in some way to the division within the aesthetic – the fact that perception and affect do not add up points to a lacuna or an excess in the aesthetic definition of the human", as Caygill concludes.[51]

In his final move, Caygill does not try so much to resolve this antithesis but rather to exacerbate it by extending it further, into the context of digitalization: "The conduct of the complicated negotiations between the divided aesthetic and the inhuman in the human on the terrain of the archaic art has been complicated by the entry of archaic art into the Internet".[52] He thus reads the "digital translation and global dissemination of archaic figures and images" as an "inhuman celebration of the human, of the passing of the human into a future of technological animality":

> The figures and images that marked the aesthetic beginnings of the human are gathered, preserved and presented at the moment and by a technology in and through which the human structures of perception and affect are put radically into question. It is by no means clear whether this is the moment of a Bataillean festive transition from the human to the *Ubermensch* or a regression from *Homo sapiens* to the less than human *Homo faber*.[53]

If I tend to be more on the side of Bataille with regard to this 'posthuman' scenario, as one might call it, than on Caygill's, as far as the role of technology is concerned, it is because I have – very much against Bataille – more faith in the continued *animality* of the human than in the supposed *technicity* of its origin.

This becomes even more evident once one maps the problematic of 'our' (originary) animality or technicity onto the Nietzschean idea of the overman as either a form of transcendence or, in fact, regression. From Bataille's 'cultural pessimist' perspective, as Caygill rightly says:

> It is difficult to avoid the suspicion when reading *Lascaux ou la naissance de l'art* that for Bataille the movement from the industrious animal of *Homo faber* to the festive human of *Homo sapiens* is being reversed in the epoch of industrial modernity and that contemporary humanity in its obsession with work and production is becoming *neanderthal*. Art, and in particular Lascaux, remains a miraculous, excessive moment, inaugurating a human that is as capable of transcending itself in the *Ubermensch* as it is in regressing to the pre-human or Neanderthal. From this perspective, Lascaux presents not only the past but also the future of humanity, especially to a culture in full regression from *Homo sapiens* to *Homo faber*. The future of the human lies in the aesthetic affect of joyous transgression and not in the continued development of the technology of *Homo faber*.[54]

The *inhumanism* which lurks behind Bataille's highly ambiguous notion of transgression with its mixture of anxieties and desires is, again, closely related to the ambiguity of finding oneself *before humanity*. For the kind of 'critical posthumanism' I have been advocating, however, it is important *not* to choose or try and resolve this ambiguity. In my discussion of Golding and the Neanderthal I

[50] *Ibid*., p. 23.
[51] *Ibid*.
[52] *Ibid*., p. 24.
[53] *Ibid*.
[54] Caygill, p. 22.

have tried to show that a simple supersession, a dialectic (even a negative dialectic) at work in the very process of negation and reinscription (of origin) should be resisted. Neither some ecstatic 'transgression' nor a euphoric belief in technology will ever be able to satisfy or exhaust the desire for and anxiety of the inhuman. *Ubermensch* and *Neanderthal* simply do not stand in opposition to each other. The co-existence of *homo faber* and *homo sapiens* ultimately resists any idea of teleology, including any attempt at *reverse* teleology (or teleology *après-coup*).

While Bataille's theory of humanity's troubled aesthetic origin resonates with the ambiguity of *before humanity*, it also encourages the 'mythologization' of Lascaux as the most important event in prehistory that it clearly was not. Criticisms of Bataille's 'miraculous' reading of Lascaux are not difficult to find, both in paleontological and philosophical quarters. For example, Bataille predictably comes under some attack from animal studies in a recent special issue of *Yale French Studies* (on "Animots", see above). Yue Zhuo points out that: "prehistory allows [Bataille] to fantasize a point outside history that sidesteps the divisions established by modern disciplines, a utopian space where the earliest men's relation to death, eroticism, religion, interdiction, and transgression is seen as tangled, poetic, and mysterious, and art as an ultimate expression resulting from this sensitive distress and confusion".[55] In fact, Bataille's was an 'animal utopia' in which prehistoric humans felt a 'poetic bond' with animals which has been lost in modern times: "they treated [animals] as their fellow creatures, desired them, moved alongside them, felt sympathy for them; but these positive feelings never excluded their desire to kill".[56] However, it was already Maurice Blanchot, who in his comment on Bataille's idea of the birth of art critically asked:

> Why this need for the origin, and why this veil of illusion with which all that is originary seems to envelop itself – a mocking, essential dissimulation, which is perhaps the empty truth of first things? Why, nonetheless, does art, even when it is engaged in the same illusion, let us believe that it could represent this enigma but also put an end to it? Why is it that in speaking of 'the miracle of Lascaux' Georges Bataille can speak of 'the birth of art'?[57]

Moreover, Bataille's account of prehistory is so obviously counter-factual, as Blanchot already pointed out, since "Lascaux itself, with the power of its complex work, a work that is vast and complete, reveals that there were already centuries of painting behind the paintings we see, that the paintings of Lascaux were elaborated through contact with traditions, models, and uses, as if they were on the inside of that particular space of art that Malraux has called the Museum. … Thus it is true that what is indeed a beginning at Lascaux is the beginning of an art, the beginnings of which, let it be said, lose themselves in the night of all ages. There is a moment where there is nothing, and then a moment where signs multiply".[58] Blanchot thus very much contradicts Bataille, as far as the notion of origin is concerned. However, he can only do so while developing an originary counter-

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[55] Yue Zhuo, "Alongside the Animals: Bataille's 'Lascaux Project'", *Yale French Studies* 127 (2015): 22.
[56] Zhuo, p. 24.
[57] Maurice Blanchot, "The Birth of Art [1955]", *Friendship*, (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1997), 2. Blanchot also reveals the paradoxical nature of Bataille's notion of 'transgression', which always remains in need of its own assurance and thus always calls for a further transgression in an endless transgressive process: "Another transgression is called for, a transgression that is itself ruled, limited, but open as if resolute; one in which, in *an instant* – the time of difference – the prohibitions are violated, the gap between man and his origin is put into question once again and in some sense recovered, explored, and experienced" (p. 6). For a more detailed discussion of the notion of transgression in Bataille and poststructuralism see Suzanne Guerlac's "Bataille in Theory: Afterimages (Lascaux)", *Diacritics* 26.2 (1996): 6-17, and her "The Useless Image: Bataille, Bergson, Magritte", *Repesentations* 97.1 (2007): 28-56. In this context, see also Jacques Derrida's reading of Bataille in "From Restricted to General Economy: A Hegelianism without Reserve", *Writing and Difference [1967]*, trans. Alan Bass, (London: Routledge, 2002), 317-360.
[58] Blanchot, "The Birth of Art", pp. 8-9.

aesthetic of his own (and which influenced a whole generation of poststructuralists around him), based on the idea of the gap or 'lacuna':

> Thus there is always a lacuna: as if the origin, instead of showing itself and expressing itself in what emerges from the origin, were always veiled and hidden by what it produces, and perhaps then destroyed or consumed as origin, pushed back and always further removed and distant, as what is originally deferred. We never observe the source, nor the springing forth, but only what is outside the source, the source become reality external to itself and always again without source or far from the source.[59]

Blanchot here evokes Teilhard de Chardin's notion according to which the "hominising mutation [*mutation hominisante*]" will always define "our awaiting [*notre attente*]", maybe not because our becoming human is lacking [*manqué*] but because it is this lack [*manqué*] itself: "because [it] is what could not occur without already having occurred and with the power to throw far back what was just behind it".[60] It is this ever receding horizon of 'truth' that, according to Blanchot, is the hidden meaning of art: "Art is intimately associated with the origin, which is itself always brought back to the non-origin; art explores, asserts, gives rise to – through a contact that shatters all acquired form – what is essentially *before*; what is, without yet being".[61]

So while Blanchot has to reject the (pre)historical claim Bataille makes, he nevertheless finds a way to salvage his 'friendship' with Bataille:[62]

> Nothing can prove that art began at the same time as man; on the contrary, everything indicates that there was a significant lapse in time. However, the first great moments of art suggest that man has contact with his own beginning – is the initial affirmation of himself, the expression of his own novelty – only when, by the means and methods of art, he enters into communication with the force, brilliance, and joyful mastery of a power that is essentially the power of beginning, which is also to say, of a beginning-again that is always prior.[63]

So even if at Lascaux "art is not beginning, nor is man …", what Lascaux might stand for is not the impossible absolute origin, the point zero of hominization, but an example of the myth-like realization or consciousness of divestment that is necessary for the human to find 'himself' ("*efface* himself in order to discover himself").[64] Thus, it might well turn out that there is 'nothing' *before* humanity, or that humanity is this constantly re-enacted (self)effacement – the subject of 'art' or 'creativity' more generally. The question, however, is what to do with this knowledge? Can it lead to anything else but some (neo)humanist aesthetic based on a 'yearning' for a (self)effacing gesture of

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[59] *Ibid*., p. 10.
[60] *Ibid*. (translation modified).
[61] *Ibid*. (my emphasis).
[62] For a discussion of the wider significance of Blanchot's act of "friendship" vis-à-vis Bataille, see Lars Iyer, "Cave Paintings and Wall Writings: Blanchot's Signature", *Angelaki* 6.3 (2001): 31-43.
[63] *Ibid*.
[64] *Ibid*., p. 11 (my emphasis). This necessary (self-)effacement is echoed in Michel Foucault's well-known prediction of the inevitable (re-)effacement of "man", at the end of his *The Order of Things: An Archaeology of the Human Sciences [1966]*, London: Routledge, 2002, p. 422:

> As the archaeology of our thought easily shows, man is an invention of recent date. And one perhaps nearing its end. If those arrangements [i.e. European culture since the sixteenth century] were to disappear as they appeared, if some event of which we can at the moment do no more than sense the possibility – without knowing either what its form will be or what it promises – were to cause them to crumble, as the ground of Classical thought did, at the end of the eighteenth century, then one can certainly wager that man would be erased, like a face drawn in sand at the edge of the sea.

(self)transcendence? Or else, is there a truly *in*humanist aesthetic that would function through a different genealogical link between the *pre*human and the *post*human that *before humanity* might make discernible?

Inhumanist Aesthetic?

Daniel Cottom seems to hint at this very problem when he writes: "Humanity is the species betrayed by art, in both senses of that word: the species at once revealed and undone through the agency of art".[65] It is worth recalling in this respect that Lascaux was not only seen by Bataille as the 'cradle of humanity'. It also represents, according to one of the pioneers of 'virtual reality', the end of humanity (and thus the beginning of a certain idea of 'posthumanity'). Howard Rheingold explains the notion of virtuality as "grasping reality through illusion" through his personal experience of Lascaux:

> I journeyed back in time to the prehistoric underground paintings at Lascaux, explored Plato's cave, and peered into a technological future that deserves our attention now – because when today's infant VR technology matures in a few years, it promises (and threatens) to change what it means to be human.[66]

Rheingold's enthusiasm is based on John Pfeiffer's seminal paleoanthropological speculation, in *The Creative Explosion* (1982), which portrays stone-age art, as an evolutionary watershed that, essentially, still captures human behaviour today: "The process which gathered momentum among the Cro-Magnons continues to accelerate in our times. The same forces which drive us today drove our recent ancestors underground with paints, engraving tools, lamps, and notions about their place in the scheme of things".[67] Rheingold goes on to provide some media-technological and media-evolutionary speculations for this affinity:

> At some point between ten and thirty thousand years ago, most of our species changed its way of life, not because of biological mutation or selection, but because people learned something new. The caves at Lascaux and other sites might be the places where that learning took place. If the theories of palaeontologist John Pfeiffer are correct, primitive but effective cyberspaces may have been instrumental in setting us on the road to computerized world-building in the first place. Toolmaking was at the beginning of the road that led to the opening of cyberspace, and toolmaking, using human attention mechanisms and high-resolution video displays instead of ochre paintings on limestone walls, may be the ultimate future purpose of cyberspace, as well.[68]

Here we find again the same reverse-teleological *cum* promissory strategy of a metaphysics of the origin at work: we have always been proto-digital in the sense that there is a direct (techno)evolutionary line between Lascaux and the virtual reality of cyberspace (at least in as far as the aesthetic 'potential' or the 'promise' of the prehistoric moment are concerned). And again we have the Bataillean *dédoublement* of human origin in the opposition between (biological) animality

[65] Daniel Cottom, *Unhuman Culture*, Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2006, p. 150.
[66] Howard Rheingold, *Virtual Reality*, London: Martin Secker & Warburg, 1991, p. 19.
[67] John Pfeiffer, *The Creative Explosion* (1982), quoted in Rheingold, *Virtual Reality*, 378. The account of the Upper Pleistocene as a "creative explosion" remains the backbone of both biological and cultural evolution, as even the recent "break-away" attempt by Edward O. Wilson demonstrates (see Wilson, *The Social Conquest of Earth*, New York: Norton, 2012, pp. 85-96), see also my discussion of Wilson in "Ancestrality: Languages and Evolutions", above.
[68] Rheingold, p. 379.

versus (originary, prosthetic) technicty driving the process of hominization.[69] As Rheingold pursues: "The earliest virtual realities on earth were constructed laboriously, by lamplight, deep underground … these subterranean cyberspaces may have been created to imprint information on the minds of the first technologists".[70]

What both Bataille and Rheingold would probably agree upon, however, is that becoming human was essentially an aesthetic event – whether induced by a process of alienation from animality or a process of technical prostheticization. Through such an 'originary' approach to hominization which sees the neolithic not only as the turning point and 'origin' but also as a prototypical and hence somehow unsurpassed (and unsurpassable) event, the question of *before humanity* becomes even more intriguing and urgent. The urgency, precisely, arises from the fact that the 'world' that Lascaux might have helped to create – namely that of 'modern' humanity – is today being threatened both with extinction *and* technological replacement. *Before* humanity now inevitably, literally, evokes humanity's end – or, its 'posthumanity' – just as prehistory inevitably speaks to the spectre of 'posthistory'.[71]

A 'world', according to Martin Heidegger, is precisely that which a work of art 'erects' [*er-richten*]: "Rising-up-within-itself the work opens up a world", Heidegger writes.[72] World however is not an object or the sum of 'reality', a world 'worlds' [*weltet*] in the sense that it opens the space and a 'home' for 'being' (it is thus much more closely connected to a 'world view'). It is also in this aesthetic context that Heidegger repeats his controversial claim that a stone is 'world-less': "Similarly, plants and animals have no world; they belong, rather, to the hidden throng of an environment into which they have been put".[73] Stone (plant and animal) do not have a world (in the sense of (human) being) but they extend into an 'environment' [*Umgebung*]. Heidegger does not refer to cave paintings or stone-age art in his short treatise (his 'ideal' case of a work of art is poetry [*Dichtung*], as he reveals in the conclusion), for if he did, it would become clear that stone and animal, especially in the context of Lascaux, would demand a far greater role within the history of aesthetics than that of mere *Umgebung*. For Heidegger, in fact, no art as such is possible without language:

> Where language is not present, as in the being of stones, plants, or animals, there is also no openness of beings, and consequently no openness either of that which is not a being [*des Nichtseienden*] or of emptiness. Language, by naming beings for the first time, first brings

[69] For a 'reversal' of this teleology from the point of view of animal studies see Bret Buchanan's "Painting the Prehuman", p. 15: "Is it not possible, then, that the passage from animality to humanity is either still underway, never to be completed, or, in what might be the same thing, was always doomed from the start to be a failed passage? … the paintings in Lascaux depict the acknowledgement of being always already prehuman, or, put otherwise, that humanity is a condition that is never fully formed inasmuch as it is a process continually in the making".

[70] Rheingold, p. 380. See also Lippit's critique of Rheingold's attempt to place VR within 'the genealogy of optical technologies'. According to Lippit, in so doing Rheingold "reduces the impact of both Lascaux and VR" (Akira Mizuta Lippi, "Virtual annihilation: Optics, VR, and the Discourse of Subjectivity", *Criticism* 36.4 (1994): 601).

[71] 'Posthistory' in the sense of the vast stretches of 'deep time' *before* humanity and *after* its disappearance – i.e. outside human history, and not in Hegel's, Kojève's or Fukuyama's sense of *posthistore*. In this 'geological' dimension, aesthetics, as Karin Yusoff proposes, "is a space of experience that holds relations of nonhuman force between phenomena to blur boundaries and cross inhuman timescales" (cf. Yusoff, "Geologic subjects: nonhuman origins, geomorphic aesthetics and art becoming *in*human", *Cultural Geographies* 22.3 (2015): 384).

[72] Martin Heidegger, *Der Ursprung des Kunstwerkes* [1935], (Stuttgart: Reclam, 1960), 40; English translation: "The Origin of the Work of Art", *Off the Beaten Track*, trans. Julian Young and Kenneth Haynes, Cambridge: (Cambridge University Press, 2002), 22.

[73] Heidegger, "The Origin of the Work of Art", p. 23.

> beings to word and to appearance. … Projective saying [*das entwerfende Sagen*] is poetry: the saying [*Sage*] of world and earth …[74]

Only in language can being find its 'openness' through which a worlding 'work' can emerge. The 'true origin' [*Ursprung*] of the poetical world [*Sage* – which also means 'legend' or 'myth', but which is here used by Heidegger to emphasise the power and act of 'saying'] is a 'leap forward' [*Vorsprung*] or an 'advance'. As such, it has nothing to do with the 'primitive': "A genuine beginning, of course, is not a beginning in the sense of being primitive. The primitive, because it lacks the bestowing, grounding leap and the leap-ahead, has no future".[75] While Heidegger's logic here seems impeccable as far as the im/possibility of the origin is concerned – especially in its relevance with regard to the discussed aporia of the *before* – what I would nevertheless critique, very much in the vein of contemporary posthumanist thinking, is the blatant 'linguacentrism' and 'anthropocentrism' of Heidegger's sense of 'being'.[76] In fact, Heidegger's *Ursprung* (literally: the originary leap) functions in exact analogy to both Bataille's notion of the 'miracle', as well as Rheingold's idea of 'proto-cyberspace', both attributed to Lascaux. All three 'leaps' are undertaken on the basis of a rejection of the 'primitive' they aim to leapfrog, so to speak. There is, however, a fundamental denial, a denegation, in these accounts, which the phrase *before humanity* might help articulate. An aesthetic *before* humanity – in the current context of 'postanthropocentric' (i.e. posthumanist) thinking – does not only signify the emergence (and hence the possible demise) of the aesthetic as such, but also the 'ancestrality' of its prehuman 'origin'. It does not only raise the question of both a prehuman and a posthuman aesthetic but also takes the idea of their radical and originary '*in*humanity' seriously.[77]

In this (*in*humanist) sense, one could argue that art is "that species of thing through which humanity imagines another species of being for itself". It is thus related to the "eminently human desire to be unhuman",[78] as Daniel Cottom suggests. An *in*humanist aesthetic would thus necessarily be somewhat 'misanthropic'.[79] In light of a current 'nonhuman' or postanthropocentric turn, Cottom's strategic misanthropy also takes on an 'ancestral' or prehistoric dimension. Prehistory, geophilia and animality are connected in the rediscovery, continuity, potentiality and ecology of their materiality:

> Prehistory is less a period and more a set of potentialities which we know, sense, and feel, but find hard to speak. Realizing the potentials of the material world lies at the heart of what makes us, and has made us, human. It is a thread to follow into the silent parts of the human story. To attune ourselves to prehistory, past and present, we need to resonate with the non-verbal bits of human experience.[80]

The anti-Heideggerian aesthetic that takes into account the 'worlding' potential of the ancestral materiality of human (and nonhuman) experience – i.e. our persistent geophilia – is maybe that which, in aesthetic terms, resonates most in the phrase *before humanity*. It is arguably not so much the hand that rocks the cradle but the rock that cradles the hand, which informs the *Ursprung*.

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[74] Heidegger, "The Origin of the Work of Art", p 46; Heidegger, *Der Ursprung des Kunstwerkes*, pp. 74-75.
[75] Heidegger, "The Origin", p. 48; *Ursprung*, p. 78.
[76] Cf. Yusoff, "Geologic subjects", p. 386, on the geology of 'cave art'. Yusoff asks: "If the rock commands, authors, and provokes the contemplation of subjectivity as much as the animal or human, what kind of fuller account of subjectivity could be realized through these geomorphic aesthetics to direct our understanding into the Anthropocene?"
[77] Here I would like to recall once more Jean-François Lyotard's critique of humanism in *The Inhuman: Reflections on Time*, trans. Geoffrey Bennington and Rachel Bowlby, (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1991), esp. 1-7.
[78] Daniel Cottom, *Unhuman Culture*, p. ix.
[79] Cf. Cottom, pp. 158: "That is why we need misanthropy: so as not to close our hearts to the cultural hope that is to be found, both within and without us, only in what appears at any given moment to be unhuman".
[80] Chris Gosden, *Prehistory: A Very Short Introduction*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), 115.

Current changes in the history of materiality, or the materiality of history, also determine the "future of prehistory", as Chris Gosden concludes: "We are uncertain of who we are, as part-people and part-objects, or of where we are going as a non-linear future unfolds. … We have a growing sense that history is rewriting us".[81] This rewriting process – not unrelated to Lyotard's notion of "rewriting modernity",[82] and extended under present 'postanthopocentric' conditions to the entire process of 'rewriting humanity' – is what both still lies ahead of us and, in a sense, is already behind us. It is, precisely, what powers the aporia of *before humanity*.[83]

[81] Gosden, p. 120.

[82] Cf. Jean-François Lyotard, "Rewriting Modernity", *The Inhuman: Reflections on Time*, pp. 24-35.

[83] Cf. The conclusion to Jeffery Skoblow's fascinating essay on "Paleolithic Representations of Human Being at Chauvet and Rouffignac", In *Fragments of a History of a Vanishing Humanism*, eds. Myra Seaman and Eileen A. Joy, (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 2016), 50: "Questions of what is fragmentary or partial, or complete or whole – that is to say, definitions of human identity and being – are precisely what we cannot resolve when it comes to Paleolithic art. This radical conceptual instability remains with us, is available to us in spite of many years of fuller access to thoughts and works of human culture (lost and otherwise) and, of course, in spite of the certainties that accrue with the advent of writing. In some sense the Paleolithic has not ended".