Before Humanity: Ancestrality and Becoming In/Human

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For the end of the human cannot be investigated without investigating its origin…[1]

1. Before…

"Before" is one of those magic words which contain an intrinsic opposition. Grammatically speaking, before is an adverb, preposition and conjunction that expresses sequence in both space and time. Spatially, it serves for example as the opposite of "behind" with its meaning of "in front, in or on the anterior side; in a *forward* direction". However, it also implies, ironically, maybe, a certain "futurity" in the sense of "ahead, in advance, in front". Temporally, this also seems to translate into "previous", in the sense of "in the time preceding that in question, previously to that or this, earlier, sooner".[2] So, one could say that *before* thoroughly ambiguates futurity, presence and pastness. A statement like "Humanity stands here *before* you" is a performative, signifying presence; while a statement like "Humans were here *before* humanity", claims a precedence of human difference over a universal notion of humanity; and a statement like "This human has his or her whole life *before* them", obviously refers to an individual human's future.

The phrase "before humanity" speaks to all these meanings of before – pastness, presence and futurity – and it does so in the context of our current "posthumanist" climate, when the question of what it means to be human is once again being asked with great urgency, in the face of new and not so new threats and new and also not so new "opportunities". Posthumanism's current main symptoms are, on the one hand, the rush for ever "smarter" technologies that increasingly think with or, indeed, for humans, and, on the other hand, the

ever more urgent discussion about climate change, extinction angst, biopolitics, speciesism and the search for exoplanets. In short, posthumanism labels the "mess" that has arisen once traditional answers to the question of "what does it mean to be human?" have given way to a renewed uncertainty about what "humanity", if such a thing actually exists beyond a conceptual construct, should do next. In other words, it is a critique of the most fundamental anthropocentric values, assumptions and reflexes that have been underpinning modernity.

The ongoing critique or deconstruction of humanism that the label posthumanism points towards increasingly affects human self-understanding in terms of ethics (in the form of a critique of anthropocentrism, speciesism, evolution etc.), politics (in the form of a critique of biopolitics, cyborgisation, neoliberalism etc.), aesthetics (through bioart, new media art, digital games, electronic literature etc.), institutions (like the life sciences, the posthumanities, social media etc.) and life styles (e.g. prosthesization, enhancement, virtual reality environments etc.).

The proliferating ideas and visions of our "posthumanity" are now reaching a wider public and are circulating in traditional mass media and even more so in new, digital or social media. As a result, the transformative potential of posthumanism has become undeniable – for better or for worse. In this context, what I have called "critical posthumanism"[3] is aimed at evaluating, contextualising and historicising this transformative potential posthumanism promises. It welcomes for example the new and extensive possibilities for co-operations between the humanities, the social sciences and the new bio- or life sciences. On the other hand, critical also means appreciating the resistance to ideas relating to the posthuman, posthumanisation and posthumanity. The aim is to "read" the anxieties and desires at work when dealing with such concepts as the human, posthuman or nonhuman and to look at prefigurations, genealogies, disavowals and alternative futures.

The ideas evoked by the phrase "before humanity" are therefore part of an ongoing critical practice that challenges posthumanist futurism and techno-utopianism. It serves to remind ourselves of the essential openness and unknowability of the future for humans and nonhumans alike. Focusing on the ambiguity of *before* implies a kind of reverse thinking and an imagining of a time before origins, before there was such a "thing" called "humanity". This deliberately goes against the predominant strain of posthumanism that tends to focus on (and maybe even help bring about) what comes *after* humanity. However, we have no idea what it means to be human. Any content that we stick to something like human "nature" is immediately undermined, rejected, rewritten, transcended. This is why posthumanism is better understood, following Lyotard's logic of the postmodern, as "anamnesis", re-membering or perlaboration.[4] "Postanthropocentrism", in this sense, really implies a kind of psychoanalysis applied at the problematic level of species identity, or, in other words, a process of "rewriting humanity" in the face of the spectre of the posthuman.

Whether one looks at the asynchronicity prompted and exploited by rewriting the human or at the "ancestrality" of object-oriented ontology and speculative realism,[5] the *before* in "before humanity" opens up a possible juncture (or, figuratively, a kind of wormhole) between prehuman and posthuman times. It is in this sense that we here stand *before* the human, in the same way that we are *before* the law, as in Kafka's text. Even though Derrida reads Kafka's parable[6] in an entirely different context, namely to explain the relation between literature and the law, there are a number of observations that will be useful for understanding the complex meaning of "before humanity" in that reading: namely that the preposition "before" allows for a positioning in front of something either facing it or turning one's back on it (like the man seeking entrance and the doorkeeper barring it, in Kafka's text). And just like the man seeking entrance to the law without ever actually proceeding to confront it, we have been before

humanity without ever finding it. Humanity, just like the law (and its unlocatable "presence"), remains forever deferred, or in *différance*. The analogy goes even further: just like the man who spends his life waiting for access to the law, who is (a subject) before the law without ever confronting it in its presence, until the doorkeeper closes his particular access upon the man's death, we, humans, might find ourselves before humanity in a similar way, without ever acceding to us gaining access to or "realising" our humanity, so to speak. Every singular human finds him, her, or indeed "itself" before (the law of) humanity by interpellation, waiting an entire life to enter that promised state, only to find out that at the end (the "end of man") some mediating doorkeeper closes our singular access while nihilistically claiming that it is no longer needed (and, instead, will be opened again elsewhere for some other human, or, indeed, the successor, maybe). There is no better way of describing the peculiar "performativity" at work in a residual humanism in posthuman times.[7]

As we might be, in all this frenzy of posthuman times, about to forget what drives this humanism, we are well advised to look back (and forth) at beginnings. "Before humanity" sets up two alternative scenarios, two speculative questions: what happened just before we apparently became human (which involves a critique of paleontology, evolution and hominisation narratives)? And, witnessing the "end" of (at least a certain notion of) humanity: what task lies "before" the human (now)? In other words, while others might choose to rush ahead into techno-utopias of artificial intelligence and embrace the apparent inevitability of our continued evolution into augmented posthumans, I am here interested in the proto-, the paleo-, the ante-… conceptualisations on which these "science factional" scenarios rely.[8] The suspicion that develops out of this might be articulated in the question whether we have ever been "human" (in a humanist sense) and if not, what could "we" have been? What could we maybe still be? This, certainly, is an "ancestral" question…

2. Ancestrality

> You think that a precursor is someone who comes before those who follow after? Well, you're wrong: the precursor is not the one who comes before, but rather the one whom the successors subsequently claim came before… This is the peculiar knowledge to which philosophers lay claim, a knowledge that sometimes seems to amount to little more than these rigmaroles wherein time is turned upside down, the better to contrive a countersensical redoubling of the time of science. A peculiar knowledge indeed, which renders us incapable of grasping precisely that which is actually most gripping about the temporality of science – the fact that science does indeed think that *what comes before comes before, and that what came before us came before us*.[9]

The idea of "before humanity" certainly resonates with the desire "to get out of ourselves, to grasp the in-itself, to know what is whether we are or not", as investigated in Quentin Meillassoux's *After Finitude: An Essay on the Necessity of Contingency* (English translation 2008). The crux of Meillassoux's use of the concept of "ancestrality" lies in its promise "to carve out a path towards the outside for [thought]". The desire in pursuing the logic of ancestrality lies in finding out whether "everything could actually collapse", once we escape (Kantian) "correlationism", i.e. the idea that nothing "exists" outside a relation to a (human) observer and that any qualities a "thing" might have do not make sense without a (cor)relation to a (human) subject.[10]

The loss of the "great outdoors" could thus almost be seen as a synonym of "before humanity", not only in a temporal sense, but in the sense of an *outside* humanity, a postanthropocentric world taken literally. It also necessarily poses a question that

paleoanthropology is closely concerned with, in what may be called its search for a "non-correlationist" way of explaining how we became human. What Meillassoux terms the "arche-fossil" is the (at least to the humanities) outrageous ability that science has to make truthful statements about a time "before humanity", even before life as such, with the effect that deep geological time seems to become less and less "mysterious" and, which as a result, increasingly also demystifies "us"). Meillassoux is thus, understandably, intrigued: "*what* is it exactly that astrophysicists, geologists, or palaeontologists are talking about when they discuss the age of the universe, the date of the accretion of the earth, the date of the appearance of pre-human species, or the date of the emergence of humanity itself?"[11] These sciences are concerned with things that are "*anterior to every form of human relation to the world*".[12] It is this anteriority that constitutes the "ancestral" (or "any reality anterior to the emergence of the human species"), while the "arche-fossil" refers to "materials indicating the existence of an ancestral reality or event; one that is anterior to terrestrial life".[13] For correlationist philosophy these questions must remain "illegitimate" since they originate in a literally "unwitnessable" scenario. A time "before humanity" is literally "unthinkable", unless it were a teleological (evolutionary) time that was (always) already "announcing" the human, or at least a "pre-human" or a "proto-human" – in the sense that prehistory was "always already" a kind of "proto-history" ("*a retrojection of the past on the basis of the present*"), [14] or, in other words, reverse-teleology, retro-fitting.

A truly *ancestral* understanding of *before humanity*, on the other hand, would involve an entirely other relationship, as Meillassoux explains, an ontology that is "*anterior to givenness itself*":

> *how to conceive of a time in which the given as such passes from non-being into being?*... For the problem of the arche-fossil is not the empirical problem of birth of

> living organisms, but the ontological problem of coming into being of givenness as such…[15]

This involves a thinking that is *both* "speculative" and "realist". It is worth pointing out, however, that, as Meillassoux himself admits, his thoughts are prompted not so much (or at least not only) by an ancestral *before* but rather by the prospect of an *after* (or, to be more precise, by the lack thereof): "transcendental subjects, coordinated between themselves but unfolding and 'floating' in the midst of an absolute nothingness into which everything could dissolve once more were the human species to disappear".[16] Before and after would thus, again, be conjoined in some "world without us".[17]

It is therefore no coincidence (given the janus-faced nature of the "before") that this scenario becomes particularly relevant in the current climate of posthumanist "postanthropocentrism", extinction threats and species angst. Meillassoux himself admits as much when he says:

> Closer inspection reveals that the problem of the arche-fossil is not confined to ancestral statements. For it concerns every discourse whose meaning includes *temporal discrepancy* between thinking and being – thus, not only statements about events occurring prior to the emergence of humans, but also statements about possible events that are *ulterior* to the extinction of the human species.[18]

It is precisely this temporal discrepancy – which Meillassoux goes on to term "dia-chronicity"[19] – that has become meaningful through the "hiatus between being and terrestrial thought" and introduced by "*the very inception of modern science*" in the first place.[20] It is this dia-chronicity that, as I would argue, is doubly inscribed within the phrase "before humanity". And it is clear that a true engagement with the questions raised by this

dia-chronicity today only makes sense through new (i.e. "posthumanist") forms of cooperation between the humanities (e.g. philosophy, literature) and the sciences (paleontology, biology etc.), since, as Meillassoux writes:

> It was science that made it meaningful to disagree about what there might have been when we did not exist and what there might be when we no longer exist – just as it is science that provides us with the means to rationally favour one hypothesis over another concerning the nature of a world without us.[21]

"Before humanity" thus necessarily refers to this thing called "a-world-without-us" and the limits it makes thinkable, i.e. the double meaning of what lies *before* (i.e. both behind *and* ahead of) us and what we may become as a result.

3. Becoming In/Human

> It is sobering to think that there have been alternative ways of being human, and that some of the options vanished despite good design, and that such a fate might have easily awaited us round some unexpected corner of our short history. Indeed, it may await us still.[22]

The historian Felipe Fernández-Armesto in his "Brief History of Humankind" singles out conceptuality as the greatest threat to humanity: "Humanity is in peril: not from the familiar menace of 'mass destruction' and ecological overkill – but from a conceptual threat". [23] Primatology, the animal rights movement, paleoanthropological and evolutionary uncertainty about "when we became human", as well as the explosion of the biological

category of “species”, artificial intelligence and biotechnology – all produce an erosion of the idea of “humanity” and undermine confidence in the historically quite recent category of the “human”. Fernández-Armesto is therefore rightly worried about the conceptual integrity of what it is and what it means to be human. However, somehow, ironically, he also displays a deep trust in what he calls the human “spirit” (or, more precisely, “the imaginative discovery that life is animated by spirit” which elevated our ancestors out of “primitive” materialism).[24] In doing so, he joins the long list of those who, in the face of some “posthuman” future, choose to trust some mysterious form of “human nature” to guarantee some kind of (human) continuity, in short, a trust in the continued re-articulation of humanism. This ultimately blind trust is, nevertheless, based on a form of sophistry: namely, the conceptual impossibility of establishing a “before” and “after”. Since we do not know how and when we became human, we also do not (and thus cannot) know how and when we will cease to be human:

> How much our nature has changed before our descendants cease to be human is a question we are not yet ready to answer. In this respect it resembles a question about when, in the course of evolution, our ancestors became human – which is also unanswerable at the present stage of our thinking and knowledge.[25]

Fernández-Armesto clearly thinks that “being human” and thinking about ourselves as “humanity” ultimately is a question of “choice” – which means that, in the end, he is not too worried about the conceptual threat to “humanity” at all, as he declares: “For now, if we want to go on believing we are human, and justify the special status we accord ourselves – if, indeed we want to stay human through the changes we face – we had better not discard the myth, but start trying to live up to it”.[26] But how is one to live up to a myth of which one ignores both the beginning and the end, or its true “nature”, for that matter? Or, to put it

differently, what exactly is Fernández-Armesto trusting, if not some diffuse conceptuality without concept that says that somehow "we will know", somehow we will (have) become human (because we just have to)? Given the irreducible plurality of meanings that the beginning, the process and the end of "hominization" produces, however, nothing seems less certain. Nothing is guaranteed by the undecidability between *before* and *after*.

At what point does one begin, and at what point may one cease to be, human? One could, indeed, add to the endless anthropological attempts to distinguish the human from other animals the idea that the human is that life form which constitutively (i.e. necessarily, but also strategically) confuses *before* and *after*. This is so because humans see themselves both as subject *of* and subject *to* "becoming" – they are always humans-in-the-making. Humans thus "project" themselves, literally, by seeing themselves as projects. In this sense, humanism is, first of all, "projectural". The number of titles containing the phrase "becoming human" is therefore hardly surprising. In one of these books, Chad Wellmon provides a critique of Immanuel Kant's foundational gesture or question that launches a philosophical anthropology: "*Was ist der Mensch* [What is man]?"[27] Wellmon argues that modern anthropology is founded on an impossible double imperative, namely that of defining "human nature" (i.e. the empirical question of what the human *is*) and of establishing a moral trajectory (i.e. the transcendental, normative or moral question of what the human should *become*). It is this foundational crisis (i.e. the ambiguity between being and becoming) that, strictly speaking, underpins the eighteenth-century emergence of (Enlightenment) modernity, which "sees itself as condemned to draw its norms and very self-understanding from itself".[28] Modernity and its self-reflexivity is thus from its beginning based on an anthropological mode of thought: "Anthropology's crisis of self-recognition epitomizes the critical project of modernity that since its self-proclaimed inception has been

obsessed with its own operations".[29] Its double claim on empiricism and transcendentalism means that anthropological modernity is, according to Wellmon, "the epoch in which the human being is condemned to justify itself".[30] Kantian anthropology is from its inception *pedagogical* (i.e. normative and teleological) in the sense that "it was meant to orient and guide the individual towards becoming human. Anthropology was pedagogy for the human race".[31] However, due to the erosion of the boundaries drawn between the human – as both subject and object of its own self-reflexivity – and its others, outlined by Fernández-Armesto above, anthropology, and in particular its (humanist) pedagogical thrust, have run into trouble and can no longer be seen as self-legitimating.

A variety of stances in such a post-anthropological environment have been emerging. I can here only provide some but hopefully symptomatic and representative positions which all reconnect with the temporal confusion contained in the idea of *becoming* human – both in the sense of "how did we become human?" (i.e. the mystery of a time before *humanity*) and "what is becoming of the human?" (i.e. what lies *before* humanity, now?). There is, first of all, following Günther Anders, the sense of human "obsolescence"[32] and a return of the Nietzschean question of the "overman" in the contemporary guise of the (technologically enhanced) "posthuman". Following this trajectory the question of philosophical anthropology, "what is man?", becomes "to what extent is the human enhanceable?" and "up to what level of enhancement is a human still 'human' (all the while 'human' remains (forever) to be defined)?" What lies before *humanity* in this *trans*humanist understanding is thus the uncertain future of technology and the teleology of (technological) becoming, which is based on nothing else than the idea that the human is essentially something that needs to be overcome. It inevitably leads to the question: "who (or what) comes after the human?" With all the echoes this brings back of the question asked by Eduardo Cadava's

collection *Who comes after the subject?* (1991) and bearing in mind the ambiguity of the *after*, in the sense of (evolutionary) succession, but also who or what is chasing (going *after*) the human and thus, again, what comes *before* it?[33] What remains more or less intact on this trajectory, however, is the idea of human exceptionalism and some form of anthropocentric principle of projection into a more or less human future (even, paradoxically, if that future were to turn out to be a "world without us").

As we know, animal studies has very different views regarding anthropocentrism: in fact, it can only be said to be posthumanist in that it is a critique of anthropocentrism. The anthropological question "what is man?", or, more neutrally, "what is the human?", within postanthropocentric animal studies only makes sense from an "ethico-ecological" perspective. The ethologist Domique Lestel, for example, in one of his latest interventions on the critique of the modern relationship between humans and animals asks: "A quoi sert l'homme? [what's the point/use of the human]?"[34] Lestel attacks "le papy de Königsberg [the grand-dad from Königsberg]" (i.e. Kant) who committed the original anthropological "sin" of determining that "unlike other animals, man is useless, every man is an end to himself, etc.", which leads Lestel to come up with a "definition" of (Western) "man" as "a means that takes itself for an end".[35] The self-legitimatory anthropocentric view established by "European humanism", however, is not only bad news for nonhuman animals but also for humans themselves, according to Lestel:

> By giving extraterritorial status to the human, and by making it the end of everything, European humanism has placed man in danger of death. The human exists as such through a life shared with other living beings... The posthumanist currents, contemporary or older, say nothing else, after all. The future of man is a machine. If man is useless, he can at least serve to eliminate himself.[36]

The (technological) transhumanist vision of a post*anthropos* scenario is of course unacceptable to animal studies since transhumanism strives to eliminate what remains of human *animality* through technological enhancement and this might finally cut our chord with "the living" [*les vivants*]. In trying to overcome the human, "post-humans" (in the sense transhumanists attribute to them) nevertheless act in some perverted interest of "preservation": "Whatever they claim, post-humans still try to save, not the human for sure, but *whatever may be human in the human*. Well, good luck, guys!"[37] What the human is "good for" then – and this is Lestel's postanthropo*centric* imperative – basically lies in unlearning to be human or in human retraining – i.e. in a diversion of the original anthropological pedagogical project – and more specifically, in finally accepting to become part of "nature".

In a similar vein, Matthew Calarco (following Giorgio Agamben) proposes to "jam the anthropological machine",[38] which is based on a reliance "on the human-animal distinction that serves as the foundation for Western political and metaphysical thought".[39] What lies *before* humanity, should the jamming be successful, is some form of "re-humanisation", outside anthropocentrism. *This* human, "us", is called upon to take on its ethico-ecological responsibility. What it means to be human, in this context, is to, first of all, show humility, solidarity and "care" (esp. for the nonhuman). There is, in this rationale, not so much a "posthuman" future but rather a "new" prehistory, an anthropology *without* humans, or, as Jean-Luc Nancy would have it: "A humanity without humanism".[40]

In an equally subtractive vein, Martin Crowley, in *L'Homme sans* [Man without], highlights the semantic "stripping process" that anthropology has been engaged in for a long time: "l'homme sans [man without]… everything that one has to subtract from man so that he can be what he is".[41] This "man without qualities"[42] constitutes the subject of a negative

anthropology (or "negentropology", as Edgar Morin called it)[43] – which is the only anthropology that remains after all those characteristics are subtracted which used to make man "exceptional", namely language, culture, bipedalism, tool-use, laughter, music, or lying etc. For such a "postanthropology", as one might also call it, "le propre de l'homme" would consist of this exposure to the subtraction of everything that he was supposed to have as "propre".[44] Crawley goes on to use this absence or lack (of qualities), which is not a lack of "any/thing" but a constitutional lack that cannot be filled or remedied, as the starting point of what he calls a new "politics of finitude" based on the solidarity (between human and nonhuman animals) of this experience of "divestment" (a stance close to that articulated by the Holocaust survivor Robert Antelme in *L'espèce humaine*, in 1947.[45] The specifically human task, following Crawley (who, in large parts, follows Antelme and also Jean-Luc Nancy), would be to become "human" by embracing not "animality" (which would be a form of self-condemnation leading towards victimisation and passivity) but "inhumanity" (by which he obviously does not mean "inhumane" behaviour but rather a kind of "unthinking" – a deconstruction of anthropocentrism and humanism).

This would also be close to the "inhuman" and the "inhumanism" that Jean-François Lyotard suggested in his volume *The Inhuman* (1991). Lyotard, notably, differentiated between two forms of "inhumanity": "The inhumanity of the system which is currently being consolidated under the name of development (among others) must not be confused with the infinitely secret one of which the soul is hostage".[46] Lyotard goes on to associate this inhumanity of the (individual human) soul within human "neoteny":

> What shall we call human in humans, the initial misery of their childhood, or their capacity to acquire a "second" nature which, thanks to language, makes them fit to share in communal life, adult consciousness and reason? That the second depends on

> the first is agreed by everyone. The question is only that of knowing whether this dialectic, whatever name we grace it with, leaves no remainder.[47]

Lyotard here articulates another important part of the idea of "before humanity" – namely the fact that hominization is a process that every individual has to go through, a cultural evolution every single specimen of the species has to re-enact in order to become "fully" human despite having been biologically "born" human. For Lyotard, *before* humanity is the state of the human child, and this is precisely the reason why the child is also the *most* human, due to its "misery" (its neotenous exposedness, defenselessness, helplessness) but also because of its "potentiality" (in many ways, the child is "*l'homme sans*" par excellence): "Shorn of speech, incapable of standing upright, hesitating over the objects of interest, not able to calculate its advantages, not sensitive to common reason, the child is eminently the human because its distress heralds and promises things possible", as Lyotard proposes.[48] The cruel irony, then, is that the "human system" that humans create to "educate" the child into becoming (fully) human (let's call this "humanism") depends on and has to eradicate the (first) "humanity" of the child, and this is then what the "inhumanity of the system" requires and exploits for its further "development". Humanism, following Lyotard's logic, therefore has two sides: on the one hand, it is that ideology that demands "child development", so to speak. While the other humanism, the one which takes the first humanity of the child seriously, would in fact be an "inhumanism" for which "becoming human(ist)" is too high a price to pay. The irresolvable double imperative of humanist anthropology, of being *and* becoming human, which feeds the anthropological machine still, continues to echo even in the phrase *before humanity*. It is precisely what prompts the ongoing deconstruction of humanism – or coming to terms with the "remainder of the dialectic", as Lyotard remarks.

If this all sounds very similar to Nietzsche's injunction to finally "become who we are", this is certainly no coincidence. As Steven Connor put it so well in his foreword to yet another volume entitled *Becoming Human*:

> For no human being can simply be, and leave it at that. The nature of human beings, it is often said, is not to be but to subsist in a state of *becoming*, by which is meant coming about, coming-to-be, being in transit, being on the way to what one will have been.[49]

This impossible demand, as Connor goes on to explain, implies that "to become human is always to become more, or less, than human". Nietzsche's imperative does not really help, of course, since "to be what you are becoming is to attempt to will and be in advance what it is you will end up having been".[50] No wonder that the temptation would be to either "subtract" ourselves from the tiresome task of "becoming" (human), or, indeed, to press ahead and become somehow "transhuman". Both escape routes, however, do not come with unwanted side-effects, as Connor explains (echoing Michel Foucault's famous statement about man's disappearance, at the end of *The Order of Things*): "If the face of the human is being effaced in the sand, it may be possible to say of the human that nothing becomes it so well as the manner of its taking leave of itself".[51]

We must not shirk the responsibilities before us, and this is precisely why we must resist the temptation to cut through the aporia of the *before* – namely that the human is always in the process of "becoming" and at the same time is always too late for this event. However, "business as usual" is also not an option given that time, technology, ecology, geology won't stand still. Instead, to quote Paul Sheehan (who echoes Emmanuel Levinas): "If rather than being human we are, more modestly, *becoming* human, then we do better to speak not of

'man's inhumanity to man' but, in Emmanuel Levinas's phrase, of 'what occasionally is human in man'".[52] And although I haven't directly addressed the other "inhumanity" here – Lyotard's "inhumanity of the system", which, today, if one believes Bernard Stiegler, is to be resisted by keeping open the "history of technological possibilities of anticipation" as "the history of the different mirror stages in which humanity reflects itself"[53] – what I derive from a reconceptualization of human prehistory in the face of the posthuman is not unrelated to Stiegler's vast project of rewriting the history of anthropology from the point of view of technics.[54]

In a way, I'd find Edgar Morin's claim that we are in the middle of a "seconde préhistoire [second prehistory]" quite attractive if we could engage with it without a sense of "tragic" that this often involves, for example when Morin calls for a "regenerating" of humanism in the face of "human megalomania" and the idea of pursuing "hominization by humanisation", or with the prospect, to speak with Heidegger, of finally "poetically dwelling" on this planet (if only we knew what "poetically", meant, here).[55] Our particular challenge, in a time when *before* humanity threatens to finally coincide with *after* humanity, literally, *materially*, is to resist the idea that any "post-human future", might still "resemble the pre-human past".[56]

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[1] Bernard Stiegler, *Technics and Time 1: The Fault of Epimetheus*, trans. George Collins, Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1998, p. 135.
[2] OED online (www.oed.com).
[3] Cf. Stefan Herbrechter, *Posthumanism – A Critical Analysis*, London: Bloomsbury, 2013.
[4] Cf. Jean-François Lyotard, "Rewriting Modernity", *The Inhuman: Reflections on Time*, Cambridge: Polity Press, 1991, pp. 24-35.
[5] Cf. Quentin Meillassoux, *After Finitude: An Essay on Necessity and Contingency*, London: Continuum, 2008.
[6] See Jacques Derrida, "Before the Law", in *Acts of Literature*, ed. Derek Attridge, New York: Routledge, 1992, pp. 182-220.
[7] Cf. also Cary Wolfe's reading of Kafka and Derrida through the lens of animal studies in *Before the Law: Humans and Other Animals in a Biopolitical Frame*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2013.
[8] On the notion of "science faction" see Herbrechter, *Posthumanism: A Critical Analysis*, pp. 107-134.
[9] Quentin Meillassoux, *After Finitude: An Essay on the Necessity of Contingency*, trans. Ray Brassier, London: Continuum, 2009, p. 123.
[10] Ibid., p. 1-7.
[11] Ibid., p. 9.
[12] Ibid., p. 10.

[13] Ibid.
[14] Ibid., p. 16.
[15] Ibid., pp. 20-21.
[16] Ibid., pp. 35-36.
[17] In posthuman times, "the world without us" scenarios have become somewhat of a topos. See for example Alan Weisman's *The World Without Us*, New York: St Martin's Press, 2007.
[18] Ibid., p. 112.
[19] By which he means "all such statements about events that are anterior or ulterior to every terrestrial-relation-to-the-world" (p. 112)
[20] Ibid., p. 113.
[21] Ibid., p. 114.
[22] Clive Finlayson, *The Humans Who Went Extinct: Why Neanderthals Died Out and We Survived*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009, pp. 2-3.
[23] Felipe Fernández-Armesto, *So You Think You're Human? A Brief History of Humankind*, Oxford: OUP, 2004, p. 1.
[24] Fernández-Armesto, *So You Think You're Human?* p. 165.
[25] Fernández-Armesto, *So You Think You're Human?* pp. 169-70.
[26] Fernández-Armesto, *So You Think You're Human?* p. 170.
[27] Cad Wellmon, *Becoming Human: Romantic Anthropology and the Embodiment of Form*, University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2010.
[28] Wellmon, *Becoming Human*, p. 2.
[29] Ibid., p. 3.
[30] Ibid., p. 6.
[31] Ibid., p. 8.
[32] See Günther Anders, *Die Antiquiertheit des Menschen*, volume 1: *Über die Seele im Zeitalter der zweiten industriellen Revolution*, München: Beck, 1956; volume 2: *Über die Zerstörung des Lebens im Zeitalter der dritten industriellen Revolution*, München: Beck, 1980).
[33] See the analogy with the question asked by Eduardo Cadava, ed., *Who Comes After The Subject?* New York: Routledge, 1991.
[34] Dominique Lestel, *A quoi sert l'homme?* Paris : Fayard, 2015.
[35] Lestel, p. 8 (our translations).
[36] Lestel, *A quoi sert l'homme?* p. 10.
[37] Lestel, p. 103.
[38] Matthew Calarco, *Zoographies: The Question of the Animal from Heidegger to Derrida*, New York: Columbia University Press, 2008, pp. 79-103.
[39] Calarco, *Zoographies*, p. 79.
[40] Jean-Luc Nancy, *Les Muses*, Paris: Galilée, 2001, p. 126 (A humanity without humanism).
[41] Martin Crowley, *L'Homme sans – Politiques de la finitude*, Paris : Lignes, 2009, p. 15 (our translations).
[42] Cf. Robert Musil's novel, *The Man Without Qualities*, trans. Sophie Wilkins, London: Picador, 1995; and our reading in Ivan Callus and Stefan Herbrechter, "Humanity Without Itself: Robert Musil, Giorgio Agamben and Posthumanism, in Andy Mousley, ed., *Towards a New Literary Humanism*, Houndmills: Palgrave, 2011, pp. 143-160.
[43] Morin, *Le Paradigme perdu : La nature humaine*, Paris : Seuil, 1973, p. 213.
[44] Crawley, *L'homme sans*, p. 16.
[45] Robert Antelme, *L'espèce humaine*, Paris: Gallimard, 1957.
[46] Jean-François Lyotard, *The Inhuman: Reflections on Time*, Cambridge: Polity Press, 1991, p. 2.
[47] Ibid., p. 3.
[48] Ibid., pp. 3-4.
[49] Steven Connor, "Foreword", in *Becoming Human: New Perspectives on the Inhuman Condition*, ed. Paul Sheehan, Westport: Praeger, 2003, p. ix.
[50] Connor, "Foreword", p. xi.
[51] Connor, "Foreword", p. xvi.
[52] Paul Sheehan, "Introduction", *Becoming Human*, 11.
[53] Bernard Stiegler, *Technics and Time 1: The Fault of Epimetheus*, Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1998, p. 159.
[54] Cf. also Ben Turner's notion of a "noopolitics of becoming non-inhuman" in this context, see his "Life and the Technical Transformation of Différance: Stiegler and the Noopolitics of Becoming Human", *Derrida Today* 9.2 (2016): 177-198 (here: p. 194).

[55] Cf. Edgar Morin, *L'Identité humaine (La Méthode 5: L'Humanité de l'humanité)*, Paris : Seuil, 2001, pp. 274-5. Cf. Martin Heidegger, "…poetically man dwells…", *Poetry, Language, Thought*, trans. Albert Hofstadter New York: Harper and Row, 1971, pp. 213-229.
[56] Fernández-Armesto, *So You Think You're Human*, p. 165.