

AN-ARCHÉ, XEINOS, URIHI A: THE PRIMORDIAL OTHER IN A COSMOPOLITICAL FOREST

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ABSTRACT: An-arché is the absence of ground. Heidegger contributed to the study of an-archaeology by postulating a new beginning that, despite being a beginning, is not capable of grounding anything. This second beginning is more primordial than the first, which is the basis of metaphysics and its effects in the history of intelligence. The second beginning is not a foundation, an *arché*, but the an-*arché* that underlies *physis*. This paper attempts to transpose this an-archaeology to a different, quasi-Levinasian context where ontologism is rejected and therefore what is at stake is not being (or *beyng*) but rather the Other. In analogy to Heidegger's underlying abyss of *beyng*, there is a more primordial otherness (*Xeinós*) underneath any Other we meet (*Xenos*). In order to conceive this second beginning of *Xeinós*, I mobilize the notion of forest (*urihi a*) as formulated by Kopenawa and Valentim. What emerges is a framework for a history of otherness, a history of *Xeinós* as a cosmopolitical narrative.

KEYWORDS: Heidegger; History of *Beyng*; Levinas, an-archaeology; *Xeinós*; *urihi a*

To Marco Antonio Valentim

Grands bois, vous m'effrayez comme des cathédrales.

Charles Baudelaire

I. ARCHAEOLOGY AND AN-ARCHAEOLOGY

Archaeology is committed to the idea that what lies underneath has something to reveal. The image is often stratigraphical: deeper layers ground what lie on top of them. What lies underneath a layer – the substratum of a layer, one could say – is both what came before it and what provoked it or made it possible. *Arché*

points simultaneously to the ancestral and to the grounding; to what commences and to what commands.¹ To pose an archaeological question about something is to ask about its antecedents but also to ask about its grounds or, at least, about an enabling condition. The quest for *arché* is surely often haunted by the issue of the primordial layer: is it a bedrock that is its own grounds – a proper foundation – or merely a layer that admits no further archaeological inquiry? The two alternatives can also merge together; in the Amazon region, for example, the archaeological endeavor often must stop because very little can be preserved in the humidity. In any case, when archaeology reaches a limit, it has to dwell on beginnings. Perhaps they are the ultimate primordial – but as such, are they un-grounded?

An-archaeology, by contrast, is the effort to break the connection between the primordial and the deepest layer of grounding.² It can do that by challenging the order of events, by examining what is ungoverned, or by considering what is contingent, accidental or otherwise insufficiently grounded. The three paths lead to uncoupling commencement and commandment – they lead to *an-arché*, a beginning that grounds nothing or a grounding that is not an ancestor. The an-archaeological endeavor explores the disconnections, the absences and the abysses incapable of grounding. When it looks for the more primordial, it shows that a measure of how things follow from the starting point is up in the air – and had been, therefore, up for grabs. The an-archaeological beginning is not something that can be regained by reaching a bedrock on top of which all layers were placed. In a sense, an-archaeology is what is left to be done when archaeology reaches its limits. It belongs in no metaphysics, at least not as understood as the effort to extract the intelligibility of things that Martin Heidegger equated with nihilism.³ The un-grounded cannot provide a final account – a converging intelligibility – of what there is; it can provide no grounds. This lack of supporting basis is what makes the project of attaining the *an-arché* more like jumping into the abyss than living in it.

Heidegger's contributed to an-archaeology through his study of the ancestor of metaphysics – and of the quest for grounds. The beginning of metaphysics

¹ See Agamben, *Cos'è il commando?*

² Bensusan, *Being Up for Grabs*.

³ Heidegger, *The Word of Nietzsche*.

commanded it to some extent and, indirectly, still directs the efforts of knowledge and the privileged status it enjoys when thinking itself is oriented by a will to truth. Heidegger's late thought – under the influence of his contact with the archives of Friedrich Nietzsche in the mid-1930s – sought to conceive a second beginning that is both more primordial than the grounding elements of metaphysics and incapable of grounding what grounds metaphysics. He labels this search for a more primordial non-grounding beginning as the history of *beyng* (*Geschichte des Seyns*), where *beyng* is itself the ancestor and the more-encompassing correlate of being. Being is the first and less primordial beginning following from *beyng* and metaphysics derives from being – and from forgetting it and not from *beyng*, as nothing follows from it.

Heidegger's reading of Nietzsche entails that the metaphysical era is one in which knowledge is ultimately the most relevant aim that directs human meetings, both with other humans and with non-humans. Knowledge is a kind of relationship with others. An important part of the state metaphysics brought about follows from the conviction that knowledge is the opposite of engagement. Thinking is then seen as innocuous to anything else, while its effects across the planet and beyond are increasingly apparent. A world that is known becomes a replaceable and dispensable one; if thinking is oriented towards a will to knowledge, it can encounter nothing if that meeting somehow requires an ear to the other side of the story. Metaphysics orients meeting towards knowing. Heidegger traces this history back from the assumption that what exists has a nature, a *physis*. This assumption is not enough to bring about a drive to make an artificial, controlled and accessible counterpart to everything – the drive that arises in the endeavor of metaphysics. However, the assumption was the beginning of metaphysics – and an enabling condition. Heidegger then moves away from that beginning towards what he takes as more primordial. From *being*, associated with *physis*, he moves to *beyng*, which, as the ancient spelling indicates, cuts deeper, is more ancestral and more original, while also being incapable of grounding anything. This second beginning lies underneath any possibility of grounding. This move from the first beginning to a second beginning – a move backward but also towards what is more implicit – provides a perspective on the movement from the assumption that things have their nature to the gradual advent of an environment of objects that can be commanded and controlled. This

perspective is also a dive into an abyss, as the second beginning underlies the grounding that is offered by the first and indeed is prior to any grounding (*Abgrund*, abyss). There is an abyss in the event that brings forward *physis* and gradually turns the world into a known world. The movement towards what is behind *physis* is an effort to think beyond the intelligibility that would be inherent in things.

This an-archaeological movement is not a project, and the post-nihilist (post-metaphysical) stage it promises is not something that can be politically achieved. Heidegger, rather, prefers to talk about being prepared for it, as we shall see. Clay Lewis has argued that the connection with the second beginning – which he describes as “a more mindful way to inhabit the Earth” – cannot be framed as a political objective.⁴ He is quite right, I think, in distancing post-nihilism from any ordinary aim of human macro-political struggle. However, I believe Heidegger is perhaps inaugurating (or at least considering) a different political sphere, one that cannot be centered on human decisions. The first goal of this paper is to elucidate how this cosmopolitical sphere emerges. The second is to place it in a philosophical background different from Heidegger’s.

In fact, I attempt to transpose this quest for a second and more primordial beginning to a background where *the others* matter more than *being* (or *beyng*). Drawing from Emmanuel Levinas’ critique of the priority of existence over the existents, I propose a movement away from seeing otherness as no more than a piece of information to increase knowledge and enhance control. The second and more primordial beginning – which I associate with *Xeinós*, a possibly more ancient variant of the Greek word for “stranger, outsider or foreigner” – is oriented by an absolute Other, which is met independently of whether there is any effort to extract information from the encounter. Seeing otherness as a source of information about a controllable world is a mark of a series of developments that started from the first beginning. The second beginning of *Xeinós*, in contrast, is one where the other interrupts thought and addresses it from the outside. The *an-arché* here is not merely the absence of grounds, but rather the interference of other grounds, which leads to the forest as conceived not by Heidegger, with his taste for clearings, but rather by Davi Kopenawa in his effort to show that the

⁴ Lewis, “The way of nature”, p. 93.

dynamics of the Amazon are akin to the crossroads between any reason – any intelligibility – and several external others that intrude on thought. The image of thought as polyphonic and diverging depends on the more primordial otherness: an abyss of the understanding, a blind spot, a reminder of the fragility of sameness. Heidegger's second beginning, however, cannot be either imposed or decided. This paper aims to start looking at the history of *Xeinós*, which, just like the history of *beyng*, is a history of preparations.

2. HEIDEGGER'S *AN-ARCHÉ*

The endeavour Heidegger called a history of *beyng* (*Geschichte des Seyns*) is at the same time cosmic – and, to a large extent, cosmopolitical⁵ – and archaeological – and, if it is so, it is *an-archeological*.⁶ After a thorough exploration of the writings of Nietzsche, Heidegger became persuaded that the metaphysical forgetfulness of being and the corresponding ontological difference between being and beings⁷ were a consequence of an *arché* – a beginning, an *Anfang* – which is itself to be exorcized.⁸ That initial beginning placed *physis* – the nature of processes but also the way things unfold by themselves, of their own power and their own accord – at the center of the effort to think the world through. That starting point paved the way to the bias of thought in favor of control, expressed in the endeavor of extracting the intelligibility from what one finds around. It is perhaps not clear, or not relevant, whether this course of developments was doomed from the outset or rather was tainted by the metaphysics it generated and maintained. Perhaps another route could have been taken at some juncture. In any case, the beginning ushered in by *physis* – and by an associate notion of truth as *aletheia* (unveiling)⁹ – grounded an era of metaphysical efforts to ensure things are separated from their intelligibility.¹⁰ That development was set up from the start, even if it could have been avoided or postponed. Heidegger was persuaded that this first beginning was desertified¹¹ into a project that makes thinking into an effort to secure an

5 Cosmopolitical in the sense of a general configuration or state of affairs involving humans and non-humans; see Stengers, *Cosmopolitics I*. See also Bensusan, “Geist and Ge-Stell.”

6 See Bensusan, *Being Up for Grabs*.

7 See Heidegger, *History of Beyng*, XI, 113.

8 See Heidegger, *History of Beyng*, III, 23, 31.

9 See Heidegger, *History of Beyng*, XII, 147.

10 See Heidegger, *History of Beyng*, XI, 115.

11 See Heidegger, *Mindfulness*, II, 9.

ever-extending environment that can be commanded through calculations.¹² This beginning was the inception of a relation between thought and everything else – or rather, between thought and what is being thought about. The enterprise of making everything understandable and controllable was born in the inception ushered in by *physis*, and that project had all sorts of consequences: for things that were turned into objects in a standing reserve; for the world, which is turned into a controlled ensemble of positions or a functioning device (*Ge-Stell*); and for *physis* itself, which is ultimately turned into an instance of a disconnected and multiply realizable intelligibility.¹³

The exorcism of the first beginning comes with the second. *Beyng* (*Seyn*) is what comes before being – the word chosen by Heidegger comes from an ancient spelling of *Sein*. Instead of *physis*, the second beginning is based on *Ereignis*, an event that presences itself without an underlying nature making it happen. The first inception – its arrival and the subsequent consequences – is itself an *Ereignis*¹⁴ and therefore comes from a more primordial source. This is a source that is behind the grounding that *physis* offers. *Physis*, as a first beginning, is followed by the history of metaphysics and itself follows from this second and yet more primordial source that nonetheless is not a ground of grounds – or an *arché* of the *archai* – but rather an absence of grounding that Heidegger calls *Ab-grund* (abyss, or un-ground, de-ground).¹⁵ That the era commanded by and commenced with *physis* was itself an event grounded nowhere but in a sheer arrival exemplifies the more original character of the second beginning, which comes from *beyng* – the more ancient being that is not an unveiling but rather the very clearing (*Lichtung*) that enables any appearance.¹⁶ *Beyng* is the precursor of being, what underlies it; similarly, something appearing is a precursor for something showing itself, unveiling. Clearing is what underlies *aletheia*. Clearing is not a revelation of the underlying intelligibility; it is not what makes something graspable or understandable, for it is not a presentation from which intelligibility can be disentangled, as is *aletheia*, but rather a mere taking place. Heidegger understands that the truth behind truth as unveiling is a mere showing, a presentation, like

¹² See Heidegger, *History of Beyng*, VI, 57.

¹³ See Heidegger, *Insight into that which is*, lecture 2.

¹⁴ See Heidegger, *Mindfulness*, III, 14.

¹⁵ See, for instance, Heidegger, *History of Beyng*, V, 37; VI, 52; VII, 82.

¹⁶ See Heidegger, *Mindfulness*, V, 37.

what happens when light arrives in the forest in a clearing. In contrast, he considers *aletheia* to have been transformed into revelation (for someone) as *physis* degenerated into commands and calculation; truth became merely adequacy, *adaequatio intellectus et rei*.¹⁷ *Aletheia* was turned into certainty as *physis* was turned into *thesis*.¹⁸ Clearing, in contrast, holds that truth lies in the unfolding of things and not in what is unveiled of them for someone, for a truth-bearer. Truth-as-clearing escapes *physis* because it precedes it while grounding nothing; truth-as-clearing is indeed nothing but the opening that makes anything appear or arrive. *Beyng* is the abyss of the event that unveils no hidden intelligibility. It lies in the very question that can be phrased in terms of a quest for intelligibility but offers no foundational answer.

The history of *beyng* heads towards what is most primordial as it reveals events that are of a cosmic nature, such as the pursuit of metaphysics. It is a history which shows more original beginnings – it is not a history of what follows (from) an *arché*, it is not a history of sequences or consequences. Rather, it is a history of starting points that can be more primordial even while coming later. Because we are often attentive only to what follows from what, we cannot see such a history taking place simply through arrivals. It is disturbing for our sense of intelligibility because first things not always come first. Moreover, it is not a history of thought separated from its effects and not a history of what there is irrespective of thinking. The history of *beyng* is partly about the effects of thinking – and calculation, machination, treasuring *Ge-Stell*¹⁹ – on the world and the effect on thought. The advent of metaphysics brings to the fore a history that cannot itself be thought through by metaphysics itself²⁰ – from a metaphysical point of view, nothing takes place, either with being or with anything more primordial than it. From that perspective, *beyng* can have no history, for it can barely be conceived among beings. Metaphysics, remarks Heidegger, is incapable both of farewells

17 See Heidegger, *Mindfulness*, V, 37.

18 See Heidegger, *Insight into that which is*, lecture 2.

19 See Heidegger, *Insight into that which is*, lecture 2.

20 See Heidegger, *The word of Nietzsche*.

and of beginnings,²¹ and *beyng* is essentially beginning²² – and hence a farewell.²³ But the history unveiled by metaphysics brings about the daring character of an *arché*, which is ultimately stepping backward towards a non-grounded pure beginning.²⁴ The cosmic character of the history of *beyng* lies in the distance it keeps from the chronology of what follows what (Heidegger's *Historie*); it is a history of beginnings that engages thought as it revolves around the moment of grounding. Thought that is not following a line of consequences is proceeding backward towards what can precede but has no power to command an *arché*. A thought that can entertain what could be the second beginning – *Ereignis* – is a thought that reveals the soil where thought can rest in the age of metaphysics. The possibility of this unearthing thought is the possibility of a history that does more than capture the intelligibility of time – of a history that faces up to the non-grounded in time. Thinking beyond the coupling of being and thought (and of time and history) that makes grounding possible is anarchaeological.

Revolving the ground means considering that which is not in itself capable of grounding; Heidegger finds the second beginning in the incapacity to have power, in the very indifference to power.²⁵ Further, that un-grounding an-*arché* can be appropriated by what can ground power and by what can dominate the very effects that veil *beyng*; this is because *physis* is itself an arrival. The ground still rests on what is underneath, even though what is underneath cannot ground anything. This is how *beyng* is indifferent to power: *beyng* can let itself be appropriated by *physis* and the abyss under the ground can remain unnoticed. The (an-)archaeology of *beyng* under the ground depends on the excavating effort facing the thinker – which is, on the face of it, for Heidegger, the human. *Beyng* is therefore dependent on the human; this state is tolerated by *beyng*, which does not crave its own unveiling and concedes to the human the freedom to think it through, a freedom grounded in reference to being.²⁶ *Beyng*, in other words, doesn't care about its power and is oblivious to any recognition. What uncovers

21 See Heidegger, "On Inception," I, 7.

22 See Heidegger, "On Inception," I, 7; I, 25.

23 Derrida, in "The time of farewells", claims that farewells, which can always be a "see you soon," elude the language of metaphysics.

24 See Heidegger, "On Inception," I, 6.

25 See Heidegger, *Mindfulness*, XIII, 65.

26 See Heidegger, *Mindfulness*, VII, 55

the abyss beneath the ground is the detection, mainly carried out by Nietzsche according to Heidegger, of nihilism as an event in the underground history – an *Ereignis*. The discovery of *thesis* arising within *physis* is the thought that enables the unveiling of a different beginning.

It is this urge for a second beginning addressing the non-grounded that disconnects thought and being and that removes history from the chain of historical consequences. Being, that which is connected to *physis* in the first beginning, harbors *beyng* inside it, as any attempt to ground anything carries the hole of a primordial event. When that gap between the destiny of *physis*, now unfolded – call it *thesis*, or *Ge-Stell*, or *Wille zu Macht* – and *beyng*, which underlies that destination, is thought about, a new beginning is made possible. That an-archaeology cannot be a product of a decision – that would place the gesture within metaphysics, which is the forced exposure of what was previously presenting itself of its own accord.²⁷ But neither can it come as an imposition of *beyng* on humans, for it is the former that depends on the latter. Heidegger insists that thinking is a state of readiness, neither forcing a beginning nor accepting that beginning as independent of thinking.²⁸ This readiness for what is unveiled that involves no act of excavating – this an-archaeological state – is prompted by questioning; asking is what determines the future of *beyng*.²⁹ The question is in the neighborhood of *Ereignis*, unbearably near and yet seemingly far – *die abgrundige Ferne des Nahen*.³⁰ The question concerning fire – the *physis* of inflammability – triggers a Promethean control, but within that, there is another question: a question about the events that give rise to the first, less primordial, beginning – *physis*.³¹ The dawn of the destiny of *beyng* (*Seynsgeschickes*) concealed *Ge-Stell* and machination in its inception³² – that destination was in the question, which carries in itself a kinship with the force that brings *Ereignis* about. The un-grounded un-grounding is like that question – indifferent to power and yet dependent on the thinker, who is compelled to entertain it.

The twist of the movement can be described as a step from the beginning

²⁷ See Heidegger, *Mindfulness*, II, 12.

²⁸ See Heidegger, *Mindfulness*, II, 12, last paragraphs.

²⁹ See Heidegger, *History of Beyng*, IX, 104.

³⁰ See Heidegger, “Draft for Koinon,” *History of Beyng*, last paragraph.

³¹ See Heidegger, *Mindfulness*, VII, 51.

³² See Heidegger, *Insight into that which is*, p. 62.

with an *arché*, a ground, an intelligibility that can be detached from what it makes intelligible, towards seeking a corresponding an-*arché*, which is the very question that made the ground possible and the extracted intelligibility intelligible. A move from a ground to an abyss, from a commandment to an emission, from a departure to an outset. *Ereignis* is hidden in *physis*, *beyng* is packed inside being – archaeology is wrapped around an-archaeology. Thinking beyond the first beginning is thinking about what came before the beginning; it is the inception of the inception, the first gesture of a grounding. *Beyng*, therefore, lies in the lack of ground underneath the *arché* – it has no answer and cannot be measured.³³ Heidegger takes *beyng* to be akin to the questionability of all decisions³⁴ – this indicates why *Ereignis* is also *Austrag*, the resolution.³⁵ The move from the first beginning to its consequences and then backward towards the second beginning corresponds to a movement through three fundamental tonalities (*Grundstimmungen*): from wonder to weirdness to the abyss.³⁶ Wonder triggers a quest for reasons, and that quest makes whatever is recalcitrant weird, strange, unfamiliar; instead, what precedes wonder is an astonishment that is not a question concerning what is before the thinker, but an immersion in the very questioning of any resolution found. The abyss lies in the pre-foundational stage, among the an-archai, in the pre-history of any resolution; an-archic is the question concerning the resolution which is going to be unfolded. The abyss belongs in the resolution and in *Ereignis*. It also belongs in the an-*arché* (*Ab-Grund*), in the absence of foundation that every ground is wrapped around.

The *Ereignis* of nihilism is taken by Heidegger to be something both cosmological and an-archaeological. There cannot be a *physis* of nihilism – or of *Ge-Stell* – because that will do no more than carry on the very project of nihilism and the event, and the resolution that brings it about, would not be considered. To face the event of nihilism, one needs to see it as un-grounded, as an-archaeological. Nihilism, according in Heidegger's reading of Nietzsche, is a long assassination of God who concentrates all the powers over the world – without God, powers are sized and there is no unsolicited event. Nihilism is nevertheless

³³ Heidegger, *Mindfulness*, XXVI, 88.

³⁴ Heidegger, *Mindfulness*, XXVI, 88.

³⁵ Heidegger, *Mindfulness*, XXVI, 81.

³⁶ Heidegger, *Mindfulness*, XXVI, 74.

not all that there is in the cosmos – neither is metaphysics the only project for intelligence. Seeing the advent of metaphysics as a |(somehow cosmic) event – one for which there cannot be an *arché* within the realm of *physis* – opens a view to something else that could underlie the (cosmopolitical) relation between thought and being. Heidegger claims that the history of metaphysics unveils *beyng* precisely because it unveils a history that includes an an-archic preamble that overshadows everything else. If the history of metaphysics is considered under the light of the event it unfolds, it can open a path towards a history of *beyng* where the absence of grounding is the protagonist. It is in the origin of metaphysical thinking that the resolution that determines the course of its development lies, and within any determination, there is an underlying abyss.

3. A QUASI-LEVINASIAN AN-ARCHÉ

What takes place here, nevertheless, can also be regarded in a different light. The first beginning, that of *physis* and *aletheia*, is one where whatever is found is understood and assimilated so that its otherness is removed and integration is accomplished. Sameness acts as a ground offered to any other through understanding. The endeavor to assimilate otherness by capturing its principles and extracting its grounds so that it can be made redundant and replicated, is archaeology, a quest for its adequate *arché*. Once something is rendered intelligible, intelligence itself grows while its object blurs. Thinking is no longer the same, yet it maintains its unity as a body that grows; thinking is always moving towards incorporating what is outside it. The center of the enterprise of thinking that orients the history of metaphysics – the extraction of intelligibility from the surrounding *physis* – is the thinker, who assimilates the objects of thought. Thinking is a continuous effort of incorporation; as Levinas would describe it: “The *outside of me* solicits it in need; the *outside of me* is *for me*.”³⁷ *Xenology*³⁸ – the effort to deal with what is outside, with the outdoors – becomes itself an archaeology: the Other is to cease being other; the Other is to be grounded, pinned to a *nous* or a *logos* which is itself an *arché*. The enterprise of metaphysics

³⁷ Levinas, “The trace of the Other,” p. 345.

³⁸ The term is inspired by the discussions around Octavia Butler’s *Xenogenesis* novels (Butler, *Lilith’s Brood*); Marco Antonio Valentim proposes that anthropology becomes a xenology (Valentim, “Antropologia e Xenologia”).

can be viewed not as the forgetfulness of being within a larger history of *beyng*, but rather as the development of a specific relationship with the outside. If it is so, the first beginning posits an intelligibility to the outside and gradually places it under control. The second beginning would then focus on the coming of the outside, on the arrival of the Other – an arrival that stems from a determination that is itself abyssal. Instead of viewing the efforts of intelligence within metaphysics as part of a history of *beyng*, one can see them as part of a history of the Other, or of the outside.

Indeed, an important charge Levinas urges upon Heidegger is that of ontologism – the priority of ontology over anything else.³⁹ Levinas claims that “the welcoming of the other by the same, of the Other by me” – which he calls “metaphysics” or “transcendence” in the opening pages of *Totality and Infinity* – “precedes ontology.”⁴⁰ I propose considering what Levinas refers to as metaphysics, the relation between the same and the other,⁴¹ as transcendence, reserving the word *metaphysics* for a particular relation to the transcending other, a particular relation which is committed to ontologism, according to Levinas. That relation – metaphysics – is what Heidegger diagnoses as nihilism: the vocation of thinking that is to extract the intelligence of *physis*. The ontologist other is the one that is subsumed into the same – the attachment to being is what promotes the forgetfulness of the otherness of the other. Ontologism, to be sure, is an epoch in the history of the others – in the history of transcendence. The other that engages the same – transcendence – precedes ontologism. Levinas seems to be pointing towards something more primordial than the nihilist project, more primordial than a reductive relation to the Other. The reductive relation is one that understands the arriving Other as having intrinsic intelligibility (a *physis*) that can be extracted; otherness brings about a question and an answer that help to complete the intelligibility of all things. The arrival of the Other brings a new message – an answer that comes with a question, with a demand – and that new message is eventually incorporated into the quest for a complete understanding of all the others. This is equivalent to the degeneration of the first beginning, which is the arrival of the Other with an intrinsic intelligibility, into nihilism: the

³⁹ Levinas, *On Scape*, p. 71; Levinas, *Existence and Existents*, pp. 19–21.

⁴⁰ Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, p. 43.

⁴¹ Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, p. 35.

Other at the service of a totality. Otherness is then converted into pieces of a jigsaw that can eventually be completed. When Levinas advocates for something more primordial in the Other, he is advocating a pre-history of this totality, what comes before the foundation provided by the Other – an infinity that grounds nothing, like an abyss not in *beyng* but in unbending otherness. Before any message brought up by the Other, the Other arrives; *tá symbánta* is what takes place, but *symbebekós* also derives from the word – accident, contingency, indetermination. (An-archaeology can also be understood as a study of accidents: *to symbebekós* comes un-grounded, an *an-arché*).

In the *Sophist*, Plato's word for the Other, as one of the five great kinds, is *héteros* or *állos*;⁴² we can also refer to the one who brings the message of otherness in the dialogue – *Xénos*. The foreigner, the stranger, the immigrant, *Xénos* can be seen as the Other that comes in and xenology as being about what arrives, what enters the picture (an advent, an event, *Ereignis*, a beginning). Nihilism – which is a consequence of ontologism for Levinas – is a moment in the history of the Other, the epoch in which the foreign brings in a plea for integration into a totality. The Other is put at the service of the quest for a complete view, and its otherness is forgotten – and yet *Xenos* is what brings about the new question, the interruption, the message that challenges the same. The epoch of nihilism follows from the first beginning, which is xenological, with *Xenos* as what brings about a message, a piece of news that may be difficult to integrate. *Xenos*, as the beginning, carries a piece of news; the Other is what informs, what brings a new element to the picture. But before being what brings news, the Other is a host or a guest, an arrival. Perhaps we can then associate this second and more primordial beginning with the Ionic spelling of the term, distinct from the Attic *Xenos* – the Ionic *Xeinós* is arguably closer to the primordial meaning.⁴³ The Levinasian advocacy would then be for a second beginning, outside the Attic tradition, foreign to it but at the same time more ancient – the second beginning that will see *Xeinós* not as a piece of information but rather as a guest arriving or a host to whom we are going. (To be sure, Levinas was often closer to non-Greek words and thoughts, but my point here is merely to address the more primordial

⁴² Plato, *Sophist*, 254^a257.

⁴³ See, for example, Chantraine, *Dictionnaire étymologique de la langue grecque*, p. 764.

meaning of the Other, a meaning that is in the abyss underlying the piece of news brought by the Other.) Rather than being a piece of information, *Xeinós* would be more like *l'informe* (formless) as defined by Bataille – the formlessness that makes the universe resemble nothing and is like a spider or spit.⁴⁴

We now have the elements to transpose the Heideggerian formulas concerning the two beginnings to the framework of a history of the Other. The second beginning, which is possible because there is an abyss underlying the arrival of any otherness, can be associated to *Ereignis* as well, for *Ereignis* can be taken as not something dispensed by *beyng* but rather a feature of otherness. The event is something other that comes to the fore. *Xeinós*, like *beyng*, grounds nothing and, at the same time, is indifferent to the groundwork that conceals the abyss. Still, however, *Xeinós* – the otherness that interrupts prior to any piece of news that *Xenos* can provide – looms around without being either an imposition or a product of a discovery. The second beginning is an *an-arché*, and it doesn't partake in the project of capturing the intelligibility of the other – not even in its most primordial sense. *Xeinós* is the other that remains so by dealing persistently in exteriority. Its *Grundstimmung* is perhaps openness itself, like a figure of the un-grounded that ensures an asymmetry where otherness can never be grasped. The absolute Other – a term that is faithful to *Xeinós* – requires a movement towards what is beyond the familiar, a movement that risks no return. To face the Other is precisely to surrender sameness, and not to assimilate what appears as strange into a (renewed) totality. The Other is not within my sovereign intelligence; rather, it is the occasion of a passivity – the occasion in which responsibility and justice bound knowledge. There is an attraction towards *Xeinós*, an attraction that is a force towards transcendence, towards what lies beyond the efforts to manage an intelligible totality. This attraction is what Levinas calls metaphysical desire or obsession.⁴⁵ The drive towards the absolute Other that shapes the movement sets it up to be a gesture with no pulling back. The Other also leaves its traces in perceptual experience – perception is retrieving information from what is other (*xenos*), but there is a trace of *Xeinós* in the unavoidable contact with otherness whenever senses are at work.⁴⁶

Xeinós is abyssal, un-grounding. The appeal of the Other is a move towards proximity, in contrast with intelligibility. Proximity is what enables one to go

⁴⁴ Bataille, "Formless."

⁴⁵ See, for example, respectively *Totality and Infinity*, p. 148, and *Otherwise than Being*, p. 55.

⁴⁶ See Bensusan, *Indexicalism*, chapter 3.

beyond the quest to extract intelligibility from what is met. Levinas writes claims that the “movement of going ‘beyond’ loses its own signifyingness and becomes an immanence as soon as *logos* interpellates, invests, presents and exposes it.”⁴⁷ When *logos* becomes the center of the picture, the proximity and exteriority of the Other turns into more of the same. The beyond ceases to be exterior when it becomes a theme, a concept or a thought. The trace of the Other is what escapes being converted into full-blown presence; in fact, Levinas claims that the trace of the Other lies in an “irreversible past” which is an “immemorial past.”⁴⁸ The trace, he maintains, is not a sign but can play the role of a sign – the graphologist examines the signs but can find traces.⁴⁹ The Other inhabits the sign but precedes its signification. Its anteriority “is ‘older’ than the a priori.”⁵⁰ This precedence also runs against the current of intelligence; further, the obsession with the other “undoes thematization, and escapes any principle, origin, will or *arché*.”⁵¹ Levinas proceeds to write that this “movement is, in the original sense of the term, anarchical.”⁵² This anarchy can be transversal to intelligence – as justice is not attainable by truth considerations.⁵³ It undoes the *logos*.⁵⁴ The Other as *Xeinós* is an-archaeological as there is no tracing back to what is already a trace.

Clearly, Levinas’ understanding of what I have been calling *Xeinós* – that Other beyond the efforts of intelligence – is in several aspects dissimilar to Heidegger’s understanding of the abyss of *beyng*. Still, I think something is gained by transferring the formulas concerning the first and the second beginning to this Levinasian context. To be sure, the context is not fully Levinasian, if for no other reason than because importantly I’m addressing *Xeinós* as not only human. Levinas takes the trace of the Other that precedes any understanding as what does not merely refuse subjugation but could also contest it – and accordingly could consecrate it.⁵⁵ There is a difference between an otherness that refuses and

47 Levinas, *Otherwise than Being*, p. 100.

48 Levinas, “The Trace of the Other”, p. 355.

49 Levinas, “The Trace of the Other”, p. 357.

50 Levinas, *Otherwise than Being*, p. 101.

51 Levinas, *Otherwise than Being*, p. 101.

52 Levinas, *Otherwise than Being*, p. 101.

53 Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, I, C.

54 Levinas, *Otherwise than Being*, p. 102.

55 Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, p. 38.

one that merely contests domination. It could almost sound as if Levinas is challenging the nihilist scheme of controlling by extracting intelligibility only when it comes to some (significant, human-like) others. In contrast, I'm making no distinction between refusal and contest; I'm assuming the absolute Other to be what escapes the totality forged by looking for more of the same.⁵⁶ The Levinasian move here is not axial – *Xeinós* precedes the exceptionalism of the human.⁵⁷ The idea of the second beginning heralded by the abyss of *Xeinós* is precisely that it places otherness itself at odds with the project of shaping a complete view from the intelligence extracted from what is met. (Interestingly, one could also claim that when Gaia is said to intrude on human history or take revenge against human practices,⁵⁸ Gaia is certainly not only refusing control but also contesting it; the point of these analyses seems to be precisely to call attention to what is beyond the biologically and geologically intelligible processes.)

The quasi-Levinasian formulation of a second beginning through *Xeinós* considers otherness to be what is met by the thinker who has engaged with the first beginning – where otherness was what would bring news and update totality. This formulation I am proposing departs from Heidegger's in two salient aspects. First, it is not a history of *beyng* that is being told and considered but rather a history of *Xeinós*, a history of absolute otherness. As a consequence, and this is the second aspect, the second beginning will prove to be not that of a mere resolution but rather an abyss formed by the grounds of the others. Because the second beginning involves the history of *Xeinós*, it has to do with otherness in its most primordial display. Like in Heidegger's formulation, where *beyng* lies underneath being, *Xeinós* addresses those who think otherness through – thinking is a way to engage with otherness. This unbending exteriority of *Xeinós* makes it something akin to what has been called *the Great Outdoors*.⁵⁹ Information brought in by the other is tainted by the traces of what cannot be encompassed by any correlation. Moreover, the Great Outdoors is to be taken as a deictic element, an otherness, and not something that can be described in substantive terms. The *xenos* element

⁵⁶ This is the move in Bensusan, *Indexicalism*, chapter 2.

⁵⁷ For a discussion of the axial era, see Jaspers, *The Origin and Goal of History*. For a recent discussion, see Viveiros de Castro and Danowski, "The past is yet to come".

⁵⁸ See Stengers, *In Catastrophic Times*, and Lovelock, *The Revenge of Gaia*, respectively.

⁵⁹ See Meillassoux, *After Finitude*, but also Bensusan, *Indexicalism*.

of the Great Outdoors is what gives a significance to thinking and knowing, while it also ensures that alternatives can never be fully eliminated. The second beginning – *Xeinós* – cannot act as a grounds for anything, and here the Great Outdoors appears as the absolute Other that lies in unreachable exteriority. Viewed as such, the Great Outdoors is *Xeinós* itself: the otherness that disrupts and runs against the current of intelligibility. All exercise of intelligence is hostage to the Great Outdoors, abyssal, an-archic and exterior, as an element of the second beginning of *Xeinós*. Like the *Austrag*, it is what determines what appears to thought – the otherness that can accept being subject to theories and concepts but transcends them. In the first beginning, otherness was a novelty that could be treated as a piece of news – a novelty with respect to what is known, which is what the Great Outdoors is if it can ground anything. But underneath this grounding, there is an abyss of otherness. The two beginnings in the relationship to otherness can no longer be summarized as <being = *physis*> and <*beyng* = *Ereignis*>. Rather, they are respectively <*xenos* = information> and <*Xeinós* = the Great Outdoors>. To be sure, there are relevant similarities between *physis* and novelty – reduced to *thesis* and news – and between *Ereignis* and the Great Outdoors, which both point towards what arrives. Contrasting with *physis* or *xenos* – which gravitate around how what is present as truth, *aletheia*, is disclosed and how this unveiling can be exposed in an adequate statement or in a piece of news – *Ereignis* and the Great Outdoors are about what lets presence arrive and in that sense are older and more (an-)archaic than presence. Both transcend presence.

4. *XELNOS* AND *URIHIA*

The Great Outdoors, as a figure of *Xeinós*, is an abyss – if it is a horizon from which things arrive, it is the place that is just past the edge of visibility and as such defies a complete view.

As Levinas often stressed, the Other is never a presence; rather, it provides limits, borders, an outside. Otherness provides an alternative that is not yet here. It cannot be anything like an *arché*, as it is resolutely exterior. The second beginning of *Xeinós*, like that of *beyng*, is one that provides no grounds, no truth-maker for truth-as-*adequaetio* and, further, no disclosure for thought, no element for truth-as-*aletheia*. The second beginning of *Xeinós* is one in which the other is not seen as a bearer of news. Heidegger conceives his second beginning as

connecting truth with a clearing – an unfolding of things, not a sending, not a message to the thinker, but rather an arrival that precedes any disclosure. The clearing is the coming into presence of an *Ereignis*; it is also the resolution from the surrounding forest which harbors the not yet unfolded. The clearing is conceived as the location of *beyng* in the forest and as the locus of truth. The Great Outdoors, in the second beginning of *Xeinós*, cannot be thought of as a clearing – the arrival is not something that merely takes place but is thought through as an encounter in which the Other interrupts. The transcending otherness is what is abyssal and what performs the un-grounding. The forest breeds interruption because it is a meeting place; it is also a place for wild interruption – perhaps a suitable image for the Great Outdoors.

Marco Antonio Valentim has developed a cosmopolitics of the forest that challenges the premises of Heidegger's appeal to clearings.⁶⁰ He pictures the forest as a place where humans are not the protagonists, nor is the location the stage of their thinking; the forest is a place where humans cease to be faithful to their held viewpoints. Valentim brings Heidegger together with the perspectivism of the Amazonian lowlands and the Yanomami shamanic practices – his forest is no longer the Black Forest with its clearings that Heidegger mostly had in mind but the Amazonian rain forest, where humans have to reckon with powers that are transversal to their thinking. Valentim understands the forest as a cosmopolitical arena open to different and intertwined perspectives. Thinking is not alien to that arena, and therefore it is both cosmic and political – thinking takes place in the confluence of the elements that meet in the forest, and it is in this melting pot that concepts are created, articulated, developed and thought through. Concepts are not separate from what they are about but rather they are an interference of the otherness that one is thinking through. Thinking is not merely an exercise in spontaneity – an exercise that betrays the Other by turning it into a concept, as Levinas fears⁶¹ – but a forest of interruptions. Davi Kopenawa, who greatly informs Valentim's account of the forest, claims that the forest itself thinks.⁶² It does so by means of the images (*utupë*, in the Yanomami language) that determine

60 Valentim, *Extramundandidade e Sobrenatureza*.

61 Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, p. 43–44.

62 Kopenawa & Albert, *The Falling Sky*.

what each thing is in each of its appearances.⁶³ The forest is a confluence of appearances. Thinking is at the crossroads of humans, animals and spirits – or of culture, nature and the supernatural. Viveiros de Castro theorizes that these three elements are three perspectives and humans are viewed also as either animals or spirits in the forest.⁶⁴ The forest is a space of transformation where one never knows when dead animals could come back as spirits or humans. Predation is what connects everything and what provides a focus to thinking: everyone has to eat, but the decision to feed on something can come from anywhere. Inspired by ideas of anthropophagy that also inspired Viveiros de Castro's account of the Amerindian philosophy as cannibal, Valentim holds that one is never indifferent to what one eats.⁶⁵ Eating, like thinking, is not without consequences.

Thinking is crucially a cosmopolitical act; analogously, as we saw above, Heidegger would claim that the metaphysical stage in the history of *beyng* is itself an *Ereignis*. The spirits in the forest also rule over the Western enterprise of knowledge, and over its spreading around the world. Valentim remarks that the forest hosts a combination of cosmopolitical decisions, and therefore the appearances that take place in it can produce an overall thinking effect in different directions. Thus, in the forest, an antidote to nihilism can be found; there are other animals, humans and spirits in the forest that can resist – refuse or contest – the attempts to make things controllable. The forest, as Kopenawa insists, neither acts without reason nor has reasons that can be extracted as intelligence and be taken away. He rather insists that the shamans in the Amazon rain forest must perform their deeds – and not merely know that which can be written in a general treatise on the forest – for the sky not to fall.⁶⁶ The forest here, in the vocabulary of Kopenawa and Valentim, could be the Greek *hyle*, which is originally woodlands, woods or wood – and also stuff, material, matter. It is from *hyle* that the consolidated metaphysical endeavor attempts to extract the intelligible – to make matter replaceable and redundant. The word we want, however, is not *hyle* but the Yanomami *urihi a* – a forest-land. *Urihi a* has its own reasons but they are not bounded, because it is not a totality but a meeting point.

63 Valentim, *Extramundanidade e Sobrenatureza*, chapter 7.

64 Viveiros de Castro, "Esboço de cosmologia Yawalapíti."

65 Valentim, *Extramundanidade e Sobrenatureza*, p. 230–235.

66 Kopenawa & Albert, *The Falling Sky*, chapter 24.

The word points not towards a hidden intelligibility to be unveiled – a piece of news brought by meeting with a particular *hyle*, a particular matter – but rather towards a *Xeinós*, towards an Outdoors capable of interrupting without providing an alternative intelligibility. Nothing in *urihi a* is irrelevant and events can have disparate consequences, as *urihi a* is suitable for cosmopolitical affairs.⁶⁷ *Urihi a* is a cosmopolitical protagonist and stage; it thinks through the production and distribution of unexpected *utupë*. This is why it cannot be encompassed and can offer no grounds.

Urihi a is an-archaic. As such, it responds always to otherness, even when an attempt to ground something is made. Drawing from Kopenawa's claims about reasons in the forest, Valentim writes that *urihi a* resists grounding both in the sense of a thesis (*Ge-Stell*) and in the sense of *Ereignis*.⁶⁸ He argues that the forest has its own (cosmopolitical) reasons. But what kind of an-arché escapes the abyss of the groundlessness brought by *Ereignis*? Valentim emphasizes that although *urihi a* cannot have its intelligibility captured, neither is it *Ereignis*; there can be no metaphysics of *urihi a*, or any general theory of *urihi a*; it can offer no adjudication, no criterion for correction, no basis for certainty or for *omoiosis*. It resists becoming a theme for a theory but, at the same time, it is not groundless as an unfolding, as a resolution, as a decision in the open. Valentim, on the face of it, leaves open the possibility that *urihi a* has some sort of *physis* and its truth could be an *aletheia* – a *physis* that would resist being turned into *Ge-Stell*. Perhaps *urihi a* would make the second beginning unnecessary, because it protects the first from its degeneration. *Physis* would maintain its original freshness in the forest, as it would somehow escape the pitfalls of *omoiosis* and *adequaetio*. The rain forest would then prove to be what was missing in the original Greek beginning of philosophy. (Ironically, that would not only contrast with Heidegger's despair with *physis* and the first beginning but also would fly in the face of much of what he had to say about non-Western thought.)

The possibility that *urihi a* could redeem *aletheia* notwithstanding, I submit that it can be seen as faithful to the second beginning of *Xeinós*. Truth, as forest and

67 Garrett Hardin wrote that ecology is based on the principle that we can never do merely one thing. (see Hardin, "Letter to the International Academy for Preventive Medicine"). The same seems to hold for cosmopolitics.

68 Valentim, *Extramundanidade e Sobrenatureza*, p. 256.

not as clearing, is hostage to the an-archic dimension of otherness. If the forest is a meeting point, it has no *physis* that can be captured; rather, it appears as the place for exteriority, for otherness, for a piece that does not fit in the jigsaw. *Urihi a* is not something that can be reproduced or be simulated by an artificial construct, because it hosts *Xeinos* – the absolute Other. Moreover, the forest, understood as the locus of *Xeinos*, can provide a notion of truth for the Great Outdoors. Truth is not about unfolding – clearing – but about meeting. This meeting involves an otherness that is not seen without the second beginning of *Xeinos* – which is an alternative second beginning, different from that of *beyng* and *Ereignis*. The difference is that the an-*arché* of what takes place lies in the abyss of the Other. When Kopenawa insists there is thinking in the forest, that there are reasons in *urihi a*, he is talking about the reasons of the others – which is the other reason these can seem like no reason at all. Again, nihilism and the spreading of *Ge-Stell* are not an *Ereignis*, for there are reasons for them – reasons that can only belong in *Xeinos*, in the cosmopolitics of the forest. The reasons of the others, though, cannot be extracted from the others. It is worth stressing that reasons here can be reasons of animals or spirits, reasons that can be grasped by us only to the extent that we allow them to substitute for the direction of our own thinking. The cosmopolitical effect is not what we intend, but what animals and spirits can achieve with the unnoticed aid of our thinking. Grasping these reasons requires a substitution in the sense of Levinas: the “passivity undergone [...] by the force of an alterity in me,” a replacement “of me for the others.”⁶⁹ The forest thinks that, because the Great Outdoors supplies what is exterior to us, requiring the passivity of substitution. *Urihi a* is a place of conversations, conversations that happen at different paces, in different media, in different forms. The forest responds to the anarchy of *Xeinos* – an an-*arché* of reasons that come from all sorts of different perspectives.

A forest – a meeting point, a melting pot. *Urihi a* is also *hyle* in the sense that it escapes understanding and can only provide the enabling condition for the intelligible; but *urihi a* emphasizes that the forest, and the Great Outdoors, is a stage where the others’ reasons intertwine with any effort to capture the general intelligibility – and prompt the very effort to capture the general intelligibility. If

69 Levinas, *Otherwise than Being*, p. 114.

the forest is the stage for cosmopolitical reasons – a kind of cosmopolitical parliament – it can only be turned into *Ge-Stell* if it is destroyed and replaced, though then it is still not captured in its underlying intelligibility. There is no underlying intelligibility, precisely because *urihi a* appears now as the stage of the Great Outdoors, the locus of *Xeinós*. Truth-as-forest marks a new beginning for xenology and a step in a history (in the sense of Heidegger's *Geschichte*) of *Xeinós* that moves towards the most primordial abyss of otherness, where there is no possible ground. The forest is itself an abyss, not because it is pure *Ereignis* or un-grounded resolution but because it stems from other reasons, other grounds, other intelligibilities. Otherness – as in other grounds – is precisely the *an-arché*, the abyss of encountering something other. Thinking relates to otherness through an insistence on interruptions; it is as if the forest were a theater of transversalities where no thought is immune to an un-grounded new beginning. This an-archaeological forest witnesses the record of encounters that reveal no ultimate bedrock. It is a humid, mobile and nomadic floor that can be excavated in the (rain)forest, a floor that fixes nothing, and therefore there is no ultimate message that could make the Great Outdoors – or the coming of *Xeinós* – irrelevant. The truth of the forest is this interminable meeting place where thought can stand on nothing but a constantly revolving *an-arché*. Thinking is hostage to *Xeinós*. *Urihi a* converges towards no thesis, no general account – it is a space for a systematic and transversal replacement of one by the other in an ongoing conversation. The cosmopolitics of the forest is intensely political – and perhaps frightening close to a *realpolitik* of all its inhabitants.

5. THE HISTORY OF XEINOS

The history of *Xeinós* holds that the abyss below any foundation of thinking lies in the unbending exteriority of otherness, the un-grounding character of any encounter. As such, it enables a history of otherness modeled on a cosmopolitical forest where encounters are part of thinking – and the Great Outdoors is always looming. The history of *Xeinós* is a tectonic one, forged by preparation to meet with what is foreign, by attempting to forget the impact of meeting strangers and by being compelled by the irruptions of that which is un-grounding. It is the tectonic activity underlying the first beginning that brings forward a succession of struggles to incorporate and appropriate that which is other and outer. There

is no *xenos*, the foreigner who brings unexpected, strange or unfamiliar news, without that original encounter with otherness, with the absolute exterior. *Xeinós* is perhaps the encounter itself. An an-archaeology of encounters finds the abyssal stranger, foreign to the intelligible – and that offers itself to a renewed intelligibility, to a history of *xenos*. The excavation towards the abyss of otherness is an archaeology of the exterior that finds neither metaphysical presences nor pieces in the jigsaw but rather eerie traces – like those that are found and lost in the forest. Those traces cannot be blended into an integrated image of everything; the encounters persist. There is a hauntology⁷⁰ to the an-archaeological efforts concerning *Xeinós*: the other that appears as a trace of an encounter haunts the otherness that grounds a piece of news. Knowledge is haunted by the questions about the outside world it had to ask – *xenos* is haunted by *Xeinós*. Similarly, *Ereignis* haunts *physis* and *uríhi a* haunts any general theory.

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⁷⁰ Derrida, *Spectres of Marx*, p.63.

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