

DANIEL M. KNIGHT

Vertigo and Urgency

Affective Resonances of Crisis

Abstract: Crisis provokes a sense of urgency often experienced as vertigo – the intense disorientation as to where and when one belongs on the temporal timeline of pasts and futures. The nauseating affects of urgency can be located in both crisis as sudden rupture and as chronic condition – the former a cliff-edge moment where a schism in historical continuity induces dizziness and a sense of falling, the latter defined by inescapability and suffocating captivity. This article presents the relationship between crisis, urgency and the concept of vertigo, offering insights from philosophy and social theory. Further, based on ethnography from crisis-ridden Greece, it explores how vertigo orients collective timespaces and affectively fosters imaginative relationships with the imminent future.

Keywords: crisis, future, Greece, urgency, vertigo

This article is intended as a theoretical intervention on how crisis triggers a sense of urgency that is manifested as vertigo, namely intense confusion and temporal disorientation where people interrogate their usually unquestioned relationship to pasts and futures. I take two crisis conditions – crisis as sudden rupture and as chronic state – to argue the prevalence of vertigo as affect and temporal orientation. Crisis provokes a sense of life in free-fall as people ricochet off onrushing pasts, the entrapment of the present and the perilous unknown of renegotiated futures. In describing the nauseating affects of urgency, people discuss the feeling of 'teetering on the cliff edge', of being 'blown away' or 'sucked up', of experiencing palpitations and shuddering, a sense of falling or treading water, of life screeching to a halt and taking a gravity-defying U-turn or plunge. Building here on arguments I have presented in *Vertiginous Life: An Anthropology of Time and the Unforeseen* (Knight 2021), I show how the condition of social vertigo distorts the perception of time, materiality and existence itself. It captures the everyday experience of lives knocked off-balance by the crisis juggernaut and the loss of moorings in history as people are suspended in the emptiness between the destruction of the old world order and the not-yet emergence of the new (Dzenovska and Knight 2020).

Beyond individual experience of a situation seeping in angst where imminent futures take on unforeseen forms, vertigo offers a broader framework for contemplating the affective structure of a collective Time of Crisis. With the world in a tailspin, time is experienced as elastic, slowing down, speeding up or



standing still, while material objects, sights and sounds become uncanny (Bandak 2019; Bryant 2016). There might be the sense, the feeling, or atmosphere, of epochal change, nothing will ever be the same . . . Out with the old and in with the something else (Lepselter 2016). I am not so much concerned with the duration of crisis – seconds, days, years – but rather the affective aesthetic generated by critical events on individual and societal levels that provides us with a better scalar understanding of vulnerability in uncanny timespaces. Vertigo can become a marker of crisis experience in situations of both sudden rupture and when crisis becomes a chronic condition, signified by a sense of stuckedness or hyperconsciousness, populated with nausea, dizziness, falling, the notion of splitting from former Self. As a set of affects associated with crisis, vertigo can be scaled-up from the individual to collective to say something about the structure of the timespace itself. The vertiginous layers of urgency found in both rupture and chronic crisis foreground a particular sense of time where temporal horizons are rendered critical (Andreas Bandak and Paul Anderson, this issue).

When crisis is at the point of sudden rupture – the cliff-edge moment – time and history cease to exist as we know it, the carpet is rapidly withdrawn from under our feet and there is a scramble to reorient lives in a drastically changed world. In this instance, vertigo relates to a sense of loss of historical grounding and uncontrollable futural anxiety, resulting in a de Martinian (2012 [1956]) crisis of presence. Futures that were promised as birthrights are invalidated and the imminent horizon of the eerie unknown provokes a sense of urgency that triggers a tidal wave psychosomatic response. Here, the radically altered imminent future invasively encroaches on the present, seeping through the cracks in the temporal threshold, increasing the sense of urgency. When all that was ever known faces eradication, unfamiliarity breeds temporal disorientation where timelines are shattered, inverted or bear little resemblance to previous conceptions of linear trajectory. Simply, commonly held notions of life in ‘progress’ ‘toward’ a foreseeable or tangible future – the actualisation of everyday orientations such as speculations, aspirations, hopes – are held in hiatus, raising existential questions of Self-identification, personal becoming and societal directionality. When crisis becomes a chronic condition, another form of urgency induces vertigo, namely the inability to escape an elongated state of captivity, inside the vortex. Inescapability ignites a sense of urgency as suffocating conditions become over-familiar, intimate relationships are established with the captors, panic sets in. Life on the cliff edge is replaced by life in the vortex (Knight 2022). With temporal rhythms of permanence and stuckedness in place of the pulsating tempo of sudden rupture, the temporal horizon of the future is now ever distant, out of reach. Imminent futures are defined by the here-and-now rather than the not-yet, lived through resignation, apathy and asphyxiation. The urgency to escape captivity is as breath-taking and anxiety-inducing as the original schism but played out over different rhythms within the timespace of crisis, cultivating alternative relationships with the imminent future.

Before delving into the temporalities and affective orientations of crisis, it is necessary to outline what is meant by a Time of Crisis and the philosophically informed approach to theorising vertigo as a prominent marker of that timespace.

Time of Crisis

In *The Anthropology of the Future* (2019), Rebecca Bryant and I have argued for understanding everyday temporalities through the notion of timespaces that provide actors with common vernaculars, affective structures and aims in how they orient their lives. At the communal level, timespaces and their affects are often described in the vernacular in epochal terms – a Time of War, a Time of Covid, a Time of Brexit (on epochs, see Hodges 2010; Stewart 2015). For instance, living in the Time of Brexit may evoke nausea, panic, apocalyptic speculation for the Remainer. The world ‘feels’ different, the atmosphere has changed, certain futures are promoted while others are foreclosed. A Remainer may suppose that the future they anticipated, perhaps as a birthright as a British citizen of late-capitalist modernity, has been shattered, replaced by alternative pathways of collective becoming. The early days after the referendum on European Union membership in 2016 were certainly marked by urgency as Remain-voters frantically scrambled to clutch onto any remnants of ‘the handrails for anchoring the future’ (Allison 2016: np). Disorientation prevailed as people spiralled into an alarming search for where the future was now located and how close the radically altered, ostensibly violent, horizon might be.

In another context underlining the temporalities, affects and futural orientations of specific timespaces, a Time of Peace in the Middle East may be eaten into by the anticipation of imminent displacement and violence, as presented in the work of Sami Hermez (2012) and Joyce Dalsheim (2015). The permanent state of ‘almost war, almost peace’ (Shir-Vertesh and Markowitz 2015: 209) means the anticipation of violent futures seeps through the cracks in the temporal horizon from the future to the present, informing daily practice. These mutually constitutive contexts underwrite everyday life, with violence either receding into dormant potentiality or surging to the fore as penetrative expectation and imminence. Urgency bubbles underneath, ready to break the delicate silence at any moment. As such, imminent past and future violence is part and parcel of everyday action in the timespace. The suspended state of the ‘not-quite’ (Markowitz 2018: 8) and its bundle of expectations, affects and infrastructures provides direction to daily choices and social interactions and signifies a Time of Peace in the Middle East.

Pertinent to the study at hand, given the duality of crisis as both rupture and chronic condition, is a Time of Crisis in Greece, where I have worked since 2003. Economic crisis burst onto the scene in 2009/10 and has since become endemic, spurring a topology of messy, disorientating, temporal trajectories.

After dramatically changing people's relationships to the past and future almost overnight (Knight 2015, 2016) – including a proliferation of narratives on falling back through time and on defeated futural expectations – a Time of Crisis has become epochal. In the timespace of chronic crisis where there is scarce hope of emergence, the present has become elongated or inescapable, the future distant and empty, with my research participants locked into a form of Stockholm Syndrome, feeling uncomfortable comfort with the familiarity of their captors (international creditors), inside the vortex of a lingering condition (Knight 2020, 2021). A Time of Crisis is marked by existential questions of splitting from former Self, not recognising the reflection of the person in the mirror, uncanny feelings that the pre-crisis years exist in a parallel universe, on a trajectory of alternate reality. People report various forms of emptiness – temporal, material, existential – and an affective register that encompasses queasiness and anxiety, as well as eerie feelings of captivity. Paralysis and stasis mark the temporal rhythm and speed, somewhat paradoxically surrounded by on-rushing pasts and futures that are both intensely proximate and always just over the horizon, out of reach.

Life in the vertiginous is multi-trajectorial, both spinning and stagnating, nauseating swells give way to stillness in the vortical eye of the storm (Knight 2022). The future is comprised of an imminent return to past contexts of hardship and suffering once thought to be consigned to the pages of history, while emergence from crisis is always just out of sight, around the next bend in the never-ending road of structural reform. It is partially this condition of permanent 'not-quite' and 'almostness' that gives the timespace its vertiginous edge, suspended as it is in the transitional gap between orders (Dzenovska and Knight 2020; Shir-Vertesh and Markowitz 2015). A Time of Crisis has a set of shared vernaculars, affects and orientations that shape everyday action, without foregoing novelty. Vertigo, I propose, is an integral element of the affective structure of a Time of Crisis in Greece and beyond, played out both when urgency is experienced at the cliff edge of sudden rupture and in the suffocating atmosphere of a chronic condition.

In daily discourse in Greece, people describe the sickness and dizziness brought about by living in the crisis world. Believing that temporal and material progression were birthrights in the modern, neoliberal West, the crisis has provoked a sense of falling back through time to eras before the 1967–74 dictatorship, to crises past that are often associated with 'village life', 'backwardness' and 'peasantry'. The proximate past has surged into the imminent future, 'history . . . rises and descends, as if on the high seas under the movements of the hurricane' (Serres 2000: 64; Knight 2012). People question 'where are we now?' and 'when are we now?', interrogating both their spatial and temporal belonging to what they perceive as the timespace of Western modernity. Do they belong to the same space and time as northern Europe (usually referred to as Germany and the United Kingdom), are they part of the same futural trajectory?

It is helpful to turn to popular culture to elucidate a theory of vertigo as characteristic of a Time of Crisis that harnesses the temporal and affective complexities of the timespace. For instance, vertigo is captured nicely in the opening credits to the original series of American television show *Hawaii Five-O* (1968–80). The camera shudders as it approaches a cityscape from above the crashing waves of the Pacific Ocean, rapidly switching between flashing visual images before juddering, almost pulsating, toward an apartment block where, on a lofty balcony, stands the striking figure of protagonist Steve McGarrett (played by Jack Lord). McGarrett swings round to a pause, staring straight down the barrel of the camera. After such a vertiginous ride, the viewer is riveted by the stillness of the shot, an elongated and somewhat uncanny present, before the dizzying camerawork starts again, frantically clicking away at images of varying relevance until the next freeze-frame. A Time of Crisis is Steve McGarrett pinned down on either side by vertiginous camera shots of events that form plotlines of past and future episodes, travelling at different speeds. For a moment everything makes sense, but the ride has been sickening and no two successive images bear logical connection.

Perhaps vertigo is most famously associated with the dolly zoom effect employed in Alfred Hitchcock's movie *Vertigo* (1958) and later in films such as *Jaws* (1975). The camerawork provides a cocktail of motions that induce a surreal sensation of sensory distortion. The mind casts back to the falling-away-from-oneself feeling as James Stewart chases Kim Novak up the bell tower. Or one might rather refer to Steve McQueen's crash scene in Lee Katzin's 1971 film *Le Mans* to describe the temporal confusion embedded in critical events (see Battaglia 2022; Knight and Stewart 2016: 3). The venture of proposing vertigo as an analytic of urgency in a world in crisis is part of an intention to better account for the long-term existential, material and temporal qualities of disorientation after a *Le Mans*-style smash shakes the world.

Vertiginous Philosophies

To better understand vertigo as an individual and social phenomenon, it is worthwhile setting up a conversation between ethnography and figures of existential philosophy and social theory. A good starting point is Ernesto de Martino's 'crisis of presence' which goes some way to account for the vertigo of a Time of Crisis in that individuals are detached from normalised rhythms of time and history. The loss of established historical and cultural moorings through personal anguish and social suffering undermine the presence of the Self, leading to a growing sense of disorientation. de Martino's 'deep anthropological perspective on precarity' relates to social and existential experiences of subjugation, migration and alienation (Farnetti and Stewart 2012: 432). Imminent futures are held in stasis as the individual loses contact with the historical timeline, undermining the founda-

tions of intersubjective being. Timespaces of crisis, momentary or chronic, are disorienting places precisely because of the stagnation of the ‘dynamic power that ordinarily propels the individual toward the future’. Trajectories are lost, temporal rhythms change. de Martino explains:

The reality of the world appears strange, mechanical, sordid, simulated, inconsistent, perverse, dead; and presence is felt as lost, dreamy, estranged from itself, and so forth . . . (the individual is) detached from the present, precisely because he cannot fully ‘be-there’ . . . in the present, being still anchored or polarised in an undecided critical moment of his own personal history. (2012 [1956]: 435)

Not fully ‘being there’, continuing to hover in the ‘undecided critical moment’, people become numb to the world and to themselves, signalling existential vulnerability where displacement outside historical becoming is marked by an overpowering sense of anguish. The risk of radical alienation from history and society, and all familiar reference points, is described in crisis narratives which cite affects of anxiety, emptiness, yearning and entrapment. Urgency is expressed through frenziedness when faced with a lack of familiar historical and social points by which to navigate life. A Time of Crisis is experienced as an era placed outside of normal – linear – historical becoming, where unpredictable ‘surges’ and ‘turbulences’ (in Michel Serres’ (1995) terms) destabilise previous expectations that ‘the givens of the past and present *should* become something novel in the future’ (Farnetti and Stewart 2012: 432). The confused trajectories as people are ejected by the turbulence of a rupture in historical continuum, and the consuming anguish this produces, incites the dizziness, nausea and assorted affects associated with vertigo. On anguish, de Martino elaborates:

crisis of presence is the ultimate risk of losing the human accompanied by anguish . . . that anguish is a reaction of presence in the face of the risk of not being able to overcome critical contents, and of feeling oneself headed for supreme abdication . . . Anguish signposts the attack on the very roots of human presence, the alienation of oneself from oneself. (2012 [1956]: 439)

The anguish of all-consuming societal and subsequent existential crisis, and of defeated futures and birthright promises, leads to feelings of the world being sucked into a vortex, whipped up in a whirling cyclone, or of falling through the cracks in time (Knight 2022). Increased anxiety toward Self and society, encountered as vertigo, is indicative of crisis as both sudden rupture and inescapable captivity. A decade on, in the chronic crisis condition of austerity Greece, there is a constant belief that other worlds and other futures are passing by, are inaccessible, and are defeated by entrapment in crisis. For de Martino (2012 [1956]: 440), crisis oversees the destruction of cultural life and human history as it *should* be written.

The anguish of dehistoricisation, or removal from normalised temporal and historical succession, incites vertigo. Historical discontinuity stimulates vertig-

inous movement on the crest of tumultuous turbulences and surges into new timespaces. Concerned with both presence and historical discontinuity, philosopher of history Eelco Runia (2010: 1) explicitly identifies the relation between transitional timespaces and vertigo, arguing that discontinuity is primarily a human creation manifested as a double-edged fear of falling and urge to jump. Runia postulates that at moments of historical rupture, where we may claim to have been whipped-up or thrown into a radically new timespace, people find themselves standing on the ledge of time. Teetering on the edge of a new era, they are consumed by vertigo, a dizzying confusion of whether to resist the widening vortex or to embrace the unknown. Having taken leave of their presence in the present, ‘to stand on the brink of time’ cultivates a sensation of struggle between the wish to step down and the desire to throw oneself off the cliff edge (Runia 2010: 15).

The analogy of the cliff edge or perilous ledge is a familiar setting in existentialism and the philosophy of science – Serres, for instance, discusses the ‘equilibrium disorder’ felt on ‘a summit ridge’, where he experiences the multi-trajectorial gyration of vertigo (2012: 94–95). Similarly, Marcel Proust (1992) describes the giddiness experienced when balancing on high stilts that never stop growing, year on year, as time accumulates. The sensation of being ‘miles high’, says Proust, makes walking in the world dangerous with the ever-increasing potential to fall, perched on the vertiginous summit of time, peering down at personal and collective pasts. At such heights ‘certain people claim to have felt the coldness of death’ (1992: 106).

Runia further contends that when situated on the cliff edge, it is our obligation to embrace vertigo, since the audacious pioneers will create a new era of distinct history. Vertigo is ultimately positive, fashioning novelty and heralding-in new eras; the potential destruction of the vertiginous plunge, and the seeming emptiness of the vortex, also holds latent possibility where futures can be formed, detached from what has gone before. When people succumb to – or feel compelled by – an irrepressible urge to create history, they later justify their actions. To step over the cliff edge, to allow oneself to ‘unravel’, is to embrace possibility: ‘the elation of inventive discovery’ (Serres 2012: 138). Denying vertigo confines us to a stuckedness in familiar formats of society and history. Serres (2012, 2014) sees endless cyclical repetition if we do not learn from vertiginous surges. No emergent novelty,

[E]very body honestly plunged into authentic life and into direct and courageous learning receives from them a force equivalent to this body directed upward, vertical, toward discovery. Amid the spins and the vertigo, we never find anything but while naked. Lifted by joy. (Serres 2012: 151)

For Runia, like de Martino, vertigo is a state of possession that stalks this transitional landscape where historical rupture provokes a loss of presence. It is productive to take the basis of his argument from an observation he makes on French

philosopher and sociologist Roger Caillois's thesis on games. The destruction/possibility duality is at its clearest in a form of gaming that Caillois calls '*ilinx*' (from the Greek for 'whirlpool') that deliberately distorts perception by pursuing vertigo, incorporating an element of creative inevitability that vertigo will eventually consume the player. Caillois explains these games – which include racing videogames – as being

based on the pursuit of vertigo and which consist of an attempt to momentarily destroy the stability of perception and inflict a kind of voluptuous panic upon an otherwise lucid mind. In all cases, it is a question of surrendering to a kind of spasm, seizure, or shock which destroys reality and sovereign brusqueness. (2001: 23)

More than the feeling of dizziness and nausea found in the existentialism of Søren Kierkegaard and Jean-Paul Sartre respectively, for Runia, vertigo involves the inclination to surrender and the dual-aspect destruction/possibility of the vertiginous jump into the *ilinx*/whirlpool created by physical or metaphorical movement, as with Caillois's videogames (Caillois 2001: 24; see Knight 2022). It is the multiplier effect, the fear of not being able to resist, the wish to overcome the fear, the fear that fear itself may not be enough to deter, that causes the sensation of *ilinx*, a maelstrom or vortex that manifests itself as dizziness at the point of no return. Perception distortion – perhaps, for the purpose of our argument, crisis rupturing the unquestioned continuity between past, present, future – Runia suggests, stimulates the wish to jump and the desire to destroy. Vertigo is, then, indicative of violent transition. But within this destruction lies the potentiality for forging pathbreaking futures and embracing this horizon actualises latent novelty.

It is Runia's contention that vertigo is a potentially positive state, and it is our obligation to take the step off the cliff edge; the truly courageous take the jump into the imminent future and create history, leaving behind the familiar to selflessly cross the frontier of time. If people fail to embrace vertigo, do not actively pursue the awesomely new, Runia asserts that the future will always have the 'same blank implacable face; in reality everything ultimately has its way if just left alone' (2014: 115). We are faced with endless repetition.

With this point I disagree. In fact, I have (co)written a whole book that would contest Runia's foregoing of agency and subjectivity in future formation, an argument that appears to support fate as the primary orientation of future-making (Bryant and Knight 2019). Also, in my ethnographic field of crisis Greece, it would be extremely difficult to identify instances where the vertiginous would be framed as positive or creative; rather, life inside the *ilinx* continues to provoke nausea, dizziness, palpitations and loss of Self in their most unwelcome guise. Being tossed and turned, slung and spun, accentuates people's vulnerability, anguish and existential questions.

To counter Runia, I find Kierkegaard's reading of destruction/creativity in the vertiginous moment helpful here, although his own preoccupation with free-

dom of choice – to stand ground or fall – is somewhat distracting for the crisis context. In the pursuit of better defining dizziness, in *The Concept of Anxiety*, Kierkegaard first distinguishes anxiety from fear:

(Anxiety) is altogether different from fear and similar concepts that refer to something definite, whereas anxiety is freedom's actuality as the possibility of possibility. Anxiety may be compared with dizziness. (1980: 42)

Kierkegaard exemplifies his understanding of dizziness as anxiety founded in freedom, which he illustrates with a story that, once more, is staged on the edge of a tall building or cliff. We find ourselves in familiar territory – a man looks over the edge, experiences the focused fear of falling, but also a simultaneous and terrifying impulse to throw himself intentionally into the abyss. The vertiginous moment is one of possibilities. For Kierkegaard, this experience is anxiety caused by freedom of choice. The potential to choose even the most self-destructive of possibilities, prospective suicide, induces vertigo. This anxiety over possibilities and realising the freedom of choice in the *possibility of possibility*, manifests as dizziness.

He whose eye happens to look down the yawning abyss becomes dizzy. But what is the reason for this? It is just as much in his own eye as in the abyss, for suppose he had not looked down. Hence, anxiety is the dizziness of freedom, which emerges when . . . freedom looks down into its own possibility . . . Freedom succumbs to dizziness. (1980: 61)

The possible creativity of vertigo depends, insists Kierkegaard, on how the condition is navigated and on educating the Self to find originality on the frontier of destruction. The terrifying assaults of anxiety are fraught with danger but can also awaken the senses to potentiality beyond; vertigo can be both destructive and generative if navigated appropriately and only in certain intersubjective interactions. This is also where Serres splits from hitherto parallels with Runia's obligation to create history, emphasising that vertigo accompanies our learning. It need not be wholly destructive since cultivating the body and mind while experiencing life 'on the edge' serves a pedagogical purpose, yet only the audacious few can navigate vertigo and may decide to step off the ledge:

[D]o we experience the distress of the spins so as to get beyond it, after having severely experienced it, and to finally understand that the body undergoes it as an obstacle and makes use of it as a passage? . . . Do we owe our best balance to these whirlwinds or the vertical circle to these vortices? (Serres 2012: 126–127)

Kierkegaard, and to an extent Serres, takes us back from the do-or-die ledge that Runia proposes where the courageous leap to create history is presented as the next logical step for the collective good and to deliver the future from the hands of fate. Now the playing field is levelled slightly, with the acknowledgement that for many people the danger of dizziness is experienced as overpowering, as

something that can overwhelm and seize the individual, and that only some people may find pedagogical potentiality in the vertiginous leap. For Kierkegaard, the more creative the individual, the more anxiety they feel and the more creative potentiality they possess. If people can navigate vertigo ‘correctly’, they will be able to destroy the status quo to create ‘new and original forms of living’ (May 2015: 40).

Kierkegaard answers the question of agency and intersubjectivity that is silenced by Runia who deems the future blank and inevitable if the leap into the *ilinx* is not embraced. But in turn he places too much emphasis on freedoms that are not always available or clearly evident in a timespace of crisis. In a Time of Crisis, individual freedom is often curtailed through structural violence, deep economic reform, increased targeted political exploitation, xenophobia and so on. In the ethnographic record, the motives behind leaping or staying put are far murkier than portrayed in the philosophies of Runia or Kierkegaard. Succumbing to the vertiginous struggle is, from my experience working in Greece, more a sign of exhaustion with an elongated condition of crisis (Knight 2016), or a coping mechanism rather than a courageous dive into the abyss to forge new history, or an awesome step beyond the status quo toward a historical ‘mutation’ (Runia 2014: 111). Vertigo is something far more grounded and mundane, taking hold as people come to reconcile the destruction of past lives (expectations, hopes, beliefs) with the choppy emergence of new social, political and aesthetic orders. Kierkegaard seems to concede this when noting that vertigo can be expressed in muteness, as well as a scream, meaning the subtle everyday struggles with vertigo are as intense and significant as sublime statements and grand gestures of history-making. In my reading of vertigo-inducing crisis, loss is not generally regarded a positive thing or perceived as a pioneering leap benefiting the collective. The abyss people are staring into is deep, dark and incredibly daunting.

Proust’s giddiness, the dizziness of Kierkegaard, the nausea of Sartre, de Martino’s anguish, Serres’ surges, Runia’s falling. In all, vertigo signals the struggle between person and world, between the freedom of action and suppression of Self, between irreparable loss and creative potentialities. Taking place in a transitional timespace of unforeseen rupture and change that is the crisis world, where imminent futures may not resemble anything that has gone before, or quite simply might be altogether unimaginable. Perhaps Caillois’s observations on amusement park rides are most revealing since he scales-up vertigo to the point of being a potential long-term social structure. While Runia and Kierkegaard emphasise the creative possibilities of destruction and applaud the courageous individuals who ‘take the plunge’, Caillois urges caution in embracing vertigo as primarily a positive, creative threshold. Vertigo, he says, is an assault on every organ, a fear often only counterbalanced by the observation that everyone else around is enduring the same. People turn pale and dizzy to the point of nausea. ‘They shriek with fright, gasp for breath, and have the terrifying impression of visceral fear and shrinking as if to escape a horrible attack’ (2001: 26). If this is to be

scaled-up to societies enduring a Time of Crisis in which vertigo is a crucial constitutive of the affective structure, then we need to detail the fine-grained existential consequences and affective nuances of this complex socio-politico-historical milieu. ‘The faithful do not agree to be entirely captivated’, nor do they deem the vertiginous seizure to be without danger. There should be, he assumes, a precaution against vertigo: if people take the decisive and difficult leap to jump through ‘the narrow door that gives access to civilization and history (to progress and to a future)’ then this ‘basis for collective existence’ (Cailliois 2001: 141) can lead to a dangerous vicious circle of vertigo, life inside the whirlpool, clawing away at body and mind, from which there is no escape.

Crisis as Rupture and Chronic Condition

Two of the core questions of this collection ask what happens to claims of urgency when they become protracted or routinised, and under what historical circumstances does urgency become a dominant motif? Greece is an excellent example through which to address both, for urgency remains in the temporal shift from sudden rupture to endemic state, and urgency manifested in the affects of vertigo has become the dominant characteristic of the timespace of crisis. When in the field at the onset of crisis in 2009/10 there was certainly the sense of sudden rupture, the world changed almost overnight – the cliff-edge moment where Runia and Kierkegaard point to the cessation of historical continuity. Narratives changed to focus on crises past – Ottoman domination, Axis occupation, the Great Famine, dictatorship and a stock market crash – and centred on themes of food security, loci of blame and abruptly uncertain immediate futures. Urgency in this instance is best described by the impression that people had a deck of cards scattered on the floor and were frantically searching for the right one to make the play. Anxious people were ‘all fingers and thumbs’ letting cards slip through their grasp, misreading their hand through blurred eyes gained from social concussion (see Lepselter 2022). In a state of emergency, each card offered not so much a solution to imminent futures, but an explanation of why the train had left the historically determined tracks while capturing fears and angst about what was to come. When struck by crisis, Michael Jackson (1998: 171) argues, people feel unable to control the exterior forces influencing their possibilities and choices: they lose control of their lives and struggle to regain and re-establish social order. As birthright futures were dramatically stripped away, the scramble for meaning left a dust cloud bellowing above the central plains – the crisis landscape began to tie down a community (Bandak 2019: 190). On the practical level, the need to ‘put food on the table’ led to short-term investment in precarious neoliberal programmes, such as the rise in rentier agreements where agriculturalists turned over their land to international renewable energy investors (Argenti and Knight 2015; Knight 2017).

A decade on and in a condition of chronic crisis, all the cards have been played and urgency rests in the last-chance saloon. Resonances of the original event continue to ripple across landscapes of imagination, fear and haunting, like shock waves continuing to reverberate throughout society (Bandak 2019: 190). The suffocation of crisis is part of a relationship of captivity where over-familiarity with the crisis condition has led to a sense of uncomfortable comfort. Futures are held hostage to international politics and reside in the realm of the repetitive 'more of the same' (cf. Bandak 2019), an elongated present where futures are not only out of sight but lurk in the shadows of potentially more severe catastrophe. Urgency here is lived as an overwhelming urge to escape the inescapable present of elongated hyperconsciousness, to come through the de Martinian crisis of presence and be reintegrated in the timeline of Western social and economic progression. The urgency to escape resides in attempts to make the vertiginous leap into the unknown, to create history anew. The rubble of the old world order is fading from memory and there is nothing to lose from leaping, if only people could locate the cliff edge. People still hold their metaphorical breath in the search for this elusive gateway of emergence, getting dizzy walking around in circles looking for an escape route. The cyclical motion of being stuck in chronic crisis contributes to captivity becoming both a structuring and affective cornerstone of the timespace.

Henrik Vigh (2008) has noted the perpetual but progressless motion that constitutes chronic crisis. Despite constant adjustments to one's trajectory and praxis in a shifting terrain, there is no way out, the vortical force is too strong. Vigh calls for anthropologists to approach crisis as context, 'a terrain of action and meaning rather than an aberration' (2008: 8). In his seminal paper 'Crisis and chronicity', he advocates a departure from perceiving crisis and trauma as momentary phenomena in favour of an understanding of critical states as pervasive contexts. Often, he observes, crisis as an 'intermediary moment of chaos' becomes routinised and people are forced to 'make lives in fragmented and volatile worlds rather than waiting for normalisation and reconfiguration' (2008: 8). In such situations the individual and the social environment are in constant dialogue – crisis forces 'agents to take into account not only how they are able to move within a social environment, but also how the social environment moves them, and other agents within it, as they seek to traverse envisioned trajectories' (2008: 18). The social environment is constitutive of what I term the timespace, and urgency is part of the affective structure which drives common vernaculars and suggests pathways of becoming in a context of chronic crisis.

In the Stockholm Syndrome effect of chronic crisis, captivity is the resonant aesthetic that propagates vertigo and signifies the inescapability of the emotional rollercoaster (Böhme 2017: 12). The captivity status quo produces and intensifies vertigo in multiple forms. In Susan Lepselter's (2016: 6) terms, those whose lives

have been abducted by crisis experience an overspilling sensation of captivity and containment by something they cannot control, something that becomes inscribed on the body, movements, memory. Captivity becomes ‘An expressive modality, a vernacular theory, a way of seeing the world, an intimation of the way *it all makes sense*’ (Lepselter 2016: 4, original emphasis). Vertigo on the societal level, what Runia calls ‘cultural vertigo’, proliferates when the previous original sin has lost its capacity to anchor individuals in their everyday lives (2010: 18). For our purposes here, we can deduce that captivity has created an atmosphere of vertigo and giving in is the acceptance of a condition of structural inescapability rather than searching for the answers in the pack of cards spilt over the living room floor. In chronic crisis, the obsession with the present, the stuckedness of life with no trajectory, the dazed state of concussion, is vertigo-inducing. The repetition of the same timespace, something that may be described as *déjà vu* or likened to living in a panic room or padded cell, hint at the affective vexations of captivity – familiarity and normalisation are not remedies but often intensify a sense of mounting suffocation and urgency.

As Andreas Bandak (2019) has argued, in everyday consciousness a crisis event may present as both a historical moment and an ongoing and returning possibility. Vertigo is located in the ricochets between knowing that there will never be a like-for-like return to the past – ‘going back’ to pre-crisis life – and the continued corporeal experience of an inescapable timespace continuously repeating itself – the stuckedness of an uncanny present with little or no futural momentum. In the Introduction to this special issue, Andreas Bandak and Paul Anderson quote Francois Hartog in suggesting that in crisis ‘the future is no longer a promise but a threat, while there is no question of trying to reactivate the authority of the past’ (2022: 9). For Hartog, being caught between the impossibility of return and defeated futural imaginings means that the critical threshold of the present is increasingly marked by urgency. The tragedy here, says Bandak, is not the ‘failure to arrive at one’s utopian hopes or longings’ but rather the fact that the present situation is ‘recurrently cast . . . as nothing but disaster’ (2019: 207). The Stockholm Syndrome effect of becoming uncomfortably comfortable with chronic crisis is part of what Bandak calls the ‘taming’ of events by seeing them as part of an inevitable ‘repeated sequence’, which, however, jeopardises any form of critical consideration of how things could be otherwise, which requires at least a modicum of urgency (2019: 208). As much as we might associate rupture and unknowingness with vertigo, the permanence of crisis is a vertiginous state in that acknowledging the endlessness of a life in captivity emphasises the utter futility of existence. One can never raise one’s head above the suffocating smog of crisis. Thus, urgency and comfort must reside side-by-side and are characteristic of the ‘layerings of time’ (Koselleck 2019; see Bandak and Anderson, this issue) that hold haunting and fear, but also resilience and responsibility, together in the lifeworlds of people residing in chronic crisis.

Conclusion

With its layers of vertiginous urgency, an era of crisis ‘delivers heat to time’ in the move away from inevitability associated with uninterrupted linear progression (Greenhouse 2019: 86–87). The realisation that the future might not take shape as once expected or anticipated signals a dawn of a new timespace with shared teleoaffective structures guiding the possibilities of practice. At the time of sudden rupture, historical discontinuity where the present is no longer sequentially connected to what has gone before opens a chasm where, for both Runia and Kierkegaard, world-shattering destruction and counterfactual potentiality are held in mutual embrace. In transitional tension, the known world is suspended between old orders and the not-yet beginnings of the new. Finding themselves in this de Martinian crisis of presence, people experience the anguish of being located outside of common timelines associated with, in the case of Greece, Western modernity, capitalist accumulation and ordinarily accepted collective pathways of becoming. On the cliff edge peering into the whirlpool of spacetime spiralling below, the imminent future seems closer and more invasive than ever given the hyperconsciousness of the moment. In Bryant’s words, sudden crisis ‘brings the present into consciousness, creating an awareness or perception of present-ness that we do not normally have . . . We acquire a sense that what we do in this present will be decisive for both the past and the future, giving to the present the status of a threshold’ (2016: 19–20). On occasion crisis becomes a chronic condition, the present becomes elongated, suffocating and ultimately inescapable, fostering a sense that imminent futures are always just over the ever-receding horizon, out of reach. There is the feeling of entrapment in a motionless, yet ever spinning, vortex. If imminent futures are invasive in punctuating the present at the point of sudden rupture, then in chronic crisis the inverse is true. An inability to transcend the threshold of the future eventually leads to resignation and apathy as cornerstone orientations of the timespace. Cyclical promises of emergence that never materialise incite feelings of *déjà vu* (cf. Virno 2015).

In both cases, urgency is experienced through the affects of vertigo: intense temporal disorientation manifested as nausea and dizziness, a sense of falling off the cliff edge of time and history (in the case of rupture), or as treading water while frantically searching for the exit door from a structural relationship of captivity (chronic condition). Scholars place importance on different affects of vertigo that depict the struggle between individual and the emergent world; for Sartre it is the nausea associated with the unknowingness and unrecognisability of Self, Kierkegaard emphasises the dizziness induced by the freedom of new possibilities in the imminent future, Serres foregrounds the audacious novelty found when riding the crest of turbulent surges, de Martino is more concerned with anguish at the precarity of historical discontinuity, while Proust talks of the giddiness experienced on the accumulation of personal responsibilities, and Runia focuses on the sense of falling. In all versions, vertigo orients the crisis

experience and is the affective catalyst that stimulates imaginative relationships with the imminent future.

DANIEL KNIGHT is Reader in Social Anthropology and Director of the Centre for Cosmopolitan Studies at the University of St Andrews. His recent books include *Vertiginous Life: An Anthropology of Time and the Unforeseen* and *The Anthropology of the Future*. Daniel is co-editor of *History and Anthropology* journal. ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0001-9197-983X>. dmk3@st-andrews.ac.uk

References

- Allison, A. 2016. 'Precarity', *Cultural Anthropology* (<https://journal.culanth.org/index.php/ca/precarity-commentary-by-anne-allison>) Accessed 10 November 2020.
- Argenti, N. and D. M. Knight 2015. 'Sun, wind, and the rebirth of extractive economies: renewable energy investment and metanarratives of crisis in Greece', *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute* 21: 781–802.
- Bandak, A. 2019. 'Repetition and uncanny temporalities: Armenians and the recurrence of genocide in the Levant', *History and Anthropology* 30: 190–211.
- Bandak, A. and P. Anderson 2022. 'Urgency and imminence: the politics of the very near future', *Social Anthropology* 30(4): 1–17.
- Battaglia, D. 2022. 'Breaktime', *Anthropological Theory Commons*, special issue on *The Vertiginous* 3 June.
- Böhme, G. 2017. *The aesthetics of atmospheres*. Trans. Jean-Paul Thibaud. London: Routledge.
- Bryant, R. 2016. 'On critical times: return, repetition, and the uncanny present', *History and Anthropology* 27: 19–31.
- Bryant, R. and D. M. Knight 2019. *The anthropology of the future*. Cambridge: University of Cambridge Press.
- Caillois, R. 2001. *Man, play and games*. Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press.
- Dalsheim, J. 2015. 'There will always be a Gaza War: duration, abduction and intractable conflict', *Anthropology Today* 31: 8–11.
- de Martino, E. 2012 [1956]. 'Crisis of presence and religious reintegration', prefaced and translated by T. Farnetti and C. Stewart, *HAU: Journal of Ethnographic Theory* 2: 431–450.
- Dzenovska, D. and D. M. Knight 2020. 'Emptiness', Theorizing the Contemporary, *Fieldsights*. <https://culanth.org/fieldsights/series/emptiness>.
- Farnetti, T. and C. Stewart 2012. 'Translators' preface. An introduction to "Crisis of presence and religious reintegration" by Ernesto de Martino', *HAU: Journal of Ethnographic Theory* 2: 431–433.
- Greenhouse, C. 2019. Times like the present: political rupture and the heat of the moment, in M. Holbraad, B. Kapferer and J. Sauma (eds.), *Ruptures: anthropologies of discontinuity in times of turmoil*. London: UCL Press. Pp. 70–92.
- Hermez, S. 2012. 'The war is going to ignite: on the anticipation of violence in Lebanon', *Political and Legal Anthropology Review* 35: 327–344.
- Hodges, M. 2010. 'The time of the interval: historicity, modernity, and epoch in rural France', *American Ethnologist* 37: 115–131.
- Jackson, M. 1998. *Minima ethnography*. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press.

- Kierkegaard, S. 1980. *The concept of anxiety: a simple psychologically oriented deliberation in the view of the dogmatic problem of hereditary sin*. New York: Liveright.
- Knight, D. M. 2012. 'Cultural proximity: crisis, time and social memory in central Greece', *History and Anthropology* 23: 349–374.
- Knight, D. M. 2015. *History, time, and economic crisis in Central Greece*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Knight, D. M. 2016. 'Temporal vertigo and time vortices on Greece's Central Plain', *Cambridge Journal of Anthropology* 34: 32–44.
- Knight, D. M. 2017. 'Energy talk, temporality, and belonging in austerity Greece', *Anthropological Quarterly* 90: 167–191.
- Knight, D. M. 2020. 'Greece's Stockholm Syndrome: futility in a time of crisis. *Anthropological Theory Commons* (<http://www.at-commons.com/2020/10/16/greeces-stockholm-syndrome-futility-in-a-time-of-crisis/>) Accessed 10 November 2020.
- Knight, D. M. 2021. *Vertiginous life: an anthropology of time and the unforeseen*. New York: Berghahn.
- Knight, D. M. 2022. 'Ilinx', *Anthropological Theory Commons*, special issue on *The Vertiginous* 3 June.
- Knight, D. M. and C. Stewart 2016. 'Ethnographies of austerity: temporality, crisis and affect in Southern Europe', *History and Anthropology* 27: 1–18.
- Koselleck, R. 2019. *Sediments of time: on possible histories*. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press.
- Lepselter, S. 2016. *The resonance of unseen things: poetics, power, captivity, and UFOs in the American uncanny*. Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press.
- Lepselter, S. 2022. 'Concussion', *Anthropological Theory Commons*, special issue on *The Vertiginous* 3 June.
- Markowitz, F. 2018. Betwixt and between in Beer Sheva: consumption and chronotopes in the Negev, in I. Pardo and G. Prato (eds.), *The Palgrave handbook of urban ethnography*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan. Pp. 153–168.
- May, R. 2015. *The meaning of anxiety*. New York: Penguin.
- Proust, M. 1992. *In search of lost time*. New York: Random House.
- Runia, E. 2010. 'Into cleanness leaping: the vertiginous urge to commit history', *History and Theory: Studies in the Philosophy of History* 49: 1–20.
- Runia, E. 2014. *Moved by the past: discontinuity and historical mutation*. New York: Columbia University Press.
- Serres, M. 1995. *Genesis*. Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press.
- Serres, M. 2000. *The birth of physics*. Manchester: Clinamen Press.
- Serres, M. 2012. *Variations on the body*. Minneapolis, MN: Univocal.
- Serres, M. 2014. *Times of crisis: what the financial crisis revealed and how to reinvent our lives and future*. London: Bloomsbury.
- Shir-Vertesh, D. and F. Markowitz 2015. 'Between war and peace: Israel day by day', *Ethnologie Française* 45: 209–221.
- Stewart, C. 2015. 'Affect, epoch and analogy: an anthropology of history'. Keynote lecture, *Maison des Sciences de l'Homme Mondes*.
- Vigh, H. 2008. 'Crisis and chronicity: anthropological perspectives on continuous conflict and decline', *Ethnos* 73: 5–24.
- Virno, P. 2015. *Déjà vu and the end of history*. New York: Verso.

Vertiges et urgences : résonances affectives de la crise

La crise provoque un sentiment d'urgence souvent vécu comme un vertige — c'est-à-dire une désorientation intense quant à l'endroit et au moment où l'on se situe sur la ligne temporelle des passés et des futurs. Les effets nauséabonds de l'urgence peuvent être localisés à la fois dans la crise en tant que rupture soudaine et en tant que condition chronique — la première étant un moment de falaise où un schisme dans la continuité historique induit un vertige et un sentiment de chute, la seconde étant définie par l'inéluctabilité et la captivité suffocante. Cet article présente la relation entre la crise, l'urgence et le concept de vertige, en proposant des idées issues de la philosophie et de la théorie sociale. En outre, sur la base d'une ethnographie de la Grèce en crise, il explore comment le vertige oriente les espaces temporels collectifs et favorise affectivement les relations imaginatives avec l'avenir imminent.

Mots clés : crise, futur, Grèce urgence, vertige