

INTRODUCTION

Vertigo

Temporalities and Inconstancies



Vertigo. The first time. That first experience. Who could ever forget it? Mine was on the deck of a Brittany Ferries service from Plymouth to Roscoff. On stormy seas in gale-force winds, the 160-metre vessel being thrust back and forth by pounding waves, sea spray moistening the brow. Even my grandfather, a weathered old seadog born and raised in the fishing villages gracing the south coast of England, was feeling it. I was nine years old and this was hellish. But more than the overpowering urge to projectile vomit, I had found from the moment I had stepped on board in Plymouth harbour – on waters my grandfather ominously described as ‘a millpond’ – that I could not bear to look over the side railings. A terrifying compulsion to jump was mixed with a sincere dread of falling, a fear not so much of height, but of giving in to the desire to launch myself overboard. The then-gentle rhythmic rocking of the in-port ferry combined with the pulsating proximity/distance of the water below – something akin to the dolly zoom effect employed in Alfred Hitchcock’s *Vertigo* (1958) and later in films such as *Jaws* (1975) and *Goodfellas* (1990) – provided a cocktail of motions that induced a surreal sensation. Over the years, I would come to understand this perspective distortion as a form of motion sickness – nausea, dizziness, blurriness as I tried to maintain focus on an ever-shifting horizon.

The next occasion on which I encountered vertigo was far more intense. This was no variety of motion sickness, but a loss of a sense of historical trajectory – an unnerving disorientation in temporal perspective. I was fifteen years old when I returned from school one crisp and sunny December afternoon. A note, written in my mother’s hand, was taped to our front door. It directed me to check in with our neighbours on the opposite side of the

road on the run-of-the-mill suburban estate in Somerset where I grew up. I read that my brother, three years my junior, had been taken to hospital by ambulance earlier that day after returning home from a clarinet recital. This struck me as odd but probably nothing too much to worry about, given my mother's reassuring tone. After all, we had walked to school together that Monday morning, planning after-school activities and chatting about soccer (the relative virtues of Chelsea and Newcastle United, and our upcoming road trip to watch local side Taunton Town in the latter stages of the FA Vase competition). Without thinking much about it, I dutifully called on the neighbours, who told me that my brother, who had no history of the condition, had suffered a mild epileptic fit. I strolled back across the road and unlocked the front door. As I stepped into our garishly carpeted hallway, something simply did not feel right. An eerie sensation engulfed me and I shuddered to the core. In a time before mobile phones, I spent the next three hours in the house by myself, trying not to pay attention to the uncanny emptiness of the space I was in, which normally was alive at this time with noise from computer games and rustling packets of biscuits. At the same time, I was aware of an existential emptiness like the bottom had just dropped out of my world. Those three hours seemed like days, and twenty years on I can still recount the details of my minute-by-minute activities. Later, I would relate this episode to Ernesto de Martino's (2012) crisis of presence: a sense of detachment from time and space, suspension outside the Self, looking down from an outer-body perspective as from the top corner of the room; a period of hyperconsciousness where the background had been blurred out, bringing one's own existence into sharp relief. It is difficult to describe the combination of disorientation and clarity that this was a critical point in my life. The house was spiralling and I was the central point of inertia for its centrifugal force.

In an attempt to maintain my footing and reimmerge myself into the standard timeline, I tried to engage with the familiar. A popular children's television programme, *Blue Peter*; my father's oversized armchair that carried the unmistakable scent of a life of physical labour; a glass of supermarket-bought orange squash – all pivots holding in place the remnants of normality. But I still could not shake the feeling that the house was spinning around me, my stomach torn to shreds as though I had swallowed a box of razor blades. The chill of a haunting winter breeze gently rattled the back door, my ear honed in on the incessant squeaking of the family pet guinea pig. I was on pause, in a state of arrest, and the world around me was careening.

Suddenly the unnerving stillness was broken when the headlights of a car swung into the front driveway, piercing the darkness of the living room (to this day, I do not recall why I had not switched on the lights, for it was 6.30 PM in December), obscuring the faces of the presenters as the beams

reflected off the television screen. I turned my head sharply to see my grandparents' mauve Renault Espace people carrier. This was weird. Why my grandparents? They lived in another town an hour away. The world came flooding back in high-speed, breaking the exhausting stasis of the past hours, a pulsating zoom accompanied by a cinematic whooshing sound clicked me back to reality. From slow motion to fast forward. My brother was dead, aged twelve, after suffering a massive brain haemorrhage while in the bathroom after his music exam.

My grandmother, gasping for breath, spluttered: We had to rush to Fren-chay Hospital in Bristol to make a final decision on continued life-support. So that was why the lock on the bathroom door was hanging from a single thread of a precariously bent screw. I had noticed it there when I went up-stairs to change out of my school uniform, following routine, but I had not *seen* it. That was the stain on the carpet. All these were signs that the old world order had perished, that my childhood had been abruptly ruptured and that I had fallen into *a new time*. My time home alone was the transitional gap where vertigo had made itself known, unannounced. It was a timespace between orders where I could physically feel my former Self fragmenting and flittering away, as if on the currents of the evening wind. I knew myself as a suspenseful condition of incoherence. I had been trying to pivot on the familiar while pasts and futures rushed to a point of convergence. Three, two, one, fingers snap, you're back in the room.

On reflection, what I find striking is that it was those three hours, the minutes and seconds, that transformed my being, not the aftermath of coping with a tragic loss. A mature and well-grounded teenager, in the coming months and years I would find direction relatively easy to establish, focusing as I did on education, my partner at university and building a career. The story has been narrativized over the years, retold to loved ones, a social worker searching for trauma who identified me as cold and emotionally disengaged, even at times to a class of Master's students. Yet I am never fully able to capture the vertiginous atmosphere at home during those intermitting hours. I also question aspects of my recollection – was it really a sunny day, for I remember short-sleeve shirts in December? Surely not. Why did the neighbours seem so sure my brother had suffered an epileptic fit? Did they not see his condition on admittance to the ambulance? They were eyewitnesses, weren't they? Did my parents really not try to call me during those hours, even from a hospital phone? Did the welfare of their other son at a time of peril not cross their mind? Did they call and it was me who white-washed this from history? How selfish of me to even raise this here. What is more, *Blue Peter* finishes at 5.30 PM – always has done, always will do. Why then, in my mind's eye, does it still provide the background sights and sounds when my family pulled into the driveway at 6.30 PM? I swear it was

still on TV. Were my brother and I discussing soccer that morning or were we engaged in a bitter argument over the most endearing qualities of Sabrina Johnson, a girl in his class? Actually, I seem to remember him running on ahead. Was that because he saw a friend beckoning down the alley or, maybe, was I taunting him about his portly figure? Of course, despite being there, I shall never know. In affinity with literary great W.G. Sebald (1990), my manic and feverish musings on the mingling of personal facts and fictions leave me entranced by the tenacity and fallibility of memory. To this day, my parents' small upstairs bathroom sends my head into a spin, provoking flashbacks to episodes past and leaving me to ponder the what-might-have-been. *Blue Peter*, launched in 1958 and still running today, shall always be on air that December afternoon in the year 2000, locked into a timespace of eternal, shattering, eerie vertigo.

Indulgent though this initial intervention might seem, this book is constructed around such character-centric leads, building from individual experiences of vertigo to offer a broader framework for contemplating the affective structure of a Time of Crisis. I hope that the reader can relate to some aspects of my story, occasions when time becomes elastic, the world is spinning, there is an apparent shift in temporal rhythms, and material objects, sights and sounds become uncanny. 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*. Over the course of many years, friends and colleagues have related stories that resonate with the vertigo I felt during those three hours in December 2000. Of being caught in an earthquake that lasted just seconds of clock time, leaving behind not only the rubble of buildings but also the destruction of the Self, an indelible mark that led to a reassessment of person in the world.¹ Or perhaps the situation of living beside a loved one with terminal illness, stretching over many years. Reconsidering the temporal horizons of 'the future' as onrushing, expecting an imminent rupture and not knowing what comes after the hyperconscious present. With each new dawn, the carer might awake with a smack to the stomach that leaves them gasping for breath, head pounding, or perhaps they dully return to a moment of time held blessedly in abeyance. A student at an elite higher education institution recalling their experience of life in an East African refugee camp, their home destroyed by international conflict, the toil of existence during ten years spent in spatiotemporal limbo, now left second-guessing the vertiginous anguish of childhood interrupted.

My project here is to follow the trail of people who express having experienced vertigo as a profoundly personalized shift in sociality. My hope is

to provide a better ethnographic and analytic picture of that *something* that seems essential to understanding the affective structure of a Time of Crisis. As I approach it, a Time of Crisis may be individual, shared, societal or even global. It may last seconds, days, years – indeed, it may remain immeasurable partly or wholly in duration. Time maps are not my primary concern. The Greek economic crisis from which my ethnography is drawn stretches over more than a decade; within this period, there are, inevitably, innumerable bubbles of interrelated crises. Of course, people die outside wider societal crises such as austerity, war or pandemics (I do not compare their qualitative attributes or subjective takes on ‘severity’). Unemployment rises and falls and may touch one family multiple times before knocking on the door of their neighbours. A Time of Crisis welcomes and elaborates the discourse of fate, chance, luck – the roll of the dice into time and space. One person’s crisis is another’s opportunity, as evinced by international investment in Greece’s energy sector and foreign (particularly Russian) interest in buying up Greek property, including islands. Sharks will always circle. I do not claim to provide a smooth omniscient picture that can account for the experiences of all within the calendrical decade of Greek crisis and its ‘fallout’ (Masco 2015); timespaces overlap and interweave, and their constitutive stories may converge or meander down different alleyways. My contention is that a Time of Crisis, regardless of duration or scale, is a transformative epoch where things feel different, lives take on strange and unexpected trajectories, folds and loops, and there is often the sense of stuckedness or hyperconsciousness.² Nausea, dizziness, falling, a sense of splitting from the former Self. The affects that populate a Time of Crisis can peramble across the individual to the collective without contradiction³ – indeed, this is its definitive modus operandi as a structuring device that calls forth the necessity of naming it.

EPOCHS

A Time is Crisis in the context of Greece refers to a period that transcends the calendrical decade 2009–19. My primary focus throughout the ‘crisis years’ in Greece has been on temporality, or how everyday people have reconsidered and utilized their pasts, presents and futures to make sense of crisis. This forms the basis for my current thinking on vertigo as elemental to the affective structure of a Time of Crisis, so it is worth pausing to momentarily review. What I have termed ‘culturally proximate’ pasts as disparate as the era of Ottoman landlords in the 1800s, the Great Famine of 1941, the Second World War occupation, the 1967–74 dictatorship and the late 1990s stock market crash inform everyday coping strategies, the contextualization of increased social suffering and poverty, and facilitate futural

planning, hopes and expectations in crisis Greece (Knight 2012a, 2015; on repetition of past events, see Bandak (2019)). One of the profoundest effects of the ongoing crisis, I have argued, has been the way in which it has stimulated people to rethink their relationship to time. Borrowing poignant metaphors from my long-term muse, philosopher of science Michel Serres, one can imagine fragments of time getting caught in the filtration process of a percolator, thus remaining present and relevant, or people living among the usually unseen sediment being tossed and turned in the countercurrents beneath the deceptively placid flow of a powerful river (Serres and Latour 1995; Knight 2015: 8–9). The social topology of the past, present and future helps us make sense of how people live a period of rupture and social change (Knight 2016). As Charles Stewart and I have argued in our coauthored introduction to a collection entitled *Ethnographies of Austerity: Temporality, Crisis and Affect in Southern Europe*: ‘Modern linear historicism is often overridden (and overwritten) in such moments by other historicities showing that in crises, not only time, but history itself as an organizing structure and set of expectations, is up for grabs and can be refashioned according to new rules’ (Knight and Stewart 2016: 13).

In the same publication, Charles Stewart riffs on how moments of crisis invite critical reflection on commonly held assumptions of temporal (and historical) succession, which I believe illustrates my thinking on how crisis transforms perspectives on time and leads nicely into the concept of vertigo presented in this book.⁴ Referring to a scene in Lee Katzin’s 1971 film *Le Mans*, Stewart recites how the race car driver played by Steve McQueen realizes he has to avoid a slow-moving car. The scene of the car careening, skidding and crashing into the guardrail is shot in a mixture of slow motion and regular speed, flashing back and forth to close-ups of McQueen’s face. Lying stunned, in a state of shock and spiralling confusion, his mind flits back and forth from the present to the moment he first perceived danger, through all the stages of the event. At this point, the past, present and future are simultaneously caught in processes of re-evaluation and projection, a dizziness of swimming, perhaps drowning, in the fluidity of time (Knight and Stewart 2016: 3). McQueen’s character is searching the archives of time to make sense of the vertiginous event that just smashed his world, yet his head is still spinning from the impact and it is impossible to focus long enough to establish a sequence of happenings. The current project on vertigo goes beyond previous concerns with temporal topologies with markedly historical trajectories and is intended as more than simply another ethnographic analysis of the financial crisis. The venture, I hope, is far more ambitious in accounting for the existential, material and temporal qualities of disorientation that I call ‘vertigo’ that, after a *Le Mans*-style smash to shake the world, form an intricate and inalienable part of the affective structure of an epochal Time of Crisis.

In a recent publication, 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 (Bryant and Knight 2019). At the communal level, timespaces and their affects are often described in the vernacular in epochal terms – a Time of War, a Time of Prosperity, a Time of Brexit. For instance, living in the Time of Brexit may evoke nausea, panic and apocalyptic speculation for the Remainer. A Time of Peace in the Middle East may be eaten into by the anticipation of imminent displacement and violence (Hermez 2012, 2017). Epochal thinking may transcend boundaries of cities and nations, as in the collective sense that the Time of Trump has beckoned in a new era of politics with global consequences and a new set of catchwords and imaginaries, or the shared hope expressed by people across austerity-ravished Europe when the radical left came to power in Greece in early 2015.

A Time of Crisis, then, has a set of shareable vernaculars, affects and orientations that shape everyday action, giving the timespace its own rhythm, atmosphere and *feel*. The affective structure presents people with projects, recommended paths and futures, guiding or informing practice within the timespace without forgoing novelty. Vertigo, I propose, is an integral element of the affective structure of a Time of Crisis. In Greece, the Time of Crisis is marked by existential ambiguity, multiple forms of emptiness, nausea and anxiety, and eerie feelings of life suspended in captivity. Paralysis, stasis, what Henrik Vigh (2008: 17) terms ‘progressless motion’, 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. It is partially this condition of permanent ‘not-quite’ and ‘almostness’ that gives this timespace its vertiginous edge, proliferating as it does in the transitional gap between the destruction of the old world order and the not-quite emergence of the new (Dzenovska 2020; Shir-Vertesh and Markowitz 2015).

Going back to popular culture to elucidate, the movement towards a theory of vertigo is captured nicely in the opening credits to the original series of the American television series *Hawaii Five-O* (1968–80), where the camera shudders as it approaches a cityscape from above the crashing waves of the Pacific Ocean. The camera switches between flashing images (the relevant ‘bits’ or ‘events’ caught in Serres’ percolation) before juddering, almost pulsating towards 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 captivated 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.

Epochal thinking frames perceived differences in the temporalizing of human activity, expressing an apparent shortening or lengthening of the relationship between past, present and future in our own lives. Learning to live with drastically decreased household income, policy attacks on health-care, energy and property rights has impacted people in different ways. The Time of Crisis in Greece and beyond has become a timespace of trying to cope with unknowingness, attempting to familiarize the unforeseen, and reconciling broken dreams of futures past. ‘Crisis time’ has burst through the boundaries of the event itself (the 2009–19 economic crisis) and the fall-out continues to order everyday life. As such, crisis has become both a form of governance (Dole et al. 2015) and a rhetorical narrative characterizing and driving our times (Roitman 2014; cf. Vigh 2008). As Christopher Dole, Robert Hayashi, Andrew Poe, Austin Sarat and Boris Wolfson have argued in their landmark multidisciplinary book *The Time of Catastrophe* (2015), the temporality of crisis should not be confined to solely the ‘rupturing of the temporal continuity of history that heralds a destructive and unexpected ending’ (Dole et al. 2015: 7; see also Holbraad, Kapferer and Sauma 2019). Instead, the timespace of crisis continues to order the mundane far beyond the event, providing what Serres (1995) might term the ‘background noise’ of everyday life that parasitically preys on its subjects, inducing vertigo at every turn. Populating the affective structure of a Time of Crisis, of which vertigo is a fundamental constitutive, is a central aim of this book.

WHIRLPOOLS

A crisis of presence in de Martino’s sense goes some way towards accounting for the vertigo of a Time of Crisis, in that individuals are detached from normalized rhythms of time and history. The loss of established historical and cultural reference points through displacement and distress undermine the presence of the Self, leading to a growing sense of disorientation, as I recall experiencing while waiting for news on my brother’s condition. De Martino’s ‘deep anthropological perspective on precarity’ relates to social and existential experiences of subjugation, migration and alienation, crises that undermine the foundations of intersubjective personhood (Farnetti and Stewart 2012: 432). A timespace of crisis, momentary or chronic, is a disorienting place 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 polarized in an undecided critical moment of his own personal history. (2012 [1956]: 435)

In my opening narrative vignette, I reflect on the uncanny timespace enveloping a critical event, the vertiginous atmosphere, and feeling that the world around is operating at a different speed. Not fully 'being there' is something most of us can relate to at certain times in our lives, where we become numb to the world and to ourselves. The losing of Self and world, for de Martino, signals existential precariousness where the movement outside of 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 a theme that comes up throughout this book, where unknowingness of Self and world creates anguish, described in narrative as anxiety, emptiness, yearning and entrapment. For my interlocutors, the Time of Crisis has a sense of detachment where normal rhythms of historical becoming are under scrutiny; 'the givens of the past and present *should* become something novel in the future' but instead forge messy trajectories or are indefinitely ruptured (Farnetti and Stewart 2012: 432). A Time of Crisis fractures timelines of anticipated historical succession and the consuming anguish 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 not being able to overcome crisis – subsequently creating an existential crisis – and of the future apparently never emerging as once expected or planned leads to feelings of being trapped in a temporal spin-cycle or of falling through the cracks in time. Increased anxiety towards Self and society based on the vertigo of captivity, of never emerging, is a recurrent theme in crisis narratives. There is a constant belief that other worlds and other futures are passing by, are inaccessible and are defeated by entrapment in chronic crisis. As will become apparent in the subsequent chapters, there is regular reference to how crisis is indexed by alienation from Self and so-

ciety; a Time of Crisis oversees the destruction of cultural life and human history as it *should* be written (de Martino 2012 [1956]: 440).

The anguish of dehistoricization, or removal from normalized temporal and historical succession, triggers the affects of vertigo. Historical discontinuity stimulates vertiginous movement into a sublimely new timespace. 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 marked by a double-edged fear of falling and a wish to jump. In my reading, Runia makes two key points. First, at moments of historical rupture, where we may claim a radical new timespace has opened up, people find themselves standing on the edge of time. Teetering on the verge 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 is similar to Marcel Proust’s (1992) description of the giddiness experienced when balancing on high slits that never stop growing, year upon year, as time accumulates. The sensation of being ‘miles high’ 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). Point two of Runia’s thesis contends that some people may embrace vertigo, and this is a decision to be applauded. Indeed, giving in to the vertiginous is a positive choice, since these pioneers will forge ahead in creating a new era of distinct history. The destruction of vertigo, and the emptiness of the vortex, also holds latent possibility (Dzenovska 2020; Dzenovska and Knight 2020). Runia’s ideas on ‘the vertiginous urge to commit history’ are highly thought-provoking and ultimately helpful in building a theory of vertigo and crisis. But they are not wholly unproblematic. Let us pause to consider them here.

Like de Martino, Runia is interested in the connection between historical rupture and loss of presence, and sees vertigo as a state of possession that stalks this transitional landscape. It is productive to take the basis of his argument from an observation he makes on French philosopher and sociologist Roger Caillois’ thesis on games. Here, the destruction/possibility duality is at its clearest. *Ilinx* (the Greek for ‘whirlpool’) is a genre of gaming (such as racing videogames) that deliberately distorts perception by pursuing vertigo and incorporates an element of creative inevitability that vertigo will eventually consume the player. Caillois explains these games 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 (Caillois 2001: 24). My initial vertigo onboard Brittany Ferries was caused by the multiple motions of the voyage – up and down, port to starboard – provoking physical sickness that was multiplied when I looked over the side of the boat to the depths of the ocean below. At that moment, another form of vertigo kicked in, an internal battle over whether to jump based on surrendering to an overpowering sensation that devoured body and mind. 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.

Vertigo in this incarnation entails the annihilation of the stability of perception linked to timespaces of ‘disorder and destruction’ (Runia 2010: 14; see also Runia 2014: 107). The inherent destructive order of vertigo distinguishes it from the fear of heights and the fear of falling. Runia suggests that perception distortion – perhaps, for the purposes of our argument, crisis rupturing the unquestioned continuity between past, present and future – triggers the wish to jump and the desire to destroy. The sense that the emptiness has to be filled may mushroom into something so overwhelming, so oppressive that people begin to fear that they will not be able to resist (Runia 2014: 114–15; Caillois 2001: 23–26). Vertigo is, then, indicative of violent suspense. This approach resonates with a key argument on vertigo and emptiness that is the subject of Chapter 4 of this book, namely that at a Time of Crisis, lives are held in suspension, positioned in the transitional timespace between the destruction of old world orders and the emergence of new, something I experienced in the vertiginous three hours waiting for news on my brother’s hospitalization. The timespace of emptiness and suspension, as scholars such as Dace Dzenovska (2019, 2020) have argued, simultaneously holds the ruins of futures past and innumerable possibilities of the not-yet. When looking over the cliff-edge into the emptiness, or vortex, of uncertain and unexpected futures, the vertiginous possesses both creative and destructive potentiality (Manley 2019a).

The second of Runia’s contentions relates to vertigo as a positive state, for he argues that the truly courageous take the jump and create history,

leaving behind the familiar to selflessly cross the frontier of time. His stance is linked to an approach to presence that he describes as follows: ‘Presence is the desire to share in the awesome reality of people, things, events, and feelings, coupled to a vertiginous urge to taste the fact that awesomely real people, things, events, and feelings can awesomely suddenly cease to exist’ (2014: 53–54). The human condition is perverse in its desire for continuity and familiarity alongside discontinuity and surprise. This line of argument resonates with Serres’ reflections in his aptly titled *Times of Crisis*. Serres borrows from medicine when declaring the crisis moment to be a point where existence is endangered as a person or organism confronts a growing infection. At this critical ‘fork in the road’, a life-or-death decision must be made (2014: xii). If the crisis moment is survived, then the person should establish a new path since reverting to the previous condition would imply a loop-like return to the original course leading to crisis. The choice of reverting to past trajectories or forging anew is the vertiginous cliff-top scenario that propels the person either towards death or something innovatively new. Many fear the obligation to invent, says Serres, yet others have the audacity to delight in the life-altering challenges of crisis. For Runia, the pursuit of the awesomely new is enabled by stepping off the cliff-edge into the vortex of the unforeseen. He ultimately states that if people fail to embrace vertigo, the future will always have the ‘same blank implacable face; in reality everything ultimately has its way if just left alone’ (2014: 115). The future will be unending cyclical crisis without emergent novelty.

It is at this point where our paths diverge. I could – actually I have – (co)written a whole other book that would contest Runia’s forgoing 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). In fact, I find Søren Kierkegaard’s reading of destruction/creativity in the vertiginous moment helpful here, although his own preoccupation with freedom of choice – to stand ground or fall – is somewhat distracting for our context of chronic crisis.⁵ 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 again, 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, triggers vertigo. This anxiety over possibilities and realizing 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)

Kierkegaard insists that the possible creativity of vertigo depends on how the condition is navigated and upon 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 takes us back from the do-or-die ledge that Runia proposes, where the courageous leap to create history almost comes across as an obligation, the next logical step, to create history for some form of collective good. However, Kierkegaard levels the playing field slightly, acknowledging that for many people, the danger of dizziness is experienced as overpowering, as something that can overwhelm and seize the individual – this seems to be Serres’ stance when saying some people fear the precariousness of crisis, while others delight in the challenge to invent. The more creative the individual, the more anxiety they feel and the more creative potentiality they possess. If people can navigate vertigo ‘correctly’, Kierkegaard postulates, 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 chronic 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 broad brushstrokes, throughout this book, the stories of vertiginous life are ones of struggle, some of conquest, nearly all with the underlying premise that people are being forced to search for alternatives to once-familiar livelihoods. It is rare to find accounts where vertigo could be construed as a positive or even a creative state of existence. At times, people may give in to vertigo, accepting or resigning themselves to the uncomfortable comfort of the crisis status quo, as in Chapter 5, where we meet people who could be said to identify with their captors in a form of so-

cietal Stockholm Syndrome. A creative engagement with vertigo is perhaps most evident on occasions where people have relocated to once-abandoned ancestral homes in search of stability in the simplicity of ‘village life’, as discussed in Chapter 2, but this would still be rendered as a ‘return to pasts’ in Runia’s (or indeed Proust’s) terms, thus tempering novelty. Still further, the fleeing from crisis Greece evinced in the so-called ‘brain-drain’, a topic covered in Chapter 4, could be construed as a leap into the vortex of the unknown to create new life through a clean break, in Runia’s words, ‘a strategy for escaping from an unbearable tension by doing something – by breaking apart from what one used to cherish, by eating the apple, by committing an “original sin”’ (2010: 14). There is individual freedom to run, to relocate, but people themselves would usually class this as an attempt to escape the vertiginous state of crisis Greece. The leap of faith here is to distance oneself from dizziness, to sooth anxiety, the creation of a new life in a new place where emergent possibility is a side-effect of absconding from crisis. Real life and the motives behind such decisions in a Time of Crisis are far murkier than portrayed in the philosophies of Runia or Kierkegaard. Succumbing to the vertiginous struggle is, for me, more a sign of exhaustion with a decade of crisis or a coping mechanism rather than a courageous leap into the abyss to forge new history or an awesome step beyond the status quo towards 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 and beliefs) with the choppy emergence of new social, political and aesthetic orders. This is not to do a disservice to the research participants; rather, it is to acknowledge the idealism of philosophies that propagate how vertiginous struggle should be embraced. Kierkegaard seems to concede this when noting that vertigo can be expressed in muteness as well as a scream, meaning that the subtle everyday struggles with vertigo are as intense and significant as sublime statements and grand gestures of history-making.⁶ In my reading of vertiginous lives, loss is not generally regarded as positive or perceived as a pioneering leap benefiting the collective. The abyss people are staring into is one of deep, dark, incredibly daunting loss.

Loss is central to the all-encompassing power of vertigo in Richard Goodkin’s (1987: 1173) comparative reading of Proust and Hitchcock, ‘the incongruity of feeling one’s finite being, limited in time and space, in the dizzying presence of the infinite, the abyss’.⁷ Vertigo surfaces in the hidden, unexpected and lost elements of pasts and futures, in the gaps between orders and while searching for meaning in the limits of the unforeseen (‘surprise’ in Runia’s terms). Obsession with the temporal in Goodkin’s interpretation of Proust is in extracting its riches, operating at what Goodkin (1987: 1173) considers the ‘highest expression of [the] mortal state’. The many years of

temporal baggage – what Serres (1995) calls the ‘cartload of bricks’ being dragged into the future – creates a sense that freedom can only be found when cutting loose historical burden, yet this is accompanied by the fear of forgetting and deleting the past (Proust 1992: 1047). Hitchcock’s *Vertigo* also explores the limits of mortal existence and the experience of the infinite, the sensation that the mortal and the timeless, or perhaps man and God, belong to two radically incompatible worlds. The protagonist’s vertigo ceases when he surrenders any ambition of joining his love interests in the world of immortality (death) and mortality (together in ‘the real world’) by letting go of any future attempt to bridge the finite and the infinite (Goodkin 1987: 1176). In layperson’s terms, vertigo ceases upon the acceptance of loss, being primarily evident at the point of contest, of coming to terms, and in moments of (in)decision while balanced on the edge of the *ilinx*.

Proust’s giddiness, the dizziness of Kierkegaard, the nausea of Sartre, de Martino’s anguish, Runia’s falling – in all, vertigo signals the struggle between person and world, between the freedom of action and suppression of the Self, between irreparable loss and creative potentialities, taking place in a transitional timespace of unforeseen rupture and change. In the local vernaculars contained in this manuscript, people tend to shift between these terms of affect interchangeably, identifying little difference at an experiential level. Yet in the pages of philosophical debate, scholars go to great lengths to establish heuristic distinction. It has not been, and will not be, my intention here to present each and every one in turn, since the purpose here is to provide ethnographically led theory on a timespace of vertiginous precarity and change. At points in this book, the analysis turns to nausea, loss, dizziness and the vertigo of existential and material emptiness, which are treated according to the core writings on these themes. Perhaps Caillois’ observations on amusement park rides are a revealing place to conclude for now, since he scales up vertigo to the point of being a potential long-term social structure. While Runia and Kierkegaard emphasize 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’ (Caillois 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 social-political-historical milieu. ‘The faithful do not agree to be entirely captivated’, nor do they deem to be without danger the vertiginous seizure.

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’ (Caillois 2001: 141) can lead to a dangerous vicious circle of vertigo, life inside the *ilinx*, clawing away at body and mind, from which there is no escape.

SCALES

The following chapters aim to provide standalone theoretical insights on the affects and resonances of vertigo, while producing an overarching framework to better understand lives in crisis. As such, the chapters work on multiple scales, each focusing on an individual whose life I have encountered at various stages throughout nearly two decades of ethnographic and archival research in Greece. It is my intention to build on the thick ethnographic description of these individuals in order to draw out key conceptual points on how people experience multiple forms of vertigo at the heart of their lives in chronic crisis. The topics tackled may seem disparate – unknowingness, ruination, the elsewhen, emptiness and suspension, and captivity – each forming as they do the backbone of individual chapters that can be read as a commentary on vertigo and crisis in their own right. Rather than adopting (and thus being tied to) a single approach from a specific school, I draw on literature from fields as diverse as existentialism, the philosophy of time, speculative fiction, film studies and material culture to unpack these themes. This epistemological diversity is essential to best account for the nuances of vertigo being portrayed by each person in my story.

Throughout the book three pins of vertigo become apparent: the existential (exemplified in Chapter 1), the material (Chapter 2) and the temporal (Chapter 3). Although not mutually exclusive and often becoming indistinguishable from one another, each chapter foregrounds one of these essential nodes in the delicate intricacy of vertiginous life. As one might expect, the existential depicts struggles with the Self, the fissures created in personhood as lives are ruptured, torn apart, scattered in the wind and stitched back together. The loss of dreams, livelihoods and loved ones to the violence of crisis has left an indelible mark on the essence of being and becoming. Trying to reconcile with former Selves is an undercurrent churning up the sediment underlying many narratives in this book. Taken to the extreme, on occasion the question ‘what is the point of existence?’ is posed as people grapple with a sense of futility in a world of unforeseen violence that has decimated public and private domains.

Materiality takes centre stage in the vertigo felt by people forced to relocate to unknown or unfamiliar physical environments, including villages abandoned since the Greek Civil War in the 1940s. Displacement fosters vertigo engrained in stone walls, derelict homes, and objects and environments drenched in occasionally uneasy historicity. Displacement is at once spatial and temporal. Simply resting a hand on the cold stone of a crumbling schoolhouse transports one on a journey of intense and unexpected topological connectivity, events and lives frantically grasping through the fog of decades of displaced space and time. The extraordinary is often embedded in the materiality of the mundane, confusing trajectories of the ultramodern and traditional, providing a gateway to entangled pasts and catapulting into futures of accelerating global abstraction (Avieli and Sermoneta 2020).

In some instances, the forced relocation is across national borders where families are divided and careers are remade in far-off lands. Further, interaction with changing technological landscapes triggers questions about temporal trajectories. Photovoltaic panels have become a common sight in the crisis years as part of a 'saviour' economic programme and reference futuristic, ultramodern, European, clean, green sustainability. Yet the engineers who install the infrastructure heat their own homes with wood-burning stoves, which speak to traditional, pre-modern pasts, reminiscent of village life and peasantry. For me, the materiality of my parents' bathroom still triggers vertigo, a portal to the affective past and a timespace of dizzying personal inquisition.

Underpinning all thematics and theoretical excursions is my original concern with temporal disorientation, or how crisis muddles trajectories that would have once been undisputed. Time's arrow, so often taken for granted as the engine house driving social and material progression in the post-Enlightenment West, has become noticeably skewed. The cartoon cuckoo clock has been smacked with an Acme Corporation crisis-branded mallet and the springs are well and truly hanging out, on display for all to see. Temporal vertigo ducks and dives its way throughout the forthcoming pages, weaving together discussions on personal unknowingness, changes to physical and material environment, concepts of emptiness and suspension, and more overarching concerns about the affective structure of a Time of Crisis. People reflect on how crisis has sparked feelings of falling back through the past to a timespace once lost to history, of being trapped in an elongated inescapable present, of being written out of futures once seen as birthrights. Time may be said to be inverted, spiralling, repeating or standing still.⁸ Often, pasts are onrushing as spatiotemporal arrangements considered to be constitutive of bygone eras resurface. Future-oriented desires and expectations are put on hold. As the rupture of crisis becomes a chronic

state, the uncanny present transforms from a timespace of suffocating captivity into one of uncomfortable comfort with the recognizable status quo. In an era of crisis, as Carol Greenhouse (2019: 86–87) proposes, the move away from inevitability associated with uninterrupted linear progression delivers heat to time.

The richness of ethnographic description on display calls for a somewhat messy analysis that follows the intricate narrative strands and attempts to do justice to the fifty shades of vertigo. There is no single model that captures all local nuances and ‘modes of knowing’ vertigo (Masco 2006: 37). Yet the final two body chapters go some way towards drawing things together in producing an ethnographic theory of vertigo that forms part of the predominant affective structure of chronic crisis beyond the borders of Greece. First by presenting the case of lives suspended in the transitional emptiness between multiple crises (Greece and Brexit Britain), something I propose is a feature of European late modernity, and then through a theory of societal Stockholm Syndrome where people ultimately become accustomed to the vertigo of crisis, I argue for the vertiginous as a marker of our times. Ultimately, it is my contention that vertigo crosses and weaves through domains of life to become one of the foremost ways through which people experience not only crisis but also the everyday axioms of violence to which we have been exposed in the early part of the twenty-first century (Pipyrou and Sorge n.d.).

The analytical and epistemological angles are punctuated by vertigo as affect or, more precisely, the multiple affects of vertigo. Nausea, dizziness, the sense of falling or spiralling out of control, loss, déjà vu and repetition, confusion as to where and when one is living, and entrapment and captivity all surface at regular intervals. Vertigo is sometimes easy to pin down linguistically and through local vernaculars. People talk about ‘feelings’ and describe the textures of vertigo (‘it is like ...’). Particularly striking are the innumerable occasions when people describe nausea and dizziness when being hit by the often-unforeseen microruptures to everyday life constitutive in the small-print of crisis – when discovering that the pension pot is running low, when an employer announces pending redundancies or when political decisions, such as those regarding citizens’ rights or capital controls, scupper the most carefully made plans. These utterances feed directly from a more generic atmosphere of anxiety about the curtailing of personal freedoms at the hands of an Other beyond accountability, as well as the heightened uncertainty concerning the form and substance of a society emerging from chronic crisis. As such, vertigo transcends easily identifiable words and phrases, experienced as an atmosphere, or in Gernot Böhme’s words, ‘an aesthetic that contains inescapable affective and emotional resonances’, a timespace ‘with a certain tone of feeling’ (Böhme 2017: 12). Vertigo is that

‘something in the air’, a cluster of ‘free floating’ intense affects, identifiable through association with a repetitive narrative trend (Lepselter 2016: 2).

Inspiration for an approach that foregrounds the atmosphere or at times intangible *something* running through individual narratives of the uncanny comes from the quite masterful work of Susan Lepselter. Exploring the resonance of stories of abduction and captivity in various genres of American culture, Lepselter frames her project as follows:

Though it is never a one-to-one kind of symbol, the accumulated stories that point to a forgotten *something* do suggest what that something might be. There are stories of ... multiple ways that a life is disappointed by master narratives of progress and success. There are stories ... resonating in scattered and displaced effects within everyday life. (2016: 19)

Lepselter advocates the reading of parallels between stories, some spoken and others seeming to affectively resonate with master narratives (or inversions) of daily life in a specific timespace (a similar approach is taken by Joseph Masco (2006) on drawing together diverse narratives of the nuclear uncanny). For Lepselter, the timespace is that of post-Cold War US society that is still coming to terms with nuclear fear, federal government conspiracy, medical developments such as cloning and surrogacy, and the hauntings of slavery. For me, the timespace is crisis Greece, where the fallout of over a decade of economic and political reform has infiltrated almost every area of life. Master narratives of progression, European belonging and mythologies of civilization have been challenged, perhaps defeated, and an overpowering feeling of disorientation prevails. It is the parallels and resemblances between stories of diverse realms of human experience that, accumulated over an extended period, must be recognized as pointing towards the same *something* (Lepselter 2016: 19). Put simply, in crisis Greece, people regularly seem to talk of the same *thing*, a life in an uncanny timespace where they experience a sense of vertigo. Sometimes the researcher must make the connections themselves, based on a combination of conjecture and long-term field experience; the reading of an atmosphere or aesthetic of vertigo that runs through individual stories that leaves one gasping for breath and clutching at straws to piece together the significance of the unsaid (on beyond-verbal communication of critical events, see Pipyrou (2020) and Kidron (2020)). At other times, people directly verbalize the vertiginous, most readily through everyday affects of nausea, dizziness, anxiety and a sense of life spiralling out of control. This book examines the intense elaboration of vertigo as it moves from a fleeting sensation to the centre of life in chronic crisis.

In framing my exploration of vertigo and crisis, it would be easy to simply replace Lepselter’s ‘resonance’ with ‘vertigo’ in the following passage. For

a moment, I ask the reader to indulge me, for I believe it helps clarify my intentions:

And, I argue, the resonance [vertigo] itself becomes another story. The sense of uncanny resonance [vertigo] becomes an expressive modality, a vernacular theory, a way of seeing the world, a intimation of the way *it all makes sense* ... [it is] the intensification produced by overlapping, back and forth call signs from various discourses. The uncanny narratives here acquire affect, intensity, and meaning through their resonance and dissonance with other more familiar cultural narratives ... Resonance [vertigo] describes the social, affective, and aesthetic dimension of a perspective based on apophenia, finding connections between signs, and often understanding that process as political. Here those connections are based on resemblance and repetition. (Lepseter 2016: 4)

In the field of critical literature, an excellent example of the disorienting narrative technique can be found in the writing of W.G. Sebald. Particularly in his 1990 work *Vertigo*, Sebald combines history and travelogue, memoir and fiction to take the audience on a disarming and perplexing literary journey. The reader is left second-guessing the connections between narratives while knowing that *something* is holding the story together. Searching in the gaps of Sebald's haunted ramblings, one is left wallowing in the nauseating uncertainty of how the prose *should* be read and where one might next be flung. *Crisis Greece* reads as a Sebald novel filled with expressive resonances where vertigo has become a storyline in its own right through the multiple criss-crossing of affects, aesthetics and political processes that produce an atmosphere of that *something* that repetitively surfaces in life narratives. The topological connections may sometimes be neatly on display and other times seemingly distant from each other, and in constant distorted movement vis-à-vis the emergent master narratives of progression and consolidation. The multiple shades, rhythms and forms of vertigo express what it is to live in a Time of Crisis. As a marker of the timespace of chronic crisis, vertigo is, for me, *the* vernacular that runs through cultural arenas as diverse as political association, workplace precarity, migration and displacement, environmental ethics, relations with extended family, inheritance practice and so much more. The resemblance and repetition of words, decisions, feelings and tones of interaction point to vertigo as the expressive modality of seeing and making sense of a world in crisis. It is the themes that echo and multiply within this modality that make up this book.

It is getting late and the sun is rising below the horizon on this English summer morning in December. I adorn myself in a short-sleeve shirt and step out into the snow. I can hear my telephone ringing vociferously on silent mode as my mother tries *not* to contact me. I see my brother walking next to me way off in the distance. You join me. We ride in the back

of an NHS ambulance aboard the mid-morning 7 PM Brittany Ferries service from Plymouth to Sto'Vo'Kor that left port in 1994 and continues its eternal crossing. On tempestuous seas, our voyage scythes its way through the thickening haze of contradiction, paradox and perplexity that is vertigo. The nauseating motions – pulsating, shuddering, falling, treading water and screeching to a halt – distort our perception of time, materiality and existence itself. The reflections off the shimmering black ocean blind us, leading us to question what we really saw back there, ahead in the haunting ghostly abyss. *Titanic*. What is known is that the unknown out here is familiar, the unforeseen expected.

NOTES

1. Dimitris Papanikolaou (2011) has noted how the Greek economic crisis has been likened to an 'earthquake', a writer telling him 'we are in the middle of an earthquake; there is no time to pause and think how we scream about it'. He uses this analogy to discuss how the crisis is a critical point in the 'disturbance' of linear genealogies of the past.
2. Unthinkable events often proliferate narratives of unthinkability, meaning that people cannot think about anything else (Masco 2006: 4).
3. Writing on crisis as an endemic condition, Vigh (2008: 13) suggests that crisis can be divided into two interrelated dimensions, namely social and personal crisis. In fact, he argues that understanding crisis as context allows us to see 'the contexts in crisis' and to analyse 'crisis embedded in crisis'.
4. Although the article is coauthored, this addition should rightly be attributed to Stewart.
5. Michael Jackson (1998: 171) suggests that when struck by crisis, 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.
6. The 'unthinkability' of events, Joseph Masco (2006: 3) tells us, takes them outside of language and comprehensibility, placing them 'into the realm of the sublime'.
7. Loss takes centre stage in Katalin Makkai's (2013) prominent commentary on *Vertigo*. For Makkai, one of the internal workings of the film is to awaken an uncanny sense of loss alongside desire. The first viewing reaches into the future. The second is not a simple re-viewing of the first object. The film is lost on both occasions despite the viewer's desire to both comprehend and maintain the temporal mystique of the storyline. When the audience realizes that there will never be another first-time viewing of the film, hence the trickery of the plotline will never again be in the realm of the unknown, there is a lingering disturbing feeling of never having had possession of the lost object (the film) in the first place. There opens 'a blank, a hole, or an abyss' and a sense that the film eludes possession. The film also eludes presentness, she continues, 'it is, or I am, always too late or too early ... always ahead or behind [the storyline]'. And this is the feeling that the film thematizes (2013: 140). The film will always remain irrevocably lost in time, out of reach.

8. In an argument calling attention to repetition and return, Andreas Bandak looks beyond the singular event. He discusses how some events are not left in the past, but tie together landscapes of imagination, fear and haunting, as well as of resilience and responsibility, for futural purposes. The recurrence of events at different scales has the 'potential to tie down whole communities' (Bandak 2019: 190). Events thus play out in history, in memory, and as an ongoing and recurring possibility. His paper is part of a special collection on repetition (Bandak and Coleman 2019).