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On critical times: return, repetition, and the uncanny present

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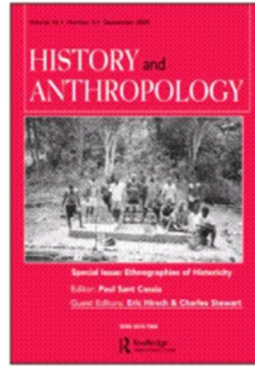
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On Critical Times: Return, Repetition, and the Uncanny Present

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On Critical Times:**Return, Repetition, and the Uncanny Present***Rebecca Bryant**London School of Economics and Political Science*

What does it mean to live in a time of crisis? What marks this experience of temporality as distinct? What makes it different, for instance, from a time of war? A time of prosperity? A time of peace? Are there identifiable features of such experiences of time that are especially relevant for anthropology?

This article posits that the vernacular understanding of crisis as existing in a different sort of time needs to be mined for what it tells us about social perceptions of temporality. I expand an argument begun elsewhere (Bryant 2012), in which I examine what it means to live in a 'time of war', and I ask here what temporal features we may identify that lead our interlocutors to see certain periods as 'times of crisis.' In particular, I propose here a notion that I call the *uncanny present* to refer to a particular sense of present-ness produced by futures that cannot be anticipated. The uncanny present, as I use it here, refers to moments when the present that I usually do not perceive as such becomes anxiously visceral to us as a moment caught between past and future.

One may argue that 'crisis' is an analytically crippled term, insofar as uses of the word have proliferated to the extent of eviscerating it of meaning. These days, everything seems to be a crisis. We not only have crises of faith or crises of state, but also the crisis of

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3 crisis, or the anticipation of a possible crisis that itself becomes a supposed crisis. In
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5 assessing this proliferation of use, Janet Roitman cogently argues that ‘crisis serves as a
6
7 transcendental placeholder because it is a means for signifying contingency’ (Roitman 2014:
8
9 loc 320). In Roitman’s reading, an event becomes a crisis because it shows that the world
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11 could be otherwise. The implication of this for Roitman, however, is that we must have a
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13 particular philosophy of history in order to see certain moments as decisive turning points,
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15 and much of the attention of her meta-narrative focuses on the effects of discursive claims to
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17 crisis.
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21 This paper brackets the philosophy of history and instead focuses on the particular
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23 experience of temporality that people express when they use the word ‘crisis.’ It begins from
24
25 the assumption that radical contingency seems to most people to be a departure from the
26
27 norm, and the word ‘crisis’ is used to reflect such a divergence from temporally ‘normal’ life.
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29 I do not assume that people have a very well-articulated understanding of what ‘normal’ time
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31 would or should be, except that it surely involves expectations of the future.
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35 I examine below several events that friends and interlocutors in Cyprus perceived to
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37 be ‘crises’, and I ask what sort of temporal experience these moments share. I describe these
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39 moments as *critical thresholds* to emphasize the sense of these moments as both decisive and
40
41 liminal, or outside ordinary time. As Roitman argues, they emerge from the sense that things
42
43 could be otherwise, but I want to suggest that one of the reasons they become moments that
44
45 we call ‘crisis’ is because they bring the present-ness of the present to the fore. In such
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47 moments, we become aware of the present that ordinarily slips out of consciousness, and it
48
49 becomes something viscerally present, a point hovering between past and future. We acquire
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51 a sense that what we do in this present will be decisive for both the past and the future, giving
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53 to the present the status of a threshold.
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3 In what follows, I will first discuss critical thresholds as moments produced from
4 what I call the *uncanny present*. Crisis, I claim, becomes such precisely because it brings the
5 present into consciousness, creating an awareness or perception of *present-ness* that we do
6 not normally have. Unlike theories of temporality that see the present as wedges or slices of
7 time that may be cut ever thinner, I argue that phenomenologically there is actually no
8 moment that I perceive as 'the present', just as there is no contained space that I perceive as
9 'here'. The present of crisis, I contend, is one when the present is perceived as such.
10 However, that perception is also uncanny in the original sense used by Freud, to refer to the
11 familiar made strange. As one commentator remarked, the uncanny 'derives its terror not
12 from something externally alien or unknown but—on the contrary—from something
13 strangely familiar which defeats our efforts to separate ourselves from it' (Morris 1985: 307).
14 In this case, what is brought to the fore and made unfamiliar is *present-ness* itself.

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30 I then, second, argue that what makes the present uncannily present in moments of
31 crisis is the inability to anticipate the future. As I will try to show, the present becomes
32 uncanny precisely because of the severing or questioning of the links between past, present
33 and future that ordinarily allow us to *anticipate*. Taking a page from Husserl, I argue that we
34 do more than simply intellectually expect the future; we engage in anticipation as a
35 comportment and mode of action oriented towards the future. In the instances that I will
36 examine here, the uncanny present appears to portend the future to the extent that it is either a
37 repetition or a return of the past. That past, however, is not any past but is the traumatic past
38 that here had been retained as a visceral experience of the relationship between past and
39 future that emerges at particular moments. What is important to create anticipation, I attempt
40 to show, is not only the use of signs, symbols and stories from the past but rather the bodily
41 and visceral responses that constitute anticipation.
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Critical thresholds and the uncanny present

I first began thinking about temporalities of crisis while writing about the anxieties of an opening. I had initially gone to Cyprus for research in the early 1990's, when the island was firmly divided into a Greek Cypriot South and Turkish Cypriot North by a ceasefire line protected by around 30,000 Turkish soldiers. Crossing was forbidden to Cypriots, who had begun to develop quite different worlds on either side of that line and for the most part were ignorant about goings-on on the 'other side.' The by-then twenty-year division of the island and stalled negotiations to resolve that division made time seem 'stuck'. Newspapers seemed to repeat the same news, and many aspects of life got put on hold 'until a solution'. This 'until' was a mired present that sluggishly churned at the past, like a car with its wheels stuck in the mud.¹

Imagine that such a car is given a sudden jerk out of its pothole and onto the smooth road of history. The metaphor is of course tongue in cheek, but it perhaps gives some sense of the unpredictable loss of control many people felt with the announcement one morning in 2003 that movement restrictions preventing Cypriots from crossing the border would be eased. As I describe elsewhere (Bryant 2010), there was initial euphoria, followed in certain quarters by an anxiety that bordered on panic. In the division of the island and movements of populations, most displaced persons had settled in the houses or on the property left by the other. Most Turkish Cypriots had assumed for what by that time was almost thirty years that they would remain in the zone of safety they had carved out in the island's North, and I had never encountered a Turkish Cypriot with plans to return to a natal village in the island's

¹ One reader of this article commented that I may wish to engage in a discussion of affect in relation to time. Here, for instance, one could certainly speak of a temporal affect of 'stuckness', a sense of the sluggishness of time. However, I find the language of affect too often confuses description with explanation, and treats experience as theory. What would it mean to say that time felt sluggish? In order to answer the question, I would first have to understand what it means to 'feel' time. Do we mean to feel time's passage, or failure to pass? What would it mean for time not to pass, in any case? Or do we attribute to time some presence outside ourselves that we then feel? These questions should give some idea as to why I find affect to be an imprecise and unhelpful way to try to understand the experience of time, which I explore here as a type of disposition.

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3 South. Moreover, many people had chosen to 'put the past behind them.' For instance, when
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5 in 2015 my Turkish Cypriot mother-in-law suddenly began explaining to her granddaughter
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7 about the missing persons in their family, my husband asked her why she had never said
8
9 anything about this when he was growing up. 'At the time,' she replied, 'we were starting a
10
11 new life and didn't want to think about the past. Now they may be coming back.'

12
13
14 'They' were of course Greek Cypriots, who after 2003 crossed the checkpoints to
15
16 visit their natal homes and villages and seemed to many Turkish Cypriots I met to be like a
17
18 return of the past. Moreover, many of those original owners seemed to expect a return of
19
20 persons to their own pasts, in the form of 'everything going back to the way it once was'—a
21
22 phrase that Greek Cypriots often used as they wistfully and wishfully probed Turkish
23
24 Cypriots about the possibility of their own return.
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28 It was during this period of heightened anxiety that I sat with two Turkish Cypriot
29
30 women in an overstuffed parlor in a formerly Greek Cypriot house in the town where I was
31
32 conducting research on these experiences of the opening. The two women, Sevim and Birol,
33
34 were both born around 1945, and their childhoods, as they describe them, were shaped by
35
36 violence. During the 1950's, they had walked to school together each day through the streets
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38 of the same town where they now lived, which formerly had a mixed population. 'We were
39
40 frightened', they tell me. 'All our childhood we were frightened'.
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44 'First it was all the guns going off', Sevim says, 'and it was the British—they'd
45
46 search us all the time, looking for weapons'. At the time, Greek Cypriots were engaged in an
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48 anticolonial campaign intended to unite the island with Greece. Although Turkish Cypriots
49
50 opposed that goal, and many joined the British auxiliary forces, they also formed their own
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52 underground organisation that soon became the target of British police, as well.
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3 'Then it was the Greeks', Birol recounts, 'because they would harass us girls all the
4 time going from school'. They were mortally afraid of being raped, they tell me, and of
5 having to kill themselves.
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10 When they were both eighteen years old, they fled the town with their families over
11 the mountain and lived for a decade in tents and makeshift housing. In an island of
12 abundance, the Red Crescent brought their food in sacks: potatoes, rice, dried lentils. 'We left
13 behind our orchards', Sevim tells me. 'We didn't see fruit for almost a decade'.
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18 Their fathers and brothers took guns and went into the mountains, only returning
19 occasionally to bathe and sleep. The women were left alone in the camps, nurturing the
20 anxiety of anticipation.
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25 'You know what they would do?' Birol asks me. 'The Greeks, they would turn on
26 their megaphones and yell filthy things all night. To prevent us from sleeping'.
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30 'We were alone, the women', Sevim adds. 'They would talk all night about what they
31 would do when they caught us'.
32
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35 When I rise to leave, they both apologize for having captured me this way, for having
36 told me such stories. '*İçimizi boşalttuk*', 'We emptied our insides', they say. 'We never talk
37 about these things', they claim.
38
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40
41 It was something that I would hear again and again from Turkish Cypriots who told
42 me their tales in the context of the opening: 'We emptied our insides', they would say, even
43 as uncertainty filled their voices and was written in their faces. Indeed, the sudden opening
44 and the return of a past that had been put away seemed a jolt into an uncertain future, one that
45 led them to seek a new anchoring in the present. As a result, their stories did not only express
46 past trauma but also disquiet, apprehension, and an unknowability regarding the future. The
47 stories were inevitably coupled with questions: What do they want from us now? Why do
48 they come so often? Will they really come back?
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3 I begin with the anxieties of an opening and will use them to reflect on two other
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5 'crisis' events: a referendum that decided the immediate future of the island and divided
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7 communities and families, and the current economic crisis in the island's South. Affectively,
8
9 all of these events are certainly critical ones in the sense used, for instance, by Veena Das, to
10
11 refer to the annihilation and recreation of worlds (Das 1997, 2006). Moreover, my
12
13 informants' view of these moments as 'critical' echoed the original meaning of a decision or
14
15 judgment, or its early modern medical meaning as a point in illness when the patient would
16
17 either die or recover (Koselleck 2000, 2006; Starn 1971). Greek Cypriot talk about the
18
19 current economic crisis describes it as a decisive struggle for existence, while anxieties
20
21 around the opening and referendum recognized that these events would reconstitute the
22
23 everyday. What made these moments something that we might describe as 'crisis' was the
24
25 experience of the present as a moment of uncertainty about the future.
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30 In a previous article (Bryant 2012), I began a discussion of the role of the future in
31
32 shaping our experience of temporality in the present and hence our approach to the past.
33
34 There, I looked at the role of apocalyptic anticipation in structuring what we think of as a
35
36 'time of war'. During the period described above, when time in Cyprus seemed sluggish, the
37
38 'until' was imagined in apocalyptic ways, with the anticipated coming of a 'solution', a
39
40 future 'rectification', that would set the present right. I describe this as a present lived at a
41
42 *threshold of anticipation*, contrasting this idea with what Paul Ricoeur and Reinhard
43
44 Koselleck, following Gadamer, call horizons of expectation with regard to the future. For
45
46 Koselleck, following Gadamer, call horizons of expectation with regard to the future. For
47
48 Koselleck, "the horizon is that line beyond which a new space of experience will open, but
49
50 which cannot yet be seen" (1985: 273), while for Ricoeur "the horizon presents itself as
51
52 something to be surpassed, without ever being fully reached" (1988: 220). While the horizon
53
54 always recedes from view and is never fully realizable, a threshold "implies crossing into
55
56 another space of time and a radical reorientation of the present" (Bryant 2012: 339). Such
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3 apocalyptic visions of the future, then, create thresholds, limens, and the anticipation of
4
5 crossing these into another timespace makes the present liminal.
6

7 I would like to develop this argument further here by discussing another kind of
8
9 threshold, what I am calling a *critical threshold*, one in which, unlike in apocalyptic
10
11 narratives, the future is not one of anticipated rectification or reorientation of time and space
12
13 but is rather uncertain and unknown. In this regard, Theodore Schatzki's notion of 'activity
14
15 timespace' is useful for thinking about the teleological orientations of human temporality.
16
17 Schatzki argues, 'The timespace of human activity consists in acting toward ends departing
18
19 from what motivates at arrays of places and paths anchored at entities' (2010: loc. 1123). I do
20
21 not have room here for an extended discussion of Schatzki's conception of 'human activity',
22
23 except to say that it reorients phenomenological understandings of time towards the ends that
24
25 humans seek to achieve. The past determines 'what motivates', while spaces around us are
26
27 understood through orientations towards ends.
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32 My own approach to temporality is similarly teleological, though I ask how different
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34 forms of teleology may result in different ways of living with the present. While a threshold
35
36 of anticipation leads to a liminal present and an apocalyptic narration of the past, I claim here
37
38 that a critical threshold leads to an uncanny present, a present that is unfamiliar in its present-
39
40 ness. It is the present that suddenly seems to hover between past and future, taking on the
41
42 burden of gathering the past and projecting it into the unknown future when the teleology that
43
44 would ordinarily shape that temporal relation is lost. For the women I described above, the
45
46 present suddenly seemed uncertain, anxious, determining the future rather than being shaped
47
48 by its ends. Both past and future took on a new immediacy and indeterminacy, even as the
49
50 women, and many other Turkish Cypriots I met during this period, sought ways to control
51
52 them. Unlike the sluggish time of previous years, then, the uncanny present was fraught with
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54 a sense of anxiety, a sense that the future was running out of control.
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On returns and repetitions

Only a few months after the opening that generated such anxiety for the women above, Cypriots were faced with a referendum on their future. After several decades of negotiations, the United Nations had finally stepped in and brokered an agreement in anticipation of the entry of the Republic of Cyprus into the European Union. Since 1974, when a Greek coup d'état and Turkish military intervention divided Cyprus, the Republic had been the island's only recognised government, claiming sovereignty over the island as a whole. However, it in fact only controls a portion of it, and the 36% of the territory under Turkish control in the North remains today a self-declared, unrecognised state. However, unlike many other peace agreements, this one was put to a vote of the people only a week before citizens of the Republic would celebrate their new status as EU citizens. The referendum was preceded by vocal and divisive campaigns that either vilified or praised the plan. Eventually, while 65% of Turkish Cypriots would accept the plan, 76% of Greek Cypriots rejected it.

In many quarters, this was celebrated as the democratic victory of the Greek Cypriot people against foreign powers that attempted to impose a plan they did not want. I do not have space here to engage in an analysis of the plan or the campaigns surrounding it.² What I want to analyse instead is a particular event that proved a crucial turning-point in the Greek Cypriot 'no' campaign, the speech of then Greek Cypriot President Tassos Papadopoulos on 7 April 2004, just a couple of weeks before Cypriots would go to the polls. In the speech, Papadopoulos significantly sat in front of the window through which President Makarios

² For such an analysis, see Akgün et. al. 2005; Bryant 2004, Stavrinides 2009, Taki 2009.

1
2
3 escaped from the presidential palace during the coup attempt of 1974.³ The part of the speech
4
5 that everyone would remember and recite afterwards was when he said, ‘I received an
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7 internationally recognised sovereign state; I will not give back a “community”’—referring to
8
9 the way that, under the plan, the internationally recognised Republic of Cyprus would be
10
11 incorporated as one state in a federation. Equally important were the tears that flowed down
12
13 his cheeks as he told his audience, ‘Every people forms its own history,’ adding that ‘the
14
15 people of Cyprus is called on, each one of us separately and collectively, to write the history
16
17 of the future of Cyprus. . . . Our homeland is going through dramatic times in its long history
18
19 through the centuries. . . . The decisions we take today form and determine the fate of the
20
21 generations to come.’
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26 Moreover, the campaign against the plan had the advantage of the resonances of the
27
28 word ‘no’ for Greek-speakers, who associate ‘oxi’, or ‘no’, with resistance, resilience, and
29
30 being on the side of right. These associations derive from Greek Prime Minister Ioannis
31
32 Metaxas’s refusal to allow Axis powers to enter Greek territory and the official entry of
33
34 Greece into World War II. Today, 28 October 1940 is commemorated as ‘Oxi Day’ in Greece
35
36 and Cyprus, and as a slogan it automatically conjures up a particular comportment and mode
37
38 of behavior towards the present and future.
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41
42 Papadopoulos made clear that the present was a critical moment, one that would
43
44 decide the future of the island, and he called upon Greek Cypriots to engage in the same
45
46 defiant stance that had defined the Greek ‘oxi’ of World War II. He called upon the past in
47
48 the sense invoked by Gilles Deleuze when he remarks that difference inhabits repetition
49
50 (Deleuze 2001). Deleuze refers to the fact that a repetition, or a copy, is always something
51
52 new, can never be exactly the same, if for no other reason than that at the time a copy is
53
54 produced, time has passed. In Papadopoulos’s speech his call for a resounding ‘no’ to the
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58 ³ Makarios describes this escape in detail for director Michael Cacoyannis in his documentary about the
59
60 division, *Atilla '74* (Cacoyannis 1974).

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3 impositions of foreign powers does not simply reference the past; it in fact uses difference to
4
5 demonstrate the uncertainty of the future. Producing a repetition—namely, the ultimate, if
6
7 costly, victory—will require unity, sacrifice, and a comportment of defiance.
8
9

10 What Papadopoulos also emphasises is the present-ness of the present, the way that
11
12 the present moment gathers the past and is decisive of the future. At the time of the
13
14 referendum, there was a sense that time itself had become weightier, that it bore a particular
15
16 burden of the future. The moment was a crisis in its pathological meaning, as a terminal point
17
18 in illness when the patient would either live or die. I suggest that it was in such a context that
19
20 the difference of repetition acquired particular significance as a future being made *right now*.
21
22

23 This sense of the present-ness of the present, its role as a node between past and
24
25 future, is one that I do not normally experience except when I stop philosophically to reflect
26
27 on the question of temporality. Sitting at my desk, I have no more sense of a ‘now’ than I
28
29 have of a ‘here’. After all, where do ‘here’ and ‘now’ begin and end? But I may become
30
31 aware of both in moments of what we call crisis, moments when contingency comes into play
32
33 and interrupts my intentional relation to the world. In the *Phenomenology of Perception*,
34
35 Maurice Merleau-Ponty said of this temporal perception of the world, ‘Husserl uses the terms
36
37 protention and retention for the intentionalities which anchor me to an environment. They do
38
39 not run from a central I, but from my perceptual field itself, so to speak, which draws along in
40
41 its wake its own horizon of retentions, and bites into the future with its protentions’
42
43 (Merleau-Ponty 2012: 31; also Husserl 1964). Sitting at my desk, I experience such an
44
45 anchoring; only the interruption of this field of intentionalities would make me feel
46
47 unanchored, adrift. I referred to this earlier—with a nod to Theodore Schatzki—as an
48
49 interruption of the normal teleology of human activity.
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54 The women with whom I began this essay were distinctly unanchored and anxious in
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56 the context of the opening. Their anxiety, I suggest, derived from a similar sense of the
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3 uncanny present, the present whose present-ness as a node between past and future had
4
5 become viscerally immediate for them. I said that this is a ‘burden of the future’, meaning
6
7 that rather than the present being shaped by ends, the present becomes determinative of ends.
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9
10 The possibility of the return of the past in the future presented itself in the form of elderly
11
12 Greek Cypriot women who brought their grandchildren to visit what would have been their
13
14 ancestral homes. It came in the form of another past, an alternative past, which had
15
16 previously been ‘put in the past’. As a result, it called on them to mobilise their own pasts in
17
18 new ways, by recalling those aspects of the past that had never been ‘emptied’, that remained
19
20 as what Paul Ricoeur (2004) calls a ‘reserve of forgetting’—those aspects of memory and
21
22 history that are forgotten but available to consciousness. Like the photographs and other
23
24 remnants of others’ lives that people had found in the houses where they came to live after
25
26 the conflict, the traumas of the past were something that had been put away without being
27
28 reconciled. They represented a past without closure, one that had been foreclosed in the
29
30 interest of particular futures but that in the opening many people began to recall in order to
31
32 creates an intentionality that in my observation was often defiant (see also Bryant 2014). The
33
34 refrains, ‘We suffered, too’, and ‘Greek Cypriots know nothing of our suffering’, were often
35
36 repeated as ways of created intentional stances towards the return of a past that threatened the
37
38 future.
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43 Return and repetition, then, become two ways in which the past reappears in the
44
45 uncanny present, shaping our anticipation of the future in the absence of a teleological
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47 ordering. The critical threshold of the present is one that is decisive and liminal, one outside
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49 of and much weightier than ordinary time, and one that will also be determinative of the
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51 future. What is significant about these moments, however, is not only the symbols and stories
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53 of the past, but also the ways in which references to other times orient us and provide us with
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55 modes of anticipation. Those symbols and stories may produce affects—a strong and
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3 unfocused sense of defiance, for instance—but what is important for the uncanny present is
4
5 the way that they give us orientations, modes of action, and what Husserl calls
6
7 ‘intentionalities’.
8

9 10 **The comportment of defiance and resolve**

11
12 In what is often cited as the first philosophical reflection on our subjective experience
13
14 of time, Augustine observes,
15

16
17 Suppose I am about to recite a psalm which I know. Before I begin, my expectation
18 (or ‘looking forward’) is extended over the whole psalm. But once I have begun,
19 whatever I pluck off from it and let fall into the past enters the province of my
20 memory (or ‘looking back at’). So the life of this action of mine is extended in two
21 directions—toward my memory, as regards what I have recited, and toward my
22 expectation, as regards what I am about to recite. But all the time my attention (my
23 ‘looking at’) is present and through it what was future passes on its way to become
24 past (Augustine, *Confessions*, Book XI, p. 282).
25

26
27 This first summation of what is sometimes called ‘A-series’ time focuses on the tenseness of
28
29 temporality, the sense of past flowing into future and future becoming past. While Aristotle
30 describes how it is that we perceive time’s flow, thereby referring to time as something
31
32 objective, I consider it important that he focuses on time as an element of doing, something
33
34 that I perceive within human practice or activity.
35
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37
38 Phenomenology, of course, is less interested in time itself than in our consciousness
39
40 of it, but we may see the beginnings of a phenomenology of time-consciousness in
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42 Augustine’s observations of the present as a moment not only of ‘looking at’ but also
43
44 simultaneously of ‘looking back at’ and ‘looking forward’. It is the latter that Husserl called
45
46 retention and protention to refer to specific intentionalities related to past and future. Our
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48 particular concern here is with the effects of protention on the present, through forms of
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50 anticipation.
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54 As I suggested earlier, anticipation is not the same as expectation, though both are
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56 orientations towards the future. Koselleck and Ricoeur, for instance, refer to the future as a
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58 ‘horizon of expectation’ (Koselleck 1985; Ricoeur 1988), contrasting this to ‘the space of
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3 experience', which refers to our relation to the past. While Koselleck's use of the term
4
5 'horizon' leads us to think of the future as open and expansive, an array of possibilities,
6
7 Husserl suggests our perceptions of the future depend upon more limited intentionalities that
8
9 are also forms of action. One example of such anticipation would be when I listen to a piece
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11 of music in a form that I know and not only expect but anticipate the resolution of a particular
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13 passage. In my anticipation, my body prepares itself for a resolution of a particular kind, and
14
15 much musical surprise comes from foiling that anticipation. Anticipation, then, is more than
16
17 simply expecting something to happen; it is the act of looking forward that also pulls me in
18
19 the direction of the future and prepares the groundwork for that future to occur.
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23 References to the past become a way of creating anticipation. This is different from
24
25 expectation, in that we do not simply believe that this will happen; like our bodily
26
27 anticipation of resolution in music, our bodies ready themselves in anticipation of it
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29 happening. The 'oxi' campaign led by President Papadopoulos not only asked citizens to take
30
31 action in the present by voting against the plan. Equally importantly, it called on them to
32
33 brace themselves with resolve for the international condemnation that would inevitably fall
34
35 on them after rejection of the plan. It asked them to be defiant in anticipation of a battle that
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37 the past taught them would inevitably occur.⁴ Anticipation, then, is a mode of action in the
38
39 present, one that shapes our present experience of the future.
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43 Similar ways of calling upon the past to create a comportment of anticipation have
44
45 been present in the current financial crisis in the Republic of Cyprus. At the beginning of the
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47 crisis in early 2013, for instance, an article in *The National* proclaimed, 'Now as Greek
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52 _____
53 ⁴ I would note that this repetition of the past appeared to repeat itself with the 2015 Greek referendum on the
54 Troika's bailout conditions, when again newspapers and commentators portrayed Greeks' 'oxi' vote as a
55 'heroic' stance against oppression. In both cases, the 'heroic no' failed to bring the future that was intended.
56 Greek Cypriot centrist and leftist politicians tended to portray their own 'no' as a vote intended to open the way
57 for further negotiations that would result in a plan with better, more acceptable conditions. More than a decade
58 on, all negotiations have provided fewer concessions to Greek Cypriots than the 2004 plan. And in Greece, of
59 course, the 'heroic no' was undermined only a week later when Prime Minister Alexis Tsipras signed the Troika
60 plan anyway.

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3 Cypriots brace for years of hardship as a result of the controversial bailout agreement by the
4
5 EU and IMF in March, they are summoning courage from the spirit of 1974 when the
6
7 previous generation rebuilt their lives from scratch.⁵ Indeed, references to the 1974 division
8
9 of the island were employed even in the first days of the crisis, when they referred Greek
10
11 Cypriots to a period of resilience and overcoming suffering in the past. In 1974,
12
13 approximately one-third of the Greek Cypriot population was internally displaced from the
14
15 island's north, and the government of the Republic of Cyprus, with significant international
16
17 aid, had to house, shelter, feed, and employ the IDPs while the island's main factories and
18
19 tourist centres remained in the Turkish-occupied North. A new tourist industry developed
20
21 around the southern city of Limassol, primarily using the labour of displaced persons (Zetter
22
23 1986, 1991; also Loizos 2008). Within less than a decade, the island's south and the Greek
24
25 Cypriot community as a whole had not only reached but surpassed previous income levels,
26
27 leading this recovery to be termed 'the Cyprus miracle' (e.g., Christodoulou 1992).

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31
32 That 'miracle', of course, was built on the suffering of many, though especially
33
34 displaced persons who were given prefabricated housing in the outskirts of the main cities
35
36 and used as cheap labour. Most Cypriots will tell you, in a largely truthful account of events,
37
38 that it was the priority they gave to family and education that enabled them to overcome their
39
40 losses. What this meant is that individuals were expected to sacrifice for their families on the
41
42 basis of their age and gender. These sacrifices took many forms, including marrying late,
43
44 foregoing education in order to send a sibling abroad to study, and other sacrifices involved
45
46 in the care of elderly parents or younger siblings. And although Cypriots know all of these
47
48 ways in which loss affected each of them personally, the tale of those times is wrapped in an
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50 aura of solidarity that shows, 'If we overcame this, we can overcome anything'.
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57 ⁵ Michael Theodotou, "Cypriots draw on spirit of '74 to see them through euro crisis," 1 May 2013, *The*
58 *National*, [http://www.thenational.ae/news/world/europe/cypriots-draw-on-spirit-of-74-to-see-them-through-](http://www.thenational.ae/news/world/europe/cypriots-draw-on-spirit-of-74-to-see-them-through-euro-crisis)
59 [euro-crisis](http://www.thenational.ae/news/world/europe/cypriots-draw-on-spirit-of-74-to-see-them-through-euro-crisis)
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3 Of course, we know that, as one historian puts it, the ‘distinction between memory
4 and history, vitally important to historians, is often blurred in the minds of ordinary folks . . .
5 who are likely to be more emotionally drawn to a past that fits their preconceptions—a past
6 they feel comfortable and identify with’ (Cohen 2014: loc. 131). The same historian notes
7 that while in times of crisis stories often emerge that ‘bear a metaphoric likeness to the crisis
8 the community is undergoing,’ the primary use of such stories is ‘inspirational’, as ‘the
9 members of the community are also drawn to stories that show a way out of the crisis and are
10 therefore a source of sorely needed hope and encouragement’ (ibid., loc. 4175).

11
12 Some persons in Cyprus have been less than comfortable with the comparisons
13 between the current financial crisis and 1974. In the same article quoted above, for instance,
14 businessman Dinos Lordos, who lost millions in the island’s division, remarked, ‘No one has
15 died now and no one has been displaced. . . . What's happening is terrible - but it's only
16 money’ (ibid.). However, the language of comparison has penetrated ordinary life, leading
17 former Bank of Cyprus manager Athanasios Orphanides to declare that the present situation
18 is actually worse than 1974,⁶ and leading others to call the crisis a ‘second war’. One woman
19 in her thirties who lost savings remarked to one newspaper, ‘We have worked hard. We have
20 saved our money and not taken risks. Now we will have to start all over again. My parents
21 who live in London and were refugees to Britain after the Turkish invasion of Cyprus in 1974
22 say this is a “Second War” that those living here are facing.’⁷

23
24 As we see from Lordos’ remark above, there is a hesitation amongst some Greek
25 Cypriots to compare the loss of money to loss of life and ancestral properties. What both
26 share, however, is a loss of dignity, an overturning of the present, and an inability to
27 anticipate the future. What I suggest is that the reference to past solidarity and overcoming
28 hardship not only inspires but more importantly creates anticipation and a comportment of

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⁶ <http://www.financialmirror.com/news-details.php?nid=30803>

⁷ <http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-2300888/Cyprus-bailout-crisis-British-ex-pat-familys-dream-building-home-crushed.html#ixzz3PGC32JFa>

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3 resolve and resistance oriented towards the future. In other words, it attempts to return to a
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5 'normal' teleological temporality in which one creates intentionalities that already pull one in
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7 the direction of an anticipated future. The references to 1974, then, are not only inspirational
8
9 but are intentional, creating bodily, emotive, and affective forms of anticipation that lay the
10
11 groundwork for realising the future in the present.
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13 14 **The return of return**

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16 We have moved from anxiety to anticipation by way of three examples of what I have
17
18 called here the uncanny present, moments when the inability to anticipate the future makes
19
20 the present-ness of the present visceral and immediate. In all these instances, the past
21
22 acquires a new immediacy and is visible in the responses of fear and uncertainty or resolve
23
24 and resistance. Within this brief analysis of new uses of the past, I have also suggested that
25
26 return and repetition are two different ways in which we may experience the past in the
27
28 uncanny present. While repetition implies taking lessons from the past, but more importantly
29
30 shaping our comportment and intentionality towards the future, return instead implies the past
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32 as a type of haunting of the present, where uncanniness arises not from intentionality but
33
34 from the past's unpredictability in relation to the future. In this instance, the uncanny present
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36 is a moment of crisis that may be resolved through mobilising 'forgotten' pasts to develop a
37
38 new intentional stance towards the future.
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