

Diplomacy as World Disclosure: A Fractal Theory of Crisis Management

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Abstract:

Key contributions of the paper:

- It introduces the concept of world disclosure to diplomatic studies;
- It advances a new logic of diplomatic action that combines pre-reflective and reflective modes of reasoning;
- It explains why international crises are defined by fractal not linear patterns;
- It suggests a world disclosing method for making sense and managing international crises.

The paper argues that the logic of diplomatic action to emerge out of the interplay between pre-reflective and reflective modes of engagement in times of international crises can be theoretically captured via the Heideggerian concept of “world disclosure”. When called upon to react to and manage challenging situations, diplomats rely on their pre-reflective understandings of the context to make sense of what is required of them. The world is thus pre-reflectively disclosed *to* them. However, when these pre-reflective understandings fail to deliver, diplomats reflectively assess the practical value of alternative solutions and choose a course of action that makes sense to them given the context. In so doing, the world is reflectively disclosed *through* them. The article concludes that “authentic” disclosures by which diplomats successfully transcend the constraints of the crisis situation, but without foreclosing the possibility of new disclosures are more likely to sustainably break the fractal pattern of the crisis.

- Early draft, comments welcome -

I. INTRODUCTION

The stealth military takeover of Crimea by Russian forces in February 2014 completely bewildered Western leaders and diplomats. The German Chancellor Angela Merkel reportedly was so taken aback by the Russian blatant disregard of Ukrainian sovereignty that she even questioned whether President Vladimir Putin “was still in touch with reality” (Paterson 2014). The general perception in diplomatic circles was that the Ukrainian crisis produced such a deep rift in the relationship between Russia and Western countries that the very fabric of the international order created in the post-Cold War period was now under threat. After recovering from the initial diplomatic shock, the European Union (EU) and United States (U.S.) eventually agreed on a system of target sanctions, which by Nov 2014 began to show some modest results (Hille and Olearchyk 2014). NATO also took steps to establish a new Allied joint force that would be able to deploy within a few days to respond to new challenges, particularly at the periphery of NATO's territory (NATO 2014). That being said, the Western diplomatic reaction to the Ukrainian crisis represented little more than a sequence of steadily escalating responses to Russian actions. NATO, EU or the US have generally proved unable to control the flow of events between Russia and Ukraine, a fact that may be indicative of the lack of good options for Western diplomats, the disunity in their positions or both.

The challenges facing Western diplomats during the Ukrainian crisis offer a good illustration of a critical issue of broader relevance for diplomatic practice: how diplomats (ought to) react to and manage challenging situations of high risk, fast-paced development and with no clear solution in sight? Put differently, *how do diplomats figure out what to do in times of crises?* While diplomatic

decision-making is hardly an overlooked issue in the scholarly literature, the way in which it has been approached remains nevertheless problematic. On the one side, a *pre-reflective* school of thought takes the view that diplomatic agency is deeply embedded in the social milieu of professional rules, norms and habits that circumscribe diplomatic conduct. According to this view, rule-following thoroughly shapes diplomatic behaviour to the extent that, through continuing practice, it generates habitual codes of action that is, taken-for-granted understandings functioning as an intuitive guide to action (Leander 2008, 17). As discussed in more detail in the next section, the more diplomats internalise these predispositions, the more likely for them to respond pre-reflectively to the demands of their profession (Hopf 2010). The problem with this view is that strenuous circumstances are not particularly amenable to habitual resolution. Precedents, routines and standard codes of action are blunt instruments for capturing the excess of meaning and uncertainty introduced by new circumstances into the social context. Therefore, reacting habitually to challenging situations such as the Russian takeover of Crimea is most likely a recipe for conceptual misapprehension and policy failure.

On the other side, a reflexively oriented school of thought of varied rationalist inspirations views diplomatic agency through the prism of strategic calculations. According to one dominant branch of this school of thought, diplomats are utility maximisers that is, they develop rank-ordered preferences, which they pursue in a manner that maximises their (expected) benefits (Bjola and Kornprobst 2013, 98). Morgenthau's four tasks of diplomacy perfectly encapsulate this view: diplomats assess the power and objectives of other nations, compare them with their own, determine conditions of compatibility, and deploy appropriate means in pursuit of their strategic objectives (Morgenthau and Thompson 1993, 361-2). From an epistemological perspective, the

rationalist approach is thoroughly *reflective* as diplomats cope with challenging circumstances by engaging in sophisticated calculations of utility maximisation and by planning their actions accordingly. Rational choice theories fail though to properly consider the role of pre-reflective meanings and background conditions in shaping parties' preferences, their rank ordering strategy, as well as the way in which they decide to accomplish their goals. In so doing, they place themselves at risk of severely misreading the contextual relevance of the preferred action strategies.

What is thus missing in this debate is a theoretical approach that can bridge the gap between pre-reflective and reflective conceptions of diplomatic agency. Despite some recent attempts to open up discussion on this topic (Constantinou 2013; Murray 2008; Kornprobst 2011), the issue has remained epistemologically bereaved and theoretically unsettled. The time for such undertaking is nevertheless right. As Margaret Archer points out, the hegemony of habits depends upon the system tendency to maintain its given form of organisation (morphostasis), but swift changes that challenge the system's legitimacy or structure (morphogenesis) reduce the relevance of habitual guidelines to action or even render them positively misleading (Archer 2012, 64). In other words, one would expect pre-reflective modes of diplomatic engagement to enjoy practical pre-eminence when the structure of the international system goes through a consolidation process as, for instance, in periods of "long peace" (Ikenberry 2001). By contrast, periods of structural upheaval swing the pendulum in favour of reflexive thinking as the "old" ways of upholding international order suddenly lose relevance (Wilson 2014). Arguably, the succession of global crises in the past decade - the 9/11 terrorist attacks, the military interventions in Iraq and Afghanistan, the global financial meltdown in 2008, the revolutionary upheavals of the Arab Spring, or the Russian

aggression in Ukraine – suggest we are now experiencing a period of systemic transformation in which the legitimacy of the post-Cold War order is being increasingly challenged from multiple directions, but the structure of the new international order is yet to reveal itself.

The thesis advanced in the article is threefold: first, that the logic of diplomatic action to emerge out of the interplay between pre-reflective and reflective modes of engagement in times of international crises can be theoretically captured via the Heideggerian concept of “world disclosure”; second, that international crises are not linear developments but fractal conditions characterised by a set of self-similar events that repeat themselves at different scales in an ongoing feedback loop unless stopped; third, that managing international crises requires not a linear mechanism of action and reaction to a set of specific circumstances, but a “world disclosing” method for understanding and breaking the fractal pattern. I will defend these points in three steps. The first section will discuss the limits of current conceptions of diplomatic agency, the second part will examine the epistemological underpinnings of the concept of “world disclosure”, while the last section will explore the contributions of the concept to theorising diplomatic crisis management. As the main objective of the paper is to introduce a novel conceptual framework for studying diplomatic crisis management, an in-depth empirical analysis of a specific international crisis is not being offered here due to space constraints. However, examples from recent crises, especially the one in Ukraine, will be used throughout the paper to illustrate key theoretical points.

II. LOGICS OF DIPLOMATIC ACTION

The concept of the logic of action has been extensively discussed in the international relations (IR) literature (March and Olsen 1998; Risse 2000; Hopf 2010). In essence, individuals learn how to react in specific circumstances by developing political judgements along a continuum ranging from pre-reflective accounts such as following tacit practices or abiding by identity-constituting rules of appropriateness to more reflective modes of engagement such as persuading interlocutors through convincing arguments or conducting cost-benefit analyses of the likely consequences of their actions (Kornprobst 2011, 71). The pre-reflective/reflective taxonomy carries analytical value for diplomatic theory as well as it helps inform four competing conceptions of diplomatic agency in the scholarly literature: the diplomat as the self-effacing bureaucrat, the two-level mediator, the foreign-policy shaper, and the diplomat as the custodian of the international society. While not being mutually exclusive, these four modes of diplomatic engagement offer a comprehensive picture of the primary modes of social subjectivity - rule-following, negotiation strategising, leadership positioning, or *raison de système* imperatives -, by which the agency of *homo diplomaticus* is being constituted and reproduces itself in practice.

The first conception, the diplomat as the self-effacing bureaucrat, circumscribes agency to a code of behaviour based on loyalty and standardised rules of action. Accordingly, the work of diplomats largely involves juggling different bureaucratic scripts, governed by a code of conduct that rewards institutional conformity, protocol compliance and political self-effacement over policy innovation, critical engagement and diplomatic leadership (Neumann 2005; Berridge 2010). This minimalist conception of agency does not rule out diplomats' capacity to make decisions on their own, but it severely limits it by ontologically prioritising the social and institutional context in which

individuals are embedded. From this agential perspective, diplomats can supply reasons for their behaviour, but they are primarily supposed to follow and enact rules, not to challenge or amend them. At the opposite side of the spectrum, there is the foreign policy shaper in the mould of Henry Kissinger, Hillary Clinton or Javier Solana. Benefitting from high ranking positions within diplomatic institutional settings, these agents handle the pressure of the dense environment of rules, conventions and norms in which they conduct their business by providing leadership. They set out diplomatic goals to accomplish, design appropriate strategies for pursuing them, and mobilise the energies of others to follow through on these courses of action (Bjola 2015). Unlike the former conception of diplomacy agency, the foreign policy shaper is ontologically anchored not in “positioned-practice places” thrown upon her by her diplomatic responsibilities, but in her capacity for reflection, decision-making, and “freedom of subjectivity” (Wight 2006, 213).

The remaining two categories of diplomatic engagement, the diplomat as the two-level mediator and as the custodian of the international society, fall somewhere in between these two opposite understandings. They are neither completely ontologically dependent on institutional scripts, nor informed by broad decision-making autonomy. The two-level negotiator model introduced by Robert Putnam (1988) emphasises the unique agential profile of diplomats as bridge builders between international actors (Level I) and domestic constituencies (Level II). On the one hand, the institutional constraints placed upon diplomats are quite severe, as negotiators cannot overrule the instructions of the principals they represent, nor can they ignore the preferences of the international actors they engage with. On the other hand, the distribution of power, preferences, and possible coalitions among Level II and Level I gives negotiators sufficient discretion for identifying and implementing successful win-set configurations. As custodians of the international society

(Wiseman 2005; Sharp 2004), diplomats face a difficult predicament: how to accomplish their function of representation of state interests without endangering the “shared lifeworld” of values, norms and codes of conduct necessary for diplomacy to operate (Bjola 2010). The unstrained pursuit of the former runs the risk of the *raison d'état* undermining the ‘fabric’ of the system itself by demotivating other diplomats from respecting the shared norms and rules that sustain international order. Unfettered confidence in the *raison de système* places diplomats at risk of curtailing the autonomy of their sovereigns and, by implication, of their own position (Bjola and Kornprobst 2013, 150). Similar to the case of the two-level mediator, the custodian model informs a conception of diplomatic agency that limits diplomats’ capacity for decision-making, but it grants them sufficient space for reflexive monitoring and behavioural adaptation.

These different conceptions of diplomatic engagement are generally useful for making sense of the main responsibilities that diplomats bear in their interactions and of the way they may pursue and meet them from a pre-reflective or reflective perspective. The more a diplomat let herself being ruled by institutional scripts or international norms, the more likely she is going to react pre-reflectively to the tasks at hand. By contrast, the more he seeks to shape foreign policy and the conduct of international negotiations, the more likely he will actively reflect on the objectives and strategies he sets out to accomplish. At the same time, the view-from-above offered by these logics of diplomatic interaction presents limited analytical currency for understanding how diplomats concretely make sense, handle and resolve international crises. One could argue, for instance, that the Western diplomats’ reaction to the Russian’s takeover of Crimea in March 2014 might have been informed by their role as custodians of the international society in upholding international law and defending the cornerstone principle of territorial sovereignty (UN News Centre 2014).

Alternatively, one may highlight the foreign policy shaping attempts of well-reputed diplomats in forging a diplomatic solution to the Ukrainian crisis (Bond et al. 2014). However, such accounts may lead to distorted conclusions as they fail to do justice to the multifaceted and dynamic process by which diplomats actually reason in practice about how to react to impending or unfolding crises.

In a landmark study on how professionals think in action, David Schön pointed out that practitioners frequently face situations of “uncertainty, complexity, instability, uniqueness and value conflict” (Schön 1983, 17) in their work, which are difficult to address from an abstract theoretical perspective. He instead argues that “doing and thinking are complementary. Doing extends thinking in the tests, moves, and probes of experimental action, and reflection feeds on doing and its results. Each feeds the other, and each sets boundaries for the other” (Schön 1983, 280). In other words, the process by which diplomats reflect about how to react to a crisis can hardly be subsumed by an overarching logic of action as the context in which they are asked to act is operationally novel, normatively murky and constantly shifting. For example, far from being informed by a coherent action strategy, the immediate Western diplomatic reaction to the Crimean crisis was actually shaped by improvisation and adaptation to constantly changing circumstances (The Economist 2014). Pre-reflective (institutional rule-following, *raison de système* imperatives) and reflective responses (negotiation strategising, leadership bids) to a crisis situation are both part of the reasoning repertoire of the diplomats called upon to manage the situation, and hence the sharp distinction advocated in the scholarly literature between these forms of diplomatic engagement is arguably overstated. One would reasonably expect diplomats to be influenced by each of these considerations as the crisis unfolds and hence the interesting question is how the interplay between them shapes the way in which a diplomat figures out what to do?

A coherent framework for understanding the logic of diplomatic action in times of crises must therefore offer clarifications to four important questions. First, when shall we expect pre-reflective considerations to dominate diplomats' reaction to a crisis? It would be thus argued that when called upon to react to and manage challenging situations, diplomats rely on their pre-reflective understandings of the context to make sense of what is required of them. In other words, the world is pre-reflectively disclosed *to* them, a fact that has important implications for how diplomats read and make sense of the unfolding crisis. Second, why do diplomats shift gears from pre-reflection to reflection during a crisis? The answer rests with Schön's notion of reflection in action. When pre-reflective understandings fail to provide suitable prescriptions for handling the crisis, diplomats reflectively assess the practical value of alternative solutions and choose a course of action that makes sense to them given the context.

Third, when does reflection stop to be relevant for managing the crisis? The excess of meaning and uncertainty introduced by a crisis situation is reflectively tamed by new readings of the context. It is only the production of a satisfactory new disclosure that can bring reflection temporary to a close. Fourth, do normative considerations apply to how diplomats reason about what to do during a crisis? The short answer is yes, since the world is reflectively disclosed *through* diplomats' actions. The latter shape the background structures of knowledge that inform the pre-reflective readings of further crises. "Authentic" disclosures by which diplomats successfully transcend the constraints of the situation in which they find themselves but without foreclosing the possibility of new disclosures enjoy normative validity. The next section will explain why Heidegger's concept of "world disclosure" offer the most coherent framework for addressing these questions.

III. DIPLOMACY AS WORLD DISCLOSURE

For a paper that seeks to develop an empirically relevant account of diplomatic management of international crises, the recourse to Heidegger's rather abstract concept of world disclosure as a theoretical anchor for studying the logic of diplomatic action in times of crisis may appear puzzling at first sight. However, despite the occasionally intimidating opacity of Heidegger's writings, his insight into the constitution of human agency offers us a unique epistemological perspective for understanding the analytical and normative boundaries of diplomatic agency. Put differently, before we can properly theorise crises management, we need to have a clear grasp of the epistemology on the basis of which to study the subject. This section aims to accomplish exactly this.

Heidegger introduces the concept in his landmark study on *Being and Time* (1973 [1927]) and he further articulates it in *The Basic Problems of Phenomenology* (1982) as a mode of explaining the horizons of meaning that make sense of what is to be human. A review of Heidegger's seminal work on the question of Being falls, of course, outside the scope of this article, and hence I will restrict the analytical section of this article to reviewing Heidegger's contributions vis-à-vis three important questions: what is to be disclosed? how?, and to what end? The first question goes at the heart of the question of agency, the second addresses the issue of how to unpack it, while the third speaks about the normative boundaries that circumscribe the agent's modes of social engagement. Taken together, the three questions provide a coherent and insightful theoretical context for discussing the concept of diplomacy as world-disclosure, both from an analytical and normative perspective.

2. 1 Diplomacy as world disclosure: the analytical dimension

Heidegger's primary concern is to raise the question of the meaning of Being not in the traditional sense of uncovering underlying principles and backdrop attributes shared in common by various entities – “that which determines entities as entities” (Heidegger 1973 [1927], 25-6), but as a more fundamental category of understanding of what makes possible the disclosure of Being as a structure of entities in the first place (Okrent 1992, 145). Heidegger thus draws a clear distinction between particular beings (all that exists: people, trees, institutions and so on) and Being as the most general quality of beings (the very existence of what exists), a distinction he refers to as the “ontological difference” (Nicholson 1996). The way in which we recognise various entities as beings (treaties, wars, diplomats) is not grounded in the image of an absolute, self-sufficient, supreme entity, but is informed by our prior understandings of what it *is* to be a particular entity, hence the ontological priority of the question of Being (Heidegger 1973 [1927], 32). However, the very act of questioning what a particular entity is involves a mode of access that is specific to the being of the inquirer that is, ourselves. For example, in order to understand the role of a diplomat in a humanitarian situation, one requires pre-understandings of what we mean by humanitarian situation, which in turn depends on who is asking the question: a lawyer, a NGO worker, a scholar etc.

This raises an important point: if what is asked about is contingent on the horizon of meaning of who makes the inquiry, then how reliably can we ascertain the meaning of what it is to be an agent? Heidegger's solves this dilemma with the assistance of an “existential analytic”, the concept of Dasein (Heidegger 1973 [1927], 32). This refers to a dual mode of engagement between us and

the world by which the latter, in one sense, is pre-reflectively disclosed *to* us, yet, in another sense, it is disclosed *through* us: it is we who make the disclosure possible (Kompridis 2006, 34). In other words, Dasein represents the horizon of meaning informed, on one side, by the repertoire of pre-theoretical everyday intuitions that create the conditions for beings (agents) to reveal themselves in various ways (Heidegger and Krell 2000, 20), and, on the other side, by the set of the possibilities that beings (agents) choose for themselves, get themselves into them, or grow themselves up into them (Heidegger 1973 [1927], 33). The answer to the question of “what is to be disclosed?” is therefore a particular conception of agency, which constitutes itself through the interplay between two modes of social engagement: first, the emerging agent takes note of the pre-reflective understandings of the situation in which she finds herself and second, she takes ownership, in a reflective manner, of the competences she requires to cope with the situation at hand.

The way to unpack this form of agency is by tracing the pre-reflective and reflective processes by which agents try to make sense of the world and of themselves. Heidegger discusses two basic modes by which an agent may disclose himself in his concrete engagement with the world: affectedness and understanding.ⁱ The first mode refers to unreflective states-of-mind, moods or sensibilities by which an agent finds himself existing as a result of being *thrown* in the world, while the second mode deals with the way in which the agent understands his own being by *projecting* himself onto possibilities of existence. More specifically, affectedness speaks about the primordial disclosure of the agent via moods and states-of-mind that is, “*prior to* all cognition and volition” (Heidegger 1973 [1927], 175). Experiencing moods is not an instance of private reflection, but a condition by which the agent unreflectively takes a stand on what is it in its thrown encounter with other entities (Heidegger 1973 [1927], 174). The shock, anxiety, fear, gratification

or determination a diplomat experiences during an international crisis are, for example, unreflective expressions of the agent's openness and disclosure in the presence of specific circumstances. Affectedness simply says that certain things the diplomat does have a bearing.

Understanding, on the other hand, is a mode of world disclosure that informs the diplomat's ability-to-be that is, knowing how to comport herself toward oneself and other entities (Gorner 2007, 79). Once thrown into an international crisis, the diplomat unreflectively senses through her moods the range of pre-reflective possibilities the crisis places in front of her for acting as a diplomatic agent. For example, international revelations about the use of chemical weapons by the Syrian government in August 2013 (BBC 2013) faced the U.S. diplomats with a pre-reflective conundrum: how to reconcile the country's commitment to international law with the necessity to enforce the "red line" policy regarding the use chemical weapons previously announced by President Obama (Good 2013). As a mode of world disclosure, understanding is about the agent taking the next step that is, projecting herself onto possibilities, not as part of a carefully designed plan, but as a way of grasping what is factually required of herself and taking a stand on how to cope, interpret and assert these possibilities (Heidegger 1973 [1927], 185-6). Using the example above, from the perspective of the understanding mode of disclosure, the US Secretary of State could have tried to build support in the UN Security Council for a resolution authorising the use of force against Syria or he could have chosen to pursue a policy of punishment of the Syrian government independently of the UN. While the suite of competences undergirding his position made available both possibilities to him, he it was up to him to choose, through a reflective process, which possibility to project himself onto.

2. 1 Diplomacy as world disclosure: the normative dimension

The question of agency has thus far been examined from an analytical perspective: what it is and how it takes shape? The concept of *authenticity*, underlying the agent's act of taking ownership of her possibilities of existence, introduces a critical normative dimension. Authenticity is a fundamental feature of agency because it addresses our deeply held desire to extract ourselves from conformity, social conditioning and habitual submission. In Heideggerian terms, authenticity implies a particular form of "forerunning resoluteness" by which one faces up to the unique concrete situation in which she finds oneself, while being ready, willing, and able to embrace a particular and essentially fragile set of possibilities (Carman 2005, 291). However, according to Heidegger, the fundamental condition of any agent is not one of authenticity but rather of inauthentic existence as his everyday conditions of possibility (tasks, rules, or standards of behaviour) have already been decided upon by Others (Heidegger 1973 [1927], 312-3). In other words, the condition of existence of the agent in his everydayness is severely circumscribed by pre-reflective social structures and hence his potentiality-for-being-one's-self it is being largely denied (Heidegger 1973 [1927], 165). A diplomat, for instance, may be thrown into an international crisis and he may project herself onto various courses of action, but the very conditions of possibility of his agency (whether to wait for the UNSC resolution or to enforce the "red line" independently of the UN as in the example above) have been largely defined for her by others.

Authenticity is therefore the theoretical anchor on the basis of which to assess the normative value of the process of world disclosure. While affectedness and understanding speak about how agents

emerge from their existential obscurity, make sense of the world and project themselves upon it, authenticity casts light on the normative underpinnings of what it is to be an agent and to act accordingly. The “falling” into inauthenticity of the agent takes place either by absorption into routines (the diplomat losing oneself in the tasks at hand), by being governed by idle talk and ambiguity (the diplomat engaging in sterile negotiations), or by taking upon oneself the purposes of other agents with which he interacts (the diplomat having her options prescribed for him by other diplomats) (Gorner 2007, 111-2). The outcome in all three situations is the same: the distortion of the agent’s ability to make choices, to develop himself, and to take responsibility of his own conditions of existence. However, the realisation by the agent of his condition of fallenness also constitutes the seed for potential regeneration and authentic existence. The agent’s anxiety or angst of losing his ability to be an agent has to be acknowledged, and not covered-up, by heeding the call of “conscience” to be himself and facing the guilt of waving alternative possibilities in his pursuit of his potentiality-for-Being (Heidegger 1973 [1927], 331).

Heidegger’s world disclosing thesis introduces three important principles that are particularly relevant for theorising the logic of diplomatic action in times of crisis. First, that intuitions, “pre-analytic and untutored judgments’ as Jaegwon describes them (1994, 53), play a critical role in the process of reasoning by which diplomats make sense of the situation in which they find themselves. Affectedness is hardly about activating knowledge propositions inferred from prior premises, but about forging knowledge out of the context “*prior to* all cognition and volition” as Heidegger reminds us. Second, reflection as a reasoning ability is not that much about reacting to the situation at hand, but about projecting oneself upon it and taking control of its conditions of possibility. The distinction is important as it calls into question the rule-following bias of the diplomatic profession.

Finally, normative considerations are embedded in the very process by which world disclosure takes place. Failing to unsettle the conditions that have created the crisis in the first place but without foreclosing the possibility of disclosing the world anew is not merely proof of professional inadequacy, but also of ethical miscarriage. It is on the basis of these epistemological tenets that we can now proceed to theorising more rigorously the logic of diplomatic action during international crises.

IV. DIPLOMATIC CRISIS MANAGEMENT

While the concept of crisis management has been less discussed in diplomatic studies, it has nevertheless been thoroughly examined within the broader context of IR theory under the conceptual umbrella of international crisis. From definitional perspective, crisis has been a notoriously difficult term to capture: “a lay term in search of a scholarly meaning” as one theorist aptly put it (Robinson 1968, 510). Conceptually, crisis has been referred to as an intermediate state between war and peace (Houben 2005, 12) characterised, *inter alia*, by “sequences of interactions between governments involving a dangerously high probability of war” (Snyder and Diesing 1977, 6-7), “situations of unanticipated threat to important values and restricted decision time” (Holsti 1972, 9), or “an emergency situation that is responded to according to a perception of danger and an urge to act against that danger” (McClelland 1977, 25). Generally embedded into and responding to historical circumstances of the Cold War period, these theoretical approaches have sought to identify generic characteristics (threat, urgency, uncertainty, stress) that could explain behavioural changes of decision-makers from routine to crisis mode of operation (Phillips and Rimkunas 1978, 260) or the structural and actor-specific conditions

responsible for the onset of crises and their proneness to violent escalation (Brecher and Wilkenfeld 1982).

More nuanced theoretical models have suggested a distinction between international and foreign policy crises (Brecher 1993) on account of their different degree of systemic impact, or called attention to the dynamic configurations of individual errors, organisational failure, and environmental flux that trigger and consolidate crises (Boin 2004, 169). In an attempt to move away from the state-to-state and security-focused conceptualisations of international crises, more recent approaches have sought to identify the determinants of financial (Nelson and Katzenstein 2014), environmental (Zhang et al. 2011) and humanitarian crises (Hodge 2013). Acuto's insightful discussion of diplomatic crises as a political genre of international crises, which usually occur alongside other standoffs such as military, economic or cultural ones (Acuto 2011, 527) represents one of the fewest examinations of the concept of crisis from a distinct diplomatic angle, but a few other studies have since taken up the issue as well (Bayne 2011; Bjola and Constantinou 2015). Despite the plethora of crisis studies, little progress has arguably been made. One may wonder whether we know more about crisis management today than we knew after the Cuban missile crisis fifty years ago. The succession of crises that have emerged in the past ten years and which has constantly taken policy makers and academics by surprise (the 9/11 terrorist attack, the 2008 global financial crisis, the Arab Spring, the Ukrainian crisis, the rise of the Islamic State, the escalating disputes in the East and South China Sea, the rising tensions in the Arctic etc.) appears to provide evidence to the contrary.

The fundamental limitation of current approaches lies with their underlying epistemology. Crises are being primarily theorised as *linear* developments moving along from an initial point of disruption to escalation, potential resolution and termination. It is because of this epistemic framework that crisis management has been generally conceived as a Cartesian dualism of reflective actions and reactions to a defined set of structural conditions. What needs to be understood, however, is that crises are not linear but *fractal* developments. More specifically, a crisis represents a set of self-similar events that repeat themselves at different scales in an ongoing feedback loop, unless stopped.ⁱⁱ Each copy of the crisis reflects itself in a similar fashion at a larger scale and as a result, its root cause is the same at every scale of observation. For example, the Ukrainian crisis did not start and end with the wave of popular protests against President Viktor Yanukovich. It was preceded by the failure of the EU and Ukraine to ratify the Association Agreement and it was followed by the Russian stealth invasion of Crimea. The failure in each case to resolve the demands for closer European integration of the majority of Ukrainian people was the pattern that reflected itself in a magnified proportion in each subsequent fractal step. Furthermore, the more the pattern repeats itself, the more complex it becomes, and the more difficult to untangle. The financial crisis that Russia has faced as a result of the Western sanctions for its military involvement in Crimea represents a more complex and arguably more dangerous fractal development of the initial recursive rule of crisis construction.

In short, despite the complexity of fractal patterns, they conform to rather simple rules of construction regardless of the scale of magnification at which they are viewed (Halsall 2008, 4). A fractal approach to international crises would thus substantially change the perspective about how to conceptualise and manage them. What is required is a not a linear response mechanism,

but a more elaborate method for envisioning, capturing and handling very unstable, blurred and hyper-complex states of the world (Topper and Lagadec 2013, 15) that takes into account both pre-reflective and reflective modes of diplomatic engagement. Since a comprehensive fractal theory of crisis management cannot be developed within the limited space of this article, the objective I prefer to pursue here is to define the broader theoretical context that would allow us to take this question seriously. This is where the concept of “world disclosure” re-enters the discussion and demonstrates its analytical prowess. It does so by providing an account of how pre-reflective intuitions may help reveal the pattern of an international crisis, how reflective understanding shapes the response to a crisis, and how authenticity can provide a guide to breaking the crisis pattern. Let us discuss these three aspects in turn.

First, the process of interpreting a crisis produces meanings that alter, in a camouflaged manner, the very process of interpretation that diplomats are part of. What crisis interpretation does is to determine *a priori* what the “things” pertaining to the unfolding crisis should be understood. Thanks to this constitutive function, world disclosure is publicly “immunised” against the parties’ inner-worldly experience (i.e., pre-reflective intuitions) that makes it possible (Lafont and Morgan 1994, 53). This is why instead of asking what a crisis is and what causes it, we turn the question on its head and ask what does it mean for a diplomat to be thrown into the crisis? This move would allow us to understand the pre-reflective considerations on the basis of which diplomats make sense of what is required of them within the particular context in which they find themselves. This is important because the fractal pattern that shapes the crisis originates in the clash of pre-reflective readings of the initial context. For example, it makes a huge difference whether the Russian takeover of Crimea is pre-reflectively read as another “Sudetenland moment” (Kralova 2014) or

as a matter of self-determination that corrected a “Soviet-era mistake” (RT News 2014). Failure to bridge the pre-reflective “disclosure gap” created by the excess of meaning and uncertainty introduced by a novel situation is what sets the fractal pattern of the crisis into motion and allows it to replicate itself at different scales.

Second, when pre-reflective intuitions fail to provide suitable interpretations for handling the situation, diplomats shift gears from pre-reflection to reflection by comparing and assessing the viability of alternative solutions and choosing a course of action accordingly. In Heideggerian parlance, this is the stage when the world is being reflectively disclosed *through* diplomats’ actions as they move from simply reacting to the situation at hand, to actively projecting themselves upon it and taking control of its conditions of possibility. However, as long as the projection fails to close the “disclosure gap”, it would simply enable the fractal pattern of the crisis to reiterate itself on ever grander scales.ⁱⁱⁱ As a general rule, crisis is supposed to end when the costs associated with the chosen course of action become unsustainable for one or all parties involved. This is why crisis management is primarily conducted as a game of asymmetrical costs: inflicting high levels of pain on the other side via economic, diplomatic or military sanctions, while minimising the consequences of the crisis on oneself. The rate of success of such strategies has proved, however, to be relatively low (Art and Cronin 2003, 405) and fractal theory tells us why: cost asymmetry is difficult to sustain when the crisis follows a non-linear pattern and reiterates itself on different scales.

More specifically, the decision taken in response to a crisis generates a new disclosure that throws diplomats back into a pre-reflective mode. Imposing sanctions, for instance, creates new facts on

the ground the full impact of which is yet to be grasped. The crisis is again pre-reflectively disclosed to parties as the new situation demands a fresh interpretation of the possibilities the crisis places in front of the diplomatic agent. Is it exactly the interplay between these two modes of social engagement (pre-reflection vs reflection) that drives the fractal pattern of the crisis onward or backward. If the new pre-reflective step inflates the original “disclosure gap” (i.e., the excess of meaning and uncertainty regarding the relationship between parties), the crisis would continue on its fractal path on a magnified scale. If, by contrast, the disclosure gap is being reduced between pre-reflective stages of interpretation, the crisis heads towards sustainable resolution.

Authenticity, the third critical element of world disclosure, offers an insightful guide regarding the conditions under which a crisis can move up or down its fractal path. “Authentic” disclosures by which diplomats successfully transcend the constraints of the situation in which they find themselves but without foreclosing the possibility of new disclosures are more likely to sustainably break the fractal pattern of the crisis. Given the importance of pre-reflective understandings in defining the conditions of interpretation of a crisis, authentic disclosures must disturb and refocus the prior understandings that sustain the fractal pattern of the crisis. At the same time, they must ensure they do not obscure their own status as disclosures as that would rigidify the world against further disclosures (Kompridis 2006, 35) and by extension, it would adversely shape the background structures of knowledge to inform pre-reflective readings of further crises. Returning to the Ukrainian example, authentic disclosures must help unsettle pre-reflective understandings that keep both sides locked in a pattern of fractal escalation (e.g., Ukraine’s relations with EU perceived as a threat to Russia), but in a manner that is considered legitimate by both sides. In sum, failing to unsettle the conditions that have created the crisis in the first place but without

foreclosing the possibility of disclosing the world anew is not merely proof of diplomatic professional inadequacy, but also of ethical miscarriage as it may open the door to new crises.

Three important avenues of empirical research on diplomatic crisis management follow from the discussion above. First, we need to understand how pre-reflective “disclosure gaps” form and develop. What exactly makes parties react pre-reflectively so differently to an emerging new situation? Is this caused by prior historical experiences, unsatisfied needs of status recognition or simply by distorted communication? Within the crisis management literature this area is the least researched but, as indicated above, it arguably presents strict relevance for understanding the powerful role of pre-reflective intuitions in setting a crisis in motion. Ground-breaking interdisciplinary research on intuitions promises to make this field more amenable to empirical research (Sinclair 2014). Second, the model offers a simple yet fascinating tool for studying fractal escalation of crises via the dynamic interplay between pre-reflective and reflective reasoning. More specifically, it suggests that the context informing this interplay is the key to understanding the development of each crisis and hence it has to be carefully examined empirically. Overarching generalisations from previous cases are not only analytical useless, but they could also make things worse at the practical level. Third, a world disclosing approach reshapes our conceptual horizon of crisis management by shifting attention from crisis termination to fractal scaling control. If we take seriously the proposition that pre-reflective disclosure gaps cannot be completely closed due to the idiosyncratic features of intuitions, crisis management would then revolve around reducing the entropy of fractal developments. Research on “authentic” disclosures must therefore involve comparative assessments of cases of fractal (de)escalation that shed light on how crisis fuelling pre-reflections can be successfully challenged.

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ⁱ Heidegger also mentions a third mode of disclosure, discourse, but as Gomer rightly points out this can be rather understood as what gives form, shape, and structure to affectedness and understanding (Gorner 2007, 88). In other words, discourse is hardly a distinct mode of disclosure, but rather one that permeates the other two.

ⁱⁱ For a good introduction to the self-similarity, scale invariance and power law relations of fractals, see (Brown and Liebovitch 2010, 2-7); See also the original text of the Mandelbrot (1982) which formalised and developed the concept.

ⁱⁱⁱ For example, in the case of Ukraine the fractal pattern of the crisis evolved from the initial Euromaidan protests, to the bloodless Russian invasion of Crimea, the "hybrid war" in Eastern Ukraine, and the Russian financial and economic meltdown following the introduction of Western sanctions.