

## ***BEHOLD, THE KAIROS***

**PM.** As I move into my eighties, Russ, I feel like I'm walking through a dark wood, at a diminishing pace, entranced by shimmering choirs of fireflies flashing out their *minuets*, *scherzi* and *jigs*. In short, I definitely find myself in a VINT (= acronym for "Very Interesting New Territory"). Have you ever found yourself in a VINT, Russ?

Take *physical balance*, for one very interesting thing; it becomes more and more of a concern, ever since I lost my right eye sixty years ago, in a car accident at age twenty. That's sixty years of a "visual handicap" that only increases with time. I thought that the physical healing had gone as far as it could, or as far as necessary, in those first few post-injury years. And that was true enough, as far as it went. But physical healing does not tell the whole story of such an injury and its aftermath. Rather, "it"—the visual handicap—just slowly advances as I age, to put it bluntly, taking away things that I once took for granted. I have managed, though, to compensate in various ways for that partial, disorienting 50% loss of vision, which began suddenly in 1963. My re-orientation mostly took place inwardly, over many years.

I believe my growing interest in the *kairos* was intensified by the eye-loss—with its sacrifice of the right, or "sun-eye," and its forced reliance instead on the left, or "moon-eye." That was a dramatic, overnight shift. It put me, unwittingly, in synch with William Blake's reference to "eyes of flesh, eyes of fire"—though it took years to realize the fact. Basically, Blake's "eyes of flesh" belong to the rational, secular, profane, materialistic, scientific, linear, literal, Enlightenment, etc., ways of seeing and thinking about things. In contrast, the "eyes of fire" refer to the visionary *gnosis* and its gifts, having to do metaphorically with the "ability to see into the dark." Thomas Berry might call that shamanic vision, along with his calls for the development of the shamanic personality. Perhaps we could also call that "epiphanic vision." Why not? I first encountered these images from William Blake—eyes of flesh and fire—through the important work of Theodore Roszak, visionary historian, in *The Making of a Counter Culture* (1969). Here's Roszak:

*"The shaman, then, is one who knows that there is more to be seen of reality than the waking eye sees. Besides our eyes of flesh, there are eyes of fire that burn through the ordinariness of the world and perceive the wonders and terrors beyond. In the*

*superconsciousness of the shaman, nothing is simply a dead object, a stupid creature; rather, all the things of this earth are swayed by sacred meanings.”<sup>1</sup>*

That passage by Roszak grabbed and shook me when I first read it, and it still shakes me today. For years afterwards, I could feel the tension within myself between eyes of flesh and eyes of fire. Only in recent years did I begin to sense this same, implicit “flesh/fire” contrast within the *kairos* itself. I suspect *kairos* is an archetype.

Most early Greek usages emphasize the sense of *kairos* as brief, momentary aspects of time—an opportune moment, a propitious moment for decisive action, timeliness in speech or action, and so forth. In other words, it’s a window of opportunity that opens briefly, but it won’t stay open forever, and must be “driven through” decisively, at the “right time.” We still see these opportune moments today, in many fields of experience. And yet, the old formulations still resonate strongly with many medieval, alchemical maxims, commonplace sayings such as *bigger than big, smaller than small*, or, *as above, so below*, and the like.

As you mentioned, Russ, the Greeks also had another word for time: *Chronos*. That was the *name of a god*, of course—time personified, depicted in the form of a familiar old bearded man with his robe, wielding a scythe, the better to “harvest” those under his care. Over the centuries, Chronos became identical with linear time, easy to measure, easy to place a price tag upon, readily harnessed to the profane purposes of science, less and less so to demonstrations of sacred doctrine and dogma. *Kairos time* was, and is, still active, but linear clock-time prevails.

The aspect of *kairos* that interests me, though, offers a different perspective—not confined to linear moments; rather, Jung described it as a shifting of the dominant values, when entire ages—long periods of history—undergo fundamental changes, as charted by astrologers, astronomers, and the like. Such “aeons” last about two thousand years, according to the precession of the equinoxes. Today, the shift between the “Age of Pisces” and the “Age of Aquarius” is underway. Nor is there any stipulation that a *kairos* must complete its transformative effects within specific human time limits, particularly when historical periods are undergoing such deep transformations. Jung put his finger on the implicit difficulty I’m seeing in the *kairos*, when he spoke of a “mood of world destruction and world renewal that has set its mark on our age. . . . Coming generations will have to take account of this

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<sup>1</sup> Theodore Roszak, *The Making of a Counter-Culture*. (Garden City, New York: Doubleday & Co., Inc., 1969) p. 248.

momentous transformation if humanity is not to destroy itself through the might of its own technology and science.”<sup>2</sup>

If I am right—always a question—this kairotic opening between aeons, however opportune or propitious, might take centuries for any real *metamorphosis of the gods, of the fundamental principles and symbols* to be inaugurated, realized, finalized, and stabilized—if that’s even possible under present conditions. Nothing in the etymology, by the way, suggests to me that such historical transitions have to be short, smooth or breezy. Far from it. I’m concerned that, if we do not recognize the depth of the transition that we’re all in, as it’s happening, then we risk a serious and widespread mental and emotional disturbance, a collective derangement. Collectively, we humans run the risk of a serious loss of adaptation, which amounts to a form of virtual species-madness—probably not the creative kind you’ve written about in the past. We’re on the brink, closer to that level of derangement. Everywhere.

Thus, whichever time we elect to observe, we’re in for more trouble than we know what to do with. To me, the view of *kairos* that I’m trying to sketch out, presages a long spell of general chaos, touching on the actions, dynamics and qualities of “heavenly” time, which closely affects “earthly” time.

This grand sense of a “*celestial kairos*” cares little for the ticking-and-tocking of temporal boundaries and strictures. It expands into longer—much longer—“historical moments,” where it begins to reveal the actions, dynamics and qualities of heavenly time, God’s time, quantum time, and so on, as you portrayed so well in your reply to #2.

Let’s set aside for now the *preemptive* tendency of early Christianity to lay hold of anything “pagan” that could be forced to serve the growing Orthodox canon, suppressing everything else. Looking around, we find a rich fund of leftover “survivors”—often-secret traditions that escaped the Church Triumphant, with its dark call to unanimity: the rack, the stake, the blade. I’m referring to the unorthodox passions and experiences as lived so often by poets and writers, artists and mystics, visionaries, depth psychologists, dreamers, oddball curmudgeons generally, and so on. Though greatly outnumbered and largely ignored, if not viewed suspiciously, those lunar vocations reveal just a few of the types that labor in the vineyards of what I call the “intuitive arts.”

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<sup>2</sup> C. G. Jung, “*The Undiscovered Self*,” (New York: A Mentor Book, by arr. with Little, Brown and Company, 1957-1958), p. 123.

Intuition, then—the inner voice that *knows* what oneself cannot have known, the way that many animals must know, with a knowing that comes from “somewhere else.” And let’s not forget *feeling*. These are a few reasons why I don’t look to orthodox sources—academic theories, research statistics, rational-materialism, etc.—when seeking hints and clues as to my opening question to you: “What the hell is happening to the world?” We don’t need more research or statistics. We need something else.

So, there is human time, but also God’s time; there is scientific time, but artists prefer artists’ time; shamans faithfully invoke shamanic time; and so it goes. There’s a lot of overlap in all this, and it may sound like I’m trying to over-define here what I do not understand. But I only want to gather the intuitive hints that present themselves to me for consideration of the mysteries. Do we humans have sufficient patience, courage, and grit, to undergo the prolonged ordeal of not-knowing? Intuition suggests that, increasingly, not-knowing will become a fundamental condition of life. Do we know what is sufficient courage? And what does “enough” mean, as we approach eight billion souls? And if it takes centuries, what then? What about kindness?

I know this is a labyrinth of ideas, moods, and intuitions. I don’t feel lost, but I do feel like I have never been “here” before, in this Land of Strange and Weird. Does any of this resonate with you, Russ?

## *Curiosity, Inversion, and Imagination*

**RL.** Because aging brings so much loss, most people try to hang on to what has been the basis for much of life's meaning and one's identity in life.<sup>3</sup> There is not much spontaneous enthusiasm for trying to find something new. I do find myself resonating with your concept of VINT ("Very Interesting New Experience."), because I find seeking the new is much more rewarding than trying to hang on to the old. In this, I find three things to be crucial.

The first is *curiosity*. Curiosity is the antidote to physical literalism. When we have a physical problem, we have been taught to seek a physical solution. Being curious opens the door to considering all manner of additional approaches: psychological, spiritual, mystical, and other dimensions as well. Being stuck in the physical (and typically only the medical) mode of dealing with problems—particularly the problems of aging—radically limits what is possible in dealing with growing old. "Be curious and welcoming," I often say.<sup>4</sup>

The second is *inversion*. I use inversion as a term to reference most anything that has the potential to *invert* one's conscious intentions. A good example of inversion is John Keats' idea of negative capability, which is the state "of being in uncertainties, Mysteries, doubts without any irritable reaching after fact & reason."<sup>5</sup> You can see that this idea is contrary to our usual agenda where the tendency is to flee from these difficult states. Things that typically invite inversion are dreams, visions, synchronicities, reversals of expectation,

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<sup>3</sup> For a more detailed view of aging, see [Lee Roloff and Russell Lockhart. \*The Final Interlude: Advancing Age and Life's End\*. Everett: The Lockhart Press, 2016.](#)

<sup>4</sup> I find it useful to greet and welcome illness and aging issues as *visitors*, much like greeting the tramps at the door as did Baucis and Philemon. All other villagers turned them away. But Baucis and Philemon offered them gracious hospitality. The tramps were tramps in appearance only. The visitors were Zeus and Hermes. The gods punished the unwelcoming neighbors by death. Baucis and Philemon were *old*, so in some respects this is an "old age tale." Note the relation between the word 'hospitality' and "hospital." Hospitals so often evoke *fear*. To be sure the villagers were fearful of what was visiting. For the complete story, see Ovid's *Metamorphoses*: VIII, 611–724.

<sup>5</sup> The full text of Keats' famous (1817) letter is cited in Andrés Rodríguez *Book of the Heart: The Politics, Letters and Life of John Keats*. Hudson: Lindisfarne Press, 1973, pp39-40.

losses, and almost anything that “befalls” one. It is useful to approach these inversion experiences as if they are the product of the intention of something *other*. This sense of otherness is always *uncanny*. The way to relate to these unexpected experiences is to stay with them, not to turn away, or try to change, or otherwise impose one’s will on them. By *staying with*, in the sense Keats implied (an act of eros), holds the *tension* of the inversion, and this tension becomes a pathway for the presentation of “something else” from the deeper psyche. I think of this as the *alchemy of inversion*. It brings the possibility of transformation that is not achievable by ego consciousness alone.

The third is *imagination*. One of the consequences of holding the tension of inversion experiences, is that the imagination is aroused autonomously. This is quite different from conscious fantasy which is related to ego needs. It is rather the main activity of the deep psyche, and one can connect with it in this way. This aspect of imagination is not directed by the ego but is spontaneous and autonomous, and brings with it strange, unexpected, and often eerie qualities. If genuine, one will experience time distortion, odd body experiences, and, very often, unusual sounds. Figures, voices, and images will appear that can be quite striking and unexpected. It is a different world from the usual rational and emotional world we think of as “reality.” Good examples are Lewis Carroll’s *Through the Looking Glass* and C. G. Jung’s *The Red Book*.

While the above is a guide on how to welcome the unexpected in terms of aging, there is something in your emphasis on the *kairos* that has led me to see that these things I have described (curiosity, inversion, imagination) can be brought fruitfully to bear on most anything. Here I am specifically thinking of the issues at the center of our concerns: climate change, institutional collapse, and the potential extinction of the human species. Relating to these distressing issues in this way is one possible means of bringing up from the depths of the psyche *its* view of these things. This is almost certain to be different in form

from anything that one engages in from the usual perspectives. You will see none of this type of experience in the headlines and people will not share these things readily.

It is not that listening to the deeper psyche will solve these horrendous events facing us. No. Not at all. But “being with” what the psyche brings up can be enormously instructive in terms of how to face what is coming. Ask yourself: in what ways am I *curious* about these issues? How are they working to *invert* my conscious agenda? What comes from engaging these calamities *imaginally*.

Asking yourself these questions leads to a highly *individual* approach to these things, not at all something that one is encouraged to do otherwise. Still, I find that curiosity, inversion, and imagination are difficult to tend in the context of the rapidity and distraction of our daily lives.

One thing I do is what I call *Wordwork*.<sup>6</sup> Consider the word *climate*. We use this word so readily, so speedily, so thoughtlessly that we do not *stop* to consider the word itself. This requires taking *time*. One gets an image of this slowing down and taking time by becoming aware of the root image of *consider*. “Consider” comes from the Latin *sider*, which referred to a star gazer. Not just glancing at the heavens. But, like the alchemists, attentive looking into their alchemical ovens until the imagination became “alive.” So, to consider the word *climate*, we need to stop, stare, and “star gaze” at it. This is a sense that the word itself does not offer up. To do this requires wordwork, that is, a deep dive into the word’s birth and development, its etymology, the things about the word we do not consciously know.

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<sup>6</sup> For a brief introduction to Wordwork see <https://www.ralockhart.com/WP/wordwork-1/>

Go to <http://etymonline.com> and do a search on the word “climate.” Here is what you will be presented with.

### climate (n.)

late 14c., "horizontal zone of the earth's surface measured by lines parallel to the equator," from Old French *climat* "region, part of the earth," from Latin *clima* (genitive *climatis*) "region; slope of the earth," from Greek *klima* "region, zone," literally "an inclination, slope," thus "slope of the earth from equator to pole," from a suffixed form of PIE root \*klei- "to lean."

Oftentimes, one will find little in the definition that sparks interest or curiosity, or imagination. In my experience, curiosity tends to be aroused when one comes to the historical *root*, in this case, \*klei- meaning “to lean.” Typically, the root meaning is an unexpected image, often in verb form, pointing to an action, in this case, “to lean.” You may find yourself puzzling over this. What has “lean” got to do with climate? But you can see that the word *root* has already taken you into a different space. The first time I asked myself this question, the phrase “to lean into” came to mind. That phrase refers to the action of trying with one’s full strength to “do something.” In relation to climate issues, to lean into them is an enormous challenge implied by the word itself. To reject or turn one’s back on this sense is to violate the deeper meaning of climate.

To carry wordwork to the next level, do a search on the root itself (\*klei-). This second step will tell you about the development, the “flowering” of the root, and all the words it has given birth to.

### \*klei-

Proto-Indo-European root meaning “to lean.”



It forms all or part  
of: **acclivity**; **anticline**; **clemency**; **client**; **climate**; **cli**  
**max**; **cline**; **clinic**; **clinical**; **clino-**  
**clitellum**; **clitoris**; **decline**; **declivity**; **enclitic**; **hete**  
**roclite**; **incline**; **ladder**; **lean** (v.); **lid**; **low** (n.2) "small  
hill,  
eminence;" **matroclinous**; **patroclinous**; **polyclinic**;  
**proclitic**; **proclivity**; **recline**; **synclinal**; **thermoclin**  
**e**.

The different words that have sprouted from the root are often surprising, if not a bit overwhelming. But as different as they are, they are all *related*. While surprising to ego consciousness, it should be noted that because language is archetypal, these things are “known” in the deeper layers of the psyche. Jung often noted that dreams make use of these things, and this is why etymology is important in understanding the language of dreams.

I find that one of the most productive ways of using this abundance is to use these words poetically. Give it a try and see what you come up with. In my experience this way with words always gives rise to something new in relation to the issues leading to the wordwork.

It is because of the relation of language to the deeper psyche that this way of wordwork is not tangential to my reflections here on kairois. No matter what the temporal duration of kairois (of any kind), it will always bear both the *spirit of the times* and the *spirit of the depths*. One way of expressing the difference between these spirits is to note that the spirit of the times embodies the fullest flowering of the past into the present, while the spirit of the depths will always embody the *formation* of the future. While the spirit of the times captures many, and leads to aggregations, groups, masses, and other forms of multiplicity, the spirit of the depths seeks out singular individuals. The medium of this seeking is dreams, visions, and synchronicities.

I think it is important to note that Blake’s “eyes of fire,” that you recalled, refers to “seeing into the dark.” This reminds that the root meaning of “mystery” is “seeing with the eyes closed.” I believe these senses of seeing belong to the “spirit of the depths.”

What do you think the spirit of the depths is seeing now?