

## *The Shock of Kairos*

**PM.** I COULDN'T AGREE MORE with what you are saying, Russ. And I'm glad you mentioned your essay on the "Alternative Reality Virus." When I first read that piece, it made a powerful impression on me. Then I re-read it several times, and with each re-reading, its impact only increased. I hope you'll find an occasion to re-circulate it soon. It cuts smoothly through all the prickly blather, the five o'clock shadow, like an Italian barber's razor.

What you're saying about how psychosis "alters consensual reality" and "encloses one in a different reality," certainly does resonate with what we've all been witnessing in the US lately. An "altered consensual reality" is exactly what we're seeing on the current free-for-all of blood-sport, full-body-contact, Roman Coliseum, Gladiator-style American politics. These psychic disturbances are happening in other countries as well, of course. It's starting to look like a worldwide thing, another global pandemic, but a psychic one this time, as you mentioned. And, with nearly eight billion of us, and counting, that's a chilling prospect.

You said, Russ: "The possibility of extinction of the human species, something humans have never experienced before, is having effects on our deepest sense of existence." I agree. Today, we are undergoing a process of dissolution, an alchemical *olutio*. But that's a pointed, specific word. I'm looking for a more general word: KAIROS. Does every reader know all about KAIROS? The simple definition Jung gave in MDR will suffice: "We are living in what the Greeks called the kairos - the right moment - for a 'metamorphosis of the gods', of the fundamental principles and symbols."

The actual shock of a kairos is different from its dainty dictionary definitions, which emphasize the "right or opportune moment." I've been taking a different view of KAIROS, though. Any "metamorphosis of the gods, of the fundamental principles and symbols," will not be momentary. It will take centuries to dissolve the old and coagulate the new—whatever that might be. Do people realize how difficult things are going to get, and how rapidly? Jung's reference to the kairos was partly a comment on great cycles of Time, as required for a changing of the gods? Holy Cow! That means the world is in meltdown, and it's unstoppable. I'm so aware of the kairos as it happens. (I know, this is starting to sound like sci-fi mind-travel, or preaching, but I'm serious.) It's very disorienting in a way, but also orienting. Whoever can see the kairos at work can almost read the future, to a degree. Thus, one is half-prepared for the inevitable

surprises, but not too surprised. One gains a modicum of equanimity, perhaps? How do you see the kairos, Russ?

### *Time is not what it seems*

**RL.** I BEGAN MY CAREER in cognitive psychophysiology sixty-five years ago and my focus since then has been on time. When I began my Jungian studies sixty years ago and became a Jungian analyst almost fifty years ago, the question of time in relation to the psyche and dreams has stayed with me as a constant companion. So, your asking me how I see the kairos is like an eros dart piercing the heart, the center of the work I have been immersed in all these years. It pleases me to have this opportunity to say a few words reflecting my current thinking about time and kairos and to raise issues we may want to explore further on.

I studied the literature of time in science, philosophy, literature, the arts, history, mythology, religious traditions, even comic books. This was all before I studied Jung. What touched me most was Marcel Proust's *In Search of Lost Time*. I did not know it at the time, but now I consider Proust's seven-volume masterpiece to have been my initial training as an analyst—which still lay some years ahead in my future.

While immersed in Proust, I had a dream. It was a voice dream that announced, "it's the mother of time." I was gripped by the image of time having a mother—and presumably a father. My mind leapt immediately to Chronos the Greek god of time, his mother, Gaia (Ge: Earth) and father Uranus (Sky, Water).<sup>1</sup> My dream pulled me up short by speaking of an "it" as the mother of time. This is an example of a dream bringing to one's awareness something quite new—and puzzling. And from "where"? Such an idea was never in my conscious experience of or about time. How does one even begin to think about time's mother as an unspecified "it." My scientist mind scoffed at pursuing such an idea, but I could not ignore the dream.

As the dictionary tells us, "it" usually refers to a "lifeless" thing. To be sure, we do not experience time directly as a *thing*, lifeless or not. What we do experience is a complex "flow" of inner and outer "events." Events are "things" that "happen." In our everyday reality, we experience time chronologically as a series of successive events.

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<sup>1</sup> All mythologies "personify" basic principles in more or less human terms.

As I explored the Jungian literature, my sense of time underwent a profound shift. This occurred as a result of reading Jung's treatise on synchronicity, and Wolfgang Pauli's on the influence of archetypal ideas on the scientific theories of Kepler, which were published together as *The Interpretation of Nature and the Psyche*<sup>2</sup>, and even more so when I learned that the dreams in Jung's *Psychology and Alchemy*<sup>3</sup> were Pauli's. It was these events which led me to study, as best I could, quantum mechanics. These studies produced strong intuitions that the deep psyche was not only similar in nature to the mysteries unfolding in quantum reality, but may in fact be synchronistically related to quantum reality. For these reasons, I surmised that the deeper psyche could *not* be understood from any other perspective of psychology or psychoanalysis.

I no longer understood time in terms of linear chronology as experienced in ordinary reality, that time moves only in one direction (past>present>future). I began to pursue the radical thought that time could flow in multiple directions and, moreover, that time could develop *spatial* characteristics.

But I was troubled by these intuitions, which themselves seemed to “flow,” because I simply did not understand what was being “presented” to my consciousness by some “source” that was simply “other,” and a source I could not know directly—but only by its offerings to my limited consciousness. What these intuitions did was to break down the boundaries of my own thinking, allowing me to think in a more Keatsean way by deliberately holding fast to “uncertainties, Mysteries, doubts, without any irritable reaching after fact & reason.”<sup>4</sup> I was hooked. Being exposed to the thinking that characterized quantum mechanics allowed me to think in new ways, even if I did not understand what I was intuiting or thinking.

For example, I began to think of the present as a *space*, a matrix, a manifold with some dimension, through which events pass from past to future. Traces of events remain in memory. Images of future are present in fantasy and imagination. I also have begun to think of kairos as a “space,” a space through which events pass in various ways. “Normal” passage is our experience of the usual sense of time. In this sense, we all have normal kairos, that is, not at all unusual or consequential and mostly unnoticed. But *entangled* passage becomes something else. That is, events become *entangled* in the kairos space. This entanglement produces the special qualities

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<sup>2</sup> C. G. Jung and W. Pauli. *The Interpretation of Nature and the Psyche*. New York: Pantheon Books, Inc., 1955.

<sup>3</sup> C. G. Jung. *Psychology and Alchemy*. New York: Pantheon Books, Inc. 1955.

<sup>4</sup> H. E. Rollins. *The Letters of John Keats*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1958.

we think of when we think of kairos: the opportune moment, the “right” time, “the coming together.” Onians<sup>5</sup> has shown that the etymological root of kairos lies in the sense of “weaving.” This gives the sense of entanglement, the weaving of events to produce the necessary conditions for the emergence of the extraordinary “moment,” no matter how long it lasts. I imagine that entangled kairos has qualities of duration as well as of space. I wonder if the spatial qualities in some way begin to incorporate “many” rather than “one” and that this may be one way in which the kairos becomes a “dominant,” in the sense Jung meant it to characterize the specific qualities of a period of time that are determinant of the time’s collective qualities.

I was quite taken with the novels and writing of P. K. Dick. A strong theme in his work is the future communicating to us in the present. Not necessarily “our” future, but “the” future, even possible futures. I took this to mean that there are different qualities of Kairos being prepared in the future which in one way or another can enter into our present time, however small or large that time may be. This naturally opens the question—particularly in the sense of a quantum question—of whether the future can affect the past.

Recent developments in quantum mechanics point toward this possibility and begin to show clearly that our normal sense of time bears little relation to quantum time. Researchers have now been able to “slit” time in the same sense that particles sent through a slit will show entangled effects; that is, what happens to one particle then happens *instantaneously* to the other, no matter the distance, illustrating that *effects can happen faster than the speed of light*. Likewise, the slit-time effect shows that *effects in the future can impact the past instantaneously*. Such weirdness is almost impossible to understand; it begins to feel meaningful not only on the quantum level, but in terms of comprehending some of the strange phenomena of the deep psyche, where one can be in two places at the same time, where the future can change the past, where the future presents itself in remarkable degrees of weirdness.

Can these off-the-wall reflections help us in any way to navigate the strange times we are in, the qualities and “intentions” of our present kairos time? Can the “it” as mother of kairos have intentions? I feel our deepening into such questions will bear fruit.

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<sup>5</sup> Richard Broxton Onians. *The Origins of European Thought About the Body, the Mind, the Soul, the World, Time and Fate*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1951.