

**The Right Moment. A Symposium on Kairotic Energies.
18-19 October 2018**

It's true that when we get caught in the spider's web – between the first chance event and the second – we fantasize endlessly and are, at the same time, willing to make do with the tiniest crumb, with hearing him – as if he were the time itself that exists between those two chance events – smelling him, glimpsing him, sensing his presence, knowing that he is still on our horizon, from which he has not entirely vanished, and that we cannot yet see, in the distance, the dust from his fleeing feet.

Javier Marías, *The Infatuations*, p. 346

The Greek term *kairós* expresses an idea of ‘grasping the right moment’, which travelled through art, literature, and philosophy. And even today, it is central to debates over, for example, time management. Combining perspectives from classical reception studies and iconology, my ongoing project at KU Leuven (2017-2021) is about the reception of *kairós* in the visual medium from antiquity to the Renaissance. How was the notion of *kairós* visualized in images throughout time, from antiquity to the early modern era? And more specifically, how did text and image work together to transform the notion of *kairós* in various contexts?

*Elle m'émouvait.
Elle me ramenait très loin en arrière.
Avant.
Avant que tout commence.
Avant la vie.*

Paul in the movie *Avant L'Hiver*, Philippe Claudel

As a crucial opening towards a new opportunity, *kairós* is the image of potential. This potential can be found in ‘transition’, in disruption and interruption. The tear in the fabric of time is the genitrix of renewal. The kairotic interruption is an interference, an intervention, a disturbance, a shift that one senses through an often indescribable atmospheric feeling. This atmospheric feeling or *Gefühlsraum* is something I have discussed in other texts, describing it as “the sensing of aura and *Stimmung* of a certain place as apparently ‘charged’ with a power that makes hierophany possible. The *genius loci* is a riddle that opens or closes: it requires reverence; it tempts, it is a *mysterium*, but also a *mysterium tremendum*.” *Kairós* also manifests itself as a sigh. He is related to the world of air and wind. In the etymology of the Indo-European languages, the root of the word for wind carries the principle of life itself. The semantic meanings are always related to movement and express the dynamic interaction of humankind and nature. Thus the wind root *Derbh-* has meanings going from dancing, turning, interweaving, connecting and knotting, to bundling grass.

If we expand the idea of kairotic interruption to a visual anthropology, we reach an alternative hermeneutic that takes into account the ontology of the imagery – an *iconogenesis* instead of an *iconology* – as ‘interruption’. The interruption lies at the level of breathing and wind, of the bipolarity that is part of life and its destiny, and finally of the gateway to the chthonic world. *Iconogenesis* – the quick flash of the ‘something’ we call imagery – requires further research. This perspective opens the recognition of *iconogenesis* as the kairotic moment stemming from *rhythmos* (the imagery breathes like *ruach*), from the duality of appearing and disappearing, and

from art as *Trauerarbeit* as a crack leading to the chthonic gate. The butterfly in particular symbolizes this iconogenesis, with the rhythmic beating of its wings, its capacity to appear and disappear, and finally the funerary/psyche nature with which the butterfly embodies a deep melancholy.



The Right Moment. A Symposium on Kairotic Energies welcomes papers that reflect on *kairós* from an iconographic, philosophical, theological, semantic, historical and/or anthropological point of view, but also warmly encourages biographical instances from personal research, where a ‘moment’ – a kairotic flash – was recognised or acknowledged, and where it turned out to be decisive for the thought process. Indeed, even *Kairós* flying away, leaving a stunned *Metanoia* behind, can be the subject of this symposium. **The Right Moment. A Symposium on Kairotic Energies** wants to both embrace an interdisciplinary look at *kairós* as cultural-historical phenomenon and concept, as well as celebrate the twists and turns, the amazement and grief that comes with the creative thought process of our trade.

The Right Moment is an initiative by Barbara Baert (www.arts.kuleuven.be / www.illuminare.be) in response to her being awarded the Belgian Francqui Prize Human Sciences 2016 (www.francquifoundation.be). Attendance for this symposium is invitation-only. This symposium is Baert’s personal token of gratitude towards the influential thinkers invited, and a sign of encouragement for the arts, interdisciplinarity, and new generations of artists and scholars.

Hence, this symposium is a celebration of science, emotion and time.

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*Le flux du temps peut bien couler, mais il présuppose
toujours une source et une embouchure,
il présuppose le lit du fleuve.*

Wolfgang Kaempfer, *Temps*, in *Traité d'Anthropologie*, p. 163

