

Cevdet Erek and Virginia Woolf on time, rhythm and moments of Kairos

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Time can run on or pass painfully slowly; time can run or crawl, flow or be stuck, and yet we use the universally adjusted and undisturbed ticking time of a clock at any time of the day to tell what time it is.

Experiencing time and measuring time often seem to be two different things. Sometimes they merge into one another, but usually they are at odds with each other or they seem to ignore other. An hour can feel like five minutes or half a day, but the clock will indicate that exactly one hour has passed regardless of what happened or is experienced. If we concentrate intensely on something, time seems to stand still, while if we are rushing to different places, time seems to go only faster.

For me and many other writers, writing mainly consists of looking for a relationship with time, because writing is, apart from telling a story, a very attentive listening to rhythms. It is listening to the cadence of sentences and the dynamics between scenes, which sometimes has to be pushed up and then endlessly delayed again, in order to capture the strange and rarely regularly beating rhythm of life. Writing is a way of breathing, sometimes galloping loudly to the rhythm of a certain tension, then again going extremely slow, as if to hold or stretch the length of a breath, and to hold on to that stillness on paper. Whatever the case, writing is mainly mocking the imperturbable, monotonous ticking of the clock, such as W.H. Auden wrote: 'All our intuitions mock / the formal logic of the clock.'

Not only writers, but also artists and musicians constantly play with the ambiguous dynamics of time: metrum and timing, measurement and pause, linear patterns and circular interventions alternate with each other or are placed in a new relationship with each other. It seems here to be the difference between a more spatial, linear approach to time - clock time - and the temporary approach to time - time as momentum or as current - to which ancient Greek philosophy gave two different names: Chronos and Kairos.

Since antiquity, time has been considered as the greatest mystery of humanity: according to Einstein, the clock time existed "so that not everything happens at the same time." But the Greek philosophers wanted to emphasize the 'two faces' of time: on the one hand the chronological time, which puts events on a horizontal line, and on the other, the kairotic time, which intervenes as a vertical axis of time in the 'course of things' and, according to Plato, this was also the time of creativity and the 'suitable moment' whereupon a new direction could be taken or a new road could be entered.

I found this such a recognizable and important difference that I devoted a book - *Kairos* (2014) - and an exhibition - *The Right Moment* (2017) to this distinction.

Chronos has been portrayed as an old man since ancient times, with an hourglass in one hand and a scythe in the other, because this is the chronological, measurable time that reminds us of finitude and transience: after all, a line has a clear starting and ending point. The other face of time is called Kairos or "the god of the right moment." This young muscular double-winged god of time is depicted with a scale in his hand, because it is a matter of very careful consideration and weighing of the right momentum for committing the right intervention to interrupt the course of things. It is also called an "in-between time" or an interlude, which is mainly characterized by the fact that the ticking of the clock is suddenly forgotten. And then something special happens. Then time seems to stop ticking, but to flow and come to life: 'Only when the clocks remain silent does true time come to life,' as William Faulkner wrote.

The Turkish artist Cevdet Erek, whose work I saw for the first time in 2017 at the Venice Biennale, and could be described to be constantly making interventions in time and space. He prefers to place his installations in spaces that are not specifically intended for art, such as the empty department store for his *Room* or *Rhythms* during Documenta 13. All attention goes to the rhythms that resound in the space, so that it looks like Erek wants to let the empty space itself speak, as an invisible author, who wants to make himself heard without holding on to a story or argument. Sometimes the repetitive rhythms that characterize his works have an enchanting effect on the clock time, which seems to fall or stop, and seems to be replaced by a different time experience. This applies, for example, to his work *Rulers and Rhythm Studies* (2007-2011), which was purchased by the Stedelijk Museum in Amsterdam, and with which Erek seems to play the double face of time - measures and rhythms - even more out against each other. The measure is represented by the use of rulers, on which Erek places divisions other than the usual centimeters, such as certain dates or words, which recall the erratic course of history, such as, for example, the moment (1928) at which the Arabic script in Turkey the western was replaced. Rulers become timelines that interrupt the monotonous ticking of the clock to reveal a different, more complex story.

'Shall we hope and pray for some transcendence of man-made clock time in the naturally governed space of prayer?' critic Monika Szewczyk rightly wondered in the magazine *Afterall* (2012) as a result of the installation *Week* by Erek in Basel in 2012¹. Here two installations of seven panels side by side were displayed, which at first appear to be "identical, but from a different perspective quite different", she writes. 'The nature of *Week's* beats vary somewhat as a computer-generated voice at times iterates: "Mon-day, Tues-day, Wednes-day, Thurs-day,

¹ <https://www.afterall.org/online/the-changing-times-cevdet-erek-and-hannah-weinberger>

Fri-day, Satur-day, Sun-day” and at others simply "tick-day, tick-day, tick-day, tick-day, tick-day, tok-day, tok-day". Ereĸ successfully casts the week after Western modernity's most commanding temporal sculpture, but there is nothing natural about the week, and one senses this artificiality in Ereĸ's beats, which are delivered deliberately and slowly.’

Art, whether this consists of seeing, making, hearing or reading art, leads us into this kairotic in-between time by turning our gaze away from the clock. In 2017, when I could be the curator of the international exhibition *The Right Time* at Gaasbeek Castle near Brussels, with works by Pipilotti Rist, Chiharu Shiota, Jorge Macchi and David Claerbout among others, I tried to create the most favorable atmosphere for setting such an interval or intervention on our lives controlled by the clock time using the course and music in the different halls. Instead of a lack of time, a time shortage or an acceleration of time, I wanted the visitors to experience a surplus of time. I had just discovered Ereĸ's work at the time, and it was too late to invite him for the exhibition, but the repetitive patterns that characterize his work refer to the freedom of not yet defined, not yet filled-in spaces as well as to the new rhythms - as a new heartbeat of time - that can emerge there, thanks to disobedience to the clock time.

We need different rhythmic patterns to experience time ourselves, as Virginia Woolf believes, describing it with the metaphor of the sea. The waves of the sea erase the monotonous ticking of the clock and cause them to merge with a continuous flow. She creates a narrator who wants to speak of time, who is ahead of the artificial time classifications of clocks, weeks, agendas, and who can evoke the ever-changing dimension of time itself. And so in her novel the voices immerse themselves in the magma of their own memories, where everything is still uncontrolled and unguided and still needs to take shape. Everything that happens one after the other in a classic, chronologically structured story here happens simultaneously, as if the characters can only like this escape the grasp of the clock: ‘Who were we? We had been extinguished for a moment, like sparks in burnt paper, and the blackening darkness raged. We passed the time, the history.’

It is my suspicion that Ereĸ is trying to do something similar with the rhythmic patterns and other references to time in his work. His works also bear witness to the tension between the artificial, monotonous clock time and the vital multiform time, which we can listen to if we, for example, lay our ears to listen to the waving waves of *Days Push off into Nights*. Then, involuntarily, one can only think of what Virginia Woolf wrote in her journal entry on the 19th of July 1939:

‘The past only comes back when the present runs so smoothly that it is like the sliding surface of a deep river. Then one sees through the surface to the depths. In those moments I find one of my greatest satisfactions, not that I am thinking of the past; but that it is then that I am living most fully in the present. For the present when backed by the past is a thousand times deeper than the

present that you enclose so tightly that you cannot feel anything else. Therefore, like a child who walks barefoot into a river, I will descend into the stream again.'

In the interval of Kairos, past, present and future are condensed into the 'fullness of a visionary moment,' as Heidegger wrote in *Being and Time* (1928). He also called this the 'Anfangliche Zeit': the time that opens up new possibilities for us. We find such moments in philosophy, music and art, but also in everyday experiences such as when our mind wanders off or when we meditate or daydream. The Kairos moment is like 'a time without hands', where 'the foreshadowing of what has not yet become' is shown, that is to say, that which is merely concealed as a possibility in the present. It also consists of the ultimate moments of inspiration.

During such a kairotic moment, a different rhythm that doesn't belong to the clock time, emerges and we humans become horsemen who come to meet themselves in the dark of the night. At such an 'eternal moment' we see a glimpse of the new beginning as a flare of light flash in the dark sky. In short, during this interlude we experience the world not according to the clock time, but *sub specie aeternitatis* - in the light of eternity. At that moment, the rushing of time and the world is interrupted for a moment, transcends the issues of the day, and makes place for a more human rhythm to emerge, that knows how to transform alienation from ourselves and the world into inspiration and connectedness.

Translated by Inez Piso

