

Rhetoric of (re)presentation

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MARIE GELANG

ÖREBRO UNIVERSITY

<https://orcid.org/0000-0002-8200-3429>

marie.gelang@oru.se

Kairos and actio – a rhetorical approach to timing

Kairos i actio – retoryczne podejście do czasu

Abstract

This article explores timing, kairos, in human interaction by analyzing nonverbal communication. The skill of timing, being able to do “the right thing at the right time,” is important for rhetorical agency. What are the silent processes in human interaction, and how do they influence the possibility for a kairotic moment to occur? Empirical material consisting of theater rehearsals has been analyzed. The findings show that the *actio* qualities: *tempo* and *energy*, as well as *phronesis*, are important factors for the appearance of a kairotic moment.

Niniejszy artykuł bada zagadnienia dotyczące czasu, tj. kairos, w interakcjach międzyludzkich poprzez analizę komunikacji niewerbalnej. Umiejętność wycucia czasu, zdolność do zrobienia „właściwej rzeczy we właściwym czasie”, jest ważna dla retorycznej sprawczości. Jakie procesy niewerbalne występują w interakcji międzyludzkiej i jak wpływają one na możliwość zaistnienia momentu kairotycznego? Analizie poddano materiał empiryczny, na który składają się próby teatralne. Wyniki badań wskazują, że takie cechy *actio*, jak tempo i energia, a także *phronesis* są ważnymi czynnikami sprzyjającymi pojawieniu się momentu kairotycznego.

Key words

actio, actio qualities, kairos, phronesis, timing
actio, cechy actio, kairos, phronesis, wycucie czasu

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MARIE GELANG

ÖREBRO UNIVERSITY

<https://orcid.org/0000-0002-8200-3429>

marie.gelang@oru.se

Kairos and actio – a rhetorical approach to timing

1. Introduction

The skill of timing, doing the “right thing at the right time,” is important for speakers such as politicians, negotiators, judges, or any citizen trying to get their opinion heard. Timing is described as the ability to know, for instance, when the time is ripe to accept a compromise in a conflict or to launch a political proposal. This ability is not acquired from precepts or rules, or through intellectual knowledge; instead it depends on “a very complex kind of mimesis – what Bourdieu would call ‘embodiment’ of an art” (Atwill 1998, 59). Several researchers find the question of what constitutes a kairotic moment to be complex and almost impossible to grasp (Gronbeck 1974, 93, Tillich 1948, Onians 1951). Nevertheless, that is the topic of this article.

Focusing on the two rhetorical concepts *kairos* and *actio* and the relationship between them, this article explores the process of silent, nonverbal communication leading up to a kairotic moment. To do so, empirical material consisting of about three hours of video from a theater rehearsal is analyzed. The choice of material might not seem very closely related to rhetoric. However, in theatrical timing, *kairos* is everything; the actor needs to know exactly what to do and when to act in order to communicate the motives and intentions of the play. In real life, one has to have a sense of timing, whereas in a theatrical performance moments of *kairos* are planned and are assigned certain patterns of nonverbal communication. Theater rehearsals therefore appear to be an appropriate domain in which to explore what kinds of nonverbal processes in a situation that lead up to *kairos*. The director of a play needs to decide what the actors must do in order for *kairos* to appear. The rhetorical concept of *actio* refers to the speaker’s delivery, which includes various nonverbal movements, such as gestures, posture, use of voice, and eye contact with the audience. In a previous study (Gelang 2008), I sought to deepen the understanding of *actio* processes by specifying different *actio* qualities such as energy and tempo. These are the ones used in this study to capture the processes that create kairotic moments.

In this article the questions to be explored are the following: What characteristics of the actors' nonverbal communication create kairotic moments? And can these be transferred into everyday situations or opportune moments when a sense of timing is crucial for making decisions, for example about a political statement? The aim of this article is thus to explore whether nonverbal, silent processes in human interaction might influence the possibility for a kairotic moment to occur.

Section two, following this introduction, outlines the theoretical concepts of kairos and actio qualities, as well as how they can be combined. In the third section, the source material and methodology are presented. In the fourth section, observed patterns of actio qualities leading up to kairos are accounted for. The fifth section concludes the article with a summary of the findings: namely the importance of the actio qualities tempo and energy in the processes leading up to kairos. A further result is that embodied knowledge, which is closely connected to the rhetorical concept of *phronesis*, is an important competence to possess if one wants to influence the kairos process. The results highlight some aspects of the processes occurring in a situation that need to be sensed since they are silently performed. Nevertheless, they can be understood and used to affect kairos. Thus, the intention of this article is to explore how actio qualities might be a part of the ongoing processes that create a kairotic moment, but not necessarily of the kairotic moment itself.

2. Kairos and actio

Kairos is a Greek word that designates the “right moment” in relation to time, place and action (Sutton 2001, 413). The concept is most often used in rhetoric in the following three ways: to refer to the necessity of decisive and determined action; to refer to the right moment to speak; and to refer to what is appropriate. Kairos is the moment that the speaker awaits in order to act in harmony with what the situation requires. One such moment can be when consensus is reached in deliberative negotiations. If the ideas are not expressed at the “right moment” the speaker misses the kairos, that is to say, fails to live up to the demands imposed by the specific audience and situation. In addition to being that which impels the speaker to speak, kairos also constitutes the value of speaking (Sutton 2001, 413–417).

In the ancient literature, the concept of kairos describes those instances where someone carries out a suitable action at the “right moment.” In these texts, kairos is related to practical actions, for example an important moment in the craft of weaving. The metaphor refers to the moment in weaving when the odd and even threads are separated so that the weft threads can be passed through the warp.

The instant when the warp opens exemplifies kairos as an opportune moment, because the opening in the weave lasts only a short time, and the weft insertion must take place exactly then. The recurring openings of the weave when the shuttle can be passed between the threads represent the “moments” when it is possible for a speaker to act. The metaphors also show that kairos is tied to a specific situation in which a coincidence of circumstances allows it to arise (Sutton 2001, 414–415).

For the Pythagoreans, kairos represented an overall sense of the vital point in time and space when, for example, a conflict reaches its resolution, which then gives form and content to the cosmos. It was from such a philosophical interpretation of kairos, concerning balance and harmony in the cosmos, that Gorgias (483–374 BC) and other sophists further developed their interpretation of kairos (Helsley 1996, 371). Gorgias claimed that there was no absolute truth, but everything could be reflected through two opposing conditions, *dissoi logoi*. Kairos represents the moment when the opposing conditions are decisively resolved. Gorgias viewed kairos as a creative action. It is in kairos that new standpoints, new knowledge, take form. Tradition and experience could hinder the spontaneous creativity and sensitivity to what is new that are needed for kairos to occur. Instead of seeking security in tradition, Gorgias emphasized maintaining an open and spontaneous attitude towards the surrounding world so that an opening will be created for something new to happen (Benedikt 2002, 228–229). Gorgias met with opposition from Protagoras (481–429 BC) who claimed that kairos is dependent on tradition and anchored in history. Protagoras argued that evaluating whether kairos is occurring “now” depends on a series of reflections and objective, situation-bound qualities. Kairos demands conscious human participation. If one over-relies on kairos arising spontaneously of its own accord, then the actual moment can pass by unnoticed. Therefore the individual is dependent on knowledge of customs and traditions. Based on this, he can reflect on ongoing processes in the situation and act accordingly (Benedikt 2002, 228–229). Like Protagoras, Aristotle claimed that it is the circumstances of the rhetorical situation that are decisive for what is the “right thing at the right time,” especially if the action has to do with questions of ethics, morality and justice (Kinneavy and Eskin, 2000, 433–439, 442).

The apprehension of the “right moment” is further influenced by the experience of the relationship between kairos and *chronos*, another Greek term used to refer to time. Chronos has a clearly quantitative meaning and consists of measurable time, while kairos has a more qualitative, culturally based sense. Kairos is a subjective moment in time, unlike chronos, which is objective, absolute and universal (Benedikt 2002, 226–29). Nevertheless, chronos and kairos depend on each other. Chronos is an underlying circumstance necessary for kairos to arise. Special historical events, natural processes and/or human actions occur when

chronos achieves a specific critical point in its qualitative character. This point in time emerges because a multitude of simultaneously unfolding events culminate in a specific “now.” Kairos arises when those who are present in a situation become aware of this “now” (Smith 1992, 47–48). The experience that “now” is the “right moment” appears to consist of these two aspects working together in some way. Hence every period of time contains a tension between what things are possible to do and what are not. Not everything is possible at every point in time, nor is everything necessary at all times; it is a matter of specific action, of doing “the right thing at the right time” (Tillich 1948, 33).

To sum up, kairos emerges as an opportunity that is tied to a delimited situation whose circumstances create the “right moment.” It requires human action, both verbal and nonverbal. The action should be adapted to the situation, yet still offer something new. It should be accepted by the receivers as the “right action” performed at the “right time.” In this way, the concept is directly connected with a rhetorical situation in all its aspects: time, place, sender and receiver. An example, which could occur in a play or in real life, is knowing the right time to tell someone “I love you.”

According to Isocrates (436–338 BC) kairos was a matter of the speaker’s ability to know when these “nows” arise and then act as the situation demands. For the speaker, the insight that “now” is the right time does not come by itself. Sipiōra writes that “phronesis is necessary for the activation of a preliminary, ‘internal’ dialectic which, in turn, gives rise to an ‘intelligence’ that expresses itself in words *and* action. This derived intelligence is based upon a rhetor’s understanding of kairos” (Sipiōra 2002, 8–9). Phronesis is one of the three types of ethos appeals, the others being *arete* and *eunoia*. Aristotle defines phronesis as “knowledge of particular facts,” and states “this is derived from experience” (*Nicomachean Ethics* 1142a). Thus, it is a practical knowledge gained by experience in how to behave in and towards the world with an ethical compass for what is expected and what is not expected in a given situation. In this sense the speaker’s phronesis is reflected in her nonverbal communication which, then, can be seen as utterances of embodied knowledge which are “shaped by social structures and made visible through the reflexivity of the embodied practitioner” (Howson 2004, 11). Embodied knowledge can thus be understood as comprising those of our actions that come of their own accord, guided by our life experiences, and is part of what is designated by *phronesis*, as is explained in the following paragraph.

An individual’s ability to perceive the “right time” is influenced, according to Gronbeck, by a series of factors such as social and cultural background, knowledge of different social processes, and psychological conditions. The number and variety of factors that Gronbeck takes up indicate the complexity of that which creates

a sense of the “right time” (Gronbeck 1974, 93). One must assume that the speaker’s understanding of *kairos* is based on a combination of practical experience and knowledge, together with the ability to be intuitive and spontaneous. Only then can a speaker/human being, using experience or knowledge gained in other ways, learn to recognize and act in this “right moment.” Consequently, the body is inseparable from culture and society; people “create meaning by their nonverbal communication when acting within and upon the physical and material environment in which they exist” (Howson 2004, 10–11). The challenge for the speaker then, is to create a way of acting that – within the framework of a number of circumstances that make *kairos* possible – is unique and meaningful (Miller 2002, xii–xiii). The connection between *kairos* and *actio* can accordingly be found in the processes within the rhetorical situation that contribute to making *kairos* possible.

In rhetoric, *actio* concerns delivery, which was an essential part of rhetorical training in the classical period, with Quintilian (*Institutio Oratoria*) and Cicero (*De Oratore*) setting the standard. It was primarily treated as a scheme of do’s and don’t’s for public speakers wishing to be persuasive and to perform a trustworthy ethos. Throughout history, authors and researchers in the field of rhetoric have continued to treat the matter in much the same way, writing handbooks on how to behave when giving a speech. However, the results from current multidisciplinary research on nonverbal communication have shown that it is far more complicated than that. Nonverbal communication is an integral part of our daily interpersonal communication and is something that we constantly interpret and are affected by. Interaction in the world is shaped by cultural norms and by violations of these norms, and is determined by the prevailing *doxa*. Research has shown that nonverbal communication can control an audience’s applause, convey power, determine the turn-taking in a conversation, create a sense of community, and much more. Bodily expressions are active, changeable, and creative, and can both reflect and strengthen relationships. They embody meaning and are meaningful.

To capture, describe, and interpret nonverbal communication, two approaches have been found to be important.¹ One is multimodality, which concerns how different human modalities – such as gestures, facial expressions, head movements, postures, vocal nuances and so on – interact and work simultaneously (Gelang 2008, Gelang and Petermann 2017). The other approach refers not only to what a person does, for instance pointing a finger, but also and especially *how* she/he does it, pointing angrily or haughtily (Gelang and Peterman 2017). How a gesture is performed is at least as important for its impact and interpretation as the

1. *Actio* is the nonverbal communication performed in a rhetorical situation where the intention is to be convincing in some sense, while the definition of nonverbal communication can apply to all situations where some form of communication occurs.

choice of gesture. The components of this “*how*” are referred to as *actio* qualities, which are the aspects of *actio* that create the nuances and make variations of *actio* appear (Gelang 2008). Qualities of nonverbal communication have proved to be an important part of how audiences perceive speakers. Modern research points to the special importance of energy as an aspect of *actio* (Kennedy 1998, McCroskey 2001, Babad, Avni-Babad and Rosenthal 2004, Mehrabain 1972). With regard to energy, a distinction is made between intensity and focus. Intensity is the degree of energy in a particular modality or in a multimodal expression of the body. Focus refers to the way in which energy is concentrated on the most meaningful modalities in relation to the verbal messages and the rhetorical situation (Gelang 2008). A study of nonverbal arguments among debating politicians proves the importance of the *actio* qualities tempo, rhythm and energy (Gelang and Kjeldsen 2011). Tempo refers to the basic rate (speed) which, when selected to fit the verbal messages and the rhetorical situation, gives order and stability to the delivery, while rhythm refers to variations of pace (flow) that can be achieved by changing one or more modalities. Naturally *actio* qualities most often occur in parallel, and tempo, rhythm, and energy can be combined at the same time.

Research on nonverbal communication shows that nonverbal expressions affect interpersonal communication. Not only *what* a speaker does is important for how events unfold in a situation, but also *how* she/he does it. Thus, *actio* can be one of the processes in a situation that lead to a kairotic moment. Before turning to the results of the analysis, I account for the material and method.

3. The rehearsal of a play

The empirical material in this study consists of sequences from a play rehearsal in 2012 at a professional theater company in Sweden, altogether comprising about three hours of video. A director and two actors were participating. Two cameras were used, one placed in front of the stage, and one at the back of the stage capturing the director as well as the two actors. The material was collected at the beginning, in the middle and towards the end of the rehearsal session.

Two researchers attended the rehearsal and took field notes and managed the cameras. The videos were then studied carefully by the two researchers separately, and further notes were taken. When transcribing and analyzing the material, two approaches were in focus, as has been explained above. After working separately, the two researchers worked together, comparing notes and studying the film clips carefully. During this analysis of the material, important changes in the display of *actio* were identified; these could consist of *actio* changes at key points in the communication, recurring patterns of change, and so on. The interactions where

these displays occurred were then explored and related to the instructions and comments offered by the director. Out of the results of this analysis, two sequences from the rehearsal that seemed especially relevant to this study were selected for close analysis (hereafter called Sequence A and Sequence B). They clearly illustrated the importance of physically exhibited changes that lead to a kairotic moment that is also dictated by the composition of the drama.

In Sequence A, the actors, Niklas and Johan, are rehearsing the opening of the play, when they are supposed to transform themselves into their characters. They begin the performance as “themselves” while introducing the play to the audience, then they change into the characters: a sick old man and a nurse. They have to create kairos, “the right moment” to transform into their characters, in a way that will be perceptible to the audience. The actors have no spoken lines explaining this change to the audience and do not announce what is going to happen beforehand. Both actors are on stage. The video of this sequence is about an hour long. From it, seven clips lasting between thirty seconds and two minutes have been subjected to detailed analysis.

In Sequence B, the actors are playing twelve-year-old boys. Niklas wants Johan to follow him to a scary old house, as Johan has promised to do earlier in the play. Now he does not want to go because he is afraid of the house, and his refusal causes a turmoil of feelings: guilt, blame and desire to get even. The actors have to create the moment, kairos, when Johan changes his mind and agrees to go to the house. There are few spoken lines in the scene so the kairotic moment for the boys to leave their home and go to the house has to be expressed nonverbally. The video of this sequence is about one and a half hours long. From this, five film clips between thirty seconds and two minutes in length have been subjected to detailed analysis.

Actors have undergone training, of course, and have practical experience and skills pertaining to their profession. They often have a collective understanding of when something is “right” (Rossmanith 2006). However, a kairotic moment in a play does not arise spontaneously; it has to be examined, explored and agreed upon during rehearsal. The actors’ understanding of what constitutes kairos in their nonverbal communication is discussed and then tested in character. When the actors have decided what to do and how the process leading up to a kairotic moment should be performed, they have to let go of what they have learned and let the acting unfold as if it were unplanned. Since this article is studying the rehearsal it does not take into account the artistic quality of the performance. By transcribing the actors’ nonverbal changes and how they are commented on by the director and actors, it is possible to capture the processes leading up to instances of kairos in the play, which is the aim of this article.

As the research proceeded it became evident that the changes in the nonverbal communication were important factors for the appearance of *kairos*. This claim will be demonstrated and elaborated upon in the analysis of the selected sequences from the material. The following section will be structured around the actio qualities performed by the actors in the play.

4. Actio qualities affecting *kairos*

In the source material two actio qualities: energy and tempo, stand out as clearly affecting *kairos*. An additional finding concerned the actors' embodied knowledge, *phronesis*, and how this knowledge was activated when the director described the circumstances of the situation. When the actors understood the circumstances they began to calibrate their nonverbal communication in a natural way to match the situation in the play.

4.1 Energy and intensity

Three film clips from Sequence A and one from Sequence B show how the use of the actio quality *energy* affects *kairos*.

In three film clips from Sequence A, Johan is supposed to transform himself into a sick old man. In the first film clip of the scene he looks at a wristwatch, offered to him by the other actor. He has a slouching posture, lacks energy and intensity in his movements, turns his upper body away from the audience and grabs a sweater that is hanging on the back of a chair beside him. He begins to put the sweater on. The director stops the action and says: "Excuse me, please go back to the beginning, before you put on the sweater; look at me, look at the audience while you think 'oh no, now I have to get into character', something like that [...]." The director instructs the actor to make a change in his nonverbal expressions, telling him *what* to do – to make eye contact with the audience – and gives him something to think about while doing so – "oh no, now I have to get into character," suggesting that he should hesitate, and not easily or willingly change character. The actor adapts to the directions and changes his way of acting. In the second film clip, he practices making eye contact with the audience. In the third film clip, he works with the inner monologue suggested by the director, "oh no, now I have to get into character." It comes to expression in the use of actio qualities, with the actor putting more intensity into his posture, eye contact and movements. Many directors do not want to give specific instructions about what an actor should do on stage, for example "go to the left and then sit on the chair," but prefer to describe the intention behind the movement and thus force the actor to find his own form of expression. Sometimes an actor might do the right thing,

“go left and sit on a chair,” yet the action still lacks some subtle aspect of meaning-making. On these occasions, it is not uncommon for the director to develop her own, often metaphorical, vocabulary to provide instructions. The director comments on the changes, saying: “Good. That’s what I need all the time, you have to saturate, saturate, saturate because it makes your transition into character believable.” “Saturate” seems to be a metaphor for the actor filling the acting with meaning. The director’s gesture accompanying “saturate” suggests something “loose” or big that needs to be condensed. The comment does not ask for any changes in the actor’s nonverbal communication – there are no “*what-to-do* instructions” – in “saturate” but instead points out *how* to act, referring to an important *actio* quality: energy and intensity.

In the film clip from Sequence B, Niklas and Johan are standing facing each other. Niklas has to convince Johan to come along to the scary house. Niklas looks at Johan, and Johan looks down at the floor. After a short while Niklas sinks his shoulders, takes a step back, turns around, and walks away with sloppy movements and unfocused energy. After a few steps he stops, still with his back to Johan, and says: “You promised.” Johan answers “Okay” in a reluctant tone of voice. Then Niklas turns to face Johan, and walks towards him in a wobbling, fast way, with focused energy. He stops in front of Johan, smiles at him, and pokes Johan in the stomach, as a friendly gesture. Johan gives him a light slap and says: “You’re crazy.” The director stops the action and says: “Ok, ok, there are a couple of things I was thinking about in the scene [...]” She brings up three things: energy, tempo and the importance of connecting mind and action. She stresses the importance of having the right mindset, and briefly talks about energy. After a pause, giving Niklas some time to think, they run the scene again. Niklas changes the intensity of his voice, making it softer. He also alters his energy when walking towards Johan. He walks in a relaxed manner, sinking his shoulders and letting his energy spread out into the room, giving Johan time and space to change his mind. Niklas uses noticeably less energy and a slower tempo. In order to make Johan agree to come to the scary house, Niklas has to calibrate his *actio* qualities with the constraints in this situation. They rehearse the scene over again and Niklas acts with even less energy and a slower tempo. Finally, when Niklas is acting with low energy and tempo, Johan agrees to accompany him to the scary house.

In all three film clips it is evident that the actors use energy in order to successfully incorporate *kairos* into the performance. The energy can be used with focused intensity or be weak and unfocused, depending on the circumstances. It is also clear that *kairos* will not arise unless the actors agree that the behavior is appropriate. Consequently, one of the processes that influence *kairos* is how the *actio* quality of energy is displayed.

4.2 Tempo

Two film clips from Sequence A and two from Sequence B show how the use of the actio quality *tempo* affect kairos.

In the film clips from Sequence A, the actors suggest that Johan should put on his sweater at the same time as the other actor picks up a wristwatch. They do a run-through of the scene. Neither the actors nor the director are satisfied with this change. They talk with each other and agree that it was not a good idea. The director says: “This way, putting on the sweater seems mechanical, it ... now there’s no real purpose [to your action]. I want it to take some time to put on the sweater. So, calm down, you don’t have to speed everything up.” In the film clip there are three actions that lead up to the kairotic moment of changing character: putting on the sweater, putting on the wristwatch and bending over coughing. After some discussion, they decide that the actor should put on the sweater at a slower tempo. The actors and the director agree that when the tempo is lowered, a kairotic moment occurs allowing the actor to change into the character of an old man.

In the film clips from Sequence B the actors focus on gradually slowing down the tempo, for example when Niklas is walking away from Johan. After the first run-through, the director says to Niklas: “[...] you notice that he doesn’t want to (follow you to the house), but save it (the question) until you’re standing face to face, do a ‘hold’, it’s needed [...]” The word “hold” refers to the tempo of the action. They rehearse the scene when Niklas walks away from Johan five times. In the first run-through it takes Niklas eight seconds to do the walk, the second time 10 seconds, the third time 24 seconds, the fourth time 25 seconds, and the fifth time 27 seconds. In addition to the change in tempo Niklas no longer stops halfway, as he did earlier, but walks in a single flowing movement. When the tempo drops and the flow is constant, silence arises, creating the kairos that makes it possible for him to reflect and agree to go to the scary house, kairos. This show that one has to wait for precisely the right moment to act.

In all four film clips it is evident that the actors use tempo to successfully achieve kairos. The results show that it is not by doing everything quickly that kairos can be made to occur; it can unfold at a slow tempo. Consequently, one of the processes that affect kairos is how the actio quality of tempo is used.

4.3 Embodied actio – understanding social and cultural differences

The complexity of having “a sense of timing” is apparent in some of the conversations between the director and the actors. It is not only about knowing how to use actio qualities like energy and tempo when acting. Other characteristics that contribute to making kairos happen are possessing phronesis, (a huge topic and there are degrees of *phronesis*) embodied knowledge, and understanding the

prevailing constraints in a given situation. The importance of embodied knowledge is evident in one film clip from Sequence A and one from Sequence B, as well as in a clip from another sequence which will be analyzed at the end of this section.

In the clip from Sequence A the need for embodied knowledge is very clear. The director mentions that “this way, putting on the sweater seems mechanical, it ... now there is no real purpose [to your action].” The director wants the actor to be aware of *why* he is acting the way he does. If an action is performed without intention it will come across as mechanical, says the director. The actor has to have an inner motive which will give the action a greater sense of urgency and presence. Before running through the scene once again, the actor takes a moment to think about the transition into character. Afterwards the action comes naturally without any instructions from the director about how to move his body. This does not result in any dramatic changes; it is about minor changes of *actio* qualities – more precise and distinct movements, the mouth being a little bit more open, breathing in slightly before turning around, and making the eye contact with the audience more direct and distinct. In the process of finding an inner motive for his actions, the actor’s *phronesis* helps him to expand his acting; that is, it enables him to use experience and knowledge gained in other ways. The actor has to know what is expected or appropriate, not just intellectually but also tangibly when it comes to the use of language, voice and behavior. He needs to have embodied knowledge that enables him to recall actions from earlier experiences in life.

In the film clip from Sequence B when Niklas is trying to convince Johan to come along to the house many emotions are in play, such as guilt, blame and a desire to get even. After each run-through of the scene, the actors and the director discuss what inner thoughts motivate a feeling and what feelings are or are not appropriate in the scene. The director relies on the actors’ embodied knowledge; once they find the appropriate feelings, the physical motions will come automatically. This is seen in one of the film clips where the actors agree on the feelings and motives of the characters. Director: “He (Johan) had actually promised (to go to the house), he’s letting you down, that is what you want to say.” Niklas: “Exactly.” Director: “Then he, then if he had perceived this (your actions) as peer pressure and gotten into a fight, then everything would have been different.” Niklas: “Yes.” Director: “[...] and you do not want that [...].” Johan is listening to the conversation and agrees. In the following run-through both actors make changes. They loosen up their previous closed, tight and intense behavior; they relax, use more gestures and touch each other in a friendly way. In this conversation, it also becomes clear that *kairos* will not arise unless the actors agree on it happening, as is explained above. The conversation reveals not only the complexity of the craft of acting, but also the necessity for the actors to possess embodied knowledge. This embodied

knowledge, vital for the acting in this play, does not however come from attending acting school alone. It comes from *phronesis*, meaning experiences in life that have been shaped by social structures rendering knowledge about the prevailing constraints in this situation and how to relate to them.

In another scene, not mentioned earlier, the actors change characters, now into twelve-year-old children. While instructing the actors, the director refers to a social and cultural conception of the behavior of a twelve-year-old child. The director comments on how one of the actors takes a breath and holds a posture, saying: “You had that typical elementary school posture when gasping with surprise.” In her comment, she refers to the common conception of how a child of a certain age would be expected to act when surprised. The action is based on the actor’s embodied knowledge which enables him to act like a child without any directions from the director. Thus, the body is inseparable from culture and society.

5. Conclusions

For a *kairotic* moment to appear, many different processes have to coincide at a specific moment in time, not only the process of nonverbal communication. However, this study has focused on the nonverbal communication in relation to *kairos*. The results show that an individual’s ability to perceive as well as act at the “right moment” is influenced by *phronesis*, the embodied practical wisdom of an individual, together with the ability to make use of the *actio* qualities energy and tempo.

Phronesis is the prerequisite for understanding what processes are at stake in a situation. The results of this study show that if one has embodied experience and knowledge of the situation at hand, one can behave accordingly and sense the other participants’ *actio* qualities. Behaving appropriately relates to the ethical dimension of *phronesis*, for instance, what feelings might be used in this situation and to what extent they should be expressed. Another dimension of *phronesis* relates to the ability to be “present” in a situation – presence being created by motivating the actions through an inner monologue. The answers to the questions that the actors in this study ask themselves, in order to find the motivation and understand the aim of the scene, are based on their past experience and present knowledge of the situation. This could easily be related to any other situation where something is at stake, such as making a decision or finding consensus, and where one has to ask such questions in order to be motivated and know that the aim is relevant.

Accordingly, an actor or, I argue, a speaker or anyone else who acts in a situation needs *phronesis*; only then can a speaker, using experience and knowledge gained

in other ways, learn to recognize and act at this “right moment.” If phronesis is necessary for understanding and sensing the “right moment,” then actio qualities are necessary for acting within the process of creating kairos.

The actio qualities are shown to be silent processes in human interaction that influence the possibility for a kairotic moment to occur. The actio qualities used in this study are energy and tempo. Energy is expressed by a change of intensity and energy in movements, posture and eye contact; tempo is expressed by a pause, a breath or a change in the rate at which an action is performed. When the actio qualities are used, it is possible to predict a kairotic moment. Thus, participants can sense the moment coming by being aware of the actio qualities in use, something that in everyday language is called having a sense of timing. The result that kairos can unfold at a slow tempo is especially interesting, as kairotic moments are often described as lasting only a second.

In conclusion, the results point to the importance of knowing something about actio as a socially, culturally and individually situated activity, and show how an individual’s phronesis and actio qualities thereby play an important role in the processes leading up to a kairotic moment. As evidenced by this study, qualities displayed nonverbally and their interactions with phronesis can play an important role in the development of kairos. This means that observations of nonverbal communication can yield important information on how to handle a situation, and thereby can provide an important step in the direction of successful communication – whether the aim is to agree to go to the scary house, to reach a compromise in a situation of conflict, to successfully launch a political proposal, or anything else. For researchers, the combination of phronesis, understood in relation to embodied knowledge, and the theoretical concepts of actio qualities provides a powerful model for analyzing nonverbal communication.

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