

JANUS – HINDSIGHT AND
FORESIGHT, CREATIVE
PRAGMATICS



We are moving on with our JANUS research initiative (core team Victor Taratukhin, Natalia Pulyavina, myself) – [\[Link\]](#).

Our case is that being mindful of the past, hindsight, is essential to being able

to act for the future. Looking back, researching and exploring, that we might be better prepared for uncertain futures.

JANUS – archaeological perspectives on understanding and managing change and innovation in organizations, businesses, communities, teams.

This is not about history – knowing what happened in the past. JANUS is about an archaeological sensibility – connecting (what remains of) the past with the future through our experiences and actions now.

Janus?

Janus was the Roman divinity associated with transition, passages from pasts through to futures, windows, doorways and thresholds.

Simultaneously looking back and forward, Janus connects pasts and futures, gaining perspective with hindsight and foresight, finding orientation now, not by telling the story of the past, not by predicting what is to come, but by seeking relationships, passages, flows from the past, ways the past lingers to haunt, hinder, and inspire the building of the future.



A classic image of Janus is a two-faced profile looking backwards and forwards.

At the Getty is a fascinating 16th century drawing By Giulio Romano. Here Janus is shown as Venus, next to Cronos (with reaping scythe or sickle). Gaia looks away. A winged Victory hovers overhead.



Giulio Romano. 1532-34. Janus, Chronos, and Gaia, with a Victory above. A study/pattern (modello) for part of the frescoed vault of the Sala dei Giganti in the Palazzo del Te, the summer residence of the court of Federico Gonzaga in Mantua (see picture at bottom of post).

Catalogue of the Collections

European Drawings 3

Nicholas Turner, Lee Hendrix, Carol Plazzotta

The J. Paul Getty Museum, Los Angeles 1997. (page 48-50 Catalogue #20)

The identification of Janus as Venus is based on another drawing by Romano, now in the Fogg Art Museum and shown below.

The scene offers insights into relationships between temporality and agency – our capacity to matter, to make things happen – exactly the themes we are foregrounding in our initiative.

The power of story

A quick recap of the story is needed to understand the connections.

Cronos (Kronos, Cronus) was the youngest of the first generation of Titans, giant offspring of primordial Ouranos (Heaven) and Gaia (Earth). Ouranos offended Gaia by imprisoning some of their younger offspring and she sought revenge by persuading Cronos to move against his father. With a stone sickle, gift from Gaia, Cronos castrated Ouranos and threw the bloody parts into the ocean, from which Venus (Aphrodite) emerged.

His actions haunted Cronos. Fearing that one of his own offspring would turn against him, he ate them all as they were born, devouring a threatening future. His wife Rhea eventually put a stop to this when she hid Zeus and tricked Cronos to swallow a stone instead, wrapped as a new-born. Zeus returned in his maturity, poisoned Cronos, and defeated him and his Titans with the help of his brother and sister gods, vomited up alive because of the poison emetic.

Cronos went on to be regularly associated with Chronos, a divine personification of time. He cut and severed Ouranos, marking the rift between heaven and earth, a gash in eternity. The scythe or sickle has become symbol of the grim reaper harvesting mortal lives.

Dramatis Personae

Romano draws Chronos holding an Ouroboros. Serpent devouring its own tail, a symbol since at least antiquity of eternal return, rebirth, reincarnation. The divinity is Aion, cyclical time, unbounded, the circuit of the heavens represented by the Zodiac, the seasons, in contrast to the divisible, empirical and sequential time of Cronus, cut into past, present, and future. Aion is a god of the ages, of *saecula*, circling generations of life.



Aion, god of the ages, is within the circuit of the Zodiac, (an eternal mobius strip) between a summer and winter tree. In front is Gaia, Mother Earth, with four children, the four seasons.

Central part of a large floor mosaic from a Roman villa in Sentinum. 200–250 CE.
The winged figure is usually taken to be Nike, Victoria, holding out the winner's crown at the moment of success. But another interpretation is possible.

This is a scene from the great conflicts between the Titans and the Gods. With Gaia's help Cronos has seized the opportunity and cut open the heavens. He too will fall when Zeus in turn seizes his opportunity, poisons Cronos and releases the Olympians to overthrow the Titans. Son of Cronos, or perhaps brother, the god of seizing an opportunity to act is Kairos. And Kairos is usually depicted as a winged youth.



Kairos, weighing opportunities in a scale balanced on a knife edge. Cecchino del Salviati. 1552-54. Sala dell'Udienza Invernale, Palazzo Ricci-Sacchetti, Rome. Kairos is time to act, or not. A central principle of rhetoric, the art of

persuasion, Kairos is a passing instant when an opening appears to be driven through (there are links with shooting an arrow and passing a weaving shuttle through warp and weft). The key to agency, one's capacity to achieve, to realize potential, is the ability to adapt to and take advantage of changing, complex and contingent circumstances. This is Kairos.

Janus stands by, a horrified witness. Romano has modeled the god(dess) on Aphrodite, who had been born of the castrated heavens, Cronos cutting eternity. Janus is involved, part of the many stories woven in and through this group of four characters or principles, seeing the interconnections between eternity and event, birth and mortality, persuasion and action, planning and opportunity, the return of the past to take vengeance.



Giulio Romano. A study of Janus as Venus. Fogg Art Museum, Cambridge, Massachusetts.

Time, decision-making, persuasion, opportunity, action.

This cast of characters and principles, this *dramatis personae*, takes us into an allegorical world of time eternal, cyclical, and eventful, of perception, persuasion, decision and action.

Connections of past through to future potential, the intermingling of hindsight, insight, foresight: these are also the core of an archaeological sensibility and imagination. [Link]



Sala dei Giganti in the Palazzo del Te, Mantua. 1530s. Janus and Cronos are to the left.