

Toward an Ontology of Waiting

by David Ackley

Waiting Space

Once waiting rooms were typically stocked with out-of-date magazines, but for some reason this has been discontinued. Now they feature television sets permanently tuned to educational features on medical specialties, or specific body parts, eyes, the urinary tract, colons etc depending on the specialty -- all produced to screw boredom to the breaking point. Or absent that, videos of predatory cats, hauling to the ground gazelles and wildebeests and tearing loose chunks of haunch with or without the sounds of bloody mastication.

Is this empathy from those who keep us waiting, offering a vicarious experience of what they know you'd like to do to them?

Unlikely.

Who can experience the time of another? Who wants to bother?

To keep someone waiting.

We are kept waiting. To keep is to hold and to hold is to imprison. We wait at the pleasure of the keeper.

Waiting and Time

By convention time passes more slowly in designated zones of waiting; we assume this is because it "just feels slower," to us, but this is wrong, clocks in waiting rooms are set at a slower rate than elsewhere in order to train our patience to the experience, and it is universally true that once your name is called and you exit the waiting room time actually resumes its normal rate of passage. You think this is because it "feels faster," and of course it does, because it is.

No Symbols where none intended

Despite his protest, many unintended meanings have been foisted on Samuel Beckett's works by critics and scholars, when the truth is explicitly in the title: His work is entirely informed by the condition of waiting, which is all his characters really do. This is because he understands, as most of us refuse to, that the largest part of our lives are spent doing nothing but that. As with Kafka before him.

Economics of Waiting

It is observable fact that an individual's time assigned to wait is in inverse proportion to her or his wealth and/or fame. The anonymous poor, having neither, will spend the better part of their lives in waiting for employment, welfare, or medical care with others of their ilk, or on the rare occasions of a slight increase in disposable income for the attention of bartenders and waitresses.

Correspondingly, greater wealth and fame can diminish waiting to net zero, the tipping point past which is achieved the most desirable state of petulance at having to wait for others while demanding with impunity that all others must wait on, or for, you.

