

Kimberly Mair

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Structures of Anticipation

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STRUCTURES OF ANTICIPATION

Guest Editors: Yoke-Sum Wong, Karen Engle, Craig Campbell

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KIMBERLY MAIR



In Eugène Ionesco's 1959 play, *Rhinoceros*, a single rhinoceros makes a senseless interruption to routine village life, and townsfolk speculate about the dangers. As they debate whether it should be permitted that a rhinoceros should run through the streets, one by one they, themselves, transform into rhinoceroses as though via thought-contagion, and Berenger, the protagonist, anticipates and struggles against the potential for his own transformation. After WWII, some thinkers proposed that information had "lost its body," become weightless and unencumbered by material and meaning, but we still had bodies.¹ Now, information baits its prey —its counterparts are data points attached to flesh and anxious presentiment. Per-

haps anticipation has always grappled with a poorly grasped temporality. “There is a scenography of waiting,” Barthes insisted, “I organize it, manipulate it, cut out a portion of time.”² The structure of anticipation might be time itself, but not with one moment following another as its reference or cause. Not like H.G. Wells’s narrator puts it: “For years even quite bold and advanced thinkers were chased by events [...] They only realized what had really occurred long afterwards. And so they never foresaw.”³ If they had, they could put to work a negative anticipation, a kind of security against something that might be emerging but remains stubbornly inchoate or isn’t quite here now. Maybe “[t]he being I am waiting for is not real”⁴—yet. There is still time to organize security for unnoticed emergencies. Anticipation would operate “like a sixth sense,” something to which attempts at explanation and preparation give a sketchy outline, turning “a potential into a threshold to the real,”⁵ until it grew a solid border, a body, and could move by itself. Or, the thing against which anticipation mobilizes its defences was already there before you heard the faint ring of the glasses clinking on the table. At that time, it might have still been nothing, barely perceptible, nearly empty, like the glasses that wait to be refilled with apprehension. Because it was there, somewhere beyond the corner, before you heard the galloping footsteps, picking up their pace, coming around towards you, like Ionesco’s rhinoceros crashing through the morning. By then, it was already too late. Even though it had already thundered past, and could no longer get us, people had taken the shape of their fear and wore it around, like you said they would. But, perhaps, “You didn’t predict anything. You never do. You can only predict things after they’ve happened.”⁶

NOTES

1. N. Katherine Hayles. *How We Became Posthuman: Virtual Bodies in Cybernetics, Literature, and Informatics*. University of Chicago Press, 2008, pp.19-24.↵
2. Roland Barthes. *A Lover’s Discourse: Fragments*. Translated by Richard Howard. London: Vintage, 1978/2002, p. 37.↵

3. H.G. Wells. "The Shape of Things to Come." In *H. G. Wells: The Complete Novels*, 171699-171701. Book House Publishing, ebook, 2017, location 170545.↵↴
4. Barthes, *A Lover's Discourse*, p. 39.↵↴
5. Kathleen Stewart. "Atmospheric Attunements." *Rubric 1* (2010): 1-14; p. 4.↵↴
6. Eugène Ionesco. "Rhinoceros." In *Rhinoceros and Other Plays*, pp. 1-107. Translated by Derek Prouse. New York: Grove Press, 1960, p. 99.↵↴