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Review of the 5th International Interdisciplinary Boredom Conference (2023), Organized by Josefa Ros Velasco and Mariusz Finkielsztein

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1. Introduction

Let's imagine a conference in which the content of its papers is finite but the convergence and intersection of a set of apparently disparate ideas presented is infinite. It is impossible not to recognize this form, which in mathematics alludes to a solid of finite volume and infinite area, in the conference at hand. We could then call it, to our inner selves and with fervent devotion, under the name of Torricelli;¹ and on the sides of its infinite area we would then find a gathering of researchers from all over the world, whose object of study is centered on the phenomenon of boredom investigated under the optics of the most diverse disciplines and areas of knowledge. The famous *universitas* is constituted here in a double direction: not only does it appear, in the form of a pictorial picture, showing to an observer who keeps sufficient distance the whole synthetic panorama of the sum and union of its colors and forms; it is also alive, and moves energetically from one researcher to another, from one discipline to the next, in order to establish new connections and develop the existing ones among them.

Based on this underlying melody arises then, in the most natural and spontaneous way, a space for interdisciplinary academic debate on boredom; an aspect that, of course, becomes essential in our days. In this regard, the researcher specialist in Boredom Studies, a reference and pioneer in Spain, National Research Award for Young Researchers María Moliner and president of the International Society of Boredom Studies Josefa Ros Velasco (2023a) refers that “this is a complicated exercise, but [...] essential for the continuity of progress. Throughout history we have made the mistake of understanding boredom as something embarrassing [...] instead of seeing it as a useful experience”. And the fact is that Boredom Studies, at the dawn of their youth,² are becoming increasingly relevant in societies such as ours and claim for themselves, in spaces such as this one, their recognition as a justified, significant, and necessary field of scientific research. The complexity of a universal phenomenon such as boredom can only be studied in the form of this almost infinite approximation of approximations; only in this way can we build a body of knowledge that comes as close as possible to the reality of its true nature, to the origin and characterization of its different causes and consequences, and to the fundamental mechanism underlying its manifestations.

The Boredom Conference was born in Poland in 2015 under the organization of Mariusz Finkielstein, also a pioneer in Boredom Studies in that country. After two sequels there, from 2021 it became part of the activities of the *International Society of Boredom Studies*. The online format required at that time by the COVID-19 pandemic has been maintained, finally, in the subsequent editions; this fact has greatly facilitated the participation of scholars from all over the world. Taking into account that the previous edition only had the presence of invited researchers, this year's edition has only invited women who are especially recognized in the studies of boredom: Elizabeth Goodstein, specializing in the ways in which modernity and modern

¹ Gabriel's Horn is the surface generated when the graph of the function $f(x) = x^{(-1)}$ defined for $x > 1$, rotates around the x -axis. The Horn was discovered in 1641 by Evangelista Torricelli, who established its famous properties, infinite surface and finite volume (which we will refer to together as the Horn Property). The proper name Gabriel refers to the Archangel Gabriel, who in some religious traditions is considered the messenger of God, who announces the End of Days with a trumpet blast. The union of the divine and the infinite completes the metaphor of the horn, which is also referred to here as Torricelli's trumpet or infinite paint can. This last description gives rise to the “painter's paradox”: how can a paint can full of paint contain enough liquid to cover its interior (Coll and Harrison, 2014).

² Boredom Studies should be understood as the corresponding research activity within the framework of the institutionalization and academization of its object of study, boredom. Only in this way will it make sense to speak of a “youth” of the same. However, the reference, as well as the reflection on boredom, has long been settled in its period of old age: in this regard, Josefa Ros Velasco dismantles one of the most repeated myths about boredom in the first paper of the conference: *Contemporary Myths on Boredom* (2023a).

subjectivity have been represented and understood in European literature and culture since the industrial revolution from an interdisciplinary perspective; Sandi Mann, Doctor in Psychology and Professor of Applied Clinical Psychology at the University of Central Lancashire, and Dr. Erin Westgate, Assistant Professor of Psychology at the University of Florida.³

2. Culture Panel I

2.1. Josefa Ros Velasco (Complutense University of Madrid, Spain). *Contemporary Myths on Boredom*

In her presentation *Contemporary Myths on Boredom*, the researcher specialized in Boredom Studies Josefa Ros Velasco (National Research Award María Moliner 2022 and author of the essay *The Disease of Boredom* [2022]) debunks some of the contemporary myths that circulate around us about this everyday experience. The first and most frequent of all asserts that boredom remains an unknown to us; a subject we know nothing about. But the truth is that boredom has been the subject of considerable study by a long list of thinkers and authors from all periods and currents—and then, with the musical fluency of a sage, she names the contributions of Lucretius, Seneca and St. Augustine, passing through those of St. Thomas, Kleist, Wagner, Flaubert, Baudelaire, Adorno, Eastwood or Westgate, among many others—and, as such, the existence of a substantial body of knowledge about it cannot be denied.

Defined as “a state of imbalance between what we expect from the context and what we actually get from it” (Ros Velasco, 2023a), boredom then becomes a universal experience that anyone can experience at any time. And if “we can all see ourselves reflected in such a situation”, adds Ros Velasco, “then we are also in a position to affirm that we possess a certain knowledge, however small it may be, about boredom” (2023a). Thus, whether through the individual knowledge that each one has of the experience, or through the knowledge constructed over the centuries, that ‘the study of boredom is still in its infancy’ can only be a myth (since, in any case, the only thing that is still in its infancy is the academization and institutionalization of it, the researcher clarifies). By the same token, neither can it be true what one hears so much about boredom as a phenomenon for which hardly any interest has been shown.

To this long list of false beliefs, we should add the one that relates the birth of the experience of boredom to modern societies. Nothing could be further from the truth, since “having more free time does not imply that one experiences more boredom; boredom can arise just as easily in free time as in busy time” (Ros Velasco, 2023a). In fact, if one is busy performing an unstimulating task, boredom can lurk at any time. Contrary to popular belief, hunter gatherer societies did suffer from boredom, since performing tasks does not necessarily mean not being bored. However, as Ros Velasco (2023a) points out, “what does differentiate our era from others is that we have much more time to write about boredom, about our experiences, whatever the context”. That is the reason why it may seem that boredom is only present in those individuals who have a lot of free time: it is to them that the written heritage belongs by majority.

³ All presentations from the fifth and fourth editions can be found on the YouTube Channel of the *International Society of Boredom Studies*, whose official name is @BoredomSocietyOfficial, as well as on the ISBS website: <https://www.boredomsociety.com/boredom-conference/>. In the last one you can also find the summaries of the presentations and the biographies of the participants.

Having clarified this first point, Ros Velasco now goes a step further and delves even deeper into the intricacies and complexities of the phenomenon. Directly related to the myth of modern societies is the one, already mentioned above, that equates boredom with doing nothing: a statement defended in such a generic way is false, since boredom arises in this case only when we are not doing anything out of obligation or, in other words, when we would really like to be doing something else. The reverse is also true: if we are busy doing something out of external demand and we do not find that activity stimulating, then we get bored (Ros Velasco, 2023a). Thus, the reader will notice the number of nuances and subtleties that underlie the experience of boredom: nothing is so evident, nothing is so clear as to establish statements that come from our so often not very rigorous common sense if a phenomenon as complex and multifactorial as boredom has not been studied in depth.

Another of the myths dismantled by Dr. Ros Velasco is that of creativity following boredom: more and more media outlets are spreading this idea as if boredom were directly responsible for creativity. The point is that such a statement is fundamentally wrong: the very definition of boredom as a symptom—which Ros Velasco provides in her essay *The Disease of Boredom*, a synthesis of all her previous research—already hints at the little real or existing relationship between a human ability that depends on the subject and/or its context and not on a mere symptom. In this regard, Ros Velasco (2023a) states that, although boredom acts as a driving force—as a propellant of change—thanks to its reactive component, the nature of that change need not be at all of a new and/or original character. Moreover, we often react to boredom in dysfunctional or unhealthy ways.⁴ Most of those who link boredom with creativity also negatively associate being continually busy with the arrival of inspiration, as if one has to be bored for the muses to appear to one. But this assertion is, once again, false: we often find the source of inspiration while working.

Finally, there are the myths associated with dysfunctional boredom,⁵ which Ros Velasco describes as stigmatizing, since they generate a series of unfounded beliefs in the collective imagination about the nature of individuals who suffer from boredom. Thus, we often hear unfounded clichés such as ‘only those who lack curiosity get bored’, ‘only lazy people get bored’, or ‘only fools get bored’. There is nothing good in making such a statement: firstly, because it ignores the theoretical corpus—and therefore the true nature—of boredom, since it ignores “the context and the possible existence of a pathological state of boredom” (Ros Velasco, 2023a), and, secondly, because it is an act of contempt. By stating something like this, the only thing that is achieved is that people are ashamed of feeling boredom and therefore avoid talking about the subject or reflecting on it in greater depth. Instead of “tolerating” boredom, as some media propose, the right thing to do is to “integrate [it] [...] into the public dialogue”, concludes Ros Velasco (2023a). This is the only way to make visible a phenomenon that, despite its undeserved bad reputation, can be profoundly beneficial in many ways and can help us to know ourselves (and the society in which we live) much better.⁶

⁴ Several papers/presentations will attempt to shed light on dysfunctional or unhealthy reactions to boredom (see Dr. Sandi Mann’s research on the relationship between poor eating behaviors and boredom [2023]).

⁵ That is, that type of boredom which, either because of the individual’s own propensity to suffer from it and/or his or her neural dispositions, or because of an environment that does not change at all, never ends because the subjects who suffer from it are not able to react and put an end to the source that began to generate it (Ros Velasco, 2022, p. 28).

⁶ Ros Velasco’s presentation comes from a paper published the same year in *Frontiers in Sociology* (2023b; see also Finkielstein, 2021).

2.2. Salamis Aysegul Sentug (University of Kent, UK). *Exploring Feminine Boredom in 19th Century and Contemporary European Paintings Depicting Women Travelers*

Establishing a dialogue between the nineteenth and twenty-first centuries, and using Martin Doehlemann's typology to analyze artistic work, Salamis Aysegul Sentug explores in her research the role of boredom in the representation of 'the woman traveler' in painting. Travel—and above all and above all, rail travel—meant for a nineteenth-century woman—certainly only for a very privileged one, since travel in general was forbidden even for most wealthy women—a remedy against her domestic boredom, as well as a means of escape.

What Sentug is attempting to explain is that, as happened in the nineteenth century with the invention of the railroad, today we are facing a new reconfiguration between the world and the self mediated by our cybernetic era. If before the escape route was the train ride, now it is the virtual world. However, the perceptual crisis originated by the travel experience itself—with its own particular reconfiguration between the self and the world—has always led to an increase in boredom, the researcher explains. The nineteenth-century perceptual crisis, Sentug (2023) explains, stems from the impossibility of linking the individual with the outside world when the former is on a moving train: "every journey becomes boring in exact proportion to its speed", said a nineteenth-century art critic, John Ruskin, referring to train travel. In addition, there was the boredom caused by waiting—situational boredom, following Doehlemann's typology—and the uncomfortable effect of a man's indiscreet gaze directed at a woman, namely the boredom of society.

Similarly, a twenty-first-century user experiences increased boredom when he or she tries to escape from boredom by turning to the virtual world. Following Pettmann, Sentug explains how our attention starts to disintegrate due to the speed at which information travels through our computers. For that reason, one begins to react in a similar way "to a joke, to a family photo, to a recipe [...] to a massacre" (Pettmann, quoted in Sentug, 2023). This general principle of technological symbiosis underlies the artistic activity of contemporary painter Nathaniel St. Amour, who explores with his art the virtual journeys in which we are increasingly immersed today.

3. Culture Panel II

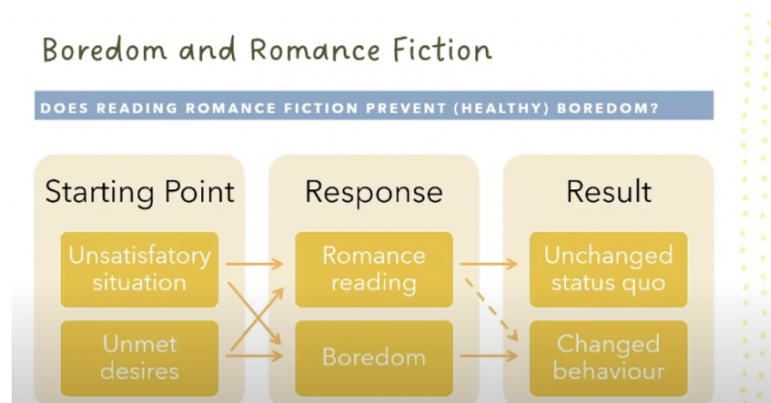
3.1. Annie Runkel (University of Dundee, UK). *Boredom and the Unoriginality of Romance Fiction*

In her research *Boredom and the Unoriginality of Romance Fiction*, Annie Runkel wonders about the surprising success of fictional romances despite the repetitive and predictable nature of their novels. While everything in them is trite—the characters, the three-act structure with a happy ending, and the settings are often cut from the same cloth—the number of readers who consume these novels in no small numbers is substantial, suggesting that there are mechanisms to compensate for the repetition and predictability that would otherwise have led readers to experience boredom. Anticipating what is going to happen, becoming an expert capable of noticing the slightest variations from one novel to another, or finding in the reading of these novels a safe space in which to obtain positive emotional reinforcement are some of the most

fundamental mechanisms. Most readers of this genre turn to romance novels as an escape from their own problems, so they find a predictable story with a happy ending and prototypical characters particularly enjoyable. There is a certain playful component to this process in which rewarding cognitive activities are triggered for the reader; hence, the reader experiences a sense of control that he or she cannot experience in real life.

What can certainly be very interesting in the context of Boredom Studies is the debate with which the researcher concludes her presentation: the dichotomy ‘boredom versus fictional romance’ is very present today in the world of romantic literature. Many believe that reacting through boredom to a situation of dissatisfaction is much more likely to lead to a healthy attitude change, while resorting to fictional romances would lead to perpetual avoidance of the real problem by the subject. In contrast, other voices see in fictional romances a possible germ of change due to the absence of social constraints in their scenarios. In such an assumption, literature serves as a place of prior experimentation that inspires the individual to change his or her behavior (Figure 1).

Figure 1. Screenshot of Runkel’s presentation. Outline around the ‘boredom vs. reading romance fiction’ debate.



3.2. Tirna Chatterjee (Jawaharlal Nehru University, India). *Beckett in Bengal: Boredom, Waiting and Repetition in the Cinema of Ashish Avikunthak*

If it is more usual to find studies on boredom in the West, Tirna Chatterjee takes it upon herself in *Beckett in Bengal: Boredom, Waiting and Repetition in the Cinema of Ashish Avikunthak* to claim a place for postcolonial or decolonial research on boredom. She does so through her particular interpretation of two films by film director and cultural anthropologist Ashish Avikunthak: his two Beckett adaptations *Waiting for Godot* and *Come and Go*, among others, show with a certain rawness a shared vision between literary and director about the nature of time, memory and repetition.

In a rather successful attempt to disintegrate the boundaries of discourse, *Waiting for Godot*—as the “postcolonial meditation on the future” that it is (Chatterjee, 2023)—is able to create a bridge between ancient Indian philosophical and religious treatises and Beckett’s great

philosophical, political, and theological themes. In a vague minimal setting, violence, sexuality, rancorous emotions and drives, and expressions of affection follow one another like a moving specter of a transgeographical, translinguistic, and transcultural piece that, at the zenith of its deliberate expressions, goes “so far as to recommend suicide as a way of passing or killing time” (Chatterjee, 2023). Avikunthak plays with the Beckettian nature of time and the boredom of waiting to contextualize within that framework a new geographical and translinguistic reference to the Indian revolutions of the late 1960s and early 1970s. He thus displays a delicate ability to add layers of meaning around the postcolonial experience.

3.3. Mariusz Finkielsztein (Collegium Civitas, Poland). *L'Ennui des Syrtes: Or the Boredom of Empires*

According to Mariusz Finkielsztein’s research, an analysis of boredom in Julien Gracq’s novel *Le Rivage des Syrtes* reveals how this fictional narrative can illustrate the thinking of one of the greatest and most important representatives of historical catastrophism and pessimism, Oswald Spengler. In *The Decline of the West*—“Gracq sees this book [...] as a prophetic work that perfectly describes our epoch”, clarifies Finkielsztein (2023)—Spengler defines culture as a living creature that “reaches old age, the fall and the end” (1946, p. 106). When it reaches the totality of its possibilities, “culture suddenly hardens, becomes mortified, its blood coagulates, its strength decays, and it becomes Civilization” (Spengler, 1946, p. 106). In the latter state, culture is decadent; the society that lives immersed in it—as the novel demonstrates—cannot avoid boredom.

The protagonist narrator, Aldo, is a young aristocrat who belongs to one of the ruling families of Orsenna—a city-state whose similarities are evident with the Venetian Republic and Empire—and who, out of boredom, gives up his youthful revelry to become a spy for the ruling class. Although Orsenna has been engaged in a dull cold war against Farghestan for decades, none of the opponents have made any hostile or threatening moves so far. Only boredom will cause catastrophe to be unleashed: the intrigues surrounding Aldo’s affair with the traitor Vanessa will inflame Orsenna’s collective animus against his adversary. Thus—warns Finkielsztein (2023)—if anything is evident in Julien Gracq’s novel, it is that “the state of societal existential boredom” leads to such a lack of meaning that even absurdity is reached, and this disposition, shared by society, makes even “the spectacle of destruction by barbarians or the mere anticipation of it [...] [more] meaningful than living in Orsenna”.

If they look outside to find a significant change—says the Polish researcher—, it is because they do not see themselves capable of leading that change on their own. Only in this way does it make sense that war becomes a source of novelty that can put an end to boredom: structural inertia, extended from generation to generation, ends up manifesting itself in the form of a dominant passivity in the subjects, who only receive orders. However—clarifies Finkielsztein (2023) in the question time—the depoliticizing character of boredom is not always a constant: “as Ros Velasco has already investigated, boredom can also lead to a revolution [...] [i.e.] boredom has these two paths” (Finkielsztein, 2023).⁷ Ultimately, the reality is that both subjects and members of ruling classes have at some point become bored with their empire. The

⁷ Finkielsztein was mentioning Ros Velasco and Moya Arriagada’s work on boredom as a revolutionary emotion in the context of Chile (2021).

boredom of empire, Finkielsztein makes clear, occurs either in the fictional setting of Gracq's novel, or in the decadent historical reality of a British Empire in its last cultural stage. A great testimony of the latter is the essay *Imperial Boredom*, by Jeffrey A. Auerbach, whose reading is highly recommended.

4. Special Guests I

4.1. Sandi Mann (The University of Central Lancashire, UK). *Why Bored People Don't Eat Nuts: The Effect of Boredom on Food Choices*

We could not miss the significant contribution of the renowned researcher Dr. Sandi Mann, active in the area of psychology and Senior Lecturer in Occupational Psychology in the Department of Psychology at the University of Central Lancashire since 1998, expert in emotions—especially in the area of work—and member of the Health Psychology Research Group. She is the author of several psychology books such as *The Science of Boredom: Why Boredom is Good* (2016).


The title of her paper already reveals the important relationship between eating behavior and boredom: *Why Bored People Don't Eat Nuts: The Effect of Boredom on Food Choices*. The key point of boredom, says the researcher, lies in our reaction to it: the search for neural stimulation—which is, in short, what we lack when we are bored—will lead us either to direct our resources and attention towards a redefinition of the task that bores us to make it a more stimulating or meaningful occupation, or to seek in external or internal activities the source of additional stimulation that we lack, distancing us from the boring task (Mann, 2023). This last behavioral pattern is the most interesting from the point of view of eating behavior research; in fact, it is no coincidence that this was the majority reaction to boredom during the pandemic.

Numerous studies, Mann clarifies throughout the central part of her lecture, have found a direct relationship between eating more and being bored. Moreover, according to studies from the 1990s, such as Schlundt et al. (1993) or Hill et al. (1991), there is a positive correlation between boredom and an increase in unhealthy cravings. An important—and it seems to be, predominant—role in this is played by the choice of chocolate—in Hill et al.'s study, 60% of the participants chose it when they felt bored—which, in fact, is corroborated by a more recent study by Havermans et al. (2015). In line with previous research, two studies conducted by Dr. Mann verified the starting hypothesis: after performing a boring task, participants prefer one fatty or sugary food over another (Figure 2). In fact, not only did they conclude that French fries, sweets, and fast food are significantly more highly valued after a boring task, but also that people who are prone to boredom are more likely to consume unhealthy foods when they experience boredom than those who are not. Mann's findings are consistent with previous experimental results (Abramson and Stinson, 1977; Havermans et al., 2015; Willis, 2014). In this way, Mann's latest research (2023), and, in general, her long trajectory in Boredom Studies, are constituted as an essential prevention method when it comes to awakening a collective wake-up call regarding the existence of boredom-induced negative behaviors.

Figure 2. Screenshot of the first of two studies conducted by Mann. The results show a preference for unhealthy food after performing a boring task

Table 1: Means and Standard deviations for food-item rating both before and after boredom inducing task. (Higher score = higher ratings)

	Means	
	Before	After
Chocolate	3.38	3.54
Crisps	2.92	3.1
Fruit	3.02	3.17
Sweets	2.88	3.17
Fast Food	2.96	3.13
Salad	2.48	2.42
Whole Fruit	2.63	2.75
Raw Veg	2.33	2.35
Fresh Salad	2.21	2.19
Fruit Salad	2.83	2.81
Nuts	2.65	2.62
Dried Fruit	3.00	2.98



4.2. Erin Westgate (University of Florida, US). *Why Boredom Is Interesting*

If we can name one particularly interesting method of approaching the complex phenomenon of boredom, it is undoubtedly the Meaning and Attentional Component Model (MAC) (Westgate and Wilson, 2018). In her presentation, Dr. Erin Westgate discusses how it can answer fundamental questions related to boredom, as well as connecting and explaining the causes and consequences of this phenomenon. The MAC, Westgate (2023) explains, is based on a constructionist approach to emotion, since it considers boredom as an emotional signal that warns us about our state and disposition towards the activity we are performing. This is how it can tell us a whole variety of fundamental data; from whether or not we are involved in an activity, to whether or not it really has a significant value for us. For the first premise to be fulfilled, we have to pay attention to the activity; this is what experts in the field call the attentional component. The second, on the other hand, is a fundamental requirement of the meaning component (Westgate, 2023).

By studying how these and other variables change—some dependent on the attentional component, the others related to the meaning component—we then obtain a whole variety of situations. For there to be no boredom—or rather, for the subject to experience a low level of boredom—two conditions must be met: firstly, the level of resources must coincide with the level of demand, because only in this way will the individual in question be in a position to pay attention to the activity he or she is carrying out. Secondly, and no less important, the activity in question must be meaningful to the person performing it. If the latter is not the case, we would be dealing with the type of boredom that Westgate calls *Meaningless Boredom*. In situations of low stimulation or overstimulation, resources and demand do not coincide, so the subject in question experiences *Attentional Boredom* (Westgate, 2023) (Figure 3).

Figure 3. Capture of boredom typologies as a function of the meaning component and the attentional component

		Meaning Component	
		High Meaning: Task is CONGRUENT with Valued Goals	Low Meaning: Task is INCONGRUENT with Valued Goals
Attentional Component	Understimulation: Demand < Resources	Attentional Boredom	
	Low-Level Engagement Low Demand + Low Resources	Enjoyment (Low Boredom)	Meaningless Boredom
	High-Level Engagement High Demand + High Resources	Interest (Low Boredom)	Meaningless Boredom
	Overstimulation: Demand > Resources	Attentional Boredom	

4.2.1. The Causes of Boredom

Among the causes of boredom, Westgate launched a series of predictions that were to be verified or refuted by actual studies. The first prediction (*attention and meaning produce boredom independently*) turned out to be true, as there were main effects of both components (Figure 4).⁸ The second prediction (*deficits of attention and meaning produce different types of boredom*) has also been corroborated by the empirical results. *Attentional Boredom* would then be “characterized by difficulty in concentrating”, whereas *Meaningless Boredom* would be “characterized by feelings of agitation and sadness” (Westgate, 2023). Westgate and Wilson (2018) saw that attention and meaning produce boredom independently, and that, moreover, they are not highly correlated; they do not interact.

The second prediction (*deficits of attention and meaning produce different types of boredom*) has also been corroborated by empirical results. Attentional boredom would then be “characterized by difficulty concentrating,” whereas “meaningless” boredom would be “characterized by feelings of agitation and sadness” (Westgate, 2023). Westgate and Wilson saw that attention and meaning produce boredom independently, and that, moreover, they are not highly correlated; they do not interact (Figure 5).

It was also interesting to verify the hypothesis that *both an excess and a shortage of stimulation can produce boredom*. The direct relationship of boredom with the process effectively results in a linear curve: the function reaches the maximum values of boredom when the level of demand is too low or too high (the subject's attention span decreases, which makes it

⁸ This makes sense, since the relationship between the two components is additive (“people felt the greatest boredom when they were not able to pay attention (AND) when what they were doing was not meaningful to them” [Westgate, 2023]).

easier for the subject to experience boredom). Only if the demands are just right does the subject performing the activity has the capacity to maintain the attention necessary to avoid boredom.

Figure 4. Capture of the results of the first real study: the first starting hypothesis is fulfilled (Westgate and Wilson, 2018)

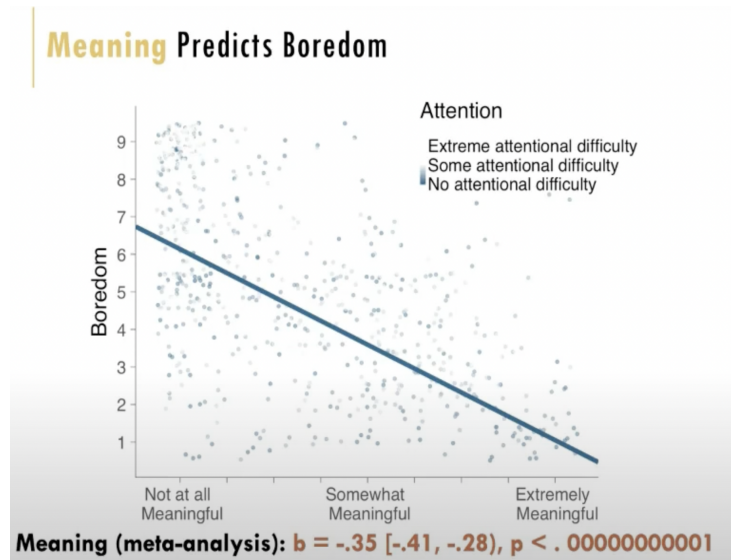
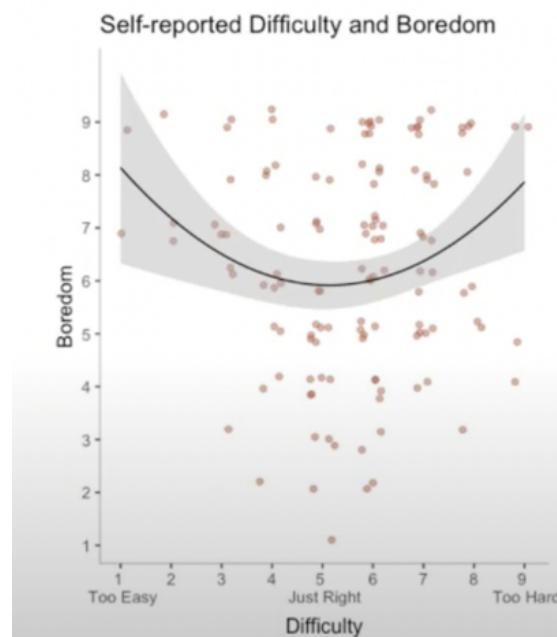


Figure 5. Capture of the results of the second prediction (Westgate and Wilson, 2018)



4.2.2. The Consequences of Boredom

In an attempt to clarify whether boredom can be bad—to the point of prompting someone to harm themselves or someone else—Westgate conducted a joint study with Stefan Pfattheicher and other colleagues (2021) in which some participants were shown a rather boring 20-minute video, while others were shown an interesting documentary. The focus of the study was to observe what the participants did while watching the video (hence, among other things, the participants were allowed to kill worms). The results showed that those who were bored tended to kill worms more often than those who were not bored.

However, clarifies Westgate (2023), *boredom is not always bad*: the response to boredom depends on its cause. Proof of this is that, if we change activities to reduce the boredom caused by the first one due to low stimulation, the probability that we will choose an interesting activity is very high. If, on the other hand, the cause of our boredom had been overstimulation, then we would have chosen as our new activity one that was simply enjoyable. In the long run, Westgate clarifies, the most beneficial thing is to have chosen the interesting activity: the fact that we have previously increased our level of knowledge allows us to find some activities stimulating or interesting that would otherwise probably bore us.

5. Psychology Panel

5.1. Sumana Sri (Claremont Graduate University, US). *Boredom Experiences During the COVID-19 Lockdown*

In order to promote healthy and effective coping strategies to boredom, Dr. Sumana Sri has conducted an in-depth experimental analysis that aims to shed light on the influence of individual and contextual factors in the process of regulating current boredom experiences. Through a study conducted during the COVID-19 pandemic in the United States, Sri has obtained enlightening results on the type of coping strategy, the type of activity performed, the intensity of boredom and the individual's own dispositions. Significant conclusions are drawn from the experiment, such as the following: when coping with boredom, most people make use of behavioral strategies, especially behavioral avoidance strategies (Sri, 2023).

This means that instead of persisting with what we are bored with (perhaps a work task), we usually switch to another activity, especially one that calms or distracts us. However, what Sri (2023) has determined is that the use of cognitive focus strategies is much more effective and healthier in coping with boredom. The subject using this type of tactic continues to experience boredom but changes his or her thinking by neutrally re-evaluating the fact that he or she is bored and trying to improve, as much as possible, the quality of his or her experiences (Figure 6).

5.2. James Danckert (University of Waterloo, Canada). *Boredom as Information Processing: Revisiting Orin Klapp (1986)*

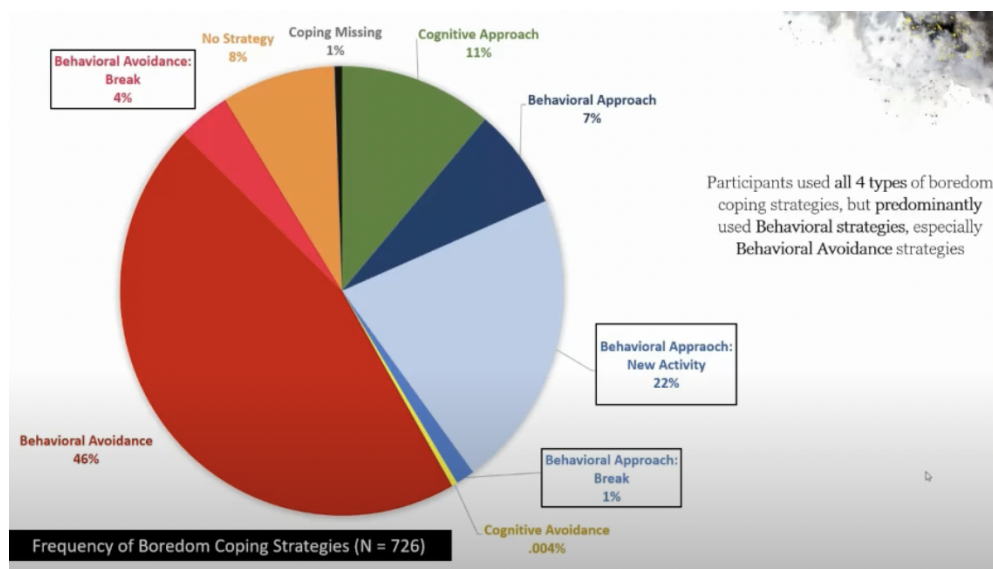
James Danckert, Professor at the University of Waterloo in Canada, is particularly interested in the behavior of boredom as a function of the rate of change of information, as the American sociologist Orin Klapp theorized in his book *Overload and Boredom: Essays on the Quality of Life in the Information Society* back in the 1980s. In a society like ours, full of constant barrages

of information, we can verify what special guest Erin Westgate has already stated in her presentation: boredom occurs not only when what we are doing is too simple for us, but also when the activity we are engaged in is too complicated and/or we cannot give it the attention it requires. Contrary to what might be imagined, the implications of this kind of accelerated background—a high rate of information exchange—are not always negative: according to Danckert’s recent research, some computational models suggest that an agent driven by boredom learns better than one driven by curiosity (Yu et al., 2019).

Similarly, a study by Burda et. al (2018) obtained a particularly interesting result: faced with a screen that changes image every two or three seconds, an agent driven by curiosity would stand in front of it forever, while a bored agent would remain a finite time in front of it, changing activity as soon as he began to be aware of the little meaning it has for him. Nor does the irruption of boredom at a low rate of information change cease to be positive: then, the former becomes a signal to explore other activities (Gomez-Ramirez and Costa, 2017).

Hence Dr. Danckert’s eagerness to thoroughly investigate and analyze the relationships and influences between boredom and this new accelerated pace that defines our contemporary world: “I don’t even think Orin Klapp could have imagined [...] the vast amount of information available to us right now, which implies the emergence of major challenges at a high rate of information change” (Danckert, 2023).

Figure 6. Screenshot of the experimental results of the study. In red the majority percentage: avoidance behavioral strategies are the most used as a reaction to boredom (46%)

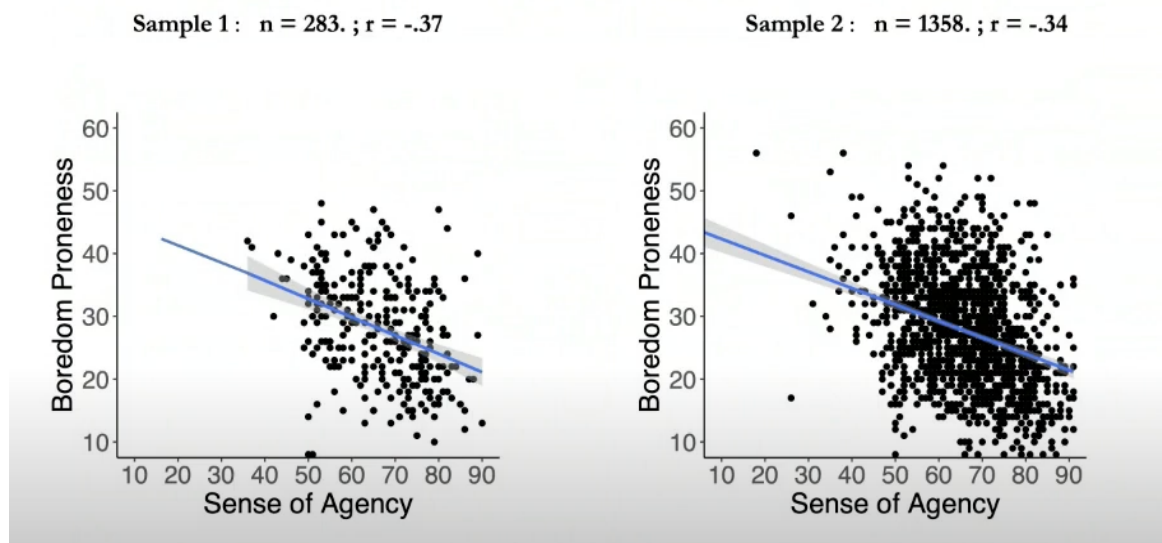


5.3. Vanessa Baaba Dadzie (University of Waterloo, Canada). *Exploring Differences in the Relationship Between Boredom Proneness and the Feeling and Judgement of Agency*

In response to Gorelik and Eastwood’s research (2023), Vanessa Baaba Dadzie conducts two studies in her research on boredom that seek to shed light on the relationship between boredom and agency. In the process, she goes even further than Garlic and Eastwood in that she “[places]

agency in the context of self-regulation”: that is, she first inserts it in the contexts of self-control and regulation and, in addition, takes into account self-efficacy as “a measure of one’s confidence in one’s ability to achieve what one sets out to do” (Baaba Dadzie, 2023). From this, she derives and verifies—in line with Gorelik and Eastwood’s results—that the propensity to boredom is higher the lower the level of self-efficacy (and, to the same extent, the lower the agency). In fact, negative agency is often directly linked to mental disorders such as depression, and explains the difficulty that sufferers have in participating or taking part in meaningful activities. Moreover, the results are consistent with theories such as Kruglanski’s regulatory mode, which distinguishes two different approaches to goal pursuit—the locomotion approach and the evaluative approach—and in whose characterization we find similar correspondences between boredom and passivity. After all, negative agency is much more likely to occur in subjects who, far from taking action, prefer to think carefully about the different options, possibilities and implications of their own decisions (Figure 7).⁹

Figure 7. Screenshot of the study they conducted proving the negative relationship between tendency to boredom and agency



5.4. Chantal Trudel (University of Waterloo, Canada). *Connecting Interoception and Boredom Proneness: A Novel Finding*

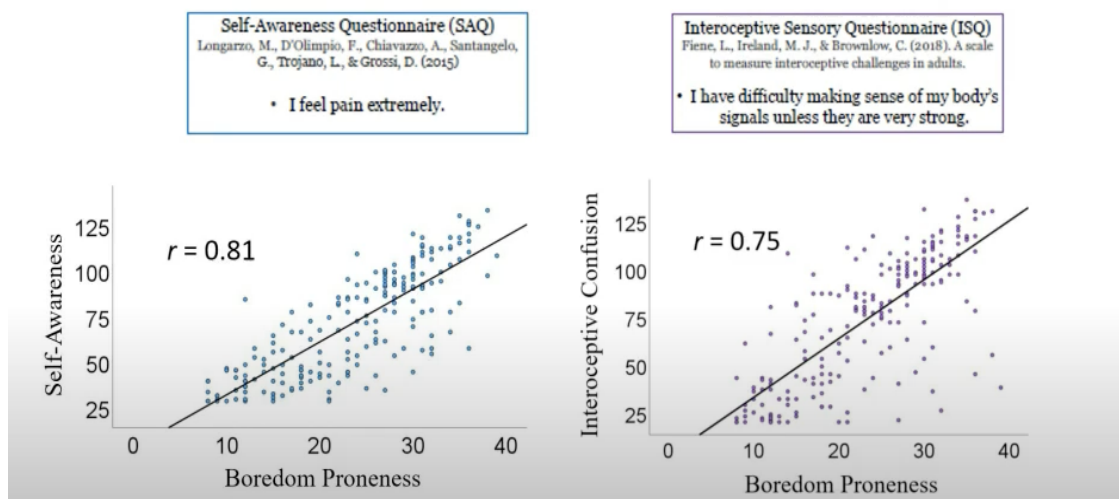
As an active member of the Danckert’s Lab at the University of Waterloo, Dr. Chantal Trudel seeks to elucidate and explore in her new research the relationship between boredom propensity and interoception. From a series of self-reported surveys, Trudel (2023) has concluded a positive correlation between boredom propensity and self-awareness ($r = 0.826$, $p < 0.001$), as well as between the former and interoceptive processing ($r = 0.767$, $p < 0.001$). Although boredom proneness is also found to be related to awareness of one’s own body states ($r = 0.497$, $p < 0.001$) and interoceptive accuracy ($r = 0.375$, $p < 0.001$), for the latter the results suggest a weaker

⁹ This would be, of course, an evaluative approach.

correlation. This fact has interesting consequences because it implies a somewhat paradoxical situation: the subject prone to boredom pays much attention to his or her internal states and yet demonstrates a lower capacity to represent them accurately (Trudel, 2023). We will have to wait, not without expectation, for the arrival of experimental data on interoceptive accuracy to be able to connect all the pieces of the puzzle (Figure 8).

Figure 8. Capture of the first sample of experimental results on the relationship between boredom tendency and self-consciousness and boredom tendency and interoceptive processing

Sample 1



6. Philosophy & Miscellaneous Panel

6.1. Julia Köwitz García (Complutense University of Madrid, Spain). *From Chronicled Situational Boredom to Deep Boredom*

Based on the prolific research by Dr. Josefa Ros Velasco (2022), Julia Köwitz frames a selection of Georg Büchner's works—*Leonce und Lena*; *Lenz*; *Woyzeck*, and, more superficially, *Danton's Tod*—within the cosmos of Boredom Studies, finding in a significant part of them the reflection of a real phenomenon that took place on a massive scale in nineteenth-century Germany: the passage from a chronic situational boredom to a deep boredom. The readers of that time, immersed in the pain of a deep boredom, enjoyed then a process of identification and catharsis when they saw reflected in literature the tedious drive of their time. And if anything is to be highlighted as a fundamental component of the process, it is the double reactive component of boredom as defined by Ros Velasco in *La enfermedad del aburrimiento*. Köwitz's argument is that, thanks to its duality, the impossibility of a revolution in German territory—or, in other words, the unfeasibility of access to the second reactive component of boredom, the passage to action—is not limited to inducing only a mood of despair in the author and his readers, but—thanks to the first reactive component, that of awareness—the force of the idea acquires, even in spite of Büchner's malinadversion toward German idealism, a higher form and meaning. In this

cosmos, the first reactive component of boredom has sublimated the *Thelema* by turning it into *Boulesis*.

6.2. Lutz Niemann (Charles University, Czech Republic). *Boredom and the Lived Body - Between Fullness and Emptiness*

With nihilistic accents—very similar to those that Dr. Goodstein will later develop in her presentation (2023)—Niemann outlines in his presentation a phenomenology of boredom based on the thought of Heidegger, Merleau-Ponty, Levinas, and Sepp. An excess of appropriation of otherness mediated by the senses leads the subject suffering from boredom to experience a specific loss of reality, given that he or she no longer lives, no longer perceives the experiences of real otherness (Niemann, 2023). In order not to fall into the void there should be a dialogue between the self and the fullness of the world, a condition that, in any case, is not present in deep boredom. If the center of gravity of the identity of the self pivots on a relationship that in cases of deep boredom does not exist, the identity crisis of the subject is imminent.

In his desire to control the resistance of otherness—the real, according to Sepp—the human being directs his forces and yearnings towards plenitude with the intention of converting his field of action into a “spatio-temporal domestication of otherness” (Niemann, 2023). And the fact is that, in our eternal disposition towards the future—because this is something we cannot avoid, “the human [...] is always ahead of itself”, says Heidegger (quoted in Niemann, 2023)—and circumscribed to an existence that is equivalent to a directed movement, boredom occurs precisely when this continuous circulation stops or is frustrated.

What Niemann comes to emphasize in Heidegger’s thought is precisely the importance of boredom as a state of mind: by its very nature, it possesses the ability to reveal to us our practical situation in the world. If situational boredom is still localized, deep boredom “extends to the whole world” (Niemann, 2023). In it, the dialogue between the self and otherness has been broken and the *Dasein* has burst into a world that has ceased to speak to it. The aversion experienced by the individual is no longer focused on the world but, as Levinas affirms, on the self. Let us emphasize in this aspect the importance of social contact according to Levinas for the prevention of boredom and the fullness of life.

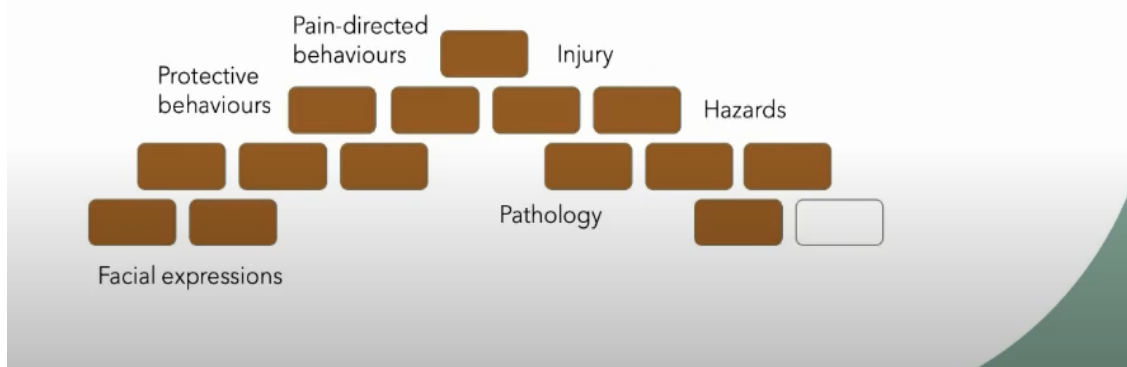
6.3. Morgan Heslop (Massey University, New Zealand). *Lessons from the Bored Room: Applying Concepts of Boredom to Animals*

There is still very little known about how animals understand monotony or boredom, how it differs between species and the different forms of it. This being the subject of study of the Heslop (2023) thesis, the researcher makes clear from the outset the fundamental importance of an unwavering maxim in the welfare sciences: it is not so much a question of whether animals are bored, but whether they have a hard time in certain situations that we as humans would consider boring. We are used to keeping animals in kennels, stables, or battery cages; and these are environments in which two factors related to boredom are present: a high degree of monotony and a low degree of free will. What the welfare sciences are positing here, therefore, is that “we have a duty to ensure that the ways in which we keep animals do not harm them” (Heslop, 2023). However, the issue is complex and far from simple to address; we do not yet know whether

boredom is an animal welfare problem or whether it is more a phenomenon of the human experience (Figure 9).

Figure 9. Capture of Heslop's presentation on the Dawkins Bridge, which allows us to infer with a certain degree of certainty the mental state—in this case, of an animal—with prior knowledge of a large number of indicators of animal welfare (behavior, psychology, environment, etc.)

Identifying pain



6.4. Jolien de Schepper (University of Antwerp, Belgium). *Phone in Hand - A Boredom Demand? Studying the Regulation of Boredom Through Smartphone Use*

Nor was there any absence of an approach to boredom from the perspective of the communication scientist. This is how de Schepper (2023), doctoral student at the University of Antwerp, has described her own work. To carry out her research she conducted two parallel studies which, although they did not yield significant results in terms of predicting boredom in media choice, did manage to find evidence for a U-shaped relationship between arousal and boredom (de Schepper, 2023). An important implication follows from this: an optimal level of arousal does not generate a high intensity of boredom, but lower and higher levels do lead to considerable boredom. Added to this finding is a very interesting one, namely, the finding that, on diary days, boredom levels are significantly higher.

7. Education Panel

7.1. Jennie Plate Blomberg (Södertörn University, Sweden). *The Affective Economy of Boredom - Teachers Practical Knowledge of Boredom as "Sticky"*

On the other hand, boredom in education is a real challenge—and even more so today—for teachers. Blomberg, from the University of Södertörn in Stockholm, is currently researching the experience of Swedish and Finnish upper secondary school teachers in relation to boredom in

her doctoral thesis on the theory of practical knowledge. Taking a close look at the different forms of practical knowledge in the professions—in this case, teaching—is essential for a better understanding of the emotions surrounding the classroom. Only in this way, Blomberg (2023) asserts, “do we adjust our practice to action”. Drawing on interviews with teachers and Sara Ahmed’s ideas about the circulation of emotions, Blomberg derives a novel perspective on boredom and its real-world implications.

Starting from Ahmed’s Marxist premise that the effective value of a body increases proportionally to the circulation of the emotion it carries, Blomberg (2023) infers that the effective value of a bored student increases proportionally to the circulation of this emotion. This repetition of an impression turns out to be precisely what Ahmed calls ‘stickiness’; a fundamental conception in Blomberg’s studies of boredom. In that same line, interviews with teachers reveal that boredom always circulates linked to three phenomena: the idea of the immature student, cell phones and computer screens, and anxiety (Blomberg, 2023). As for the teachers, they have to cope with a new phase of widespread digitalization at school—in Sweden, every pupil owns his own computer—which, in turn, promotes their own boredom.

Teachers’ adaptation to the new digital reality leads them to take on the unwanted role of ‘screen police’ or ‘entertainer’ when in fact they would like to carry out their teaching work without having to enter into a kind of competitive situation with their students’ screens. This gives rise not only to ethical dilemmas (‘how should a teacher relate to his students?’), but also to aesthetic considerations (‘how should interesting and instructive teaching be composed?’) or even personal questions (‘what kind of teacher do I want to be?’).

7.2. Carrie Hall (CUNY, US). *The Boredoms: Learning under Duress*

For Carrie Hall (2023), boredom “is an interaction between the student, the text and the situation” and, to that extent, “lies in the tension between engagement and disengagement”. The researcher states clearly that the investigation of this phenomenon can serve as a basis for promoting important curricular changes as well as the degree of student engagement. That is why one of the keys in Hall’s boredom studies consists of analyzing her students’ writings, insofar as individual reflection on their own experience can encourage them “to develop a metacognitive awareness of boredom” (Hall, 2023). Furthermore, Hall qualifies (2023), “one can perform boredom without actually being bored”, i.e., there is actually a big difference between being bored and performing boredom, and this distinction should always be kept in mind; there are many cases in which the learner pretends to be bored but is not really bored.

Based on the testimonies of her students and on Hall (2021) and Rallin’s (2019) theories of coercion and engagement, Hall (2023) sheds light on the nature of the phenomenon of boredom in the context of teaching and literacy. The aforementioned need to destigmatize boredom—in this respect, Ros Velasco (2023a) and Hall share the same concern—makes a generalized awareness of it on the part of the population essential. Contrary to popular belief, it is a sign of change capable of shedding light on the nature of the human being: “people”, Hall (2023) begins, “think of boredom as something atypical and an experience without qualities [...] [but] boredom is the key part of the history of everyone”.

8. Special Guests II

8.1 Elizabeth Goodstein (Emory University, US). *Nothing to Do: Boredom and the Technological Imaginary*

In her special guest lecture, Professor Elizabeth Goodstein describes the contours of the theoretical foundation of her new project, titled *Nothing to Do: Boredom and the Technological Imaginary*. Expanding on her previous work, Goodstein (2023) develops a critical concept of boredom “as a philosophically and politically significant and historically specific experiential configuration”—with clear and direct allusions to Simmel’s philosophy of money or Max Weber’s reflections on nihilism—locating it spatially and temporally on the complex and contradictory consumerist society of our time. Under the imperative of what Goodstein agrees to call a *nihilistic dynamic*—inherent to the *experience without qualities*—the individual not only does not appease his boredom when he turns to the most representative distractions of our hypermediatized world but aggravates and intensifies it in a worrying way (Goodstein, 2023). Moreover, as a “diffusion index of skepticism in the self” (Goodstein, 2023), boredom is nothing more than a “tip-off” to the truth: we should not turn to the motive to relieve our meaninglessness, but rather turn away from it, she advises.

Although the language of boredom has not lost in all cases its previous pre-industrial meanings and resonances, during the nineteenth century—Goodstein states (2023)—the evolution of the discourse on boredom shows the irruption of a new rhetoric of experience: the previous spiritual-existential connotation—name, for example, *l’ennui*—has given way to a new secularized terminology, linked to a self-understanding rooted in the deep contradictions of scientific progress. Hence Dr. Goodstein (2023) repeatedly refers in her presentation to the ambiguity of reason and, to the same extent, “the ambiguity of the rationality of modern life”.

If its peak manifestation is now in the form of “doubt, self-doubt and unfreedom” (Goodstein, 2023) in an increasingly polarized society, mediated by massive technologies of disinformation and surveillance, it is impossible not to share the researcher’s concern for the future of democracy and the integrity of the individual. But probably the most remarkable aspect of the ambiguity of the discourse on boredom is the following: despite the difficulties it offers to interpretation, it possesses the valuable capacity to reveal the nature of this “fundamental transformation [...] in the way of understanding the human relationship with history” (Goodstein, 2023). This is precisely what Goodstein is interested in: relating subjective experience to cultural modernization and bringing together, at the same time, philosophical, sociological, and historical reflection on boredom.

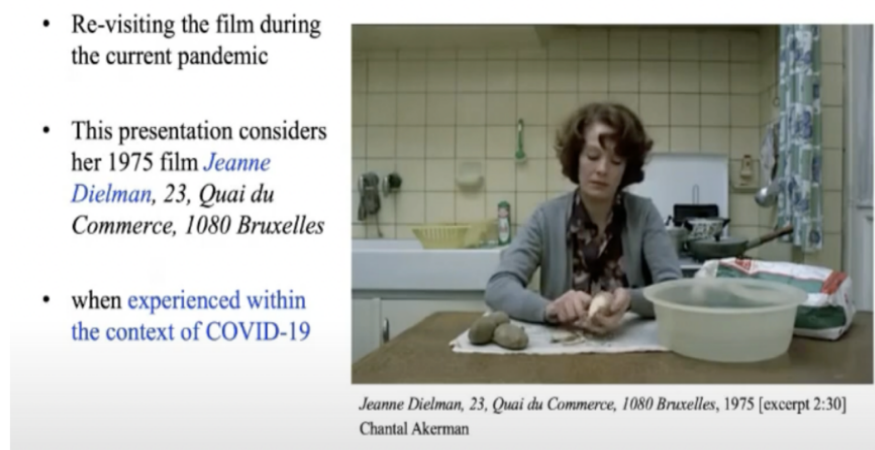
9. Culture Panel III

9.1. Julian Jason Haladyn (OCAD University, Canada). *Chantal Akerman in the Time of Covid-19*

Chantal Ackermann’s films took on a new significance during the pandemic because they dealt with a phenomenon that every human being, at that time, experienced every day, without any possibility to ‘escape’ from it (Haladyn, 2023). These are the statements of Dr. Julian Jason

Haladyn about his research on boredom in the film work of this director: far from the gimmicky habits of Hollywood studios, Ackermann's films place the viewer directly in front of the duration. The most famous scene in the film *Jeanne Dielman, 23 quai du Commerce, 1080 Bruxelles* (Figure 10) shows us a woman peeling potatoes from start to finish, without any cuts in between; or a Jeanne with an impassive expression making love as part of her routine sex work. The viewer is thus confronted with duration in its full extent; "and precisely this question was fundamental during the COVID pandemic" (Haladyn, 2023). It is therefore no mere coincidence that Ackermann's strategic use of slowness or boredom became much more significant at that time. A change in context also suggests a new interpretation, namely that boredom and duration became twinned evils during the pandemic. Indeed, all the activities Jeanne engages in in the very long film-it lasts almost four hours-from housework to sexual work, are part of that enduring boredom that is in the very structure of the film and that, according to Haladyn (2023), "provided a point of reference within an otherwise overtly fluid sense of life under COVID".

Figure 10. Capture of Haladyn's presentation of the most famous scene from *Jeanne Dielman, 23 quai du Commerce, 1080 Bruxelles*



9.2. Christian Parreno (University of San Francisco de Quito, Ecuador). *Boredom in the Architecture of Will Alsop*

The omnipresence of boredom is such that we even find it in the very heart of modern architecture, as Christian Parreno, professor at the University of San Francisco de Quito, tells us in the presentation of his research *Boredom in the Architecture of Will Alsop*. From the mythical Le Corbusier, through Philip Johnson to the origins of the Vanguard Group, they all share the same source of inspiration: the struggle *against* boredom, their position *against* the phenomenon. This is how, among other things, the meetings of the Vanguard Group arose at the end of the 1960s, in whose activity dedicated to criticizing projects or writing letters to the press we find nothing more than a resonant shared resistance against the boredom caused by working in the architectural offices of London. It was Cook who, in fact, described it that way back in 1999; fifteen years later he would acknowledge his view of boredom as a tedious proxy for political

correctness. Will Alsop, on the other hand, looked more to its potential positive implications, insofar as he saw in boredom “a force not only of creation, but also of enlightenment, a source of knowledge” (Parreno, 2023). This is how the phenomenon at hand acquires almost programmatic dimensions in the work of an architect who, posthumously, was described as an “architectural provocateur” (*New York Times*) or as a creator of “wild and wacky visions” (*The Guardian*) (quoted in Parreno, 2023) in the midst of a world dominated by commercial architecture. Alsop’s approach to boredom is intuitive and is constituted as an act of rebellion against the prevailing rationalist and functionalist methods: faced with the obligation to be doing something at any time and place, he claims the opposite: being able to sit and do nothing “allows the world to enter your head [...] that’s where it all is” (Alsop, 2012).

9.3. Tathagata Bhowmik (Case Western Reserve University, US). *Endless Scrolling Through Social Media and Boredom - A Tool for Organizational Control*

In line with other previous presentations, Tathagata Bhowmik discusses the implications of today’s frenetic pace of information consumption. The most direct consequence derives from a weakening of the user’s attentional systems, which in turn prevents the user from focusing and orienting on a specific task to which to assign real meaning. On this basis, and based on Giddens’s theory of structuring, Bhowmik (2023) verifies the inevitable interrelation between actions in one space and the result in a different space: boredom that has been born in a private space is maintained in organizational spaces. In this context, the lack of cognitive resources to face a more demanding task becomes a constant that makes it very difficult to get out of this loop. Bombarded as we are by a constant information overload, we become “knowledge workers” ironically devoid of the aptitude to extract from the information we receive a true purpose and full meaning. In line with Goodstein’s (2023) thesis, Bhowmik (2023) recognizes in this contemporary dynamic of noise and redundancy an amplification of boredom and, to the same extent, the feedback of a loop of exploitation, control and existential unease.

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