

Journal of Boredom Studies (ISSN 2990-2525)

Issue 2, 2024, pp. 1-4

<https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.10633976>

<https://www.boredomsociety.com/jbs>



**Christian Parreno: [Boredom, Architecture, and Spatial Experience](#). Bloomsbury, 2001, pp. 272.
ISBN: 9781350148130**

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How to cite this paper: Honarmand Ebrahimi, S. (2024). Christian Parreno: *Boredom, Architecture, and Spatial Experience*. Bloomsbury, 2001, pp. 272. ISBN 9781350148130. *Journal of Boredom Studies*, 2. <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.10633976>

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Received 7 February 2024; 8 February 2024.

I would like to first establish my position: I read *Boredom, Architecture, and Spatial Experience* as an architectural historian of emotions, rather than as a historian of boredom. Thus, my review looks at the book's contribution to the history of architecture and emotions. Although Christian Parreno does not introduce the book as a contribution to histories of architecture and emotions literature, I believe it has much to offer to the historians of emotions and their work on materialities and the built environment, as it does to architectural historians of emotions.

Parreno's ruminations are complex. He provides a multivalent view of boredom by drawing on the writings of a wide and vast range of authors, architects, theorists, and philosophers. In seventeen short chapters, Parreno shows how 'the condition' has had multiple configurations, arisen in diverse situations, been resistant to fixed definitions, and remained at times incommunicable. It is exactly these observations that are of great relevance to architectural historians and other scholars interested in the interrelation between architecture and emotions. His book shows why it is essential not to treat emotions as natural labels in favor of ready inclusions and analysis. In other words, Parreno liberates scholars from the perils of straightforward interpretations and analysis. It becomes clear throughout the book that boredom can no longer merely be linked to the emergence of 'user' experience (Emmons and Mihalache, 2013) because it appears as "a dynamic mechanism of defence," "a feeling of displeasure" (p. 41), "an unpreventable symptom of modernity and capitalism" (p. 48), "an inescapable presence in entrepreneurial and consumerist endeavours" (p. 59), "contagious" (p. 83), "a stance against modernist sensibilities," "the great terror of life," and "an inevitable component of the creative process" (p. 132), among others.

The book also contributes to the historiography of the relationship between architecture and emotions. It reveals countless studies that are missing from this historiography, such as *The Origin of Architectural Style* (1888) by Adolf Göller, who was a professor of architecture at Stuttgart Polytechnikum. While Göller's book might not appear as being about architecture and emotions *per se*, it is a useful source. Firstly, it raises questions about the links between architectural transformation and different and changing conceptualization of emotions. According to Parreno, Göller called a building's failing to "occupy the attention of its users" jading (p. 45). But he saw jading as a condition that can happen after a period. A building that used to produce engagement, "stops creating images in the mind" (p. 45). He used this argument to show "how perception can be accountable for the continuous evolution of architectural style" (p. 44). As Parreno rightly notes, Göller discounted "historical particularities" to "expose change as abstract operations that occur in abstract space" (p. 45). Yet, his argument demands an appraisal of emotions as "the meta-factor of [architectural] transformation" (p. 45), a point that has so far remained relatively unexplored by architectural historians. Secondly, historians of emotions have begun to criticize understanding of the relationship between emotions and architecture in binary terms: imposition and resistance or evocation and misunderstanding (or failing to feel correctly). Göller put forward a binary understanding of the relationship between emotions and architecture when he talked about the role of memory and the 'continuous contact with a building' as an 'educational practice.' It is essential to remember that Göller was not alone; others like Heinrich Wölfflin also produced similar theories. Rather than dismissing their work, we can draw on them to understand how the binary understanding of the relationship between architecture and emotions came about.

Among other sources that Parreno examines are *Women as They Are, or The Manners of the Day* (1830) by Catherine Gore, and *Bleak House* (1852/1853) by Charles Dickens. Considering these two novels side by side in Chapter 4 allows Parreno to highlight the difference between boring and boredom and dull and dullness and explore the interrelation between gender, class, and social and economic values. While *Women as They Are* validated “the dullness of men” and portrayed boredom as “the basis for the emerging bourgeoisie” of early nineteenth-century England, *Bleak House* condemned them as a “pervasive manifestation of moral and political corruption” (p. 34), even calling England as the “bleak house” that everyone occupies (p. 37). As Parreno notes, this change can be explained if we consider how ‘the inactivity and lack of political commitment of the upper classes’ assumed negative connotations in the Victorian era. Here, Parreno highlights one of the main points of the historians of emotions; that is, talking merely about emotions is not enough; it tells us little about past experiences. It is essential to look at their situated meanings and charges that played a role in forming experiences while being formed by them in a dynamic process.

Parreno argues in the book’s Epilogue that boredom can be “understood as a condition of space across many architectures” (p. 187). But one might ask, is that not the case with every emotion? And protest so what? My answer to the first question is that what Parreno argues is of course true about every emotion. And here lies my answer to the second question: by achieving his main goal of complicating dominant views of boredom as a mere ‘modern experience,’ Parreno’s book has the potential to complicate architectural historians’ works on use, the user, and the space. It urges architectural historians to historicize not only these categories but also emotions. Moreover, it should compel historians of emotions to consider how the emergence of the categories of user and space changed the relationship between architecture and feelings. With these points in mind, I wish Parreno had gone beyond boredom in the book’s Epilogue to discuss his argument’s contribution to studies of architecture, the user, space, and emotions. A future study might explore points of correspondence and disjunction between works of architectural historians and historians of emotions to offer a more nuanced understanding of the relationship between buildings and feelings.

Moreover, while the book is “a long [and interdisciplinary] essay” (p. 3), it is one-sided. I emphasize one-sided—not as opposite of multivalent—because the book does not look at building and city residence. By highlighting this omission, I do not mean that there is an ‘alternative’ history of boredom and architecture from the viewpoint of the city and building’s residence. Nor do I suggest an analysis that looks at the encounter between authors, architects, theorists, and philosophers and residence. Rather, in accordance with historians of emotions (Boddice and Hitzer, 2022), I argue that a further study might go beyond any individual architects, theories, and writers and their encounter with residence to explore why there have been so many different understandings of boredom and discern how different understandings of boredom relate to different and changing understandings of the relationship between emotions, the heart, and the mind.

References

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