Journal of Boredom Studies (ISSN 2990-2525)
Issue 4, 2026, pp. 1-3
https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.18429871
https://www.boredomsociety.com/jbs

An Answer to the Question: "How and why I became a boredom researcher/scholar?"

JULIAN JASON HALADYN
OCAD University, Canada
julianhaladyn@ocadu.ca

How to cite this paper: Haladyn, J. J. (2026). An Answer to the Question: "How and why I became a boredom researcher/scholar?". *Journal of Boredom Studies*, *4*.
https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.18429871

* This essay is part of a special autobiographical section and has not been subject to peer review.

Received 30 December 2025; Accepted 30 January 2026.

In the first year of my PhD, I was fortunate enough to take a class on boredom, taught by Michael E. Gardiner. The course examined writings on boredom and related concepts by a number of philosophers, theorists, and sociologists. One of the main reasons I took the class was because, until that time, I had never really considered the idea of boredom as a viable research topic—in fact, I personally never gave it much thought at all, except as a term to describe moments of mild discontent in my life. Most of my writing to that point was about art, specifically looking at modern and contemporary art history, including my MA thesis which was on the modernist artist Marcel Duchamp. For this course on boredom, I knew from the beginning that I would write on the idea of boredom in art, which I assumed would be a simple task but became complicated quite quickly. First off, I discovered that very few art historians had written on the topic, even though it seemed obvious that boredom had a crucial role in art practices and receptions from the 19th century to the present; one of the few exceptions was Frances Colpitt's 1985-essay "The Issue of Boredom: Is It Interesting?" My essay looked at the question of the 'ever-new,' which was an integral part of the idea of art within modernity, even tied to the developments of the avant-garde. By the time I completed my essay for this course I was fascinated with the idea of boredom and the types of questions this condition asked of people and culture. Michael had become my primary supervisor, and my dissertation was now on boredom.

My original intention was to write about boredom in contemporary art practices, especially considering how the condition was used by artists as a way of resisting capitalism. But, as I started researching its development I became personally invested in trying to understand the larger role of boredom within modernity, a process that led me to early modern questions of visuality. If being bored is a condition of modern subjective experience, then I wanted to look at the defining of a distinctive modern subjectivity; at first this brought me to René Descartes, but through him I began looking at Galileo Galilei and the changes in human perception that emerged around his time in relation to his telescopic discoveries. This tracing of a history of modern subjectivity and its discontents became my entire dissertation, with art playing a key role in 'picturing' an increasingly abstract experience of the world. It is, as I argued, this distancing between self and would that the boredom describes. While the majority of early discussion of boredom see it as a negative condition, I examined its positive aspects, proposing what I called the will to boredom as a drive seen within modernist art practices, especially the avant-garde. This research became my book, *Boredom and Art: Passions of the Will to Boredom*.

During the final year of my PhD, just as I was preparing to graduate, Michael and I began to think about co-editing an anthology of writings on boredom. Put simply, we wanted to produce a publication that we wish would have been available when we started researching boredom. The original plan was to collect existing texts on the subject, creating a volume that could be used as a sourcebook for those scholars interested in studying the condition; most of the writings would be historical, the usual suspects, with some more recent publications that point to its current possibilities. Eventually, however, this project became a volume of essays written for the collection that covered what we understood as core approaches to studying boredom—looking at subjectivity, visual culture, the [techno-]social world, its discontents and futures. The book included a range of scholars from various disciplines and backgrounds, encompassing a wide range of cultural and political perspectives. When I defended my dissertation, I was privileged to have as my external examiner Elizabeth Goodstein, who would later contribute an important

essay to this collection. In addition to the introduction and Michael's Postscript, there were seventeen contributors to the volume. From the beginning, Michael and I had been insistent that the publication be titled *The Boredom Studies Reader* and would serve as a core resource for what was, at that time, still a vague area of study. The publisher was at first resistant since boredom studies was not yet a recognizable field of research, which is why, in our introduction, we actively argued for its significance and necessity. It was incredibly rewarding to see the publication come together, with its breadth of perspectives on and ideas about what boredom was and could be. Since the publication of this volume in 2016 there has been much development and now Boredom Studies is, thanks to the many scholars who have continued to define and expand the field, an important contemporary mode of critical thought and analysis—as demonstrated by the existence of an International Society of Boredom Studies.

One of the reasons for my own continuing interest in boredom is the ways in which this condition asks questions about subjectivity, inviting us to critically rethink contemporary modes of perceiving and experiencing the world. During the COVID-19 pandemic, for example, the idea of being bored was tied to issues of depression, of peoples' attempts to cope with the realities of being deprived of contact, engagement and experience while in quarantine—a life on pause, surrounded by illness and death. As I explored in a recent text looking at boredom and self-awareness (Haladyn, 2025), I personally believe that the idea of boredom is intimately tied to modern understandings and definitions of self. Living in a time of mass entertainment and spectacle, boredom represents the antithesis of the distractions that define much of contemporary existence. I became a boredom researcher because of these philosophical questions that I believe are necessary in our current world.

References

Haladyn, J. J. (2024). Theses on Self-Awareness in the History of Boredom Studies. *Journal of Boredom Studies, 3*. https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.17549849