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Bruno Moroncini

The Time of Repetition and the Time of Suspension for an Historical and Political Understanding of Boredom



Summary:

According to Otto Fenichel, boredom is the sign of a conflict between the Id and the Ego, between the push of the first to reach the goal of our drives and of the second to inhibit them—an unstable equilibrium between movement and calm, frenetic agitation and catatonic immobility. This thesis provides the interpretive key to two of the most important concepts on boredom of this last century: 1) the concept of “deep boredom” elaborated in 1930 by Martin Heidegger in the text of his lecture on *The Fundamental Concepts of Metaphysics. World, Finitude, Solitudes*, and 2) the concept of boredom as “stiffened restlessness” elaborated in good part in the 1930s by Walter Benjamin in the section of *Passagen Werk* in “Boredom, the Eternal Return”.

According to the Heideggerian analyses, once boredom becomes “deep” and embraces one’s being in its totality, it reveals itself as that sort of basic emotional situation capable of awakening us to our authentic temporality, finally freeing ourselves from that empty and repetitive rhythm, from that “boring” space that, not by chance, we are constantly seeking to chase away. From Benjamin’s perspective, on the one hand, boredom is the subjective reflection of that eternal return of the same which time had become after the revolutionary defeat; but, on the other hand, in so far as it is the expression of a conflict, it is also an innovative energy potential ready to rupture. If boredom on the one hand is the inhibition of the drive goals, it can also, on the other, halt the repetitiveness of time and indirectly favor revolutionary change.

What struck me above all was that I did not want to do simply anything, although I desired eagerly to do something (...) between these frenzied bouts of boredom...

Alberto Moravia, *Boredom*

1)

It is by no means easy to understand the historical, cultural and political reasons why in the 1930s the state of mind of boredom – the importance and centrality to subjective life of which had already been captured in the second half of the 19th century (Leopardi, Schopenhauer, Baudelaire), and in the even nobler medieval tradition of sloth[1]– rose to the rank of foundation, in other words, according to philosophical terminology, to that of ontological condition from which to determine the core of the essence and historical destiny of man. Indeed, it was Heidegger who in the seminar of the 1929-1930 winter semester, the Fundamental Concepts of Metaphysics: World, Finitude and Solitude[2], after restating that attunement (*Stimmung*) is a part of man's being" and that it is therefore not simply "something that only exists,"[3] but represents instead "a fundamental mode (*Grundweise*) of being," i.e. what "gives being substance and possibility,"[4] indicates in profound boredom, ennui, the fundamental attunement (*Grundstimmung*) of the spiritual situation of his time, using it to replace, partially or entirely, that of angst, thematized only three years earlier in *Being and Time*.

We shall soon return to Heidegger, whereas the other pole that we shall use to counterpoint the Heideggerian use of boredom will be the section of Walter Benjamin's *Passagen Werk* entitled Boredom, Eternal Return, where the German philosopher, towards the end of the 1930s, using the life and works of Auguste Blanqui, links boredom to the deep feeling of defeat that had struck the revolutionary forces after the disastrous experience of the Paris Commune. To fill in the picture, which will inevitably remain incomplete and approximate, we shall place between Heidegger and Benjamin, with the risk of making the author play the part of a crock in between iron vessels, a 1934 essay by Otto Fenichel, a rare, and therefore extremely precious, example of a psychoanalytical reading of boredom.

Though a chasm divides them, Heidegger and Benjamin have something in common: both are concerned with waking up either a sleepy being-there or an entire dormant era. Of course, for Benjamin the era doesn't limit itself to sleeping: because as it sleeps it also dreams; and if it dreams, perhaps to carry on sleeping, as Freud argued, it is also true that it dreams at the same time of its decline and its supersession. It dreams, in other words, of a subsequent era that will achieve in a waking state what it can only desire by dreaming: a better world and a free society. When an era awakens, something that in Benjamin's case coincides with the Paris Commune, what will be the task of the materialist historian, who is also the revolutionary politician, if not that of interpreting the dream as a cipher to make the event, in the here and now (*Jetztzeit*), readable? This schema, which already heavily relies on the Freudian *Traumdeutung* model, is obviously totally absent in Heidegger, for whom the question is to awaken the being-there in a much more traditional sense, i.e. to summon it to authenticity, to being itself, and to responsibility, withdrawing it from the daily commerce with the world in which, sleepy and dazed, it tends to lose and forget itself, despite being its shaper, as the seminar in question asserts. We could also say, though the being-there is constitutively a being-in-the-world, or as Nancy would express it, being-to-the-world, it must not be 'worldly.'

In contrast to the tradition, however, for Heidegger it is not a question of wakening it to thinking or through thinking, but to and through an attunement, upon condition that this attunement is fundamental, that is, as we've already seen, that it will act as the foundation of the truth of man's being-there. This, however, does not answer the question why boredom is no longer angst. Why is boredom this truth and not, for example, sadness or even joy? To answer this, we should start from the fact that the being-there we intend to awaken

to a fundamental attunement is actually nothing more than ourselves and that we are therefore obliged to determine who we, who are giving ourselves the task, actually are: to determine what our current situation is. According to Heidegger, we (we who? We moderns? We living in the early 20th century? We living in 1929? Or even we now, living in 2018? The power of performative utterances!) interpret our current condition in four ways, as exemplified by Spengler, Klages, Scheler and Ziegler.

What all four have in common is the thesis that the current condition is one of decadence, and each indicates the cause and the remedy. Spengler argues that the West is declining and finds the cause in the uncontested dominion of the spirit, here meant as calculating utilitarian reason, which has prevailed over life leading it to its decay. Klages argues something similar, with the difference that he focuses more closely on the contrast between the soul (life) and the spirit, postulating the need to destroy the latter, held to be the source of the mortal illness that has struck life. On the other hand, life in Klages becomes confused with the “obscure seething of the impulses,” which finds its maximum expression in the mythical element. The third and fourth interpretations – Scheler and Ziegler – are, so-to-speak, more moderate, as they tend to find a balance, an ethical and historical midway between life and the spirit.

But all of them derive, according to Heidegger, from Nietzsche and his characterization of the condition of modern culture through the conflict between Dionysian and Apollonian: between life and form, excess and order, vastness and measurement. In fact, it is not only these four interpretations of the current condition that derive from Nietzsche, but every fermentation in the world of culture, including the George Circle and, particularly important to us, psychoanalysis. Psychoanalysis, like everything else, is for Heidegger nothing more than a variation of the philosophy of culture, namely an intellectual apparatus that, initially presenting itself as the diagnosis for the illness the present era suffers from, turns imperceptibly into a prognosis that establishes in advance the roles and tasks that concern us as subjects invoked by the spiritual situation of the times. It’s easy game for Heidegger to show that, however desperate the condition the current degeneracy condemns us to – in general the destruction of life by the spirit (calculating utilitarian reason) –, it doesn’t, however, upset us all that much, it doesn’t clench us, it doesn’t arouse any fundamental states of mind. On the contrary, it acts as a balm, insofar as it absolves us from any form of commitment: our condition does not depend on us, but on the spiritual situation of the times we live in that a philosophy of culture allows us to know. And this not only acquits us from any responsibility towards ourselves, but goes as far as making us interesting to ourselves: we are not abandoned and neglected beings, but we bear tasks on which the salvation of culture itself depends, we occupy a place in universal history.

Heidegger has no difficulty overturning the main proposition of philosophy of culture: if we must make ourselves interesting in own eyes, is that not because we have become insignificant? And is it not true that if we give ourselves a role, that’s precisely because we no longer have one? Perhaps the entire flurry of philosophy of culture is no more than a pastime to drive away boredom: behind all the grandiloquent roles, the essential tasks and the destinies of universal history, we find nothing but the boredom we feel for ourselves. Not only are we bored, but we are bored of ourselves, man has become bored of itself.

Indirectly, the recognition of the status of culture led us to a fundamental attunement, it awakened us to boredom. But now it is a question of keeping awake in boredom, to delve into it, to avoid falling asleep again. It is evident that our habitual attitude towards boredom consists in trying to escape it, to drive it away, to make the protracted time of boredom pass by as fast as possible, to make it painless. Boredom is inevitably accompanied by the pastime, the task of which is to spur time so it will go by as quickly as possible and cease to bore us.

It is on this relation between boredom and time, with the primordial temporality we ourselves are, that Heidegger’s discourse on boredom develops. Heidegger identifies three forms of boredom: becoming bored by something, being bored (boring ourselves) with something and profound boredom (the boredom that gives itself in the impersonal form of “one bores oneself”). In the case of “being bored by,” the pastime opposes or tries to oppose the boredom, while in the case of “being bored with,” it is the pastime itself that bores. In the train station, the pastime is used to make time go faster, while the social evening, itself a

pastime, one is not bored by anything specific, but, rather, the situation as a whole is boring, the paradox is represented by the fact that one is bored by the pastime itself: we had accepted the invitation precisely to spend a non-boring evening in the company of friends. The evening is in itself a pastime: therefore, if we are bored there, it is the pastime that bores us. To return to the question of time, we should note that whereas in the 'being bored by' time runs quickly, in the "being bored with," on the contrary, time expands and the now (*jetzt*) goes on, i.e. time stops. In "being bored with" we have an amputation of time and we assist to a mutual breakup of the future and of the having been. The now no longer runs from the not-yet to the no-longer, it lies completely still. This Heideggerian notation will appear even more significant if we take into account that in Benjamin, on the contrary, the task given to the historical materialist and the revolutionary politician is precisely that of stopping time, blocking it in the *Jetztzeit*, i.e. not in the now but in the now time. Benjamin's present is neither the Aristotelian now nor the duration in which the now expands, but the here and now in which the continuous time of history halts and the fuse of revolution is lit.

In profound boredom, on the other hand, the last residues of consciencism and personalism still present in the 'being bored with' Are done away with at last. Indeed, the bored one is neither me nor you, him nor her, but an Es (it/one), which is given in the modality of the one: *Es ist einem langweilig*, i.e. 'it is boring for one' (there is some One that is bored). Here the use of the neutral pronoun 'es,' Heidegger explains, is the same as in expressions such as '*es blitzt*' (it flashes), '*es donnert*' (it thunders) and '*es regnet*' (it rains), in which "es is the determination for the indeterminate, the unknown.[5]" If it is true that in this es, however undetermined and unknown, what is summoned is what we actually are, i.e. "one's own forgotten self, which is every time itself, every time with this specific history, in this specific age condition, with this name and profession and destiny, the self, one's own dear ego, of which we say that I, you, we, are bored," in the passage to one/it is bored, however, this ego disappears without an abstraction or generalization, a sort of universal ego, to take its place: what is left of us is only an "indifferent No-one." [6]

If in profound boredom it is the entity in its totality that becomes indifferent, that bores, this indifference concerns us too, ourselves as people: "we are no longer, as subjects and kin, before this entity and distinct from it, but find ourselves in the midst of the entity in its totality, in other words, in the totality of this indifference. The entity in its totality, however, does not disappear, on the contrary, it reveals itself as such precisely in its indifference. The void here consists in the indifference that envelops the entity in its totality." [7] This is the difference between anguish and boredom: though both allow us to seize the entity in its totality, preventing the being-there from continuing to lose itself in the world, anguish leads to this result of annihilating the world in the forerunning anticipation of death, whilst boredom seizes the entity by making it emerge in its total indifference. If in this way all the ontical possibilities are taken away from the being-there, if even time is taken away from it, for this very reason, as Vigorelli remarks, we may reopen "discourse at the level of authentic 'ontological' possibility." [8] Profound boredom, as an impersonal attunement wipes away any subjectivist residues and allows us to think about the history of the being-there, about its authentic temporalization, not as a heroic resolution but as an anonymous event. Boredom has eradicated the ego.

2)

Though many Freudian texts, from Totem and Taboo to Civilization and its Discontents, from The Future of an Illusion to Group Psychology and the Analysis of the Ego, not to mention Moses and Monotheism, may have indirectly suggested that it is psychoanalysis is neither a philosophy of culture nor a vision of the world. As a whole, the tradition that recognizes itself in Freud firmly asserts that it is instead a science of words, of the psyche, in the modern Galilean sense, the limits of which – suture of the subject, identification between truth and knowledge – cannot be overcome through a leap into philosophy, or, as Ricoeur would like, into hermeneutics [9], but by assuming an ethical position at the center of which desire and *jouissance* are placed neither in succession nor as alternatives.

In contrast to what Heidegger believed (and not only he: an entire generation of intellectuals and thinkers agreed with this interpretation, with the difference that what for the latter was a positive signal was for Heidegger the reason for his critique), the object of psychoanalysis is not life, not its turbid wild traits, not its degeneration, but psychic determinism, the representational chain formed by mnemonic traces into which things like drives are inscribed, which even when it is of the erotic variety has nothing to do with life and its Schopenhauerian thrust towards reproduction. In other words, psychoanalysis is not anthropology; it is not a type of cultural construct that, though it leads man back within the general traits of living things, determines, according to Scheler's famous definition, their position in the world through those specific characteristics that are thinking and consciousness. On the contrary, from this point of view psychoanalysis rejects the centrality of the ego and consciousness and moves towards the impersonal and anonymity: for it, too, the subject is an id (es), not a persona, a neutral person, a persona from which the centralizing and normative role of the ego has been neutralized. Above all – and this is where the comparison with Heidegger becomes compelling – psychoanalysis is a science of singularity, a discourse about the one and of the one, a one not intended in the Plotinian sense of the one-All, the one from which multiplicity emanates, but the singular exclusive one that everyone of us is and the exemplarity of which is dictated by desire and *jouissance*. In psychoanalysis, too, we deal with 'some One who enjoys,' with someone whose desire has been circumscribed within a mode of enjoyment that pinpoints and signifies him, that represents him before the other and before the rest of the world, or, in Heidegger's words, before the entity in general.[10]

The step Heidegger does not take, closed up as he is within the magic circle of philosophical thought, is that of seeing in the 'one is bored' one of the possible vicissitudes of the drive, thus inscribing it in the plot of the unconscious[11]. On the contrary, Otto Fenichel's essay, a practically unique model in the scarce psychoanalytic literature on the phenomenon of boredom[12], immediately moves in this direction: boredom is an inhibition (*Hemmung*) of the drive to activity. This does not mean, however, that there is no tension (*Spannung*) in boredom. The phenomenon of boredom is double: "besides the need for, there is simultaneously an inhibition of, intensive psychological activity.[13]" It is as if, Fenichel immediately adds, in boredom we felt the tension, the drive to action, but the goals were removed: the drives come to nothing, tension remains high, but lacks any outlet and because of this the bored seek in the external world some help against this repression, they expect that the world will offer them those stimuli they cannot find in themselves. Boredom leads to an impasse: the search for new impulses coming from the external world causes the same resistance from which the repression of the drive goals had derived and the fact that external thrusts inevitably have certain similarities with the original drive goals prevents any movement.

Boredom is a psychic conflict between the ego and the id: whilst the latter wants a drive action, the ego opposes it and does everything it can to remove the drive-aims. This conflict can reach paroxysmal forms: Fenichel relates the situation of boredom in which high tension is accompanied by a repression of drive-aims to the frenzy that appears in the tonic-clonic seizures typical of epilepsy, in which the tonic state corresponds to the stiffening phase and the clonic to the phase of convulsions and motoric agitation. This means that, though the frantic state of agitation is very different from the "manifest quiet of boredom," the two conditions are comparable: what we define as boredom stands as a tonic phase in alternation with the motoric agitation of the clonic phase. Boredom is only apparently stillness and monotony; it is actually tension and agitation.

The double structure of boredom – quiet and agitation – would seem to provide a foundation for Heidegger's phenomenological and existential analyses: the first two forms of boredom – becoming bored by and being bored with – seem to correspond to Fenichel's tonic-clonic cycle: in the first form we have the agitation and restlessness typical of the clonic phase with an attempt to make time go by at all costs, whilst in the second an apparent calm would seem to prevail, a stagnation of time and a stillness characteristic of the tonic phase.

This would confirm the inverted mirror-like character of states of mind and passions: the incessant alternation between hate and love, depression and euphoria, boredom and overexcitement. A confirmation of this thesis, according to Fenichel, is given by the relation between boredom and monotony: if in most cases monotony is boring to the point of inducing sleep, in many other cases it is on the contrary a cause of

excitement. Monotony, the repetition of the identical, turns into such an intense stimulus that in some cases it can lead to ecstasy: Fenichel provides the examples of prayer and of primitive dances, which serve, like in sleep, to divert libido from an external world perceived as monotonous and boring, but in which, however, in contrast to sleep, which places the subject in a state of rest, we see a narcissistic super-investment that leads to a violent exacerbated excitement[14].

Fenichel follows these situations in which monotony may become a source of excitement and boredom a push towards motoric discharge back to the childish root of libidinal pleasure in which any monotonous rhythm, beginning with the cardiac beat itself, can turn into a sexual stimulus. But if his analysis of boredom stopped here, Fenichel would have failed in the aim of his psychoanalytical understanding: far more relevant than the fact that the monotonous stimulus can induce sleep or ecstasy, modes of libido satisfaction, is the opposite, i.e. when monotony becomes intolerable and has to be immediately interrupted, when rhythmical repetition produces displeasure. According to Fenichel, the nature of this displeasure is comparable to what we feel when a sexual act that has already reached a very advanced state of excitement has to be suddenly interrupted.

It is at this point that the other fundamental affect in psychoanalysis enters Fenichel's discourse: anxiety (to which, after all, boredom was related via inhibition, as Freud himself had attested when, through the latter, he had linked anxiety and symptom[15]). We won't here reconstruct in all their complexity the two Freudian theories on anxiety: anxiety as the transformation of repressed or inhibited libido and anxiety as an alarm and danger signal. We shall only remind ourselves that one difference between the two is the time relation between anxiety and repression; in the first theory anxiety occurs after repression whilst in the second it precedes and causes it.

Fenichel, who wrote his essay in 1934, would seem to refer to the first Freudian theory of anxiety, but, as we shall see shortly, it's as if he were indirectly forced to conjecture the second theory. According to Fenichel, the sudden interruption in excitement caused by rhythmic monotony (i.e. by boredom) occurs in those people who are capable of tolerating a limited degree of sexual excitement without it causing them anxiety. Now, whether we want to read this psychic phenomenon as the effect of a transformation of libido into anxiety due to the repression or, on the contrary, as the signal warning of the danger represented by the sexual aim towards which that excitement tends, this does not change the fact that anxiety stands in the way of drive satisfaction. This is further proved in Fenichel's successive observation: monotonous excitation and the subsequent "displeasure by interruption" (an ambiguous expression that can mean both that the interruption is in itself a source of displeasure and, on the contrary, that it puts an end to an unpleasant condition) can be traced back to those childhood situations in which the child who witnessed (or perhaps only fantasized about) the primal scene becomes excited by waiting in vain for it to be repeated. In this case, the interruption may mean both that the child puts an end to a situation that is intolerable because it lacks any satisfaction, and that he wants to avoid the repetition of the primal scene itself and the drive satisfaction that would come with it, because both are sources of very intense displeasure. Returning to the initial definition of boredom, Fenichel again opposes the id and the ego: whereas the former pushes for drive satisfaction, the latter inhibits the aim.

We are faced with a key question of psychoanalysis: what is more unpleasant, the repression of the libidinal drive or satisfying it? What is most dangerous for the psychic apparatus[16]? According to the post-war Freud, the answer is satisfaction... *jouissance*, when it breaks the banks built by civilization against the deadly antisocial thrusts of the erotic drive. When, in Lacan's words, desire, abandoning the paths of metaphor (i.e. of the symptom) manifests itself as desire for something else, for the Thing. Unless analysis is recognized as interminable and the stress is placed on the remainders of interpretative work, on partial *jouissance*, on the *jouissance* of parts of the body, which in turn represent individualizing and singularizing symptoms, symptoms that make a subject a One.

'It is boring for one' (there is some One that is bored): this means that boredom lies somewhere between anxiety and the symptom. It is not anxiety itself, because, by inhibiting the aim, it contributes, with its

character of excitation, to allowing some psychic apparatus to appear on the horizon and somehow precedes it and avoids it. It is not an authentic symptom, as for example Little Hans's fear of horses[17]because, though in the form of a conflict, that relation between the id and the ego produces no metaphor. Boredom, like anxiety and like melancholia, is an affect, one of the affects that take place in psychoanalysis, but it is not a formation of the unconscious, it is not equivalent to the lapse, to a forgetfulness, to the *Witz* or in general to the symptom. Boredom is an inhibitor, it blocks movement and cages time in rhythmic repetition, in monotony.

3)

The Heideggerian analysis of profound boredom, the boredom of 'one is bored,' had resulted in the being-there of man experiencing a plunge of the entity in its totality into total indifference. A void had opened up before the being-there, a void, Heidegger specifies, that is not "absolute nothingness, but a void in the sense of denying oneself, of evading, hence a void as lack, privation, state of necessity." [18]. It would seem we are perfectly conscious of this void as a state of need: do we not face multiple and diverse states of necessity each day? Do we not fight against "contemporary social misery, political confusion, the impotence of science, the hollowness of art, the groundlessness of philosophy, the weakness of religion?" [19] And do not the philosophies of culture indicate each day what it is we should worry about, what we should fight against and which cures we should apply against the discontents of civilization? The doubt arises, however, that all these states of necessity calling us into action are ultimately nothing but pastimes, defenses against the effects of boredom. They keep us occupied, involve us and prevent us from experiencing profound boredom, in the form of "being-left-empty-in-its-totality." [20]

In actual fact, for Heidegger this "restless legitimate defense against states of necessity prevents a state of need in its totality from arising and spreading." [21]. What does this state of need in its totality, this radical void we must face, consist of? It consists exactly in this: that nothing seizes us anymore, nothing oppresses us, nothing calls us to decisions; everything bores us and becomes bored. What oppresses us, what we deeply experience, Heidegger concludes, is "the absence of an essential oppression of our being-there in its totality." [22] In our present being-there, Heidegger notes, "mystery is lacking." [23] Here is the true lack, the authentic privation, the central void of our being-there: we lack nothing, we lack privation (a formula that refers us to the later formula of the oblivion of oblivion, of the being characterizing the age of nihilism and technology). If Heidegger's objective is to awaken the being-there that we are to deep boredom, to make each and every one of us, one by one, plunge into the anonymity of 'one is bored,' this is because it is the only way that will allow us to capture the present condition of our being-there-to-the-world, what concerns the being-there that we ourselves are in its totality: the fact that we no longer lack anything, that we are without world and without opening, that our being-there has been reduced to a being-in-the-world in the way of a stone or animal, that we no longer arrange ourselves according to the temporal ecstasies of the past, the present and the future. Only plunging into the abyss of the foundation that deep boredom has emptied once and for all is capable of forcing us once more to remember, and hence to reestablish, our being time and our being in the world, to reopen history and have a destiny.

Heidegger continues his attack against psychoanalysis, restating that everything to which modern man commits himself ultimately has only the function of preventing the experience of profound boredom and, consequently, hiding the being-there to oneself. Heidegger adds that all this happens despite "all the psychology and all the psychoanalysis, in fact, precisely by means of psychology, which today even pretends to be depth psychology." [24]

Had he been more of a cosmopolitan and less of a Black Forest farmer, he may perhaps have realized that only psychoanalysis could give empirical consistency to his ontical and ontological analyses. In his 1962-1963 seminar, Lacan found one of the specific characters of anxiety in the fact that it puts us before the lack of lack [25]: if anxiety is an alarm signal, the danger of which it warns us is that there is no longer a void in

being, that nothing anymore carves into the body of the real the absence that makes subjectivization possible. Bestowing upon anxiety an aspect that Heidegger reserved instead to boredom, thus bringing closer together the two emotional situations, Lacan also allows us to identify the limits of the interpretation of anxiety given by Being and Time. If the other character of anxiety Lacan identified is that of not deceiving, (i.e. what abolishes in one go the pretense and doubt that characterize normal commerce with the world by the various being-there, what does away with what the early Heidegger called the artificial life, a life full of 'blunders' and deceits, of poverty and desire, of inclinations and flights, of euphoria and disappointments, in other words that inauthentic life all of us find ourselves living), we can fully understand why for Heidegger anxiety becomes the foremost emotional situation that pushes the being-there to abandon such a world and to take on that heroic predisposition that, becoming entirely warlike, easily turns being-for-death from an existential position that makes all life projects authentic (precisely because it leads them back to our finiteness) into the most trivial sacrifice in battle, into the fascist striving for 'a beautiful death.' What Heidegger does not understand is that this dissolution of the world of pretense and doubt is what constitutes the danger that anxiety signals to us, the fact of being made to face the cause of our desire without any screens, without being protected anymore by all those blunders and deceits, all those phantoms of artificial life.[26]

If it is true that in moving from anxiety to boredom Heidegger softened the individualistic and subjectivistic traits of the former in favor of the more anonymous and impersonal traits of the latter, he did, however, produce an uncertain comprehension of both: he failed to see the danger signal aspect of anxiety and the conflictual nature of boredom. Above all, he failed to consider the relationship of boredom with monotony (i.e. the relationship of boredom with time). For Heidegger, boredom relates to time in three ways: as a spur, as stationary time or duration, or as radical oblivion of the original temporality of the being-there. But Fenichel showed us that boredom, insofar as it is akin to monotony, has to do with rhythm (i.e. with the repetition at regular intervals of something identical, such as the heartbeat).

Boredom, therefore, has a specific temporality, which is that of repetition, and it would be difficult to say that in it time stops, that it is immobilized. The distinction will then no longer be between stationary time and the original opening of temporality — time as the relationship between the three temporal ecstasies of past, present and future[27]— but between time as repetition and time that comes to a standstill, between time that returns and time that stops, but not to remain, but rather to never return again and to initiate a new and different temporal series. This distinction is the fulcrum of Benjamin's thinking at the end of the 1930s. In his Theses on the Philosophy of History, Benjamin develops a concept of a historical present (*Gegenwart*) that can no longer be interpreted as a mere passage from past to future but, on the contrary, as a temporal caesura, as a present in which time is in equilibrium "and has come to a standstill." [28] This present is what thesis XIV characterizes as *Jetztzeit*: a time in which, on the one hand a certain event of the past is actualized, thus achieving all its potentialities, which had remained unexpressed at the time it happened, and, on the other, a time that makes suddenly readable, from both a historiographical and political point of view, an entire historical constellation.[29]

The time of repetition, on the contrary, is thematized in *Passagenwerk*, section D: "Boredom, Eternal Return." [30] This reflection by Benjamin on boredom owes nearly everything to his reading in 1938 of Louis-Auguste Blanqui's *Eternity by the Stars: An Astronomical Hypothesis*, published in 1872. This 'dream,' [31] this 'vision,' or even this vaguely psychotic 'delirium,' transforms a historical defeat into a cosmic ineluctability. In the midst of modernity, Blanqui restores a circular conception of time the fundament of which can only be of a cosmic nature. But what in pre-modern culture gave stability and measurement — a sky of fixed stars and the circular movement of the celestial bodies — for a human experience, in itself unstable and exposed to fortune, now becomes, in the historical present after the Commune, the resigned justification for a burning political defeat. In a time that celebrates the 'magnificent and progressive fate,' recourse to astronomical repetition is the drug that like opium or absinthe heals chagrin and soothes pain. Better to deny the existence of progress itself than having to bear its vanquishment: "there is no progress. Alas! No, they are only vulgar re-editions, repetitions. As it is with editions of past worlds, so it is with those of future worlds." [32]

We're eternal in the sense that we always repeat the same things: "What I write at this moment in a cell at the Fort du Taureau I have written and shall write throughout all eternity, at a table, with a pen, clothed as I am now, in circumstances like these. As shall we all." [33] Despite this, Blanqui does not completely exclude some form of hope for our grandchildren, but in this case too, a possible better world is not an effect of progress, it is not prepared by the past and projected onto the future by the present. If any progress is possible, it is only because it too has already existed, even though we have never benefited from it. Within the fierce eternity of all things, Blanqui introduces the device of forks in the road: we must not forget that "everything we could have been on this earth, we are it somewhere else." [34] A better world than the one we are condemned to has therefore already existed and, like all other things, will return. In the same way, however, we who have missed this better world, shall always miss it, we shall forever be the defeated, the desperate. If our grandchildren will see a better world, this will be possible at one condition: that they become not our heirs, that they do not repeat our history, but that of happier and more accomplished men.

Those who failed, therefore, are the men of the nineteenth century (and us, the us of today, who continue to fail just like them), who were unable, as Benjamin writes, to "respond to the new technical possibilities with a comparably new social order," [35] who were incapable of conjugating, as Kant would have said, the development of one's natural talents and abilities, which runs at breathtaking speed compared to the moral progress of humanity, which is slow and often staggers. [36] These same men, however, have also turned this contingent failure into a mythical image, a phantasmagoria, an authentic dream, projecting a historical Now into cosmic immutability. And if it is true that there is also room left in the dream, as we saw with Blanqui, for the possibility of a better world than the actual, it is also true that we must reawaken from this dream. Hence the dual nature of Blanqui's text, which is at once a "an unconditional surrender" and "the most terrible indictment of a society that projects this image of the cosmos — understood as an image of itself — across the heavens." [37] Hence also the dualism of the phenomenon of boredom, which is the subjective reversal of that phantasmagoria.

"Nothing bores the ordinary man more than the cosmos," Benjamin writes; nothing has such a "narcotizing effect" on "shallow and brittle" man as atmospheric time, which "is one of the highest and most genial manifestations" [38] of the cosmic forces. The city rain showers that turn into dust is the ideal climatic condition for boredom: "Rain makes everything more hidden, makes days not only gray but uniform. From morning until evening, one can do the same thing — play chess, read, engage in argument — whereas sunshine, by contrast, shades the hours and discountenances the dreamer." [39] The temporal dimension of boredom, as Benjamin describes it, is very distant from Heidegger's analysis: it is not a question of making time go by, to deceive it, kill it, as a gambler does, but rather to "invite it in" and/or store it in oneself, as a *flâneur*, as a loungeur, does, in the same way as "a battery" stores energy, [40] or transforming it into waiting, though when we are bored we never know what we are waiting for and knowing it, or thinking we know it, is nearly always only "a form of distraction or amusement." [41] Boredom is like "enterprises not yet off the ground," [42] a waiting, as Fenichel said, for the longed-for incitement to move to come from the external world.

Boredom induces to dreaming, it favors reverie, it is like "a warm gray fabric lined on the inside with the most lustrous and colorful of silks" in which "we wrap ourselves when we dream" [43]. If the dream is the hallucinatory realization of desire, a phenomenon or formation, of the unconscious, boredom is then its "external surface, [44]" the ornament covering the swinging of desire between repetition and eternity. [45] That covers above all its actual condition according to which the eternity possible for desire can only be its repetition, which comes to nothing.

On the one hand, boredom is a dream — and if a dream protects sleep, as Freud thought — then it protects the dreamer from the awareness of the vanity of his desire, but, on the other, as soon as we wake up and interpret the meaning of the dream, it reveals itself as the ornament that concealed the horror. Boredom shows its reverse: a waiting, Benjamin writes quoting Hebel, it is actually a waiting for death, and its cozy uniformity is the ideological distortion of "factory labor," that desolate routine of endless torture in the form of work Engels describes in *The Condition of the Working Class in England*. [46]

However, compared to the infernal vision and theological speculation Blanqui talks about in his *Eternity by the Stars*, boredom, which still represents the subjective side of that cosmic vision of the world, acquires, in Benjamin's eyes, a dialectical side. If, as we have seen, boredom is a dream, a mythical image, it can, however, turn into a dialectical image and break the mythical frame in which everything repeats itself, thus restoring the tension that exists between the past and the now. Benjamin's question that resounds at the heart of section D of the *Passagenwerkis*: "Now, it would be important to know: What is the dialectical antithesis to boredom"?[47]

If boredom stores time like a battery stores energy, it is then only apparently immobile and uniform: it is actually ready to deflagrate, to explode, to ensure that this coagulated time, this time spent wasting time,[48]will break the involucre of repetition and, reactivating the unconscious past – Proust's time regained – will reunite it with the time of now that will make it finally intelligible. Boredom is movement from stillness, 'hardened disquiet,'[49]latent conflict, dialectics at a standstill.

If "Boredom is always the external surface of unconscious events,"[50]the ornament of the inferno towards which, according to Freud, we must walk if we eventually really do want to 'come forth to see the stars again.' Boredom, however, is also an antidote against the infernal sentence repeating itself infinitely. More than a fundament starting from which man may rebuild his relationship with the world, as the latter preserves and even disproportionately increases its infernal traits, boredom is the inhibitor that blocks the time of repetition and triggers the time of standstill.

Translated from the Italian by Gianmaria Senia

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Notes:

[1] On the relation between boredom and sloth, see Garaventa (1977), pp. 105ss.

[2] See Heidegger (1992). Citations from this text are translated by the translator of this paper.

[3] Ibid.

[4] Ibid.

[5] Ibid.

[6] Ibid.

[7] Ibid.

[8] On this point see Vigorelli (2009), pp. 104-107.

[9] On the culturalist reduction of psychoanalysis, see Moroncini (2013), pp. 152.156.

[10] We are referring to the ‘there is some One’ of Lacan’s later teachings, where what remains of the subject is the symptom insofar as something non-interpretable resists within it, something that cannot be traced back to the Other as the treasure of the signifier. This non-interpretable remainder that made Freud believe that analysis was interminable – jouissance deriving from the refusal of castration – is a non-treatable jouissance that makes up the subject and identifies it. As Jacques-Alain Miller clarified, the One in question is the One without the other, that is to say the signifier of jouissance that, however, does not link to another signifier and that therefore receives no signification. On this subject, see the seminar held by Jacques-Alain Miller in 2011-2012 entitled *The Being and the One*. But on these points, see Pagliardini (2016). After all, it was Lacan himself who introduced the relation between boredom and the One in his lesson of 15 March 1972 of the seminar *...ou pire*, which he ended by saying that if he chose the form ‘Unien’ (One-ian) to indicate the specificity of the One he has been talking about, the One of the first hypothesis of Plato’s *Parmenides*, the ‘if one is one’ that opposes the ‘if the one is,’ the formula through which the One is reconnected to being and to the multiple, he did so only because “*l’Unien(...) c’est l’anagramme d’ennui*”. See: Lacan (2011), p.135.

[11] On the relation between Heidegger and psychoanalysis, the crucial reference is to Heidegger (2001).

[12] See as an example Various Authors (1992).

[13] See Fenichel (1934).

[14] The relation between prayer and boredom is also found in Lacan when he deals with the subject of the fundamental structure of desire as desire of something else: if in boredom the world collapses, this is because what is desired is something else compared to what the world can offer. Lacan had already captured the relation between boredom and the desire for something else in his seminar on the formations of the unconscious [See Lacan (2017)]. But it is in the seminar on the ethics of psychoanalysis that he poses not only the relation between boredom and prayer, but above all he identifies once and for all the something else, the other thing, as The Thing, *Das Ding*: the psychic reality intended by Lacan as the aim that is the compendium of all drive-aims, the absolute form of jouissance in which desire is allayed (See Lacan (1997)).

[15] See Freud (1978).

[16] This regards the question of the existence of pleasant drives and of satisfaction as a source of displeasure, a question Fenichel tackles at the beginning of his essay and that has been hounding psychoanalytic theory since the twenties, the years when Freud thematized the beyond the pleasure principle. On the basis of the first theory of drives and of the functioning of the psychic apparatus, on the basis of the two principles – the pleasure-displeasure principle and the reality principle –, one should conclude that “drive-tensions are displeasurable” because they increase excitement and “drive-gratifications are pleasurable” because they reduce tension. Therefore, the presence of impulses is displeasurable and the lack of them pleasurable. However, Fenichel points out, with a reference to *Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality* that “the problem that pleasurable impulses nevertheless exist has often been discussed”: from this we derive the fact that if the presence of impulses is pleasurable, their lack can only be displeasurable. We witness, in other words, an inversion of the pleasure principle where what was a source of pleasure becomes unpleasant and what produced displeasure produces pleasure. We could say that beyond the pleasure principle means that pleasure pushed as beyond as possible, i.e. forward, ultimately turns into displeasure. What does all this have to do with boredom? Simply the fact that in the phenomenon of boredom the lack of impulses is felt to be unpleasant. If to this we add the fact that in boredom we also find “the need for an intensive psychic activity,” that, in other words, “lack of impulses and lack of tension and freedom from tension by no means coincide,” the conclusion must be that boredom is beyond the pleasure principle.

[17] On the relationship between anxiety and the formation of the phobic symptom as thematized by Freud in the clinical case of ‘Little Hans,’ see Moroncini (2012), pp. 181-210.

[18] See Heidegger (1992).

[19] Ibid.

[20] Ibid.

[21] Ibid.

[22] Ibid.

[23] Ibid.

[24] *Ibid*, p. 219.

[25] See Lacan (2014).

[26] On these points and on the indirect relation between Heidegger and Benjamin on the relationship between categories and life, see Moroncini (2000), pp. 35-107.

[27] Let us not forget, however that the theme of deciding is present in Heidegger and that, therefore, the time he thematizes has nothing to do with the 'homogeneous and empty' time Benjamin stigmatizes as the time of historicism. Except that for Heidegger deciding is a decision in favor of a reopening towards original temporality, whilst for Benjamin it is a decision in favor of interrupting the course of time.

[28] See Benjamin (1942).

[29] *Ibid*.

[30] See Benjamin (2002).

[31] This is how one of its first reviewers, F. Desideri in his introduction to the Italian edition of 1983, defined the book.

[32] See Blanqui (1872).

[33] *Ibid*. In the light of this, Benjamin can reasonably argue that Blanqui anticipated by almost ten years Nietzsche's eternal recurrence of the same: though Blanqui's version is more similar to the dwarf's than to Zarathustra's, it is undeniable that the two texts are very similar, especially when Zarathustra, asking the dwarf to look at the gateway called This Moment, pronounces the thesis according to which everything – this slow spider which creepeth in the moonlight, and this moonlight itself, and thou and I in this gateway whispering together, whispering of eternal things – is the return now of things that have already existed. As Lacan would say, every object is a re-found object.

[34] Ibid.

[35] See Benjamin (1997). To fully understand this observation by Benjamin, we need to consider that a few years earlier, in full contrast, Heidegger had hailed Nazism as an encounter between modern global technology and the original source – Greek – of European humanity.

[36] On this point, see Moroncini (2006) pp. 253 ff.

[37] See Benjamin (2000).

[38] Ibid. In Heidegger the presence of atmospheric time is retraceable in the comparison between boredom and the fog: See Heidegger (1992).

[39] Ibid, p. 111.

[40] Ibid. On these points, see Cuomo (2015)

[41] Ibid.

[42] Ibid.

[43] Ibid.

[44] Ibid.

[45] Ibid.

[46] Ibid

[47] Ibid.

[48] On this important point, see Papparo (2012).

[49] Benjamin uses this image in relation both to the status of the cosmos, as outlined in Blanqui's vision of the world, and to the biography of Baudelaire, which knows no development: see Benjamin (2000)

[50] Ibid.

Bio:

Bruno Moroncini teaches Philosophical Anthropology at the University of Salerno, Italy. He has dealt with the relations between psychoanalysis and philosophy, with particular attention to Lacanian theory. His most recent publications include: *Il sorriso di Antigone. Frammenti sulla storia del tragico moderno* (Naples: Filema 2004); *Il discorso e la cenere. Il compito della filosofia dopo Auschwitz* (Macerata: Quodlibet 2006); with Rosanna Petrillo, *La lingua del perdono* (Naples: Filema 2007); *L'etica del desiderio. Un commentario del seminario sull'etica di Jacques Lacan* (Naples: Cronopio 2007); *L'autobiografia della vita malata. Leopardi, Nietzsche, Dostojevskij, Benjamin, Blanchot* (Bergamo, Italy: Moretti&Vitali 2008). [bmoroncini@unisa.it]

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