ANGLO AMERICAN UNIVERSITY
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THE LIMINALITY OF BOREDOM

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DECLARATION

I hereby declare that no portion of the work referred to in this thesis has been submitted in support of an application for another degree, or qualification thereof, or for any other university or institute of learning.

I declare that this thesis is my independent work. All sources and literature are cited and included.

I also hereby acknowledge that my thesis will be made publicly available pursuant to Section 47b of Act No. 552/2005 Coll. and AAU's internal regulations.

Mariana Gaitán Rojas

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Abstract

Throughout its history as a recognized social phenomenon, there has been a tendency to portray boredom in binary terms and to equate it with either positive or negative consequences. The aim of this paper is, in contrast to this trend, to present boredom as a liminal space rich with ambiguity and possibility, and to explore the different outcomes that it can lead to. Utilizing what was originally an anthropological theoretical framework, this thesis seeks to contribute to the literature on boredom by analyzing it from a new perspective, in which the possibility of it leading to a dependence on external stimuli or to imaginative creation are both accounted for. The discussion in this paper is purely theoretical and based not on empirical primary data, but on the secondary accounts that have been produced by academics in the areas of both boredom and liminality.

Keywords: boredom, liminality, experience, social theory, creativity

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"It is in liminal experience that the depths are disturbed and the soul is stirred, and it is for this reason that liminal experience is associated with forms of creativity that are never more than a hair's breadth away from destructive chaos." – Paul Stenner, *Liminality and Experience*.

"Of course boredom may lead you to anything." – Fyodor Dostoyevsky, *Notes from Underground.*

Introduction: Ambiguous Languor

Throughout modern history, social theorists have speculated about boredom's causes and outcomes, analyzing the concept from a variety of angles. Schopenhauer, in *The World as Will and Representation*, argues that boredom is the antithesis of fulfillment and equates it with suffering (1969, p. 260). Similarly, as Gardiner and Haladyn (2017) comment, philosophers such as Kierkegaard and Arendt have studied boredom in relation to evil and violence respectively (pp. 7-10). On the other hand, Benjamin and, to a lesser extent Nietzsche, have explored boredom in connection with possibility and considered it fertile ground for exploration and imagination (pp. 8-11). The trend, as it can be seen here, has often been to position boredom at the extremes of a spectrum or to conceive of it as necessarily negative or invariably positive. This thesis's aim is to contend such unilateral perceptions by analyzing boredom not as a fixed state that can lead to only one outcome, but as a liminal space in which resolution can take more than one shape.

The intention here is to provide a theoretical analysis of the historical and secondary literary accounts on the subject that are available to the scholar instead of working with any primary empirical data. In doing so, this paper would be contributing to the growing field of boredom studies, which seeks to understand and explore a concept that seems to be pervasive throughout modern societies and that, despite being so ubiquitous, has not yet been analyzed in connection to liminality. Boredom's

liminality will be considered as it has been in the social sciences, beyond anthropology: A threshold space between two states in which limits are removed and "the very structure of society [is], temporarily suspended"[1] (Szakolczai, 2009, p.142).

Martin Doehlemann (1991), in his *Langeweile? Deutung eines verbreiteten Phänomens*, identifies different types of boredom. The first one, situative boredom, and the second one, boredom of satiety, are the ones with which this paper is concerned. Svendsen (2005) describes situative boredom as that which is experienced "when one is waiting for someone, is listening to a lecture or taking the train" and boredom of satiety as the boredom in which someone gets "too much of the same thing and everything becomes banal" (pp. 41-42). As Svendsen himself recognizes, these two types of boredom often overlap and, therefore, will not be considered separately here, but as different facets of the same boredom[2]. Existential boredom (similar to Heidegger's profound boredom and Flaubert's *ennui modern*) will not be discussed in this paper since it represents an entirely different phenomenon, that constitutes a persistent "predicament" instead of a singular instance. Here, boredom will be analyzed as an inner transitional state, as a distinct experience which can personally affect the individual but which can also have repercussions in the social sphere.

In the first section of this thesis, the history of boredom will be explored, as well as its relation to the industrial revolution, the vilification of idleness, and the routinization of novelty in consumerist Western societies.

The second part of this paper consists of an analysis of the concept of liminality and boredom's connection to it. It briefly deals with how liminality originated as an

[1] The concept of liminality and its history will be further explored as the paper progresses.
[2] Henceforward, the term "boredom" will be used to refer to both situative boredom and boredom of satiety, unless a distinction between the two appears to be necessary in a specific context. The concept will be analyzed as an inner state, as an instance in someone's expericence.

anthropological term and then, over time, was adapted to define phenomena on different areas of the social sciences. Boredom will be studied in light of Turner and Thomassen's accounts of liminal spaces (1977; 2014), as well as in contrast to Voitkovska and Vorontsova's (2007) formulation of the concept in order to pave the ground for further discussion on what constitutes boredom as an experience and what that experience might lead to.

And lastly, the concluding sections of this thesis will be focused on the two drastically different paths that an individual might choose to get out of a state of boredom. Namely, seeking external stimuli to relieve oneself from the distressful feelings that boredom can entail or, contrastingly, choosing to find relief through one's own imagination and creativity.

Boredom et Circenses: A Modern Development

The Old Words and the New Newness

Boredom, as we understand it today, is a relatively young social phenomenon. According to Gardiner and Haladyn (2017), "the word 'boredom' dates from the 1760s, but did not come into common usage until decades later, and such variants as 'to bore' or 'boring' emerged in the nineteenth century" (p. 5). However, similar terms such as ennui and acedia predate it. These were explored before and sometimes during the 18th century, but their usage and conception differ from today's notion of boredom. Acedia, the oldest of the two terms, has been commonly understood as a condition that affects those who live isolated and routinized lives (mostly monks and devotees under strict vows) and has been deemed the "disease par excellence of the hermit" as Toohey (1990) would put it (p. 341). Ennui, on the other hand, originates in 18th century

French and was mostly understood as a fashionable and all-encompassing indifference, as an "absence which the soul feels when deprived of interest in life, action, or the world" (Kamm, 1976, p. 21).

Contrastingly, the boredom that appears to be so ubiquitous today and the one with which this thesis is concerned, is neither limited to those who live in religious isolation nor widely considered a fashionable kind of aloofness. It is a boredom that has many faces but is always characterized by dissatisfaction, yearning, and more importantly, a strong connection with what Thiele (1997) calls "the routinization of novelty" (p. 490).

In his essay on the subject, Thiele explores Heidegger's account of boredom as the basic mood of our times and illustrates Heidegger's suggestion that the "drive for endless economic growth and technological innovation that characterizes much postmodern life . . . is a product of boredom" (p. 490). Although the connection between boredom and technological innovation described here seems coherent (particularly since the term 'boredom' appeared amidst the Industrial Revolution), Heidegger's formulation should perhaps be reversed. He envisioned profound boredom as the basic mood of our times and the exacerbated need for novelty as a symptom of it. It will be argued here that, on the contrary, the routinization of novelty is the basic mood of modernity and boredom is a side effect resulting from it.

The routinization of novelty is to be understood as the need for innovation and entertainment that the modern individual develops in societies that are geared towards constantly producing the innovation and entertainment the individual has learned to seek. Today, a walk through most cities entails being exposed to numerous advertisements and eye-catching new products. The market and media provide an ample supply of "newness" in the form of clothes, technological gadgets, games, music,

etc. Hence, when the production and reproduction of novelty is standard, the individual becomes so accustomed to its presence that its absence appears to be synonymous with emptiness. This feeling, this "lack," is what has commonly been understood as boredom. The following pages are dedicated to an exploration of how the notion of boredom took shape historically and the impact that external stimuli have on how the subject constructs ideas of interest and fulfillment.

The Decline of Idleness and Leisure

The connection between boredom and highly-industrialized societies, and the ramifications capitalism has had in communal perceptions of time has been considered in a number of studies (Goodstein, 2004; Hand, 2017; Ringmar, 2017; Veblen, 1994). These authors, analyzing the palpable transformation from pre-industrial to modern societies, have recognized the effect that constant exposure to technology has had in the pervasiveness of boredom, as well as the consequences of a gradual change in the perception of how time should be spent. In his account on the subject, Piper (1963), has suggested that boredom "emerges in modern culture because—in our obsession with utility and productivity—we have forgotten the value of genuine, purposeless leisure, confusing it with instrumental distractions like shopping, dining, or going to the movies, activities that we are fundamentally indifferent to" (as cited in Aho, 2007, p. 447). According to this, the "lacking" space that boredom constitutes is not inherently lacking: It has been attributed this characteristic in modernity simply because leisure[3], which used to fill said space before processes of industrialization took place, has been

[3] Henceforward, "leisure" will be used to describe free time devoided of an activity that serves a specific purpose or is considered meaningful according to modern standards.

removed from the modern mindset. Or perhaps, it has not been removed as much as it has been altered and defamed.

Weber (1930) finds in Christianity the origins of such notions, since through it, the idea of what a "waste of time" entails, took shape. According to him, leisure had been vilified as "the deadliest of sins" for constituting a space of time which was not devoted to increasing the glory of God. Hence, to Weber, Christianity advocated that any "loss of time through sociability, idle talk, luxury, even more sleep than is necessary for health, six to at most eight hours, [was] worthy of absolute moral condemnation" (Asceticism and the Spirit of Capitalism chapter, para. 4). Hence, at a time when religion directly informed the construction of national identity and influenced the principles on which economic systems were based, this notion easily permeated the capitalist mindset as an axiom upon which to build further values.

Thus, in industrialized societies today, efficiency, multitasking, and productivity have been equated with success, progress, and a wide array of positive meanings. At the same time, idleness and slowness have been given negative connotations and deemed the traits of sluggish or irresponsible personalities. Because of this, the general trend has been to assume that any time that is not filled with an activity serving a concrete purpose must necessarily be useless or, more drastically, meaningless. Therefore, much of modern life is spent trying to avoid those "useless," in-between spaces that connect one purposeful activity with the next, or with trying to fill them with any kind of content available (be it meaningful or not).

In an analysis of 19th-century Swedish culture, Frykman and Lofgren (1987) studied the arduous change peasants had to go through in order to adapt to an industrialized and fast-paced mode of living. Linking the rural Sweden of the 1800s with contemporary societies, they observe that:

> The art of waiting which the peasant knew so well has died out. Waiting can now be unbearable and many people feel stress if they have to spend any time in unproductivity. Running after the bus is preferable to waiting five interminable minutes at the bus stop. The old bourgeois virtue of economy may have given way to an ideology of consumption but it is still a virtue and a frenetic sport to try to save minutes or seconds finding a shortcut through town or a supermarket checkout where the waiting time is half a minute shorter. (p. 36).

This commentary illustrates the extent to which efficiency has consumed modern life and imbued even the simplest of instances with a necessity for productivity and with the urgency of constantly avoiding any time that might appear to be "wasteful." Furthermore, in the same line of studies, other academics have also commented on the impact industry has had in the concepts of idleness and leisure: Sahlins (1972) says of the Yolngu (then called Murngin) that the "first impression that any stranger must receive in a fully functioning group in Eastern Arnhem Land is of industry. ... And he must be impressed with the fact that with the exception of very young children... there is no idleness" (as cited in Musharbash, 2007, p. 312). Comparably, Thompson (1967) says that what differentiated the 1830s and 1840s industrial English worker from an Irish worker of the same period was the "repression, not of enjoyments, but of the capacity to relax in the old, uninhibited ways (p. 91).

Thus, with industry comes the transformation of leisure and idleness into negative concepts, disabling them as spaces the modern subject can resort to without being judged. And, in the void now created by their absence, boredom swipes in and replaces the space that the individual encounters when transiting from one concrete activity to the next.

A Shapeshifting Novelty

As industrialization spread and a variety of products flooded the British market[4] throughout the 20th century, new advertising techniques were devised to convince the masses of consuming what was being sold. These new advertising techniques changed not only the way products were offered, but also altered the way people perceived what they wanted and needed.

In his paper titled *Pop, Consumerism, and the Design Shift*, Whiteley analyzes the situation in Britain during the 1950s. He comments that after the Second World War a time marked by austerity and constraint, the British masses were enticed by the "affluence so seductively presented in American films and magazines" and that "everyone was encouraged to buy and be a good consumer" (1985, pp. 32-33). This, inevitably, as Whiteley himself comments, changed the leisure time habits that were deeply affected by "the expansion and character of television . . . by 1951 still only six percent of households owned a television set. A decade later that figure had increased to 75 percent" (p. 34). Thus, as the access to screens grew, so did the spaces in which it was possible to advertise a product or an idea. Throughout the 20th century (and especially during its second half), Western societies saw a proliferation of new images and sounds designed to convince the public that the goods being advertised could have an impact on how the buyer would feel or be perceived by others. A car, therefore, was no longer sold as a means of transport, but a symbol of status[5]. Similarly, everyday

[4] A prime example of the repercussions capitalism and industry had on purchasing habits.
[5] See Veblen's theory of conspicuous consumption, in which he argues that individuals consume according to a social hierarchy and will mirror the consuming patterns of those above them in order to display power and assert their social status (*The Theory of the Leisure Class*, 1899/2004). See Gershuny on how work has displaced leisure as an indicator of dominant social status (*Busyness as the Badge of Honor for the New Superordinate Working Class*, 2005).

clothes were no longer advertised for their durability or practicality, but for how they could make someone feel when wearing them.

As the decades passed, the obsession with consuming products (beyond what is basic or necessary) grew throughout Western societies and the demand for a constant flow of new goods became conventional. The routinization of novelty that Thiele (1997) talks about regarding Heidegger's account, permeated communal and individual mindsets and fashion[6], as Svendsen (2005) argues, became a principle of modernity. To this statement, he adds that "in a world with fashion as a principle we get more stimuli but also more boredom" (p. 46). Therefore, people demand constant novelty from the industries, their jobs, and their personal lives and if that novelty is not provided, boredom appears[7]. This trend has been especially exacerbated in the 21st century, when the subject is being constantly exposed to a rush of information and distractions that keep the mind constantly occupied (or entertained) with novelty.

Moreover, this novelty can take many shapes: Some are more obvious than others and are advertised as such (the release of a new model of a specific brand of cellphones or a new album by a popular band), and some are subtler (the new messages popping up in one's screen or the new stories in a Facebook feed). Whichever the type, the effect that this constant expectation of "newness" has in the mind is similar, for a person who is accustomed to an unceasing flux of novelty, will fare poorly in its absence.

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[6] Fashion as "the eternal recurrence of the new" (see Benjamin, Spencer, & Harrington, *Central Park*, 1985, p. 46).

[7] "That boredom is probably more widespread than ever before can be established by noting that the number of 'social placebos' is greater than it has ever been" (Svendsen, 2005, p. 26).

The Resistance in Boredom

Simmel, in *The Metropolis and Mental Life* (1903/2002), discusses how urban capitalist cities have certain unprecedented dynamics and how, through those dynamics, the mental life of the individual is constructed. The city dweller, who is constantly assailed by a cacophony of lights, noises, and smells unnatural to him or her[8], starts functioning primarily at an intellectual level and develops a certain detachment from emotions. Operating, hence, through the head, the metropolitan subject responds to the surrounding chaos with a type of coping mechanism that Simmel has called the blasé attitude. This coping mechanism is a reaction to the discordant environment in which the city dweller finds him or herself and, through it, the individual, devises a way to handle the intense external stimuli that he/she is continually exposed to. Although the external stimuli of the city (the accelerating cars, the rushed tempo, the traffic lights) are incompatible to the individual's internal rhythms, the person is asked to alternate rapidly between the two. Therefore, it is through the blasé attitude that the velocity and complexity of the metropolis become bearable to those who inhabit it.

The blasé attitude should not, however, be confused with mental dullness, for the blasé individual still perceives violent external stimuli but sees them in a "homogeneous, flat, and grey colour," as Simmel, (1903/2002, p. 14) would put it. Hence, the blasé attitude should be seen more as a heightened tolerance to the environment than as a complete indifference to it. Boredom's case is similar, for it can also appear as the mind's resistance to the overwhelming sensory input that it receives in the form of advertisements, loud noises, and "filler"[9] activities. If seen in this form,

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[8] According to Simmel, rural settings are more natural for humans (see *The Metropolis and Mental Life*, 1903/2002, p.12).

[9] Such as scrolling down the newsfeed of a social network, switching through TV channels aimlessly, etc.

boredom can also constitute (even if paradoxically) an antibody or a natural protest to the forces that commonly cause it (i.e the routinization of novelty and the proliferation of techniques devised to keep consumers buying unnecessary goods[10]).

It is perhaps because of this resistance that "marketing, advertising and public relations drive technology and culture forward with efforts to discover ever more creative approaches to shape attitudes and control behavior" (Hobbs & McGee, 2014 p. 64). These industries, faced with the public's raising threshold of interest, have had to devise ever more intense techniques to keep people entertained and to prevent them from halting their consumption. Amongst these techniques, one can count the increasingly vibrant colours all kinds of screens display, the relentless (and individual-tailored) ads that swarm the internet, and the constant *ring* of notifications from our cellphones, announcing minor or major news in the same tone, regardless of their importance.

In this manner, images, sounds, and words are carefully measured so that they can impact the public (or a particular individual) in the most advantageous way for those who produce or distribute them. It is amidst those images, sounds, and words and in the shift from one activity to the other that boredom appears to fill the cracks between them, occupying a liminal space.

Boredom and Liminality: What Constitutes the In-Between

[10] Be it material goods or forms of entertainment.

From Anthro to Socio

In order to establish a connection between liminality and boredom, the concept of liminality (used in anthropology originally, and later in social theory) should be explored. The concept was first developed by etnographer Arnold van Gennep to describe the ambiguous phase in rites of passage in which the subject "passes through a cultural realm that has few or none of the attributes of the past or coming state" (Turner, 1977, p. 94). In this context, and usually applied to the traditions of small-scale societies, it could be used to describe transitional states in the rites of a plurality of cultures. An example of this, given by van Gennep himself in *The Rites of Passage* is the transition from adolescence to marriage, in which the liminal (or threshold) space is betrothal (1960, p. 11). The engaged person, in this sense, finds him or herself in a temporary state characterized by what could be called a "neither-nor-ness." The rules, perceptions, and connotations that come with betrothal are not the same as those of singleness or marriage and although this space links both, the individual's experience during this phase is surrounded with a fluidity[11] that does not mark the previous or coming states.

Later, in the 1960s, Victor Turner reclaimed the term and explored it in depth, realizing its applicability to fields beyond ethnography. As Thomassen (2014) comments, for Turner "the study of liminality was a study of human experience. In his late career, this brought him into contact not only with novel empirical phenomena, but also with a philosophical dimension" (p. 86). Hence, Turner removed liminality from the confinements of tribal studies and began exploring it in the context of larger societies, as well as in the realm of social theory. His approach, which advocated for

[11] "Fluidity" here refers to the movement intrinsic to liminality, since it is a transitional space, instead of a fixed one (as singleness and marriage are).

experience as central to philosophy and liminality as an essential part of experience, paved the way for numerous studies regarding the importance of recognizing liminal spaces in the humanities.

Amongst these, Thomassen's is perhaps the most relevant to this thesis. In his book, *Liminality and the Modern*, he explores liminal moments in history and politics and presents an account of how the concept breaks through the borders of anthropology to find a space in other areas of the social sciences. He argues that early modernity constitutes a liminal period in that it is a time of transition characterized by a "desperate search for new ordering principles within politics, philosophy and science" and by the "loss of taken-for-granted structures" (p. 113). Furthermore, Thomassen contends that political revolutions are also liminal, for they present "drastic moments in which previously existing structures crumble and collapse, where norms and hierarchies are turned upside down" (p. 191). These postulations are both connected by the affirmation that liminal spaces are marked by a change (or disruption) in the status quo and a search for resolution.

Disruption and Resolution

Comparable to the liminal instances that Thomassen proposes, boredom is characterized by a change in the existing conditions. Hence, an individual who was originally entertained or occupied, loses that source of entertainment or occupation and enters a state of discomfort.

The possible reasons why that discomfort appears when one is bored will be discussed later, but what must be noted here is the *change* from the original state to a different one. That change, in one way or another, is disruptive. It can be abrupt, as

when a person is listening to enjoyable music and the device used for this purpose suddenly runs out of battery. The device, which at that moment was the source of entertainment, is no longer useful and the individual must find a way to fill the void that the lack of music has left behind. The change can also be gradual, as when someone reads a book or watches a play that is interesting in the beginning, but becomes dull as time passes. In this case, unlike the previous one, the source that originally provided entertainment is not gone, but (to the eyes of the individual) has lost the quality of being entertaining or meaningful.

This means that to avoid boredom, the individual does not merely need external stimuli but requires that stimuli to be enjoyable. Commenting on the subject, Healy (1984) notes that "the word 'boring' is bound up with the word 'interesting'; the words become widespread at roughly the same time and they increase in frequency at roughly the same rate" (as cited in Svendsen, 2005, p. 28). Therefore, boredom can be a disruptive lack of something external (a music-listening device) or something internal (an individual's perception of something as interesting or meaningful). Thus, being entertained requires the participation of the subject, either as an engaging spectator or as a giver of meaning who actively enjoys what is before him or herself. When boredom occurs, it is precisely because the individual is failing to participate. As Svendsen states, in modern times we have turned more and more into "passive observers and consumers, and less and less active players. This gives us a meaning deficit" and "meaninglessness is boring" (pp. 29-30). Therefore, when the individual enters the state of boredom, he or she is going through a process of change and transition. In this transition, the person goes from *being occupied* by something that is perceived as entertaining or meaningful, to *seeking* the fulfillment that now appears to be gone.

Therein, besides change or transition, one must explore the other aspect that Thomassen attributes to liminal states: A constant search for resolution. When analyzing early modernity as a liminal age, Thomassen (2014) delves into the many ways in which the period was profoundly marked by a quest for new answers on how to believe, think, and govern (pp. 113-139). In a sense, the early modern mindset was geared towards finding a way *out* of the current state of affairs. Similarly, when an individual has entered a state of boredom, the main priority is often to escape that state. Therefore, the subject who is in a place devoided of entertainment or in which the entertainment provided does not suffice to satisfy its needs, will desperately seek a way out. The means by which an individual attempts to accomplish this differ and the rate of success varies according to several factors. For example, one of these factors could be culture or simply upbringing. Hence, a boy who has been raised surrounded by technology and usually finds entertainment in videogames or phone applications, might struggle leaving a state of boredom by playing with a twig doll. On the other hand, a boy who has grown up spending a significant amount of time outdoors and is used to making his own toys out any material available, might find the twig doll interesting enough to escape boredom.

In the same way, the routes that someone chooses to leave boredom can be affected by social status, cultural traditions, gender norms, or even the place in which they find themselves (Ferrell, 2004, pp. 287-302), but the search for a resolution remains prevalent despite these distinctions.

Thus, boredom is aligned with Thomassen's examples of liminal instances through its connection to a disruptive change and a search for resolution, but there are other characteristics of liminality that are present in boredom. Amongst these, are the

"neither-nor-ness" mentioned at the beginning of this section and its relation to the trickster figure, which has been amply studied regarding liminal concepts.

Tricksters and Ads

The figure of the trickster, popularized by characters in folklore and mythology such as Rumpelstiltskin and Loki, is recognized as the liminal entity par excellence and has been considered a "crucial complementary concept to the analysis of liminal situations in large-scale settings" (Thomassen, 2014, p. 104). In stories, tricksters have often been known for having hidden intentions or at least ambivalent motives and are characterized by, as Grottanelli (1983) would call it, an "intrinsic ambiguity" (p. 130).

As the literature on liminality grows in the social sciences, the figure of the trickster has been used to describe a number of phenomena. Since tricksters often lead people to liminal situations or places, in the context of boredom studies this figure can be paralleled with the advertising industry. Earlier, the techniques used to convince people to consume products and the lengths to which the advertising industry would go to capture one's interest were briefly described. Amongst these were the intentional use of certain images, words, and sounds aimed at achieving a concrete purpose. This purpose, however, is not always transparent. One would assume that products are designed with the intention of keeping people interested, but perhaps an important component of planned obsolescence[12] (which ensures that objects are renewed constantly) is what will be here called "planned indifference." By making sure that

[12] See *Planned Obsolescence: Publishing, Technology, and the Future of the Academy* (Fitzpatrick, 2012).

individuals eventually lose interest, or get bored with whichever product they consume, manufacturers can secure new purchases in the future. Certain sports and streetwear brands, for example, seem to be particularly adept at planned indifference. As a marketing strategy, they release new shoe models in a restricted and relatively standard set of colors only to, after some weeks or months, release the same model in a flashy array of new color combinations. This pattern is then repeated with every model, marketing first the plain version and then releasing a more "stunning" variant for the public to consume. A similar strategy can be seen in online content such as apps, programs, etc. These are first presented as free to attract users and then quickly turn boring due to a narrow scope of usage that can only be widened through premium purchases.

In this way, once the subject is bored and seeks entertainment again, the advertisement industry can step in and offer relief in the form of a new product through the techniques mentioned above. After all, as Thomassen (2014) observes, “tricksters live for the attention of the public, and they play with words and images” (p. 104).

Neither-nor-ness and Ambiguous Spaces

In his account of liminality in *The Ritual Process*, Turner says that liminal entities are “neither here nor there” but that they are “betwixt and between” instead (1977, p. 95). In this sense, liminal entities (or states, in the case of boredom) exist in the space between two distinct things, without being either of the things that contain them. Earlier, betrothal was used as an example of a liminal state and was described as transitional. Legally, “married,” “widowed,” “divorced,” and “never married” are marital statuses, but “engaged” is not, for it is not considered a permanent or definitive state. In the same way, as Thomassen proposes, political revolutions are not considered

a form of government, but a path that (if successful) might lead to an authority change. Boredom's case is similar, for it exists in an ambiguous place, or what Sandywell calls an abstract 'dead' space (2017, p. 44) and cannot be defined as an 'active' activity. What is meant by this, is that the word "boredom" can never be turned into a verb executed by the same subject who experiences it. One can bore someone else, but "boring" is used as an adjective and not as an action. Therefore, boredom is delimited and lies in between what will be here called alert activities and relaxed activities. An alert activity is that in which the individual participates consciously and in which he or she interacts with the external world (e.g listening to music, talking to someone, reading). A relaxed activity, contrastingly, is that in which the individual participates subconsciously or in an altered state of mind while interacting with the internal world in its own mind (e.g sleeping, meditating).

Boredom does not belong to either of these categories but seems to fall somewhere in the middle. The subject experiencing boredom is not actively doing something, but is normally aware (and often acutely aware) of its situation in the world. Because of this lack of active participation, boredom could not be classified as an alert activity, but at the same time, since the subject is aware of its situation, it could not be classified as a relaxed activity either. This "neither-nor-ness" that characterizes boredom, originally considered by Turner, is also part of Voitkovska and Vorontsova's formulation of liminality, in which they describe it as:

> An experience rich with ambiguity, uncertainty, and the possibility of creative foment. Its initial and acute phase is marked by disorientation, a loss of identity and control, and a sense of uncertainty about the future. During its second, more adaptive and enduring phase, a person constructs and reconstructs the meaning of his or her experience (2007, p. 83).

Having already dealt with the ambiguity that boredom entails, the other parts of this description of liminal spaces should be considered. Namely, the disorientation the subject experiences in this state and the loss of control when facing an unclear future. As for the possibility of creative foment and the reconstruction of meaning, those aspects will be discussed at the end of the thesis in light of the possible outcomes to which boredom might lead.

A Loss of Control and an Unclear Future

Since boredom appears as a disruptive state, the individual experiencing it will seek to escape the oppressive situation that seems to confine him, or her. However, achieving this escape is not always possible. Using again the examples given above, the person whose music-listening device has run out of battery, might not have other means of entertainment available. Similarly, the individual watching a play that is no longer enjoyable, would have to devise a mental way of remaining interested, which might prove difficult if not unattainable. The need for escape, combined with a lack of means to obtain it, translates into a loss of control and that the subject, who moments before felt in charge of its experience, can no longer find the reins in its hands. This, consequently, is accompanied by a feeling of uncertainty about the future, since the amount of time that the experience of boredom might take and the means by which the subject will be relieved of its presence are unclear.

Ringmar (2017), basing part of his theory on the works of Nordau and Thompson (1895; 1967), discusses the connection between boredom and resignation, tracing it back to the Industrial Revolution and the new factory jobs in which “people lived by the clock and the clock belonged not to them but to their employers.

Routinization lead to a loss of agency and a sense of resignation, and the resignation, in turn, lead to boredom" (p.195). What should be highlighted from this, is the connection between resignation and boredom. As Ringmar has stated, the absence of control over one's own experience (be it in the workplace or elsewhere) can lead the individual to relinquish any sense of power over his or her condition and fall into the ambiguous space of boredom. Nevertheless, in the same way that resignation can lead to boredom, boredom can lead to resignation. McKenzie (2008), in his study of Heidegger's governing moods, comments that "when *Dasein* finds itself in the clutches of profound boredom, it resigns itself to its fate as unheimlich, without any type of resolution or redemption" (p. 579). It should be noted that the type of boredom McKenzie is addressing here is that which Heidegger considers an existential type of anxiety, a chronic ailment that leads the *Dasein* to a deeply rooted feeling of alienation, to an awareness of not being at home in the world. However, boredom (either situative or of satiety) can also lead to resignation and, although that resignation might not have consequences as intense as those Heidegger attributes to profound boredom, they will nonetheless have repercussions on how the bored individual perceives his or her role in escaping the liminal state. Those repercussions will ultimately affect the way in which the subject acts, and determine whether he or she looks outwards or inwards when searching for a resolution to a situation that seems binding.

The Two Sides of the Threshold: Where does Boredom Lead to?

Why is Boredom Aversive?

In an earlier part of this paper, boredom was described as an absence that the individual feels when deprived of the novelty and entertainment that he/she is used to

receiving. Alongside this, the vilification of purposeless leisure and idleness was explored as a possible cause that opened the space for boredom to take place in modernity. It has also been stated that boredom is often perceived as oppressive and mentally distressing for those who experience it, but why is boredom aversive? Why does it represent such a burden for those in that state?

There are, of course, several theories regarding this subject. Eastwood, Frischen, Fenske, and Srnilek (2012) affirm that boredom is "the aversive experience of wanting, but being unable, to engage in satisfying activity" (as cited in Willis, 2014, p. 29). This definition is aligned with Schopenhauer's proposition of boredom as the opposite of the fulfillment of desire[13]. According to these approaches, what causes the individual's disdain for boredom is the impotence one feels when the satisfaction one seeks is not obtained. Hence, the oppressiveness of boredom is caused not only by dissatisfaction, but also by a feeling of being unable to solve whatever it is that causes said dissatisfaction.

From a neurological perspective, boredom is the result of the prefrontal cortex losing communication with the rest of the brain, which in turn, prevents the lower brain networks from producing controlled behavioral responses. "When boredom reaches the high-stress level — the combination of sensory deprivation (disengagement) and perceived loss of their ability to access pleasure and need fulfillment reduce voluntary behavior control," (Willis, 2014, p. 29). Therefore, once again, the discomfort that boredom elicits is traced back to a lack (sensory deprivation) and to a sense of impotence (perceived loss of an ability to access pleasure) in light of the specific circumstances.

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[13] See *The World as Will and Representation* (1969, p. 260).

If, as these theorists suggest, what causes boredom's gravity in the subject's experience is a perceived combination of inadequacy and dissatisfaction, the way to escape boredom would be to combat at least one of those two factors. Thus, an individual seeking to regain control over his or her own experience, would probably favor addressing the feelings of inadequacy (or impotence) and attempt to actively change the situation in which he/she is in. In doing so, the individual is choosing to be in charge of the circumstances and, therefore, must be willing to make his or her own path out of boredom. Electing this route, however, might not be as simple as it seems and requires a great deal of mental effort on behalf of the subject (as will be discussed in the ending section of this paper).

On the other hand, the individual experiencing boredom might choose to focus instead on solving his or her lack of satisfaction. In this case, since the goal is not to regain control of the situation but merely to find the gratification that the person desires (be it physical or mental), the individual is likely to seek solutions outside him or herself. Therefore, the individual will turn his/her gaze to the outer world instead of the inner one and pursue different types of external stimuli that might either solve or mitigate the consequences of boredom. Both alternatives mentioned here (the two sides of the threshold of boredom, as the title of this section indicates) will be explored in the following pages with the aim of illuminating the ways in which boredom constitutes a malleable state. Malleable in the sense that it is not static and that its outcomes are not unilateral but manifold and can lead the individual to consume from the outside or to create from within.

Seeking Outside: A Blinding Exterior

When boredom presents itself, with all its heaviness and pressure on the mind, it propels the subject into finding ways to escape what has been perceived as a confinement. Hence, when entering boredom, the individual who is unable to deal with the dissatisfaction that boredom generates, will search for some kind of external stimuli or novelty that can remedy the absence that he or she is feeling. The subject, now looking for entertainment, will seek it in a myriad of places external to him or herself, such as social networks, TV channels, books, alcohol, etc. A modern person, accustomed to receiving all kinds of input from its surroundings (as Simmel exemplifies so well in *The Metropolis and Mental Life*[14]) is likely to think that it is there, in the outer world, where he/she can find the solutions to his/her distress. Yet, unknowingly, in doing so, the individual augments the necessity that he or she is trying to satisfy.

In a process that one could compare to that of an addict developing a tolerance to a drug, the modern subject quenches its thirst for satisfaction by swallowing large amounts of external stimuli in the form of superficial activities[15] and "newness." This, in turn, might make it harder for the subject to find entertainment each time that he/she seeks to escape boredom, for what was once new and interesting, has become dull due to overuse. The bored subject inadvertently increases its own resistance to the effects of the stimuli, much like someone who drinks often develops a tolerance to alcohol the more he/she drinks. Therefore, paradoxically, in desperately trying to avoid boredom, the individual enhances the possibilities of being bored. Svendsen (2005) comments on

[14] See pages 11-19.

[15] Superficial in that their purpose is only an appearance, for the individual does not engage in said activities because they are truly enjoyable to him/her, but because they offer an escape. Thus, the activity becomes a means instead of an end in itself.

the subject saying that the new "quickly turns into routine, and then comes boredom with the new that is always the same" (p. 45). Here, "the new that is always the same" refers to the way in which "new" products are advertised as innovations, as revolutionary or as incredibly unique, but in truth are merely reproductions of each other with only a few trivial variations. Simmel (1903/2002), describes humans as differentiating creatures whose mind is stimulated by that which makes one thing (e.g. object, activity, image, etc) different from the next. These differences, however, are easier to perceive (or less taxing for the mind) when presented in a natural and gradual succession instead of in the "rapid telescoping of changing images" that the metropolis provides (p. 11). The result of this "rapid telescoping of changing images" is the blunting of the individual's mind in recognizing differences, for they all appear so quickly and in such a quantity, that the person is no longer able to discern what makes one thing stand out from the next. It all becomes a blur, an amalgam of things that, although different, can no longer be differentiated from each other.

Therefore, in order to attract people's attention to a product that seems to be the same as countless other products, the advertising and marketing industries have had to emphasize and sometimes exaggerate differences. The consumer, thus, guided by the promise of stimulation that those differences offer, buys the product[16] but soon realizes that the differences are few and gets bored again. Each time, the cycle is repeated and each time, it becomes harder for the subject to find stimuli that can keep boredom at bay.

[16] "Product" here refers to objects, but also to experiences (e.g. a movie) or platforms (e.g. social networks).

The following pages are concerned with the different types of external stimuli that the individual might seek in pursuit of escaping boredom and with some of the detrimental consequences that such a desperate search for stimuli can lead to.

The External

As was mentioned earlier in this paper, for an individual to avoid boredom, he or she does not only have to be exposed to something external, but has to find that which he/she is exposed to entertaining or meaningful. This was illustrated with the example of someone watching a play and not finding it interesting after a while. The external stimuli (the play) is there, but the subject fails to find it meaningful enough to evade boredom. In this sense, when the individual is bored, he/she is confronted with a feeling of meaninglessness. Hence, the subject either feels that the *activity* he/she is engaged with is lacking the desired meaningfulness or that *he or she* is the one lacking it. This might lead the individual to feel alienated from his/her own experience and cause him/her to desperately try to find some sort of content that can fill this void. Svendsen (2005) argues that humans are addicted to meaning and struggle dealing with anything which might make one feel like that meaning is missing. He states that boredom constitutes a meaning withdrawal that causes discomfort and that "in order to remove this discomfort, we attack the symptoms rather than the disease itself, and search for all sorts of meaning-surrogates" (p. 30). Those meaning-surrogates are that with which the following pages are concerned and represent the activities a person engages in when seeking to leave the state of boredom. Here, for the sake of simplicity, these have been divided into a few categories that, although pertinent, do not nearly encapsulate all the activities a bored person resorts to, but only the most prevalent ones.

Meaning-Surrogates

Screen-Surrogates

Perhaps the most common route out of boredom, and the most readily available in Western societies, can be found in the plethora of technological devices the subject has access to. Cellphones, computers, and video game consoles all offer varied distractions charged with dashing lights and a seemingly endless source of novelty. These devices act as doors to a world filled with information and the possibility of entertainment.

Mann and Robinson (2009) illustrate this in their study on boredom in the lecture theatre, in which 63%[17] of the students being considered reported using technological devices when bored during a lecture (p. 253). Matic, Pielot, and Oliver (2015), found boredom proneness to be related to a number of activities regarding smartphones, such as "the daily frequency of opening the notification center and of activating the screen and changing its orientation, the use of social networks on the phone" and "the number of launched apps" (Conclusion section, para. 1). Furthermore, in a related study on boredom as a state and not as a psychological tendency (as boredom proneness is) Pielot, Dingler, San Pedro, and Oliver (2015) found that "users are more likely to engage with suggested content on their phones when they are bored" (Conclusion section, para. 1).

Therefore, as these studies illuminate, there is a strong connection between boredom and the individual engaging with technology. The choice of trying to leave boredom by interacting with technological devices can be traced back to a number of

[17] 45.5% reported texting people on their mobile phones and 17.5% reported playing video games on them.

reasons. As stated above, technology seems to be ubiquitous in Western societies today and a significant number of people will have constant access to at least one type of technological device. On top of this, devices equipped with internet access provide instant connectivity between people and instead of offering a single type of entertainment (as a book or radio would), they offer a plurality of entertainment choices (ranging from movies and video blogs to social networks and online games). Thus, technological devices act as meaning-surrogates by creating the illusion of choice. The subject, when presented with a plethora of options, feels like he/she has found a meaningful experience in being able to choose. The "choices" that a connection to the internet provides, however, never truly depend solely on the individual. They are often tailored and designed with the intention of causing a predetermined effect on the public that accesses them and, because of this, they represent what could be called a constrained choice. The individual, thinking that he/she has an open choice, can only, in fact, choose from the options that have been chosen for him/her.

Lastly, amongst the reasons that cause the subject to seek escape through technology, is simple practicality. Since cellphones have become such a common thing in present times, many people might perceive them as the easiest thing to access when bored. This is not meant in the sense that they are easily available (although they are), but that when, for example, planning to go to a doctor's appointment and knowing he/she will probably have to wait, the subject might think other forms of entertainment are inconvenient in comparison to a cellphone. A book or a deck of cards, for instance, might be seen as unnecessary "extra" objects, since the individual was already planning to bring a phone with him or her in any case.

Towards Mind-Altering Substances

Another external activity in which the modern subject can easily find the stimuli he/she seeks, is in the consumption of mind-altering substances (i.e. depressants, stimulants, hallucinogens, and opium-related painkillers). Some of these substances, such as heroin or LSD, might be harder to obtain for the standard individual but substances such as alcohol, tobacco, and in certain places marijuana as well, are readily available for the public to consume. A number of scholars have found a positive correlation between boredom and substance abuse (see Johnston & O'Malley, 1986; Pascale & Sylvester, 1988 as cited in Sommers & Vodanovich, 2000, pp. 149-150). Moreover, Greene *et al* have found a connection between sensation-seeking[18] triggered by boredom and drug abuse, especially tobacco smoking and alcohol intake (2000, pp. 439-461).

Hence, the bored individual resorts to mind-altering substances to escape his or her state, and in doing so distracts the mind from the aversive sensation that boredom imposes over it. This type of distraction, although effective in the moment, can have a negative impact, for it can lead to addiction and that addiction can, in turn, lead to a series of other mental, emotional, and physical health problems. As meaning-surrogates, mind-altering substances affect the way in which the individual perceives the world and create the illusion that the meaningfulness that the individual so desperately seeks is present. That meaningfulness, nonetheless, is ephemeral and dissolves as fast as it was projected when the effects of the substances dissipate, creating a stark contrast between what a moment ago appeared to be more meaningful

[18] "Sensation-seeking is broadly defined as a trait identified by the seeking of varied, novel, complex, and intense experiences and the willingness to take risks to obtain those experiences" (see Zuckerman, 1994 as cited in Greene *et al*. 2000, p. 440).

and suddenly seems decidedly empty. Therefore, now aware of this contrast, the individual can not only develop a further need for said substances, but might end up feeling the oppressive presence of boredom more drastically.

Violence as a Surrogate

Amongst the studies on boredom, perhaps the ones with the most serious implications, are those which have found a connection between it and violence. Kustermans and Ringmar (2011) discuss how a bored individual (incited by what has developed as a fascination with arms and war in modern societies) might play violent video games or, more extremely, enroll in the army and go to war to avoid boredom. They state that violence aroused by boredom is radical, since it "contains the hope that in war, not only the bored agent, but also society as such, will transcend themselves" (p. 1778). Hence, in this instance, war and violence are taken as means that enable an individual and its society not only to escape boredom, but to go beyond it. Therefore, the dangerous conception of war as a cure arises with it being perceived as the antidote to the "malady" of boredom.

Thus, boredom can lead to aggressive acts in different spaces and appears to be related to violence in schools and vandalism in the urban setting (see Dean, 1979 and Beaulieu, 1981 respectively). Besides this, Arendt (2006), in her *Eichmann in Jerusalem: A Report on the Banality of Evil* found boredom to be a crucial factor in Eichmann's choice of joining the Security Service of the Reichsführer-SS. Once again, violence is taken as a medicine capable of curing boredom and thus, presented as justifiable. The subject, so desperate for any stimulation that can shake the numbness caused by boredom away, is willing to go to considerable lengths to find the

entertainment it seeks. Regrettably, this entertainment sometimes comes in the form of war, in which the subject finds a meaning-surrogate. Violent acts are thus masked as acts of patriotism or justice and perceived as meaningful when, in fact, the individual pursues those acts merely as an escape. The war that arises from boredom is not a war with a cause, but a war for the sake of war. Paradoxically, in thinking that he/she is engaging in a meaningful act, the individual who pursues violence because of boredom is, in fact, engaging in the type of violence that has no meaning or deep purpose at all.

Seeking Inside: An Eye-Opening Lethargy

In contrast to what has been explored in the previous pages, an individual, when confronted with the discomfort that boredom provokes, might attempt to regain control over his/her situation. In this case, instead of looking outwards for distractions, the subject will look inwards and try to generate his or her own source of entertainment. Hence, in a process marked by the use of creative qualities, the bored person learns to utilize the ambiguous space that boredom constitutes for imaginative exploration and creation. In this way, thus, instead of trying to escape boredom, the individual finds a way to work within it.

Daydreaming

Daydreams, defined in the Oxford English Dictionary as "a series of pleasant thoughts that distract one's attention from the present" (Oxford Living Dictionaries) have been found to be one of the most common activities the brain resorts to when bored (Eastwood *et al*. 2012; Mann and Robinson, 2009; Smith 1981; Tushup & Zuckerman 1977). According to Smallwood and Schooler (2006), "mind-wandering

may share important similarities with incubation processes related to creativity" (p. 956). Furthermore, a correlation has been found between daydreaming and creative problem-solving abilities, as well as between daydreaming and the brain's executive processes that permit creative thought (Klinger, 1999; Christoff *et al.*, 2009).

Therefore, when the bored individual begins daydreaming, his or her mind is, in fact, engaging in important creative processes. What may seem like a waste of time or a mere distraction that prevents the subject from engaging in "purposeful" activities, can effectively help the person's brain solve a multiplicity of problems. Thus, mind-wandering entails not an escape from boredom, but a way of using boredom's liminal space to address certain issues[19] and to explore one's own ability to imagine. In contrast to seeking solely satisfaction in the outer world, the individual who chooses to take advantage of being bored, opens a door to an inner world in which he or she can actively transform his/her experience. In doing so, the subject is no longer at the "mercy" of boredom but has regained agency over the situation. This, nevertheless, does not entail that the individual can control boredom and make it disappear at will, but that he or she can use the space it mentally provides for creating alternative spaces in which he or she can have authority[20].

It is perhaps the "neither-nor-ness" of boredom which provides fertile ground for imaginative exploration, for rules that usually apply to other experiences, are blurred in the case of liminal ones. In an ambiguous space, in which everything seems uncertain and yet malleable, the individual has ample room for investigation and, if the circumstances are right, for creation.

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[19] The person engaging in daydreaming might use this space for resolving negative past experiences, for planning or setting goals, for organizing ideas that seem scattered, etc.

[20] The kind of authority a musician has over a song or a writer has over a novel. Or, simply the authority of making one's own decisions about how to proceed in the future or reconcile the past.

Fabulation

In his book, *Liminality and Experience*, Paul Stenner (2017) discusses the importance of fabulation, which he describes as "a symbolic means through which human beings gain imaginative access to the world," in regards to liminal experiences and states that fabulation "is a core ingredient in the emergence of novel forms of individuality and collectivity" (p. 38). The theoretical framework he developed will be used here to analyze the role that fabulation plays in the experience of boredom specifically.

Stenner's interpretation of fabulation as crucial for new forms of individuality and collectivity to take shape is connected to both Nietzsche's and Benjamin's interpretation of boredom. In Nietzsche's account, boredom has the "ability to force individuals to question their existence, even question human existence as a whole – on its most grand scales" (Gardiner & Haladyn, 2017, p. 9). In this sense, boredom constitutes a pause, a halt in the rush of modern life in which one can stop and consider oneself and one's place in the world. Therefore, boredom presents an opportunity for the individual to evaluate his or her situation beyond the boredom that it presently experiences. In other words, the lack of stimulation that boredom entails drives the subject to consider his or her current situation, since distractions are not available. And in considering the current situation, or state of boredom, the individual has the opportunity to go beyond it and consider larger matters of his or her existence.

Benjamin's interpretation finds its premises in Nietzsche's, but goes further into the possibilities that boredom presents for the recovery of experience within modern culture:

> Being bored provides a means of allowing both individual and society an imaginative mental space, away from the proscribed [*sic*][21] meanings given on the surface of life's experiences, one that culturally and historically is needed for the possibility of accomplishing great deeds (Gardiner & Haladyn, 2017, p. 11).

Benjamin argues that boredom's imaginative mental space provides not only a halt, but also an opportunity for depth. What is meant by depth here is that, through boredom, even with its perceived dullness and oppressiveness of the mind, the individual can peak under the surface of experiences and find a world beyond prescribed meanings[22]. In doing so, the person gains a better understanding of what boredom truly entails and can begin to see it as an entrance instead of as a wall. Thus, boredom gives the individual the opportunity to reflect upon boredom itself and his or her role in that experience, allowing the person, in this way, to regain insight but also agency. For when the person finds the possibilities that boredom offers, away from any prescriptions, he or she can have control again and decide what to make of said experience or what to build from it. This act is fabulation, and like daydreaming, fabulation has often been labeled as merely a means to escape reality. Nevertheless, as Stenner (2017) comments, fabulation is "less a question of misrepresenting a pre-existent world of facts, and more a question of gaining imaginative access to a world that ever exceeds us, but that we are already in some sense a part of" (p. 40). Thus, the individual who engages in fabulation is not running away from reality, but simply finding alternative ways to interpret it and new paths to create within it. From this

[21] Prescribed?

[22] The meanings accorded by society in which an experience (such as boredom) is, by consensus, regarded as negative and limiting.

creation, that which goes beyond the imagined realm of fabulation and into the physical world might be what Benjamin calls great deeds.

Great Deeds: Creation and Change

Since Benjamin does not go further in depth regarding his concept of "great deeds" in *The Arcades Project* (1999)[23], one can only speculate about the meaning of his words. Here, they will be taken plainly[24] but considered in a twofold way: Great deeds of creation and great deeds of change. The great deeds of creation encapsulate the works of art, music, literature, film and other creative manifestations that were conceived in the liminal space of boredom, or that could not have come into existence without the artist being bored or wanting his/her public to be[25]. These deeds, represent the culmination of fabulation through boredom and shed light into the plurality of masterful outcomes that this state can lead to. For when an individual utilizes the mental space that boredom constitutes to create art, he or she is using the fabric of what can be felt as an aversive experience to design the opposite kind of experience for others. In this sense, through the oppression of boredom, an artist can choose to breathe liberation into the world.

Great deeds of change, on the other hand, do not necessarily take the shape of art, although they can materialize in this way. These great deeds are concerned with the

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[23] Benjamin has a tendency of coming up with useful concepts but not elaborating much on them. He is what one could call an indicator or a pointer: He signals to a relevant idea, but instead of delving deeper into it, he moves from one relevant idea to the next and allows others to explore these. In this sense, Benjamin is often more concerned with opening doors than with walking through them.

[24] Taken in their literal meaning according to the dictionary.

[25] When a work of art is created with the intention of causing boredom, the artist must think that the experience of being bored is in itself a form of art or a worthy conclusion of it. For an example of this, see Andy Warhol's *Sleep*.

other part of Benjamin's postulation. He proposes that boredom creates an imaginative space not only for the individual but also for society at large. Therefore, the effect that boredom has on the individual of allowing him or her to reflect upon his or her existence and take action, might also have implications in the collective sphere. Great deeds of change, thus, are the resolution that boredom can lead to when the individual's contemplations of his or her experience have a rippling effect and open the possibility for an entire society to transform itself.

According to Blanchot and Hanson (1987), "boredom is the everyday become manifest" (p. 16). If taken as such[26], boredom can represent an opportunity for the individual to better understand the realities of his or her existence or to at least be confronted with them. Hence, boredom has the potential of leading a person to question his/her situation and, consequently, to question society's norms. If upon being confronted with reality through boredom, the subject does not like what it sees, the alarming sight might make him/her act in order to change the current state of affairs. Therefore, in being a manifestation of the everyday, boredom illuminates that which has turned into a routine and makes those aspects of life that are unjust apparent. Boredom calls for the individual to recognize what has been hidden behind the "surface of life's experiences" and opens the possibility of following a path that, if taken seriously, can constitute a great deed of transformation.

Conclusion

Boredom, as a phenomenon that deeply affects the individual who experiences it, has often been diagnosed as a sort of modern illness or, contrastingly, perceived as a

[26] While considering Nietzsche's previously mentioned idea of boredom as a force that can make a person question his/her existence and human existence as a whole.

cure that allows one to escape the rush that modernity imposes on the subject. Throughout this thesis, both these possibilities have been accounted for and boredom has been explored not as a terminal experience, but as a liminal one. By analyzing boredom as a transitional space rich with ambiguity, this paper has sought to expand the ways in which the topic is considered while at the same time adding a new theoretical framework[27] to the studies on this field.

Furthermore, boredom (as a relatively young phenomenon with a specific historicity) has been placed in context with larger socio-economic factors and has been analyzed as closely related to processes of industrialization. Processes that result in the routinization of novelty, the defamation of idleness and leisure, and the aversion to activities that seem to be meaningless or that lack a concrete purpose. All of these, in turn, have been here considered as aspects from which boredom's pervasiveness in modernity originates. Amidst these consequences, thus, boredom has surged as a liminal space, as a halt in the hurried form of life the metropolis creates, and as a state in which the individual can ponder about his or her place in the world and ponder about the world itself.

Boredom, constituting an uncertain and malleable space, falls upon the subject and presents two doors to him/her: Through one, the individual can find satisfaction in the same stimuli that has generated its boredom in the first place (or in activities that act as meaning-surrogates but that are not meaningful in themselves) and, through the other, the individual can find solace in his/her own creativity and imagination.

In late modernity, Western societies have encountered what Rosa (2013) calls a "frenetic standstill"[28] (p. 15). This "frenetic standstill" comes through the fast-paced

[27] Boredom as a liminal experience.
[28] See also Virilio's *inertie polaire* (*L'Inertie polaire*, 1990).

system of information, images, and "innovation" that one encounters in the metropolis (as described by Simmel) and that has permeated both the personal and social spheres. Between this rush of content, divided into parts that are no longer differentiable from one another and that merge into a flat grey, experience acquires the paradoxical quality of being both fast and stuporous at the same time. And there, in the fast numbness of modernity, boredom appears. In that space, in the crack that has opened in the surface of modern experience and that runs deep into the very existence of the modern subject[29], one can encounter boredom's reservoir. A reservoir that seems, or has been often described, as an empty space but that contains in its depths a plurality of possibilities that the individual can access. As Turner (1977) argues, if liminality "is regarded as a time and place of withdrawal from normal modes of social action, it can be seen as potentially a period of scrutinization of the central values and axioms of the culture in which it occurs" (p. 167). Therefore, boredom, being a liminal space, allows the subject who is willing to reach into its most profound spaces the opportunity of questioning the status quo. In this way, boredom can constitute a reservoir of sociopolitical imaginaries and serve as the spring from which ideas that have the potential of revolutionizing society can surge. Thus, having accessed this reservoir, it is in the hands of the modern subject to decide which course to take: That which leads to the constant recursion of a thirst for satisfaction that is never fully satiated or that which might result in the materialization of better societies and systems. In the end, boredom is merely a threshold that offers two very distinct exits and the subject is the one who must choose which path to walk. No matter what seems to chain us, be it a lack of

[29] See Durkheim on how the deepest of the individual's emotions are rooted in external socio-economic circumstances (*Suicide: A Study in Sociology*, 1951).

meaningful experiences or oppressive societal norms, boredom acts as a reminder that one is only truly trapped if one's mind is incapable of fathoming a key.

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