

**SPACES OF BOREDOM:  
IMAGINATION AND THE AMBIVALENCE OF LIMITS**

A THESIS  
SUBMITTED TO THE INSTITUTE OF  
ECONOMICS AND SOCIAL SCIENCES  
AND THE DEPARTMENT OF GRAPHIC DESIGN  
OF BİLKENT UNIVERSITY  
IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS  
FOR THE DEGREE OF  
DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY  
IN ART, DESIGN AND ARCHITECTURE

**By  
ÖZGE EJDER**

**September, 2005**

I certify that I have read this thesis and that  
in my opinion it is fully adequate, in scope and quality as a thesis  
for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

.....  
Assistant Prof. Dr. Mahmut Mutman (Principal Advisor)

I certify that I have read this thesis and that  
in my opinion it is fully adequate, in scope and quality as a thesis  
for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

.....  
Prof. Dr. Bülent Özgüç

I certify that I have read this thesis and that  
in my opinion it is fully adequate, in scope and quality as a thesis  
for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

.....  
Associate Prof. Dr. Zeynep Direk

I certify that I have read this thesis and that  
in my opinion it is fully adequate, in scope and quality as a thesis  
for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

.....  
Assistant Prof. Andreas Treske

I certify that I have read this thesis and that  
in my opinion it is fully adequate, in scope and quality as a thesis  
for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

.....  
Assistant Prof. Dr. Hazım Murat Karamüftüoğlu

Approved by the Institute of Fine Arts

.....  
Prof. Dr. Bülent Özgüç, Director of the Institute of Fine Arts

## **ABSTRACT**

### **SPACES OF BOREDOM: IMAGINATION AND THE AMBIVALENCE OF LIMITS**

Özge Ejder

Ph.D in Art, Design and Architecture

Supervisor: Assistant Prof. Dr. Mahmut Mutman

September 2005

This study aims to contribute readings of arguments pertaining to and conceptualizations of the experience of boredom to discussions of art, philosophy and culture. Relevant histories and readings of philosophical accounts of boredom are considered in order to enable an understanding of boredom as generative of distinctive understandings of space. This is further developed as an account of boredom as problematic in the reception and creation of literary and visual art. Beginning from critical discussions of boredom in recent cultural and critical commentary, in particular discussions of the everyday, this thesis considers the phenomenological analysis of the everyday that is at work in Martin Heidegger's account of boredom and in rewritings of this analysis, as the experience of the impersonal, in texts by Maurice Blanchot and Emmanuel Levinas. Boredom is shown to provoke an ambivalence that can nevertheless unfold, or produce, spaces of thought, art and the everyday through the experience of the impersonal. The limits of these spaces of boredom invite us to certain passages through experiences of ambivalence where thought, art and the everyday are opened up, by means of an imagination of boredom, to new possibilities.

**Keywords:** Boredom, space, ambivalence, limit, imagination.

## ÖZET

### **SIKINTI MEKANLARI: HAYALGÜCÜ VE SINIRLARIN MUĞLAKLIĞI**

Özge Ejder

Sanat, Tasarım ve Mimarlık; Doktora

Tez Yöneticisi: Yard. Doç. Dr. Mahmut Mutman

Eylül 2005

Bu çalışma, sıkıntı deneyiminin sanat, felsefe ve kültür tarafından ele alınışındaki kavramsallaştırmalara ve tartışmalara katkıda bulunmayı hedeflemektedir. Sıkıntıya dair, ilgili tarih okumaları ve felsefî metinler, sıkıntıyı anlamada farklı türden bir mekan anlayışını ortaya çıkarması açısından ele alınmıştır. Bu yaklaşım, edebiyat ve görsel sanatın alımlanması ve yaratılması sorunsalları açısından geliştirilmiştir. Bu tez, sıkıntının eleştirel ve kültürel kuram tarafından özellikle gündeliğe dair tartışmalarda ele alınışı ile başlamakla birlikte, Martin Heidegger'in sıkıntı kavramsallaştırmasını gündeliğin fenomenolojik analizi üzerinden yeniden kurmaktadır. Sözkonusu analiz sıkıntı deneyiminin öznesini belirsizleştirirken Emmanuel Levinas ve Maurice Blanchot'nun yapıtlarındaki özne modelini esas almaktadır. Sıkıntının kışkırttığı iddia edilen muğlaklık, belli türden bir özneye ait olmayanın deneyimi yoluyla gündelikte, sanatta ve düşüncede mekan katmanları açan ve üreten olarak olumlanmaktadır. Sıkıntı mekanlarının sınırları, muğlaklığın deneyimi sayesinde sanatın, düşüncenin ve gündeliğin hayalgücü üzerinden yeni olanaklara açıldığı geçişler olarak ortaya çıkmaktadır.

**Anahtar Kelimeler:** Sıkıntı, mekan, muğlaklık, sınır, hayalgücü.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

It would, as I understand it, be impossible to acknowledge my debts to all those whose work has assisted mine in the preparation of and writing of this thesis. The limits of my knowledge are surpassed in an understanding of the extent of these debts, which could not be limited either to my immediate circles outside academic institutions or to those within them.

However, it is with no less a sense of gratitude that I wish to thank the following, by name and according to the parts that they have played in assisting me with the work for this thesis.

I would therefore like to thank my supervisor Mahmut Mutman for his valuable support and Zafer Aracagök for the instructive courses and consultation he gave during my time as a research student in the Faculty of Art, Design and Architecture at Bilkent University. I would also like to thank Trevor Hope, Andrea Rehberg and Ali Akay for helping to shape my research as members of my thesis proctoring committee. My thanks are also due to Bülent Özgüç, Dean of the Faculty of Art, Design and Architecture, for, among other matters, assisting me financially in attending the Collegium Phaenomenologicum held in Italy in the summer of 2003.

I am grateful to Saffet Babür, Head of the Department of Philosophy at Yeditepe University, for his support and encouragement in the last year during which I have been working in his department. I was glad to be able to present work for this thesis at the department's seminar series, the reception of which was constructive.

I am indebted to my friends who gave me the most valuable inspiration, support, help and capacity to endure. Derya Gürses has provided me with obscure articles from libraries worldwide. Özlem Çaykent spent hours late at night towards the end helping me conclude. Hakan Tuncel consistently alerted me to the nuances of academic life and Hasan Keler never let me feel helpless.

This thesis has been carried from Ankara to İstanbul and back again so many times, to Datça, to Chandlers Ford, to Pesaro. I am most thankful to Lewis Johnson for accompanying me and my thesis during those journeys in one way or another. This thesis would have been very different if not unfeasible without his existence in my life.

Lastly, I want to thank my parents and my brother for liking and respecting what I have been doing and note that I wrote this thesis in continuous remembrance of my dearest friend Olgu Adıgüzel.

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

<b>ABSTRACT .....</b>	<b>ii</b>
<b>ÖZET .....</b>	<b>iii</b>
<b>ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS .....</b>	<b>iv</b>
<b>TABLE OF CONTENTS .....</b>	<b>v</b>
<b>LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS .....</b>	<b>viii</b>
<b>CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION.....</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>CHAPTER 2: PHILOSOPHIES OF BOREDOM.....</b>	<b>15</b>
2.1 The Greeks and Plato .....	16
2.2 Acedia as Mediaeval Boredom.....	21
2.3 Pascal.....	24
2.4 Kierkegaard .....	30
2.5 Boredom as a Creative Force.....	37
2.6 Boredom as undecidability .....	40

<b>CHAPTER 3: PHENOMENOLOGY OF BOREDOM.....</b>	<b>43</b>
3.1 Dasein’s Existential Spatiality.....	44
3.2 The Disclosive Function of Moods .....	48
3.2.1 The Disclosure of Thrownness as the First Essential Character of Disposition.....	50
3.2.2 The Disclosure of Being-in-the-world as a whole as the Second Essential Character of Disposition.....	51
3.2.3 The Disclosure of Ways of Mattering as the Third Essential Character of Disposition.....	52
3.2.4 The Disclosure of Being as a whole in “What is Metaphysics” .....	54
3.3 The Fundamental Attunement of Anxiety.....	56
3.4 The Grounding Attunement of Boredom .....	58
3.4.1 Boredom in the Mode of Anticipation: The First Form of Boredom .....	61
3.4.2 Boredom in the Mode of Recollection: The Second Form of Boredom.....	66
3.4.3 The Third Form of Boredom.....	72
3.5 The Hidden Spatiality of Moods .....	79
3.6 Langeweile-Unheimlich.....	82
<b>CHAPTER 4: THE IMAGINARY SPACE OF BOREDOM .....</b>	<b>89</b>
4.1 Heidegger through Levinas.....	91
4.2 Levinas and the Experience of the Impersonal .....	100
4.2.1 <i>There is</i> and art as exoticism.....	106

4.2.2 The Subject/Object Distinction.....	110
4.3 Blanchot and the Experience of the Impersonal .....	115
4.3.1 Neuter as the agent of experience .....	119
4.3.2 Boredom and Waiting .....	122
4.3.3 Fascination.....	124
<b>CHAPTER 5: CONCLUSION.....</b>	<b>128</b>
<b>BIBLIOGRAPHY.....</b>	<b>140</b>



## LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

### *Books*

- AD Mark Wigley, *The Architecture of Deconstruction: Derrida's Hunt* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1993).
- AO Maurice Blanchot, *Awaiting Oblivion*, trans. John Gregg (1997; Lincoln and London: University of Nebraska Press, 1999).
- AP Walter Benjamin, *The Arcades Project*, trans. Howard Eiland, Kevin McLaughlin (1999; Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2003).
- AR Jill Robbins, *Altered Reading: Levinas and Literature* (Chicago & London: The University of Chicago Press, 1999).
- BR Maurice Blanchot, *The Station Hill Reader*, ed. by G. Quasha, trans. by Lydia Davis, Paul Auster & Robert Lambertson (New York: Station Hill Press, 1999).
- BT Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time*, translated by John Macquarrie and Edward Robinson (1962; Oxford: Blackwell, 1990).
- BRI Michael Raposa, *Boredom and the Religious Imagination* (Charlottesville, London: University Press of Virginia, 1999).
- CT Martin Heidegger, *The Concept of Time*, trans. William McNeill (Oxford: Blackwell, 1992).
- DN Reinhard Kuhn, *Demon of Noontide: Ennui in Western Literature* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1976).
- EE Emmanuel Levinas, *Existence and Existents*. trans. Alphonso Lingis (1978; Dordrecht, Boston, London: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 1995).
- EO Søren Kierkegaard, *Either/Or: A Fragment of Life*, Ed. Victor Eremita, trans. Alastair Hannay (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1992).
- EWQ Elizabeth S. Goodstein, *Experience without Qualities: Boredom and Modernity* (Stanford: UP, 2005).
- FCM Martin Heidegger, *The Fundamental Concepts of Metaphysics* Translated by William McNeill and Nicholas Walker (Bloomington, Indiana: Indiana UP, 1995).

- HATH Friedrich Nietzsche, *Human All Too Human: A Book For Free Spirits*, trans. by R.J. Hollingdale (1986; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004).
- I Walter Benjamin, *Illuminations*, ed. by Hannah Arendt, trans. Harry Zohn (London: Fontana, 1973).
- IC Maurice Blanchot, *The Infinite Conversation*, Trans. Susan Hanson (Minneapolis, London: University of Minnesota Press, 1993).
- LHS Patricia Meyer Spacks, *Boredom: The Literary History of a State of Mind* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995).
- MO Siegfried Kracauer, “Boredom” in *The Mass Ornament: Weimar Essays*, trans. and ed. by Thomas Y. Levin (Cambridge: MA, 1995).
- MP Jacques Derrida, *Margins of Philosophy*, trans. Alan Bass (Chicago: U.P., 1982)
- OE Emmanuel Levinas, *On Escape*. trans. Bettina Bergo (Stanford University Press: Stanford, California, 2003).
- OG Jacques Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, Trans. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak (1974; Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP, 1976).
- P Blaise Pascal, *Pensées*, trans. A. J. Krailsheimer (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1966).
- PB Lars Svendon, *A Philosophy of Boredom* (London: Reaktion Books, 2005).
- RP Thomas Carl Wall, *Radical Passivity, Levinas, Blanchot, and Agamben* (Albany: State University of NY Press, 1999).
- RS Emmanuel Levinas, “Reality and its Shadow” in *The Levinas Reader*, ed. By Seàn Hand (Oxford, Basil Blackwell, 1989).
- SL Maurice Blanchot, *The Space of Literature*, trans. Ann Smock (1982; Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1989).
- TO Emmanuel Levinas, *Time and the Other*. trans. Richard A. Cohen. ( 1987; Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania Duquesne University Pres, 1992).
- WM Martin Heidegger, “What is Metaphysics?”. *Basic Writings*, Edited by David Farrell Krell (1993 London: Routledge, 2000).
- Articles** Repeated references to articles use the surname of the author.

## CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

“Yes, I have the spleen, complicated melancholy, with nostalgia, plus hypocondria, and I bisque, and I rage, and I yawn, and I am bored, and I strike myself, and I am bored!”

Victor Hugo, *Les Misérables*<sup>1</sup>

The introduction to this thesis aims to situate philosophical questioning, exploration of conceptualizations of and arguments pertaining to the experience of boredom that is to follow in chapters two, three and four in relation to a series of issues concerning, in particular, debates about culture and art in which boredom can be understood to be implicated. That is, before turning to conceptualizations of and arguments pertaining to the experience of boredom, we shall consider some of the ways in which boredom, as term, concept, and cultural problematic, might be understood not to be approachable simply as experience. In the chapters that follow, we shall be developing arguments that, as the title of this thesis promises, propose certain ways of understanding the experience of boredom as generative of distinctive understandings of space, even while boredom as such is, in many of the source arguments of this thesis often considered primarily as a problematic of time and of temporality. Before this, and before turning to a consideration of the implications of boredom as generative of distinctive understandings of space in accounts of literary and visual art, we shall seek to argue for

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<sup>1</sup> Quoted from, “L’Ennui”, *Magazine littéraire* (273) (January 1990): 1.

the relevance of the histories and readings of the philosophical accounts of boredom that occupy the main portion of this thesis.

To do this, it is instructive to assess some of the ways in which boredom has been cited in recent cultural criticism. The trajectory of this thesis has, as it were, imposed itself as the aim was to stay away from obvious diagnoses of boredom in terms of the cultural and to consider more precisely ways in which understandings of boredom might intersect with, if not undermine discourses of the cultural. This is interestingly enough suggested by the following recent text of critical and cultural theory by Fredric Jameson:

... “boredom” is taken not so much as an objective property of things and works but rather as a response to the blockage of energies (whether those be grasped in terms of desire or of praxis). Boredom then becomes interesting as a reaction to situations of paralysis and also, no doubt, as defense mechanism or avoidance behaviour. Even taken in the narrower realm of cultural reception, boredom with a particular kind of work or style or content can always be used productively as a precious symptom of our own existential, ideological, and cultural limits, and index of what has to be refused in the way of other people’s cultural practices, and their threat to our rationalizations about the nature and value of art.<sup>2</sup>

Jameson’s own judgment concerning boredom as a kind of critical paralysis can be argued to be grounded in a Marxist account of praxis and a reaction to popular culture as ideological. His suggestion that boredom is a ‘symptom of our existential, ideological and cultural limits’ on the other hand requires careful analysis. This thesis aims to contribute to an analysis of boredom of that kind that may subsequently enable a re-approaching to the wider questions of activity and culture that Jameson invokes.

This thesis also aims at responding to different definitions and periodizations of boredom that conceive boredom as an invention or a culturally and historically constructed concept by way of questioning the validity of such a claim. This will be done

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<sup>2</sup> Fredric Jameson, *Postmodernism, or The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism* (Durham: Duke UP, 1991), 71-72.

by re-tracing the emergence of the concept of boredom in the history of philosophy. As a preliminary to this, the etymology of boredom - which offers certain parameters for a history of boredom - needs to be mentioned here for reason not only of situating it historically but also to enable an understanding of how boredom is conceived in relation to language. The works by thinkers that we will be particularly interested in require a certain awareness to their language as their thought maintains a preoccupation with language. This will be perhaps less obvious with some of the thinkers and their works, and sometimes very predominant like for example in the case of Maurice Blanchot. One of the interesting things about boredom is that, in relating it to language and culture, one finds it difficult to isolate it from the determinations of the culture or the language in question. It may be argued that cultural and literary critics salvage something affirmative from this aspect of boredom for their argument about its being a cultural construct.

The entry for boredom in the 1976 edition of Oxford English Dictionary refers to *ennui* which is defined in the same dictionary as “Mental weariness from lack of occupation or interest.” The English word ‘boredom’ is not found in the dictionaries before the nineteenth century although the verb ‘to bore’ as a psychological term appeared in the mid- eighteenth century.<sup>3</sup> It is still rare to find the word ‘boredom’ as denoting a concept and not the act. The German *Langeweile* on the other hand entered the dictionaries a couple of decades earlier than ‘boredom’ and it is suggested that it had Old-German precursors before that. Boredom in some languages – like Danish, for example - offers etymological resemblances to the Medieval Latin term *acedia* suggesting an earlier usage in the language. French *ennui* and Italian *noia* come from another Latin term; *inodiare* which can be traced back to the thirteenth century.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Patricia Meyer Spacks, *Boredom: The Literary History of a State of Mind* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995), 9. Hereafter, LHS.

<sup>4</sup> Lars Svendsen, *A Philosophy of Boredom* (London: Reaktion Books, 2005), 24. Hereafter, PB.

As for Turkish, it can be argued that instead of a concept of boredom we have a concept which covers the state of boredom as well as other states. The noun *sıkıntı* and the verb *sıkılmak* in Turkish come from the root *sık* which has spatial and temporal connotations, as it means both “placed or spaced close together” and “frequently, often”<sup>5</sup>. *Sıkıntı* in Turkish dictionaries means a series of things: distress, trouble, difficulty, annoyance, worry, depression and boredom. And *sıkılmak* means both to be bored and to be squeezed. All of these meanings suggest an oppressiveness and a relation to space. The verb does not suggest a necessary causal relation to an object. The way the act is related to the subject can be understood both as reflexive and passive.<sup>6</sup> The significance of this may be misconstrued. It is not that reflexive and passive values cannot be remarked in Turkish usage: both grammatical categories are at work in Turkish as *edilgen*, the passive, and *dönüşlü*, the reflexive. Rather, in Turkish the subject is not systematically determined in the difference between the passive and reflexive that western and romance languages appear to require. Instead, the question of the subject opens to a multiplicity of meanings through the ambiguities between the passive and the active on the one hand and the reflexive and the subjective on the other. Arguably, Turkish involves the subject more intimately in what we shall be arguing as the ambivalence that attends the experience of boredom. In the following chapter, we shall be reviewing the history of thought about boredom in Western philosophy and we shall be developing an argument that points to a discovery of the ambivalence of boredom that engages a series of ambiguities arising out of the difference between the passive and the reflexive in so far as these mark a relation to the boring ‘object’ and the subject as the one who thinks that he or she is bored. We shall further be seeking to show that rewritings of the question of the subject in respect of Western thought return, one way or

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<sup>5</sup> Redhouse *Büyük El Sözlüğü* (İstanbul: Sev Yayıncılık, 2003), 663.

<sup>6</sup> İsmet Zeki Eyüboğlu, *Türk Dilinin Etimoloji Sözlüğü* (İstanbul: Sosyal Yayınlar, 1998), 596.

another, to this problematic of ambivalence, even in the case of Heidegger who would make of boredom the very motive of philosophizing.

We might read Blanchot as if against a certain drift of the following text in respect of the problem of ambiguity by questioning the values of the infinite, semblance and the void in the following account of ambiguity:

Because of ambiguity nothing has meaning, but everything *seems* infinitely meaningful. Meaning is no longer anything but semblance; semblance makes meaning infinitely rich. It makes this infinitude of meaning have no need of development – it makes meaning immediate, which is also to say incapable of being developed, only immediately void.<sup>7</sup>

Boredom appears to be able to allow nothing to suggest meaning, a meaning which passes through semblance without simply becoming void. Indeed the rhetorical work of this term in Blanchot's text points us towards a question of what the emptiness of boredom communicates with and which we shall be exploring in the name of spaces of boredom.

The thesis aims at invoking and provoking a reading of cultural texts as well as cultural studies texts without – in particular in respect of the latter – providing a detailed consideration of the occasions and modes of articulation of such texts. This thesis is not, then, a history of cultural studies. A possible path for this thesis to unfold could have been through a critical analysis of modern culture which problematized the subject in modern culture and its relationships with modern technology. Having said this, this thesis does seek to position itself in respect of particular developments in the unravelling of certain positions that have tended to define the frameworks of work in cultural studies, work that has perhaps unknowingly repeated positions on experience, belief or ideology

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<sup>7</sup> Maurice Blanchot, *The Space of Literature*, trans. Ann Smock (1955; Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1989), 263. Hereafter, SL.

and technology. One of the more recent scholars and thinkers, inspired by the work of Michel Foucault and Paul Virilio, working in particular on histories of visual culture has returned to these matters in connection with boredom. Jonathan Crary in his book *Suspensions of Perception* briefly remarks on the importance of the relationship between technology and boredom and claims that, “It is particularly important now to determine what creative possibilities can be generated amid new technological forms of boredom”<sup>8</sup> suggesting not just new forms for technology but also new forms of boredom that have been generated as a response to technology.

The work of certain thinkers and cultural critics associated with the later development of cultural studies will not simply be given voice in this thesis but this should not be understood as a kind of underestimation of their problematics concerning boredom as a cultural phenomenon. This thesis offers itself as a clarification in respect of recurrent problematics of boredom, culture and cultural texts and experience as assisted by philosophical traditions and rewritings of those in Heideggerean and post-Heideggerean thought. This thesis aims to provoke readings of such texts of cultural studies, by showing that such readings are possible, involving a questioning of the ways that they repeat certain presuppositions of relations between subject and object, particularly in respect of accounts of inside and outside, or interiority and exteriority, in ‘relations’ between texts and their readers and/or viewers. We might question, in respect of this, whether Crary’s understanding of ‘new technological forms of boredom’ does not repeat a belief in a model in which experience is imposed by technology, a metaphysical agent authoring experience, which repeats a pessimism about boredom that tends to recur in western traditions.

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<sup>8</sup> Jonathan Crary, *Suspensions of Perception: Attention, Spectacle, and Modern Culture* (1999; Cambridge, London: MIT Press, 2000), 78.



In the second chapter of this thesis, we shall show how this might be addressed in respect of the emergence of a thought of boredom as it is found in the work of Blaise Pascal and its legacies in Søren Kierkegaard, Friedrich Nietzsche and, later, in Martin Heidegger. The early twentieth century cultural and critical studies texts by Siegfried Kracauer and Walter Benjamin can be argued to be faithful to a certain philosophical legacy especially that of Pascal's in terms of reiterating his account of diversion in terms of technology. Arguably what we find in recent studies is a reconsideration of these early texts by recent theorists like Fredric Jameson and Jonathan Crary with a view to a question of the status of the 'subject of experience' as taken up by contemporary philosophy. It is therefore useful to briefly state the problematics in some of these texts that have addressed the issue of boredom in ways that might have changed how we conceive boredom and in so doing explore subjectivity in modernity.

There are two short essays in Kracauer's *The Mass Ornament: Weimar Essays*, one entitled "Boredom", written in 1924, and the other "Those Who Wait", of 1922. Kracauer argues in "Boredom" that "the self has vanished – the self whose presence, particularly in this so bustling world, would necessarily compel people to tarry for a while without a goal, neither here nor there."<sup>9</sup> Joe Moran, in his article "November in Berlin: the End of the Everyday", points towards a suggestive link in German between to bore [*langweilen*] and to tarry or linger [*verveilen*] alluding to this sense of boredom as a 'long whiling away' which necessarily involves a certain sense of waiting, a waiting that would be extinguished in contemporary culture in so far as it keeps producing distractions and diversions.<sup>10</sup> According to Kracauer it has become difficult to find the quiet and solitude that is required "to be thoroughly bored with the world as it ultimately

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<sup>9</sup> Siegfried Kracauer, "Boredom" in *The Mass Ornament: Weimar Essays*, trans. and ed. by Thomas Y. Levin (Cambridge: MA, 1995), 331-2. Hereafter MO.

<sup>10</sup> Joe Moran, "November in Berlin: The End of the Everyday," *History Workshop Journal* 57 (2004): 218, 216-234.

deserves”.<sup>11</sup> In the other essay on waiting, Kracauer proposes that boredom and waiting are important as possible modern experiences in so far as they should provoke people to start questioning what they might actually be waiting for. In a sense, it could be argued that Kracauer sees in the experience of waiting and boredom the possibility of change in terms of series of reinscriptions of the modern subject who is caught up in limbo between the frameworks of the experiences of leisure and work as defined by modern society.

Another cultural critic Henri Lefebvre writes extensively on the modern subject’s habitual undertakings of the everyday in which boredom and waiting occupies a significant role as determinants of some of these habits that are generated to cope with the everyday and, in so doing, effectively impose a certain everyday. In the words of Lefebvre:

The days follow one after another and resemble one another, and yet – here lies the contradiction at the heart of the everydayness, everything changes. But the change is programmed: obsolescence is planned. Production anticipates reproduction; production produces change in such a way as to superimpose the impression of speed onto monotony. Some people cry out against the acceleration of time, others cry out against stagnation. They are both right.<sup>12</sup>

The accounts of boredom that will be provided in this thesis necessarily engage themselves in certain understandings of the everyday. As Blanchot rightly affirms, in his review of and reflections on Lefebvre’s criticism of the everyday, a claim to which we will be returning, “boredom is the everyday become manifest: as a consequence of having lost its essential – constitutive trait of being unperceived.”<sup>13</sup> This thesis, instead of getting involved in discussions of the everyday provided by cultural and critical studies texts, returns to a phenomenological analysis of the everyday that is occupied by

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<sup>11</sup> MO, 332.

<sup>12</sup> Henri Lefebvre “The Everyday and Everydayness”, trans by. Christine Levich, Alice Kaplan, Kristin Ross, *Yale French Studies* 73 (1987): 10, 7-11.

<sup>13</sup> Maurice Blanchot, “Everyday Speech”, trans.by. Susan Hanson, *Yale French Studies* 73 (1987): 16, 12-20.

the anonymous subject and the significance of the experience of the impersonal as “the daily always sends us back to that inapparent and nonetheless unhidden part of existence.”<sup>14</sup>

Another thinker who shares a similar line of thought with Kracauer on the issue of boredom and the everyday is Walter Benjamin. Patrice Petro in his article “After Shock/ Between Boredom and History” pursues a suggestive series of comparisons between these two thinkers in terms of their accounts of boredom. He argues that, “Benjamin tends to theorize boredom in relation to emptiness and *ennui*, Kracauer emphasizes the distracted fullness of a leisure time become empty”.<sup>15</sup> Thus his article traces this difference in their thinking by pointing towards issues of the spatial in their work: “in Benjamin, the empty streets of Atget’s Paris; in Kracauer, the crowded stadiums and picture palaces of 1920’s Berlin.” For Benjamin, characteristics of space and of spatiality were significant parts of the experience of boredom be it a literary space or photographic space – as in the case of Atget’s photographs - or a city space, even while he makes no systematic distinction between space as to be experienced and to be thought. Space itself as generative of boredom or as the medium for boredom to take over leads us to his understanding of modernity which offers, according to Benjamin, a replacement of *Erfahrung* - the capacity to assimilate relations between things, recollect and communicate with others - with *Erlebnis* – the sense of life as a series of disconnected impressions with no common associations.<sup>16</sup> Benjamin writes that - for the one that, this replacement have already occurred, became a prisoner of boredom – he

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<sup>14</sup> Blanchot, 16.

<sup>15</sup> Patrice Petro, “After Shock/ Between Boredom and History” in *Fugitive Images: From Photography to Video*, ed. Patrice Petro (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1995), 274.

<sup>16</sup> This understanding of modernity in Benjamin’s criticism is argued at length in an article by Joe Moran, “Benjamin and Boredom”, *Critical Quarterly* 45 (1-2) (July 2003): 169, 168 – 181.

“feels as though he is dropped from the calendar. The big-city dweller knows this feeling on Sundays.”<sup>17</sup>

A similar ‘Sunday feeling’<sup>18</sup> will recur in Heidegger’s account of profound boredom in the third chapter of this thesis. A whole section of the most established part of Benjamin’s unfinished *Arcades Project*, the “Convolutes”, brings together a series of sources to create a suggestive text on boredom. ‘Convolutes’ means something turned back over on itself, folded, as in architectural decoration or, more figuratively, in thought. Benjamin is perhaps aiming towards a certain unfolding and clarification by means, however, of an implication of reading in the series of the parts of the text – quotations, sources, remarks. In this subsection of the work entitled “Boredom, Eternal Return”, he alludes to a difference between *ennui* and boredom although he tends to use these terms interchangeably. *Ennui* is understood to be more significant in its relations to culture, class and gender, whereas boredom seems to be more mundane, in that it is temporary and less distinctive. The distinction, though, is never affirmed and Benjamin goes on to argue for different types of boredom in different contexts. The boredom of the gambler differs from the *ennui* of the dandy or the *flâneur* or people from different classes of the society. In their different articulations, boredom sometimes appear as “the dream bird that hatches the egg of experience”<sup>19</sup> and sometimes as “the external surface of unconscious events”.<sup>20</sup>

Benjamin, it can be argued, maintains that boredom can reveal certain aspects of everyday life that would otherwise be unnoticeable for us. In that sense Blanchot and Benjamin arguably share the thought that a certain kind of critical awareness potentially

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<sup>17</sup> Walter Benjamin, “On Some Motifs in Baudelaire” in *Illuminations*, ed. by Hannah Arendt, trans. Harry Zohn (London: Fontana, 1973), 186-7. Hereafter, I.

<sup>18</sup> Similar idioms are used in English to mark the beginning and end of periods of work and leisure such as “Monday morning feeling” or “Friday night feeling”.

<sup>19</sup> “The Storyteller” in I, 89.

<sup>20</sup> Walter Benjamin, *The Arcades Project*, trans. Howard Eiland, Kevin McLaughlin (1999; Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2003), 106. Hereafter, AP.

always accompanies the experience of boredom, an awareness that can make us see extraordinary things in the everyday or just ordinary things differently:

We are bored when we don't know what we are waiting for. That we do know, or think we know, is nearly always the expression of our superficiality or inattention. Boredom is the threshold to great deeds. – Now, it would be important to know what is the dialectical antithesis to boredom?<sup>21</sup>

In this thesis we shall not be producing a direct answer to Benjamin's rhetorical question. The idea that there is a logical or existential opposite to boredom that can be deployed in thought and feeling to transform boredom into great deeds is something that even Benjamin's own text goes on as if to question. The next passage provides a short account of Emile Tardieu's book *L'Ennui* published in 1903. Benjamin introduces this as a "quite humorous book..., whose main thesis is life is purposeless and groundless and that all striving after happiness and equanimity is futile".<sup>22</sup> This remark about equanimity suggests perhaps that Benjamin himself would not expect an answer to his rhetorical question that would satisfy the promise of dialectics to arrive at an answer concerning the transformative opposite of boredom. He goes on to note that Tardieu's book "... names the weather as one among many factors supposedly causing boredom."<sup>23</sup>

It would be too much at this point to claim that this remark about the weather points towards an understanding of being-in-the-world such as we will find it proposed and developed in Heidegger's thinking. However, the structure of Benjamin's text and the reading it invites opens each remark about boredom to the next avoiding a single authorial voice that would narrate an exemplary narrative of the transformation of boredom into its revolutionary opposite. The passage from boredom via reading to

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<sup>21</sup> AP, 105.

<sup>22</sup> AP, 105.

<sup>23</sup> AP, 105.

questions of activity, working with if not overcoming boredom, are suggested by Benjamin's text, perhaps in a mode of distraction. In the following passage of "Boredom, Eternal Return", Benjamin appears to leave his sources to offer an extravagant series of propositions about boredom:

Boredom is a warm gray fabric lined on the inside with the most lustrous and colourful of silks. In this fabric we wrap ourselves when we dream. We are at home in the arabesques of its lining. But the sleeper looks bored and gray within his sheath. And when he later wakes and wants to tell of what he dreamed, he communicates by and large only this boredom. For who would be able at one stroke to turn the lining of time to the outside? <sup>24</sup>

The move as marked and transformed from the inside to the outside from a dream space to a textual space by way of narration suggests a challenge of relating boredom, the subject, narrative, temporality and spatiality, as they are to be read, experienced and thought, that this thesis addresses itself to. We shall pass via a reconsideration of the philosophical traditions on which Benjamin's thought depends – that opposes idealism and materialism for example – towards an account that questions such oppositional ways of comprehending experience and thought to suggest an understanding of boredom that will answer to this challenge. This thesis will return to the roles of narrative and narration in respect of a consideration of space and spatiality, the threshold that Benjamin suggests is in play in relation to a dream of boredom, in a number of ways, passing from experience to thought and back again. The thesis will propose an account, for example, of narrative and narration in the fourth chapter via Blanchot's notion of the neuter that will allow for an understanding of the passages that Benjamin's text involves us in.

Benjamin's dreamlike description of being wrapped up in boredom and the feeling of being at home "in the arabesques of its lining" is suggestive of many issues

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<sup>24</sup> AP, 106.

that will be explored in this thesis from Heidegger's homesickness to art as exoticism in Levinas as well as certain issues that will not be explored. Perhaps one of the weaknesses of this thesis is an omission of an extended consideration of boredom in eastern culture and thought. As was suggested in terms of *sıkılmak* in Turkish, different languages and cultures may reveal different aspects of boredom that tend to be unthought if not unknown in others and that remain as yet unexplored as possible passages in understanding the significance of the experience of boredom. This thesis takes the position that such an experience as may be referred to as 'boredom' is not simply constructed by culture or language, and thus that these different aspects of boredom are arguably inherent in the mood itself. In the emergence, in Benjamin's text of a recurrent series of aspects of boredom, some of these differences are articulated as oriental and exotic, as in the articulation of the involvement in boredom as involving us in 'the arabesques of its lining'. In so far as issues of the spatiality of the spaces of boredom are articulated at the same time here, it may be suggested that boredom can be considered as that which encourages a passage to the internal limit of a culture as it opens towards another proximate one – in this case, western European to the Arab. The articulation of this risks a repetition of prejudices accompanying other cultures, and it might be argued that the Turkish is itself 'squeezed' out here. Perhaps it is a privilege of this thesis to be caught up in opening up questions of passages from one space of boredom to another that traverse dogmatic accounts of the oriental and the occidental.

Benjamin's title imply a concern for a critical relationship between the experience of boredom and Nietzsche's eternal return which, according to Benjamin, may be understood to suggest a "magic circle". Benjamin's investment and belief in a revolutionary resolution of problems of 'contemporary society' is arguably threatened by this 'magic circle' which suggests that nothing changes but the change itself in an eternal

return of the same. Benjamin reserves other readings of Nietzsche's eternal return in relation to boredom. One such reading would propose that it could be through boredom that the tediousness of life and eternal sameness in a certain society can be rendered as that which should be changed. The second chapter will provide a reading of Nietzsche in particular following an account of Pascal on boredom, and will suggest that there is no general decision to be made in respect of the eternal return particularly concerning boredom, as Benjamin suggests. Boredom involves both the same and the different, a sense of space which, as Levinas suggests, is a zone of the indifferent, but nevertheless this possible indifference to space – in the subjective preoccupations with the temporal in boredom – are yet implicated in the chance of different passages across it. In the conclusion, this thesis will suggest ways of understanding this relation to space and passage that boredom provokes and how we may understand the enactment of this in a selection of artistic texts of boredom.



## CHAPTER 2: PHILOSOPHIES OF BOREDOM

For thinkers and all sensitive spirits, boredom is that disagreeable ‘windless calm’ of the soul that precedes a happy voyage and cheerful winds. They have to bear it and must wait for its effects on them. Precisely this is what lesser natures cannot achieve by any means. To ward off boredom at any cost is vulgar, no less than work without pleasure.

Nietzsche: *The Gay Science*<sup>1</sup>

This chapter deals with ‘philosophies of boredom’ and will provide a historical account of the main concepts developed around discussions of boredom. The aim of this chapter is to demonstrate that despite the general neglect of boredom as a concept in philosophical and cultural discussions, we can operate direct and indirect references to boredom in relation to some relatively popular discussions - or discussions that are considered to be of greater importance - that have been taking place in order to understand what is contemporary.

The main emphasis will be on the Greeks- as every historical overview requires direct or indirect references to the emergence of the concept or problematic that is at issue in Western philosophy-, Blaise Pascal – for a classical account of boredom- and Søren Kierkegaard –whose influence in 20<sup>th</sup> century existentialist and phenomenological research is unquestionable-. It should be noted here that other philosophers or thinkers

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<sup>1</sup> Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Gay Science*, trans. Walter Kaufmann (1887; NY: Vintage Books, 1974), 108, §42.

could well be investigated both in terms of their investments in the subject of boredom and their influence, like Friedrich Nietzsche or Arthur Schopenhauer but Pascal and Kierkegaard may be read as complementing each other in their ambivalent relationship to the concept of boredom as well as having influenced Martin Heidegger whose contribution to the subject of boredom will be dealt in the third chapter so as to provide a ground for the main arguments of this dissertation.

The ambivalent character of boredom - manifesting itself as both negative and positive, as generative of both activity and passivity, as temporal and/or spatial- makes it worthy of being the focus of philosophy. The idea guiding this chapter is the tracing of the concepts the arguments that accompany boredom and demonstrate that their emergence in contemporary critical thought, literary theory and art is not accidental. The following chapters will provide further insights into how these concepts function in these areas.

## **2.1 The Greeks and Plato**

It seems difficult to think about boredom without bearing two things in mind: its temporal aspect and its negative connotations. One of the aims of this chapter is to address these difficulties by introducing different accounts given by different philosophers and writers. This will involve dealing not only with 'boredom' but also 'spleen', 'ennui', and even 'melancholy', although the last mentioned may be understood to differ from the first three radically. These may be thought of as types of boredom which are often confused with each other as they can never be easily divorced from each other. Given the large scope of this thesis, they will all be explored in ways that differ and do not.

The research into and the analysis of boredom is largely concerned with its manifestations in literature. Any historical approach which goes back to the Greeks would necessarily refer to this literature. Antiquity as the subject of European literature since the Renaissance is full of difficulties as this literature tends to describe it through its own concepts throughout ages. What we are doing here might therefore face the same difficulty as each time we say boredom we will not be certain what that actually corresponds to in Antiquity. Each time we say boredom we will not be able to strip its contemporary connotations from it. But the differences we might come up with between the Greek understanding of such a concept and what we make of both this understanding and this concepts' contemporary understanding are very important for the aims of this thesis.

Daniel O'Connor in his article "The Phenomena of Boredom"<sup>2</sup> claims that the Stoic and Cynic philosophers of antiquity, by recommending *apathy* and *ataraxy*, brought forward the importance of feelings. It has been claimed that by introducing opposing terms in relation to feeling they tried to eliminate feeling, O'Connor says that this would have been an impossible task and was, more importantly, not the aim.

The recommendation is rather to choose and maintain a certain range of feeling: the cultivation of tranquility, equanimity and fearlessness, the removal of perturbation, servility, envy, jealousy, hatred, etc... The Stoic and Cynic philosophers do admit the tenor of our emotional lives is not something that merely happens. They imply that it is, to some extent, something we choose.<sup>3</sup>

This kind of understanding of feelings does not eliminate "feeling"; rather it suggests that no feeling can simply be positive or negative in itself. No feeling can have predicted effects on humans and their conditions on its own. To be able to understand what boredom could have possibly meant in Antiquity, we should first stop seeking a definite

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<sup>2</sup> Daniel O'Connor, "The Phenomena of Boredom", *Journal of Existentialism* 7 (Spring 1967): 381-399.

<sup>3</sup> O'Connor, 383.

term which describes this phenomenon as it could be inherent in any of those feelings that the Stoics and Cynics adopted in their daily lives. It would therefore appear to be useful to trace boredom in relation to other feelings, including in particular those it could have been grouped with. It may become good or bad only in relation to these other feelings that are cultivated. From a distance this looks like a possible task but what we find in Antiquity is that rather than having simply been put in relation to a range of feelings, boredom grouped in with other feelings, the terms that might correspond to boredom are multiplicities and sometimes are evaluated contradictorily, making a decision about them difficult.

Reinhard Kuhn in his book *The Demon of Noontide: Ennui in Western Literature*, argues that, “A reasonably reliable index of the role that a concept plays within a culture is provided by the number of words available to express it.”<sup>4</sup> There was not a single word to express boredom; rather there is a variety of words which from time to time were translated as boredom depending on the context. These words however have multiple meanings and it is through these other meanings that we get a sense of how boredom occurs in ancient Greek culture. Reinhard Kuhn gives examples of these words and their other meanings which will be useful so as to allow us to relate the concept of boredom to other *contemporary* issues and concepts. Most of the time, the Greek term *άλυς* is translated as boredom but it is not until the fourth century that a single expression occurs in philosophical texts. What can be found instead are pairs of expressions. There is an expression; *πλησμονη* which means “surfeit” and it is generally found paired with its antonym, the state of emptiness. Another term, *άπληστία*, which signifies a state of insatiate desire, is also translated as boredom in places. “The need to produce such a state of awakened longing presupposes its opposite, the state in which desire has never

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<sup>4</sup> Reinhard Kuhn, *Demon of Noontide: Ennui in Western Literature* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1976), 16. Hereafter DN.

existed, or no longer exists.”<sup>5</sup> The occurrence of these terms in texts with multiple meanings suggest an undecidability not just around the issue of boredom but also around other issues such as desire, emptiness, excess. The proliferation of meanings does not obscure the issue; rather it enriches them, pushes them to their limits. To leave them ambiguous in a way is to encourage the undecidability which might be understood as a productive way of exploring a concept in relation to a culture as it opens many possible spaces for this concept to perform.

All these expressions and their usages suggest that it is not simply our contemporary attitude that brings emptiness together with excess, desire - and its impossibilities - into the conceptual framework of boredom, but that these relations need to be explored in order to understand how boredom functions in contemporary social and cultural spheres. The Greeks used these expressions in relation to physical functions rather than psychic ones, and it is no surprise that the existential register is missing here as that would have undermined the role of Gods in that culture. The attitude of the ancient Greeks did not, therefore, simply separate the physical from the psychic and to suppose otherwise is to impose a categorical difference which is absent in Antiquity. Desire as it is often understood currently, as something purely psychic, would have been foreign to the ancient Greeks. It can be argued that the interplay between the Gods and man is important at least in so far as it enables an understanding of how these expressions become available and what has changed or been replaced in this structure since the Greeks.

Reinhard Kuhn argues that it is through the absence of all desires that we are led to the problem of monotony, “for monotony is one of the principle conditions that can bring about an absence of all desires.”<sup>6</sup> Monotony is a notion Plato was concerned with

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<sup>5</sup> DN, 16.

<sup>6</sup> DN, 16.

and this is the closest we get in Plato's text to the topic of boredom. Socrates runs the danger of boring his listeners by being monotonous. After all he always says the same thing about the same thing in order not to fall into contradiction. The monotony Socrates practices also serves for the absolute harmony and perfect sameness privileged in and by the Platonic tradition. This monotony is the challenge man has to deal with as the philosopher all the time, a challenge which raises the stakes of an account of boredom to an identity with philosophy itself. Reinhard Kuhn indicates three texts by Plato in which this topic of boredom via monotony is mentioned: *Gorgias*, -where Sophists complain about Socrates' always saying the same thing and running the risk of boring his listeners; Book II of *The Laws*, in which there is a description of a festive, the role of the chorus and the necessity of them always singing the same things; and the *Timaeus* where this sameness is made equivalent to absolute harmony and exemplified with heavenly bodies and contrasted with man's inconstant and disorderly thoughts.<sup>7</sup> We might go on and give more examples from Antiquity but the already given examples suffice to show the extent to which boredom reaches in ancient Greek culture in communication with other issues and concepts.

We can imagine at least two possible ways of approaching these rather complicated sets of relations for the purposes of the following chapters. One would involve Heidegger's obvious investment in Greek culture and perhaps his criticism of Plato who, according to Heidegger, is the first of the 'metaphysicians' to give priority to *logos* over *ousia* by insistently misinterpreting certain Greek terms and concepts. Heidegger condemns Plato as the perverter of Greek understanding. This criticism is in conformity with Heidegger's project on the relation between thinking and being which according to him should be rescued from Platonic distortion.

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<sup>7</sup> DN, 17.

## 2.2 Acedia as Mediaeval Boredom

We see in the mediaeval times that *acedia* – one of the seven deadly sins - appears as what might be understood as a certain form of boredom. Lars Svendon points out in his book *A Philosophy of Boredom*, however, that *acedia* was for the few whereas, as he argues it, boredom afflicts the masses. The few mentioned here were in large part the monks whose practices became a major interest of Christian thinkers and artists of the time. One useful description of *acedia* can be found in Patricia Meyer Spacks book/article which claims that 'a combination of what we call boredom and what we call sloth, [*acedia*] was understood as a dangerous form of spiritual alienation, a misery of the soul that could, like other sins, be avoided by effort or by grace'<sup>8</sup>

*Acedia*, derived from the Greek *ἀκηδία*, corresponds to lack of interest, caring about with a negative prefix.<sup>9</sup> Although the term did not have much significance in Greek thought, it came to dominate Christian thought, the “demon of noontide” of the title of Reinhard Kuhn's study. *Acedia*, understood as being demonic by Evagrius Ponticus (c. 345-399) in the 4<sup>th</sup> century, occupies an extended space in his book *Of the Eight Capital Sins*. According to Reinhard Kuhn, he was very particular about it in the sense that he argued that it mostly attacked monks between the hours of ten and two. One interesting detail about Evagrius Ponticus is that his interest in this demonic mood emerged when he left Constantinople where he was the archdeacon to go to the deserts. Apparently the desert life - he believed - made man more prone to this midday demon. We can argue that the temporal and spatial unity in relation to a mood affecting humans was appreciated by early theorists of boredom as it was important for Evagrius where

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<sup>8</sup> LSM, 11.

<sup>9</sup> PB, 50.

that midday was passed in order for it to be recognized as that which allowed the demon to come and play. If we go back to our initial argument about the ambiguity of the state of boredom as vice or virtue, Evagrius does not surprise us in that he understands that like every vice, acedia comes with a promise of a virtue as its counterpart. Acedia withstood patiently and wisely may lead one to joy. Acedia as the possible generator of joy in this sense does not stand on its own as an absolute vice. The person who is full of joy is believed to stay away from sin. Acedia as the cause of crisis actually brings about an awareness of a certain human condition. This human condition finds its relief in a state of joy which is nourished by love of God and his Creation. In Evagrius' writing we come across another term, namely *apatheia*, which is also treated as a form of what we now understand as boredom, this time partially divorced from acedia's demonic character, its negative connotations, and described more positively.

This is a cultivated boredom, one that arises as a conditioned response to carefully specified objects and only as those objects are framed in a particular fashion... The word boredom stretches to the breaking point here, because none of the agitation, restlessness, or anxiety that we typically associate with that psychic state is properly descriptive of *apatheia*. But the vagueness of the term can be mitigated by appropriate qualifiers; this is 'good' boredom, a 'practiced' disinterest in ephemeral goods, not a vice, but rather, a mark of spiritual progress.<sup>10</sup>

This description of boredom from the middle ages is significant as the emphasis on its being good in communicating a certain disinterest relates to some contemporary discussions of the term 'disinterest' which comes to be understood as an economy of interest.<sup>11</sup> It should be mentioned here that both acedia and its various forms including *apatheia* were treated as moral concepts, not psychological states as the hidden desire

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<sup>10</sup> Michael Raposa, *Boredom and the Religious Imagination* (Charlottesville, London: University Press of Virginia, 1999), 22. Hereafter, BRI.

<sup>11</sup> For further discussions of "disinterestedness" throughout the history of philosophy, see Sean Gaston, "Derrida and the Ruins of Disinterest", *Angelaki* 7 (Dec. 2002): 105-118



for subjectivity inherent in these could only be manipulated and controlled by making them as functions of morality, sins, vices which come with promises of a constructed cure namely a virtue attached to it, provided they are overcome. Apatheia as a 'mark of spiritual progress' has perhaps diverted from religious institutions to educational institutions in history. Jacques Derrida once claimed that "la philosophie" has traditionally been designated as disinterested research that is as the disinterested exercise of reason, under the sole authority of the principle of reason.<sup>12</sup> This point is in a sense important as in the following chapters we will see that through what he calls "profound boredom" Martin Heidegger will be suggesting a new way of philosophizing.

Another Mediaeval thinker Johannes Cassian (c. 360-432) adopted a relatively less demonic form of acedia, - influenced by possible positive forms of acedia like apatheia introduced by Evagrius- in his writings which can easily be confused as a form of sadness - *tristitia*. His description is, although reminiscent, quite different from that of Evagrius';

Our sixth combat is against what the Greeks called "acedia"; it is torpor, a sluggishness of the heart; consequently it is closely akin to dejection [*tristitia*]; it attacks especially those monks who wander from place to place and those who live in isolation. It is the most dangerous and the most persistent enemy of the solitaries.<sup>13</sup>

*Acedia* is certainly less ambiguous than any of the terms in Antiquity though it still lacking the extensive range of meanings of boredom in the modern era. It is important to mention these medieval accounts of boredom here, however, in order to note the relevance to a thought of the human soul and the context in which boredom emerges as a

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<sup>12</sup> Taken from Gaston's article, originally from "The Principle of Reason: The University in the Eyes of the Pupils", *Diacritics* 13 (1983): 3-20.

<sup>13</sup> This quotation - from Cassian's first book *The Foundations of Cenobitic Life and the Eight Capital Sins*- quoted from DN, 50.

sin so as to provide a passage to Pascal on the subject as well as to evidence the undecidability boredom gives rise to across cultures and in differing times. Although we cannot argue for a kind of pure continuity from acedia to ennui, to boredom, given at least the ruptures already noted, there are conceptual affinities across terms which are quite telling as well. Melancholy in Renaissance literature and onwards is for example discussed in relation to concepts and beliefs that had gathered around the term acedia. The moral aspects of acedia will be picked up and questioned by Pascal in the 17<sup>th</sup> century. It can also be argued that Pascal's ideas ended up portraying boredom as de-Christianized acedia.

### 2.3 Pascal

What has attracted philosophers in boredom has not been its most commonly known and experienced forms which tend to come with promises of terminations and cures but the boredom that haunts and lingers. The significance of this profound boredom lies in its being persistent and in harmony with other moods - which according to Pascal sums up Man's condition; "Inconstancy, boredom, anxiety."<sup>14</sup> -that threaten the human soul. It is a profound boredom we find in Pascal's reflections on the nature of distractions in his famous book *Pensées*, which consists of first notes for a work which he left incomplete.

Pascal distances boredom from the mediaeval concept of *acedia* which, as has been shown, is among the seven deadly sins in the Christian tradition as well as in effect from the romantic notion of 'spleen' and holds a position comparable to that of the mystics. He describes ennui as a natural condition of man. Man is his absolute emptiness, he writes; "For, after all, what is man in nature? A nothing compared to the nothing, a

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<sup>14</sup> Blaise Pascal, *Pensées*, trans. A. J. Krailsheimer (1636; Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1966), 36. Hereafter, P.

middle point between all and nothing, infinitely remote from understanding of the extremes.”<sup>15</sup> The belief in God makes man forget about this nothingness of his: boredom is that which creates a self awareness of this nothingness, therefore a belief in God and boredom are incommensurable. Boredom on the one hand puts at risk the relief provided by belief, on the other it provides a self-perception which might end up strengthening that same belief. It is certainly preferable for Pascal to having become lost in diversions or in suffering as these two presuppose something to relate to one’s own existence to whereas this existence needs to be grasped through an appreciation of this fundamental nothingness which can only be tolerated or related back to life by believing in a creator, God. Nothingness, though, is far too threatening for Man to come to terms with and therefore we give ourselves up to diversions. This is precisely why man’s efforts inevitably end up being a failure as he is not capable of understanding this emptiness but only feels it without realizing it. Michael Raposa explains the human condition that Pascal describes:

If we project ourselves forward, we confront the inevitable darkness of death. If we stand in the present moment and look outward, we survey the empty infinity of space. If we shift our gaze inward we perceive the nullity of a self reduced to infinitesimal smallness by the vast All.<sup>16</sup>

Boredom thus plays a crucial role in Pascal’s book *Pensées* as it was given a special emphasis among all of man’s misfortunes.

It can be argued that Pascal gives a historical approach to ennui since he traces its roots to the memory of the Garden of Eden. This is the kingdom that was lost forever and the remembrance of which became intolerable and consistently led man to ennui. In a sense Man never finds his existence in this world tolerable which brings him face to face with its nullity, emptiness and reflects his restlessness through his passions, misguided

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<sup>15</sup> P, 90.

<sup>16</sup> BRI. 44.

activity, diversions. Man's misfortune lies in his attempts to overcome ennui by constantly undermining memory through neutralizing it and trying to find the cure for it in misguided activity, whereas the cure could be found neither in the external world nor in internal contemplation. Pascal finds this futile and condemns most of human activities on the basis that they are all diversions. "Without examining all of the individual occupations, it is sufficient to classify them all under the heading of diversions."<sup>17</sup> They are diversions insofar as they only serve the purpose of forgetting which will never happen. The only good thing about imagining a possible escape from ennui is that it makes man believe in the possibility of forgetting himself. "Being unable to cure death, wretchedness and ignorance, men have decided, in order to be happy, not to think about such things."<sup>18</sup> The possibility of forgetting here can be thought as the same as not thinking. Not thinking that he is mortal, not thinking the happiness he would have in the Garden of Eden, not thinking that he is wretched. In order to avoid thinking all these, men need diversions.

The presupposition concerning the contrast between boredom and happiness is clear. "Man wants to be happy"<sup>19</sup> The thought of his finitude, emptiness, wretchedness, all the things that bore man make man unhappy. To be happy, man has to forget about these things. As forgetting is not possible then, he should stop thinking, and to be able to do that he needs diversions. The equation might seem simple. But the path that leads us from boredom to diversions and then to happiness is quite complicated.

Pascal says: "What else does this craving, and helplessness, proclaim but that there was once in man a true happiness, of which all that now remains is the empty print and trace?"<sup>20</sup> Thinking boredom in relation to trace of happiness -where might we draw

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<sup>17</sup> P, 204.

<sup>18</sup> P, 66.

<sup>19</sup> P, 66.

<sup>20</sup> P, 75.

the border between the state of boredom and state of happiness? - Pascal obscures this border if not destroys it by making happiness the goal of diversion from boredom. Michael Raposa writes: "With boredom, my attempt to mask or elude it through diversion is evidence of its presence."<sup>21</sup> To affirm boredom, diversion is required. From the presence of boredom to the trace of happiness, diversion is made to function as that which would secure the status of happiness as present or absent. Boredom opens up a space for itself and for desire or, as Kuhn would say, desire of desire through which imagination revives and functions with a promise of happiness. The desire to be happy can be found in the state of boredom, and then this desire is reflected and deferred to diversions and then back to happiness. In this circulation of arguments, man necessarily desires his boredom so as to get to desire his happiness. This can be understood as an undecidability that is crucial in Pascal's thinking. The unfulfilled desire keeps changing its object in the form of diversion, but what is not noted is that it actually changes its projected object as well, in an undecidable fashion, from boredom to happiness and then again back to boredom.

The examples of human activity that he chooses to demonstrate his thesis are particularly interesting: hunting and 'gaming' or gambling. Reinhard Kuhn claims that; "Pascal indicates that they are more than just examples insofar as they define an existence that is preyed upon by desire and by the desire of desire."<sup>22</sup> There is more in these examples as they anticipate possible identifications with the loser and/or the one that escapes. Boredom is opened up in Pascal as that which creates a space for desire and for identification. What is more crucial is that boredom keeps bringing about double symbols of man as angel and beast, as loser and the one who wins, as hunter and the one that escapes only always as possibilities and always in ambivalence.

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<sup>21</sup> BRI, 45.

<sup>22</sup> DN, 110.

It is in this fashion that all life is spent: Man struggles against a number of obstacles in order to find repose; but if he succeeds in overcoming them, repose becomes impossible; for either man thinks of the miseries with which he is afflicted or of those that threaten him. And even if he were to find himself sheltered in all directions, ennui, on its own, would not take long to arise out of the depths of the heart where it has its natural roots in order to fill the spirit with venom.<sup>23</sup>

This is how he eliminates the external world and its promises as the cure for boredom, making it into the space where boredom emerges as the source of desire.

The significance of Pascal's reflections on boredom lies in their undecidable moments. From the start it is proposed as a misfortune, as that which leads to diversion and distraction that are to a certain extent condemned, but boredom is also perhaps implicitly presented as a state which makes man realize his own emptiness. Boredom pulls one from limbo by first making it recognizable. One can argue that Pascal is being equivocal in terms of boredom and diversion, but according to Maurice Blanchot that is where his ideas get their strength from.

Pascal has been one of the most intriguing figures of philosophy. Maurice Blanchot comments on this in his *The Infinite Conversation* under the heading of "Tragic Thought" and says; "...he was impious in the eighteenth century, pathetic and prophetic in the nineteenth, and in the twentieth century, existential."<sup>24</sup> But what most fascinated Blanchot in Pascal is his effective *justifying* of diversion - a consequence of one strain of the undecidable condemnation of boredom - a justification which, for Blanchot, rehabilitates one of the literary's neglected functions. Blanchot does not make straightforward points about Pascal on boredom but explores the ambiguity around diversion. This is important for the aims of this thesis as it will provide the link between

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<sup>23</sup> P, 205.

<sup>24</sup> Maurice Blanchot, *The Infinite Conversation*, Trans. Susan Hanson (1969; Minneapolis, London: University of Minnesota Press, 1993), 97. Hereafter, IC.

Kierkegaard and Heidegger and beyond to other contemporary approaches to problematics of boredom.

Blanchot claims that diversion is not condemned in Pascal as he was well aware of the fact that the thoughts and the judgments of diversion come out of the vicissitudes of a diverted life. Blanchot says:

There can therefore be no knowledge of diversion: being as it were the very essence of diversion, this sort of infinite regression, this bad infinity ruins the knowledge that would apply to it and makes it so that knowledge, in so applying itself, also alters and ruins it. If one wishes to be faithful to the truth of diversion one must not know it, nor take it to be either true or false for fear of making disappear the essential, which is ambiguity: that indissociable mixture of true and false that nonetheless marvelously colors life with ever-changing nuance.<sup>25</sup>

The essential ambiguity is that which creates undecidability which secures the concepts it is related to from absolute judgments and truisms. That is why Pascal becomes a key figure for contemporary philosophers as his texts provide the possibility of overcoming the reign of certain attitudes inherent in the history of philosophy concerning a final judgment about boredom, revealing the obscured and implicit stakes of a thought of boredom in the concepts with which boredom communicates.

Pascallian diversion sometimes takes different forms in the twentieth century and sometimes they can simply be adopted to a discussion about twenty first century diversions. The fact that *Pensées* was written in the seventeenth century and its diagnoses on culture are still valid to a certain extent, makes one think that perhaps boredom is not simply the invention of the modern era.

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<sup>25</sup> IC, 97.

## 2.4 Kierkegaard

Kierkegaard provides us with a way of understanding the existential structure of boredom. Despite his concern to present it as the daemonic side of pantheism, he was nevertheless interested in its capacity to transform itself from that which renders the world destitute of intelligibility, to an intelligibility of one's own relation to a worldly content. His attitude towards boredom also had an ambivalent character. He says in *Either/Or*, that:

This principle [of...] possesses the quality of being in the highest degree repellent, an essential requirement in the case of negative principles, which are in the last analysis [i.e., Hegel's] the principles of all motion. It is not merely repellent, but infinitely forbidding; and whoever has this principle back of him cannot but receive an infinite impetus forward, to help him make new discoveries...Strange that boredom in itself, so staid and stolid, should have such power to set in motion. The influence it exerts altogether magical, except that it is not the influence of attraction, but of repulsion.<sup>26</sup>

In these lines we read a philosopher's appreciation of the powers of a mood that is ambivalent, attractive as repellent. Patrick Bigelow claims that Kierkegaard's questioning of boredom involves an active enunciation which is also its denunciation.<sup>27</sup>

We may read this activeness as that ambivalent attractiveness.

Under the influence of Pascal, Kierkegaard goes on to argue that boredom has always been seen as something to be overcome through diversion. However, he is more interested in the forms of diversion than boredom itself. He dares to stage himself as an exemplary figure of someone - sometimes disguised as an aesthete - who suffers from

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<sup>26</sup> Søren Kierkegaard, *Either/Or: A Fragment of Life*, ed. Victor Eremita, trans. Alastair Hannay (1843; Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1992), 281. Hereafter, EO.

<sup>27</sup> Patrick Bigelow, *The Ontology of Boredom: A philosophical Essay*, *Man and World* 16 (1983): 251- 266.



boredom. One can argue that his was a kind of introspection with similar ambivalent reactions as that of Pascal.

Since boredom advances and boredom is the root of all evil, no wonder, then, that the world goes backwards, that evil spreads. This can be traced back to the very beginning of the world. The gods were bored, and so they created man. Adam was bored because he was alone, and so Eve was created. Thus boredom entered the world, and increased in proportion to the increase in population. Adam was bored alone; then Adam and Eve were bored together; then Adam and Eve and Cain and Abel were bored *en famille*; then the population of the world increased, and the peoples were bored *en masse*. To divert themselves they conceived the idea of constructing a tower high enough to reach the heavens. This idea is itself as boring as the tower was high, and constitutes a terrible proof of how boredom gained the upper hand.<sup>28</sup>

This famous argument from Kierkegaard may have influenced many writers and thinkers, like Alberto Moravia who in his famous book *Boredom* quite fanatically says:

In the beginning was boredom, commonly called chaos. God, bored with boredom, created the earth, the sky, the waters, the animals, the plants, Adam and Eve; and the later, bored in their turn in paradise, ate the forbidden fruit. God became bored with them and drove them out of Eden; Cain, bored with Abel, killed him, Noah bored to tears, invented wine...<sup>29</sup>

Moravia also suggests that the rise of empires, religions, ideologies all have their roots in boredom. The similar threads between Moravia and Kierkegaard are not limited to their interest in boredom and creation story in relation to that. The major character of Moravia's book is also an aesthete and an artist who suffers from boredom. There are also other philosophical versions of the creation story: with Nietzsche suggesting that we might not have understood the famous story, we get another version from him in *The Anti-Christ*:

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<sup>28</sup> EO, 228.

<sup>29</sup> Alberto Moravia, *Boredom*, trans. Angus Davidson (1960; NY: New York Review Books, 1999), 8.

The old God, all 'spirit', all high-priest, all perfection, promenades in his garden: but he is bored. Against boredom gods themselves fight in vain. What does he do? He invents man--man is entertaining. . . . But behold, man too is bored. God's sympathy with the only kind of distress found in every Paradise knows no bounds: so he forthwith creates other animals. God's first blunder: man did not find the animals entertaining--he dominated them; he did not even want to be an 'animal' himself.—Consequently God created woman. And then indeed there was an end to boredom- but also to something else!<sup>30</sup>

There is a variety of texts in which the story of Adam and Eve's is retold in relation to boredom. Staying with Kierkegaard's seminal account, the ambiguity sustained and maintained in Pascal's text can also be found in Kierkegaard only this time for the sake of a justifiable passage from the actual to the spiritual world. The aesthetic life, which provides a space in between the ethical and the religious life, also defines an ambiguous state belonging neither to the actual world nor to the spiritual world. The aesthete, to whom Kierkegaard gives voice to in *Either/Or*, in which he develops his ideas about various moods like melancholia, anxiety, enthusiasm and boredom, demonstrates an intentional undecidability so as not to sacrifice the ethical for the religious. It is this undecidability that pulls the aesthete to boredom since the aesthetic space is the sphere of immanence where the transcendental bounds - both religious and ethical - need to be suspended. Despite his permanent preoccupation with aesthetics, it is not easy to communicate through his reflections on art on a merely aesthetic level as they always give way to the ethical, which gives way to the religious. What we find in Kierkegaard is an effective demonstration of Hegelian *Aufhebung* through which the aesthetic and the ethical are annulled and preserved in their synthesis in the religious stage. But it should be noted that the aesthetic and the ethical are also allowed to intertwine.

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<sup>30</sup> Friedrich Nietzsche, *Twilight of the Idols and The Anti-Christ*, trans. R.J.Hollingdale (1889, 1895; Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1968), 164, § 48.

Michael Raposa argues that the Tower of Babel can be understood as the symbolic precursor of all types of diversion, but of artistic creations in particular. Kierkegaard sets boredom in relation to aesthetic existence. The aesthete - A - in his book *Either/Or* provides a character for Kierkegaard to stage boredom as the root of all evil but also as the root of all inspiration for an artist in a repulsive kind of attractiveness - or an attractive kind of repulsiveness.

This range of affects of boredom returns us to its undecidability. It might be the cause of evil - which in itself has both religious and ethical connotations- or the cause of an artistic production which would necessarily contribute to bad art according to Kierkegaard, like the Tower of Babel. Kierkegaard's move is to define the diversion itself as boring and unimaginative; the implication of which is to understand boredom as a state of mind that could be transmitted to an audience, attributed to a creation with a certain reserve about the work of art that is after all rendered possible through boredom.

Another highly problematic point is the position of the audience of the work of art. Kierkegaard distinguishes human activities that are taken as a response to boredom from others. He also claims that boredom can conceal itself within its depths. So we might not always be sure whether the activity we pick up is diversionary or not. The enjoyment of an artwork would be devalued by Kierkegaard if it was an action taken in order to avoid boredom. But then we might be doing this without ever being aware of what we are doing. It seems as if he leaves no room for an authentic experience of the artwork rather he sees it as a generative of relief from boredom.

An artwork could be the embodiment of repulsive powers of boredom quite independently from its being boring or interesting or its meaning. To evaluate art for its own sake is being irresponsible in terms of one's own social debt and communal existence. This approach to art is devalued also for the self-deception it creates through a

substitution of fantasies for actual state of affairs, although Kierkegaard is in favor of an imagination which opens up infinite possibilities. The relationship between boredom and imagination is very complex as it keeps falling into the ambiguity around the status of art. Kierkegaard does not simply allow fantasies to function as a form of diversion that leads one to the interesting as this function is reserved for the imagination. The imagination is maintained as a transcendental category.

The prime motivation of the aesthete is the possibility of transforming the boring into the interesting. The aesthete to whom Kierkegaard gives voice in *Either/Or* criticizes most of the strategies of diversion on the basis that they are ineffective. Nevertheless there is a certain sympathy for the goal of diversion in so far as it is achieved which is the aforementioned transformation of the boring to the interesting.

Kierkegaard suggests "The Rotation Method" - the title of a section of *Either/Or* - as a strategy for overcoming boredom, a strategy which actually bears on the extreme point of diversion. Just as farmers frequently rotate their crops to increase the productivity of their land, many of those who seek diversions to overcome boredom vary their routine. As Kierkegaard put it, "One tires of living in the country, and moves to the city; one tires of one's native land, and travels abroad ... one tires of porcelain dishes and eats on silver; one tires of silver and turns to gold; one burns half of Rome to get an idea of the burning of Troy." One reading of this method would be that certain kind of aestheticians move from activity to activity, always seeking diversion from the inactivity that confronts them with a consciousness of their boredom, despair, and the threat of meaninglessness.

Another reading would suggest that the basis of this method is change which according to Kierkegaard always comes under the general categories of remembering and forgetting. Here it should be noted that Pascal was concerned with these two

categories only as impossibility. Remembering - forever lost heaven - is that which causes boredom and forgetting is the greatest diversion in Pascal. In Pascal's account both of these categories fail in the sense that they are merely anticipations of a future or a past. In Kierkegaard's account, however, it is essential to have these categories under control - that is precisely what Pascal renders impossible - in order to understand life.

The ability to forget is conditioned upon the method of remembering, but this again depends upon the modes of experiencing. Whoever plunges into his experiences with the momentum of hope, will remember so that he cannot forget. *Nil admirari* is therefore the real philosophy...the more poetically one remembers, the easier one forgets; for remembering poetically is really only another expression of forgetting.<sup>31</sup>

*Nil admirari* is to wonder at nothing. In Pascal's account memory was neutralized so as to avoid the functioning of remembering and forgetting. Kierkegaard, on the other hand, through poetic memory sees a possible transformation of experience which would enable a forgetting of painful aspects of the experience.

The undecidability in Kierkegaard's text is created through giving voice, for example to the aesthete in *Either/Or*. So the irreducibility of art is sustained in the movement of the text which makes the text problematic in terms of differentiating the aesthetic, art and the work of art. We might argue that Kierkegaard incorporates all these voices in order to get rid of himself - the bored subject. What the rotation method ends up providing is a self-deception which masks the unhappiness of one who is haunted by the emptiness of life more than death. Kierkegaard's exemplary person "is always absent, never present to himself."<sup>32</sup>

Pascal and Kierkegaard are not chosen arbitrarily among many other philosophers or writers who wrote on boredom. They share the metaphysical profundity,

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<sup>31</sup> EO, 234.

<sup>32</sup> EO, 220.

which nevertheless allow their theories to influence contemporary theory. The undecidability of the moments of boredom its ambiguities and ambivalences as well as more specifically the emphasis they put on diversion, the emptiness of being and the depsychologization of moods in favor of philosophy, are of key importance for this thesis on the relation between spatiality and boredom. Theodor W. Adorno claims that Pascal and Kierkegaard share the same intention of bringing forward the lonely believer's attitude in their dealings with moods and the line they draw between the outer and the inner.<sup>33</sup> Pascal's genuine believer and Kierkegaard's aesthete come very close to each other as they tend to explore their imagination and reason departing from an inner space to relating this to an outer space therefore creating a passage between the outer and the inner so as to secure a free subject.

Boredom, a mood like others, with relative significance for different cultures, ages, and institutions, religious, educational, artistic and philosophical, has been brought forward so as to demonstrate the ambivalence that inheres in the modern concept of boredom. This ambivalence has been tried to overcome through naming it differently which to a certain extent ends up underlining it.

Certainly not a virtue but not simply a vice either, not physiological but not merely psychological either, not purely social or cultural, boredom is that which responds to all these. The guiding question in this chapter has been how philosophy has sought to handle this concept that behaves ambiguously and generates ambivalence. Do all concepts call for a rethinking in that we might argue that these characteristics of boredom could well be inherent in other concepts? It has been argued throughout the chapter that the thinkers mentioned in terms of their dealings with boredom, could be read and understood as entertaining a certain undecidability around the concept of

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<sup>33</sup> Theodor. W. Adorno, *Kierkegaard: Construction of the Aesthetic*, trans Robert Hullot-Kentor (1962; Minneapolis, London: University of Minnesota Press, 1999).

boredom. This undecidability is not always obvious to be read as such, but in its sometimes repressed, sometimes remarkable form, it allows boredom to create a space to function as a concept which resists philosophical, social, religious, moral or cultural constructions of meanings around it. It is from and through such a space that boredom can be understood to mark our contemporary situation.

This portrait of boredom through the aforementioned thinkers, Pascal and Kierkegaard, is also important in terms of demonstrating how Heidegger - a central figure of this thesis - provided himself with the path which leads him to argue that, "...boredom is not something we ought to resist; rather, we must find a way to 'make room' for our boredom, to allow it to 'resonate.'"<sup>34</sup>

## **2.5 Boredom as a Creative Force**

This chapter in itself demonstrates a certain ambivalence around a particular philosopher, Nietzsche who in his dealings with boredom does not allow us to present him as a theorist of boredom but nevertheless provides us with possibilities of grafting from Pascal to Kierkegaard, from Ancient Greeks to Heidegger and arguing a relationship between boredom and creativity. Boredom is 'the disagreeable windless calm of the soul' for Nietzsche which precedes creative acts and also that which is endured only by creative spirits. Lesser souls tend to escape from boredom. His references to boredom especially those which are spread out this chapter seemingly arbitrarily all suggest that Nietzsche puts special emphasis on the relation between boredom and creativity and therefore art via his conceptualization of the will to power. Nietzsche understood art in terms of artist. An artist is who embodies occurrences of all beings as they are created and self-creating. In the series of lectures given in Freiburg

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<sup>34</sup> BRI, 55.

from 1936 to 1939 Heidegger reads Nietzschean will to power in relation to art: “But creation within art actually occurs in the productive activity of the artist. Thus, initiating the inquiry with the activity of the artist most likely guarantees access to creation in general and thereby to will to power.”<sup>35</sup> Boredom is introduced as that which precedes creation and art as that which is produced in the eternal recurrence to give an impetus in life for the subject which is named as will to power. The will to power also inheres the question of being as it is the basic character of all beings. The will to power is maintained as that which produces difference in the movement of the eternal recurrence of the Same. Heidegger mediating on Nietzschean eternal recurrence – as the thought of thoughts - and the will to power - as the ultimate fact -, claims that they should be thought together in relation to being as a whole. Boredom represents a rupture which affirms the ‘now’ in the eternal recurrence which is not projected to a future, rather to presence itself therefore to being. In this prolonged ‘now’ that boredom is experienced through which a need to create is developed. In terms of the relation between will to power and eternal recurrence Gilles Deleuze – in a way distancing himself from a Heideggerian reading of Nietzsche - claims that will to power is that which can be understood as the world of differences whereas eternal recurrence is the only Same which is said of this world “remember that the will to power was first presented as a feeling [*Stimmung*], a feeling of distance.”<sup>36</sup> This feeling which sometimes shows itself in the form of boredom to Nietzsche can be understood as that which makes creativity possible in distancing one from the world in a play between difference and the same. This sense of distancing provides for a thought of the space of boredom, a space of the

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<sup>35</sup> This is the ground of Heidegger’s reading of Nietzschean aesthetics in his Nietzsche volumes. Martin Heidegger, “The Will to Power as Art”, in *Nietzsche Vol 1*, trans. David Farrell Krell (1961; NY: Harper San Francisco, 1991), 139.

<sup>36</sup> Gilles Deleuze, *Difference and Repetition*, trans. Paul Patton (1968; NY: Columbia Univ Press, 1994), 243.



différance between difference and the same, between different ‘things’ and the distancing of ‘the same’. Nietzsche writes in *Human all too Human* that:

*Boredom and play.* -- Need compels us to perform work with the proceeds of which the need is assuaged; need continually recurs and we are thus accustomed to working. In the intervals, however, during which our needs have been assuaged and are as it were sleeping, we are overtaken by boredom. What is this? It is our habituation to work as such, which now asserts itself as a new, additional need; and the more strongly habituated we are to working, perhaps even the more we have suffered need, the stronger this new need will be. To elude boredom man either works harder than is required to satisfy his other needs or he invents play, that is to say work designed to assuage no other need than the need for work as such. He who has become tired of play, and who has no fresh needs that require him to work, is sometimes overtaken by a longing for a third condition which stands in the same relation to play as floating does to dancing and dancing to walking -- for a state of serene agitation; it is the artist's and philosopher's vision of happiness. [*ataraxia*]<sup>37</sup>

The play that man invents to elude boredom recalls Pascal's and Kierkegaard's diversions. However this play is also necessary for a longing for a ‘third condition’ to occur; ‘a state of serene agitation’, ‘windless calm of the soul’. The Stoic and Cynic doubling of *apathy* and *ataraxy* recur in Nietzschean understanding of boredom demonstrating another eternal recurrence. The hidden criticism of modern culture as that which introduces more need and demand to our lives requiring more work stands in Nietzsche's text also as a criticism of those souls who try to elude boredom. His understanding of modern culture is not limited to inhuman machinic structures that imprison souls, it also includes the condition which we tend to put in opposition with that, the humanly- which has become a product of modern culture-. He argues that solitary is necessary to grasp this situation. Instead of eluding boredom one needs to invite boredom to elude modern culture. Nietzsche says:

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<sup>37</sup>Friedrich Nietzsche, *Human, All Too Human: A Book For Free Spirits*, trans. R.J.Hollingdale (1878; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 194, §611. Hereafter HATH.

*The solitary speaks.*— One receives as a reward for much ennui, despondency, boredom—such as a solitude without friends, books, duties, passions must bring with it—those quarter-hours of profoundest contemplation within oneself and nature. He who completely entrenches himself against boredom also entrenches himself against himself: he will never get to drink the strongest refreshing draught from his own innermost fountain.<sup>38</sup>

These lines could be read as a confession that one needs a reward for welcoming boredom, a reward that one owes to oneself. It also reads as if boredom does not come for free either. One needs to make sacrifices from the pleasures and obligations of daily life which to a certain extent might become boring without any effort anyway. Nietzsche silently admits perhaps that it is easier to elude boredom than to call it or find good reasons to call it. The reward of that call is a self reflection that discloses one to oneself, refreshes one with a source that comes from the depths of oneself. It is as if boredom stands on that fine line and the step forward to either side is marked by a reward or deprivation, neither of which is decidedly good for all souls. What is presented as a reward requires a sacrifice of what our daily lives offer us in order to enable a sense of belonging; friends, books, passions, even duties, the deprivation on the other hand is less recognizable as it is the deprivation of an unknown.

## **2.6 Boredom as undecidability**

Nietzsche together with other philosophers and philosophies represent the ambiguous character of boredom perhaps better than its other characteristics. They do differ in terms of their handlings of the concept as well but the aim of this chapter was to demonstrate this common thread in relation to other aspects of boredom. The ambiguity of boredom is that which creates ambivalence in our attitudes towards it. This can be

understood as a positive ambivalence on the side of the subject who in this play of thought with seemingly opposite meanings that can be produced of boredom performs a certain undecidability. Undecidability is that which undermines the determined positions of both the subject and the text which might be understood as boring, brings forth the possibilities of acting and deciding. If a decision marks a certain kind of end, undecidability suggests an impossibility of that, a sense of an impossibility of leaving aside a thought, getting over and done with it. In this play of thought, oppositions do not simply dissolve: rather they violate their own limits, the limit that separates their insides from their outsides. Concepts are given by or which inhere oppositions – and this chapter has sought to present boredom as such a concept – suggests that each of the opposed terms is defined in terms of what is external to the other. The opposition between the inside and the outside can thus be seen as the matrix of all possible oppositions. The limit that separates the inside from the outside operates in other directions as well in a mode of defining layers of each sides of the opposition which can only be unfold so as to activate a concepts through a certain displacement in thought which is enabled by undecidability.

Undecidability, as coined by Jacques Derrida as term descriptive of a deconstructive strategy, has been useful, therefore, in coming to terms with the operations and double meanings of boredom in Ancient Greek thought, Pascal – including the discussion of diversion -, Kierkegaard – whose work that deals with boredom entitled *Either/Or* suggests a relation between concepts as an undecidable without saying it – and Nietzsche – whose thought catches up boredom in the movement of the same and the different – that are introduced in this chapter. We should perhaps adopt Derrida's remarks in relation to another undecidable in his book *Dissemination* in our thinking of boredom. He writes:

We cannot qualify it, name it, comprehend it under a simple concept without immediately being off the mark. Such a functional displacement, which concerns differences more than any conceptual identities signified, is a real and necessary challenge. It writes itself. One must therefore begin by reading it.<sup>39</sup>

The concept of boredom as handled by philosophy reveals it as an undecidable. As we have shown, this character of boredom is perhaps not always fully appreciated and sometimes only hinted in an aggressive – in the case of Pascal and mediaeval thinkers - or humorous fashion – in the case of Kierkegaard – but even in its least interesting readings it manifests itself as a challenge.

This thesis will now turn to the analyses of the experience of boredom in the work of Heidegger who, most explicitly among thinkers of boredom, situated his work on it in relation to the lineage of works and thinkers outlined in this chapter. A reading of boredom in Heidegger will thus be undertaken which reads his account of the experience of boredom, in particular his account of a passage from boredom to profound or total boredom, in a way which will put this account of undecidability, ambivalence and ambiguity to the test.

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<sup>39</sup> Jacques Derrida, *Dissemination*, trans. Barbara Johnson (1972 ; London :Athlone Press, 1993), 104.

### CHAPTER 3: PHENOMENOLOGY OF BOREDOM

Why do we find no meaning for ourselves anymore, i.e., no essential possibility of being? Is it because an indifference yawns at us out of all things, an indifference whose grounds we don't know? Yet who can speak in such a way when world trade, technology and economy seize hold of man and keep him moving? And nevertheless we seek a new role for ourselves. What is happening here?, we ask anew. Must we first make ourselves interesting to ourselves again? Why must we do this? Perhaps because we ourselves have become bored with ourselves? Is man himself now supposed to have become bored with himself? Why so? Do things ultimately stand in such a way with us that a profound boredom draws back and forth like a silent fog in the abysses of Dasein?

Martin Heidegger

This chapter aims at positioning boredom in Martin Heidegger's theory of moods which has been thought to have brought a new insight not just to the conception of moods but also to philosophy in terms of defining its task as fundamental ontology. The question of being takes a new turn through alteration of the relation between subject and object to provide us with a new understanding of the relation between Dasein and its world. This new approach introduces the possibility of arguing a spatiality for moods which is of great importance for the aims of this thesis. In this chapter we will see how Heidegger's own thinking evolves along these problematics and how boredom will gain

its significance among other moods. We will start from his magnum opus *Being and Time*<sup>1</sup> of 1927, proceed with his inaugural lecture in 1929 entitled “What is Metaphysics?”<sup>2</sup> and finally conclude with his discussions in lecture course of 1929-30 entitled *The Fundamental Concepts of Metaphysics*.<sup>3</sup> Although the first two have received a lot of attention and were translated into English not long after their publications, the last one, where he develops his theory of moods further along with a discussion on boredom has been relatively neglected since its first publication in 1983 and translation in 1995.

The theory of moods enables us to understand how Heidegger pulls himself away from the metaphysical tradition, from Descartes, Kant, Hegel and Husserl. Heidegger’s project of fundamental ontology problematizes the subject of the experience by understanding it existentially rather than ideally.

### 3.1 Dasein’s Existential Spatiality

The description of moods appears in Section 29 of Chapter V of Division One, in BT entitled “Being-in As Such”. This section concerns one of the constitutive elements of Being-in-the-world [*In-der-Welt-sein*] which according to Heidegger is a unitary phenomenon. Therefore we need to go back in the book where he deals with this phenomenon first to understand how moods function in relation to Being-in-the-world which is the basic state of Dasein. In Chapter II of BT, Heidegger argues that Dasein’s existence must be understood as a possibility and should not be confused with mere

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<sup>1</sup> Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time*, trans. by John Macquarrie and Edward Robinson (1927; Oxford: Blackwell, 1990). Hereafter, BT.

<sup>2</sup> Martin Heidegger, “What is Metaphysics?” *Basic Writings*, ed. by David Farrell Krell (1949; London: Routledge, 2000). Hereafter, WM.

<sup>3</sup> Martin Heidegger, *The Fundamental Concepts of Metaphysics*, trans. by William McNeill and Nicholas Walker (1983; Bloomington, Indiana: Indiana UP, 1995). Hereafter FCM.

presence of a thing as it is in a world in a way that is different than a thing's being in the world. Dasein should always be thought in terms of mineness which means it is singular and individual. "Dasein is an entity which in each case is I myself am. Mineness belongs to any existent Dasein, and belongs to it as the condition which makes authenticity and inauthenticity possible."<sup>4</sup> Dasein's being in a world is a constitutive state and should be understood as a whole. This whole cannot be divided so as to show its contents but it can be studied through examining its constitutive elements without undermining its wholeness as a phenomenon. Beginning from the second chapter, BT can be read as the unfolding of this phenomenon with respect to each of these elements, finally reaching to the last one where Heidegger introduces *Befindlichkeit*<sup>5</sup> [disposition] as one of the two defining moments of this element.

First of these constitutive elements is 'in the world' and Heidegger's inquiry into the ontological structure of 'world' and 'worldhood' occupies the third chapter of Division One. The second is 'who'. The fourth chapter of Division One seeks the entity that we refer to when we are talking about Dasein's everydayness. And finally the third one is 'Being-in' [*In-sein*] as such. Heidegger begins his analysis of this third element by first distinguishing Dasein from what he terms categorical beings whose occurring in the world can be described as Being-present-at-hand [*Vorhandensein*]. The kind of Being of these entities is not of the character of Dasein.<sup>6</sup> That is why we can talk about two things being present-at-hand in terms of a certain kind of side-by-side-ness but not the world and Dasein. Dasein's Being should be understood existentially and not categorically. Heidegger nevertheless reserves a certain 'presence-at-hand' for Dasein so as to provide

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<sup>4</sup> The page references belong to the eighth German edition of *Sein und Zeit* and its pagination that is been given in the translation. BT, 53.

<sup>5</sup> *Befindlichkeit* was translated as 'state-of-mind' by John Macquarrie and Edward Robinson. We prefer 'disposition' –risking minor confusions- which is suggested and used in some secondary literature on BT as it comes closer to a more literal translation of the term; 'the state in which one may be found'.

<sup>6</sup> BT, 54.

a framework for encounters between Dasein and other entities within a world. The manifold relationship between entities present-at-hand, Dasein and the world requires a careful approach as a simple distinction between categorical beings and existential beings is not enough to define another characteristic of Dasein's Being which is its facticity. In Heidegger's own terms;

Dasein understands its ownmost Being in the sense of a certain 'factual Being-present-at-hand'. And yet the 'factuality' of the fact [*Tatsache*] of one's own Dasein is at bottom quite different ontologically from the factual occurrence of some kind of mineral, for example. Whenever Dasein is, it is a Fact; and the factuality of such a Fact is what we shall call Dasein's 'facticity'...The concept of 'facticity' implies that an entity 'with-in-the-world' has Being-in-the-world in such a way that it can understand itself as bound up in its 'destiny' with the Being of those entities which it encounters within its own world.<sup>7</sup>

In other words, Dasein relates itself to things and to itself in a certain way through encountering things in its world. This means that Dasein too can be understood as a thing, as something present-at-hand. But the fact that Dasein conceives itself as a fact makes all the difference in terms of Being of Dasein and Being of a thing, a stone for example. A stone lacks such a relation to itself and cannot conceive itself as fact. What Heidegger emphasizes in this relationship is that the facticity of Dasein allows it to have a relationship defined through 'concern'. Concern is what makes Dasein a Being-in-the-world and other entities worldless.

Being-in-the-world is an essential structure of Dasein. The spatiality of Dasein requires careful analysis as the delimitations of Being-in might be understood to have negative implications around the issue of spatiality.<sup>8</sup> Being-in-the-world is a unitary phenomenon, therefore we cannot conceive the world in this structure as a space where Dasein is placed – or thrown for that matter - with regard to its facticity. These are not

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<sup>7</sup> BT, 56.

<sup>8</sup> BT, 82.



two entities that meet or touch each other. The world is not outside Dasein either in a way that a tree is outside my house. Dasein builds up its own space - which becomes its world - in a manner of Being towards the world [*Sein zur Welt*] which is essentially concern.<sup>9</sup> Heidegger explains this character of Dasein:

Dasein's facticity is such that its Being-in-the-world has always dispersed [*zerstreut*] itself or even split itself up into definite ways of Being-in. The multiplicity of these is indicated by the following examples: having to do with something, giving something up and letting it go, undertaking, accomplishing, evincing, interrogating, considering, discussing, determining...All these ways of Being-in have concern as their kind of Being.<sup>10</sup>

Concern according to Heidegger is what makes Dasein an existential Being with possible ways of Being-in-the-world. These possible ways suggest a series of possible spatialities for Dasein rather than one into which it is thrown as a fact. As Being-in-the-world, Dasein discovers a world. Heidegger claims that this Being-in-the-world is spatial and it is through this sense of the spatial, the series of possible spatialities, that Dasein encounters entities that are ready-to-hand and gives them space in its world. Spatiality provides Dasein with the possibility of grasping the phenomenon of Being-in-the-world as a whole existentially. In this sense space is not a priori to the world; rather it is through the spatiality of Being-in-the-world that space becomes accessible for cognition.<sup>11</sup> Heidegger nevertheless reserves a certain kind of 'apriority' to space as it shows itself as a sort of a priori.

Space is not in the subject, nor is the world in space. Space is rather 'in' the world in so far as space has been disclosed by that Being-in-the-world which is constitutive for Dasein. Space is not to be found in the subject,

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<sup>9</sup> BT, 57.

<sup>10</sup> BT, 57.

<sup>11</sup> BT, 111.

nor does the subject observe the world ‘as if’ that world were in a space; but the ‘subject’ (Dasein), if well understood ontologically, is spatial.<sup>12</sup>

The importance of this passage is that it reveals Being-in-the-world as that which discloses space as and through its own spatiality, hence spatiality as that essential character of Dasein which presents Dasein its existential possibilities by allowing it to create the world to realize these possibilities. This world is not just another entity in a categorical space.

We have argued earlier that we needed to revisit Heidegger’s analysis of Being-in-the-world so as to understand how moods function through one of its constitutive elements, Being-in, in the following chapters of *Being and Time* where the description of moods is presented. Leslie Paul Thiele in his article “Postmodernity and the Routinization of Novelty: Heidegger on Boredom and Technology”<sup>13</sup> quotes Ralph Waldo Emerson who wrote, “Life is a train of moods like a string of beads, and as we pass through them they prove to be many-colored lenses which paint the world their own hue, and each shows only what lies in its focus”.<sup>14</sup> Thiele adds that “Moods carry us into the world, and, as it were, carry the world within us.”

### 3.2 The Disclosive Function of Moods

Moods function as a mode of disclosure [*Erschlossenheit*] in Heidegger which can also be understood as the ontological and empirical constituents of *Befindlichkeit*, disposition or what the translation of *BT* terms “state of mind”. “What we indicate ontologically by the term state of mind [*Befindlichkeit*] is ontically the most familiar and

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<sup>12</sup> BT, 111.

<sup>13</sup> Leslie Paul Thiele, “Postmodernity and the Routinization of Novelty: Heidegger on Boredom and Technology,” *Polity* 29 (Summer 1997): 489-517.

<sup>14</sup> Ralph Waldo Emerson, *Selected Writings of Emerson*, ed. Donald McQuade (NY: Modern Library, 1981), 329.

everyday sort of thing; our mood, our Being-attuned.”<sup>15</sup> The state I find myself in the world is determined by moods and determines how I am. Heidegger claims that it is necessary to see this phenomenon as existantiale in so far as through having a mood Being is brought to its ‘there’.<sup>16</sup> Dasein [Being-there] as disposition characterises the existential constitution of the ‘There’, the Da of Dasein. The ‘there’ of Being therefore should not be understood literally or as a categorical space as it cannot be a property of something-present-at-hand, rather its character is existential, deriving from and depending on existence. ‘The entity which is essentially constituted by Being-in-the-World is itself in every case its ‘there’.’<sup>17</sup>

According to Heidegger moods function in a quasi-transcendental way in that they articulate how things appear to us. He writes that in understanding [*Verstehen*] and disposition [*Befindlichkeit*] or being-in-a-mood [*Gestimmtsein*] we have the two constitutive ways of being of the ‘there’ in human being-there. It is a function of human being-there that discloses the world as a whole.

In *Being and Time* three basic kinds of phenomena are stated as being disclosed by moods. The disclosure of thrownness [*Geworfenheit*], the disclosure of Being-in-the-world as a whole and the disclosure of ways of ‘mattering’ occur through moods. Heidegger will add other phenomena to these three in his later writings like the disclosure of Being [*Seinden*] as a whole in “What is Metaphysics”.

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<sup>15</sup> The noun *die Stimmung* is translated into English as attunement which literally taken means the tuning of a musical instrument. Heidegger uses the term for mood in general. Being-attuned is *Gestimmtsein* in German. BT, 134.

<sup>16</sup> BT, 134.

<sup>17</sup> BT, 132.

### 3.2.1 The Disclosure of Thrownness as the First Essential Character of Disposition

The disclosure of the thrownness of Dasein can also be understood as the disclosure of Dasein's Being-in, its 'there'. What is Dasein's thrownness then?

Heidegger writes:

This characteristic of Dasein's Being – this 'that is'- is veiled in its "whence" and "whither", yet disclosed in itself all the more unveiledly; we call it the "thrownness" of this entity into its "there"; indeed, it is thrown in such a way that, as Being-in-the-world, it is the "there". The expression "thrownness" is meant to suggest *the facticity of its being delivered over*. The 'that is and has to be' which is disclosed in Dasein's state-of-mind is not the same 'that-it-is' which expresses ontologico-categorically the factuality belonging to presence-at-hand. This factuality becomes accessible only if we ascertain it by looking at it. The "that-it-is" which is disclosed in Dasein's state-of-mind must rather be conceived as an existential attribute of the entity which has Being-in-the-world as its way of Being.<sup>18</sup>

Thrownness is an a priori character of Dasein's Being. Dasein's thrownness is the facticity which is also a characteristic of Dasein's Being. Dasein conceives of its 'there' and finds itself in its thrownness. Through disposition Dasein finds itself before itself in the mood that it has.<sup>19</sup> In relation to its thrownness and disclosure that is made possible through moods, Dasein tends to turn away rather than toward. That is to say that although our attitude towards moods tends to be determined by turning away rather than toward, we can never be moodless, we may only replace one mood with another. "We are never free of moods. Ontologically we thus obtain the first essential characteristic of states-of-

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<sup>18</sup> BT, 135.

<sup>19</sup> BT, 135.

mind [*dispositions*] that they disclose Dasein in its thrownness, and - proximally and for the most part - in the manner of turning-away.”<sup>20</sup>

Dasein finds itself thrown into its Being. This Being becomes a burden for Dasein when it finds itself in a certain mood. Dasein finds itself thrown into the burdensomeness of its Being, the facticity of its Being and a certain ‘how one is’. The moment of disclosure of thrownness would bring Dasein face to face with the burden of its own Being, introducing it to its thrownness, the facticity of its Being. This would be what is made possible for Dasein through mood and finding itself in its world in the mode of ‘how one is’.

### **3.2.2 The Disclosure of Being-in-the-world as a whole as the Second Essential Character of Disposition**

The second essential character of disposition concerns Being-in-the-world as a whole. Here we need to recall that the world as a constitutive element in Being-in-the-world which is a unitary, singular phenomenon could not be understood as merely an other entity that Being encounters, rather it was that which defined the there of the Being in Dasein. It is the world that Being is in that provides Dasein with its existential possibilities. According to Heidegger, we find ourselves in a mood in the world to which our concern is directed. In having a mood, the mood reflects this directedness rather than absorbing it as it is precisely that which makes it possible for Dasein to direct itself to something. Moods’ disclosive function is prior to any such directedness or concern; that is why it is never the moods that are disclosed for Dasein but the other way around.

The description of this character of disposition includes the discussion of the sources of moods. Heidegger claims that:

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<sup>20</sup> BT, 136.

A mood assails us. It comes neither from the ‘outside’ nor from the ‘inside’, but arises out of Being-in-the-world, as a way of such Being...*The mood has already disclosed, in every case, Being-in-the-world as a whole, and makes it possible first of all to direct one-self towards something.* Having a mood is not related to the psychical in the first instance, and it is not itself an inner condition which then reaches forth in an enigmatical way and puts its mark on Things and persons.<sup>21</sup>

To argue for the source of moods in some inner or outer being would be to deny the fact that the disclosure of any such being is made possible through moods. In this second character of disposition Heidegger argues that the world, Dasein-with and existence are disclosed. Disposition is an essential existential element of this disclosure, in fact this disclosure itself is Being-in-the-world.

### **3.2.3 The Disclosure of Ways of Mattering as the Third Essential Character of Disposition**

Heidegger argues that, this third essential character of disposition brings us closest to an understanding of the worldhood of the world as it provides a description of moods similar to the traditional understanding of moods. As Dasein in its existential spatiality encounters things and gives space to these Beings and things in its world, it does this through circumspective concern. That is to say that they first have to matter to Dasein so as to be encountered within-the-world. “The fact that this sort of thing can “matter” to it is grounded in one’s state-of-mind; and as a state-of-mind it has already disclosed the world.”<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>21</sup> BT, 136-37.

<sup>22</sup> BT, 137.

The circumspective concern Heidegger mentions is less related to the senses than one's disposition's being attuned to the mood in question, be it boredom, fear or anxiety. Sensory experiences and affects that occur as the outcome of a mood are secondary to one's disposition and attunement. The disclosure of ways of 'mattering' therefore is important as it brings into question affects in relation to moods which most of the time are undermined in Heidegger's theory of moods. The reason for that may be to underline the fact that affects find their necessary condition only after one's disposition determines the way a certain being or beings matter to Dasein. Another reason is that affects shadow the existential significance of moods and brings the body that is affected back into question along with Dasein, indicating a problematic of the relation between corporeality and Dasein. The question of affect tends to undermine the issue of moods as depsychologized. Heidegger is very cautious about that and he is not interested in the feelings that accompany moods as they do not tell us enough about Being-in-the world as a whole. Heidegger states that 'affects' and 'feelings' have long been the concern of philosophy but they do not belong to the context of his investigation on moods.<sup>23</sup>

A disposition discloses Dasein in its submission to the world where it conceives its thrownness as a fact. He also adds that disposition "is itself the existential kind of Being in which Dasein constantly surrenders itself to the 'world' and lets the 'world' matter to it in such a way that Dasein evades its very self."<sup>24</sup> We might perhaps understand this evasion in terms of Dasein's reaction at the moment of disclosure. The evasion does not simply suggest a kind of disavowal of what has been disclosed rather it is a necessary one which reintroduces Dasein to its possibilities as an existential Being. Disposition plays the most crucial role in this construction. This is where Heidegger's theory of moods gets its power from.

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<sup>23</sup> BT, 138.

<sup>24</sup> BT, 139.

Basically, Dasein encounters Beings in its world. These Beings could be Beings-ready-to-hand [*Zuhandensein*], Beings-ready-at-hand [*Vorhandensein*] or Dasein-with [*Mitdasein*]. These are all kind of Being that Dasein can give space to in its world so as to enable possible encounters. These beings can matter to Dasein in their own way only these ways of ‘mattering’ needs to be recognized, discovered by Dasein. The conditions for such a discovery would be that Dasein possesses the modes of disposition as a priori possibilities, such as ‘fear’, ‘anger’, ‘boredom’, ‘sadness’. It is only through finding itself in the mode of any such disposition that the disclosure of a way of ‘mattering’ occurs. “Only something which is in the state-of-mind of fearing (or fearlessness) can discover that what is environmentally ready-to-hand is threatening. Dasein’s openness to the world is constituted existentially by the attunement of a state-of-mind.”<sup>25</sup>

### 3.2.4 The Disclosure of Being as a whole in “What is Metaphysics”

The inaugural lecture Heidegger gave at Freiburg University in 1929 “What is Metaphysics” can be read as a contribution to his theory of moods developed in *Being and Time*. It is also of special importance for the aims of this thesis as this disclosure resembles the disclosure mentioned in *The Fundamental Concepts of Metaphysics* most. Considering the fact that this lecture was given earlier in the same year as the lecture series on boredom, this is not surprising. Quentin Smith in his article “On Heidegger’s Theory of Moods”<sup>26</sup> draws attention to this fourth essential character of disposition as disclosure of being [*Seienden*] as a whole. He argues that this disclosive character of moods reveals the whole of being and not Being as a whole. “This character is the

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<sup>25</sup> BT, 137.

<sup>26</sup> Quentin Smith, “On Heidegger’s Theory of Moods”, *The Modern Schoolman: A Quarterly Journal in Philosophy* 58 (May 1981): 1-17



disclosure of the ontic totality rather than the ontological totality.” It should also be noted that the idea of the whole of being, the totality of beings, comes into question in Heidegger’s analysis of the question of the ‘nothing’. “For the nothing is the negation of the totality of beings; it is nonbeing pure and simple.”<sup>27</sup>

The next step for Heidegger is to find out where to find this nothing. “The totality of beings must be given so as to be able to fall prey straightaway to negation - in which the nothing itself would then be manifest.”<sup>28</sup> The comprehension of the totality of beings in themselves is in principle impossible according to Heidegger, but a mood is an attunement that is disclosive of the whole of being which provides the necessary conditions for Dasein to find itself in the midst of beings revealed somehow as a whole.<sup>29</sup>

No matter how fragmented our everyday existence may appear to be, however, it always deals with beings in a unity of the “whole”, if only in a shadowy way. Even and precisely when we are not actually busy with things or ourselves, this “as a whole” overcomes us - for example in genuine boredom [*eigentlichen Langeweile*]. Boredom is still distant when it is only this book or that play, that business or this idleness, that drags on [*langweilt*]. It irrupts when “one is bored”. Profound boredom, drifting here and there in the abysses of our existence like a muffling fog, removes all things and human beings and oneself along with them into a remarkable indifference. This boredom reveals beings as a whole.<sup>30</sup>

Profound boredom is an example of being attuned which defines us and leads us to find ourselves among beings as a whole although this attunement according to Heidegger is not capable of unconcealing the nothing. Heidegger gives this privileged status of concealing or unveiling the nothing to the fundamental mood of anxiety among all other moods.

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<sup>27</sup> WM, 97.

<sup>28</sup> WM, 98.

<sup>29</sup> WM, 99.

<sup>30</sup> WM, 99.

### 3.3 The Fundamental Attunement of Anxiety

We will discuss later the significance of the disclosure of beings as a whole in terms of profound boredom. What might be the significance of boredom if it only reveals beings as a whole and still conceals from us the nothing? But before that it might be useful to explore why anxiety as a fundamental attunement is privileged over other moods in Heidegger. To start with Heidegger provides us with the analysis of disposition in *Being and Time*. The term disposition [*Befindlichkeit*] is replaced with attunement [*Stimmung*] in “What is Metaphysics” and we are introduced to the analysis of attunement as the emphasis is put on transcendental and metaphysical implications of what attunements reveal. It might perhaps be argued that Heidegger prefers disposition to refer to moods that disclose Being-in-the-world as a whole and Dasein’s thrownness while maintaining the manner of turning away, evasion. Whereas an attunement suggests a peculiar surrender to the mood and a tuning of one’s disposition around it with regard to the existence it reveals as transcendence, or as metaphysics. So anxiety as fundamental attunement and profound boredom as grounding attunement [*Grundstimmung*] have already been distinguished from other moods as dispositions and take Heidegger’s theory of moods into a slightly different direction than it has in *Being and Time*. There is enough evidence to believe that such a distinction – although it is circumspective - can be made between disposition and attunement and it is a working one.

Anxiety is the attunement through which Dasein experiences its own thrownness profoundly –“it is oppressive and stifles one’s breath”<sup>31</sup> - and it does not turn away from this thrownness rather “a peculiar calm pervades it”<sup>32</sup> The nothing is revealed in anxiety

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<sup>31</sup> BT, 186.

<sup>32</sup> WM, 100.

but Dasein does not simply grasp this nothingness. As Heidegger writes in *Being and Time*:

In anxiety what is environmentally ready-to-hand sinks away, and, so, in general, do entities within-the-world. The 'world' can offer nothing more, and neither can the Dasein-with of Others...Anxiety individualizes Dasein and thus discloses it as '*solus ipse*'. But this existential 'solipsism' is so far from the displacement of putting an isolated subject-thing into the innocuous emptiness of a worldless occurring, that in an extreme sense what it does is precisely to bring Dasein face to face with its world as world, and thus bring it face to face with itself as Being-in-the-world.<sup>33</sup>

Through anxiety, Dasein experiences the possibility of nothingness as a necessity. This experience can be understood as the experience of the withdrawal of all beings as a necessary condition of its own finitude in the mode of Being-towards-death. The disclosure of beings-as a whole provided by anxiety also marks the moment of vision for Dasein where its ownmost possibilities are revealed. "Death is Dasein's ownmost possibility."<sup>34</sup> In terms of death for example at the moment of vision Dasein finds itself face to face with its own nothingness in the form of death as a possible impossibility of its own existence.<sup>35</sup> This is understood by Heidegger as a constant threat coming out of its own 'there'.

Anxiety as an attunement discloses this threat for Dasein. Although it is not easy precisely to distinguish two threats here, there is a grafting of more than one in the threat to Dasein: as it is clear in Heidegger's text, the threat of death for Dasein, but there is also some threat, that tends to dictate the privileging of the authentic relation to death as possibility – namely, this threat's being of something outside its world, which nevertheless draws Heidegger towards seeking to make it into a possibility for Dasein.

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<sup>33</sup> BT, 187-88.

<sup>34</sup> BT, 262.

<sup>35</sup> BT, 266.

The finitude defined by Dasein's facticity also defines and suggests the limits of its world. It is not an everyday disposition that reveals this fact for us which discloses Being-in-the-world as a whole or our thrownness. The fundamental attunement of anxiety discloses what is not of this world but still defines my Being-in-the-world as a whole. If death and nothingness are not of this world, to what do they belong? They belong to the realm of metaphysics and transcendence. This is in a sense symbolic for Heidegger's whole philosophy as it provides a unique approach to metaphysics "which is the interpretation of beings and forgetfulness of Being" and therefore to philosophy by making Dasein the subject of both its world and the world that is hidden in the realm of metaphysics.

We will discuss the significance of this in terms of and around the issue of the limit that separates Dasein's world from the other side of the limit, which makes an 'outside' possible for Dasein's world. This 'outside' is itself a possibility and reveals other possibilities for Dasein which needs to encounter and anticipate such possibilities so as to define itself as an existential Being, and to discover its authentic existence. The possibility of authentic experience is grounded on the distinction between outside and inside – spatial categories – and this is where we can start questioning Heidegger.

Heidegger's account of boredom will suggest another version of such a limit and a different relation to the 'outside'.

### **3.4 The Grounding Attunement of Boredom**

We can argue therefore that anxiety appears more often than not as a privileged mood in Heidegger's work or that this has been made as the case by his commentators; the mood that best accompanies his philosophizing, and that its privileging also

represents a certain strategy. What needs to be noted in terms of boredom is that it occupied a large proportion of 1929 lecture series which also marks a significant shift in Heidegger's thinking on boredom. Elisabeth Goodstein argues in her book *Experience Without Qualities: Boredom and Modernity*<sup>36</sup> that this shift can best be viewed by first taking into account the discussion of boredom in his talk *The Concept of Time* held before the Marburg Theological Society in July 1924, some five years before "What is Metaphysics" and the subsequent lecture series. Heidegger does not simply introduce a theory of moods in this talk. However, we may draw out some points of significance for this thesis in respect of the contexts that boredom brings with it. Here "Heidegger was far from viewing boredom as a mode of lived indifference to the finitude of one's own existence - like Kierkegaard, he regarded it as a sign of human being mired in inauthenticity"<sup>37</sup>. According to this argument, the stakes of in/authenticity would include the play between the aesthetical and the spiritual in Kierkegaard. Boredom did not yet have the profundity as a mood to be considered as a constitutive aspect of Dasein, according to the conception of moods Heidegger later developed in *Being and Time*. One can argue that Heidegger discovered a source for authenticity in anxiety and a possibility of arguing for temporality of Dasein through this mood which also suggests that boredom as a fundamental attunement would not provide Heidegger with such a possibility.

In *The Concept of Time*<sup>38</sup> the concept of boredom is mentioned in a way to signal the existential analysis of "falling" in BT, as a lengthening and emptying of time, absorbed in a certain understanding of the present as imposed on us by the everyday. According to Heidegger this is the universal tendency of human beings to lose

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<sup>36</sup> Elisabeth S. Goodstein, *Experience without Qualities: Boredom and Modernity* (Stanford: UP, 2005). Hereafter, EQW.

<sup>37</sup> EQW, 290.

<sup>38</sup> Martin Heidegger, *The Concept of Time*, trans. William McNeill (1979; Oxford: Blackwell, 1992), 14-17. Hereafter, CT.

themselves in the everydayness of present concerns and preoccupations which results in alienating them from their personal and unique future possibilities. In everydayness Dasein is preoccupied with things that are present; therefore the question in relation to time becomes “what” fills time and not the “how” of existence. Immersed in everydayness, Dasein:

grows weary in the ‘what’, weary to fill up the day. Time suddenly becomes long for Dasein as being-present....Time becomes empty because Dasein, in asking about the ‘how much’, has in advance made time long, whereas its continual returning in running ahead towards the being-over-with never becomes boring.<sup>39</sup>

Thinking boredom in relation to everydayness does not necessarily belong to any phenomenological analysis of it and it was therefore abandoned by Heidegger,- after having dealt with it in relation to “falling” in *Being and Time* - later to be picked up by the Frankfurt School thinkers. Their reading of boredom will be dealt with in following chapters. However, Heidegger’s preoccupation with boredom in *The Concept of Time* is important at least for two reasons here. One, as mentioned earlier, is that it shows the gradual change in his conceptualization of boredom by first making it seem insignificant by comparison to other moods, like anxiety; second, despite the seemingly insignificant role it is being given, Heidegger proves that this role has disturbed him further so as to become a thread to be taken up again in *The Fundamental Concepts of Metaphysics*. In *The Concept of Time*, Heidegger invokes uncanniness [*Unheimlichkeit*] three times<sup>40</sup>. We will explore the significance of that later in this chapter.

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<sup>39</sup> CT, 16.

<sup>40</sup> David Farrell Krell has an important article concerning the place of [*Unheimlichkeit*] in Heidegger’s thought- especially in *The History of the Concept of Time* - in relation to another thinker of the term drawing attention to the uncanniness of the fact that they never give references to each other although they published in the same period. See David Farrell Krell, “Das Unheimliche; Architectural Sections of Heidegger and Freud”, *Research in Phenomenology* 22 (1992): 43-61.

Boredom appears as a grounding attunement in *The Fundamental Concepts of Metaphysics*, abstracted from the worldly context in which it has first become problematic for him. The 1929 lecture series were more specifically addressed to his listeners than perhaps any other lectures he had given as the project was defined as awakening boredom to philosophizing. It could have been a boring experience for his listeners to start with and interestingly enough he begins his analysis with that kind of boredom. What is more important in terms of it being a lecture series is hidden in Heidegger's warning: the aim of these lectures is not to provide the audience with proper definitions and classifications of boredom to take home with rather, the aim is learning and understanding how to move in the depths of Dasein.<sup>41</sup> Therefore from the first to the last form, we will see that the analyses keep incorporating the previous form that has been introduced through a comparison. Rather than providing individual descriptions for each, he develops the analysis as a kind of movement into more profound forms, into the depths of Dasein.

### **3.4.1 Boredom in the Mode of Anticipation: The First Form of Boredom**

Heidegger's lecture series distinguishes three types of boredom. From the first to the last type, he draws attention to their getting more profound progressively as if to explain and justify his prior lack of interest in the mood which eventually turned into a major interest. He identifies each form with a stage of his growing interest and investment in boredom. The first form of boredom is entitled "Becoming Bored by Something" [*das Gelangweiltwerden von etwas*]. The reading to be given here of these three forms of boredom will seek to identify and question seemingly unimportant usages

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<sup>41</sup> FCM, 131.

of spatial metaphors used to exemplify each form. It is quite unusual for Heidegger to seek to explain by exemplifying certain phenomena with reference to everyday life as in the following, a passage which is offered as an explanatory narrative of the first form of boredom:

We are sitting, for example, in a tasteless station of some lonely minor railway. It is four hours until the next train arrives. The district is uninspiring. We do have a book in our rucksack, though - shall we read? No. Or think through a problem, some question? We are unable to. We read the timetables or study the table giving the various distances from this station to other places we are not otherwise acquainted with at all. We look at the clock - only a quarter of an hour has gone by. Then we go out onto the local road. We walk up and down, just to have something to do. But it is no use. Then we count the trees along the road, look at our watch again - exactly five minutes since we last look at it.<sup>42</sup>

How can one pass time in this situation? “Passing the time is a driving away of boredom that drives time on.”<sup>43</sup>

The analysis of this first form of boredom starts with an example of a book. He demonstrates that the daily expressions of boredom would allow us to claim that a book can be boring. We sometimes say “this book is boring” with only a partial awareness of the fact that it would be inadequate to express our experience of boredom through attributing some boringness to an object. The object understood to be the cause of a particular effect on a subject might not always have the same effect on a different subject. The same book may well be quite interesting for someone else. This puts into question the so called well established relations between object and subject. If we simply remove the subject from the position of the judge who claims to be able to decide on the qualities of the object he/she relates to, we end up questioning the subject as the generator of the mood not the object. “...that which bores, which is boring, is that

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<sup>42</sup> FCM, 93.

<sup>43</sup> FCM, 93.



which holds us in limbo and yet leaves us empty.”<sup>44</sup> This is in tune with Heideggerean phenomenology which suggests as a rethinking of traditional philosophy’s object-subject relationships. Things first of all matter to me in a world that I care about. Care is what distinguishes certain objects from other objects for Dasein.

Heidegger keeps reminding us that what is at issue here is an attunement, not simply a quality that we can attach to an object or a subject. We need to get away from the causal determinations of subject- dominant structures. If we are going to call boredom as the cause of something, this cause is neither inside nor outside the subject or the object. This cause is the attunement itself playing in between the object and the subject, there is no transfer whatsoever of that particular mood from one to the other.

The thing can ultimately be boring only because the attunement already plays around it. It does not cause the boredom, yet nor does it receive it merely as something attributed by the subject. In short: boredom - and thus ultimately every attunement - is a hybrid, partly objective, partly subjective.<sup>45</sup>

The tension between objectivity and subjectivity of boredom will be exploited quite strategically throughout the analysis of other forms to draw attention to the experience of attunement away from the mood itself. We will see that profound boredom is the epitome of this strategy in terms of hiding away the subject of the experience together with the object in order to leave us with the question of the experience itself.

Can a train station be boring then? In what sense can a space like that contribute to the hybrid character of boredom that arises out of waiting there? Perhaps it is sufficient to say that the time and space are both redefined in that they are both objectified by the subject attuned according to boredom as mood which needs to be

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<sup>44</sup> FCM, 82.

<sup>45</sup> FCM, 88.

grasped as a fundamental nature of our Dasein. Being bored by something manifests itself not in Dasein but in the time passed in a specific place – a train station. How can we understand a train station as a particular space of boredom?

This is not an ordinary train station; this is a train station in which we have to wait for to generate a train to come. The more we try to drive the time off the more oppressive it gets. We are held in limbo [*Hingehaltenheit*] and left empty [*Leergelassenheit*], unable to relate ourselves, our attention to anything. The train station which might have otherwise offered us possibilities in which to become engaged has nothing to offer us in the dragging of time, leaving us empty:

Such emptiness is, rather, a consequence of the thing around us inappropriately becoming present-at-hand [*vorhanden*]. Understood properly, the boredom of the train station reveals something about Dasein's being-in-the-world.<sup>46</sup>

Things being inappropriately becoming present-at-hand asks us to develop a new relationship to those things, but the space these things are in becomes uncanny in relation to our being-in-the-world. Dasein and its world of concern gain new definition as boredom turns Dasein into a detached spectator. If the station could be presented to us at the right time - just before the train we are supposed to take departs, for example - this form of boredom might seem not to have arisen. This is not to blame time for this boredom to have arisen as time itself does not bore us. Despite the fact that we are usually able to identify some objects, situations that accompany our getting attuned in a particular space, the phenomena accompanying the experience of boredom seem to problematize time for us. We tend to experience objects intertwined in a temporal context. That is why Heidegger claims that “boredom is only possible at all because each

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<sup>46</sup> EWQ, 317.

thing, as we say, has its time.”<sup>47</sup> The more we attend to the time, the more it drags and prolongs and becomes more and more oppressive, the less its counterpart remains attractive, therefore becomes boring.

Being held in limbo and being left empty are two ways Dasein becomes bored with things. A train station can only be understood as a space of boredom if Dasein grasps itself in these two ways. As a preliminary point to be noted here, in respect of an understanding of an art of the boring, Heidegger’s account of mood and attunement suggests the possibility that an artwork, rather than being something simply to be understood as boring or not as an essential character of that art work, may be something that has a capacity to attune us in ways that boredom as an attunement attunes us. An artwork may well be something which seems inappropriately present-at-hand and may well alter our relation to our time by imposing its own time, displacing Dasein’s intimate bond to its world. It may then be argued that certain artworks ask for an engagement to them which suspend our attachment to the world in favor of another offered by them.

Given the argument of this thesis, concerning the ambivalence of boredom, it is appropriate to note here that this suspension of attachment occasioned by art necessarily gives rise to problematics of evaluation signalled in debates about boring art. Art would appear, according to Heidegger’s account of suspension, necessarily to risk being boring by resembling boredom in its suspension of attachment to things. It would be to draw Heideggerean terms out of their context to say that being held in limbo might correspond to this suspension, but it is nevertheless suggestive of the co-implication of the spatial with the temporal that marks the Heideggerean account of the phenomena of the experience of the first form of boredom. It would be another discussion whether or not it is wise to consider this capacity of any particular artwork directly in relation to this first

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<sup>47</sup> FCM, 105.

form of boredom as for Heidegger this form of boredom is still not profound enough to engage us in ways desirable for us to stay in this mood. Rather we tend to call it to an end.

### 3.4.2 Boredom in the Mode of Recollection: The Second Form of Boredom

As we have stated earlier, the forms of boredom Heidegger suggests get more profound as the analysis proceeds. In this second form of boredom Dasein is bored with something. He entitles this form “Being bored with something” [*das Sichlangweilen bei etwas*]. Elisabeth Goodstein explains the distinction between the first and second forms of boredom grammatically and argues that; “The distinction between being-bored-by and being-bored-with is made more emphatically in German because the first is grammatically passive, the second a reflexive form”<sup>48</sup> This is important as we shall see that, with the third form of boredom involving the impersonal, Heidegger’s preoccupation with subjectivity and objectivity in relation to boredom leads towards a new way of philosophizing which is not caught up in this metaphysical opposition. He provides us with a story again to exemplify this “deeper” and “more deadly” form of boredom, this time a story about a dinner party;

We have been invited out somewhere for the evening. We do not need to go along. Still, we have been tense all day and we have time in the evening. So we go along. There we find the usual food and the usual table conversation, everything is not only very tasty, but tasteful as well. Afterward people sit together having a lively discussion, as they say, perhaps listening to music, having a chat, and things are witty and amusing. And already it is time to leave. The ladies assure us, not merely when leaving, but downstairs and outside too as we gather to leave, that it really was very nice, or that it was terribly charming. Indeed. There is nothing at all to be found that might have been boring about this evening,

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<sup>48</sup> EWQ, 319.

neither the conversation, nor the people, nor the rooms. Thus we come home quite satisfied. We cast a quick glance at the work we interrupted that evening, make a rough assessment of things and look ahead to the next day - and then it comes: I was bored after all this evening, on the occasion of this invitation.<sup>49</sup>

Unlike the experience of the train station, the time spent at the dinner party is not necessarily of a kind imposing itself on us in an oppressive fashion. We might have enjoyed ourselves well enough at the dinner party. In that sense the second form of boredom is not immediate, it is recognizable only retrospectively. Here whatever Dasein was subjected to is not itself boring, and this is the first distinction from the first form of boredom. There is no specific object to identify as boring in itself or activities that could be boring in themselves or be understood as expressions of boredom. The time spent at the dinner party is only being registered as ‘killing time’ after the event. What happens after the event? We come home and recall the things we were supposed to be doing during the time we spent at the dinner party. Suddenly that duration becomes a pastime. In line with Kierkegaardian understanding of a pastime being a diversion from authentic experience, Heidegger argues that the experience of the party was nothing like an authentic experience; moreover it was an evasion in the face of boredom from a possible authentic experience. It could have been recalled as being pleasurable after the party if the subject is unable to recognize the emptiness of his own being-there.

What happens after the part is a retrospective epiphany which suggests that the activity was idle perhaps but not simply boring: the subject was bored not by the dinner party but with the dinner party. The object is carefully withdrawn as that which might have understood to have caused boredom. In this form of boredom “we have something

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<sup>49</sup> FCM, 109.

indeterminate that bores us”.<sup>50</sup> The emptiness of this boredom therefore is even less tangible in the sense of less objectifiable and yet apparently more concrete.

In the first two forms of boredom, we see that Heidegger distinguishes different forms of a possible encounter of a subject with an object. In the first form he experiments with an object which might at least partially be found responsible for the emergence of boredom - the ‘by’ in ‘being bored by something’ corresponding to such an object although Heidegger reserves an objection to such an identification - and a subject which finds itself in such a situation, perhaps unexpectedly. In the second form, the object can hardly be found responsible, moreover can hardly be recognizable as that which might have caused boredom - “they are only coincidentally that which we ourselves are bored, they are not that which bores us”<sup>51</sup> - whereas the subject in this form manifests a certain kind of intentionality so as to partake in a sort of encounter with the object:

The evening is that with which we are bored and simultaneously what we are bored with here is passing the time. In this boring situation, boredom and passing the time become intertwined in a peculiar way.<sup>52</sup>

Dasein, here, may be understood to have slipped away from itself towards what has been taking place. Dasein, by not being present to itself, loses its capacity to view itself. The lived now at the party loses its references to a certain past or future of Dasein’s and is experienced as indefinitely prolonged. Past and future dissolve and is consumed in mere presence in this second form of boredom.

From the first to the second, boredom becomes more profound and the emphasis shifts from the object to the subject. This also suggests that Heidegger considers this second form of boredom as being more troubling existentially. That which was thought

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<sup>50</sup> FCM, 114.

<sup>51</sup> FCM, 113.

<sup>52</sup> FCM, 113.

to be amusing at the time can become boring afterwards for Dasein. Is this a kind of an existential problem? We don't even know that what bores us at the time of feeling this second form is or was boring:

With the best will in the world we can find nothing that could have bored us there. And yet I myself was bored. With what, then? I *myself*- did I then bore myself? Was I what was boring for myself?<sup>53</sup>

'Boredom' throws itself backwards in time as Dasein rediscovers in relation to the second form of boredom the structural moments of being held in limbo and being left empty. But the being left empty and being held in limbo have been transformed in the second form of boredom. In the first form of boredom, the time drags and presses on us, it oppresses us. Retrospectively, in the second form, it is disclosed for Dasein that the structural moments of being-held-in-limbo and being-left-empty are grounded in an evasion from more authentic ways of spending time. This evasion signals a danger for Heidegger in revealing a whole way of being in the world. His criticism of the inauthenticity of modern life has its roots in this analysis of the second form of boredom as in this second form we allow ourselves time and we spend this time inauthentically, letting ourselves be bored.<sup>54</sup>

Espen Hammer<sup>55</sup> argues that Dasein's being-bored-with takes us to the negative limit of Dasein's self-abandonment and self-effacement as it can be read out of Heidegger's phenomenological analysis of falling in *Being and Time* and *The Concept of Time* - as a lengthening and an emptying of time - as they both mark the consummation of inauthenticity:

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<sup>53</sup> FCM, 109.

<sup>54</sup> FCM, 131.

<sup>55</sup> Espen Hammer, Being-Bored: Heidegger on Patience and Melancholy, *British Journal for the History of Philosophy* 12 (2) (2004): 277-295.

The very interpretation of Being as pure presence, where presence is understood in terms of the temporal mode of the Present, the prolonged, self-identical Now, which for Heidegger characterizes the originary movement of forgetfulness that spells the fate of Western metaphysics, may itself be thought of arising from a condition of being-bored-with.<sup>56</sup>

Heidegger will point to this problematic again in his *Contributions to Philosophy*, this time calling it *total boredom* and relating it to a criticism of the age of technology. The categories of all possible experience are obstinately imposed by machination to be turned into empty lived experience of entertainment and distraction which in turn causes an abandonment of beings by being by mistaking the concreteness of beings as mere occasions for lived experience. Adding that, “The hidden goal toward which all of this and much more rushes is the state of total boredom”<sup>57</sup>, Heidegger argues that it is through recognition of this total boredom that the human condition in the age of technological age will be disclosed.

Despite Heidegger’s emphasis on the temporality of this second form of boredom, the spatiality of this mood can easily be brought to the surface by questioning it on the basis of an evasion from a possible authentic experience. The possibility of such experience can nowhere be found or disclosed in the lived now of Dasein - that prolonged now that comes to haunt Dasein after the event -, which makes one wonder whether it ever existed even as a possibility to be grasped in terms of temporality. The problematization of temporality in this second form of boredom does not provide us with sufficient sources to justify this evasion from a possible authentic experience. It does not help one to understand why this possible possibility cannot emerge in the spatial fabric of what has been taking place as it has been argued that Dasein may be understood to have

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<sup>56</sup> Hammer, 285.

<sup>57</sup> Martin Heidegger, *Contributions to Philosophy (From Enowning)*, trans. by Parvis Emad and Kenneth Maly (1989; Bloomington & Indianapolis: Indiana University Press 1999), 109 §76.



slipped away from itself towards what has been taking place. Whatever is taking place takes place somewhere as well as sometime. Just because Dasein arguably loses its time in the time of what has been taking place does not necessarily lead us to argue that, that self that Dasein loses is still not present in a certain space. The well known tension between the authentic and inauthentic is rearticulated by Heidegger in this second form of boredom recalling their treatment in *Being and Time*. It is tempting to argue that Heidegger falls into an ambivalence around this issue. The narrative stories he gives to exemplify the first two forms of boredom are taken from the everyday of Dasein. The everyday is necessarily linked to being-in-the-world for it is the ontological presupposition of Dasein's understanding of all of its possibilities. From the everyday there is:

...never a possibility of extrication. In it, out of it, and against it, all genuine understanding, interpreting, and communicating, all re-discovering and appropriating anew, are performed...The dominance of the public way in which things have been interpreted has already been decisive even for the possibilities of having a mood – that is, for the basic way in which Dasein lets the world “matter” to it. The “they” prescribes one's state of mind, and determines what and how one sees.<sup>58</sup>

This passage suggests that one is never outside the everyday moreover it equates the everyday with inauthenticity – in a manner similar to what we are given to understand in the dinner party context- which brings Heidegger's ambivalence around inauthenticity and authenticity into the light. Where does the possibility of this authentic experience lie if not in certain understanding of the everyday? If we are going to understand the dinner party as Heidegger's escape to an everyday social space from a possible authentic experience of another space, where does this other space possible, hence authenticity? Hubert Dreyfus in his book *Being-in-the-World* suggests a three fold structure and

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<sup>58</sup> BT, 169-170.

argues that the everyday represents a mode of existing other than that of the authentic or the inauthentic in order to save Heidegger from this ambivalence.<sup>59</sup> Such attempts seem to be necessary to secure the everyday from Heidegger's frame of inauthenticity and an understanding of 'falling' in terms other than of temporality. The very unitary phenomenon of being-in-the-world that is supposed to account for 'falling' by making us familiar with the world, tends to lead Dasein to "lose itself in what it encounters within the world and be fascinated with it."<sup>60</sup> Jacques Derrida's diagnosis of Heidegger's failure is shaped around this conceptual pairs of opposites of authentic and inauthentic in his article "Ouisa and Grammē"<sup>61</sup> to which we will come back.

The second form of boredom sketched by Heidegger perhaps manifests a certain weakness of his theory of attunements as lacking a dimension which might be at issue in a social space, like the dinner party.

### **3.4.3 The Third Form of Boredom**

In the third form of boredom, Heidegger describes boredom as a fundamental attunement of contemporary Dasein by bringing forward the existential structure of mood as such. Heidegger says that profound boredom bores whenever we say or know without saying that it is boring for one [*es ist einem langweilig*]. It is quite different from saying I am bored with this or I myself am bored of that in the sense that this expression goes beyond the idea of something – some object - as the cause of the emergence of this mood. Subjectivity is under erasure as well:

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<sup>59</sup> Hubert Dreyfus. *Being-in-the-World* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1991), 169.

<sup>60</sup> BT, 76.

<sup>61</sup> Jacques Derrida, *Margins of Philosophy*, trans. Alan Bass (1972; Chicago: U.P., 1982), 63. Hereafter, MP.

It is boring for one. What is this 'it'? The 'it' that we mean whenever we say that it is thundering and lightening, that it is raining. It - this is the title for whatever is indeterminate, unfamiliar. Yet we are familiar with this, after all, and familiar with it as belonging to the more profound form of boredom: that which bores. It - one's own self that has been left standing, the self that everyone himself or herself is, and each with this particular history of this particular standing and age, with this name and vocation and fate; the self, one's own beloved ego of which we say I myself, you yourself, we ourselves are bored. Yet we are now no longer speaking of ourselves being bored with... but are saying: It - for one - not for me as me, not for you as you, not for us as us, but for one. Name, standing, vocation, role, age and fate as mine and yours disappear.<sup>62</sup>

There is more than one crucial point to dwell on concerning these remarks. To claim that all these disappear does not lead us to a point where we can establish a universal ego; rather we become undifferentiated no one. The metaphor of everything's' disappearing and the essence of boredom's appearing in the midst of all beings, enveloping them as a whole, may be interpreted in various ways. In his book *Boredom and the Religious Imagination*, Michael Raposa suggests that:

...these beings do not disappear, but rather they themselves appear as empty in the shadowy light of this pervasive and powerful indifference... 'this boredom wishes to tell us something' and compels us to listen. In the fundamental attunement of boredom for those who are awakened by it and to it, the whole of being is revealed.<sup>63</sup>

So just like some interpretations of 'there is' as the disappearance of the world and myself, sometimes it is more tempting to hear this tone of Heidegger's as that of nihilism. Yet there is still a certain experience involved here, if not the experience of boredom, then perhaps the experience of a contemporary condition in and through a space opened up and dominated by profound boredom.

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<sup>62</sup> FCM, 135.

<sup>63</sup> BRI, 57.

The indefinite third person implies that Heidegger is not addressing the issue of boredom in an everyday context anymore. It is therefore difficult for Heidegger to give an exemplary narrative as he did for the first two forms of boredom, narratives involving apparently recognisable actors involved in present actions or recalling them, narratives which helped us to argue for a spatiality of these forms of boredom. However he mentions a possible “but entirely non-binding occasion”<sup>64</sup> which we are invited to imagine encountering. We do not necessarily notice it emerging or find a particular cause or situation to correspond to it; therefore we are unable to give a specific time or a place for that occasion.<sup>65</sup> As if taking a deep breath and saying something like: “It is boring for one to walk through the streets of a large city on a Sunday afternoon.”<sup>66</sup> It is as if it comes from the depths of an indeterminate ‘there’. We cannot understand this boredom as a way of relating ourselves to our everyday being in the world. Although we are not simply relieved from our everyday personalities, those personalities become distant and alien to us. The only particularity of this situation is the indifference it creates which makes everything, everyone and every situation lose their particularities. Heidegger claims that in this indifference everything becomes equally great and of equally little worth, not even gradually but as a whole. This is to say that the disappearance of the subject in this indifference does not suggest a disappearance of beings as a whole; rather, they gain a different kind of presence for us, one that is enveloped in the indifference offering itself in the ‘form’ of emptiness to us. “This means that through this boredom Dasein finds itself set in a place precisely before beings

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<sup>64</sup> FCM, 135.

<sup>65</sup> Some commentary on Heidegger suggest that we therefore need to question whether or not this form of boredom really exists as” it is not based on any ontological evidence”. One example is: Rivca Gordon, “Questioning Heidegger’s Thinking on Boredom” *Philosophical Inquiry* 25 (1-2) (Winter-Spring 2003):125-134

<sup>66</sup> FCM, 135.

as a whole”.<sup>67</sup> The possibility of these beings acting is withdrawn as well as the possibility of our doing anything. This Heidegger says is “Dasein’s *being delivered over to beings’ telling refusal of themselves as a whole.*”<sup>68</sup>

In his article “Impersonal Existence”, William Large suggests that Heidegger’s move in his lecture series on boredom is the continuation of an ongoing project which was rightly diagnosed by Levinas and Blanchot as having its strengths and weaknesses. In his attempt to question Being in *Being and Time*, Heidegger was shifting the focus of metaphysics around the meaning of being from essence to existence, the importance of which according to Large is to distinguish between the categorical and existential meaning of being:

Categorical being belongs to the being of things, whereas existential being expresses the particular being of human beings, or what Heidegger calls Dasein, so as to distinguish this ontological analysis from any metaphysics of human nature.<sup>69</sup>

Blanchot and Levinas in their descriptions of the ‘neuter’ and ‘there is’ follow the path that Heidegger opens up but, rather than stating the condition of the world and the subject in relation to it through these concepts, they tend to question this self in terms of existence and not essence. The existential analysis of Dasein brings out the importance of moods in Heidegger’s thought in which there is always a search for the essence of metaphysics and time although not for Being.

“And profound boredom? How are we to designate this? We shall try to do so, and shall say that profound boredom bores whenever we say, or better, whenever we silently know, that it is boring for one?”<sup>70</sup> Profound boredom does not suggest any kind

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<sup>67</sup> FCM, 139.

<sup>68</sup> FCM, 137.

<sup>69</sup> William Large, “Impersonal Existence: a conceptual genealogy of the ‘there is’ from Heidegger to Blanchot and Levinas”, *Angelaki* 7 (3) (2002):131-142, 131.

<sup>70</sup> FCM, 134.

of abstraction or generalization which would allow us to think of an 'I in general', Heidegger claims. Personal experience is not to be imagined as the purely reliable source of this form of boredom as opposed to other forms of boredom although profound boredom necessarily involves the personal as source. Our attitude to profound boredom differs quite radically from that towards other forms of boredom as we tend not to escape from profound boredom. All diversions like passing the time become futile:

In this 'it is boring for one' lies the fact that this boredom wishes to tell us something arbitrary or contingent. This attunement to which we give expression in 'it is boring for one' has already transformed Dasein in such a way that in our being transformed we also understand that not only would it be hopeless to want to struggle against this attunement with some sort of passing the time, but that it would almost be something presumptuous to close ourselves off from what this attunement wishes to tell us.<sup>71</sup>

This attunement does not and would not tell us about the essence of this mood or why we suddenly find ourselves deprived of something we do not even know of or how to deal with the emptiness that this mood leaves us with. We find ourselves subjected to boredom without the means to shake it off. Dasein which is 'always and inevitably mine' gets free of Dasein, and its here and now, its world, and meets its possibilities other than those offered by beings as a whole, which have been obscured. This is the moment Dasein comes face to face with its own being and recognizes its own Dasein as a burden. Profound boredom brings Dasein to a certain limit, a limit that recalls the oppressiveness of a temporal limit, the finitude of Dasein, but which is also different – from the existential analytic of anxiety and death - in that it is also spatial. First of all, it is spatial in the sense that this limit gives us a world, a being in the world, even if it becomes a world in which beings refuse themselves as a whole to Dasein. Heidegger's account of the third form of boredom would suggest perhaps that this sense of the spatial

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<sup>71</sup> FCM, 135-136.

is lost as a consequence of this refusal. However, the disclosure of being in which Dasein is reintroduced to its possibilities of thinking, of acting, what Heidegger calls being held in limbo returns us to an issue of the spatial. In his article "Boredom: Between Existence and History", Miguel de Beistegui explains this being held in limbo as:

With boredom, beings as a whole have withdrawn...an access to beings as a whole is denied, something is actually made manifest...What does this refusal actually tell? What does boredom bespeak? It bespeaks the refusal of what could be and ought to be, the refusal of possibilities of Dasein. It makes them manifest precisely by refusing them. It announces them precisely in the moment which it suspends them.<sup>72</sup>

The possibilities of Dasein which are refused are the possibilities that disguise the lack of deprivation of beings as a whole. Echoing Nietzsche who says "To elude boredom man either works harder than is required to satisfy his other needs or he invents play, that is to say work designed to assuage no other need than the need for work as such."<sup>73</sup> Heidegger is pointing at a contemporary situation of man around the issue of need. The possibilities of Dasein for which Dasein finds the necessary conditions for their withdrawal through profound boredom are provided by the everyday. The indifference manifest these possibilities as corresponding to a lack of need rather than as those which may satisfy our needs.

Being held in limbo can be understood as another spatial metaphor. The German term, '*Hingehaltenheit*', 'held-in-between-ness', suggests being in between two spaces, being held and even pushed in between spaces, to sway into a third space. In such a framework, the traditional definitions of the subject no longer work and perhaps this

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<sup>72</sup> Miguel De Beistegui, "Boredom: Between Existence and History": On Heidegger's Pivotal "The Fundamental Concepts of Metaphysics", *The Journal of the British Society for Phenomenology* 31 (2) (May 2000): 154, 145-158.

<sup>73</sup> HATH, 193-194.

framework is put to work by Heidegger to demonstrate the limits of this notion of the subject. But we need to be careful about what this questioning of the subject entails. The rejection of subject in Heidegger does not lead us to the rejection of self. The everyday world, in which Dasein exists, is exhausted in this indifference together with the self accompanying its everyday existence. This can be understood as the awakening of Dasein to its possibilities, or to put it in Heidegger's words:

...`it is boring for one` first brings the self in all its nakedness to itself as the self that is there and has taken over the being-there of its Da-sein. For what purpose? To be that Da-sein. Beings as a whole refuse themselves tellingly, not to me as me, but to Dasein in me whenever I know that `it is boring for one`. <sup>74</sup>

This passage recalls Heidegger's problematic criticism of the everyday. In the search for an authentic existence, are we left with an exhaustion of the everyday in indifference in a space opened up by profound boredom? Are we supposed to understand this as Heidegger's contribution to an understanding of boredom which promises an authentic mode of existence? If so, we would be falling from one metaphysical trap to another. Patrick Bigelow suggests that "boredom authenticates the totality of beings as invalid, disqualified, derelict, and dissolute"<sup>75</sup> and in doing so pulls us back from the authentic-inauthentic distinction. For him nothing disappears in indifference rather "all is abandoned"<sup>76</sup>. This abandonment requires a reconstruction of another spatiality in the form of a spacing which would be inevitably temporal, which calls beings to being, being to Dasein and Dasein's 'there' to its existence differently.

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<sup>74</sup> FCM, 143.

<sup>75</sup> Bigelow, 261.

<sup>76</sup> Bigelow, 262.



### 3.5 The Hidden Spatiality of Moods

We have started this chapter by arguing that a mood is an attunement that is disclosive of the whole of being. Having shown how moods, in particular and importantly boredom, are grafted in this complexity of spatiality, it becomes necessary to revisit this spatiality introduced to us by Heidegger<sup>77</sup> this time from the point of view of attunements. It is because of these moods in which, as we say, we ‘are’ this or that (bored in our case), we find ourselves in the midst of a whole of being, completely pervaded by it. “A mood makes manifest ‘how one is, and how one is faring’. In this ‘how one is’, having a mood brings Being to its ‘there’”<sup>78</sup>

Heidegger claims that, with Being-in-the world, space is proximally discovered in its spatiality. “When we let entities within the world be encountered in the way which is constitutive for Being-in-the-world, we give them space.”<sup>79</sup> Heidegger argues for a giving space to which would be literal and, as it were, more-than-literal, referring unquestionably to being-in-the world. However, giving space can also be used in a figurative, perhaps metaphorical sense of ‘making room’, as in giving space to a thought or idea. Heidegger wants to move against this figurative usage, which thinks of thought as ideally removable from the world. However, in so doing, he tends also to underestimate the reach of the figurative, writing of space in a way which repeats a certain metaphysical position, as if being-in-the-world were something remarkable from somewhere else. He perhaps thereby also under-estimates the interest of everyday

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<sup>77</sup> For a full and reliable account of “space” in Heidegger’s thought see, Maria Villela-Petit, “Heidegger’s Conception of Space” in *Martin Heidegger: Critical Assessments*, ed. by Christopher Macann, *Voll: Philosophy* (London, NY: Routledge 1992), 117- 40; and for a rather conservative reading of Heidegger on space see, George Seifler, “Heidegger’s Philosophy of Space”, *Philosophy Today* 17 (3) (Fall 1973): 246-254

<sup>78</sup> BT, 135.

<sup>79</sup> BT, 111.

actions, such as arranging furniture, as well as the interest more generally of making room for things and/or others.

Robert Frodeman suggests that ‘giving space’ could also be understood as a possibility of creating a space where we may welcome others to our world where we can activate our spatial abilities of de-distancing and directionality.<sup>80</sup> This metaphorical sense may be applied to other metaphors - such as house - inhabiting in Heidegger’s discourse. The sense of lived spatiality is best invoked in his conceptualization of Being-in [*In-sein*] which suggests a certain involvement.

We may argue that whatever partakes in Dasein’s involvement in the world and in others is summarized by Heidegger in his category of concern [*Besorgen*]. In all three forms of boredom this involvement is outlined in its varying forms interestingly enough in ways that makes this involvement problematic for Dasein, manifesting the tensions between the subject and object positions which this involvement is supposed to be responding to. The first form of boredom provides us with a sketch of an impossibility of a meaningful involvement in the train station which creates oppressiveness, the second form with a split in the involvement in the sense that the active involvement of Dasein at the dinner party is presented as being overshadowed by a longing of another involvement that was abandoned for the sake of the party, and the third form of boredom with a pure impossibility of involvement granted by indifference. We might therefore argue that the analyses of forms of boredom that are presented by Heidegger manifest a hidden interest – which perhaps never emerged as such in Heidegger – in one of the main existential categories of Being-in-the-world, namely; care –which we tend to understand as a certain form of involvement - that proves itself to be spatial as well as temporal.

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<sup>80</sup> Robert Frodeman, “Being and Space: A Re-reading of Existential Spatiality in *Being and Time*”, *The Journal of the British Society for Phenomenology* 23 (1) (January 1992): 33-41, 37.

Robert Frodeman who reads Heidegger on spatiality against Heidegger - as he claims that the neglect in his categories of lived space may well be the result of his careful limitation of his spatial perspective around the discussion of worldhood so as to disable this perspective to be easily applied to other categories - argues that:

Deseverence and directionality summarize the spatial possibilities of Dasein. They demonstrate that our primary sense of space is not abstract and geometric, but embodied and erotic, directed and oriented toward the regions we desire. Dasein orders the world by moving around, through and beyond the regions of its circumspective concern. More than simply spatial categories, deseverence and directionality are fundamentally determinative of Dasein's Being-in-the-world.<sup>81</sup>

Robert Frodeman moves from the categories and concepts that are more commonly established as having spatial signification – deseverence, directionality - to those that are more commonly considered in relation to temporality, such as attunements, in relation to Being-in-the-world.

Deseverence can be understood as de-distancing which shapes Dasein's spatial orientation in relation to things in terms of involvement. Distance as that which denotes the space between things and me be it physical or psychic space needs to be altered alongside my involvement. Deseverence is therefore a spatial category which spatializes the space in terms of bringing things closer to me as well as spatializing those things by making them familiar through giving them space. Directionality on the other hand defines this space as mine by making it more concrete for me. They are important so as to provide a passage from an ideality of space to materiality of it.

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<sup>81</sup> Frodeman, 36.

### 3.6 Langeweile-Unheimlich

Through his analysis of boredom Heidegger asks us to question the problem of time. This intention is indicated very clearly from the start of the lectures on boredom. Profound boredom is the fundamental attunement in the sense that “we pass the time in order to master it, because time becomes long in boredom”<sup>82</sup> He then starts questioning what would be the significance of this assertion. We all want (a) ‘long time’ for ourselves but when we have it or if we have it especially when we want it to pass quickly, we ward off its becoming long. This is Heidegger manifesting the ambivalence that emerges in us in our relation to time. Boredom certainly has crucial significations in terms of time and that is what Heidegger primarily wants to bring forward. He certainly does not want this to be mentioned just in passing but he mentions something else in passing in relation to Novalis’ definition of philosophy as “really homesickness, an urge to be at home everywhere”<sup>83</sup>:

Boredom, long time: especially in Alemannic usage, it is no accident that ‘to have long time’ means the same as ‘to be homesick’. In this German usage, if someone has long-time for.... this means he is homesick for....Is this accidental? Or is it only with difficulty that we are able to grasp and draw upon the wisdom of language? Profound boredom - a homesickness [*ein Heimweh*]. Homesickness - philosophizing, we heard somewhere, is supposed to be a homesickness. Boredom - a fundamental attunement of philosophizing.<sup>84</sup>

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<sup>82</sup> FCM, 80.

<sup>83</sup> FCM, 5. (This is a quotation by Heidegger from 1923 Jena edition of Novalis’ writings, vol. 2, 179, Fragment 21).

<sup>84</sup> FCM, 80.

This could be a typical example of a moment of spatiality being underestimated even subordinated to temporality or another ambivalence illustrating the tension between temporality and spatiality in Heidegger's text. We can ask the question why Heidegger opens his lectures with this motif of the house and allows the whole lecture series to unfold under this motif. It should be noted here that this reference has several implications in terms of historicity, and overcoming metaphysics which will not be discussed here. What interests us here is the significance of using spatial metaphors to unfold these problematics. The quoted introduction manifests the analysis of boredom as a phenomenological site in which spatial and temporal significations are gathered.

Heidegger referring to Novalis questions whether or not "homesickness" still exists in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. To be at home everywhere is understood by Heidegger as "to be at once and at all times within the whole".<sup>85</sup> Within the whole immediately calls upon what might be outside the whole. The movement between inside and outside of this whole throws Heidegger back to what is uncanny about his own philosophizing around boredom. The inside and outside of the whole - the world – is problematized around boredom which is identified as the attunement that is fundamental to philosophy. But is not there an im-possibility here as we are considering a "whole" which covers the "world" for Heidegger, which yet does not accommodate a certain philosophizing? Heidegger, in his project of overcoming metaphysics, goes one step further than his aim through the mood of anxiety in terms of defining an outside for the possibility of authentic experience in relation to being-towards-death. Boredom as an attunement brings back the all-too-remarkable distinction between outside and inside, this time to place it in the world.

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<sup>85</sup> FCM, 5.

Mark Wigley in his book *The Architecture of Deconstruction* notes that “Heidegger’s sickness for the home is displaced by Derrida’s sickness of the home”.<sup>86</sup> Derrida in *Of Grammatology* writes of: “The sickness of the outside (which comes from the outside but also draws outside, thus equally, or inversely, the sickness of the homeland, a homesickness, so to speak)...”<sup>87</sup> Following Derrida’s traversal we may perhaps say that profound boredom as an attunement which is fundamental to philosophizing, understood as a homesickness, lead us to argue for an outside and inside of thought or boredom as an undecidable in relation to this distinction. On the one hand we can understand this as a failure of this thought’s reaching the ‘outside’ of the world. Attunement offering a certain involvement in the world is supposed to make us feel “at once and at all times within the whole”, “at home everywhere” instead of offering itself as a drive in relation to being within the whole or at home – the sickness for the home – in the mode of anticipation. On the other hand we may well argue that attunement opens up a space in the world in the manner of drawing outside to inside, recalling the experience – or im-possibility of such experience - of the outside creating a sickness of the home – in the mode of recollection. Neither outside nor inside. This is the double structure of profound boredom as an attunement which is fundamental to our philosophizing.

The undecidability of profound boredom provides us with a framework that brings together the first two forms of boredom presented by Heidegger under profound boredom, the first understood as involving a mode of anticipation and the second, a mode of recollection, the becoming bored ‘by’ something and being bored ‘with’ something. The ‘by-with’ structure of profound boredom allows for an imagining “that it

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<sup>86</sup> Mark Wigley, *The Architecture of Deconstruction: Derrida’s Hunt* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1993), 109, Hereafter AD.

<sup>87</sup> Jacques Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, trans. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak (1967; Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP, 1976), 313. Hereafter OG.

is boring for one to wait for a train to come in a train station” or “that it is boring for one to be at a dinner party instead of staying at home to do some work”. Profound boredom cannot be placed either inside or outside. There is uncanniness in Heidegger’s profound boredom but in the mode of denial.

The uncanniness inheres in Heidegger’s text in terms of the relation between *langeweile* and *heimweh*. In his book *Heidegger and the Political*, Miguel de Beistegui claims that;

The specificity of the human dwelling is captured under the motif of the Unheimlichkeit: the abode of man, his Heim...the experience of the unfamiliarity of beings and of his essential homelessness. Man can truly be at home in the world, and thus create his own abode, only when he is faced with his fundamental not-at-homeness.” In his essay “The Uncanny” (*Das Unheimliche*), Freud describes it as the uneasy sense of the unfamiliar within the familiar, the unhomely within the home. He defines the term homely (*heimliche*) as “belonging to the house, not strange, familiar, tame, intimate, friendly, etc.” and as what seems at first to be its opposite: “concealed, kept from sight so that others do not get to know of or about it, withheld from others.”<sup>88</sup>

This detail in Heidegger’s *The Fundamental Concepts of Metaphysics* is open to interpretation both philosophically - in terms of the spatial - and psychoanalytically - Unheimliche appearing in the text as the return of the repressed. “Uncanniness is the basic kind of Being-in-the-world, even though in an everyday way it has been covered up.”<sup>89</sup> What is suggested here is that profound boredom as an attunement of philosophizing manifests itself as an undecidable in its relation to spatiality which becomes remarkable especially when house as a metaphor is put into play. House as one

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<sup>88</sup> Miguel de Beistegui, *Heidegger and the Political* (NY: Routledge, 1998), 375.  
Sigmund Freud, “The Uncanny”, 1919 in *Sigmund Freud: Collected Papers*, ed. James Strachey, vol.4. (NY: Basic Books Inc.,1959).

<sup>89</sup> BT, 276.

but not the only metaphor in Heidegger turns out to be that which destabilizes his philosophy in the mode of resisting metaphysics.

The metaphorical links from the ideality of space to materiality bring forth questions about the status of phenomenology in twentieth century. Post-Husserlian phenomenology enables a way of philosophizing which displaces idealities from within themselves and makes them subjects of experience. This might be taken as a kind of rethinking metaphysics with one reservation of the fact that the concepts in question are not treated as mere metaphysical categories. The theory of moods enables us to understand how Heidegger pulls himself away from the metaphysical tradition not always successfully not always deliberately but by providing us with a possibility of a space for the operations of undecidables.

Heidegger's project of fundamental ontology problematizes the subject of the experience by understanding it existentially rather than ideally. What Blanchot and later Levinas did was to challenge Heidegger - who challenged the metaphysical tradition - further by introducing the subject in a different fashion to phenomenology. This is why deconstruction and the Blanchotian limit experience are crucial in exploring the possibilities of deappropriating the concepts of time and space in relation to boredom. Despite the fact that Dasein's spatiality can be deduced from its constitutive character of being-in-the-world, this is not the only possible way. Heidegger is hiding away the possibility that space might be accessible even if the environment is deprived of its world-hood, with spatiality as the ideality of that space.

The next chapter will deal with Levinas' philosophy which gets its impetus through a ceaseless attention and criticism of Heidegger's *Being and Time* finds its own voice in ethics. This is to say that Heideggerian ontology is somewhat criticised not just by Levinas but also by Derrida mainly around authenticity and inauthenticity two



seemingly ethical terms that dominates *Being and Time* and *The Fundamental Concepts of Metaphysics* to a lesser extent. While Derrida writes in a critique of Heidegger titled “*Ousia and Gramme*,”

The extraordinary trembling to which ontology is subjected in *Sein und Zeit* still remains within the grammar and lexicon of metaphysics. And all the conceptual pairs of opposites which serve the destruction of ontology are ordered around one fundamental axis: that which separates the authentic from the inauthentic and, in the very last analysis, primordial from fallen temporality.<sup>90</sup>

This criticism was articulated by Levinas as early as in the 1930’s precisely pointing at the extent to which Heideggerean ontology falls short to reach. Levinas provides us with a possibility of phenomenology which does not try to undermine what is ethical in the phenomenological.

The next chapter will take up the issue of boredom and spatiality in a play between an imaginary space of boredom and everyday space and search for the possibility of profound boredom in these spaces and try to define it in terms other than of an attunement of our philosophizing. This chapter was aimed to manifest a resistance to Heidegger’s operations of philosophy which risks presenting boredom as another mood of Dasein in its search for authenticity, oscillating between the authentic and inauthentic existence. Therefore we will be exploring the significance of this imaginary space in relation to Levinas’ *il y a* and Blanchot’s *neutre* which seem to be related to the impersonal existence hinted by Heidegger through profound boredom.

The experience of the impersonal is one crucial point that allows us to discuss Heidegger, Levinas and Blanchot in the same context in the mode of their turning away

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<sup>90</sup> MP, 63.

from either Western metaphysics – as in the case of Heidegger – or fundamental ontology – as in the case of Levinas – or any philosophical discourse – as in the case of Blanchot for the sake of the imaginary. We will be arguing that this turning away finds its necessary conditions or possibility in the mood of boredom. We will also be discussing what is being provided to us as possibility by this turning away in terms of art.

## CHAPTER 4: THE IMAGINARY SPACE OF BOREDOM

Levinas describes  
[*décrit*] and Blanchot  
cries [*crie*] – as it were –  
the *there is*.

George Bataille<sup>1</sup>

The previous chapters have aimed at situating boredom in a series of philosophical frameworks. The account of Heidegger's work has provided some suggestions with reference to the artistic and the everyday but the emphasis was mostly on how boredom as a mood, attunement or a grounding attunement functions in relation to these frameworks as part of the ambition to renew the philosophical in the twentieth century. The more we proceeded into the depths of boredom through certain readings of Heidegger's work which considers different forms of boredom, the necessity to engage this reading with issues and concerns about the philosophical – perhaps in particular the ethical – and the artistic grew: the trajectory of this thesis, then, is not to provide a classification of boredom and define what is or is not boring or how to avoid it or welcome it but to argue for spaces of boredom in and through the philosophical and the artistic.

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<sup>1</sup> Georges Bataille, "From Existentialism to The Primacy of Economy" in Jill Robbins, *Altered Reading: Levinas and Literature* (Chicago&London: The University of Chicago Press, 1999). Hereafter AR.

In this chapter, therefore, we will be putting Heidegger's notions of boredom and spatiality as well as his preoccupation with the subject-object relationship to the test - pushing it towards a certain overcoming of it - by questioning them through the work of Emmanuel Levinas and Maurice Blanchot as they provide us with subtle criticism of Heidegger's philosophy, criticisms which may shed light on both boredom and thoughts of space. Unlike the thinkers we dealt with in the first three chapters, with the exception of Nietzsche, neither Levinas nor Blanchot could easily be claimed to be philosophers of boredom. There is hardly any reference to boredom in Levinas, and Blanchot only makes passing remarks about this particular mood in different contexts. Therefore we will not be looking at these philosophers in ways that we have looked at other thinkers in relation to boredom. Levinas and Blanchot are chosen so as to provide us with some insight to Heidegger's thought for which boredom has become the grounding attunement that he decided upon for philosophizing. Certain elements that come to dominate Heidegger's philosophy seem to play a crucial role in their thinking and are explicitly, implicitly and as it were latently at work in much of Levinas' writings, if less so in Blanchot. It can be argued, however, that they are both Heideggereans if what is meant by this is not simply followers of Heidegger. They are Heideggereans in so far as they provide us with work that does not simply oscillate between the ontological and the metaphysical or questioning or overcoming them but that helps us to think through and beyond them, in Levinas' case with a concern for the ethical and in Blanchot's case with a withdrawal of the philosophical in favour of the literary, if sometimes also a tendency towards an incorporation of the philosophical by the literary.

This chapter aims to invoke a reading of these thinkers so as to think through and beyond Heideggerean boredom through and beyond each of these thinkers' radical criticism of and divergence from Heideggerean phenomenology to enable an

understanding of the importance of the space of the ‘there is’ [*il y a*] and a questioning as to whether or not this space provides us with a reformulation of Heidegger’s ontology through which we can better understand profound boredom. The impersonal space of profound boredom of Heidegger’s, *there is* of Levinas’ and the *neuter* of Blanchot’s will be compared to each other so as to demonstrate what can be achieved through such a comparative reading. This reading follows from their different understandings of the implications of the analysis of Dasein in terms of moods in general and boredom in particular. We can perhaps ask anew at the start of this chapter what Dasein can be thought to be. This will be the underlying question in respect of an account of the significance of the work of Levinas and Blanchot for an understanding of the possible meanings of a contemporary boredom/being bored today. Furthermore, their rewritings of Dasein – as the impersonal, and as the neuter – will be questioned for their significance in respect of experiences of affect and mood in order to test the intensification or deepening of boredom identified by Heidegger in his existential analysis of boredom, particularly in relation to questions of the experience of space.

#### 4.1 Heidegger through Levinas

Levinas’ recurrent debate with Heidegger manifests itself more explicitly in his early works than his later works. In this chapter we will be focusing on the earlier stages of this debate through a reading of three texts by Levinas: his 1935 study published first in *Recherches Philosophiques* entitled “De l’évasion” [*On Escape*]<sup>2</sup>, and two of his early phenomenological studies that he published first in 1946 and in 1947 after his return from the work camp during the Second World War which appeared in English entitled

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<sup>2</sup> Emmanuel Levinas, *On Escape*, trans. Bettina Bergo (1935; Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 2003). Hereafter, OE. There is an introduction and annotation by Jacques Roland in the book .

*Existence and Existents*<sup>3</sup> and *Time and the Other*.<sup>4</sup> It can be argued that this debate with Heidegger was mostly limited by Levinas familiarity with the former's *Being and Time* and "What is Metaphysics?" and cannot easily be extended to his later works but some inferences can be drawn to shed light on some of the topics and issues concerning boredom in the *Fundamental Concepts of Metaphysics*. There is no extant evidence that Levinas addressed this work. None of his surviving work gives references to it. The procedure here might be justified, however, in so far as he took up a style of writing concerning his debate with Heidegger which persistently stayed away from an explicit referencing although he admitted in his prefaces to certain editions of his books to a ceaseless attention to *Being and Time*.

*On Escape* is Levinas' earliest attempt to question ontology as defined as the task of philosophy by Heidegger. From 1929 and onwards, fundamental ontology gained a new consistency for Heidegger, moving from being the interpretation of Dasein as temporality to metontology: namely, the question of being in relation to "beings as a whole", a question that remained central for him. Therefore it can be argued that Levinas' attempt does not bear simply on the questioning of taking ontology as it was presented in *Being and Time*, but also the recurrences of metontology in the different contexts problematized by Heidegger in the 1930s. *On Escape* insists on the necessity of an escape from being. From the early paragraphs, it is clear that Levinas is explicitly interested in "escape" as a phenomenon which pertains to human existence, freedom and Being. For Levinas, it is thus vital that we begin to think *beyond* being, beyond traditional conceptions of metaphysics and ontology. For being itself is this escape. By defining being as escape, he therefore moves away from Heidegger by giving being a

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<sup>3</sup> Emmanuel Levinas, *Existence and Existents*, trans. Alphonso Lingis (1946; Dordrecht, Boston, London: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 1995). Hereafter, EE.

<sup>4</sup> Emmanuel Levinas, *Time and the Other*, trans. Richard A. Cohen (1947; Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania Duquesne University Press, 1992). Hereafter, TO.

meaning as verb and suggesting that it be understood as a series of acts. This move will dominate his later work as he will go on to argue for an understanding of existence before that of the existent.

Escape in relation to being is not a new theme. It might be necessary to recall Heidegger's discussion in *Being and Time* where he writes about "fleeing of Dasein in the face of itself"<sup>5</sup>. Dasein in its 'natural' or 'everyday' [*alltägliche*] state 'flees' or covers over anxiety. David Farrell Krell in his article "Das Unheimliche; Architectural Sections of Heidegger and Freud"<sup>6</sup> argues that it is one of the uncanninesses of Heidegger's thought that it proposes uncanniness as a fundamental structure of existence and sustains this uncanniness in the discussions on 'fleeing'. According to Farrell; "...what is uncanny is the need of existence to flee itself. What is unhomelike is the need of Dasein to escape from itself, to be forever in flight."<sup>7</sup>

In terms of the mood of anxiety, Heidegger rearticulates his distinction between the authentic and inauthentic by suggesting that the authenticity of Being-one's-Self is closed off in 'falling'. "Dasein's falling into the "they" and the 'world' of its concern, is what we have called a 'fleeing' in the face of itself ... In falling Dasein turns away from itself".<sup>8</sup> This consideration of Dasein's 'fleeing' "in the face of itself and in the face of authenticity" around the mood of anxiety can be extended to boredom.

What Dasein experiences through anxiety as a coming face to face with itself becomes "the moment of vision" in relation to boredom. One of the concluding subsections where he expands on the meaning of the word boredom as "the lengthening of the while in profound boredom as the expansion of the temporal horizon and the

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<sup>5</sup> BT, 184.

<sup>6</sup> David Farrell Krell, "Das Unheimliche; Architectural Sections of Heidegger and Freud", *Research in Phenomenology* 22 (1992): 43-61.

<sup>7</sup> Krell, 50.

<sup>8</sup> BT, 185.

vanishing of the extremity of a moment of vision”<sup>9</sup>, he argues that what vanishes in profound boredom is the extremity of moment of vision - the grasp of being-held-in-limbo. In vanishing, this extremity molds itself into the moment of vision which offers Dasein the “properly authentic possibility of that which makes possible the existence of Dasein”<sup>10</sup>. It follows that the demand that Dasein faces in the moment of vision has to be taken as a burden which liberates Dasein:

This liberation of the Dasein in man does not mean placing him in some arbitrary position, but loading Dasein upon man as his ownmost burden. Only those who can truly give themselves a burden are free.<sup>11</sup>

The liberation of Dasein would find its possibility in the proper questioning of this attunement of boredom: in not getting lost in the demand and diversions of everyday life by responding to the moment of vision and acknowledging the temporal horizon.

There is a latent criticism of philosophies of culture in the consequences Heidegger draws from this. Heidegger opposes his work to philosophies of culture that tend to understand culture as a series of presentations of man made possible by and created as culture:

We do not ultimately need any diagnoses or prognoses of culture in order to make sure of our situation, because they merely provide us with a role and untie us from ourselves, instead of helping us to want to find ourselves.<sup>12</sup>

What Heidegger proposes instead is the awakening of our fundamental attunement, profound boredom, in order to be able to deal with what contemporary world in the form

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<sup>9</sup> FCM, 152.

<sup>10</sup> FCM, 153.

<sup>11</sup> FCM, 166.

<sup>12</sup> FCM, 77.



of economic growth and technological innovations offers us. “Awakening attunements is a manner and means of grasping Da-sein with respect to the specific ‘way’ [*Weise*] in which it is, of grasping Da-sein as Da-sein, or better: of letting Da-sein be as it is, or can be, as Da-sein.”<sup>13</sup> Moving away from a thought of culture as role, the disclosure of Dasein through awakening this mood also discloses a way of being in the world with its limitations.

For some commentators, therefore, escaping or suppressing boredom will result in evading the possibility of experiencing the nothingness of Being in the mode of turning away from it. Leslie Paul Thiele in his article “Postmodernity and the Routinization of Novelty: Heidegger on boredom and technology” evidences this position in line with an account of the task of philosophy in twentieth century and says:

What Nietzsche says of nihilism, we might then say of boredom: the task is to digest it and only thus to leave it behind. The challenge is not to escape or suppress boredom but to overcome it. One only ever overcomes boredom by passing repeatedly through it.<sup>14</sup>

Heidegger’s attempt can thus be understood to grasp both the question and the meaning of being in the age of the technological through the mood that prevails in it while constantly being produced by it. If this task of philosophy sets itself a challenge, that challenge cannot simply be an overcoming of it. If Heidegger is not recommending an escape, it is not because he finds a way of overcoming it. Quite the opposite: boredom offers itself as the attunement which problematizes overcoming – of metaphysics, of ontology, of the limits of Dasein. Thiele misses the crucial difference that Heidegger uncovers between anxiety and boredom. The analysis of boredom differs from the analysis of anxiety most explicitly in “What is Metaphysics?” as Dasein is defined in

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<sup>13</sup> FCM, 68.

<sup>14</sup> Thiele, 500.

relation to anxiety as Being-held-out-into-the-nothing [*Hineingehaltenheit in das Nichts*] whereas *The Fundamental Concept of Metaphysics* defines Dasein in relation to boredom as being-held-in-limbo [*Hingehaltenheit*]. This seemingly small difference shifts the focus from nothingness to the totality of beings as a whole, from transcendence to immanence, from metaphysics – as understood to be an “inquiry beyond or over beings, which aims to recover them as such and as a whole for our grasp”<sup>15</sup> - to world – in the form of another metaphysical question which manifests the limits of this metaphysical tradition – from authenticity to the difficulties that the distinction between the authentic and the inauthentic creates. Simply, it would be a mistake to consider the roles of anxiety and boredom as the same in Heidegger’s thought although similarity is necessarily in play as both are treated as grounding attunements. What may be suggested here, in order not to lose the distinctiveness of boredom, is that Heidegger and Levinas come very close to each other in terms of acknowledging a need for escape from Being, despite their different directions concerning the direction and outcomes and possibilities of such an escape. This point might easily be missed again if boredom and anxiety are not thought carefully in their differences from each other.

Levinas blames bourgeois spirit and its philosophy for man’s greed for ‘things’ and material goods which he can manipulate and control, complaining about capitalism and conservatism alike:

Yet, prosaically materialistic, he prefers the certainty of tomorrow to today’s enjoyments. He demands guarantees in the present against the future, which introduces unknowns into those solved problems from which he lives. What he possesses becomes capital, carrying interest or insurance against risks, and his future, thus tamed, is integrated in this way with its past.”<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> WM, 106.

<sup>16</sup> OE, 50.

Levinas finds the need for escape necessary though perhaps impossible. It is only through such an urge to escape that we can come to terms with our existence in this world which would open up towards the possibility of an experience of pure being.

The importance of moods in Heidegger's thought lies in its availability to provide a conceptual framework for the world, human being and Dasein through a definitive concept; Being-in-the-world. Moods bring us face to face with Dasein as well as the world that Dasein dwells in. This is not the actual world but rather the world that presents Dasein its possibilities as a whole. In a sense, the implication of this is that not all of these possibilities can be actualized however, as possibilities – and which might never be experienced as other than possibility - define Dasein in its totality. One can argue that through moods we become as close as we can to some such possible experiences. Here in Heidegger we find two notions that guide us in relation to fundamental moods; *Befindlichkeit* [disposition] and *Geworfenheit* [thrownness]. These notions were considered in detail in the previous chapter. At the risk of being repetitive, we can say that he mentions these two terms in a relation to each other that argues for a necessity of evasion. In *Being and Time*, disposition is defined as follows: “What we indicate ontologically by the term ‘state-of-mind’ [*Befindlichkeit*] is ontically the most familiar and everyday sort of thing; our mood, our Being attuned.”<sup>17</sup> The further contention is that:

Ontologically, we thus obtain as the first essential characteristics of state-of-mind [*Befindlichkeit*] that they disclose Dasein in its thrownness, and – proximately and for the most part - in the manner of an evasive turning-away.<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>17</sup>BT, 172.

<sup>18</sup> BT, 175.

We can thus argue that evasion is necessary both in Levinas and Heidegger, only their sense of a focus in terms of the direction of this escape differ. For the former this need for escape is what introduces us to the nothingness of being through the experience of *there is*, possibility of thinking beyond being, routeless, an unknown path which is emancipatory for the being. For the latter, the direction at the moment of disclosure is backwards, away from the disclosure of being.

In his 1932 study on “Martin Heidegger and Ontology”<sup>19</sup>, Levinas puts the notion of thrownness in the heart of his study and claims that it is by way of affective disposition that Dasein understands itself, its being there but that this being there is imposed on it. He tends to see this evasive turning back as a paralyzing effect of Dasein’s being thrown. In his analysis, Levinas claims that by being thrown into the midst of its possibilities Dasein has always already riveted to them rather than being placed before them. This is what Levinas calls fact. Jacques Roland in his introduction to *On Escape* confirms this when he writes, “Having been thrown into the world, abandoned and delivered over to oneself – such is the ontological description of a fact.”<sup>20</sup> “The moment of vision”, the moment of disclosure which brings Dasein face to face with itself, is binding and always already placed before it. Heidegger strangely enough, understands this as the ‘innermost necessity of the freedom of Dasein’<sup>21</sup> as it also marks the moment Dasein comprehends itself as Da-sein.

Levinas departing from this rather difficult understanding of freedom reveals the contradiction of this freedom’s binding necessity and questions the facticity in Heidegger. He replaces nausea as the fundamental disposition (*Grundstimmung*) in his own thinking in relation to being riveted. Jacques Rolland insists that we should not

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<sup>19</sup> Emmanuel Levinas, “Martin Heidegger and Ontology”, trans.by the Committee of Public Safety, *Diacritics* 26 (1) (1996): 11-32.

<sup>20</sup> OE, 13.

<sup>21</sup> FCM, 166.

understand nausea as simply physiological, just as we do not understand moods like anxiety or boredom in terms of the psychological. It is not that these aspects do not matter; rather, quite the opposite, in so far as the reintroduction of the body as something other than an object of experience is implicitly brought into question by the moves of both Heidegger and Levinas.

Rolland states three traits of nausea and suggests that these are common as traits of moods like boredom and anxiety. “In its phenomenon, nausea is not reducible to the determinacy of the object that caused it...”<sup>22</sup> We argued that this was the case in Heidegger’s analyses of all forms of boredom, from the first to the last form he gradually problematized the object-subject relationships in relation to different forms of boredom. “...Nausea lays bare the essential solitude of the being-there it strikes, and manifests nothingness...”<sup>23</sup> What boredom creates is a kind of indifference in and through which we come face to face with what-is-in-totality. It should be noted that the moods mentioned here have different ways of relating to the nothingness. The common ground is that they provide a certain kind of limit experience, if not necessarily in a Blanchotian sense. This limit could be defined in terms of the moment of disclosure that necessarily involves an imagining, between the everyday world we live in and other worlds that we can imagine and the way we relate to them.

The experience of nothingness as possible would further require an absence of the subject to experience it as well. Heidegger’s and Levinas’ accounts of this – if also, as we shall see, Blanchot’s - involves the impersonal as the possibility of an experience of nothingness. For Levinas, the impersonal does not belong to an actual self which can be interpreted as any existent, in the sense that Levinas’ understands this term, but to an existential self which would provide the necessary condition for an impersonal

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<sup>22</sup> OE, 19.

<sup>23</sup> OE, 20.

experience, “I experience myself no longer as a self, but as something other. I become other to myself to such an extent that in this experience we can no longer speak of an ‘I’ or a ‘myself’.”<sup>24</sup>

#### 4.2 Levinas and the Experience of the Impersonal

The experience of the impersonal leads to the authentic self in Heidegger. This experience takes different paths in the work of Emmanuel Levinas and Maurice Blanchot. It is interesting to see that the impersonal springs out of their attempted radical criticism of Heideggerean authenticity. It could be argued that in ‘it is boring for one’ there is an anticipation of a world other than the everyday world in which a truly public self would exist. Being and being, existence and what Levinas will call the existent, is held in limbo between these spaces, as Heidegger re-stages a thought of the ontico-ontological difference. In ‘it is boring for one’ it was argued that this attunement wishes to tell us something. The *there is* in Levinas’ thought and, differently, if with similar difficulties, the imaginary space of literature in Blanchot aims at such a communicativity which may be understood as an imaginary communication between the self and otherness. Thomas Carl Wall calls this ‘radical passivity’. In his book *Radical Passivity, Levinas, Blanchot, and Agamben* Wall writes, “...Communicativity pulverizes discourse. It gives nothing to be thought; it gives no message to which we might listen but, in effect says: there is (*il y a*).”<sup>25</sup>

We can start tracing the major diversion from Heidegger’s thought in Levinas from the title of his book *Existence and Existents [De l'existence à l'existant]*; from existence to the existent, whose project is defined as an analysis of a being, a subject, an existent,

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<sup>24</sup> Large, 137.

<sup>25</sup> Thomas Carl Wall, *Radical Passivity, Levinas, Blanchot, and Agamben* (Albany: State University of NY Press, 1999), 9. Hereafter, RP.

arising in impersonal Being through hypostasis.<sup>26</sup> Levinas suggests a reversal of the Heideggerean problematic from the start of the work in the title – a reversal to which, rearticulated in *Time and the Other*, this thesis will return - where he introduces the *there is* by beginning with the Heideggerean distinction between Being and beings, reformulating the distinction as that between existing and existent. Heidegger departs from the existent – existing human being – that is thrown among other beings, other existents, and passes to a mode of existence as ownmost possibility; authentic being towards death. By reversing this structure, Levinas puts forward the verbal mode of existing as hinted at in *On Escape*. The move from the act of existing to the substantive existent can be understood as a move from verbality – potentiality - to passivity. This reversal is justified by constant references to Heidegger. The book does not only stand as the work where he introduces the *there is* but also where he seeks to rewrite the Heideggerean notion of *ek-stasis* through another notion that governs this work, namely hypostasis [*l'hypostase*].

Jacques Taminiaux describes Levinas' project that is presented through hypostasis in his article "The Presence of *Being and Time* in *Totality and Infinity*" as follows:

Likewise the *hypostasis* in Levinas' sense of the word is a relational notion. But the relation designated by the word does not take place between a divine verb and a substantive refracting it. The relation at stake in Levinas' use of the word is the emergence of the human substantive, an *existent* out of a verb which is strictly anonymous, neutral, impersonal, called in French: *il y a, there is*. By naming hypostasis the primary relation between an existent and existence, Levinas means that the human being emerges first of all from an anonymous flow of existence under which he stays, to which he is intimately submitted and which again and again is experienced by him as a load, a burden he has to sustain.<sup>27</sup>

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<sup>26</sup> EE, 19.

<sup>27</sup> Jacques Taminiaux, "The Presence of *Being and Time* in *Totality and Infinity*", [<http://ghansel.free.fr/taminiaux.html>].

Levinas effectively aims towards a certain salvaging of the subject from this burden of existence by pushing it to limits, paying special attention to certain situations which human beings more commonly experience as a burden. The special ‘situations’ taken up by Levinas in order to be subjected to a philosophical analysis are fatigue and insomnia, situations which escape intentionality, situations which would not be projected and would be avoided if possible. The space of the *there is* as hypostasis, as staying under the burden, provides Levinas with the possibility of working with these situations philosophically on the one hand, and arguing against the Heideggerean notion of ecstasy on the other hand. As he writes:

The concept which appears to reside over the Heideggerean interpretation of human existence is that of existence conceived as ecstasy – which is only possible as an ecstasy towards the end.<sup>28</sup>

These are situations of the human existent in so far as they are experienced without ever simply having been intended or projected. Similar lack of intentionality – in the mode of “inverse intentionality” - is detected in art for Levinas as he, according to John Llewlyn argues in “Reality and its shadow” that “the aesthetic phenomenon is scarcely more than a dream in which responsibility is suspended.”<sup>29</sup> In the first move, the attention is directed at the work of art perceptively and this move is immediately accompanied by a second one which is non-perceptive, which loses its object as the work of art and the subject as the spectator. Therefore it could be argued that the phenomenon of art takes place in a ‘there is’ like space.

We may hypothetically draw boredom into such an account, even while making room for understanding why Levinas himself does not do so. Boredom, according to

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<sup>28</sup> EE, 19.

<sup>29</sup> John Llewelyn, *The Hypocritical Imagination: Between Kant and Levinas* (London & NY: Routledge, 2000), 170.



Heidegger's account, would be a human condition which resembles Levinas' insomnia and fatigue in the sense that it is experienced as a burden – as in the first form of boredom – a rupture, dispossession of oneself and subjection to the everyday – as in the second form of boredom – and a submission to the anonymous with no proper reference to a subject or an object as a cause – as in the case of profound boredom. Therefore Levinas' impersonal experience of the *there is* will be treated as corresponding to a possible account of the experience of boredom given that characteristics of insomnia and fatigue that are similar to boredom allows Levinas to argue that these are not the conditions that emerge as a result of being in the world, but rather that their experience reveals existence as antecedent to the world and not the existent in its relationship to the world. "For the Being which we become aware of when the world disappears is not a person or a thing, or the sum total of persons and things; it is the fact that one is, the fact that *there is*."<sup>30</sup> The space of *there is* therefore is where hypostasis is produced.<sup>31</sup>

This account of the existent in Levinas would be confirmed by Bataille's reading.

According to Bataille:

The opposition between existence and existent does not differ from that of being-becoming. Existence is impersonal, it is the universal. The existent is the individual. It is the substantive of which existence is the verb: existence is for Levinas a "pure verb" of which the passage to the substantive is hypostasis.<sup>32</sup>

What is described by *there is* is not simply an actual state of things; rather, it is also an imaginary space. The experience of *there is* stands on the limit and makes the limit disappear and it is the subject's position which disappears as the agent of the action. The loss of the world and the disappearance of all objects indicate a rupture with the category

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<sup>30</sup> EE, 21.

<sup>31</sup> TO, 50.

<sup>32</sup> Bataille in AR, 165.

of the substantive through the “extinction of the subject”.<sup>33</sup> What appears is the disappearance, what becomes visible is the invisibility, only not in a way that would affirm these negations as they are not dialectical counterparts of these concepts. The change from the visible to the invisible, from something to nothing, lacks a corresponding subject to recognize these changes in so far as the subject as perceiver loses the possibility of this position as recognizer.

This imaginary space is also the space where some single distinction between subject and object can no longer be put into play. The subject is lost. In consequence, the experience of this space is termed an ‘impersonal’ experience although Levinas describes this imaginary experience in his book *Existence and Existents* as follows:

Let us imagine all beings, things and persons, reverting to nothingness. One cannot put this return to nothingness outside of all events. But what of this nothingness itself? Something would happen, if only night and silence of nothingness. The indeterminateness of this ‘something is happening’ is not the indeterminateness of a subject and does not refer to a substantive. Like the third person pronoun in the impersonal form of the verb, it designates not the uncertainly known author of the action, but the characteristic of this action itself which somehow has no author. This impersonal, anonymous, yet inextinguishable ‘consummation’ of being, which murmurs in the depths of nothingness itself we shall designate by the term *there is*. The *there is*, in as much as it resists personal form, is ‘being in general’.<sup>34</sup>

It may be hypothesized, in relation to this development of the argument that Levinas’ thought effectively aims at and works to undermine a notion of subject as authorship, an authorship which would correspond to traditional philosophical idealism if also to an interest of such a position which would oppose itself to some materialism.

John Sallis argues in his article “Levinas and the elemental” that Levinas ignores the complex set of indications as to how this imagination would be construed in relation

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<sup>33</sup> EE, 67.

<sup>34</sup> EE, 57.

to the question of Being. From Plato onwards the determinations of imagination seem to be surpassed by Levinas for the sake of a proposal of imagining nothingness which would not necessarily be different from imagining something.<sup>35</sup> The tone of Levinas' argument becomes more convincing, however, in his description of the *there is* in *Time and the Other* where he writes:

Let us imagine all things, beings and persons, returning to nothingness. What remains after this imaginary destruction of everything is not something, but the fact that *there is*. The absence of everything returns as presence, as the place where the bottom has dropped out of everything, an atmospheric density, a plenitude of the void or the murmur of silence. There is, after this destruction of things and beings, the impersonal "field of forces" of existing. There is something that is neither subject nor substantive. The fact of existing imposes itself where there is no longer anything. And it is anonymous: there is neither anyone nor anything that takes this existence upon itself. It is impersonal like "it is raining" or "it is hot". Existing returns no matter with what negation one dismisses it. There is, as the irremissibility of pure existing.<sup>36</sup>

For Levinas the hypostasis produced in the space of the *there is* provides us with a possibility of an existing without existents. It is remarkable that he puts into play a concept that might appear to belong to aesthetic thought, namely the imagination, in order to conceptualise this space. According to Sallis, the reason Levinas calls us to imagine such a space is that imagination not only reduces things and beings into nothingness but also "it has the power --indeed, is the power -- of hovering between opposites and holding them together in their opposition."<sup>37</sup>

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<sup>35</sup> John Sallis, "Levinas and the elemental", *Research in Phenomenology* 28 (1998): 152, 9.

<sup>36</sup> TO, 46-47.

<sup>37</sup> Sallis, 161.

#### 4.2.1 *There is* and art as exoticism

Jill Robbins writes extensively on Levinas' access to *there is* by way of imagination and reads his 1948 essay "Reality and its Shadow" in relation to the operations of *there is* and suggests that, "Both the *il y a* and the aesthetic event may be understood as an antihypostasis."<sup>38</sup> According to Jill Robbins there is a juxtaposition of Levinas' discussion of art as exoticism and the *there is* and that they are conceptually connected. Levinas writes in "Reality and its Shadow" that, "The most elementary function of art consists in substituting for the object its image."<sup>39</sup> The experience of an art work falls into a space which resembles the space of the 'there is' as they both suggest "the extraction of the thing from the perspective of the world".<sup>40</sup> An art work is experienced as an image which belongs to an object whose place is indeterminate. The object that lends its image to the art work might belong to the world where nevertheless its use-function is suspended for the sake of its image to circulate as a work of art. On the other hand, the object might not have any such function in the world, there might not be an object as such in the world, and any object that lends its image to an artwork might belong to another world, an imaginary world. The object in question and the *there is* address us in a similar fashion, from outside of this world but their effects occur in the world.

Georges Bataille remarks on the similar operations of art and the *there is* in Levinas' thought in a review essay of 1947 - the first review Levinas' work had received by that time – which aims at situating Levinas' and Blanchot's thinking of the *there is*

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<sup>38</sup> AR, 93.

<sup>39</sup> Emmanuel Levinas, "Reality and its Shadow" in *The Levinas Reader*, ed. By Seán Hand (Oxford, Basil Blackwell, 1989), 132. Hereafter, RS.

<sup>40</sup> EE, 52.

as “the return of presence in negation”.<sup>41</sup> Bataille argues that the experience of *there is* can become accessible through alluding to experience of art: “The *there is* is, apparently, the ineffable of mystics: although Levinas has spoken about it, nevertheless he has expressed it only through the channel of formal effects (modern painting, surrealist art...)”.<sup>42</sup>

What both art and the *there is* provide us with is a thought of the outside which is also inside. An imaginary limit that separates the inside from the outside, a limit which says what is imaginary and what is not, what belongs to the world that ‘I’ as the knowing subject inhabits and what of where ‘I’ am left outside together with my world. This imaginary limit sends what ‘I’ term imaginary in the mode of ‘the return of presence in negation’ back to the world. Therefore the experience of this limit is without any proper references to the everyday world. It takes place in an imaginary space. This space lacks existents but not existence, there is not this or that or something, there is not I, he or she, there is ‘one’ and this ‘one’ does not correspond to any ‘one’ in the everyday world. The existence in this space is also neutral. This space could well be an artistic space, space of literature, space of art in so far as they would be devoid of predetermined cognition and memory. The artwork represents pure possibilities, if it represents anything, possibilities that wouldn’t necessarily be actualised in the everyday world. The artwork comes from another space intertwined with ours; it is in its actual form that it is only a borrowed image of a reality which does not belong to this world. However, it would not carry us to its own space; the experience of the artwork takes place in this world.

In the space of literature or art in general, signification as systematic dissolves, with the suspension of signifier/signified or signifier/referent relations infecting each element. Reading or viewing becomes an imaginary activity of recombination and we

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<sup>41</sup> EE, 65.

<sup>42</sup> Bataille in AR, 171.

take part in that. Such a space allows for intervention provided that the subject does not seek to reclaim this space as the space of literature or art. 'I' as bored subject may let this boredom deepen in so far as such connections do not seek to reclaim this space as the space of art and literature as the already known. Boredom can be avoided, suppressed, diversions can be found to escape from it but only when it is let to linger and become profound boredom that it leads one to a participation in this space. The limit, in separating the everyday world from another, creates a space in-between them. What we find in Levinas is a search, a mediation between these spaces, without privileging one over the other. The *there is* is his key for keeping an equal distance from each world and his promise for a return to the world suggesting an impossibility of an access to another world other than an imaginary one. This side of the limit marks being-in-the-world and there is also the other side which transcends being-in-the-world. These could also be understood as two sides of Being. It should be noted here that Levinas claims in *Existence and Existents* that, "Transcendence is not the fundamental movement of the ontological adventure; it is founded in the non-transcendence of position."<sup>43</sup> This provides us with a modelling of a Levinasian participation in the spaces of art and literature.

In *Being and Time*, Heidegger claims that Dasein has an authentic potentiality-for-Being-a-whole. It can be argued that ontologically the conditions for Dasein to grasp itself as a whole lies beyond a limit of existence defined in relation to possibility. Death and nothingness belong to 'the other side' and can only be experienced as possibilities by Dasein from 'this side'. However, Dasein has to experience death in order to grasp itself as a whole. This is not just an example to show how one necessarily relates oneself to 'the other side'. It also shows more dramatically than anything how both sides of the

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<sup>43</sup> EE, 100.

limit define each other. Levinasian hypostasis tries to show that whatever belongs to the other side can only be possible as impossibility. The space of *there is* is the space of horror that emerges as a consequence of a realisation of this impossibility.

According to Bataille; “For Levinas art indeed is one of the ways of the *there is*. Art ‘tears objects away from the world’...”<sup>44</sup> It is not obvious what Bataille or Levinas mean by ‘the world’, therefore we might tend to understand this ‘world’ as where objects retain their objecthood and are related to by subjects accordingly. Art, like the *there is*, is proposed as that which provides us with spaces where object and subject positions are suspended. The inverse intentionality of the space of art, in resembling the unintentionality of the space of ‘there is’ work through a certain kind of disinterestedness. We may understand this disinterestedness as the suspension of the object/subject positions which nevertheless sustains them as existents and place the existent in a move from the existence – the phenomenon of art and not just the work of art – to the existent – the work of art -. The Levinasian aesthetic therefore - in “tearing objects away from the world” - can be argued to create another limit between the world and the space of art and suggest the aesthetic phenomenon as an experience of the limit and the experience of the work of art as a possibility of impossibility. Levinas writes in “Reality and its shadow” that, “...art, essentially disengaged, constitutes, in a world of initiative and responsibility, a dimension of evasion.”<sup>45</sup> This dimension opened up in the world by art recalls a similar space, the space of the ‘there is’. It can be argued that this claim of Levinas’ is also consistent with the necessity of escape he maintains in *On Escape*.

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<sup>44</sup> Bataille in AR, 175.

<sup>45</sup> RS, 141.

#### 4.2.2 The Subject/Object Distinction

We have implied in passing that the task Levinas takes up is to point at the confusion that the history of consciousness creates in terms of the subject perhaps contributing to that confusion for the sake of overcoming it. It was mentioned before that some of the notions Levinas deals with such as nausea, if also latterly need and pleasure, should not be understood simply in terms of physiology or psychology or even psychoanalytically, as they have ontological status in his thinking but nevertheless the idea that they manifest a questioning of consciousness which had preoccupied psychoanalysis as well as philosophy needs to be explored. As Levinas writes in *Existence and Existents*:

Since the discovery of the unconscious – and this contradiction in terms is evidence of a considerable upheaval - philosophy has been conceiving of the unconscious as another consciousness, failing to recognize the ontological function of the unconscious and its specific relationship with conscious clarity, with sincerity, which separates itself from the obscurity, depth, and ambiguity of the unconscious. The unconscious is interpreted in terms of consciousness, or the reverse. The unconscious appears as a possible, a germ, or as something repressed. In fact, the implicitness referred to in speaking of implicit cognition no longer presents the structure of cognition; the essential event of the world, which is intention and light, no longer means anything here. Consciousness is precisely a sincerity. In taking being-in-the-world as an intention one is above all affirming – and the history of our civilization and our philosophy confirms this - that the world is the field of consciousness, and the peculiar structure that characterizes consciousness governs and gives meaning to all the infiltrations of the unconscious in the world. It is ‘before’ the world comes about that the unconscious plays its role.<sup>46</sup>

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<sup>46</sup> EE, 38.



What is being suggested here is a questioning of the Cartesian subject/object dichotomy, world as the object of knowledge and the knowing subject. *There is* creates a space where these dichotomies are suspended. Levinas' argument has significant consequences in thinking the possibility of an ethical relationship between the 'I' and the other, the 'I' as hostage to the other, or between the knowing subject and God. These are somewhat irrelevant to our aims here. What comes out of this encounter with Descartes is, in Levinas' words, "discovering thought as substance, that is, as something that is posited".<sup>47</sup> In the space of 'there is' according to Levinas the anonymous, impersonal subject is affirmed in the taking of positions. This is not the space of nothingness or being; it is that which is "excluded in the middle", between nothingness and being, the space of this limit.

This imaginary space provides an image for the subject of possibilities. What the subject sees is not himself/herself actualizing some of these possibilities but that which the subject might misrecognize. We previously argued that profound boredom brings Dasein face to face with its own being and makes it to recognize its own Dasein as a burden. These encounters do not suggest any doubling of the subject or split into the being and Dasein. In the simplest sense of the term, and sparing, for now, a consideration of the relation between thought and imagination, we can say that the split is between this world and another world, what happens in-between is imaginary but the affect is real.

Turning back to the question of subject in Levinas, it may be helpful to read him in relation to another thinker, the philosophically informed psychoanalyst Jacques Lacan who perhaps contributes more to discussions concerning the Cartesian subject than many philosophers of his generation. Lacan's first presented his account of the 'mirror stage' in 1936. Tina Chanter in her article "Reading Hegel" cites Lacan who claims in terms of the

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<sup>47</sup> EE, 68.

experience of the mirror stage that, “It is an experience that leads us to oppose any philosophy issuing directly from the Cogito.”<sup>48</sup> The mirror stage denotes the passage which enables the constitution of the subject, the first steps of the formation of the ego.

There is more than one fascinating intersection between Levinas’ and Lacan’s thinking. The parallelism between the ‘there is’ and the mirror stage exemplifies only one of them. The mirror stage could well be reversed to understand the passage from the person to the impersonal. What was being suggested in Lacan’s theorisation concerning the formation of the ego is an anticipation of a mastery of space in the enabling identification with a reflection of the body of the subject which, as such, is a misrecognition of that which is, as ego, enabled. The subject formation is founded on the misrecognition of what is occurring in the mirror through treating one’s image as oneself. We can argue that Lacan’s mirror stage can be taken as a model to understand the play of the operations of the space in and across the imaginary. This subject instrumentalises him or herself through a ‘medium’ of misrecognition, in an account which misses the enabling identification that it presupposes with the mirror as the ‘producer’ of the image of the self. Lacan thus repeats the bias of western metaphysics, if not of metaphysics as such, which would make of the image that which exists by means of a fundamental sublimation of *techne*, a stress which tends to allow for the forgetting of the instrumentalising of the ‘self’ which it fails to explain.<sup>49</sup>

Lacan argues that the subject ‘masters’ space because of the ‘interest’ in the figure of the self - fundamental or primary narcissism. In the ‘there is’, Levinas’ subject discovers, in a sort of unravelling of the pretension of the mirror stage, that space escapes the mastering of the visible as what was outside exists across the inside. The impersonal

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<sup>48</sup> Tina Chanter, “Reading Hegel as a Mediating Master: Lacan and Levinas” in *Levinas and Lacan: The Missed Encounter*, ed. Sarah Harasym (Albany: SUNY Press, 1998), 10.

<sup>49</sup> Blanchot on the imaginary and Narcissus try to mediate between his/her image and himself/herself through the lack occurred in the mirror.

is this excess of existence in an unravelling of the proprietary claim over the image. The imaginary space of the mirror becomes a threshold across which the subject is drawn into the possibility of the discovery of the non-belonging of the existence of appearances as image. What a mirror creates after all is an imaginary space, a threshold, where the subject either puts off or on his/her subject-hood at the door of this space.

We can conclude with a further account of this relationship between Levinas and Lacan. Paul Laurent Assoun in his article “The Subject and the Other in Levinas and Lacan” gives a brilliant account of the significance of the encounter of these two thinkers and the striking parallelism between their conceptions despite the fact that one serves for psychoanalysis and the other for philosophy. Assoun calls ‘there is’ the ‘neutral home’ which provides us with a rather horrifying perspective to grasp the relation of the ego and the world and of the subject and the Other. He considers Levinas’ account of insomnia as exemplifying one of the states in which the experience of ‘there is’ emerges. As this experience is the closest we could get to the experience of nothingness and death, it reminds us what we might have well forgotten in the hubris of the everyday world namely our mortality, finitude:

Here insomnia finds its function as absurd cogito of the ‘it watches’, face to face with anonymity and its personal - an extreme passivity and underemployment of an ego that drowns in the ‘rustling of being’ and no longer finds distinctive ‘inside’ and ‘outside’ reference points.”<sup>50</sup>

The impersonal experience of the *there is* therefore is the experience of existence in the absence of a self to recognize the situation he/she/it is in. The significance of this absence finds its reference in the history of philosophy which has been understood to require a subject in order to account for a possibility of experience in general. This

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<sup>50</sup> Paul Laurent Assoun, “The Subject and the Other in Levinas and Lacan” in *Levinas and Lacan: The Missed Encounter*, ed. Sarah Harasym (Albany: SUNY Press, 1998), 88.

subject does not only stand as the condition for the possibility of experience but also as the condition for the possibility of the objects of experience. What Levinas wants us to imagine therefore is also impossibility as far as the history of philosophy concerned. The experience of impossibility might be impossible, we are however as subjects capable of imagining impossibility. We also experience certain situations where we come very close to an impossible experience. It may be argued that these situations - as exemplified for Levinas by fatigue and insomnia and hypothetically in this thesis as profound boredom – bring the subject to a certain limit where the subject withholds its subjecthood, in the mode of ‘underemployment’, an important echo of the unravelling of the instrumentalising of self in Lacanian identification, to partake in the experience as one among others. The space of the impersonal existence therefore cannot simply be interiorized by the subject as it cannot simply be thought as outside either.

It should be remembered that Heidegger’s Dasein needed to salvage an authentic self from this experience which corresponds to an interiorization of this experience. This suspension of another binary opposition – inside and outside – and its being left unresolved is a part of Levinas’ attempted strategy for the renewal of philosophy, a relatively less ambitious one compared to Husserl’s or Heidegger’s, a strategy perhaps less convincing in comparison to Blanchot’s persistent concern with the literary and literary space.

According to Assoun, it is not by chance that Levinas finds the most fitting example for the experience of ‘there is’ and the description of the ‘vertigo of subjectivity’ in Maurice Blanchot’s work. In one of the rare footnotes in his book *Existence and Existents*, he writes:

*Thomas l’Obscure*, by Maurice Blanchot, opens with the description of the there is...(CF., in particular Chapter II, pages 13-16). The presence of absence, the night, the dissolution of the subject in the night, the horror of

being, the return of being in the heart of every negative movement, the reality of irreality are there admirably expressed.”<sup>51</sup>

But this ‘vertigo of subjectivity’ recalls another source in his thinking as well, the vertigo which Dasein experiences in relation to boredom in terms of being-held-out-in-limbo. John Sallis remarks on this, “Thought experiences a kind of vertigo in pondering the emptiness of being, of mere existing; it slips imperceptibly from being as being to a being in general, a cause of existence, reenacting that very slippage that Heidegger has shown to govern the entire history of philosophy.”<sup>52</sup> This Levinasian reading of Heideggerean thought, in which being is construed as occasion of existence, nevertheless suggests the passage from existence to existent in which Levinas’ ‘*there is*’ involves us.

### 4.3 Blanchot and the Experience of the Impersonal

The experience of the impersonal in Heidegger’s account leads one back to a self, an authentic self, as was argued earlier. Levinas and Blanchot share the same resoluteness about not falling into Heideggerean discourse of authenticity and searching for the possibility of an impersonal experience that does not seek a subject to attribute that experience to but rather seeks a presence of its own. According to Bataille, and the epigraph to this chapter, “Levinas describes and Blanchot cries - as it were – the *there is*.” In a sense, what Levinas aims at by means of the term ‘verbality’ can be argued to be fulfilled in the work of Blanchot. Bataille is pointing at the difficulty that Levinas faces in relation to the space of *there is*, in terms of making this space communicate, the difficulty that has been turned into an advantage of the literary by Blanchot. The space of

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<sup>51</sup> EE, 63.

<sup>52</sup> Sallis, 153.

*there is* as the space of horror and suffocation becomes the space of art in Blanchot where “art’s summons is heard”:

Art requires that he who practises it ... should become other, not another, not transformed from the human being he was into an artist with artistic duties, satisfactions and interests, but into nobody, the empty, animated space where art's summons is heard.<sup>53</sup>

The space of *there is* for Blanchot, in which the agent is the neuter, does not simply belong to philosophy or art; rather, it is an imaginary space which is left empty of all substances, all relations to the world, it is neither in the world nor outside the world, qualities do not cling to matter but to no one and nothing. The work – of art – is that which sustains this space, inhabits this space by accomplishing nothing but affirming the space. This is to say that the work of art in its passive relation to nothing and no one – not an author or reader – is caught up in inertia. Therefore this is the space of unworking [*désœuvrement*], idleness where nothing happens, where the artist turns into “the one who does not produce, who wanders astray within an infinite idleness”<sup>54</sup> and the work – the text – as something idle.

Strangely enough Blanchot’s criticism of Levinas on art takes the space of unworking as its vantage point. Blanchot disagrees with the assumption that “First we have the object, afterwards comes the image”<sup>55</sup> as he does not think of the image as the “distancing, the refusal, the transposition of the object”. An artistic relationship to the world is problematized through a relationship with this space of unworking. “An artist could never ascend from the use he makes of an object in the world to a picture in which this object becomes art.” In other words, the relationship between the object and its

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<sup>53</sup> Maurice Blanchot, "Where Now? Who Now?" *The Siren's Song: Selected Essays by Maurice Blanchot*, trans. Sacha Rabinovitch, ed. Gabriel Josidovici (1953; Bloomington: University of Indiana Press, 1982), 192-8, 197.

<sup>54</sup> SL, 182. *Désœuvrement* is translated as idleness.

<sup>55</sup> SL, 46.

image which is to become art cannot be mediated by the artist. What the artist does is to look at a certain object and respond to the demand of the work that comes from this space. It is not simply another space – which is the world’s other - that he responds to but also another time, time’s other. In this time and space the artist is exposed to the “essential solitude where fascination threatens”<sup>56</sup> which draws the artist to look at the objects of the ordinary world differently. This look which comes from this space and time neutralizes the object’s material usefulness and renders it pure and in secondary move adopts it to the time of the world – “simultaneity” - and space – “symmetry” - through stylizations. “In other words, one never ascends from “the world” to art...rather, one goes always from art toward what appears to be the neutralized appearances of the world.”<sup>57</sup>

This space described as the space of idleness nevertheless is the space of fascination as well provided that both the author and the reader – Blanchot always maintains a relation to the essence of language independent of whether he is laying stress on the work of art or the literary text - allow language to be what it is in itself and withhold their identifying presences. This is the space where there is nothing to do but to wait.

It has been claimed by several commentators that the Blanchotian neuter cannot be thought without being related to Levinas’ *there is*. Jacques Rolland finds it an astonishing fact that Blanchot used the term *there is* in his story entitled “The Last Word” published in 1935 while Levinas was still drafting “On Escape”.<sup>58</sup> We can argue that it is questionable to whom to attribute *there is* as Levinas’ *there is* does not seem to be suggesting something so very different from Blanchot’s own use of this phrase in the

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<sup>56</sup> SL, 47.

<sup>57</sup> SL, 47.

<sup>58</sup> OE, 107.

following passage. Peculiarly, Levinas sends us back to another work by Blanchot for an account of *there is* and not the one which goes as follow:

I ran away. It was already dusk. The city was invaded by smoke and clouds. Only the doors of the houses were visible, barred and gigantic inscriptions. A cold dampness was shining on the cobblestones. When I went down the stairway beside the river, some large dogs appeared on the opposite bank. They were similar to mastiffs and their heads bristled with crowns of thorns. I knew that the justice department [*la justice*] used these dogs from time to time and that they had been trained to be quite ferocious. But I belonged to the justice department as well [*j'appartenais à la justice*]. That was my shame: I was a judge. Who could condemn me? Instead of filling the night with their barking, the dogs silently let me pass, as though they had not seen me. It was only after I had walked some distance that they began to howl again: trembling, muffled howls, which at that hour of the day resounded like the echo of the words *there is*.

“Those are probably the last words,” I thought, listening to them.

But the words *there is* were still able to reveal the things that were in this remote neighborhood. Before reaching the pavillon, I entered a real garden with trees, roots tangled along the ground, a whole forest of branches and plants...<sup>59</sup>

Blanchot's authorship as it were continues to introduce the phrase *there is* in various passages in a number of different texts. I shall proceed to consider the similarities and differences of these different uses of this phrase, with a view to relating them to Blanchot's own stated notion of the neuter. The significance of these passages lie in their capability to communicate a sense of the space of *there is* through the narrative of the neuter, like a first person pronoun withholding itself in favor of the words *there is* in “The Last Word” in the passage above.

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<sup>59</sup> Maurice Blanchot, “The Last Word,” in “*Vicious Circles: Two Fictions and 'After the Fact'*” in *The Station Hill Reader*, ed. by G. Quasha, trans. by Lydia Davis, Paul Auster & Robert Lambertson (New York: Station Hill Press, 1999), 41-2. Hereafter BR.



### 4.3.1 Neuter as the agent of experience

In his essay, “The Narrative Voice” Blanchot explains the neuter and why it should not be understood simply as an ungendered subject. Because what he aims at through the neuter is not a substitution of one subject with an undetermined other, rather it is a substitution of the subject who partakes in the story with what takes place when one tells a story. The neuter therefore is the impersonal voice which is neither someone from the text nor a projection from outside the text. The neuter is that which is in the text in a way that everything and everyone else is rendered as if outside the text:

The ‘he’ of narration in which the neuter speaks is not content to take place usually occupied by the subject, whether the latter is a stated or implied ‘I’ or whether it is the event as it takes place in its impersonal signification. The narrative ‘he’ dismisses all subjects, just as it removes every transitive action or every objective possibility. It does so in two forms: 1) the speech of the tale always lets us feel that what is not being told by anyone: it speaks in the neuter; 2) in the neuter space of the tale, the bearers of speech, the subjects – who used to take the place of characters – fall into a relationship of nonidentification with themselves: something happens to them, something they cannot recapture except by relinquishing their power to say ‘I’ and what happens to them has always happened already: they can only account for it indirectly, as self-forgetfulness, the forgetfulness that introduces them into the present without memory that is the present of narrating speech.<sup>60</sup>

The impersonality of Blanchot’s neuter suggests that we get to know or articulate who we are and what we are only after a forgetfulness in which what has happened cannot be contained in a reflection, has ‘always happened already’ and, as such, exceeds memorising. Narrating speech would forget this in a voice that was no longer one’s own. The essence of language can only be communicated through the neuter as this experience

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<sup>60</sup> BR, 465-66.

of the impersonal. Blanchot defines his notion of the 'neuter' as a play of words which in narrating pass across events that exceed them, making of literary space a space in which those who narrate communicate the exceeding of that space by those events. Formal and semantic resonances fail to enclose that space apart from the passage across it performed by these narratings, in a language which no longer affirms or negates something about the world but interrupts it as the neuter.

This space according to Blanchot does not offer the one who enters it a going beyond himself. This space does not have a place in another world which is more beautiful, more justified, more authentic, where he can speak a language which speaks more honourably for everyone. What speaks or what is being communicated through language is the essence of language which is spoken by him who is no longer himself or anyone for that matter. The author, artist, or reader does not necessarily seek "objective disinterest" or "creative detachment" through finding refuge in this space by saying *He* and not *I* or "*He* does not glorify the consciousness of someone other than me, the soaring of human life that, within the imaginary space of the work of art, keeps its freedom to say *I*".<sup>61</sup> Through entering the neuter or the space of the neuter, the capacity to address myself solely to myself is withdrawn. This renders this space as the space of non-intentionality like the space of the *there is*.

Blanchot's model of subjectivity is not one of enclosed interiority of the Cartesian model but a model of exteriority. The subject 'who falls into a relation of nonidentification with themselves' does not have access to this exterior as it is neither in the world nor outside the world. We may argue that the imaginary limit that was in question in Levinas' work exists in Blanchot's as well with a view of the extremity of the

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<sup>61</sup> BR, 408.

impossible and the non-power of it. And the proper experience of this impossible is the ‘limit experience’ in the face of horror. Blanchot’s narrator in *Death Sentence* says;

I sat down on the bed. The blackest space extended before me. I was not in this blackness, but at the edge of it, and I confess that it is terrifying. It is terrifying because there is something in it that scorns man and which man cannot endure without losing himself.<sup>62</sup>

The disappearance of the subject indicates a certain incapacity of the subject to endure as the impossibility does not lie in the fact that the experience of it for the subject of interiority is impossible, that which is impossible does not belong to an outside which is accessible for this subject; rather this experience is the experience at the threshold, at the imaginary limit not on either side of it. And it is the experience of the limitlessness of the limit in the sense that the limit disappears into indifference. The ‘limit experience’ is a ‘contestation’ which suggests the possibility of non-positive affirmation. Michel Foucault defines Blanchotian contestation as an act that does not imply a generalized negation but nevertheless as an affirmation that affirms nothing.

Rather than being a process of thought for denying existences or values, contestation is the act which carries them all to their limits, and from there, to the Limit where an ontological decision achieves its end; to contest is to proceed until one reaches the empty core where being achieves its limit and where limit defines being.<sup>63</sup>

According to Blanchot limit experience provides us with the possibilities of new origins through which thought is affirmed.

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<sup>62</sup> BR, 117.

<sup>63</sup> Michel Foucault, “A Preface to Transgression” in *Bataille: A Critical Reader*, ed. by Fred Botting, Scott Wilson (1963; Oxford: Blackwell, 1998), 29.

### 4.3.2 Boredom and Waiting

The impossibility according to Blanchot is that which withdraws from us the capacity to be, which brings us to a limit – without a promise of transcending it – where the only thing left for us is a waiting:

The decay of waiting, boredom. Stagnant waiting, waiting that at first took itself as its object, complacent with itself and finally hateful of itself. Waiting, the calm anguish of waiting; waiting become the calm expanse where thought is present in waiting.<sup>64</sup>

Waiting and boredom are articulated as a parataxis, a “placing of clauses etc. one after another, without words to indicate co-ordination or subordination.”<sup>65</sup> Depending on how we read this incomplete quasi-sentence in the mode of a definition, we may understand the relation between boredom and waiting differently. Boredom may be understood to succeed waiting, coming after it, as it does in the ‘sentence’, as if boredom took place on completion of the decay of waiting, once waiting is over or as if it were no longer possible. Alternatively, given that there is no temporal priority specified, we may understand boredom to occur in the very decay of waiting, in the ever increasing diminution of waiting as it ceases to be – or at least, seems to cease to be – waiting. On this second reading, the phrase or quasi-sentence enacts a relation between boredom and waiting that may be compared interestingly to Heidegger’s account. Blanchot’s own ‘reading’ of his text as developed in the rest of the passage would appear to stress waiting rather than boredom as the topic to be thought. The participation in a ‘calm expanse’ may be understood to involve a reconciliation to waiting, a sort of idealism of waiting in thought. The ‘calm expanse’ suggests an indifference of space to which a

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<sup>64</sup> Maurice Blanchot, *Awaiting Oblivion*, trans. John Gregg (1962; Lincoln and London: University of Nebraska Press, 1999), 29. Hereafter, AO.

<sup>65</sup> *The Concise Oxford Dictionary* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1976), 800.

thought of waiting has become reconciled as if in a negotiation of a salvation of existence. However, if we understand this conclusion concerning a sort of indifference of or to space to involve boredom in the never to be completed decay of waiting, then Heideggerean being-held-in-limbo can be understood to be distributed across an interval between 'one' space and some other. The indefinite temporality of waiting gives rise to a possible experience of the spaces of boredom.

In so far as Blanchot's text 'performs' or enacts this, we can take this paratactical passage as a kind of model for the emergence and taking place of texts that attest to the spaces of boredom as a particular experience of spatiality – space as thinkable in and across the texts of experience. Blanchot's text in its appeal to thought gestures as if into this, as it exceeds a purely rationalist or existentialist account of boredom. In so doing, the text as read 'performs', in the very paratactical distribution of its clauses, a certain version of Pascallian diversion in so far as it reintroduces us to an experience of boredom that allows that experience to be thought and understood differently than as pure oppression or as the motivation of escape. The text as read enacts a version of diversion that returns us again and again to a sort of nameless experience of boredom occurring in the gaps, reasoned and punctuated, in waiting. In not seeking to escape from boredom, boredom offers 'itself' differently; as a distinctive experience of a temporally given spaces and as waiting as that which turns itself away from thought that in its turning away returns to thought.

The deepening of boredom from the first to the profound in Heidegger's account is compatible with Blanchot's account of waiting – "first complacent with itself and finally hateful to itself" – in their suggestion of a certain relation to thought at the end. Waiting and boredom in their objectless, subjectless mode in their opening up a space for thought in the manner of turning away from themselves in indifference

entertain a certain relation to the impossible – nothing, death, timelessness, unthought – whatever cannot be grasped or experienced in the totality of beings. “In waiting where there is no longer anything that can differ. Waiting is difference that has already taken back everything different. Indifferent, it carries difference.”<sup>66</sup> Nothing is revealed in waiting or boredom because waiting and boredom are themselves that which change everything by first pulling them into indifference and into a latent state. Therefore spaces of boredom offer themselves as spaces where “indifferent difference come to presence”<sup>67</sup>. The experience of the space of boredom is therefore a limit experience through which nothing is revealed or affirmed or attained but everything collapses into an indifference which creates the difference:

The limit experience is the experience of what is outside the all when the all excludes every outside; the experience of what is still to be attained when all is attained and of what is still to be known when all is known; the inaccessible, the unknown itself.<sup>68</sup>

The experience of boredom may argued to fall into the space that is opened up by the limit experience as it suggests an oppressiveness created by certain limits.

### **4.3.3 Fascination**

Fascination is a state that brings the subject to the limit of this space where the subject is seized by the question which permeates the subject; the subject is suspended. Blanchot describes this movement as that of acting under fascination. Fascination is an important figure in Blanchot’s thinking through which he goes on to create analogies that

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<sup>66</sup> AO, 71.

<sup>67</sup> AO, 58.

<sup>68</sup> IC, 205.

obscure the literal. He writes on the relation between writing and fascination in his essay “Essential Solitude”. Fascination according to him is tied fundamentally to the:

... impersonal presence, indeterminate One, the immense and faceless Someone. It is the relationship – one that is itself neutral and impersonal - that the gaze maintains with the depths that have no gaze and no contour, the absence that one sees because it is blinding.<sup>69</sup>

Fascination might be understood as the state that keeps one in the space of art or literature, this space according to Blanchot is threatened by it. It makes one to pass from the ‘I’ to the ‘He’, what happens in this space does not happen to me as me. The Neuter as the agent in this space where everything becomes image again, as it used to be when there was no world yet. This space is the region of the ‘there is’, an imaginary space where the author is left with a language that does not belong to him/her anymore. What is being asserted through the pen of the author is without a self, the subject of this assertion is the narrative that is always already in this space, is created in this space and creates the space in an affirmative fashion. This is the space of the ‘there is’ where everything disappears and this disappearance appears, where what is being concealed from me appears in the form of concealment. Thomas Carl Wall claims that in his opinion “Blanchot has gone further than any other writer in our times toward making this space speak.”<sup>70</sup> When Blanchot claims that when a person enters the realm of fascination, his perceptive capacities change to the extent of not perceiving real things, forms, anything that belongs to the world of reality, he is separating the space where fascination reigns from the ‘world’ and suggesting different kinds of spatialities. This space where things are not perceived in their real forms turns them into their absolute states which create an effect of indifference. This space would be as follows:

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<sup>69</sup> BR, 414.

<sup>70</sup> RP, 27.

What fascinates us, takes away our power to give meaning, abandons its “perceptible” nature, abandons the world, withdraws to the near side of the world and attracts us there, no longer reveals itself to us and yet asserts itself in a presence alien to the present in time and to presence in space.<sup>71</sup>

Seeing through the gaze of fascination and the gaze of boredom resemble each other in so far as they both allow the world itself to emerge from the ordinariness of everydayness. Pierre Lamarche in his article “Blanchot not reading Proust” suggests that, “boredom in Heidegger’s account is the origin of all doing and acting, the *Ursprung* of authenticity”.<sup>72</sup> The promise of authenticity lies in the act of turning away from boredom which as discussed earlier in comparison to waiting, amounts to thought. This gaze of the bored subject – who becomes an undifferentiated no-one in the face of a world which submerges into indifference - in its turning away from the space of boredom returns to thought, returns to creativity, returns to a world which is not the same anymore as this turning away discloses this world’s uncanniness and novelty. Boredom enacts the worklessness of the spaces of fascination as if boredom and fascination stand for two affects that mediate between the work and worklessness.

Arguably, Blanchot’s writing is haunted by binary oppositions like work and worklessness. Limit experience might be suggestive in terms of understanding how Blanchot deals with dialectics of such oppositions. On the one hand the limit that separates opposing terms of dialectics is negated through making them objects of the same experience which may be understood as the work. On the other hand this limit – being an imaginary one- opens up the space of the ‘there is’ where the impossibility of negation is affirmed – and that may be understood as the worklessness. Boredom by

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<sup>71</sup> BR, 412-413.

<sup>72</sup> Pierre Lamarche, “Blanchot not reading Proust” in *Extreme Beauty: Aesthetics, Politics, Death*, ed. by James Swearingen & Joanne Cutting-Gray (New York: Continuum, 2002), 76.



sometimes manifesting itself as the opposite of interest or boring as opposed to interesting, may be argued to become an object of such a limit experience, but more importantly as an undecidable, as that which inheres ambiguity around dialectical opposition, it may be that which opens up a possibility of space of worklessness and work.

## CHAPTER 5: CONCLUSION

Space – is it that which, since that time (Newton), challenges modern man increasingly and ever more obstinately to its utter control? Does not graphic art also follow this challenge insofar as it understands itself as dealing with space? Does it not thereby find itself confirmed in its modern character?<sup>1</sup>

Martin Heidegger

In his article “Everyday Speech”, Blanchot departs from a brief definition of the everyday: “...the everyday is what we are first of all, and most often: at work, at leisure, awake, asleep, in the streets, in private existence. The everyday, then, is ourselves ordinarily.”<sup>2</sup> This definition provides us with ‘the everyday’ as an all embracing space of boredom with several temporal and spatial layers and these different layers arguably become subjects of different types of studies concerning boredom – from psychoanalytic to sociological,<sup>3</sup> political to linguistic. In this thesis we have mostly treated boredom as a topic of philosophy in its intersections with art and literature hoping that such an approach would shed light on other possible studies of boredom, at least to help us to

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<sup>1</sup> Martin Heidegger, “Art and Space”, trans. Charles Seibert, *Man and World* 6 (1973): 3-8.

<sup>2</sup> Blanchot, 12

<sup>3</sup> For sociological studies on boredom see, for example, Orrin Klapp, *Overload and Boredom: Essays on the Quality of Life in the Information Society*, (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1986) or Sean Desmond Healy, *Boredom, Self and Culture*, (London and Toronto, 1984) or, Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi, *Beyond Boredom and Anxiety*, (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1977).

understand them better. The conclusion, however, aims to bring forward some apparently more commonplace approaches to boredom in order to test whether we can relate the conclusions of each chapter to such approaches.

Blanchot's 'everyday' also suggests that "man is at the same time engulfed within and deprived of, the everyday."<sup>4</sup> What is myself is also what I am not or, in other words, what escapes me. The everyday is both how I find myself being bored at work and at leisure, in the streets and asleep, and how I get lost at work, at leisure, in the streets. In between these two states or, as Blanchot says, "the ambiguity of these two moments"<sup>5</sup>, my resistances to what the everyday presents to me, what becomes my everyday, the everyday reveals a hidden present as if it is lived by me without my knowledge. Boredom arguably corresponds to such a manifestation of a hidden present, a rupture in the continuity which, on the one hand, creates a longing for continuity and, on the other hand, a curiosity for what else might emerge from this continuity, an unfolding of other spaces. In so far as this manifestation is provided by the everyday, every hidden present or future possibility, every incompleteness that I attribute to it accentuates it as mine; on the other hand, "it allows no hold, it escapes."<sup>6</sup> Therefore, the everyday can never simply be mine: in its evasiveness it provides me with possibilities of still being a part of me in an illusionary mode.

The everyday keeps producing ambiguities and so-called clarities for certain ambiguities. Our immediate reaction to ambiguity is to make it disappear: whatever presents itself in an ambiguous fashion is thought to require a clarity which apparently is not provided by that which is ambiguous. This is when we seek diversions, just as we do when we are bored. Thus, that which is not proper to boredom is, in a sense, not proper

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<sup>4</sup> Blanchot, 13

<sup>5</sup> Blanchot, 13

<sup>6</sup> Blanchot, 13

to the everyday either, as if they reveal or hide different sides of the same coin.

Everything sinks into similar indifference in a space of boredom and the everyday:

What is proper to the everyday is that it designates for us a region, or a level of speech, where the determinations true and false, like the opposition yes and no, do not apply – it being always before what affirms it and yet incessantly reconstituting itself beyond all that negates it. An unserious seriousness from which nothing can divert us, even when it is lived in the mode of diversion; so we experience it through the boredom that seems to be indeed the sudden, the insensible apprehension of the quotidian into which one slides in the levelling of a steady slack time, feeling oneself forever sucked in, though feeling at the same time that one has already lost it, and is henceforth incapable of deciding if there is a lack of the everyday, or if one has too much of it.<sup>7</sup>

Blanchot's everyday is where "the unjustifiable difference between authenticity and inauthenticity" disappears. There is no boredom that does not belong to the everyday, that does not spring from the everyday and that can simply change the everyday. Yet boredom opens up spaces for itself and it is through passing from the everyday that these spaces become spaces of imagination where the ordinary in the everyday reveals itself as extraordinary, the impossible as possible.

One of the aims of this thesis was to reveal boredom in everydayness in its ambivalent character and find a way of arguing for what we tend to push away as boring as opposed to interesting. It may be argued that such a preoccupation is necessary in order to understand our attitudes towards some works of art. It is sometimes through art that such oppositions are rendered weak and redundant. Such judgements like boring or interesting seem to be saying very little about the artistic quality of works of art and it would seem that no artist, author or director deliberately wants his or her work to bore. In this perhaps commonsensical sense, to have produced something boring may be

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<sup>7</sup> Blanchot, 16

understood as a failure. On the other hand, we do not easily discard those works of art that we find boring as if there is something uncanny about them that we cannot even explain to ourselves. We might think of books and films that are objected to as boring. Perhaps this pertains to such modes of art that are, as narratives, more obviously narratable than others, such as books and films, though, following the suggestions of Blanchot's account of the neuter, we might imagine a certain difficulty haunting the narration of even the most apparently narratable 'event'.

A recent discussion about boredom in the film-philosophy discussion list provokes a reconsideration of the relevance of Blanchot's notion of the neuter in respect of the boring. A long list of film scholars debated why, for example, Antonioni's films were boring, or what Antonioni might be achieving in a style which was apparently boring people. It was striking to remark that no meaningful agreement was achieved throughout the discussion about what a film that is boring is, or whether a judgement that something is boring is always an objection to it or whether there is a question of what is liked when we nevertheless like boring films. A participant in the discussion wrote, "the underlying issue would seem to be whether boring Antonioni films really are profound . . . or maybe they're just boring in pretentious ways"<sup>8</sup> as a response to a suggestion which said, "I assert that these movies are 'better', both morally and aesthetically, than the cynical market driven dreck which forms 99% of mainstream film. Why else could a film like *L'avventura*, which is boring, be so profound at the same time?" Despite the range of skills, methods, techniques of analysis and theories of the production of filmic meaning that were deployed by the many members of the list who participated in the discussion, it was interesting to see that the topic of boredom in relation to films revived certain anxieties about the habits of cinema-goers and a question of what films are for: whether

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<sup>8</sup> These quotations are taken from e-mails sent to film-philosophy@jiscmail.ac.uk, the Film-Philosophy Email Discussion Salon.

“the film is meant to be a potential 'cure' for boredom that is turned down because it is not what the cinema-goer is 'waiting for'.” Little else by way of a consideration of the generation of filmic meaning in ‘boring films’ was offered. It was further interesting to note that the topic of boredom provoked a debate that returned us to questions that one might have expected to have already been settled in respect of film: that is, whether or not films as such could be artistic.

Arguably there are boring films and there are films that are about boredom. Cedric Kahn’s filmic adaptation of Alberto Moravia’s book *Boredom* [*La Noia*], called *L’Ennui*, is interesting as providing an opportunity to compare two narratives, one filmic and the other literary – both of which thematise boredom. Moravia’s main character Dino is an artist who suffers from boredom. In his novel, Dino narrates his failing attempts to cure his boredom which, according to him, is a deeper version of his father’s, perhaps entertaining the notion that there might be a question of a genetically inherited disposition, but at least deciding, one way or another, that boredom is some kind of illness:

...my father, it was true, had also suffered from boredom; but in him this suffering had been dissipated by happy wanderings in one country after another.<sup>9</sup>

Dino’s decision echoes Heidegger’s move towards a profound boredom, comparing his experience of the condition favourably with his father’s lesser or less intense form. Interestingly, for the purposes of this thesis, the activities of Dino’s father, reported in the narrative after his death, involve, despite their apparent diversionary character, a movement from space to space that might yet be more important than Dino’s judgements about them suggest. The father is reported to have spent his wife’s money. Dino is

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<sup>9</sup> B, 13

resentful, however, about his mother whom he believes did not give his father enough money, causing his father to have to return regularly in order to receive more money to re-commence his wanderings. Dino's desire, apparently Oedipal, cannot finally put the father to rest. Despite the restrictions on his expenditure, the father kept wandering, induced through boredom to pass from country to country, enacting the move which this thesis proposes is characteristic of a boredom which, moved initially by a desire for diversion, nevertheless may discover an interest in spaces that is decisive for an understanding of the condition.

Reports about Moravia's life provides us with some evidence which suggests that he is writing out of his own boredom. His friend, William Weaver, provides an introduction to the English translation of *La Noia* that tells of Moravia's childhood and the illness that kept him at home. Weaver reports how Moravia became bored as a child perhaps especially in so far as he was repeatedly asked how he was, becoming particularly bored with the prospect of having to narrate his condition. Perhaps it was this involvement, however, in a relation to narration that spurred Moravia to explore boredom as a series of narrations, in the person of Dino. These narrations, variously unreliable though they may be, as in the case of the relations between Dino and his mother and father, nevertheless stake the value of boredom high. The author, who witnessed world wars and fascism in Italy, has his bored narrator Dino tell us that it is boredom that saved him from these threats.

Moravia's female character Cecilia, with whom Dino gets involved in an obsessive sexual relationship, paralyzes her lover. He finds the embodiment of his boredom in her which dangerously attracts rather than repels him - though there is a dramatisation of ambivalence. He soon finds this attraction, which derives from an affect of boredom, unbearable but difficult to escape from. What he actually finds unbearable is

what has been called his ‘dead world’ in which his consciousness is both awake and inert.<sup>10</sup> Dino’s experience becomes untranslatable and unavailable to be re-enacted in another space such as filmic space, as its narrated form resists any such attempts.

Kahn’s adaptation tries to mediate the loss of the subject of this experience. The subject – the narrator – who already had to withdraw from his subjectivity in the novel so as to provide a space for the experience of boredom to unfold is carried into a filmic space which requires a subject, as if to exist, in a space of the representation of experience. The withdrawal of the subject or its passage from the ‘I’ to the ‘He’ is necessarily reversed in the film which thus cannot perform the mediation between the narration and the experience of boredom, between that which is represented and the subject of the experience. The neuter cannot attach itself to the experience. As Leslie Hill elucidates concerning what becomes available and what gets lost in the writing of the neuter: “The neuter bears witness to the necessary excess of discourse over words, syntax over semantics, gesture over sense, saying over said, experience over subjectivity.”<sup>11</sup> Cedric Kahn’s *L’ennui* cannot manage to create a sense of the ‘there is’ or a space of the neuter in which he can elaborate the ‘boring’ because his ‘narrator’, the character who plays the role of Dino in the film, makes himself distinctive among other things, other people and events, and does not allow the passage from a space of indifference to a filmic space, to an everyday. Hence from an experience of boredom to a boring object and back to boredom.

Andy Warhol, on the other hand, sometimes called the ‘Prince of Boredom’, made some films, on boredom, about boredom, in boredom:

Sometimes I like to be bored, and sometimes I don’t – it depends on what kind of mood I’m in. Everyone knows how it is: some days one can sit

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<sup>10</sup> Bill Marx, ‘The Kingdom of Moravia’, *Boston Review*, April/May 2001.

<sup>11</sup> Leslie Hill, *Blanchot: Extreme Contemporary* (London and New York: Routledge, 1997), 134.



and look out the window for hours and some days one can't sit still for a moment. I've been quoted a lot as saying, "I like boring things". Well, I said it and I meant it. But that doesn't mean I'm bored by them. Of course, what I think is boring can't be the same as what other people think is, since I could never stand to watch all the most popular action shows on TV, because they are essentially the same plots and the same shots and the same cuts over and over again. Apparently, most people love watching the same basic thing, as long as the details are different. But I'm just the opposite: if I'm going to sit and watch the same thing I saw the night before, I don't want it to be essentially the same – I want it to be exactly the same. Because the more you look at the same exact thing, the more meaning goes away, and the better and emptier you feel.<sup>12</sup>

It may well be argued that Andy Warhol, like Dino in Moravia's book, suffered from boredom throughout his life and became involved in an obsessive relationship with whatever he could imagine to be the embodiment of his boredom. He worked and 'unworked' from a space that he instituted and organised – namely the 'factory'. The factory as a space of boredom allowed for the production of other spaces where Warhol effectively challenged the view, articulated by his contemporary and fellow-artist, Donald Judd, that "a work needs only to be interesting"<sup>13</sup> by producing works that risked being boring – in particular a series of films. There is a challenge in Warhol's films which echoes the argument of this thesis, from chapter three above, that a work only needs to risk being boring. Indeed, these films suggest that a work can even remain or become so in ways that allude to a significant impossibility. Warhol's 1964 film *Empire*<sup>14</sup> invites viewers towards a sharing in an impossible idea of watching. By using a stationary camera producing single shot reels of the Empire State Building to make a film that lasted for eight hours, Warhol both withheld narrative interest and apparently put his audience to the test of an experience of duration. This experiment was even

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<sup>12</sup> Andy Warhol and Pat Hackett, *POPism: The Warhol '60s* (New York: Harper and Row, 1983) 50

<sup>13</sup> Donald Judd, "Specific Objects" in *Art in Theory: 1900-1990*, ed. by Charles Harrison, Paul Wood, Oxford, Cambridge: Blackwell, 1992) 813.

<sup>14</sup> Andy Warhol, *Empire* (1964) 16mm, 16fps, 8 hours, silent.

pushed further in his 1966-67 project \*\*\*\*\*, otherwise known as *Four Stars*,<sup>15</sup> which was 25 hours long. *Empire* tends to evacuate the significance of the much-represented Empire State Building, gathering it into a framing in which it is played across by changes in atmosphere and conditions of light. Little happens, but this gives a chance to Warhol's interest in the alteration of the meaning of what is shown in film. The threat of an experience of the filmic without interruptions nevertheless offers an event in which something can rejoin the everyday in which a loss of meaning is also the chance of a generation of a new meaning.

In another attempt to film boredom or communicate boredom, Warhol uses a couch<sup>16</sup> and shoots actors on it until they get bored and leave. This is thus arguably a film of resistance to the experience of boredom. The coming and going of the actors, entering and leaving the space of the filmic to pass through to another space, leaving the couch as if the witness of the experience, as if letting the couch become one of the actors in the film, makes this film a study in boredom. The resistance on the side of the actors can be explained as a partial awareness of the space becoming a space of indifference and their unwillingness to lose their subjectivity before the camera and in this space, making them turn to diversions. The camera itself as that which creates the frame, that which represents the limit between the filmic space and the space from which this filmic space is created, turns into the possibility of an evasion from this space. Warhol's films are his ambitious attempts to catch the passage from the space of the filmic to the space of boredom and back to the filmic, nevertheless remaining studies in boredom. Patrick Bigelow points towards what such a study threatens to involve:

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<sup>15</sup> Andy Warhol, \*\*\*\*\* (1966–67) 16mm, 25 hours, colour, also known as *Four Stars*.

<sup>16</sup> Andy Warhol, *Couch* (1964) 16mm, 16fps, 40mins, silent.

It would have been necessary, if this were to have been a study of boredom, to be a study in boredom. It would have been necessary to evince boredom; but this is impossible to do. A commentary on boredom needs to be an exercise in boredom; but not even this can be said, not even this can be shown – boredom can only be performed and performed in an act of defiant despair. Boredom cannot be confirmed by its commentary; there can be no complicity with it, for boredom announces – obliquely and abscondingly – the levelling down of sense into a horribly commonplace, self-evident unintelligibility until a certain kind of repulsive nonsense advances. But nonetheless boredom, as the sovereignty of a certain kind of nonsense... has a meaning, or rather, a meaning is attributed to it: boredom is the ruins in the midst of which totters “the house of Being”.<sup>17</sup>

In order to stay this side of nonsense, the threat to a sense of belonging in space needs to be accepted and the passages it invites us towards need to be acknowledged, if not experienced. Boredom in its ambivalent character is that which unfolds, or produces, spaces of thought, art and the everyday through the experience of the impersonal. These spaces suggesting limits and inviting us to certain experiences of these limits are where thought, art and the everyday are opened up for new possibilities.

This thesis has aimed to bring forward what might be argued to be neglected in the discussions of boredom, namely its spatial aspects. Boredom, in so far as it insists on a certain temporality, as something which will not simply go away, resists the overcoming of it and has thus drawn commentary on it as that which involves an experience of duration and temporality. However, the hypothesis of this thesis has been that the involvement in the experience of boredom as feeling, mood or affect involving temporality nevertheless opens onto experiences of space. The rearticulation of space as a space of experience and the generation of thought as a thought of space from out of the experience of boredom have, as this thesis shows, been neglected in the Western tradition. This has been accounted for in terms of an understanding which is made

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<sup>17</sup> Bigelow, 264.

possible in the openings between space and the spatial. The opening offered from within the Western tradition and its preoccupation with space as ground, of the physical, the actual and the objective, that Heidegger's work represents has been explored as a chance to rethink the occurrence and persistence of such ways of understanding space.

This thesis has aimed to contribute to work which shows that this desire for objectivity, actuality and ground that idealizes space according to a governing fiction, which would be as such the very motive for the expansionary character of Western thought. In returning to boredom and reviewing the tradition of the emergence of the problematic of the concept of boredom, this thesis has aimed to uncover the implication of the spatial in time and space against the Kantian arguments which offer time and space as pre-given forms of experience, actuality or any other ground of thought. In so doing, this thesis has aimed to be a rethinking of space and time in their identity and difference.

This thesis has aimed to stay with the ambivalence that is marked in the emergence of thought about and the development of conceptualities of boredom. This direction has been given to the thesis especially in the second chapter which reviews the history of the emergence of a concept of boredom as a distinct textual problematic. The early and paradoxical formulation of Pascal that boredom and diversion are interdependent in the sense that diversion may lead us away from boredom but, in so far as activity becomes remarkable as that which has been undertaken as diversion, we are led back to boredom again, is a framework that this thesis does not simply go beyond. The process whereby activity in becoming remarkable as diversion is perhaps undermined in its seriousness haunts the exposition in this thesis of the significance of boredom as decidable conceptuality, with implications for the perhaps well-established and more Nietzschean thought of boredom as the motive for creativity.

The persistence of the problematic that this dual legacy in the history of Western thought of the ambivalent character of boredom as that which threatens to mark activities undertaken in response to it as mere diversions, on the one hand, and, on the other, as a profound experience motivating the production of the new suggests that boredom ought not to be treated as that which can be overcome. Instead, the orientation of this thesis has been to review the ways in which the thought of boredom is marked by chances of the generation of an alteration in the senses of space and the spatial.

This conclusion has remarked a series of ways in which boredom as topic and theme has been treated in literary and visual works, in particular in a novel, a film of that novel and in what might be called filmic installation. As a theorization of art and design, this thesis invites towards the possibility of an alteration in terms of pleasure that is signalled in the notion of risking boredom. To imagine that any thematic material may become boring and yet not cease to be 'of interest' as art is to give a chance to an experience of the passage to the spatial. If there is no such thing as space as ground of actuality or objectivity, then space needs to be rethought as that which emerges for us as marked by characteristics of time. The exploration in this thesis of Heidegger's use of exemplary narratives of boredom has been treated as such an instance of the emergence, from boredom, of the spatial.

Thus, despite desires to overcome boredom or desires to find ourselves at home in the world, what has emerged in this thesis on boredom is a consideration of a series of – what Derrida has termed, marking the coeval character of different senses of space and time – 'spacings'; involvements in 'texts' - philosophical, literary, artistic, but also everyday 'texts' of perception - from out of which distinctive experiences of space are generated.

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