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How and Why I Became a Boredom Researcher/Scholar: Between Restlessness and Presence—Notes from a Life Accompanied by Boredom

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Conducting a general examination of my own existence, I find it rather simplistic to claim that I chose boredom as a research topic. In a sense, boredom itself quietly insinuated its way through the cracks of my life. Of course, in the end, we are the ones who choose how to deal with what affects us. For years—without even realizing it—I was urged (perhaps even pressed) to listen to what my own boredom had to tell me. Yet I only understood this later, in retrospect. Looking back, I see how much time I spent trying to suppress that affectation, frenetically and intensely filling my days with various activities—of which I will speak shortly.

The fact is that I truly began to listen to my own boredom only within a psychotherapeutic setting, after a deeply personal and dramatic event—a divorce, more specifically, following a fourteen-year relationship. At that time, my reaction was to experience what we now call, in our studies, ‘existential boredom’ or ‘boredom with life.’ It was through this encounter with what I considered a more extreme form of boredom that I became interested—clinically and philosophically—in the phenomenon that had so profoundly affected me.

The impact and details of a rupture of such magnitude are profound, personal, and far too complex to share within such limited space. Still, I believe the reader can imagine the powerful sense of emptiness that follows the end of a relationship once idealized to last a lifetime—a void sustained by the collapse of a project of meaning, an existential project. Borrowing an expression common in another circle to which I belong (that of existential philosophers and psychologists), such an event pulled me out of everyday self-forgetfulness and returned me to my most primordial nothingness. I was no longer ‘this’ or ‘that’—a husband, a partner—but simply a *being there*, trying to re-situate myself in the world and rebuild the existential project that I myself am.

My interest in the theme of boredom took on more defined contours shortly after I began my training in phenomenological-existential psychology—more precisely, during a course in clinical phenomenological-existential psychology—when, for the first time, I decided to study boredom from an academic perspective. That was when I encountered the thought of Martin Heidegger—whose influence I cannot in any way deny—and later, the remarkable works of Lars Svendsen, Elizabeth Goodstein, Peter Toohey, Josefa Ros Velasco, Mariusz Finkielstein, Andreas Elpidorou, James Danckert, and many others I cannot list here.

Today I possess the internal, clinical, philosophical, and scientific insight (thanks also to my colleagues in the *International Society of Boredom Studies*) to recognize how present boredom has been throughout my life. If you had the chance to visit my home, you would see it immediately. You would only have to glance at the number of hobbies and sports I practice (and their corresponding accessories: surfboards, stand-up paddles, kayaks, skateboards, rollerblades, sandboards; musical instruments I once loved and then grew bored of—several times!). If you wish to grasp the motivational force of boredom in someone’s life, just count how many hobbies that person has. I admit—it is an indirect and scientifically questionable metric. Yet, for me, it makes sense—at least insofar as it makes sense to discuss boredom in our contemporary society amid the omnipresence and multiplicity of entertainment forms.

I was born and raised in a small tourist town in the Brazilian Northeast, surrounded by beaches, dunes, lagoons, rivers, and countless other natural beauties. It would be difficult not to love (and even to need) the intense, radiant sun that shines almost every day of the year. However,

today, with the experiences I have accumulated, I realize how much I have always depended on external stimuli to avoid boredom. Possible ADHD? Certainly—and it is even fashionable now.

A few years ago, I also found myself quite bored with my teaching work—something that Josefa Ros Velasco would call *chronic situational boredom*. And no wonder: to reach the Ceará-Mirim campus (IFRN)—the institution where I teach philosophy—I must drive about fifty kilometers, roughly an hour each way. Two hours a day on the road. Sometimes I offer rides to colleagues; most of the time, however, I go alone. The amusing thing is that, when I began my studies on boredom and came across the expression ‘the noonday demon,’ I quickly adapted it to describe some of my experiences on that home-to-work journey: ‘the demon of the road.’ These days, I would say that that demon is under control!

As you can see, boredom is not merely a topic of study in my life—it inhabits my personal history as well as my main professional environments: the campus and the psychology office. School boredom is no new thing, of course. But now I get the impression that something is off. I currently perceive frequent exhaustion among my students (most of them adolescents). They seem bored with everything, not just with school or the classroom. That by itself would not seem strange. However, what feels different now is their apparent lack of motivation to search for something—anything—that might alleviate their boredom. Sometimes it seems that, for them, anything other than sitting and mind-scrolling through their phones is simply not worth it.

There is also the recurrent boredom of some patients: the fatigue of living in a time when everything seems easily accessible and yet somehow meaningless. Such experiences have led me down a path where boredom emerged as a question—not necessarily about the lack of external stimuli or internal resources, nor merely about distinguishing situational boredom from chronic boredom caused by internal or external factors. Perhaps the question sounds too metaphysical—and that is perfectly fine—but what continues to intrigue me is the paradox that, while the contemporary world offers countless possibilities for engagement, we seem to have, paradoxically, become increasingly estranged from it. Since then, I have never abandoned boredom: it has become a research companion, a mirror, and at times, a way of thinking about thinking itself.

This entire journey has made me realize something: to speak of boredom is also to speak of myself—of my attempts to reconcile the philosopher and the psychologist (a rather exhausting task), the researcher, the clinician, and the teacher—the one who observes and is, at the same time, traversed by what he observes. In the classroom, boredom often takes, among my students, the form of a distant gaze or the discomfort that arises from the conflict between the desire to use a smartphone and the institutional rules forbidding it. For me, classroom boredom sometimes manifests as an odd, intense desire to leave—and do what? Study boredom itself! Sometimes a class seems to last fifty hours—doesn’t it, Evagrius?

In the psychotherapeutic setting, boredom occasionally takes the form of a silence heavy with meaning—or, on the contrary, of a certain haste to end the session. Could this be an avoidance of difficult themes? Certainly. But could it also be simply an escape from the boredom of having nothing to say? Indeed. I confess that I have not yet experienced what is called *therapist’s boredom*—at least not consciously. Still, I suspect it will not take long: for someone

prone like myself (so I believe), and equally immersed in a technologically overstimulated world, it is only a matter of time. This realization brought my clinical listening closer to my philosophical reading, allowing me to understand boredom as a limit-experience—one deeply shaped by its historical and cultural context, my inner constitution, my personal history, and, equally important, my condition of being a consciousness aware of its own existence.

As an ‘existential person,’ I see boredom as a point of inflection where existence reveals itself as it truly is: nothing in particular—nothing beyond its own happening. Such an encounter with our condition can, as we know, be influenced by one’s surroundings, epoch, socioeconomic circumstances, or individual disposition. For me, studying boredom has been more than merely thematizing it. It is a way of dwelling in time with greater attentiveness—of remaining a little longer within what, at first glance, appears to be mere absence but might, in fact, be a more radical form of presence.

At the intersection of teaching, clinical practice, and Boredom Studies, I found a language—more or less adequate—to name what I once struggled to express. At the *6th International Interdisciplinary Boredom Conference*, organized by this very association, I was deeply moved by Professor Svendsen’s talk. His openness in speaking about his own experience with boredom touched me profoundly. That encounter raised an intriguing question: how can one study the phenomenon of boredom without being, in some way, traversed by it—without remaining available to it when it comes?

It is not that I wish to deliberately become bored. Not at all. It is simply about learning to listen to it—a lesson I learned from Josefa Ros Velasco. Becoming bored—or simply allowing oneself to be immersed in its atmosphere—accompanies me as an existential phenomenon that reemerges with every teaching experience, every clinical listening, every text I write. To speak of boredom today is also to speak of resistance: the resistance to remain, to allow oneself to be affected, and, at the same time, to keep asking—and caring—about existence itself.