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An Answer to the Question: “How and Why I Became a Boredom Researcher/Scholar?”. The Significance of Investigating Boredom Amidst a Loss of Meaning

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I never ask myself why I study boredom. I just find it interesting, and I spend my time understanding it. That doesn't mean that everyone, without exception, doesn't ask me why I study boredom. The same reaction in all of them is starting to get boring to me.

When I had to write my master's thesis in Philosophy, I started looking for topics to write about. In 2019 I was going dark on the road to knowing in depth what boredom was. I had a certain idea of the meaning of boredom, conditioned by the cultural heritage and the Western context in which I live (superficial knowledge). I had never dedicated myself to studying what boredom was, I accepted the definitions that others gave me throughout my life without contrasting them too much. The prejudices and cognitive bias I had took me a while to soften, eliminate, modify, and recreate.

The subject of my research came to me because of that mania that mothers have, perhaps philosophical, of questioning what their children do. When I saw my teenage daughter spend hours and hours looking at her cell phone, I made a silly comparison of her teenage self and what I did when I was 16. It was clear that the world was not the same, the way they related was not the same, not even she and I are the same. The terms of comparison were not comparable, the question of why I did it did encourage my curiosity. I came to the conclusion that she should be processing a form of boredom that caused her to focus on nothing but a passive activity filling her time looking at her mobile phone. To this day I don't blame her for having in her 'catalog of options' (a metaphor coined by boredom researcher Josefa Ros) to get out of boredom a solution that every teenager has at hand. I don't blame her, because that's what society has given us all. The worst thing is that it is so addictive. The worst thing is that the consequence of this addiction fully affects the brain, interpersonal relationships, the focus of interest, that it compromises our own future and plunges us into a fog of boredom from which we cannot get out (even if we want to).

My master's thesis investigated the relationship between boredom and capitalism (studying my daughter seemed a bit invasive to me). The conclusion I came to was that capitalism used boredom to function in the system of buying and selling that feeds it. There I also studied leisure because I had thought that boredom was very connected to fun (a question that I disconnected later). My idea of boredom, at that stage, was almost the opposite of what I think today. I thought that if you got bored it was because you yourself didn't know how to find things that were interesting to you. I also thought that I was never bored, and that, on the Boredom Proneness Scale, I had a high tolerance for boredom. I later realized that what happened to me is that I knew how to get out of it because I really have a medium-low tolerance towards boredom that has made me learn what I have to do when I experience boredom... and run away.

As I began my PhD studies, my interest shifted to the work I had been doing for the past 10 years before switching to a research career. Having worked in the fashion sector (as a radio announcer at Cadena SER and in the management of a communication company for fashion brands) made me know the market in which I had moved, and I wanted to use that backup to delve into it from a philosophical perspective. The first thing I noticed was that we always need to have something new in order to give meaning to our personal and social identity. We present ourselves to the gaze of 'the other' dressed in a certain way. What we think will be our final clothing changes every day and will change the rest of our lives because we are an identity in

transit that defines itself as clothing through time, the relationship and interaction with others, the context in which we intend to situate ourselves, or the class status we intend to be perceived, through our body, with a specific semiology of clothing or through the symbolic charge that others impose on us or that we ourselves learn to give. Therefore, the industry knows of our need and proposes new clothes for that ‘self’ that we never get to finish modeling. When studying the circular economy at the Ellen MacArthur Foundation, I realized that we can change the consumerist policy that the West has, and we can design a new form of consumption that is more positive with the planet. My thesis: *Boredom and Fashion. The New, along the Path of Sisyphus Towards Nothingness*; I had structured it to be able to conclude that boredom makes us consume more and that it is avoidable to want to have something new if we transform what we have into something else by turning it into something new. Of course, *boredom-of-always-the-same-clothes* can bore anyone, even those who say they are not interested in fashion. ‘The new will always be necessary’; I thought it is avoidable, but its ability to trap us with enthusiasm, promises of personal satisfaction, raise our self-esteem or change what we already know routinely. The new has everything to convince you to be caught, and at the same time, knowing its transience, it has everything to leave us unsatisfied again around the corner.

The radical change in terms of the perspective of what boredom is came to me when I met Dr. Josefa Ros Velasco, who is my thesis co-director. I met her when I was listening to the radio while ironing (yes, I am supremely bored of ironing and she helped me with external stimuli to be able to survive it), she was talking about boredom in nursing homes and, immediately, I knew that I had to contact her. His vision of what boredom is made me understand that it is something painful, that it is the prelude to change, and that we can get out of the experience of boredom through functional or dysfunctional solutions. Many times, it can happen that we do not know how to get out of boredom, degenerating into chronic cases (Ros Velasco, 2022, 2026). However, we can learn to get out of boredom and not stop trying until we succeed.

In my second year of PhD, I decided to write a scientific article in order to carry out activities that were requested by the International Doctoral School at UNED. Of course, I will tell you that I am in the fourth year and I have not yet managed to finish the article, although there are only a few corrections left, and it is going straight to be published. The article was written together with Dr. Josefa Ros Velasco, and is based on his conception of boredom, adding new nuances that make it applicable to a sector of society that suffers from boredom induced through the uniforms that they are forced to wear throughout their sentence, without the option of refusing to do so. We have called it Situation[prison-clothing]-dependent and chronic boredom. The article grew as we learned more details about penitentiary institutions, especially with the contributions on key concepts of André Ward (executive director of John Jay College of Criminal Justice, NY). His explanation on the way we refer to people in prison made me reconsider how we subjugate others through words. Also, Dr. Sergio Grossi (professor at John Jay College of Criminal Justice, NY) introduced to me to the perspective of new authors. My three-month stay in New York City made me understand, on the one hand, consumption (to which I devoted a chapter of my thesis, linked to boredom); in addition to being able to feel in first person the *blasse attitude* (of others towards me), elaborated by Georg Simmel (2001), that otherwise would have only been a concept in a book for me (a concept that is defined as

indifference, boredom, and emotional disconnection in the face of the bombardment of stimuli in cities); on the other hand, I had access to archives and stories about prison uniforms from an American perspective (which allowed me to complete, with an in-depth vision, the article we were writing).

In my third year of PhD, I obtained a predoctoral fellowship for the training of teaching and research staff at UNED thanks to the Banco Santander Foundation. It was a very enriching year in which I learned every day how to be a better teacher and researcher. All these new stimuli prevented the intention of the state of focus in my thesis from being interrupted by all the new things I was experiencing and in which, inevitably, I was involved. Something that Kant (1991) warned about in his *Anthropology*: contrast, novelty, change, ascent (see also Anscombe and Mosterín, 1991).

Now, about to finish my PhD, my vision of boredom has changed and I have managed to apply it to the creation of new nuances that explain intuitions that I perceive and that could be studied in depth in the future.

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