

WRITING ON BOREDOM
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There is a difficulty in writing on boredom. The topic does not elude consideration. Rather boredom brings with it two specific problems. The first problem concerns the simultaneous need for a phenomenology insofar as boredom involves the experiencing subject, while at the same time it necessitates having to work with the limits of that phenomenology as there will always be the question – and thus the questioned possibility – of the generalisation of boredom such that boredom may come to describe the age within which subjects live. In the first instance boredom is linked merely to the subject, while in the second it would describe the subject's condition. This condition would need to be thought in terms of the historical nature of subjectivity. However, that generalisation would necessitate a philosophical justification that was not available

phenomenologically. It is in this sense that boredom demands a phenomenology while at the same time it charts the limits of such an approach.

The second problem that arises in taking up the topic of boredom concerns the particular logic within which any investigation of boredom is already articulated. What marks this logic out is the centrality of a form of passivity that escapes the hold of the opposition active/passive. It is a passivity that occurs because of the specific impossibility of objectifying boredom. In this sketch of some of the themes at work in such an investigation reference will be made to both these problem areas.

To contemplate boredom, to investigate it and thus to allow it to emerge either as an object of study or the site of simple reflection, are moves that will already have overcome the determining effect of boredom by refusing it any form of immediate presence. Boredom works within the conditioning and determining modes of subjectivity; i.e. the modes of being of subjectivity. It will be in this sense that it is

correct to write that the subject is bored. What this means is that subject is in its *being bored*. Consequently, opening up boredom, opening whatever it is that boredom inevitably brings with it as its own self-definition, must take place prior to this transformation: a transformation that occurs in the movement of boredom from the place of the subject to its having become an object for a subject. Once this move occurs – the move resulting in the objectivisation of boredom – then boredom can no longer play a role in either determining actions or be implicated in the form such actions will take.

This transformation has a precise location. It occurs in the movement from the subject who is bored to the recognition by that subject of being – perhaps only of having been – positioned by the hold of boredom. Once boredom no longer has the subject in its hold, and thus with boredom having become an object for that subject, boredom no longer inhabits and determines modes of subjectivity. In fact the contrary will be the case. The move from subject to object means that the

subject will have become interested in the determining effects of boredom where the latter is understood as the site of analysis rather than a lived experience. The result of this is that any real analysis of boredom must concern itself with the moments prior to what could be described as the becoming object of boredom. (Any philosophical analysis of boredom will already be concerned with its presence as an object. However, rather than account for its objectivity there can always be the attempt to take up boredom as a mode of subjectivity. It would be at this precise point that both the necessity and the limits of a phenomenology emerge.) What will need to be investigated is the object of boredom; not boredom as object but the object proper to boredom itself. With what – what object – is the subject bored? Even in asking this question it is essential to move slowly since it may turn out to be the case that the language of subject and object proves to be no longer straightforwardly appropriate for an sustained examination of boredom; i.e. any analysis of boredom prior to

the transformation already noted. Perhaps, the opening move here will be the recognition that boredom works beyond the hold of a predictable conception of causality; i.e. a conception of causality in which individual or singular occurrences are all interconnected within a determined causal link. While a particular state of boredom may be attributed a cause, the identification of that cause neither explains the boredom nor does it allow for its resolution. Particularity, therefore, is defined beyond the hold of an explanatory series of interconnections. It is in the terms set by the impossible possibility of causality that a similarity emerges between boredom and restlessness.

To be restless is to be in a state of agitation that cannot be objectified. Allowing restlessness to become an object is already to have shaken free from its determinations. It would be as though one were at ease with restlessness. This is, of course, an impossible state of affairs. It would deny the insistent determining hold that restlessness has. Before pursuing the implications of

the connection between boredom and restlessness it is essential to identify the logic they both seem to announce.

The logic involves the need to maintain a specific conception of passivity. To be bored demands the effective presence of that particular conception of passivity that will resist attempts to displace or overcome boredom either by analysis or a change in attitude. The passivity in question touches on activity insofar as boredom maintains itself. And yet, it is not actively maintained. Once again to allow it to be maintained would be to objectify boredom and thus preclude its hold on the subject. Equally, there cannot be complete passivity for in such cases boredom would have become a simple loss of self-consciousness or self-awareness. Phenomenologically, what is central to boredom, and thus what would in this instance define boredom, is the lived awareness of the state of being bored. It would be a performative contradiction to admit the state both of being bored but also of being unaware that one was bored. There is an insistent element within

boredom which resists the hold of either complete activity or complete passivity. Boredom, in order that it remain what it is, demands another formulation.

There will be an obvious parallel with restlessness at this precise point. Again, it would be contradictory to affirm an unacknowledged restlessness. It is rather that to be restless, involves a state of agitation that maintains itself but not through an act of will. Willed restlessness is a simple oxymoron. Boredom and restlessness resist the operation of the will. Neither state can be willed into presence. None the less, neither works to exclude the operation of the will since the will may operate in conjunction with either state.

The question that arises here concerns what the acknowledgement of either restlessness or boredom involves. If it can be accepted that both are already acknowledged then the nature of that recognition needs to be taken up. Simply, the questions that have to be asked are: What is it to be bored? What is it to be restless? The key to these questions concerns

the complex presence of passivity. Passivity opens up recognition. Being bored becomes the absorption of the subject into that state. And yet the absorption is not absolute. The subject identifies with this set up. It is the non-absolutisation that is fundamental here. If there were a closure then boredom would be linked to the state of being unaware; itself another form of closure. Complete passivity would have led to the gradual identification of subject and mood. Subject and an internalised object would have meshed enjoining a stupor. Awaking from such a state would demand a shock sufficiently severe that it could also have given rise to forgetting or a regression back to the initial setting. In either case what would have emerged would have been the impossibility of allowing boredom to be present as a determining state – the subject is in its being bored – but one which incorporated an opening not precluding actions.

Being bored therefore demands a passivity that allows for a type of opening. The opening in question is the site of recognition; the locus in

which the subject identifies itself as bored. And yet in that act of identification the subject holds itself apart from complete identification. Boredom is always more. In the 'more' the question of the object returns. What is the object of boredom? Answering this question will need to begin with the recognition that the object while present has to be defined in terms of a type of negation. That the presence of an identifiable and thus straightforwardly nameable object is an impossibility becomes that which defines the object of boredom. The elusive nature of the reason for boredom therefore becomes integral to any understanding of boredom's object. Boredom will open up beyond itself only to close in on itself. At-hand and yet ungraspable, boredom touches the very preconditions that would allow a search to be undertaken. Boredom and research touch, though only in the end to separate.

They touch because the opening that works within each of them allows for a fleeting connection. They separate because boredom can go no

further than the opening itself. Boredom becomes the site in which the subject becomes mired in the opening between the at-hand and the ungraspable. Boredom becomes therefore the continual repetition of working within that set up. Activity is the repeating. Passivity is boredom's endurance. Boredom cannot have an end because it is already located in a structure of repetition. The conception of repetition with which it works is determined by an unspecifiable conception of Sameness. It is the Always the Same which continues to predominate. Its repetition is ensured because of the effective presence of the ungraspable. It is, however, a conception of repetition understood as mere continuity. Even diversity within continuity would not shake the possibility of boredom's reiteration. Once diversity is ruled by continuity then the conditions for boredom endure. Indeed, it is precisely this consequence of the relationship between diversity and continuity that both defines novelty and accounts for why it is that novelty will never be

free from its capacity to bore. A phenomenology of boredom will always have to be concerned with having to account for the movement between the at-hand and the ungraspable where that movement is determined by a repetition of the Same. The limits of any phenomenology do not concern the difficulty of taking up a subject's mood. Rather, the limit emerges because of the intrusion into that setting of that which is always greater than a state of affairs limited by subjectivity. In this instance, that which would break the limits given by subjectivity is effective presence of the repetition of the Same. Any analysis of this structure has to begin to confront the relationship between the reiteration of Sameness and the nature of modernity. Pursuing the limit of phenomenology means working with the recognition that the interruption of boredom will always involve more than allowing the subject another mood. Interruption has to be thought as the larger possibility given by modernity due to the complex set up in which modernity is given. The attempt to