

Economy and Value of Time in Boredom

The word *boredom* has been in circulation since Ancient times, in the shape of a variety of synonyms --*acedia*, *taedium vitae*, *horror loci*, *melancholy*, *ennui*, *spleen*-- and bearing a theological stamp, since it was believed to be a demonic sin in the Christian tradition. In modernity, however, for the “enlightened subject” (Goodstein, 4), as a response to social and economic transformations, boredom has become a secular experience concerned with temporality, signifying loss of meaning and feeling of emptiness in the pace of modern life. In critical circles, boredom remains a hybrid phenomenon that brings together a variety of contradictory definitions. Whether it is considered a creative and transformative force (Benjamin) or a root of evil (Baudelaire, Kierkegaard), one constant in the state of boredom is the subjective experience of time, which is characterized as empty time. As Heidegger famously notes in *The Fundamental Concepts of Metaphysics* (1983), boredom is a problem of time, and in boredom, objective time is eclipsed by our own subjective experience of time, where time is elongated. The experience of time in boredom becomes a primary problem because of the value of time. As Martin Hägglund writes in his book *This Life: Secular Faith and Spiritual Freedom* (2019): “we will always have to organize our lives into some form of economy of time, since there will always be a question of what we should do with our time... In leading a life, you are necessarily engaged in the question of how you should spend your time and what you should prioritize, which is fundamentally a question of valuing” (370). While the wage-labour economy attempts to assign a monetary value to our time (in the form of an hourly wage, for example), and by filling our time with work, emergence of boredom in this landscape suggests that placing individual’s time in an equation with money is not a proper measure for value, and that the question of value of individual’s time transcends any monetary value.

Elizabeth S. Goodstein notes that, “[i]t was literary language that first identified boredom as a specifically modern malaise” (15). For instance, in Charles Dickens’ *Bleak House* (1853) --where the first literary reference to boredom is found-- Lady Dedlock, in search for something new, is repeatedly “bored to death” in her bourgeois routine; in Gustave Flaubert’s *Madame Bovary* (1856), Emma Bovary’s provincial routine becomes the landscape of boredom; Charles Baudelaire in *Les Fleurs du Mal* (1857) depicts boredom in modern life as the root of evil. In Beckett’s *Waiting for Godot* (1953) boredom flourishes in the repetition of waiting; Thomas Mann’s *The Magic Mountain* (1924) depicts boredom linking it to the compression of time in monotony; Maurice Blanchot’s *L’Attente Oubli* (1962) repeatedly unfolds boredom onto the space of waiting; in Robert Walser’s *Jakob von Gunten* (1909) boredom is inscribed in the schoolboy Jakob’s diaries, as it blooms in the routine life of school, leading Jakob to question the value of his time.

By the token of these examples and aided by such reflections, this session invites papers that examine the problem and experience of time in boredom, in relation to the question of value and economy of time, in 19th and 20th century literature. Possible discussion questions and topics include, but are not limited to:

-How do we measure the value of time?

-Why does time become a problem in boredom and what precisely *is* this problem?

- What is the relationship between boredom and the value of our own time?
- How does a spatial metaphor (empty time) aid our understanding of time in boredom? What is the opposite of this emptiness?
- How can we talk about the value of time in empty time?
- Is there a relationship between emotions and boredom?
- Space of boredom: waiting
- Repetition, routine, monotony, interesting, new
- Boredom, emotions and feelings
- Our linguistic relationship with time: spending, wasting, losing, giving, gaining
- The time taken away from us and the time we give: autonomy of time

Please send 250-word abstracts and a short bio to Busra Copuroglu at bcopurog@uwo.ca by March 15, 2020.