

MARIUSZ FINKIELSZTEIN

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THE SOCIOLOGY OF BOREDOM

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The Sociology of Boredom

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Mariusz Finkielsztein

WILEY Blackwell

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To my wife

la mia volpe, la mia topolina, la mia più saggia strega

‘a ma vurpi, ‘u ma topu, ‘a ma mavara cchiu saggia

Contents

Illustrations	xi
About the Author	xii
Acknowledgements	xiii
Introduction: Upstream Psychological Trend	1
In Search of the Sociology of Boredom	1
Boredom as a Social Emotion	4
Defining Boredom	5
The Structure of the Book	9
References	15
1 Boredom and Modernity.	19
Does Boredom Have a History?	19
Hard Essentialism	20
Soft Essentialism: Philosophy	21
Soft Essentialism: Historicism	22
Boredom as a Social Construct of Modernity	29
Disenchantment of the World: Life Without a Mythology	32
Rationalization: The Superseding of Meaning by Function	35
Industrialization	36
Alienation	37
Institutionalization of Boredom: Bureaucracy and Education	39
Individualism: The Atrophy of Community	42
Leisure Boredom	43
Romantic Boredom	43
Anomie and Boredom	45
References	50
2 Late Modern Boredom	57
Busy Boredom	58
Acceleration and the Achievement Society	58
Social Placebos and Smart Boredom	61
Overload: Redundancy, Noise, and Inattention	64
Consumer Boredom	68
Artificial Needs	72
The Addiction to Stimuli, Novelty, and Pleasure	74
Change for Change's Sake: Fashion	77
The Boredom Industry and the Failure of Re-enchantment	79

	The Rationalization of Consumption	80
	Consumer Passivity	81
	The Dream-driven Society of High Expectations	82
	Boredom as a Fundamental Mood of Consumerism	83
	References	85
3	Boredom and Social Inequality	90
	Boredom as a Class Issue	90
	Boredom of the Marginalized	96
	On the Margins of the Society	97
	Boredom in Refugee Camps: Anomic Boredom	99
	Women's Boredom: Between Privilege and Marginalization	104
	Boredom and the Capitalistic World-system	109
	Peripheral Boredom	111
	Indigenous Boredom	114
	References	117
4	Workplace Boredom	122
	Work as a Boring Concept	122
	Unnaturalness of Work	122
	Boredom and Basic Income	128
	The Concept of Workplace Boredom	131
	Causes of Workplace Boredom	133
	Direct Causes	133
	Individual Characteristics	133
	Task Characteristics	135
	Person-job Fit	137
	Work Environment	139
	Systemic Causes	139
	Managerialism: Rationalization and Bureaucratization	139
	Secularization of Work: Lack of Calling	141
	Identity Disturbance: Anomic Work-related Boredom	144
	Precarious Employment: Lack of Belonging	146
	Redundant Work: Bullshit Jobs	149
	Commodification of Feelings: Emotional Labour	152
	Boring Occupations	153
	Outcomes of Workplace Boredom	155
	Empty Labour	156
	Boreout, Burnout, and Boredom	157
	Counterproductive Work Behaviours as Workplace Boredom	
	Coping Strategies	158
	References	161

5	Religious Boredom	171
	Boredom in the Sphere of Religion	171
	Boredom as a Moral Issue	171
	Boredom and Religion	173
	Demagification and Secularization of Religion	174
	Between Disenchantment and Re-enchantment	176
	Acedia	178
	Church Boredom	182
	References	189
6	Boredom and Social Change	194
	Boredom and Social (De)Mobilization	195
	Political Boredom	198
	Boredom and Violence	200
	Wars	200
	Terrorism	202
	Revolts and Revolutions	204
	Relative Deprivation and Failure of Expectations	210
	References	213
7	Boredom and Utopia	217
	Literary Utopias	219
	Why Utopias Are Inherently Boring	219
	Prohibition of Boredom	224
	Preventing Utopian Boredom	225
	"Real" Utopias	227
	References	231
8	Interactional Boredom	233
	Interactionist Approach	233
	Interaction Withdrawal	233
	Role Distance	235
	Interactional Ritual and Anticipatory Boredom	237
	Low Emotional Energy	240
	Boredom and Socialization	241
	Conversational Boredom: Bores	243
	Boredom and Power	248
	Strategic Boredom: Boredom and Social Control	252
	Boredom on Display	255
	Romantic Relationship Boredom	257
	References	261

Conclusion: The Relational-expectational Theory of Boredom . . .	267
Premise 1: Boredom Is a Socially-constructed Emotion	268
Premise 2: Boredom Is a Relational State.	268
Premise 3: Boredom Is Caused by a Failure of Expectations	269
Premise 4: Expectation-Driven Boredom Is a Civilizational Trait	271
Premise 5: Expectations (in the Form of Desires/Dreams/Aspirations) Make the Reality Boring.	271
Premise 6: Expectation-driven Boredom Is a Function of Social Comparisons	274
Premise 7: Expectations May Lead to Anticipatory Boredom.	275
Remedies	276
References	281
Further Reading	285
Index.	318

Illustrations

Figures

2.1	The spiral of consumer boredom	71
5.1	The relationship between acedia, boredom, laziness, sloth, and melancholy	182

Tables

1.1	Types of essentialism and constructivism	31
1.2	Types of suicide identified by Durkheim	47
1.3	The influence of unbalanced integration and regulation on boredom	47
1.4	Typology of boredom (integration vs regulation) based on Durkheim	48
2.1	Sectors of information search	66
4.1	Workload typology.	135
4.2	Types of approach to work and the level of work-related boredom.	142
4.3	Types of empty labour.	156
9.1	Causes and remedies for boredom.	279

About the Author

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Some parts of the current book have previously appeared or been published in other works of mine. Here is the list of such “borrowings” (they are all reproduced here with the permission of the publishers).

- Some parts of Chapters 1, 2, and 4 constitute extended and amended fragments of the unpublished PhD thesis, “On the Social Significance of Boredom: The Phenomenon of Boredom in the University Milieu” (Finkielsztein, 2019, pp. 101–116, 149–162).
- The section “Consumer Boredom” in Chapter 2 has previously been published as an article in the *European Journal of American Studies* under the title, “Consumer Boredom: Boredom as a Subliminal Mood of Consumer Capitalism” (Finkielsztein, 2022).
- The major part of the section “Boredom in Refugee Camps: Anomic Boredom” in Chapter 3 and the section “Strategic Boredom: Boredom

and Social Control” in Chapter 8, constitute edited fragments of the article, “Strategic Boredom: The Experience and Dynamics of Boredom in Refugee Camp. A Mediterranean Case” in the *Journal of Contemporary Ethnography* (Wagner & Finkielstein, 2021, pp. 5–6, 19, 23–25).

- The extract in the section “Precarious Employment: Lack of Belonging” in Chapter 4 is derived from the chapter, “From Passionate Engagement to Chronic Boredom in Polish Academia: An Overview of Early-Career Motivation and Systemic Contributory Factors” in the book, *Early Career Teachers* (Finkielstein, 2021b, pp. 126–127).
- The first part of Chapter 7 constitutes a re-edited and extended version of the chapter, “Boredom and Melancholy in Utopias and Dystopias” in the book, *More after More* (Finkielstein, 2016, pp. 104–114).
- The sections “Role Distance” and “Low Emotional Energy” in Chapter 8 were published originally in the book, *Boredom and Academic Work* (Finkielstein, 2021a, pp. 63–66).
- The section “Interactional Ritual and Anticipatory Boredom” in Chapter 8 is based on the unpublished MA thesis, “Boredom during University Classes: The Perception of Boredom among Students of the University of Warsaw” (Finkielstein, 2013, pp. 68–71) and short fragments of the article, “Class-Related Boredom among University Students: A Qualitative Research on Boredom Coping Strategies” in the *Journal of Further Education* (Finkielstein, 2020, pp. 1107, 1110).
- The section “Boredom and Power” in Chapter 8 is based partially on the article, “Boredom and Power: How Power Relations Influence Feeling Boredom” published in the journal *Zoon Politikon* (Finkielstein, 2023, pp. 127–134).

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Introduction: Upstream Psychological Trend

In Search of the Sociology of Boredom

When I started to research boredom 14 years ago, I dreamt about a sociology of boredom being established. Over these years, boredom studies have been developing at a fair pace and more and more research covering the subject has been published every year. Still, though, psychology seems to dominate the field. In my previous book, *Boredom and Academic Work* (Finkielstein, 2021), I showed that out of 572 scientific publications on boredom that I analysed, almost half (273) were from the field of psychology, and this estimate would be higher if we included in that category publications from the field of education that are based almost entirely on psychological theories and methodology. I found only 35 publications that can be classified as “sociological” and fewer than 20 that were written by sociologists. Boredom being still mostly perceived as a strictly individual affliction is the most probable reason for the neglect of the social dimension of the feeling (Anderson, 2004; Darden & Marks, 1999; Kenny, 2009; Misztal, 2016; Zijderfeld, 1979). From my perspective, there is still no sociology of boredom, and the conclusion of Donna Darden and Alan Marks (1999) that “[s]ociology has largely ignored boredom, although producing a rather large amount of it” (p. 33) seems still to be an adequate description of the state of the art. Even the sociology of emotions neglects boredom (the only exception I’m aware of is Jacobsen, 2019). Sociologists of previous generations usually never mentioned boredom (the rare exceptions are evaluated in this book), and sociology has simply not dealt with boredom and, therefore, has no tradition in that regard. There are no counterparts in sociology for the classics of psychodynamic approach by Otto Fenichel (1951), Ralph Greenson (1951, 1953), or Victor Frankl (2000), producing weighty texts on boredom. Similarly, sociology has not had its Kierkegaard, Schopenhauer, or Heidegger who have devoted in-depth treatises to the issue of boredom. There are mostly crumbs and scattered traces of indirect mentions of boredom with only a few

exceptions (such as Orin Klapp's [1986] book, *Overload and Boredom*). I had a moment of great excitement only once when I saw the journal article by Michael Gardiner (2012), "Henri Lefebvre and the 'Sociology of Boredom'"¹. But it was just a false alarm, a false hope—there was no real sociology of boredom included. The article "only" reconstructed the thought of one thinker and did not advocate for a sociological subdiscipline of the sociology of boredom. Admittedly, Henri Lefebvre (2002) stated that "[o]n the horizon of the modern world dawns the black sun of boredom, and the critique of everyday life has a sociology of boredom as part of its agenda" (p. 75)—yet, he seemed never to take that part of its agenda more seriously. Boredom has continued to be a rather minor mention of no serious consideration in sociology, and was frequently used in a taken-for-granted and colloquial manner (Darden & Marks, 1999). Given that situation, I decided to take the sociology of boredom into my own hands.

The recent publication of *Out of My Skull: The Psychology of Boredom* by James Danckert and John Eastwood (2020), not to mention the already classic *Philosophy of Boredom* by Lars Svendsen (2005), made it even more apparent that in the field of boredom studies there is still a lack of serious sociological voices. It is even more pressing in the face of boredom being a well-established subject of other disciplines' investigations (measured by the number of papers published every year). The perception of boredom as a strictly individual phenomenon seems to constitute the prime reason for the lack of a sociological study of boredom and a more in-depth sociological analysis of boredom comparable to Danckert and Eastwood's in psychology or Svendsen's in philosophy. This book aims to fill this gap by providing a summative and theoretical reflection upon boredom as a social phenomenon. *The Sociology of Boredom* is meant to do the following:

1. Collect and present all the scattered strands of social/sociological reflection and research on boredom in one place.
2. Contribute to the introduction of new ways of conceptualizing, interpreting, and perceiving boredom, that is, to develop the further sociological analysis of boredom as a socially-constructed emotion, by using existing sociological theories.
3. Propose a new theory of boredom that highlights social and interactional aspects of the phenomenon, which I would call the relational-expectational theory of boredom.

Although the title of this book is *The Sociology of Boredom*, it is not meant only for sociologists. In some parts of the book, I interpret boredom in terms of classic sociological theories and provide some basic information about them—yet, this book is not a manual, but aims at demonstrating the significance and usefulness of sociology, and the sociological view in general, for an analysis and understanding of boredom. This message is directed to sociologists and non-sociologists alike—to the former, for encouragement and inspiration for

¹This was probably the first time the expression "Sociology of Boredom" was used in the title of a scholarly publication; this book is the second.

further studies, to the latter, as a supplement to previous and/or discovery of novel perspectives on boredom.

The book provides a summary of previous studies and theoretical developments and a reinterpretation of boredom in light of the sociological perspective. It is based on my reflections accumulated over 10 years of researching and theorizing on boredom and uses many of my previous ideas scattered throughout various venues (papers, chapters, theses) but constitutes an entirely novel project, as all preceding work that is incorporated into this book has been rethought and rearranged to produce a novel series of interconnected theoretical essays. Each chapter analyses boredom in different spheres or levels of social life, together creating a wide horizontal picture of boredom in modernity and late modernity, showing the mechanisms of the social production of boredom. At times, I employ the perspectives of social anthropology, which provides a lot of valuable material on the social dimension of boredom, and of philosophy, which offers a theoretical framework for discussing various sociological issues. In that sense, therefore, this book is not purely sociological, as I cannot avoid a pinch of heretical multidisciplinary. The book will present boredom from the various sociological vantage points of the sociology of work, the sociology of social change and theories of social mobilization, the sociology of religion, theories of social structure, interactionist theory, historical sociology, the sociology of emotions, and social anthropology. It will start with macro-sociological perspectives covering various spheres of social life and continue down to micro-sociological analysis (see the overview of the structure of the book later in this chapter).

The book may seem to demonstrate a black-and-white picture of boredom at times, but this is the result of the multiplication of approaches, a polyphony of voices that mingle within each chapter. There are probably even parts of the book that present apparently oppositional perspectives on boredom. All of this is caused by shifting the perspectives and the fact that sometimes I merely refer to what has been researched and written on the matter, and at other times I develop my own reflections. The second important note is that consecutive chapters show only some aspects of the phenomenon, and even if they discuss more general theoretical issues (such as work), I tried to keep them as focused on boredom as possible. As a consequence, some statements may sound like exaggerations but actually this is just a matter of narrowing the attention to only one emotion. The landscape of my reflection is always limited. Dealing with boredom academically forces one to be an expert in many subjects beyond mere experience of that emotion. The bitter truth is yet that one cannot be an expert in everything, and I would not pretend that I am an expert on every single subject that I have raised in this book because I definitely am not. My expertise lies in boredom, I am a boredom researcher and boredom expert. This is why experts in the given fields would probably add tons of footnotes, reservations, and comments to each chapter. I am aware of that, but the aim of this book is different. It is not meant to be the last word on the subject of the sociology of boredom but, conversely, the invitation to further work to establish the field. This is not the end of the road but its beginning. I ask readers to bear that in mind while reading and finding exceptions and limitations to my statements.

Boredom as a Social Emotion

The starting point of this work is the premise that emotions are social phenomena—they are not merely an innate physiological processes or individual psychological states, but are also socially constructed. Social constructionists emphasize that “cultural ideologies, beliefs, and norms as they impinge on social structures define what emotions are to be experienced and how these culturally defined emotions are to be expressed” (Turner & Stets, 2009, p. 2). Social processes have a significant impact on emotions and, as shown by sociology of emotions, “considerable variability exists historically and cross-culturally in the situational causes, experience, meaning, display, and regulation of emotions” (Thoits, 1989, p. 319). Social construction theorists (Gordon, Averill), and symbolic interactionists (Hochschild, Shott) view emotions as primarily dependent on definitions of the situation, emotion vocabularies, and emotional beliefs, which vary across time and location. Such “variability between and within societies can be seen as a reliable indicator that subjective emotions are socially acquired and structured” (Ohlmeier et al., 2020, p. 3). In this way, if boredom is an emotion, it is socially constructed as well.

In popular discourse, boredom is frequently equated with lack of emotions, being described as “a state of emotional deficiency”, or “affective lack” (Ngai, 2005, pp. 268, 269), but in contrast to that vision, it actually constitutes a fully-fledged emotion. Boredom (at least situational boredom) perfectly fits into existing definitions of emotions—it is a short-lived, subjective, psychophysiological affective state that has five components (Macklem, 2015, pp. 8–9; Mulligan & Scherer, 2012, p. 352): (a) affective (an unpleasant, negative feeling), (b) physiological (a non-optimal level of arousal), (c) cognitive (a low level of attention, the perception of time passing slowly), (d) motivational (disinclination towards the activity/situation at hand and urge to change it), and (e) expressive (a slumped posture, drowsiness). More to the point here, according to Thoits’ conceptualization (1989, p. 318) emotions in general involve: (a) appraisals of a situational stimulus or context; (b) changes in physiological or bodily sensations; (c) the free or inhibited display of expressive gestures; and (d) a cultural label applied to specific constellations of one or more of the first three components. First of all, “an emotion is a reaction to a situation, usually of social origin, such as a change in a social relationship. The person responds to the situation as he/she interprets it, so this is both a cognitive and social component” (Gordon, 1990, p. 152). Second, a physiological component from the biological point of view can be something objective, but only by learning culturally transmitted meanings of these sensations can people achieve a particular interpretation of them (see the case of marijuana users in Becker, 1966). Third, expressions of emotions are not universal but socially-learned (even in the case of primary emotions). And, lastly, many theorists observed that bodily sensations in the case of emotions are rather unspecified and ambiguous, it is culture that creates distinctions between very similar physiological reactions and similar states are labelled differently in various cultures. The sociological definition of emotions “shifts the focus to the societal interpretations, patterns and rules which influence the experience and appraisal of boredom” (Ohlmeier et al., 2020, p. 4). Boredom fulfils all the criteria for being a social emotion included in the above conceptualization.

The main aim of this book is to present boredom as a socially-constructed phenomenon and to prove that boredom can be perceived in the same way to suicide, which was viewed as having a strictly individual/psychological nature, and which was famously shown by Durkheim (2005) to be a socially dependent phenomenon as well. People produce boredom in their relations with the social environment (on various levels from direct interaction with people to their relations with institutions, social norms, etc.). Boredom is also culturally- and historically-dependent—it is not merely a psychological state, nor is it uniform, regardless of culture; it is a socially-constructed secondary emotion that can be felt, perceived, and/or displayed differently in various cultures and/or social classes. In other words, boredom is a socially-produced emotion, it is relational and social in nature, similar to other emotions.

Defining Boredom

Taking into account in how many spheres of late modern life boredom is present, or even plays a significant role, I would claim that we all now live in the society of boredom (analogous to Ulrich Beck's risk society). The COVID-19 pandemic has made us realize with powerful force that boredom is a society-wide issue dependent on social factors—for instance, lockdowns and restrictions on social interactions that turned out to be circumstances conducive to boredom growing and spreading (see, among others, Ohlmeier et al., 2022; Westgate et al., 2022). Yet, the paradox of boredom lies in the fact that while being quite a serious social phenomenon, it is ignored and disregarded on a massive scale. Boredom is like the air that surrounds us and “has now reached a state of such intimate familiarity that we often fail to recognize that we are bored” (Lefebvre, 1984, p. 186; see also Svendsen, 2005, p. 14). Boredom, like other emotions, may well go unnoticed or “function below the threshold of awareness” (Scheff, 1988, pp. 397–398, in Barbalet, 2004, p. 80) and the majority of people (scientists and scholars included) “rarely wonder about boredom” (Lombardo, 2017, p. 37) and rarely take “it to be a serious phenomenon for investigation” (Gamsby, 2012, p. 350). Still, many people resent the mere idea of being bored and vigorously deny the possibility of ever feeling bored. This situation, I suppose, is basically a function of a simplistic conceptualization of boredom.

In the course of various discussions on boredom on the internet or among friends as a boredom researcher, I have noticed that people often misunderstand this phenomenon and divide themselves into those who identify boredom with idleness and those for whom it is synonymous with rest and relaxation. When asked about boredom, the first group responds: “I am never bored. I do not know what it is like to be bored. I do not understand people who get bored”, because, as we allegedly all know: “an intelligent person is never bored”. A negative attitude towards boredom and a sense of superiority are clearly visible in these statements (cf. boredom superiority effect in Gallegos et al., 2022)—how one can waste their time on boredom-idleness clearly surpasses human comprehension and is equated with the defect of laziness. Representatives of the second group speak about boredom in a nostalgic and dreamy tone, generally in the context of having no time for it. Such people generally “dream about

boredom”, while others “shamelessly” declare: “I was bored a good chunk of last weekend, and it was wonderful.” Here, boredom is equated with relaxation and evaluated positively. Such people often endorse the recently fashionable slogan that “boredom is creative”. In this sense, boredom has also become part of the campaign for slow life—“slow down, make time for boredom in your life”. In general, in our current achievement society (Han, 2015), boredom is regarded either as contemptible idleness or desired but not easily acquired rest. In extreme cases it may even be regarded as a mild form of resistance against the cultural imperative to be in a constant hurry and always meticulously occupied.

However, based on my extensive theoretical research into the matter of conceptualizing boredom, which took almost half of my previous book, *Boredom and Academic Work* (Finkielstein, 2021), it can be concluded that boredom is definitely not synonymous with either rest or idleness. Boredom, according to almost all its definitions, is a negative, or rather negatively perceived, emotion. Its possible effects may be positive (creativity) or negative (aggression), it can serve a vital function, but as an affective experience, boredom is unpleasant and should be so, because it is an important signal that something should be changed, that the situation we find ourselves in is uninteresting, unstimulating, and/or meaningless for us (Elpidorou, 2017). Boredom is therefore not the same as relaxation, the essence of which is that it is judged to be something desirable. As for idleness, on the other hand, early psychological theories admittedly associated boredom with a lack of stimulation (or even sensory deprivation), and also a lack of activity, but boredom is not idleness, because then its opposite, and also its remedy, would be work, and as many people—not to mention a number of studies—can attest, boredom at work is endemic. Idleness, therefore, would be just one possible cause of boredom or of the circumstances surrounding its experience.

Boredom is also sometimes equated with apathy. Yet it is exactly a life without boredom that would be filled with apathy and stagnation. “The apathetic person is free of the pressured desire to find engagement: By its very definition, apathy is an absence of any desire to even bother redressing a lack of challenge—a failure of motivation, classically embodied in the couch potato” (Danckert & Eastwood, 2020, p. 54). Boredom, on the other hand, is described as a “desire for desires” (Tolstoy, 2002) or “the will to will” (Fernandez, 2006) “The bored person is tormented by a wanting without knowing the conditions for satisfying that want” (Danckert & Eastwood, 2020, p. 29). Boredom is, therefore, a state that includes a strong component of restlessness. More to the point, I claim that boredom is a combination of lethargy and restlessness (cf. Danckert et al., 2018), a mixture of oppositely directed listlessness and restlessness. “[T]o be bored is to experience listlessness and restlessness at the same time, from which the former is directed towards the situation at hand and the latter is focused on a prospective activity, thus, on escaping from the anaesthetizing experience” (Finkielstein, 2021, p. 74).

Many researchers and theorists have claimed repetition and monotony to be an essential quality of boredom (Brodsky, 1995; Davies, 1926; Drory, 1982; Hill, 1975; O’Hanlon, 1981). Yet, simplifying boredom to that dimension is inaccurate, as a number of studies have suggested otherwise. First of all, in industrial work, the epitome of monotony and repetitiveness, many workers express even a preference for routine tasks as those enable them to split their

attention and focus their thoughts elsewhere (Watt, 2002). Second, when the skillset is expanding, the capacity to sustain, or even enjoy, repetition increases and boredom remains out of the picture. In this connection, Richard Sennett (2008) discusses the so-called Isaac Stern rule in music, stating that “the better your technique, the longer you can rehearse without becoming bored” (p. 38, in Danaher, 2019, p. 241). This rule is corroborated by Izabela Wagner (2015), who observed that classical musicians (violins and pianists) seem never to be bored with the routine exercises (except for some child musicians). From my own experience as a ballroom dancer, I can draw similar conclusions. I was never bored with repeating limited sets of basic moves and steps when I was practising them and I realized it only by contrast to teaching others. In general, therefore, if a routine is meaningful and purposeful, it does not prompt boredom and may even provide actors with a sense of security and belonging (Barbalet, 1999; Klapp, 1986; Winter, 2002).

Consequently, in my previous book (Finkielstein, 2021), I did not use the term “boredom” as a close synonym of idleness, rest, apathy, or monotony. Instead, as basic coordinates of the experience, I used the sense of meaninglessness, lack of engagement/attention, lack of agency, and the failure of expectations. Many boredom researchers and scholars have claimed meaning deficit to be a basic characteristic of the feeling of boredom (Barbalet, 1999; Danckert & Eastwood, 2020; Martin et al., 2006; Svendsen, 2005; van Tilburg & Igou, 2012). As Viktor Frankl (2000) famously claimed, humans constantly “search for meaning”, and are “addicted to meaning” (Baumeister, 1991, p. 358)—boredom “can be described as meaning withdrawal, in analogy with drug withdrawal, as a feeling of discomfort that signals that our need for meaning is not being met” (Svendsen, 2016, p. 213). Boredom is thus associated with “the meaning vacuum” (Baumeister, 1991) and constitutes a certain kind of frustration, an “irritable distress after a wish collided with an unyielding reality” (Jeronimus & Laceulle, 2017)—a meaning frustration, that is, an emotional reaction to the unfulfilled need for meaning or the unsuccessful construction of meaning. Certainly, we may feel bored with activities that we perceive to be very meaningful, such as babysitting (Rogge, 2011) or lectures (Finkielstein, 2013), or highly engaged with something that we see as ultimately meaningless (such as binge watching; Danckert & Eastwood, 2020, p. 53). This is why I connect boredom rather with personally-perceived lack of meaning in a concrete situation rather than meaningfulness in general. As I have argued elsewhere:

There is no possibility for one to be bored and simultaneously to perceive the situation as personally meaningful. If one feels bored, it means that one does not assess the particular situation as personally valuable, and would prefer to do something else instead. If one truly finds meaning in one's occupation, one never gets bored by it. If one feels bored, it means that, at this very moment and in the specific circumstances, one does not evaluate the task/activity/situation as meaningful. The task as such may remain ‘objectively’ meaningful to somebody who performs it, but carrying it out can be, at times, boring—under certain conditions, in particular situations.

(Finkielstein, 2021, p. 75)

Moreover, what one sees as meaningful or boring is a matter of socialization, socially-transmitted and culturally-dependent values and perceptions and not only personal whims. Yet, in general, for one to perceive something as meaningful, one needs a purpose, a justification (perceived value), and a sense of efficacy (agency; Baumeister, 1991). Boredom strikes when there are some problems with purpose (sense of pointlessness) and efficacy (lack of agency). As Dankert and Eastwood (2020) stated, “as its root, boredom is a crisis of agency” (p. 48; also in Eastwood & Gorelik, 2021, p. 112). If people feel no control over their actions and cannot externalize their needs and/or desires, they will have difficulties with ascribing meaning to an action. Sometimes a mere sense of control can keep boredom at bay. Boredom, therefore, is strictly associated with constraints on one’s actions, which are usually socially defined. In that vein, boredom may be also connected with the failure of expectations (Conrad, 1997). The incongruence between what we need/want/expect and what is possible may result in disappointment and boredom. Later, I will demonstrate this connection with many examples. One of my theses is that the concept of expectations, so proliferated in late modernity, is vastly responsible for establishing the society of boredom.

Within relational sociology, agency is defined as “the temporally constructed engagement” (Emirbayer & Mische, 1998, p. 970), that is, one’s engagement in the social world around them. In that connection, I also conceive of boredom as a lack of engagement. One is basically disconnected with one’s social environment, and is disinterested in and/or bereft of social interactions. This is, by the way, the original meaning of the Latin “inter-esse” (from which originated English “interest” and “interesting”)—to be between. The lack of interest thus means disconnection, being unable to relate to something/someone. Boredom alienates, turns us off from social engagement, and usually ends the interaction (Darden & Marks, 1999; Musharbash, 2007).

The last thing that should be mentioned here is that there are various kinds of boredom from the most volatile to the most severe. In the literature, the most basic distinction is between state/situational boredom and existential/profound boredom, which is reflected to some extent in English by the difference between boredom and ennui (Goodstein, 2005, p. 23). The former is a short-lived and relatively superficial emotion/feeling that is a reaction to a concrete situation, task, or external circumstance that usually slips away along with the removal of its causes (Healy, 1984; Irvine, 2001; Kuhn, 1976; Toohey, 2011). The second kind is a long-lasting mood deeply rooted in the individual’s self. In that situation, boredom is not associated with a concrete situation but is a generalized attitude towards reality and involves a pessimistic view of human existence—boring and meaningless is not the situation at hand but one’s whole life and/or life in general. However, there is also an intermediate kind of boredom, which I call chronic boredom. As I have explained elsewhere:

This kind of boredom affects only one sphere of the individual’s life, leaving the rest of it untouched. One can be extremely bored, for instance, with one’s job or studies, and still not be existentially bored, as one finds his/her leisure time or family life enjoyable and rewarding. Such boredom ... is a consequence of the accumulation

of situational boredom due to its frequent repetition in similar circumstances associated with a particular sphere of one's activity.
(Finkielsztein, 2021, pp. 79–80)

My idea of chronic boredom resembles the concept of “chronified situational boredom” conceptualized by Josefa Ros Velasco (2022) and remains in sharp opposition to its psychological or psychodynamic understanding. This kind of boredom is not a matter of personal characteristics but social circumstances. It is also not a profound mood being the opposition to situational/state boredom but an intermediate type—more serious than situational and much less severe than existential one.

In this book I focus on situational and chronic boredom, for the most part leaving existential boredom to philosophers. In general, boredom will be conceptualized as an outcome of the incongruence between social reality and (a) human needs, including the need for meaning, relations with others, belonging, and sense of agency, and (b) human desires, expectations, and aspirations.

The Structure of the Book

As these are expectations that make books boring, readers need a clear picture of what they can and cannot expect from this book. It definitely does not cover all the subjects that one may imagine being associated with the phrase “sociology of boredom”, but includes a series of interconnected essays dealing with a set of social spheres (consumption, work, religion, social relations, violence) and topics (utopian thinking, social structure) in which boredom plays an active role. Chapter 1 shows links between the onset of modernity and the emergence of boredom as democratized phenomenon. Subsequent chapters constitute an exploration of boredom in various spheres of social life describing its causes, mechanics, and outcomes. The recurrent themes and claims include: (a) the social character of boredom, (b) boredom as a function of relations between an individual and their social circumstances or internalized socially prevalent perceptions of social reality, and (c) boredom as distinctively prompted by the failure of socially-produced expectations, aspirations, appetites, and desires that due to socially-dependent factors remain unmet or unfulfilled.

Chapter 1, “Boredom and Modernity”, presents two approaches towards the historicity of boredom: essentialism (boredom is a timeless phenomenon) and constructivism (boredom is a social construction of modernity). I propose a division between soft essentialism, hard essentialism, and constructivism, where hard essentialists contend that boredom is timeless and part of human biology and evolutionary heritage, while soft essentialists view it as an inherent quality of humans as cultural beings, an outcome of the condition of being human. Soft essentialism is a perspective found within philosophy and literary studies, which claim that boredom under various labels has always existed in human culture and experience. Chapter 1 also discusses the anthropological perspective, which advocates that the origins of boredom are associated with the shift to a sedentary and agricultural lifestyle (the Neolithic Revolution), and that boredom was a reaction to unnatural, from an evolutionary point of

view, circumstances of human life. I claim here that boredom is not timeless but has a history, yet, that history is far longer than the word “boredom”, and began with abandoning the hunter-gatherer lifestyle. I would like, however, to propose a new approach that breaks with the dichotomic division between essentialism and constructivism—historicism.

The second part of the chapter is devoted to unravelling the constructivist standpoint claiming that boredom is a uniquely modern phenomenon with no previous precedents (hard constructivism) or that boredom has been democratized in modernity, existing previously only marginally and in a trivial form. Boredom in this approach constitutes a defining feature of modernity and is a socially-constructed phenomenon associated with a set of social changes and circumstances including disenchantment with the world (secularization and de-ritualization), rationalization (industrialization and bureaucratization), individualization (the atrophy of community), and anomie. Boredom is a result of demagification of human experience and the replacement of the meaningful by mere function. Boredom constitutes one of the irrationalities of rationality and is a side effect of the transition between substantial rationality (pre-modernity) and formal rationality (modernity). The cases of industrial, school, leisure, and romantic boredom are presented. The chapter concludes with a discussion of the Durkheimian notion of anomie (social state of normlessness), and I propose a division of boredom parallel to Durkheim’s typology of suicides (egoistic, fatalistic, and anomic boredom). Boredom is treated as a result of anomie, which is a persistent aspect of life in modern times, as central to anomic situations is weariness of endless aspirations that reality can never satisfy, which is ultimately highly boredom-inducing due to the failure of life to meet expectations and the state of indeterminacy of the axiological order.

Chapter 2, “Late Modern Boredom”, aims to provide a comprehensive overview of two late modern modalities of boredom: busy boredom and consumer boredom. The former describes the inner boredom felt despite the busy lifestyle of the current achievement society. The accelerated social life leaves little space for standing still, and people occupy their time with overworking and an abundance of social placebos—false remedies to boredom (one of which is using smart devices). In the chapter, I reinterpret the notion of smart boredom, giving it the meaning opposite to the popular one—smart devices do not cure our boredom, they merely push our small everyday boredoms away for a while, contributing to the emergence of a deeper mood of chronic boredom that gradually takes root in us due to accumulation of unresolved situational boredoms. The chapter also provides a concise presentation of the theory of boredom in the informational society by Orin Klapp.

The second part of the chapter, in contrast to the official discourse of boredom in consumer capitalism, poses the thesis that boredom, which is allegedly the villain and the main antagonist of consumer capitalism, is in fact its main driving force, and most powerful ally, meticulously employed for the system’s benefit. Through a sequence of social and cultural shifts and freeloading on humans’ natural predispositions, the system has redefined the relation between human beings and their external environment and has manufactured a new type of human, *homo consumens*, who is socialized to be passive, driven by desires and dreams, and addicted to novelty, constant change, a ceaseless stream

of stimuli, and pleasure. Boredom enables the smooth functioning of the system. Bored consumers buy more and are led by desires that promise to alleviate the feeling. Consumer capitalism is devoted to fighting the very boredom that it actively produces, amplifies, or invites by consumer socialization towards boredom. The entire entertainment/culture industry, the boredom-preventing industry, is in fact the boredom industry, whose institutions are preoccupied with mitigating the consumer's (natural, situational) boredom, but—at the same time—push this light type of boredom into the subliminal realm, where it has time to accumulate and takes root unnoticed, becoming a subliminal mood of consumer capitalism.

Chapter 3, “Boredom and Social Inequality”, advocates the view, contrary to the common psychologically-driven one, that boredom is a group phenomenon, that is, is a matter of shared social position. Although representatives of all social strata are vulnerable to boredom, their understanding and perception of it may be class-specific, that is, manifestations of boredom among different social classes are not identical in their frequency, causes/antecedents, forms/character, the way they are felt/experienced, and strategies that are employed to prevent, cope with, or remedy it may differ. The chapter, unlike the previous tradition associating boredom mostly with the upper class, discusses the boredom of various marginalized groups—the unemployed and the homeless, refugees, and women. There is a straightforward connection between occupying a marginal position in society and the experience of boredom associated with systemic constraints (inhibition of actions), lack of agency (lack of control and freedom of choice), and the sense of powerlessness. Boredom of such groups is also exacerbated by the severe failure of expectations, as a marginal position is also a matter of unfulfilled aspirations towards an inclusion in the mainstream. The marginalized experience of anomic boredom is characterized by not belonging, lack of a stable social identity, a sense of displacement, and indeterminacy. Such a situation is illustrated by the concept of *waithood*, a limbo state of suspension between childhood and adulthood. The liminal case described in the chapter is *feminine boredom*, as women were (or are) marginalized but do not always share all the traits of other marginalized groups, as their boredom is usually associated with relative affluence and caused by unfulfilled aspirations for public significance, control, and freedom, and equality (boredom here is a case of inhibition of becoming).

The second part of the chapter discusses the issue of marginalization on the global level and, employing the theory of Immanuel Wallerstein, advocates the stance that boredom can be an outcome of the troubled relationship between the centre and peripheries in the capitalistic world-system. This kind of boredom, which I call *peripheral boredom*, is caused by unfulfilled aspirations of the peripheries to share the affluence of the centre. The here-and-now of the everyday life of the marginalized becomes totally uninteresting in comparison to what they can imagine as an alternative due to exposure to Western cultural traits (consumerism or the idea of progress; linear time) via the media and the internet. In that connection, boredom is a matter of colonial encounters. I argue that boredom is one more civilizational disease that now has been globalized. Colonialism has deprived Indigenous populations of their traditional affluence, destroying economic and social grounds for their cultural life and leaving

them poor, dependent, marginal, in anomie, and with expectations previously unknown in their cultures. The chapter describes the notion of peripheral boredom using the examples of Niger, Egypt, Ethiopia, and Georgia, and Indigenous boredom among Australian Aborigines and Native Americans.

Chapter 4, “Workplace Boredom”, deals with the vocational aspect of boredom. It starts with the claim that the mere concept of work is a bit boring in itself. The busy mindset and the compulsion to work are civilizational diseases, and the current capitalistic work ethic is not natural, but something that we now call “laziness” is. The idea of work is learned and got used to through the process of a long socialization and training. Our current approach to work is related to: (a) agriculture, which accustomed people to scarcity and hard work, on which all farmers’ lives have been based, and (b) modern capitalism, which has proliferated the idea of a job for monetary gain being the aim in and of itself. The crusade to make work a moral issue and to ennoble it, along with the moral condemnation of laziness, has been introduced to eradicate natural energy-saving mechanisms that prevent people from overwork (or prevent them from being utilized for that purpose). The modern work ethic has been also introduced as a new way of exploiting many people for the benefit of a few. All philosophies trying to convince us what a marvellous thing our work is and what a privilege, honour, and opportunity it is to be able to do our work efficiently or at all are calculated to ease our exploitation. In a word, I advocate the stance that the concept and practice of work under the modern capitalist regime is boring—first of all, due to its compulsory character. Work is not natural for human beings, and spending long hours each day at work is not congruent with our evolutionary heritage. Boredom constitutes the response to such an incongruence.

Not only is the concept of work boring, but actual work is as well. The second part of the chapter is devoted to the exploration of various possible causes of workplace boredom, which is employed as a close synonym of job disengagement. The chapter analyses direct as well as systemic factors contributing to work-related boredom. Direct factors encompass personal characteristics, task characteristics, the relationship between personal and work characteristics (person-job fit), and the work environment. Systemic factors include bureaucratization in the form of managerialism, secularization of work (lack of calling), identity disturbance (anomic work-related boredom), precarious employment (lack of belonging), redundant work (bullshit jobs), and commodification of feelings (emotional labour). I propose the development of a Baumeister-inspired typology of approaches towards boredom and show that the idea of work as a calling has been superseded by the idea of work as a job, and work as a career by work as an adventure (the last category is my proposal for supplementing the typology). I also claim that this shift is responsible for much work-related boredom. The feeling can also be associated with vocational identity and its disturbance or crisis. Boredom is more likely to emerge in those activities that are perceived as further from an individual’s core identity, for which more identity work is needed to make them meaningful. Boredom might constitute an emotional response to identity disturbance, which occurs when the roles that are offered are not perceived as central to one’s identity and do not meet one’s expectations of their imagined role/calling (the struggle between the ideal