A Cinema of Boredom: Heidegger, Cinematic Time and Spectatorship

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Abstract:
Boredom, in cinema as well as in our everyday experience, is usually associated with a generalised loss of meaning or interest. Accordingly, boredom is often perceived as that which ought to be avoided. In Martin Heidegger's philosophical inquiry, however, boredom is posited as one of the fundamental existential dispositions that provide access to the possibility of philosophising. My contention is that boredom can be a tool for understanding spectatorship in cinema and, in contrast to the ordinary perception of boredom as something to escape, it can be a stimulus for reflecting on the images before us. To this end, I focus on Heidegger's tripartition of boredom – "becoming bored by something," "being bored with something," and "profound boredom" – and the ways in which these forms can be significant to cinema. I then consider boredom's potential for film spectatorship, differentiating between mainstream entertainment cinema as a means to evading boredom and less immersive forms of cinema which allow for boredom to remain present. On the one hand, "profound boredom" disrupts the potentially alienated relationship between spectators and spectacle-images by opening up a time which becomes long – something which Isidore Isou's *On Venom and Eternity* (*Traité de Bave et d'Éternité*, 1951) and, less manifestly, Michelangelo Antonioni's *L'Eclisse* (1962) and Ingmar Bergman's *Cries and Whispers* (*Viskningar och rop*, 1972) deliberately arouse. Thus, profound boredom can be a tool to criticise the spectacularised image in the cinema, promoting a pensive spectatorship. On the other hand, the escapism endorsed by mainstream narrative cinema can dialectically reveal the contemporary anxiety of *horror vacui*, therefore turning boredom into a means for investigating our relationship with time and the image.

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This article ultimately argues that boredom – that from which we daily try to shy away – has the potential to un-conceal the ways we understand and interact with moving images in the world we currently inhabit.

Keywords: boredom; Martin Heidegger; time; Isidore Isou; aesthetics; Michelangelo Antonioni.

> But meanwhile it flees, irretrievable time flees.
> *Sed fugit interea, fugit inreparabile tempus.*
>
> (Virgil, *Georgics*, III, 284)

In Western philosophy the concept of boredom has been discussed from both an analytical perspective, which deals mainly with the necessary and sufficient conditions for everyday boredom (O'Brien, 2014), and from more holistic, discursive angles, which use an interdisciplinary approach drawing from philosophy to literature, visual arts, and cinema (Dalle Pezze & Salzani, 2009; Goodstein, 2005; Svendsen, 2005; Toohey, 2011). However, the most in-depth philosophical analysis of boredom, which takes on a phenomenological perspective, can be found in the work of Martin Heidegger. Specifically, in *Fundamental Concepts of Metaphysics: World, Finitude, Solitude* (1929–30/1995), Heidegger examines in great detail the issue of boredom, delineating its potential for philosophising. In our everyday experience, as well as in cinema, boredom is usually associated with a generalised loss of meaning or interest, hence as something which ought to be avoided, while in Heidegger's philosophical inquiry boredom is posited as one of the fundamental existential dispositions that provides access to the possibility of philosophical thought. Heidegger (1929–30/1995) divides boredom into three forms, that of "becoming bored by something" [*das Gelangweiltwerden von etwas*] (p. 78), "being bored with something" [*das Sichlangweilen bei etwas*] (p. 160), and "profound boredom" [*die tiefe Langeweile*] (p. 139), which all share an inextricable link with time. Furthermore, Heideggerian boredom configures itself as a relational notion which combines together the subject experiencing boredom and the object attuning to boredom and time. My contention is that, in the cinema, boredom as conceived by Heidegger constitutes a suitable tool for discussing spectatorship with particular attention to time and has the potential to stimulate thinking about films and the ways we interact with moving images. While I draw on Heidegger's analysis of boredom to explore its potential for discussing cinema, time and spectatorship, I neither strictly apply his philosophy to cinema nor argue that the films under discussion are doing Heideggerian philosophy.

Therefore, this article is both an homage to, and a deviation from, Heidegger's incredibly rich argument on boredom.

An examination of boredom's potential for cinematic thinking is particularly relevant in the current media horizon, in which moving images are potentially always accessible – via smartphones to computer, television, and cinema screens – moving images are an integral part of our daily experience of the world (Friedberg, 2006; Krajina, 2014, pp. 1–14; Manovich, 2002). Thus, boredom as the meaningless, empty instant should be almost non-existent. Nevertheless, we do experience boredom, often precisely when we are busy in activities designed to escape it, such as watching a film or television programme (Narušytė, 2010, p. 58; Torbett, 2009, p. 160). Rather counterintuitively, boredom, thanks to its close link with time, can be a means through which to arouse thinking about moving images and question our relationship with them. Heidegger's understanding of boredom as an entwined relationship between subject, object, and therefore time is useful in discussing the ambiguous relation that viewers establish with moving images – they are at once a way to pass time and a stimulus for thinking. As I will discuss, while the second form of boredom can be associated with entertainment cinema and a certain contemporary *horror vacui* aimed at killing empty time, "profound boredom", which may arise from an encounter between spectators and films which exhibit moments of slowness, stillness or non-representational images, constitutes a productive mood which allows the subject time to think.

From Metaphysical Boredom to Cinematic Boredom

Heidegger identifies boredom as the fundamental mood for philosophising in virtue of its privileged relationship with time. The German etymology of boredom[1] makes apparent the link it has with time: "*Langeweile*, the *while* [*Weile*] becomes *long* [*lang*]" (Heidegger, 1929–30/1995, p. 152). Thus, in boredom, time becomes conspicuous. However, this dilated time does not refer to a quantifiable length of duration, as Heidegger often remarks. In order to understand Heidegger's boredom, a definition of mood is needed. A mood or attunement [*Stimmung*] is an existential disposition, namely a way in which we enter into a relationship between ourselves and the world (Boss, 2009, p. 91;

1. The English etymology of boredom is obscure and terms sharing the same root are found in usage from the mid Eighteenth century (see Dalle Pezze & Salzani, 2010, p. 10). It translates as in the domain of (-dom) something which causes ennui, an annoyance or a nuisance (bore).

Slaby, 2010, pp. 103–106). Moods are neither subjective nor objective, but position themselves in between these two terms. Moreover, they are not created from scratch, suddenly coming out of nothingness; rather, they already exist in some sense and only need to be awoken. More specifically,

> an attunement is to be awakened. Yet this means that it is there and not there. If attunement is something that has the character of "there and not there", then attunement itself has to do with the innermost essence of man's being, with his Dasein. *Attunement belongs to the being of man.* [...]. Attunements are the fundamental ways in which we *find* ourselves *disposed* in such and such a way. (Heidegger, 1929–30/1995, pp. 63–67)

Boredom is identified as a fundamental attunement or mood [*Grundstimmung*] that allows for the possibility of philosophical thought. Usually, we tend to avoid boredom and this act of pushing away boredom corresponds to keeping it asleep, impeding its ability to awake and work in us. Heidegger develops his analysis of boredom by distinguishing among three forms, from a more familiar and superficial boredom to that which he calls "profound boredom." He also identifies the two fundamentals of boredom; that is, two essential, defining moments that can be found in all three types of boredom, although in different forms. They are the moments of "being held in a limbo" [*Hingehaltenheit*] and "being left empty" [*Leergelassenheit*] (Heidegger, 1929–30/1995, p. 106).

In the first form – "becoming bored by something" – a specific object or situation attunes the subject to boredom. Heidegger's example is that of waiting for a train at a small, isolated station. The time between the arrival of the train and its departure holds the subject in a limbo, and this dragging time also causes a sense of "being left empty". In fact, the station fails to offer the subject the possibility of boarding on an immediate train, thus leaving the subject "empty". "The station refuses *itself*, because time refuses *it* something" (Heidegger, 1929–30/1995, p. 105); that is, the dragging of time does not allow the station to give the subject what the subject expects from it (i.e. an immediate train to catch), therefore paving the way for the arousal of boredom.

In the second form – "being bored with something" – it is an unspecified situation, designed to avoid boredom, which reveals boredom itself. Heidegger's counterintuitive example is of an evening party during which the subject does not seem to perceive boredom. While in the first boredom the subject can easily identify an object which attunes to boredom, in the second form there is no specific boring object. According to Heidegger, in this deeper form of boredom the two

fundamentals are hidden and yet present – an emptiness is formed because the subject spends time and time stands still. That is to say, while during the first boredom we experience time as conspicuous, in the second form we forget about time as movement because we are immersed in an act of passing the time.[2] In both these forms of boredom, however, time acquires the form of a now-time [*Jetzt-Zeit*]: in one case it is a clock-time that moves incredibly slowly, in the other case it is a now-time that stands still. Accordingly, the dimensions of past and future are excluded and taken "as mere modifications of the present, not as distinct dimensions in their own right. The past is understood as merely an 'expired now' [...] and the future [as] an *expected* 'now'" (Boss, 2009, p. 98).

The third form of boredom – "profound boredom" – is caused neither by a specified object nor by an unspecified situation. Rather, it is the experience of boredom as such, in which any "passing the time" is prevented and indifference becomes a key term. In trying to provide an example, Heidegger (1929–30/1995) ventures that "profound boredom" might be experienced when "walk[ing] through the streets of a large city on a Sunday afternoon" (p. 135). It is a state of indifference: indifference towards oneself, indifference towards entities as such. Matthew Boss (2009) argues that in "profound boredom",

> the failure is absolute. It is not bound to any determinate situation. Rather, entities fail us *as a whole* in all their possibilities, which have now become pointless, a matter of indifference. (p. 101)

In the third form of boredom there is no longer the intention of getting rid of that boredom nor the possibility of the passing the time. In experiencing "profound boredom" there is a will to let boredom remain awake because we understand that "this boredom wishes to tell us something" (Heidegger, 1929–30/1995, p. 135). Unlike the first and second forms of boredom, the third boredom is a productive attunement which brings forth an interrogation of meaning.

Endorsing Heidegger's types of boredom as tools for exploring time and spectatorship in cinema requires a change in our relationship with the medium of film. Indeed, as "the understanding of attunement ultimately demands of us a transformation in our fundamental conception of man" (Heidegger, 1929–30/1995, p. 82), so the understanding of boredom as

2. Heidegger employs the expression "passing the time" [*Zeit vertreiben*] as a noun with the meaning of "a diversion from boredom" (1929–30/1995, p. 90).

an aesthetic category requires us to transform our conception of the film medium and experience, positioning ourselves so as to allow boredom to remain awake. That is to say, to deliberately permit the "being left empty" and "being held in a limbo" aroused by certain films, instead of attempting to escape boredom through mainstream entertainment cinema. More simply put, it means that one has to be in the mood for boredom. Additionally, while metaphysical boredom "gives us the possibility of grasping the Dasein of man as such" (Heidegger, 1929–30/1995, p. 82), cinematic boredom opens up the possibility of better understanding our relationship with cinema and our modes of producing and consuming what is visible.

In discussing the aesthetics of mood in cinema, Robert Sinnerbrink (2012) defines mood "as a way of revealing or opening up a cinematic world" (p. 149). As in Heidegger, moods in cinema dispose spectators, who are free to accept or oppose this disposition, in a certain way. Although connected with emotions, moods are a sort of pre-emotional state; they are the substratum for the arousal of emotions. Closely related to the film form, moods

> contribute to the aesthetic composition of a cinematic world – which is to say how well that world is achieved. They are not merely diffuse and variable subjective states, something vague "within us" with only an arbitrary relationship to the world. Rather, they are expressive of how a (cinematic) world is revealed, of what aspects of such a world might be emotionally significant. (Sinnerbrink, 2012, p. 154)

Moods thus result from the interaction between film and spectator, configuring themselves as an interlacing of some aspects pertaining to the object and some others originated within the subject. In cinema Heideggerian boredom, because of its quality of being objective and subjective, can be used as a way to explore the treatment of time and spectatorship. Boredom in its three forms has the potential to un-conceal certain aspects of film spectatorship and prompt viewers to question their relation with moving images. It is in particular "profound boredom" as "a long whiling away of time" (Dalle Pezze & Salzani, 2009, p. 10) which encourages spectators to question cinema and its images. Such a boredom is aroused, on the one hand, by certain films to place spectators in a questioning state. On the other hand, spectators have to deliberately accept being disposed in such a way, namely to be disposed to interrogate the relationship they establish with the images before them, because the film alone is not sufficient for the awakening of "profound boredom". Some films, rather than filling up every single space and time of our

everyday life for the fear of emptiness and moments of stillness, require from viewers quite a different disposition, that of deliberately allowing boredom to leave them empty. Examples of potentially profoundly boring films are Isidore Isou's experimental work *On Venom and Eternity* (*Traité de bave et d'éternité*, 1951), films defined as "slow cinema" (among others, Çağlayan, 2018; de Luca & Barradas Jorge, 2016), or even less experimental films such as Michelangelo Antonioni's *L'Eclisse* (1962) and Ingmar Bergman's *Cries and Whispers* (*Viskningar och rop*, 1972).

Alessandro Alfieri (2010) and Richard Misek (2010) have considered Heidegger's tripartititon of boredom in cinema. Accordingly, the first form corresponds to a boredom caused by a specific object, being it a whole film or part of it, which fails to meet the initial expectations. The second form refers to the act of escaping boredom in mainstream cinematic entertainment. However, film entertainment, being that which has suspended boredom, "dialectically highlights such boredom" (Alfieri, 2010, p. 49: my translation). That is to say, the whole activity of watching the film consists in killing time to escape boredom, thus revealing boredom itself. Finally, the third form of boredom is that which disposes spectators to question what they see and hear, and more generally to problematise the relationship with audio-visual images. Indeed, as in Heidegger's metaphysics, in cinema "this boredom wishes to tell us something" (1929–30/1995, p. 135). It is neither the becoming bored by a film which fails to meet our expectations, nor the act of escaping boredom through entertainment; it is a fecund boredom which solicits an interrogation of cinema, its images and our relationship with them. Alfieri emphasises the potentialities of "profound boredom" in cinema as follows:

> We are in an area decisively different from that of films "that bore us", or that of films that serve as (illusory) escape from boredom. In these works boredom acquires such a profundity that it manifests to us the reality of our existence. [...] This profound boredom configures itself as an existential experience rather than an emotional state of the spectator; it is an experience encouraged by the film, which finds in the stimulation of 'profound boredom' the only way to interact with spectators in a negative manner, destabilising their classical cinematic viewing and fruition habits. (2010, pp. 50–52: my translation)

Whilst "profound boredom" is the more explicitly thought-provoking, the second form of boredom is also useful for exploring film spectatorship in virtue of boredom's objective-subjective quality. Boringness pertains as much to the object – something is boring – as to the subject – I am bored (Heidegger, 1929–30/1995, pp. 82–88). In the

cinema, too, boredom results in part from the film – its narrative and aesthetics – and in part from spectators – from their disposition towards the film. Consequently, the film is not that which produces boredom, but "that which *attunes* us" (Heidegger, 1929–30/1995, p. 87). Boredom thus represents a possible tool with which to investigate the triangular relation among spectators, moving images and time – how do we enter a relationship with moving images and how does this relation change according to the ways we experience time? Perceived time hinges as much on the film's narrative and aesthetics as on the viewer's disposition. Hence, the same film can attune to different forms of boredom in a non-quantifiable manner and the experience of a film's time can sensibly differ. While the film's length remains unaltered, a subject's experience of it can take the forms of an intolerable now-time, a pleasurable now-time, or a time for thought.

Cinema maintains a privileged relationship with time since it not only is in time, but also imposes – in theory – different times,[3] such as its actual running time and the fictional time of the diegesis, to which the viewer's perceived time of the film should be added. Films which potentially arouse "profound boredom" are characterised by an aesthetics of the slow and/or the empty which considerably differs from that of mainstream cinema. As a result, the kind of spectatorship addressed by profoundly boring films does not correspond to that of entertainment films, which illusorily suspend boredom. Although we are never passive consumers of images, we do not always question what we see. Spectators are never utterly passive in the sense of not acting upon the audio-visual images before them since they respond to those stimuli through perceptive and cognitive activities (Bordwell, 1985, pp. 29–47). At the same time, however, spectators can be quite passive in their activity of film viewing and do not necessarily initiate a process of critically questioning the images they are watching (amongst others, Aaron, 2007; Baudry, 1974–75; Mulvey, 1975). In current Western societies, there is a well-attested increasing saturation of the visual horizon which exemplifies this ambiguous relationship with images – our daily consumption of images does not imply a critical analysis of their meaning. Various scholars have extensively discussed the pervasiveness of visual images in contemporary society (Jay, 1993; Mitchell, 1994; Debray, 1995;

3. I am considering here film as ideally watched in its integral length, without taking into account other modes of viewing which allow spectators to impose their own time onto the film – watching it in intervals, pausing it, fast forwarding it, rewinding it, and so on.

Mondzain, 2003; Nancy, 2005), which results in individuals being somewhat anesthetised by this constant presence of images. The daily response to images, although not passive, is neither fully active. A thinking process is not invested in many of the images we consume every day. We do use perceptions to physically see images and we do activate a series of cognitive processes to understand what images represent; however, this does not entail that we are actively thinking about images and more often we are limiting ourselves to an understanding of their denotative meaning. Images in quotidian life have acquired a disposable nature, lasting until the first signs of boredom arise, when they are promptly replaced by another image in a process that fails to allow time to think about these images.

The emphasis on visual images and our distracted viewing thereof can be related to one last significant aspect of Heidegger's understanding of boredom, namely its being distinctive to our experience of modernity. For Heidegger, boredom is a fundamental mood of modernity insofar as "it reveals the existential lack that characterizes modern subjectivity" (Goodstein, 2005, p. 282). However, he does not analyse boredom's historical specificity but, rather abstractly, links it to a modern understanding of human existence and delineates its potential for philosophising in the modern world. This linkage between boredom and modernity, however indefinite, is also relevant to the importance of boredom for cinematic spectatorship. Cinema is itself a product of modernity and as such it shares with the modern world an appetite for images and the tendency to distracted attention. In the current abundance of audio-visual stimuli, boredom as conceived by Heidegger is significant in considering spectatorship because by disrupting habitual modes of perceptual engagement with a conventional cinematic world, it can encourage a thoughtful approach to cinema as well as revealing the indifference that frequently accompanies our experience of audio-visual media in modernity. As Elizabeth Goodstein (2005) observes,

> on Heidegger's view, precisely because boredom reflects the inauthentic mode of existing that dominates everyday life in the modern world, grasping it as one's own fundamental mood can reveal the possibility of overcoming the attitude that makes life itself a matter of indifference. (p. 309)

In this respect, art cinema as a broad category constitutes the most paradigmatic example for an examination of "profound boredom" because of its challenging of stylistically and narratively conventional cinematic worlds. Art cinema at once subverts the immersive spectacle of

mainstream cinema and fosters awareness of our often-distracted viewing. Boredom has the potential to stimulate a questioning of our attitude about images in two, seemingly paradoxical, manners thanks to its relationship with time: by killing time in the second form of boredom and by making time conspicuous in the third form.

A Cinema that Kills Time

Our digital everyday has accustomed us to a frenzy of visual fluxes, and boredom can be a way to arrest this flux – its continual movement and now-time – to give thought the time necessary for reflection. This potentiality of boredom in cinema has already been outlined by some authors in relation to slow cinema (Dargis & Scott, 2011; De Luca & Barradas Jorge, 2016; Çağlayan, 2018). Manohla Dargis and Anthony Oliver Scott (2011), for instance, distinguish between a boredom aroused by films that present the same generic plot with slight changes in the details (e.g., action films, romantic comedies and Hollywood sequels) and films which are defined as boring because of their slowness. In their view, the dilated time in slow films can initiate a thinking process in viewers:[4]

> Faced with duration not distraction, your mind may wander, but there's no need for panic: it will come back. In wandering there can be revelation as you meditate, trance out, bliss out, luxuriate in your thoughts, think. (2011)

Similarly, Emre Çağlayan (2018) discusses boredom's creative potential for thinking in slow cinema, understanding it "as a receptive state of mind and a productive aesthetic strategy" (p. 192). Rather than being associated with a lack of meaning or interest, as boredom is commonly perceived, boredom is here linked to a stimulation of intellectual activity. The recognition of boredom as a positive and productive mood, which in a film context owes a debt to slow cinema, should also extend to include mainstream entertainment films. Indeed, Heidegger's second form of boredom can be a fruitful attunement when considered in relation to mainstream cinema for, in concealing boredom, it reveals a contemporary anxiety to suppress boredom and forget about time. While the first kind of boredom in cinema refers to the common perception of boredom

4. Although the adjective "slow" in slow cinema does not necessarily refer to a long duration, as William Brown (2016, pp. 112–113) has pointed out, here Dargis and Scott are employing "slow" with the meaning of both an aesthetics of slowness and of extended duration.

("the film has failed my expectations, and I just want it to be over as soon as possible"), the second and third forms of boredom can open up interesting paths for discussing the ways in which we interact with cinematic images. In what follows, I will delineate some specifics of the second form of boredom in relation to mainstream entertainment cinema and then set it in opposition with "profound boredom".

Mainstream entertainment cinema constitutes the objective part of the second form of boredom as aesthetic category. Such boredom should exhibit two fundamental moments of "being left empty" and "being held in a limbo". These moments are present, but they are hidden in this boredom, so much so that rather than "being left empty", we experience an illusion of being filled up. The situation in the second form of boredom is apparently anything but boring. However, pleasure and boredom are oddly tied together in the second form. Apropos of this, Heidegger (1929–30/1995) considers that "we were bored, even though it was all so pleasant [*nett*]. Or perhaps it was precisely the pleasantness [*Nettigkeit*] of this evening with which we were bored?" (p. 110). In the second form of boredom the whole activity is at once the passing the time and that which disposes us to boredom.

Mainstream entertainment cinema can be linked to such boredom since the act of watching the film corresponds at once to a way of killing time and to that which reveals boredom. As in Heidegger's second form of boredom, it is the spectator – the subject of boredom – who has deliberately chosen to invest some of their time in the activity; therefore, time is not the intolerable slow ticking of the clock of the first form of boredom. This passing the time "filled us in" [*uns ausfüllt*] (Heidegger, 1929–30/1983, p. 174: my translation) and

> we are involved in all that is going on, we are in there chatting away. Yet this is after all a peculiar form of comportment and perhaps characteristic of the whole situation [...]: this *being there chatting away*, a letting oneself be swept along by whatever is transpiring there. (p. 117)

In mainstream entertainment cinema spectators are emotionally invested in the narrative, sympathising or empathising with characters and situations, reacting through perceptions and cognition. If the film "works", that is to say, if the film fulfils our expectations (otherwise it would correspond to the first form of boredom) spectators like it, and hence are filled up with pleasure. However, this apparent satisfaction, Heidegger affirms, is an illusion:

> Our being satisfied [*Ausgefülltheit*], in being there and part of things, manifests itself, if only faintly and indeterminately, as an illusion

> (a peculiar dissatisfaction!) – as a passing the time which does not so much drive off boredom as precisely *attest* to it and let it *be-there* [da-sein]. (1929–30/1995, pp. 117–118)

To express the satisfaction which apparently accompanies the second form of boredom Heidegger employs the terms *Ausgefüllt*, *Ausgefüllten* and *Ausgefülltheit*, which are variations on the past participle meaning of "filled out/filled up" and whose sense is slightly different from the English translation: satisfaction. It is a proper being filled up, something seemingly quite opposite to one of boredom's fundamentals of "being left empty". Satisfaction refers more to the process of the being filled up: I am filled up with something therefore I am satisfied. In mainstream cinema we often experience this illusory being filled up (Alfieri, 2010, p. 54). However, being filled up and satisfied, we as spectators do not necessarily look for something other than passing the time. In this apparently pleasant experience, we let ourselves be caught in the flow of cinematic entertainment, which echoes Heidegger's account of the experience of the second form of boredom:

> In this casualness of *leaving ourselves behind* in *abandoning ourselves* to whatever there is going on, *an emptiness can form*. Becoming bored or being bored is determined by this emptiness forming itself in our apparently satisfied [*Ausgefüllten*] going along with whatever there is going on. (1929–30/1995, p. 119)

Here the relationship that the second boredom and entertainment cinema have with time emerges in the peculiar form of killing time. Since we are engaged in the act of watching an entertaining film, and given that that which causes boredom is also that which constitutes the passing the time, in the second form of boredom

> we pay no attention to *enduring* [*Während*], i.e., to the lasting flowing away and dissipating of time. [...] It [time] *abandons us* entirely *to ourselves*, i.e., it leaves us free and lets us be entirely there, alongside and part of things (Heidegger, 1929–30/1995, p. 121).

It is a time that stands still. It is the time of mainstream entertaining films, which are considered good when spectators do not perceive the passage of time (Misek, 2010, pp. 780–781). Thus, time in this kind of cinema does not make its presence felt. Although unable to absent itself, time is as if forgotten – or rather, the less it is felt, the better the film is regarded. In deciding to watch a mainstream

entertainment film, understood as the passing the time of the second form of boredom,

> we take time in such a way that we do not have to reckon with it. [...] We spend [*verbringen*] it – i.e., in and during our spending it we constantly remove it [*bringen sie weg*], but in such a way that in and during this removal it precisely does not appear. (Heidegger, 1929–30/1995, p. 123)

Therefore, what we as spectators tend to do when we watch a mainstream entertainment film is kill time. Whilst in the first form of boredom we do not want to waste time, with boredom arising from the failure of our initial expectations so that the act of watching the film corresponds to a waste of time, in the second form of boredom we deliberately kill time by watching a film.

A Cinema of Deadly Boredom

If the second form of boredom applies to entertainment cinema, which produces a seeming disappearance of time, and the third form of boredom relates to those films where time makes its presence felt, it follows that these two types address different spectators. More specifically, the latter type requires spectators who are willing to be(come) deeply bored, where being bored corresponds to being disposed to question both audio-visual images and our place as spectators. In "profound boredom", pleasure such as that which fills up appears as if suspended. The third boredom disposes us as spectators to an interrogative state so that we can probe the ways in which we interact with what we hear and what we see. Certain films, by negating the audio-visual image of mainstream entertainment cinema – which has a nearly univocal, self-evident meaning – manifest the cinematic image's potential for stimulating thought. Thus, films which configure themselves as the objective component of the third form of boredom can make apparent what cinema can be through the negation of what cinema usually is.

Isidore Isou's *On Venom and Eternity* (1951) is a particularly suitable example, since it is a Lettrist experimental essay-film theorising and possibly effecting the destruction of cinema. Isou's film has a high potential for provoking "profound boredom", opposing the pleasure of mainstream narrative cinema thanks to its form and content. The Lettrist avant-garde founded by Isou in 1946 addressed the privileged status accorded to sound over the visual dimension and, in the specific field of cinema, it aimed to problematise the relationship between sound and image tracks to the point of complete disjunction (Cabañas, 2014; Uroskie, 2011). With his first and only film, Isou ultimately intended to

dismantle cinema as entertainment; that is, he wished to destroy cinema as a way of killing time to escape boredom. Indifference is achieved in *On Venom and Eternity* via the indifference *of* the images to each other (i.e., there is no montage logic) and the indifference that we as spectators feel *for* the images, in a manner reminiscent of Heidegger's remarks apropos of "profound boredom": "this *indifference of things and of ourselves with them*" (1929–30/1995, p. 138). While the sound track articulates the film's meaning through intelligible speech, the image track, composed of images no longer related to a concrete reality, is left to arouse "profound boredom" in spectators. Boredom, thus, becomes a key element in destroying the lure and fascination of the image, turning it into an arbitrary visual element, and also constitutes the mood promoted by the film in spectators for countering passive forms of cinematic reception.

The film is composed of three chapters and explicitly proposes to destroy cinema as pleasure. The first chapter is a manifesto for "*discrépant*" cinema, which is based on the disjunction between the image track and the sound track, which are treated as independent from each other (Cabañas, 2014, p. 9; Poirsonne-Dechonne, 2016, p. 181); the second chapter centres on a loose love story between a girl named Ève (Blanchette Brunoy) and the protagonist Daniel, played by Isou himself; the third chapter, framed by the love story, focuses on Lettrism and reflections on cinema. The most peculiar aspect of the film consists in the lack of connection between the sound track and the image track, which offers the film the potential for awakening "profound boredom". Sound and image are separated in the film through disjunction because words, in Daniel/Isou's view, should "reveal the limitations and the possibilities of the image." Accordingly, the film's sound track is an intertwining and stratification of different voices, sounds and noises that range from the protagonist's speech on cinema to a narrator's voice-over commenting on the love story, passing through the shouting and whistling of the audience of a ciné-club – now insulting Isou's film now praising it – and recitals of Lettrist poems. Similarly, the image track is a pastiche, composed of images of Daniel/Isou's slow wandering in the streets of Paris – which resonates with Heidegger's "it is boring for one to walk through the streets of a large city on a Sunday afternoon" (1929–30/1995, p. 135) – interspersed with shots of buildings' façades, boulevards congested with traffic, texts, found footage images of soldiers, military marches and fishermen, photographs of Ève, and shots of Lettrists reciting poems. Most of the filmstrip has been physically manipulated and is defaced by scratches, deleted faces, painted figures and over-exposed images. These extremely diverse images are intentionally indifferent to both each other and the sound track. That is, each image is not causally or

logically related to the ones preceding or following it, and images are disjointed from what is heard, according to Daniel/Isou's intent "to make the flow of images indifferent to the sound story."

This practice is manifestly in contrast with mainstream entertainment cinema, where shots are linked to each other via continuity editing and coupled with sound to convey an easily comprehensible story (Uroskie, 2011, p. 26; Cabañas, 2014, p. 3; Feldman, 2014, pp. 86–87). And, indeed, Isou deliberately dismantles the images and sounds of mainstream cinema because he notes a fundamental problem with images, namely that "it is possible to make them say whatever one wants and that which they do not say." To subvert this perceptual power of images, so dear to mainstream cinema, *On Venom and Eternity* configures itself as a succession of sounds rather than a flow of images so that, as the voiceover argues,

> the word would no longer come from the screen, in order to coincide with its sequences, but would always come from an elsewhere, as if concretely and visibly it were an excess without any relationship with the organism.

To exalt sound to the detriment of the visual element, images are reduced to indifferent particles before the spectators' eyes. In their turn, viewers are encouraged by the voice-over to actively participate in the film production during reception:

> As of today, the character turning towards the partner was shown, his gestures were seen. From now on, [spectators] will hear: 'Daniel has turned,' without seeing him turning. Imagination is incorporated in the cinema because the real, the concrete, is destroyed. The spectator will be able to invent his character like he has never been allowed to do before in the history of cinema.

As a result of this indifference to and of images, the audience of the ciné-club in the film insults Daniel/Isou, accusing him of boring the spectators. But the film is only a component in the awakening of boredom – it is "that which *attunes* us" – therefore it alone is insufficient for the arousal of "profound boredom". If spectators are not disposed in such a way to "profound boredom", the film might just elicit the first form of boredom, as attested by the ciné-club audience. However, through this work on sound and images, *On Venom and Eternity* has the potential for provoking a thoughtful boredom, where boredom corresponds to an opening to a new mode of conceiving the relationship between the fundamental components of cinema – sound and image – and, consequently, to a new mode of looking at cinematic images.

Spectators of *On Venom and Eternity*, no longer lulled by pleasant, referential images and an intelligible sound track, are left with either the annoyance derived from the first form of boredom or the time for thinking allowed by "profound boredom". A deep boredom is made possible by Isou's film because *On Venom and Eternity* attunes spectators to something reminiscent of Heidegger's third form of boredom inasmuch as images become indifferent – to each other and to the sound track – and any passing the time is prevented.

Via the non-indifference of images of cinematic entertainment, we as spectators kill time to escape boredom; hence retreating from the possibility of questioning the ways in which we interact with images. "Profound boredom" instead posits itself as a tool with which to challenge the image of entertainment cinema – that through which we kill time – and the pleasure it arouses, through which we reject active questioning of the object of our look. *On Venom and Eternity*'s disruption of a conventional cinematic world can achieve this phenomenologically profound form of boredom because it presents viewers with both images on the verge of unintelligibility and non-representational images that frustrate pleasure and "stretch" time. That is, images are emptied of their entertainment value and time makes its presence experientially felt through the various manipulations of cinematic time: the stillness of freeze-frames and photographs, the frenzy of fast-paced discrepant montage sequences, the slow emptiness of blank screens. These images break the continuous flow to which we are accustomed, i.e. the entertaining flow of forgetful time, encouraging a different experience of cinematic time. It is up to viewers whether to treat such a time as unbearably tedious or profoundly boring.

While Isou's is an experimental and radical film that particularly lends itself to discussion of "profound boredom" in cinema, narrative films can also stimulate something akin to the third form of boredom. Like Heideggerian boredom, which is neither quantifiable nor easily identifiable with long duration – it is rather the deadly boring instant which allows for philosophical thinking – boredom in cinema does not solely correspond to a long-in-length film or *avant-garde* cinema. Indeed, even in less experimental narrative films there can be instants which open up to "profound boredom" and configure themselves as intellectually stimulating moments thanks to their stillness, slowness or emptiness.

For example, the ending of Michelangelo Antonioni's *L'Eclisse* (1962), a film about the dissolution of a couple and the impossibility of communication between individuals, can be a stimulus for the awakening of "profound boredom". In the closing sequence, the camera wanders

through an almost deserted Rome, framing quotidian objects and places such as a fence lit by the shadows of nearby trees, an empty street marked by the white stripes of a pedestrian crossing, fronds of trees moved by an alternately intense and gentle wind, buildings under construction, and the flowing water of a narrow stream. Although not as completely indifferent as the image-track of Isou's film, this last sequence breaks with the narrative image flow, making the spectator wait for a last image of the protagonists or a concluding image related to the story, which, however, never comes. The film provokes a pause which can attune spectators to "profound boredom", initiating a reflection on these seemingly insignificant images.

In his detailed analysis of *L'Eclisse*'s ending and boredom, John Rhym (2012) stresses the importance of "the void that permeates the [final] scene," arguing that "what is made explicit is the indeterminacy of − and an indifference to − time in the ordinary sense" (p. 495). In sequences like *L'Eclisse*'s ending, time "becomes long" due to the lack of entertainment images and the presence of a void (a visual or narrative void, but also a meaning gap in the images). As such, the perceptual experience of cinematic time as conspicuous, which is allowed by certain stylistic or narrative choices, elicits spectatorial reflection − if there is a void or a gap, this can be filled through imagination and thought. In a similar manner, Ingmar Bergman's *Cries and Whispers* (1972) contains instants that can attune to "profound boredom" as non-representational images encourage thoughtful viewing. The film explores the difficulties of empathy via the characters' inability to suffer with and for their severely ill sister. Although primarily composed of mimetic images, *Cries and Whispers* is broken at more or less regular intervals by fades to red which decompose the characters' faces, plunging them into a monochromatic red screen. This intensely red screen, which tears apart the figurative, intelligible shots, opens up the possibility of "profound boredom", a time that allows for thinking.

A blank screen, a disharmony between sound and image, and a slow aesthetics can contribute to the construction of a cinematic world which differs from the usually-perceived and conventionally reproduced world of mainstream films. Breaking with habitual film forms and linear story-telling displaces spectators by presenting seemingly "empty" images (the blank screen which spectators can fill with experiential content) and "indifferent" images (indifferent to the rest of the narrative, like *L'Eclisse*'s ending, or to sound, as in *On Venom and Eternity*). Such images are boring in the sense that they do not fill time to the point of making it forgettable: nothing seems to happen in the monochromatic screen moments or happens extremely slowly in a series of incomprehensible and banal

events. Thus, "adhering to a foreign stretch of time, images are dragged out and made alien to our modern sensibilities" (Torbett, 2009, p. 157). Emptiness, slowness and sound-image disharmony bring about a threat for the spectator; that of intolerable superficial boredom, of confronting a time deprived of any passing the time in the habitual sense of the term. However, such disruptive aesthetics can more likely stimulate a phenomenologically "profound boredom" by challenging customary forms of perceptual engagement with a cinematic world. The non- or anti-spectacular character of these audio-visual images produces a rupture not only with the aesthetics of entertainment cinema, but also with our experience of cinematic time. It does not matter that, for instance, *On Venom and Eternity* and an entertainment film might share the same length; our experience of their running time is presumably going to differ because of the perceptual encounter in the former film with non-representational or quasi-unintelligible images which dismantle time as entertainment. However, while any film displaying such a disruptive aesthetics retains the potential for "profound boredom", there is always the human variable, that is, the subjective disposition towards a film which does not necessarily lead to a pensive boredom.

Profoundly boring films neither kill time nor bore in the sense of making spectators aware of the insufferable now/clock-time. Boredom in its third form configures itself as a mode in which to reflect, as a fundamental disposition in which to become aware of our relationship with cinematic images and, through them, with images in general. It is a "deadly boredom" (Heidegger, 1929–30/1995, p. 96), an expression that Heidegger also uses to define the first, more superficial form of boredom. From a Heideggerian perspective, the adjective "deadly" bears no negative connotation, pointing instead to the peculiarity of boredom, namely its being related to the essence of *Dasein*. Since death is *Dasein*'s horizon of meaning, "deadly boredom" refers to a fecund existential disposition that can lead to philosophising or, in the cinema, to thinking about our modes of producing and consuming visual images.

Pleasure as Being Filled Up vs Pleasure as "Being Left Empty"

The time disclosed in "profound boredom" is decisively empty compared to that of quotidian digital life where, as in entertainment cinema, time is full to the brim. As such, being profoundly bored can be a way to investigate our relationship with cinematic images and, more generally, with the visual images which constitute such a predominant element of our everyday experience. Our daily life constantly calls sight into question, from work computer screens to our phone screens and all the other visual apparatuses that we use to escape instances of the first form

of boredom as described by Heidegger. In his philosophical analysis of boredom, Lars Svendsen (2005, pp. 20–48) draws attention to the connection between boredom and the entertainment industry in contemporary Western societies, from the role of television as an "apparatus [to] destroy time" (p. 23) to "social placebos [such as] the cult of celebrities" (p. 26), or the constant need for stimuli to suppress empty time, the kind of time perceived as uninteresting. What is more, Svendsen links these needs to "modern technology [which] more and more makes us passive observers and consumers, and less and less active players" (p. 29). In our need to escape boredom we often hide behind electronic apparatuses, immersing ourselves in digital activities – reading news, checking social networks, sending messages. In short, we place ourselves in front of a flow of images which leaves no time for thinking. This daily escape from boredom continues in the cinema, since what we often look for in films is the arousal of pleasure in terms of being filled up and forgetting about time. (And it is no coincidence that action films, superhero sagas and comedies – which are genres full of movement, special effects, actions and reactions – constitute major box-office successes [Gunter, 2018, pp. 90–91].) In films that present "deadly" boring instants, however, pleasure is more problematic and, contrary to entertainment cinema, does not present itself as filling. Here, the pleasure of being filled up, whether illusory or not, is as if suspended. These films require a willingness to be "left empty" by boredom. In a way, "profound boredom" opposes the pleasure of mainstream entertainment cinema, where pleasure is the (illusory) being filled up, and replaces it with the pleasure of "being left empty".

Nevertheless, even the concealed boredom of mainstream entertainment cinema can evoke a productive mood. There is an omnipresence of visual fluxes, in everyday routine as well as in entertainment cinema, which conceals the constant need to be filled up. Therefore, the second form of boredom and entertainment cinema can also be fruitful for the analysis of the contemporary longing for fullness. Both the second and third forms of boredom are significant to examinations of the relation between spectators and moving images; the former by suppressing empty time and the latter by displaying such time. While in the second boredom there is only time for a now-time which swallows dead times, "profound boredom" paves the way for reflection via the concession of time which allows for thinking.

Boredom in its Heideggerian threefold partition can thus be a fascinating framework with which to investigate the concept of time and spectatorship in cinema, both in mainstream entertainment films and in "deadly" boring films. The act of escaping boredom as well as the

mood of "profound boredom" have the potential for provoking thoughts and revealing a specific vision of the world. The second form of boredom bears witness to current *horror vacui* through films which constantly fill up the screen with images aimed at entertaining, that is, at forgetting about time. Conversely, "profound boredom" promotes a re-evaluation of *horror pleni* (horror of fullness) via films that welcome unfilled screens and disclose time in its emptiness. Once the inherent resistance to being bored is overcome, this more or less "long whiling away of time" permits us to think about what we see and how we look at images. Hence, it allows us to reflect on the ways we relate to and live in this extremely visible world.

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