

EUROPEAN JOURNAL OF AMERICAN STUDIES
2023 SPECIAL ISSUE
THE BOREDOMS OF LATE MODERNITY



Twożywo, *Kiedy wreszcie będzie wojna* (When there will finally be a war), 2001

CALL FOR PAPERS

Goethe allegedly remarked that “monkeys would be worth considering as humans if they were capable of being bored” (Svendsen 33). As most recent studies devoted to this ambivalent and paradoxical phenomenon posit a close connection between boredom and modernity, it seems that even if Goethe was wrong and it does not define the human species, the notion of boredom may be instrumental in facilitating a better understanding of the emergence and development of modern selfhood. Predominantly focusing on the historical and philosophical aspects of this affective state, scholars such as Lars Svendsen, Elizabeth Goodstein, or Michael E. Gardiner trace its beginnings, which coincide with the emergence of modernity. As the premodern divine order was displaced by the belief in human progress, earthly happiness, and self-fulfillment, and simultaneously, the feudal economy was dethroned by the Industrial Revolution, alienated labor, and the rise of leisure and mass entertainment, *the boring* and *the interesting* became central ideas in the human experience. Referring to the works of key modern thinkers (such as

Schopenhauer, Kierkegaard, Heidegger, Benjamin, and Adorno to cite the most frequently recurring names), critics have analyzed the political, ethical, and phenomenological possibilities of boredom, from its function as a coping mechanism that preventively shuts off affect to a state that may provide existential insight.

Whereas early modernity perceived boredom as related to emptiness (hence *horror vacui*, for example), paradoxically, today it is more often than not linked to overstimulation. It seems that boredom is the biggest sin one can commit in the 21st century. Allowing oneself to be bored means being unproductive, which in turn shamelessly violates the regime of 24/7 capitalism as defined by Jonathan Crary, a system in which one is not supposed to have the time to resist the impulse of constant activity. However, with the rising popularity of procrastination not as an actual activity, but an image one intends to project to the outside world, a way of appearing interesting to others, it becomes evident that how we spend our time when taking a break from work is of utmost importance. With a plethora of activities to choose from, such as binge-watching one series after another, playing freemium games or following sporting events which seem to be going on almost every day, our idleness is a battlefield for the entertainment industry, whose primary objective, it seems, is to save us from boredom and help us present ourselves as interesting. Faced with such hyperstimulation and information overload, with so many options to pick from, we often find ourselves doing nothing and end up feeling *bored* as well as *boring*. On the other hand, many products of the entertainment industry today try so hard to be interesting that they epileptically overwhelm us with hyperstimulating images, evoking the boredom of satiety. Whereas traditionally perceived as the opposite of excess, in such cultural texts, boredom stems precisely from their excessive aesthetics. This aesthetic overkill may take various forms, from the overload of special effects, hyperdynamic pace, extreme vulgarity, to tedious technical perfection. With such a flood of images, one finds oneself longing for the simplicity of the “good old days” when boredom was simply boredom.

In this special issue, we would like to contribute to the recently emerged field of boredom studies and extend the existing, predominantly historically- and philosophically-oriented research into another direction. *The Boredoms of Late Modernity*, a special issue of the *European Journal of American Studies* aims to examine the experiences of boredom in the time of late modernity from the perspective of cultural studies.

The call for papers encourages articles that address – but are not limited to – the following topics:

BOREDOM AND...

- ★ labor: from alienation to procrastination
- ★ idleness: from the sin of sloth to the leisure industry
- ★ the neoliberal regimes of productivity, sociability, extrovertism, and having fun
- ★ privilege: from the leisure class to the generation meh

- ★ the late modern subject, or “17 ways to become a more interesting person”
- ★ social transgressions: sex, drugs, and drag
- ★ bohemia: from *flâneurs* to hipsters

- ★ the everyday: habituation, defamiliarization, and the alienation effect
- ★ the feminine sublime: the ordinary, the common, and the everyday (or Brach-Czaina’s pottering [*krzątactwo*])

- ★ aesthetic exhaustion and experimentation
- ★ unentertaining culture: slow film and music-not-to-be-listened-to
- ★ tedious perfection: utopias and paradises

- ★ libidinal disinvestment, or desire to desire
- ★ the death drive: trauma and repetition compulsion
- ★ melancholy: from spleen to depression

Please, send abstracts of 250-500 words and a brief bio note to the editors – Anna Pochmara and Łukasz Muniowski – at late.modern.boredom@gmail.com, by February 28, 2021.

You will be notified about the acceptance by March 15, 2021.

Full essays (5,000-8,000 words) will be due by September 30, 2021.

EDITORS

Anna Pochmara is Assistant Professor at the Institute of English Studies, University of Warsaw. As a graduate student, she received a Fulbright grant to do research for her doctoral project at Yale University. She is the author of over twenty articles and reviews in the field of American studies and the monograph *The Making of the New Negro: Black Authorship, Masculinity, and Sexuality* (Amsterdam University Press, 2011), for which she received the Polish Minister of Science and Higher Education Award. She co-edited *On Uses of Black Camp*, a special issue of *Open Cultural Studies* (2017) in collaboration with Justyna Wierzchowska and the anthology *Cosmopolitanisms, Race, and Ethnicity* (De Gruyter Open, 2019) in collaboration with Ewa Luczak and Samir Dayal. Pochmara has just completed her book on the uses of temperance and intemperance in late nineteenth-century and early twentieth-century African American literature. It will be published under the title *The Nadir and the Zenith: Temperance and Excess in the Early African American Novel* by the University of Georgia Press in 2021.

Łukasz Muniowski (Ph.D., American literature, University of Warsaw) has published over a dozen of academic articles on various topics, including gentrification, geek culture, American literature, video games and television series. He is the author of *Three-Pointer! A 40-Year NBA History* (McFarland, 2020) and co-editor (with Aldona Kobus) of *Sex, Death and Resurrection in Altered Carbon: Essays on the Netflix Series* (McFarland, 2020). In 2021, Lexington Books will publish his monograph *Narrating the NBA: Cultural Representations of Leading NBA Players after the Michael Jordan Era*. His newest book, *Sixth Men: NBA History off the Bench* will be published by McFarland in 2021. He will also be the co-editor (with Kamil Chrzczonowicz) of a collection of essays on the *Uncharted* video game series.