

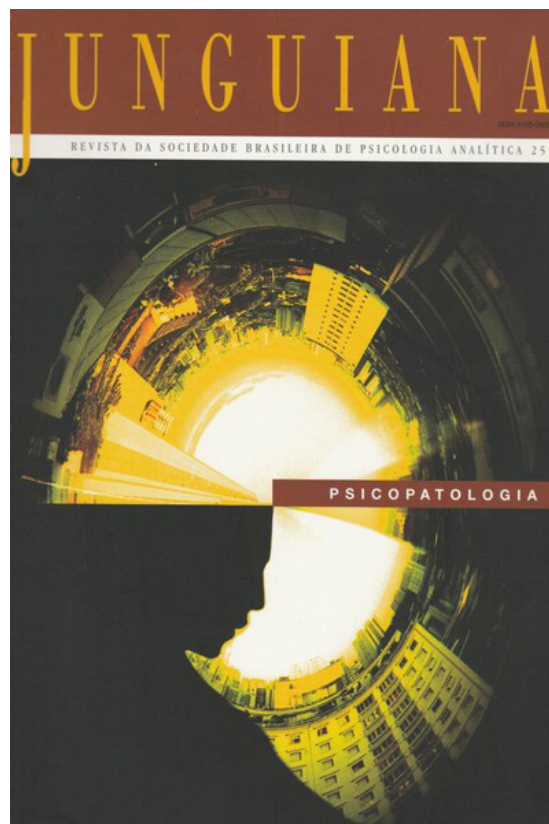
Boredom¹

Victor Palomo*

Abstract

This paper is an attempt to approach boredom in a historical focus, emphasizing its archetypal roots and its prevalence in Modern Age. Furthermore, the author makes an attempt to describe how boredom is approached in Freud's and Jung's works, and also in DSM-V. Finally, the article makes amplifications on the possible meanings of boredom and mass consumption in the individuation process. ■

Keywords
boredom,
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* Psychiatrist, MD. Analyst member of the Sociedade Brasileira de Psicologia Analítica (SBrPA) and International Association for Analytical Psychology (IAAP). Master and Doctor in Languages from University of São Paulo (USP). E-mail: victorpalomo@uol.com.br

Boredom

I am not myself nor am I another,
I'm something in between:
Pillar of the Bridge of Boredom
which goes from me to the other
(MÁRIO DE SÁ-CARNEIRO, 7, Lisboa, 1914).

Every day is like Sunday,
Every day is silent and gray
(MORRISEY, Viva Hate, London, 1988).

Boredom is human, all too human.

The search for the archetypal roots of this expression of the soul is inexorably mixed with the history of melancholy. It is known that Greek medical practice was based on the notion that the human temperament resulted from the intermittence of bodily fluids: phlegm, yellow bile, blood and black bile. The excess of the latter, whose Greek words are *melaina chole*, led to melancholy, which had “discouragement” as one of its most obvious manifestations: the soul consumed by its painful aspects along with apparent inappetence. In search of a rebalancing of the humors, Hippocrates, at the end of the fifth century BC, already proposed the consumption of emetic and cathartic herbs, such as mandrake, for the treatment of melancholy. A “bulimia” for melancholy! He also proposed the “therapeutic” consumption of the love experience, when he recommended a marriage to the melancholic King Perdicas II, as a solution to his suffering (SOLOMON, 2002).

The first descriptions of what is today called boredom derive from antiquity until the Renaissance, receiving the name “*acedia*”, a term that carried with it psychological and moralizing meanings. Originating from the Greek word *akedia*, which alluded to a disregard for the world, the term progressively gained the meaning of

“sudden lack of interest”, a kind of rupture with the prevailing order, which resulted in an experience of fragmentation (SVENDSEN, 2006).

Being understood in the medieval scholastic moral perspective, in which it had been translated as laziness, *acedia* was considered a form of sin, which plagued the monks with such intensity that they became apathetic and progressively moved away from the ascetic path to which the monastic choice was intended. By proposing a distancing from *tristitia*, which invariably led man back to God through repentance, the demon of *acedia* suddenly haunted the monk's path. He then began to experience a total lack of meaning for life, and the fantasy of a probable encounter with God, which constituted the hope and justification for such confinement, dissipated in daydreams of a life full of pleasures, nostalgia of a paradise that perhaps he had glimpsed in a time before the cloister (SVENDSEN, 2006).

In the Renaissance, depression, which had *anhedonia* (or boredom) among its components, becomes idealized, having Marsilio Ficino as its greatest philosopher, who considered that the deep thinker and the artist need melancholy as a perspective, as they long for the greatness and eternity of the world. Ficino described Saturn as the planet that ruled this state of the soul, and around this idea, gathered intellectuals from other European countries, who traveled to Florence fascinated by that aristocratic image of a taciturn, disheveled man with dark eyes (SOLOMON, 2002).

However, it is mainly in the German romantic movement of the 18th century that the topic of boredom occupies a prominent place, in a sense that intersects with the one commonly used today. At that moment, it seems, objective reality becomes less legitimate as a way of apprehending the “truths of the world”, and subjective

experience gradually gains respect, being understood as a form of knowledge.

The bored romantic man doesn't know what he's searching for, he's just hungry. Hungry for a grand, infinite meaning, actually perhaps without much meaning. For the meaning would be in the "I" and, as Hegel wrote, if "everything that exists only exists thanks to the 'I', everything that exists thanks to the 'I' can equally be destroyed by the 'I'" (apud SVENDSEN, 2006, p. 65).

Here we have a disturbing definition of boredom, which sees it as the product of arrogance, since it is encouraged by an inflated ego that time and totality disregard. This hyper subjectivism deprives objects of the world of their own value, leaving it to the ego to deliberate about all things. This ego, lord of the world, qualifies as the only and ultimate reality, thus making the rest as interesting as uninteresting, therefore boring.

According to a survey carried out by the Norwegian philosopher Lars Svendsen (2006), the theme of boredom interested many other philosophers who registered different perceptions about the phenomenon. For example, for Pascal (1623–1662), life is a phenomenon that does not bring solid or true satisfaction, so, having fun is the only way out that can give comfort to man. He said: "It [entertainment] prevents us from thinking about ourselves. Without it we would be bored, and this boredom would lead us to look for a safer way to escape..." (apud SVENDSEN, 2006, p. 56).

Pascal alludes to a consumption of pleasures that leads to fun, as a way to find encouragement for a very little creative life. There is, between the lines of this statement, a suggestion that the individual who lets himself be visited by boredom can walk more safely. Or, to put it another way, there are sparks in this dark state of the soul that can be covered up and, when ignited, greatly heat up the process of self-acquisition, or what Jung called individuation.

Pascal adds that man without God is nothing and boredom sets in from this awareness. Therefore, there would be in boredom a proposal to reinvent reality, perhaps by allowing

the emergence of hitherto unknown aspects of himself and now, subject to consideration (apud SVENDSEN, 2006). Kant is another author who devoted himself to the theme of the torment of emptiness and understood its specificities in the opposite way to Pascal. For him, the god of work would be the savior for the emptied soul: "The greater our awareness of time, the emptier we feel... The only cure is work, not pleasures... Man is the only animal that must work..." (apud SVENDSEN, 2006, p. 58).

Another author who brought us important reflections on the theme was Kierkegaard (1813–1855), for whom boredom was part of a demonic pantheism, where the demon is the void that permeates reality. He understood that the bored state of the soul is typical of the world of the elite, an attribute of the refined, noble man (apud SVENDSEN, 2006, p. 61). Aligned with Kant, he endorsed the conception that those who have to fight to survive do not succumb to boredom, because this would be an arrogance of abundance. Perhaps here he refers to that inflated state of the ego, for which everything around is imperatively uninteresting.

However, it is fundamentally the concept of modernity that legitimizes boredom as an exuberant phenomenon in current times. Proof of this is the plethora of authors who have focused on this subject, of which I highlight Baudelaire.

Among the many essays dedicated to the author and their re-readings by Walter Benjamin, one written by the Swiss author Gagnebin (1997) stands out, which emphasizes that the word modernity refers to an opposition that has existed since Antiquity, where "old" and "new" were temporally polarized, with the first representative of the "once" and the second, of the "current".

The modern, then, would be defined as an opposition to the past, within Enlightenment logic, or as a painful departure from the past, according to the romantic conception, but always implying a rupture in search of the new. Now, this struggle with time in search of the new creates a serious side effect: the advent of the non-new, the obso-

lete. That is, the problem with the modern is that it quickly becomes old (GAGNEBIN, 1997).

This is the trap into which the bored man fell: the voracious search for the new that is already becoming old. The border between the two quickly blurred, and modern man's obsession with consuming the elusive villains of the novelty and of whatever interesting is, throws him into tormented abandonment. And in boredom!

Baudelaire, in "The painter of modern life", cited by Gagnebin (1997), clearly predicts the age of consumption. For, if modernity is the transitory, the ephemeral, the contingent, a space is opened for the soul, in times of intense capitalist production, to seek solace in the fetish of merchandise, in the novelty about to become scrap metal. And get bored!

Probably, one of the first attempts at systematization that seeks to integrate boredom into the field of psychology is the text by Freud (2006) entitled Mourning and melancholia. In it, mourning is considered as the psyche's reaction to loss, be it a loved one or some abstraction that took the place of a loved one. Mourning is not considered pathological, because in it the ego surrenders to reality, even if it is painful. In contrast to mourning, melancholic suffering is announced, characterized by discouragement, loss of interest, of initiative, accompanied by intense feeling of guilt and a disproportionate expectation of punishment. However, unlike a predominantly conscious mourning process, in melancholia the subject knows who he lost, but not what he lost in that someone...

The melancholy ego is poor and empty, which would justify crime and punishment. Possessed by the god (or by the complex) of inferiority and by his worshippers – pettiness, dependence and inertia –, the melancholic man feels incapable of any elaboration, as if part of himself had been lost. And then, emphasizes Freud (2006, p. 254): "There is an identification of the ego with the abandoned object... the shadow of the object fell on the ego and this

could, from then on, be judged... as if it were the abandoned object".

The opposite of melancholy, where the soul in guilt and resentment is consumed, is mania, where the soul indiscriminately and urgently consumes everything. In both cases, the dialogue is established with the same god, but in melancholia the ego surrenders to the complex. In mania, the god of inferiority or incompetence is dominated and denied.

The difficult task here, many times, is to understand what recalls the manic celebration. The fact is that it fosters much consumerist human voracity, which presents itself as impulsiveness, whether the objects of adoration are chemical substances, whether they are games, random sex, products that shine on the internet screen, food, clothes, perfumes, cars, books, psychotherapy and the soul of the other.

In short, Freud (2006) understands that in melancholy there is loss of a loved object and the ego splits in the face of this loss, but the melancholic individual is paradoxically hopeful. Conversely, in the bored soul it is precisely the breath of hope that is lacking. However, in Freud's work there is no specific text on boredom, just as there is none in Jung's work.

A tracking in the Complete Works reveals that the word "boredom" appears in only three situations. The most significant of these is Jung's use of the term in the text on the transcendent function, by emphasizing that the analyst must be aware of the prospective aspects of the symbols constellated in transference, as opposed to their historical-reductionist determinants, which can produce resistance in the patient. Jung (2000) says: "The boredom that arises, then, in the course of the treatment, is nothing more than the expression of monotony and poverty of ideas – not of the unconscious ..., but of the analyst..." (p. 7, par. 146).

In this perspective, boredom is the result of the analyst's archeological anguish, who persistently tries to consume the biographical aspects of the symbols constellated in the

therapeutic encounter, to the detriment of their possible amplifications. I understand that Jung's antidote-invitation against boredom in psychotherapy is based on allowing oneself to be impregnated (or consumed) by the images – or symbols – that eventually appear, and mainly on the insistence on the search for their variants.

Jung (1988) also uses the term boredom as opposed to interest when reporting on Rhine's experiences in his book on synchronicity. However, in the text: "Flying saucers: A modern myth of things seen in the sky" (Jung, 1978, p. 27, par. 648), he makes a brief allusion to an intersection between boredom and consumption when he points out that "the inhabitant of cities looks for artificial sensations to escape their banality; the solitary, on the contrary, does not look for them, but unintentionally is beset by them".

For this individual condemned to solitude, hermitism or the ascetic quest, Jung suggests (p. 27, par. 649):

[...] spontaneous psychic symptoms arise to compensate for biological needs [...] such as numinous pictures of fantasies, visions and hallucinations, which arise from the spiritual sphere [...]. Others [symptoms come from] the well-known world of instincts, where plates, full bowls and hearty meals sate hunger; where seductive and voluptuous beings offer themselves to contained sexual desire [...] where the racket, noise and music want to give life to the unbearable silence and solitude.

Psychiatric nosology does not consider boredom as an isolated mental disorder, but a symptom of some categories. Covertly, it appears as "lack of interest" in major depressive disorder and dysthymia, and explicitly as "chronic feelings of emptiness" in the description of borderline personality disorder, according to DSM-V (AMERICAN PSYCHIATRIC ASSOCIATION, 2014). In this last condition, boredom would encourage consumption and impulsivity in areas that

are harmful to the individual, such as excessive financial spending, sex, substance abuse, reckless driving and compulsive eating.

In this way, boredom distances itself from the affective blunting observed in psychotic disorders and is clearly closer to its other half, that is, consumption, when describing the borderline personality. Evidently not every bored soul is co-opted by this nosographic description. But then, what is the meaning of boredom for the soul? Would boredom be a psychotic phenomenon, in which the "I-identity" (according to the Jaspersian postulate) would be in the process of disintegration? Or a kind of unbearable emptiness, different from the major depressive experience, because it is based on the lack of an object for hope?

Boredom certainly comes close to what was called by the DSM-V as "dysthymia" or "borderline personality" (AMERICAN PSYCHIATRIC ASSOCIATION, 2014), but it also distances itself, if one considers the core element of the bored soul: the nihilation of the world. A weightless and shapeless sorrow devastates the self in an indelible way, consuming the kinetic energy of the soul. Paradoxically, this soul desperately seeks a movement that brings some "novelty", some "anti-monotony poison", consuming the world in a reactive formation when facing the darkness installed by the material coming from the shadow. Boredom consumes the soul and the soul consumes the world.

Is there relief or creativity? Is it possible for the psyche to tolerate an egocide, which is the inexorable unfolding of boredom, in the service of the emergence of unknown archetypal material?

Boredom is empty of itself. In melancholy there is lack; in boredom there is a lack of lack itself, that is, there is no desire even for oneself, therefore it is almost impossible to recognize the other. God really seems to be dead, and the creature desperately tries to establish a dialogue with the creator, but he does not answer! Therefore, the search (consumption) of images that can give meaning to existence (food, sex, chem-

istry) is justified, even if these are diluted in infinite repetitions and lacking in meaning, just like the way in which Sisyphus was condemned.

Schwartz-Salant (1992, p. 69) recalls an archetypal image that perhaps uniquely illustrates this dynamic: the vampire. He says: "In some legends, when the vampire looks in the mirror there is no image. The vampire represents a psychic force that has no identity. It is, in a sense, the perfect dark side of Narcissus, the mirrorless psyche."

Therefore, if for Narcissus there is despair in the face of another who is himself, for the bored person despair is that not even he himself can become another. Desperately looking for a god. And this despair coagulates the bored in his unique truth.

Among the psychic processes enunciated by alchemical operations, *coagulatio* represents the moment when psychic material is linked to an ego. *Fixatio* is one of its synonyms (EDINGER, 1985). Probably, in boredom, there would be a standstill in the pace of waiting, as if time fixed the individual within the unbearable limits of literality. Time no longer zigzags, does not move out of step, does not allow a look at an outside goal.

The alchemists represented this absence of movement basically by means of two images, explaining that the element to be coagulated would be the elusive mercury. In the first, a crucified serpent was represented. In another, there was a *trans fixation*, in a tree, of a serpent and a king, in a clear allusion to the paralysis imposed by *coagulatio* (EDINGER, 1985).

It is known that coagulation was carried out by means of three agents: magnesium, sulfur and lead. It is also known that lead is a symbol clearly associated with the melancholy experience and, why not, with one of its variants: boredom (EDINGER, 1985). Lead poisoning is called "saturnism" in association with the planet Saturn. Its psychological translation is apathy, inactivity, hopeless longing, dismay. It's the time that stops and scourges...

Saturn is the Roman version of the Greek titan Cronos, the youngest son of Geia and Uranus, that

castrating father whom Cronos kills with a sickle, freeing himself and the other brothers from the maternal body, where until then they were kept imprisoned by the "father". In a second moment of the mythical narrative, Cronos is the lord of the world and, on the verge of losing power to one of his children, swallows them (BRANDÃO, 1988).

It is an eloquent image of the time that devours, of the counting/discounting that chronifies the soul and makes man lose himself in inertia and solidification. From this perspective, time is the king, but a king that rules and does not teach what I do not yet know. It does not transform the old ways of living. It revolves around conscience, suffocating it or abandoning it to the same, so that we can still be the same and live like our parents.

It is known that what is coagulated and swallowed are the children of a new era of consciousness. And, according to alchemical wisdom, what is petrified must be dissolved, dismembered and transformed. That is, a new time is the constellation of other realities hitherto unknown by the conscious process, and the mediator of this process is the *anima*.

Perhaps a possibility that does not exist for the bored person is precisely this hermetic perspective of seeing through, as suggested by Hillman (1975). Certainly, because boredom is an imperative expression of literality, an impossibility of the "as if" experience. Hillman (1975, p. 140) describes psychologizing as seeing through when he emphasizes:

It is a moving through the apparent to the less apparent... When clarity itself becomes obvious and transparent, there seems to cease within it a new darkness, a new question or doubt requiring a new act of insight to penetrate again into the least apparent.

I believe that to the bored person such movement, proper to the soul, seems stagnant. The world presents itself only as an appearance and the whole experience of the outside is made difficult. Or uninteresting, because this world seems

reproducible in its entirety. Life collides with an era that is based on its technical reproducibility. The bar codes pasted on all consumable merchandise denounce a disenchanting world, because they expose identical, literalized proposals to consumption, without the novelty that the bored soul hungers for.

It does not free man from his confinement because the bored soul is hungry for fright, thirsty for conversation, for verse and prose, for a third margin of speech that opens a path to the outside, or often to the inside., even if that inside is apparently empty.

Perhaps the bored person will find a breath when he humbly places himself at the service of his own soul, in self-consumption, which can be constellated when he looks at himself inside, outside, diagonally, in his concreteness and abstraction. It is perhaps by acknowledging his responsibility in the literalization of temporality that the bored person, imprisoned in himself, can find metaphors for the literalization of his conflicts, adopting a hermetic perspective.

Because in the anguish of filling time, or finding a hobby, boredom voraciously consumes the world, like a vampire seeking its own image. In concreteness. In the literalization of gondolas, stands, brands, the brightness of strobe lighting, in self-help or in hetero help that often seeks the trap of self-autonomy as a solution, despising the lucid and creative richness of the heteronomic perspective.

In this sense, boredom is arrogant, as Pascal meant it, because it translates an imprisonment of the individual in a super autonomous complex, the so-called complex (or god) Ego.

Or one might think that the bored person is fascinated by the goddess Persona, daughter of the Father, in the service of normalization. Normopathy, which has the persona as an avatar,

also has boredom as a side effect, since the normopath consumes normality. He reveals the universal conflict that exists in the tension inherent in the senex / puer clash but throws himself into a trap: the new chosen one is heartless, because he yearns for adaptation and not for legitimacy.

The bored person lacks the patience to consume himself, to know the nuances of himself that, I understand, the slow speed of the soul exposes. By consuming the outside, he is afraid of the “emptiness” of consuming the inside. By swallowing the new, he is afraid of becoming old and becoming chronic.

In this sense, boredom would be essential to the process of individuation, an *opus contra naturam*, a search for uniqueness from multiplicity. And, in this multiplicity, Hillman (1975, p. 160) emphasizes the inherent wandering aspect, characteristic of the soul, as part of this path:

A misconception is an *opus contra naturam*, a place where the psyche speaks against the natural flow of possible and reasonable expectations... Hermes, who deceives his father Zeus as soon as he is born, is the congenital illusionist, bringing misconception into the world with divine authority. He is the god of misconception or the guide of souls...

The hermetic deceit may lead this soul to a place of lightness, where self-consumption can take place, seeing through laughter, crying, playful experience, excess and emptiness. Perhaps *homo ludens* can remind the bored person (*homo consumericus*) that, despite appearances, it's always good to remember that an empty glass is full of air! ■

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Resumo

O tédio

Este artigo busca fazer uma abordagem histórica do tédio a partir de suas raízes arquetípicas, enfatizando a importância que esse estado da alma ganha no contexto da modernidade. Procura também referências que tentam explicá-lo na perspectiva da obra de Freud, Jung e nas

categorias psiquiátricas descritas no DSM-V, mapeando suas possíveis interseções com o consumo em massa. Finalmente, o autor faz algumas amplificações que aludem ao sentido do tédio e do consumo para o processo de individuação. ■

Palavras-chave: tédio, melancolia, psicologia junguiana, modernidade, processo de individuação.

Resumen

El aburrimiento

Este artículo busca hacer una aproximación histórica al aburrimiento desde sus raíces arquetípicas, enfatizando la importancia que este estado del alma gana en el contexto de la modernidad. También busca referencias que intenten explicarlo desde la perspectiva de la obra de

Freud, Jung y las categorías psiquiátricas descritas en el DSM-V, mapeando sus posibles intersecciones con el consumo de masas. Finalmente, el autor hace algunas ampliaciones que aluden al significado del aburrimiento y del consumo para el proceso de individuación. ■

Palabras clave: aburrimiento, melancolía, psicología junguiana, modernidad, proceso de individuación.

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