

Wars Have Got Boring: The Affect of Watching Everything All the Time

Abstract:

Martin Heidegger deemed boredom the mood of the twentieth century. Polysemic, yet quintessentially affective—boredom is a complex and conflicting experience of different types of emotions akin to what Braidotti called the posthuman convergence (2013, 2019). A mix of hope and resolve, exhaustion and melancholia happening all at once, all the time because of constant mediation. This paper posits that the posthuman experience is one of boredom stemming from perpetual spectatorship. The ‘mediatic’ occupies each moment as a way to stall or avoid boredom inadvertently making it the design and structure of contemporary life. The image is of and about everything; everything is imagistic! Since the first atomic bombs destroyed Hiroshima and Nagasaki, and the imagination of absolute destruction was captured in images and made real and consumable for all.

The continuous destruction of the fateful ‘other’ (the non-European, colonised, marginalised, post/de-colonial, occupied) is normative and boring. The everyday experience of the other is not an imagistic creation based on value or affect derived out of photographs, news telecast or tweets but rather the slow and everyday experience of oppression. This paper will explore how the advanced technologies (War, Media, Pharma, Prison etc), that supposedly drive this ‘Age of Industrial Complexes’ have given rise to the contemporary psychic landscapes where everyday struggles question the network of our historical contexts. For the internally fractured posthuman subjects of today’s technologically mediated world, the question is about the everyday life in its many shapes, locations and fragments; and the structure of senses on which these are built so as to look at the slow and boring processes of unfolding the constantly destabilised present(s).

Keywords:

War, image, affect, boredom, technology.

“There is shame as well as shock in looking at the close-up of a real horror. Perhaps the only people with the right to look at images of suffering of this extreme order are those who could do something to alleviate it ... or those who could learn from it. The rest of us are voyeurs, whether or not we mean to be.”

-Susan Sontag, *Regarding the Pain of Others*, 2003

1. War and the Image

It would seem counterintuitive to think of boredom and war in the same vein. War is an event, a condition that conjures imaginations of death, destruction and dispossession while boredom is where nothing happens. War is understood as conflict, violence, aggression and boredom is understood as mood, emotion, affliction or even cure. In the contemporary world of perpetual mediation, ubiquitous imagery and endless wars, boredom as critically an interpretative philosophical tool, can help question our relationship to the consumption of war.

Wars have long been contingent on the machinations of representation to provide precise accounts of troops and weapon deployment while the image of destruction is also perversely employed as a symbol for the demand of peace. Military surveillance and cinematic representation became integral to militaristic strategies which eventually developed into satellite imaging, simulation, informatics and the likes. From the onset of the 1900s, accelerating exponentially during World War I and the later high-tech explosion, the image has been a part of military strategy; especially the cinematic image involving the precise representation of both strength as well as movement, and instant perception of the real dynamics within the battlefield – *in motion*. Paul Virilio postulated that speed was not introduced till the 19th century. It was marked by the combustion engine and the electric telegraph which sped up transportation tremendously and communication became instant, shrinking great distances and obliterating breaks of time and space. Speed generated its new forms – social, political, economic and cultural. The acceleration of events, technological development, and speed marked "a double movement of implosion and explosion," where the new war machine brings together "a double disappearance: the disappearance of matter in nuclear disintegration and the disappearance of places in vehicular extermination" (Virilio, 1986: 134). The acceleration of destruction in war

began to ape the speed of light through laser armaments and computer/remote-controlled weapons systems allowing for the "geostrategic homogenization of the globe" (ibid. 135). Microtechnology and constant updates change, produce, communicate, and shrink the world while military technology and associated technocratic systems dictate every aspect of everyday life: all the while condensing time, space and scope for conversation, deliberation or imagination.

Virilio discerns paintings to be the formal logic of the image while film and photography as (the age of) dialectic logic whereas computer graphics and video mark the inception of the paradoxical logic where "the real-time image dominates the thing represented, real time subsequently prevailing over real space, virtuality dominating actuality" (1994: 63). Herein, the image and the representation supplant the real, the object represented loses its magnitude, while a frontier of images takes the place of reality. Images when colliding with the technologies of speed produce a crescively splintered, disjointed, and transhistorical elocution of experiences capable of grasping simply instances and fragmental details and not whole fields. Culturally though such phenomena contain the accretion of *new vision machines* which burgeons artificial domains of information – data and images – which form an unaccustomed demesne of experience. Computers, phones and other new vision machines (be it laser or surveillance or disinformation technologies and strategies, new kinds of image warfare, and new-fangled military spectacles) alter the very fabric of culture and the very meaning, conceptualisation and nature of war (ibid. 66). This 'industrialisation of vision' dislocates vision by machines where one sees through cameras, videos, phone screens, nanotechnology, satellite-surveillance which continuously monitor the body by subjecting it to an endless blitzkrieg of images, information and control (Virilio, 1997: 89). The media condition and limit vision, where vision and experience are implicitly compromised and in inhabiting *the societies of control* (Deleuze, 1992), the human subject constantly loses control of the body functioning as no more than a recording device.

These new vision regimes allow for dreams of transgression which are reliant on media for vicarious experiences. Media-prosumption through television, films, video games and the internet provide the bulwark of entertainment. At the start of the 21st century, death was the

final taboo, the last thing which aroused us (Svendsen, 2005: 37-44). Death that is indiscriminately administered by a superhero in cinema or a rogue cop on TV or a military officer on the news is a muddled space where one is supposed to be affected but owing to ceaseless production and regeneration of war images and imageries, there's a plateauing of the affect towards it. This anaesthetised relation to image can be understood further by reading boredom as the structure and design of contemporary social life.

2. Modernity: War and Peace and Boredom

Michael Howard argues that the idea of perpetual peace came out of the Enlightenment (2001:1). That there could be a war to end all wars predates modernity but faith (and demand) in its plausibility is quintessentially modern. To Howard, the idea of perpetual peace in modernity comes from the progressive, unilinear view of history that came to the fore in the eighteenth century. A motley crew of liberal/progressive thinkers of the Enlightenment – the likes of Bentham and Kant – affirmed that man simply needed to employ philosophy and science (reason and rationality) to understand society and control nature which then could be made 'better', more rational and efficient. However, is perpetual peace really possible? From Howard, we receive a rather unpredictable reason that bourgeois society is boring (ibid. 112). One can imagine that peace would be boring – where nothing happens; it is a zone of no conflict, the progressive goal on which modernity has been imagined. However, oppression, conflict, colonisation and occupation have never not been the reality of human history. Boredom akin to peace is also deemed a modern concept (Goodstein, 2005). People in modern society are distinctively differently bored (of, with or by things) from those of previous ages and places, where there wasn't an expectation or feasibility to be constantly entertained and engaged. The realisation of the passage of time and the realisation of the futility of agency is that murky terrain of the human psychogeography where boredom rests; such feelings are rapidly democratised through the processes pertinent to modernity – industrialisation, urbanisation, secularisation, globalisation etc. While previous societies had their defectors from faith, or bored kings, noblemen and aristocrats, boredom gets universalised and democratised in modernity, as what Heidegger termed the *Grundstimmung* i.e., the fundamental mood of modernity (quoted in Goodstein, 2005: 301).

Rapid industrialisation and urbanisation pushed people into the cities hoping for improved living conditions but in reality, it created new kinds of alienation which forced rural communities into disintegration and disappearance in the sprawling, uncaring metropolises. Life in cities was regimented under the modern paradigm of clock-time, remarkably different from the experience of the passage of time in villages or colonised lands. A disenfranchisement with time and space which belonged to the employers of labour rather than the owners of labour resulted in a life that was constantly controlled, unspontaneous and repetitious (Thompson, 1967). In the gap of a few years there was all of a sudden, an array of technologies from railways, electricity, telegraphs, motorcars to phonographs, and kinoscopes. The pace of life accelerated while distances seemingly diminished; time and space were rendered homogenic and synchronic though dictated by prevalent hegemonies. Religion was losing its hold so when Nietzsche pronounced that God was now dead towards the end of the 19th century, there came about a new experience of meaninglessness marked by a widespread loss of people's *ability to act* while being constantly controlled, monitored and dictated under the guise of total freedom. Boredom became the emergent affective state; an emotion (Crawford, 2000; Mercer, 2005 & 2010) and politically, emotions only matter when felt by 'enough' number of people for then it can be read as a 'public mood' as "diffuse affective states, having distinct positive and negative components, which citizens experience because of their membership in a particular community" (Rahn et al., 1996: 31) therefore, being socially and historically located. Public moods are facts more so about society than simply the subjective experience of the "I" in society. Moods create a psychogeography of their own not restricted by national boundaries essentially because modernity is a transnational condition making boredom a transnational mood.

3. War and Boredom

"In the contemporary political economy...informational data is the true capital"

-Rosie Briadotti, 2017

Wars have always been unbelievably cruel even with modernity's inclination towards legal provisions. In ancient times, wars often happened out of the 'ruler's' motivation, but in modernity that's a little implausible. Philosophical questions pertaining to war have mostly been

to reconcile and reason with entering or joining or all that can take place within war. In the ways that wars as a happening are described makes it seem as though it were a different sphere outside of the quotidian, alluding to presumptions that war is precisely not everyday life. In talking about the political, moral or ethical ambit, war is determined as an event; an occurrence (or assemblage of occurrences) which are bookended by a clear beginning and end (goal) underlined by institutional avowals but it never is. Wars and military activities in 'peacetime' or conflict are driven by pronounced intents which are carried out by individuals, collectives, decision-makers and agents of states. Wars as a fact of everyday life designs gendered, racial, communal and nationalistic lived realities and moral imaginations. The implicit violence of war, the ways in which it persists, the slow assaults of related oppressive systems and structures are not part of the visual regime, deliberately. The everydayness of war, destruction, dislocation, death is compressed into sporadic and fragmented images.

Military capitalism brought with it 'big' government and 'big' corporations which employed unimaginable amounts of resources with computers developing essentially out of military mandates creating a world full of calculating and information machines. These industrial complexes called the shots on scientific and technological research, development and dissemination, especially dictating the Cold War world-economy after WWII (Melman 1965 & 1974). This is eventually followed by "Microsoft Capitalism" where technologies became apparently decentralised allowing for newer models and methods of connection and communication (Kellner, 1999) while also providing the design of where war is played out and consumed. This age of technocapitalism has made the way for an infotainment society where the body politic is regularly disintegrated, surveyed and monetised with one's apparent consent. The space of online algorithms of war and war imagery become the realm of disaffection borne from an abundance and obliteration of events and images.

Boredom can lead to thinking through how to discernate technology and the human experience of the constantly altering fabric and cadence of the quotidian. The spectators' and technologies' affective, perceptive and cognitive relationship are consistently and thoroughly shuffling because of the all-encompassing take-over by the digital and the inevitable onslaught of mobile computing. The proliferation of war images on the internet point to the workings of technology

functioning way beyond human limitations, be it a question of attention, economics or affect. One can be bored from under-stimulation or over-stimulation but sometimes the image consumer is entrapped in the design of boredom where technology constantly promises the next new – the *next* event, war, weapon – *the next giant leap for mankind*.

War bears deep connections to the perpetual presence of militarism, declared wars, continuing wars, media, cinema, news, the internet and ideological inclinations to use military solutions for social problems. Warfare and military practices are stitched into the fabric of life in the twenty-first century. There are intricate, powerful, enmeshed, omnipresent systems of oppression that determine the everyday life of all people. Denying the constant presence of war leads to the assumption that when there are no declared armed conflicts there is peace. It is therefore especially easy for people whose lives are shielded in safety, those who do not on an everyday basis encounter the realities of militarism to forget that they are partisan in war as well, if not culpable. Understanding the omnipresence of war as everyday life draws attention to the fact that state-sponsored violence is happening all over, all the time perpetrated through institutions, bureaucracies, agents of states and individuals. The ever-present war machine is the constant and ultimate threat to humanity producing a perpetual and therefore boring "state of emergency" where the world is always a button away from total annihilation. And the image of total annihilation is implanted into the visual dictionary through the imagistic and the mediatic – be it apocalyptic science fiction or images from actual war (and its many ensuing tragedies). Material reality is dislocated by newer kinds of technological idealisms which create concepts that are disconnected from the material world: common sense, the body, conceptual structures, systems of the past and lived experience. This is compiled with the slow, everyday dissolution of the city, state, and politics as computerised production, virtual automations and "flexible accumulation" (David Harvey, 1989) dislocates human labour. A revamped world of transnational corporations, political organisations, and important cities go on to dictate and conceptualise the world as one experiences it.

In this chronopolitics (Wallis, 1970) whoever is in control of the means of instantaneous communication or information, is also the threat to ultimate destruction and therefore perversely the agent of peace. Each technological system comes with its own kind of accident that is both

constituent and specific to it and in the nuclear age one has to live out the aforementioned constant *state of emergency* which empowers states to force its diktats on the everyday lives of people. The purported threat of nuclear holocaust as imagined, reimagined and propagated by the visual regimes constantly distance the actual facts of war and destruction. Every technology creates an opening into the outside world annihilating geopolitical boundaries and demarcations. Global communication ends in places and people lose their particularities and lives making way for a cyberlife – an arbitrary, fractured space, determined by world-time and currency, compelling people from different time zones in the world to witness each and every event at the same time, all the time. The fragmentary images procured from different sources create not only one's image of a place but one's image of war marking a transposition in the image, imagining and imagination of the world that is constantly being transformed from perceptive to quantitative representation culminating finally into absolute digitisation. This displacement in experience ephemeralises the real while it effaces everyday life onto a realm of abject technological representation which obscures realisation and materialisation of the object creating an experience of non-affect, of boredom.

Conclusion:

Boredom in the information age remains blank precisely because it is overloaded with information of ambiguous complexity and choices with no real alternatives. To Heidegger, boredom was not just a problem of living inauthentically but rather an opportunity (1929/95) where one can confront one's existence as boredom allows a kind of 'mystery' or 'inner terror' where lies the radical (political) potential to be life-affirming (Goodstein, 2005: 331). Affect, emotion, and feelings help in understanding "subject-formation and political oppositionality" and are vital when "neoliberal capital has reduced possibilities for collective political praxis" (Puar and Pellegrini, 2009: 37). Not only can boredom help us understand certain affective and aesthetic gestures and dispositions but also point to larger historical, political, cultural and technological questions. People in modern society have only the desire for desire, of wanting to want something but it is insatiable especially when it comes to the question of war as lived reality. Being consumers of the war image, the bored individual becomes more and more part of the disaffected crowd, perpetuating the public mood of inaction. Inaction renders the event

into something that happens every day, wincing it away from urgency and immediacy into a fact of life. The image of destruction and oppression gets lodged into the corners of curated algorithms.

In the short history of the theorisation of the contemporary digital life with affect and the everyday (Berlant, 2011; Stewart, 2007) and media theory (Hansen, 2011; Hayles, 2009) excoriates how the digital and mobile computation and its promise of endless regeneration functions at a pace and a quantity well beyond abilities of human attention abstracting away from what the supposed interaction of technology and people can/should be like. Blanchot wrote that “the everyday is without event; in the newspaper this absence of event becomes the drama of the news item. In the everyday, everything is every day; in the newspaper everything is strange, sublime, abominable” (1987: 18) but we inhabit a world where the constant tickers on news channels and social media turns news into the everyday, saturated by endless streams of events rendering even War non-eventative. The spectacle of war diffuses the everyday nature of its gravity by virtue of its everyday consumption. In modern society everything is boring, with war being no exception. Images of war unsuspectingly fit into the everyday-all the time mediated lives of people. Boredom thus makes for a pertinent tool for the discussion of image consumption as an indispensable part of one’s everyday experience of the world (Manovich, 2002; Friedberg, 2006; Krajina, 2014).

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