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The Philosopher's Stone

Philosophical Discussion Group, Armstrong State University

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THE PHILOSOPHER'S STONE

The Newsletter of AASU's Philosophical Discussion Group

*Please join us for a philosophical discussion of technological boredom.
We will meet in Gamble Hall 106 on Thursday, March 27 at 3:30 pm.*

A Technological Boredom

By Duong Vo

To understand the importance of boredom, one must understand its relationship to the military industrial complex that is in control of our lives. This system is unlike any the world has seen. It provides means once only dreamed of in science fiction like star trek communicators (now called cell phones). Each person carries around a device to remain in continuous contact with the entire planet. This system like all things that are systematic is about control, but the control in this complex is so subtle that it *almost* seems like freedom rather than the contrary. This "illusion of freedom" helps perpetuate the system as a whole while creating tighter physiological and psychological hold upon the individuals. This technological society is not only endemic in our physical lives, but it is also rampant in our mentality and ideology because technology's appeal is based on rationality and even hyper-rationality.

Most people would probably think nothing good can come out of boredom because it appears to be a waste of time. Calling boredom a "waste" of time reflects the language of the technological culture which assigns it such value. Given the social ideal of efficiency, boredom is obviously inefficient. If boredom is inefficient, then one generally attempts to avoid it in order to fall in line with modern technological ideals. Most if not all boredom is viewed negatively in our society. What if it is an opportunity to think differently than one's society has trained one to think?

Nowadays, given the variety of technologies and techniques available, people argue frequently that they are in more control of their lives than they have ever been. People can now contact anybody anytime they wish through the internet or cell phone. There seems to be no place on earth that human beings cannot

travel due to the innovations of technology. It is this illusion of more freedom through technology in an ever-growing complex system that appears most attractive and powerful to people.

The realization of what it means to live in a technological system is different from the realization that one can turn on or off one's cell phone. Focusing on the latter presents the illusion of freedom, but thinking about the system as a whole yields a different set of observations which do not affirm freedom. The question becomes can I individually or WE collectively turn off the technological system? What does "freedom" mean in relation to a system that an individual does NOT control?

Not everyone wants to think about or analyze technology in any negative narrative because it is inefficient, perhaps even boring to read such analyses, and such thinking does not appear to produce any vocational benefit in this mega-industrial age. It must also be stated that to really understand this "system", we cannot use the very technical "thinking" that got us into the system in the first place. It would be similar to using a problem as a solution to the problem itself which is at the very least problematic. The technological system must then be analyzed in a non-technical way if the analysis is to have any chance of being objective. Technical thinking based on the goal of increasing efficiency will only perpetuate and affirm positively a technological system, no matter what inefficient flaws are found within the parts of the whole system. With these thoughts in mind, how does one start to think in a non-technical, inefficient way? Out of boredom, non-methodological thoughts come and perhaps other types of thinking.

What is boredom? Soren Kierkegaard called boredom the "root of all evil", the moment where there is no meaning. I agree that it is the moment where there is no meaning, but I disagree that it is the "root of all evil". It might just as easily be described as the root of all subjective contemplation. Lack of culturally-

provided, technologically-instilled meaning could be the perfect mental clearing and escape one needs to think in the midst of a distracting technological forest. Potentially, spontaneous thoughts that are our own might emerge in such a clearing of meaning. In a situation where one is bored, do most people not turn to technology for "relief" from the boredom? In doing so, are people choosing technological systematic thinking rather than the possibility of new thoughts that might emerge from the experience of boredom? Boredom might be the only path to other ways of thinking about the world rather than the dominant technological ways of dealing with the world.

Boredom is also an essential part of the creative side of human existence. Is it not out of pure boredom that people have new insights and creative impulses? Individuals seem less likely to have creative ideas if they are stimulated and entertained continually by a system of technologies. Imagine a computer science major creating some new system of coding more efficient than the old one. Does that mean that the individual was creative? This is where technology has tight control over what is creative because technology channels our creativity only into more technology. The word "innovation" slowly replaces the old idea of "creativity" in our mentality. Is a thing really creative if it has to fit within the confines of a system? Will thinking be called "creative" or "innovative" when it only comes up with new ways to perpetuate the existing type of society and system? Do all forms of creativity have to maintain the system or become consumable items within an economic system which is but one part of the larger system I am attempting to reflect on?

The most important aspect of boredom is the fact that it appears to descend upon us spontaneously and it is not a measurable event. There is no methodological way to get to boredom because methods and technologies are always about getting us out of boredom. Nevertheless, boredom

happens to everyone at all different sorts of times. According to the technological society, boredom is inefficient, like a stuck gear in a clock, and must be tightly controlled if the system is to hum along more productively than before. Entertainment technologies are the primary way in which the system will try to control and channel this boredom into efficient technologically, psychologically, economically, and politically acceptable ways. In the modern world, it is rather peculiar that finding mediums of entertainment at the tip of our fingers is more common than touching a natural object. This increased efficiency of entertainment has an inverse relationship with contemplation because the more time one spends distracted by technology, the less one thinks about anything, and also ironically the less time one spends being bored. Even when one is thinking about their specific favorite forms of entertainment, those thoughts are essentially derived from the entertainment itself. When one thinks about the advertisements, it is usually about what one wants to buy instead of the effects of the actual advertisement --one of which is to remake the individual over time into an insatiable consumer.

Boredom not only inspires us, or drives us, to be creative but it can be a time of self-reflection on ourselves and our environment. The lack of subjective meaning due to boredom triggers all kinds of questions about the asker and his/her relationship to the world. These thoughts are real human thoughts however undervalued they are in today's society because these thoughts have an immeasurable qualitative value to them apart from the quantitatively measured thinking of the technological world. It is in these thoughts that we will have a chance to realize a non-technological view of the technological society. This realization is difficult for people habituated to instant gratification and the technologies of comfort and ease. With boredom, thoughts do not come easy. It takes time and effort to think non-technologically about the systematic world. If all the entertainment streams of the world just disappear for one day, such as tv, radio, ipads, and all other relevant mediums of distractions, it would theoretically not be long before people realize how much of their thinking was not their own. People do not appear to like to think because following technically prescribed methods is easier. Methods and rules do our thinking for us and create a comforting self-reinforcing mentality.

Boredom appears suddenly and rather

quickly when we do not find a stimulus in the environment to keep ourselves busy, but it also shows itself in our work and in our being adapted to new technologies. Today, many who drive a vehicle think of it as instinctive, even "natural" after a point, since we do it so much of the time. We have memorized and internalized the driving techniques or the driving mentality as our society taught us to. But, after internalizing all the methods relating to driving (which in the beginning was exciting), driving eventually becomes boring. The efficiency of a machine that systematically produces 2000 Rotations Per Minute will eventually be too much for a spontaneously bored human mind to keep up with. Hence, another technological adaptation is needed to keep that human mind from succumbing to boredom while driving: the car radio is invented to fend off boredom in addition to providing greater access to the human mind while trapped in a couple tons of steel. When we memorize and internalize a particular sub-system, boredom could become a problem again. Hence, the system must provide us with another new technology to avoid the boredom the previous technology could not hold off. The scary thing is: this appears to be an endless cycle which technology can keep providing for indefinitely.

Plato wrote, "The unexamined life is not worth living", but the task of examination seems boring against the endless technologically-provided activities now at our fingertips. It is true that the technological industrial complex allows us seemingly endless examinations of the world, but it deters all examinations of itself and its method. If boredom provides us with the possibility to examine what this systematic society does not want us to think about, then the final question becomes:

Is a life without boredom worth living?

"Our civilization is first and foremost a civilization of means; in the reality of modern life, the means, it would seem, are more important than the ends."

**--Jacques Ellul,
The Technological Society**

CAVE MOVIE NIGHT SHADOWS



***"The aim of totalitarian education has never been to instill convictions but to destroy the capacity to form any."* – Hannah Arendt**

Join Us on April 3, 2014 at 4:30pm in Gamble 221 for the "Shadow Wall" discussions of the Hannah Arendt biopic.

Glimpses from the last meeting...

Is art worth dying for? What is art, a progression of human achievement or an economic commodity? Why create art? Is art a pursuit of fame and immortality or something more akin to developing a connection with one's fellow man?

The jury is still out...

Discussion of Pursuits of the Human Condition

"We must choose a pursuit because without pursuit a human is just matter." - Jon Hatcher

Jon's characterization of the different pursuits evoked a variety of responses from the second wave feminism perspective of male rationality to the subjective nature of human desires and how they relate to meaningful pursuits.

Can't make it to the March meeting? We hold the Cave meetings every 3rd Thursday of the month during the academic year! April meeting is scheduled for April 17, 2014.