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Aesthetic Boredom in Everyday Architecture

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Abstract: I defend that saying in everyday parlance that an architectonic space is 'boring' can be an aesthetic judgement and, in such cases, we can talk about a form of *aesthetic boredom* about spaces. As an emotion (rather than a mood), aesthetic boredom would be the negative or opposite emotion to what might be called our aesthetic *excitement* about a space. The latter would be our emotional response to what I call the aesthetic quality of *inhabitability*: the quality of a space which we experience as being responsible for 1) creating possibilities which are significant for us (regarding what we can do and how we can do it in that space), and for 2) enhancing (qualitatively) the experience of realizing those possibilities. Unlike (simple) boredom about a space, aesthetic boredom would be boredom due primarily to the absence of inhabitability thus understood. As to the frustrated desire which, as it is commonly understood, is constitutive of boredom, I will argue that this desire is the one revealed by our constant active search for inhabitability in the spaces in which we find ourselves, or for greater inhabitability when we choose them. Our frustration is a response, not simply to not encountering possibilities, but rather, to realizing that there are none where we expect some. This would explain the considerable strength of our (negative) response to boring spaces. We experience aesthetically boring spaces as spaces that *deny* both significant possibilities and the enhancement of the felt quality of the experience of realizing them.

Keywords: boredom, aesthetics, architecture, inhabitability, spaces, aesthetic boredom.

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1. Introduction

I defend here that we can talk about a form of *aesthetic boredom* distinctive of our everyday experience of architectonic spaces, that is, distinctive of our experience of using man-made spaces as we go about our daily life. This aesthetic boredom is an affective response that seems to exhibit the defining features of the common experience of boredom while being specifically about an aesthetic quality of spaces. I will also try to show that this experience meets the general *requirements* to be considered an emotion.[1]

Affective experiences imply valuing; aesthetic appreciation implies *aesthetic* valuing. As both an affective and aesthetic experience, the task I propose requires paying particular attention to *what we value* in each case, that is, to the intentional object of our everyday experience.[2] In this case, this means paying attention to what exactly our aesthetic boredom towards a space is *about*—as opposed to an objectless boredom, or to our (simple) boredom about a space, or to our aesthetic appreciation *of* a space.

I will propose to understand aesthetic boredom about spaces as our affective response to the absence of an aesthetic quality that I take to be distinctive of spaces, namely, the quality I call *inhabitability.* In this precise sense, inhabitability is the quality of a space which we experience as being responsible for 1) creating possibilities significant for us regarding what we can do and how we can do it (in that space), and for 2) enhancing the felt quality of the experience of realizing those possibilities (in that space). Aesthetic boredom would result from the clash between our always-present desire for inhabitability—whose existence I will also defend—and its absence in the space we are currently filling (or occupying).

Since I am attempting to explain everyday experience, I will study it as it can be *observed* primarily *via* phenomenological analysis of our own experiences, and *via* behaviors and common linguistic expressions when it comes to third parties. The goal is to show that the everyday experience that accompanies our judgments of—or thoughts, or behaviors indicating it—architectonic structures as 'boring' can be cases of *aesthetic boredom* about spaces. In these cases, 1) the judgements (or behaviors) accompanying the experience are about our everyday *use* of architecture *qua* architecture (i.e., about architecture *qua* created spaces); 2) our experience is both *affective* (in particular, proper of an emotion) and *aesthetic*, and 3) it results from the frustrated desire to find the distinctive aesthetic quality of spaces in the space we are occupying.

I will undertake mainly three tasks to show this. First, I will try to *demarcate* the experience I am referring to by addressing the *when* (we have this experience). Second, I will bring into the argument—in order to identify the sense in which we can talk about an aesthetic

[1] The direct focus on the *everydayness* of the individual user's experience of architecture distinguishes this paper from other significant studies on architecture that have taken into account boredom. The latter have usually taken boredom to be a (collective) mood proper of a historical period which has been (at least partially) created by architecture or that has affected the practice of architecture (e.g., Gamsby, 2019, 2022; Mihalache, 2020; Parreno, 2019, 2021; Preissner, 2021a, 2021b). Mihalache (2020, p. 135), for example, concludes his study on boredom and midcentury architecture thus: "At its worst, boredom is the malaise of the modern individual confronted with both excess and dearth. At its best, it offers an unexpected potential for contemplation, reflection, and critical judgment" (cf. "Conclusion" in Gamsby, 2019, p. 222). The analysis of the *individual* experience and, in particular, the extent to which it might be an *aesthetic* experience reduces more its scholarly company (even if we also take into account studies on philosophy of architecture or everyday aesthetics). As it will be clearer throughout the paper, adopting this approach—especially the analysis of the subject's unique *experience* itself—results in some other significant differences with respect to the *standard* ways of talking about architecture: one is that architecture, rather than *qua* created physical object which is evaluated visually, appears primarily *qua* created space which is evaluated *doing something in it* and from the perception of visual and non-visual qualities; another is that our experience, far from being determined by the architectonic structure, is the result of creative encounters with it (cf. Borden, 2014).

[2] This type of object is what philosophers have called the *formal object* of an emotion, that is the object shared by all instances of an emotion (Teroni, 2007).

experience—the view I defended somewhere else (Franco, 2019) that the distinctive aesthetic object of our everyday experience of architecture is the created *space* (as opposed to any perceivable feature or object) and, more precisely, the aesthetic quality I call *inhabitability*. This should explain both the phrase '*qua* architecture' above and why we can talk about an *aesthetic* emotion about architecture and how we should understand it. And third, I will try to show that the aesthetic experience that we can call everyday aesthetic boredom about spaces seems to have all the defining *components*—on which there is considerable agreement among researchers (Scherer, 1984)—of the affective experiences that we call *emotions*.[3]

2. Boring Spaces

2.1. Experiencing a Boring Space

We want to understand everyday experiences in which built environments produce the type of response we ordinarily express by declaring those environments 'boring' or, more precisely, by declaring (or meaning) that the spaces they create are 'boring' or that ourselves are 'bored' by them. In general, we think of something as boring when we take it to produce boredom in us or, probably more frequently, if we perceive it may contribute to produce it. "*To be boring* is to tend to bore" (O'Brien, 2014, p. 238); "boring" is that which "annoys, wearies, or causes ennui" (Oxford English Dictionary, 2022c). A boring space would then be, in principle, one that has boredom-inducing qualities.

As our experience shows, and this is one of the issues this paper must explain, a space may be boring for some but not for others ("anything could in principle for someone or other be an object of boredom" [O'Brien, 2014, p. 241]). Although, as I will try to show, we all perceive some common quality in the spaces we consider boring, we do not all perceive that quality in the same spaces ("boredom is a hybrid, partly objective, partly subjective" [Heidegger, 1995, p. 88]). This means that it is difficult, if not impossible, to provide specific examples of spaces which might be universally (experienced as) boring. An empty factory building, a prison cell, a landfill, a parking lot, a hospital room, a public restroom, a street where all the houses look alike, or an urban space where all we can find is warehouses or storage structures could be, under certain circumstances and for some, examples of either boring spaces or spaces with boring features. The pictures under the title "Beautifully Boring Pictures of Typical American Architecture" in Dundon (2016) or "Boring Urban Landscapes" in Ward (2012) or a number of those in Preissner (2021a) could suggest more precise examples.

So, first, what is distinctive of the experience of boredom in general? According to Elpidorou (2017a):

> As a state ["not the personality trait of boredom"], boredom is a concrete and short-lived affective experience that is characterized by feelings of dissatisfaction, attentional difficulties, and the perception of meaninglessness. In a state of boredom, one is disengaged with one's situation, and one wishes to do something else. Recent work on boredom suggests that boredom is an emotion with a self-regulatory

[3] This does not mean that we cannot also talk about the effect of boredom as a *mood*—or a "condition" or a "malady" (Parreno, 2021, p. 2)—which might both condition our perception of architecture and be proper of our time, as Parreno (2021) has defended.

> function. Because of its affective, cognitive, and volitional character, boredom can motivate the pursuit of a new goal when the current goal ceases to be attractive, meaningful, or satisfactory.

According to O'Brien (2014, p. 237), boredom is "a mental state of weariness, restlessness, and lack of interest in something to which one is subjected, which is unpleasant or undesirable, in which the weariness and restlessness are causally related to the lack of interest".

Notice that, according to Elpidorou (2017a)'s definition "one is disengaged with one's situation", which seems to imply that boredom about *an object* might not be proper boredom. This is in consonance with our ordinary experiences and language. 'I am bored' expresses my overall current affective 'state'; 'this living room is boring' does not (even if it is boring *to me*). According to O'Brien, however, boredom implies "lack of interest in something to which one is subjected", where "something" can go from an "easily identifiable object" to "your life" and "there always is an object of some sort that can be identified" (2014, p. 241).

In our case, although we are supposedly referring to *an object* (space), it appears that the boredom we are dealing with here—aesthetic boredom about spaces—could be a form of what Svendsen (2005, p. 21) has called "situative boredom", which is "boredom that is due to something specific in a situation", as opposed to "existential boredom" which "affects [someone's] existence as a whole" (p. 42).[4]

> We can be bored with objects and people, we can be bored with ourselves. But an anonymous form of boredom also exists where nothing in particular bores us. One feels bored, for boredom does not have any content that can make it mine (Svendsen, 2005, p. 41).

The "situation" in question, in our case, would be distinctively defined by our simultaneous experiences of 1) *occupying* and 2) *evaluating aesthetically* a space (in an everyday manner). But this also means that 3) any personal circumstances that affect the formation of these experiences can be said to be part of the (lived) situation. The "something specific" to which our boredom is "due"—if by this we mean *caused*—would be the space, or some quality in it (if we accept that the perception of its intentional object can be considered the prominent cause of an emotion).[5] Notice that we are evaluating it aesthetically, even if such an evaluation is done in a distracted and not very conscious fashion. We start evaluating a new café as soon as we enter it and continue evaluating it for as long we are in it; we start evaluating a train station as soon as we leave the train, and continue evaluating it as we walk through it towards the exit.

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[4] Svendsen claims to be following a typology by Doehlemann (1991, pp. 22–23): "I prefer Martin Doehlemann's typology, which distinguishes between four types of boredom: situative boredom, as when one is waiting for someone, is listening to a lecture or taking the train; the boredom of satiety, when one gets too much of the same thing and everything becomes banal; existential boredom, where the soul is without content and the world is in neutral; and creative boredom, which is not so much characterized by its content as its result: that one is forced to do something new" (2005, pp. 41–42). Among other classifications of boredom based on its content, particularly influential on discussions on boredom and architecture has been the one offered by Heidegger (1995) which is ordered "with respect to depth" (p. 130) (from less to more): 'becoming bored by something', 'being bored with something', and 'profound boredom'. As examples of the 'something' of the first experience, Heidegger gives a book and a railway station; and as example of the second type of experience, he mentions the case of someone who, after a "pleasant" evening, realizes later on that he "was bored with the evening" (p. 109). "Profound boredom" is a mood, a "fundamental attunement" (p. 132), that gives us access to the "essence of time" (p. 133) and opens the "authentic possibility of its [our] existence" (p. 153). Among the classifications not strictly based on the content of the experience, Gamsby (2019)'s has also had an influence on discussions on architecture and boredom. He talks about three "views" of boredom depending on their historical presence or significance: "ordinary" boredom which is "equated with individual emptiness" (and also "easily remedied and ultimately unworthy of serious attention") (p. 210); the "ahistorical" view takes boredom to be a "universal experience" (p. 210); and the view that "takes boredom to be an historically specific phenomenon, one that is inextricably tied to modern life" (p. 211). Thus put, the experience of boredom I am dealing with here, would fall within the first type studied by Heidegger and, somehow, under the first two views mentioned by Gamsby.

[5] As an object, however, the distinctiveness of space can make the experience also closer to an emotional response to a *situation* (rather than to 'something specific'). Parreno (2019, p. 108) refers to a case of boredom supposedly caused by continuous living in a monotonous confined space (a room) as being "triggered by the environment".

We can now return to the meaning of 'boring', that is, the (causally) active meaning derived from 'to bore' and applied to objects. Do 'boring' objects really produce boredom? 'Boring' objects seem to be experienced, rather than as full-fledged boredom with its own course and temporal duration (proper of an affective response), as if they produced a *lesser* or *partial* boredom. They seem to be experienced as if the boredom they cause occurred primarily at the level of *sensible perception*, that is, as what we could call *visual* or *auditory* or *gustative-olfactory* or *tactile* boredom. Boring clothes or a boring meal or a boring perfume seem to be of this kind. 'Peter is wearing boring clothes' does not mean 'I experience boredom when I see Peter wearing those clothes'; and 'this food is boring' does not mean 'I am bored when I am eating this food'.[6] We rather mean that the sensible features of the object in question do not have much interest—they are dull, plain, unexciting—and that this lack of interest is of the sort that can produce an affective effect on us that we experience as *somehow similar* or *related to* boredom. And it can produce this effect precisely because, for some reason, we are paying attention to that object ("lack of interest in something to which one is subjected" which produces "weariness and restlessness" [O'Brien, 2014, p. 241]).

The above 'somehow similar or related to' suggests a relation similar to the one between other emotional qualities we attribute to objects and the experience of the emotion itself, e.g., a sad sunset, a joyful lamp, a peaceful color.[7] Notice, however, that, among the objects we may be more inclined to perceive as emotional, spaces occupy a prominent place. We talk about a melancholic city, a joyful café, or a serene poppy field. This seems to suggest that the emotion in question might be more clearly experienced—i.e., it might retain more of its features—when it is *about* these objects (spaces). Even so, the boredom conveyed by a 'boring' space—or any other object for that matter—may not be as clearly experienced as the one we attribute to activities in which we are engaged. Unlike our sensorial exposure to boring objects, the experiences of listening to a boring talk, or reading a boring book, or watching a boring movie seem to be closer to what the active sense of 'boring' denotes. An activity, especially if it requires our full attention, a considerable amount of time, and it is one we have not chosen, is more likely to contribute to produce boredom in us. Similarly, we are also more inclined to attribute boredom-inducing capabilities to a space if, besides its boring appearance, we must spend a considerable amount of time in it, or, more so, if we must spend it doing activities we have not chosen.

Even if we think about architectonic spaces as *objects*, they are peculiar ones. A boring space and a boring car qualify the meaning of 'boring' in different ways. If we think in terms of what we can call the potential impact of their *boringness* in our overall affective state, in both cases—space and car—we can think about this impact as being compatible with a simultaneous *lack of boredom* about other objects or even about the 'situation' as a whole. We can occupy a boring space and yet not be bored; we can see or drive a boring car and not be bored. On the other hand, unlike a boring car, the *boringness* of a space shares more closely similarities with

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[6] See a discussion of cases in which the "boring" cannot be said to cause boredom in Heidegger (1995, p. 86). Notice that we also commonly say that the non-boring causes boredom if we are exposed to it repeatedly. "Much boredom derives from repetition. I am often bored, for example, when I go to museums and galleries and only find pale imitations of works I have seen already far too many times. I am bored when I hear a lecture for the fourth time, and I am bored when I give a lecture for the fourth time" (2005, p. 41). Although Svendsen uses 'being bored', our experience indicates that the repetition itself might be 'boring' but we may not experience boredom as such.

[7] In Heidegger's terms, "[t]he landscape is not itself melancholy, but merely attunes us in such a way, causes this attunement in us. And similarly with the 'boring book'" (1995, p. 85).

the boredom about a 'situation' than with the boredom about individual objects (if by this we mean a well-delimited individual concrete thing). Our *relation to* a space has more in common with our relation to a situation than with our relation to an object *per se*. And the fact that we are *immersed* in both could explain why a space or a situation may affect us more profoundly than most ordinary boring objects—i.e., why they might be better *carriers* of affective powers.

Boredom about a space is, thus, different from boredom about individual objects, or about particular experiences or activities. It is also different from general states of boredom not caused by the external reality (or by a particular activity)—i.e., from what Svendsen calls "existential boredom" (2005, p. 42). Boredom about spaces, on one hand, is boredom that seems to have an external cause and yet differs from the boredom—or the *boringness*—we attribute to individual concrete objects (e.g., a table, a jacket); and, on the other, shares similarities with boredom about particular activities (e.g., reading a book, watching a movie) without being about an activity (at least, as we usually understand them). This could be so both because spaces may not be proper objects or, if they are, we do not experience them as such; and because, although we do not usually think of spaces as activities, we experience them through actions. Let us turn to this issue.

2.1. The Intentional Object: Spaces, Not Physical Objects

Perceiving an architectonic structure *qua* (physical) object *tout court* and perceiving that structure *qua space-creating* or *space-shaping* object are different things. Although both can be considered manners of perceiving architecture, whereas the latter is distinctive of architecture, the former is not (Franco, 2019). The creation or formation of *spaces* to live (i.e., to realize human activities) defines and distinguishes architecture from other creative activities. Other activities that may arguably contribute to create space, such as furnishing or interior design, can be seen as part of 'architecture' broadly understood. In any case, more important for the purposes of this paper is that our everyday aesthetic evaluations of architecture differ from the aesthetic evaluation of other objects and activities in that they are primarily evaluations of created spaces (to live).[8]

Among the common expressions with which we affirm something to be boring, when it comes to architectonic structures—or built environments—our ordinary language is quite ambiguous regarding the precise (intentional) object of our affective state. We do not usually say, or have an expression that unequivocally says, something of the sort: 'I feel aesthetically bored by this city', or better, 'by this city's space'. We rather say simply 'this city is boring' or 'this café is boring'. These expressions, however, do not necessarily refer to the (created) space or to its aesthetic value. They can refer to—and usually refer primarily to—the *life*, or what we colloquially call the atmosphere, of that city or that café. And even if they refer to the city or the café *qua* architecture, we can understand this reference in two possible manners: 1) to the physical object(s) or features we perceive through the senses (walls, floors, ceilings, furniture, light, colors, textures, smells, etc.), or 2) to the *space* formed or shaped by those physical objects and features—i.e., the city *space* or the café *space* in this case.

[8] Cf.: "The heresy that architectural value resides in the image or concept of a building rather than in its creation, experience and use has been around since the rise of printing and the subsequent diffusion of treatises by Palladio and other architects" (Saint, 2014, p. 35).

Our ordinary language, once again, hides rather than reveals the latter distinction. If we asked someone why they liked the café where they had coffee yesterday, the answer will quite likely acquire the form of a series of descriptions of pleasant physical things (e.g., chairs, tables, decoration, light, colors, materials) interspersed, possibly, with some references to the atmosphere (i.e., feelings perceived in, or generated by, the café). So, how can we tell whether our boredom is about the space itself? Can we tell apart our experience of boredom about a space from boredom about the physical elements or features we perceive around ourselves (when we occupy a space)?

Since we perceive the space we occupy, at least in part, *from* the perception of the surrounding physical objects and their sensible features, we should expect both perceptions (space and objects) to be narrowly entangled in our experience. But this does not mean we cannot distinguish both types of perceptions. Perceiving *space*, I suggest, is to perceive possibilities for action (for the perceiver) created by the *physical interruptions* (materials and their qualities, e.g., tables, walls, decorations, sensible features) which can be encountered by our perceptual reach and by our mobility and within which we are situated. Those 'interruptions' are such in relation to an empty or uninterrupted *space*. Placing a table in a room is adding a physical interruption: it interrupts our sensible (mainly visual) field and, potentially, our movements. And, thus, it creates and eliminates possibilities for action (e.g., we can eat on it; we cannot walk through it).

Although in certain circumstances we may not notice or pay attention, we certainly cannot say we perceive these (material) interruptions without perceiving their sensorial qualities (we see the *wooden* tables, *light-brown* chairs, *rugged* tiles, and we feel the *hard* floor and the *sound* of our steps on the floor). We manifest the significance of these perceptions for us as we commonly attempt to alter our living spaces by altering surrounding physical features (e.g., McKeough, 2022). And we do not perceive these features or sensorial qualities without perceiving the (very personal) meaning they acquire under our gaze (cf. Johnson, 2007). The leather armchair between the old bronze floor reading lamp and the chimney, together with the dark wooden bookshelves from floor to ceiling and the also wooden floor partially covered by thick dark rugs *means* coziness. And, thus, they create—or contribute to it—a cozy space. The space seems to borrow meaning from what we perceive.

Altering what we perceive sensorially alters the meaning of the space *via* a sort of creation or transference of meaning that seems to have its unique expression—or, at least, a breeding ground—in spaces. This seems to occur as the very qualities we perceive in objects *expand* or *spread* through space. 'The cathedral smells like candles' means 'the *cathedral space* smells like candles'; 'the late-afternoon winter light fills the library' means 'the late-afternoon winter light *spreads through the library space*'. The concept of ecstasies, as Böhme (1993) uses it, gives, a possible explanation of how physical qualities *qualify* space and, thus, how this qualified space triggers emotional responses ('solemn atmosphere'; 'cold atmosphere').[9]

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[9] Atmospheres, according to Böhme, are "spaces insofar as they are 'tinctured' through the presence of things, of persons or environmental constellations" (1993, p. 121); "it [atmosphere] is the felt presence of something or someone in space" (Böhme, 2017a, p. 33); "I would call atmosphere the *sphere* of the *felt bodily presence*" (Böhme, 2017b, p. 69). Böhme explains this "presence" with his concept of 'ecstasies'. "Forms of presence […] are modes in which a thing characteristically steps out of itself. I call these ecstasies" (2017b, p. 46). Instead of thinking of blueness as something the cup *has*, Böhme says, "[t]he blueness of the cup […] can be thought […] as the way, or better, a way, in which the cup is present in space and makes its presence perceptible. The blueness of the cup is then thought of […] as something which radiates out to the environment of the cup, colouring or 'tincturing' in a certain way this environment" (1993, p. 121). In some occasions, Böhme says atmospheres

Similarly, if some of the surrounding physical features appear to us as boring, they can make us perceive *boringness* in the space. But this does not need to imply that perceiving boring features *is* perceiving a boring space or even that perceiving boring features always *make us* perceive a boring space. An empty apartment room—which might be the prototype of a boring space for some—might exhibit boring features but not appear as a boring space. The combination of its light, its size, and its shape might reveal a potentially interesting (i.e., *exciting* to some degree) space. Even if we might not be able to point out many non-boring features in a space (e.g., a living room, a kitchen) we may freely choose to occupy it regularly. It is possible, then, to think about features which might be boring if taken individually but that do not create a boring space—or which, precisely because they seem to contribute to create a (non-boring) space, they may acquire a not-so-boring appearance.

When it comes to *evaluating* spaces—as opposed to simply *perceiving* them—a reliable test to determine whether we are evaluating what we perceive through the senses or the space itself might be our own behavior. We experience—and judge—spaces while we do things in them, that is, as we actively occupy and fill them with our physical presence and life. If our choice is free, we choose between spaces primarily depending on how we *feel* in them—i.e., how we feel ourselves occupying and filling them—which means how we feel in them *as we do something in them*. And how we feel in them depends on our perception of their inhabitability as defined above.

This means that neither our senses nor the function of the space has primacy in determining our free choices. We often spend more time or do more things—all things being equal and assuming, once again, we are choosing freely—in spaces in which we would *not* say that what we see, touch, smell, or hear is more pleasurable. The latter might be relevant but not determining. Our preference is not determined either by the functionality, narrowly understood, of the architectonic structure. It is true that, as we choose one among several structures for a certain activity, we usually do not even take into account those structures in which we cannot realize that activity. But all things being equal and our choices being free, we often prefer spaces that have less functionality with respect to the activity we want to realize. We often prefer to write a paper in the old library instead of in our own kitchen despite not having outlets for computers, being noisier, colder, and with harder seats. When we choose freely, our preference is for spaces with greater *inhabitability*. I turn to this now.

3. Aesthetic Boredom

3.1. When Is It Aesthetic?

When is our boredom about a particular space *aesthetic* boredom and when is it simply boredom? I am suggesting here that the reason why we can talk about, at least, one form of aesthetic boredom *about spaces* is because our experience of boredom can have as its intentional object

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"fill" spaces: "Atmospheres fill spaces; they emanate from things, constellations of things and persons" (2017a, p. 26). This is consistent with the idea I have suggested above that we should think about space, the space *we perceive,* as *content* rather than container. Notice, on the other hand, that although Böhme (1993) places atmospheres at the centre of a 'new aesthetics', we should understand 'aesthetics' here, as Griffero (2019) has put it, as a general theory of perception (as conceived under the prism of Schmitz's new phenomenology [1965, 1969]). Unlike the concept of *inhabitability*, the concept of atmosphere by itself does not isolate what we take to be the aesthetic quality of a space.

what I call the aesthetic quality of inhabitability. And this aesthetic quality is a quality of—i.e., a quality we perceive in—*spaces*. This is why we can talk about aesthetic boredom about spaces.

As mentioned above, I have defended somewhere else (Franco, 2019) that our aesthetic preferences for spaces respond to our search for *inhabitability*. Inhabitability is what we look for when we look for aesthetically valuable or preferable spaces. It is what we value when we value a space aesthetically. And what we value is the quality of the space which we experience as being responsible for affording *significant* possibilities for action (i.e., activities significant for us) and for positively *enhancing* the felt quality of the experience of realizing, or the anticipation of realizing, those (or some of those) activities. 'Significant' possibilities 'for us' are possibilities that allow us to develop the life we want to live—which means they are (spatially) significant in relation to our personal ideal of life. Qualitatively 'enhanced' possibilities are experiences whose felt quality has been increased positively, i.e., possibilities whose realization *feels better* (in this space).

Thus, of two spaces, the one that enhances *more* or enhances the felt quality of a *greater number of activities of significance* for us would be aesthetically preferable. This space would have greater *general* inhabitability for us, at least, at this moment of our life. A space that allows us to realize *more* activities of significance would also be preferable even if it does not enhance positively the felt quality of the experience of realizing any particular activity. In other words, the very possibility of realizing an activity can be considered the first degree of enhancement. The aesthetically preferable café is the one where it feels better to do what we want to do in it—or, we could equally say, even if it sounds strange, where the *space feels better* as we do in it what is significant for us. And it feels better because it allows for, and enhances qualitatively, the experience of realizing possibilities that are significant for us (at this moment in our life). In this case those possibilities are the ones included in what we take to be part of the experience of *having a coffee*, which is, in fact, a cluster of lived actions and passions: reading, having coffee, seeing people, listening to music, feeling the café's atmosphere, talking to people, etc.

Notice that a central aspect of this aesthetic evaluation—i.e., the evaluation of a space's inhabitability—is the perceived relation between the particular space we are evaluating (if we can talk like this, as opposed to *Space*) and the spaces contiguous to it. This is in agreement with the idea, suggested above, that we evaluate *Space* interrupted (or filled) in different ways rather than individual spaces, and with the idea that how our life *fits* in that space is a key aspect of this evaluation. This is so because we are constantly searching for spaces which afford significant possibilities, and since life is continuous and always requires spaces, it means we are also searching for *significant contiguity* between those possibilities. The possibilities of the living room—and our aesthetic appreciation of it—depend on where and how it is situated in the apartment; the possibilities of our apartment depend on where and how it is situated in relation to other spaces in the city; and so on. A space is aesthetically preferable if we perceive that it allows for our life to develop continuously in a significant way, that is, through contiguous spaces that afford significant possibilities.

Inhabitability is always inhabitability 1) for me (i.e., in relation to my ideal of life), 2) at this moment of my life (i.e., under the influence of all the personal particularities that may affect my perception of the world or my ideal of life at this very moment), and 3) in relation to certain

activities. This is what defines the framework of reference for our evaluations. A space can be said to have *general* or *particular* inhabitability. The latter would be greater inhabitability with respect to a particular activity (e.g., having a coffee, reading a book, meditating); the former with respect to a range of significant activities (e.g., a house, a workplace, a school). Inhabitability explains not only our preference for spaces as we commonly refer to them (this café, this office, this apartment, etc.) but also why we choose the orientation we choose as we occupy a space (e.g., facing the window or the interior of the café; sitting at the front or by the aisle in a theater), the specific location within that space (e.g., between the piano and the window), and even the bodily posture we adopt (e.g., standing at the bar *vs.* sitting). All these preferences are aimed at experiencing greater inhabitability.

Notice that repetition by itself—i.e., the repeated use of a particular space—might not imply a reduction in the qualitative degree of experienced inhabitability. We do return to the same park bench for lunch and to the same café day after day, year after year. Time, however, might on the one hand bring about changes in our ideal of life, and thus on the activities that are significant for us; and on the other it might reveal that a space (e.g., our home) does not allow for the realization of certain (previously) imagined significant possibilities or for their qualitative enhancement. This might reduce the degree of inhabitability we might perceive in that space. To this we can add that, if inhabitability itself—as I would suggest—triggers a distinctive affective response, we should certainly expect a gradual reduction in the intensity of our response as a space becomes familiar (which also means it becomes simultaneously imbued with other emotions). On the other hand, we can also expect that repeated exposure to the same space might increase—whether indefinitely or provisionally—its degree of inhabitability for other reasons: new possible activities or new manners to enhance the felt-quality of those activities might be discovered.

I am proposing to think about aesthetic boredom about a space we are occupying as boredom due to the lack of inhabitability of that space. For the experience of boredom to occur, however, it would not be enough to simply occupy such a space. Boredom requires also, at least, that the space itself attracts sufficiently our attention and that our evaluation of that space becomes significant within the overall meaning we may find in the *situation* in which we are (i.e., doing this activity here at this very moment of my life). An elevator might be a boring space, even an aesthetically boring space, but this *boringness* might only become experientially relevant if 1) we pay attention to the *elevator space*, and if 2) the *boringness* can be said to define the situation in which we are (to the point of coloring or altering noticeably our general affective state). The short period of time we usually spend in an elevator, as well as the freedom not to pay attention to the elevator space are obstacles for these conditions to exist. A boring library that we occupy for hours in a row to write a paper might have a greater effect on us, both because of the time we spend in it and because we might pay more direct attention to the space we occupy—all of which might result in reinforcing the clash between our search for inhabitability and the space (see section 3.2 below).

If we can talk about *proper* aesthetic boredom about a space—i.e. the sort of *ideal* case—this might be best revealed to us when the space not only absorbs us as fully as possible (i.e., we are physically immersed in it and our attention is oriented towards it) and we have not chosen it

freely but also, at the same time, either 1) we are not engaged in any other activity that requires our attention, or 2) we are *forced to realize an activity* in that space which we have not chosen freely. The former cases—i.e., not engaged in any activity that requires our attention—seem to be a bit unusual in our everyday life. Being in a doctor's office's waiting room without anything to do (no phone in our hands, no magazines to read) could be that situation. The latter cases could be exemplified by having to attend lectures in a boring classroom or being forced to work in a boring cubicle.

It has often been said that Edward Hopper (1882-1967) painted well loneliness in our modern life (e.g., Jenkins, 2020; Levin, 2021). It could also be said that he painted well the negative affect that certain spaces produce *via* aesthetic boredom. Hopper's better-known paintings highlight the significance for the perception and evaluation of space of three particular features: the activity we are realizing (1927, 1939), the light (1951) and whether other humans occupy the same space and how—in particular, their absence (1925, 1930) and the lack of human interactions (1942, 1958, 1960) in places where we should probably expect it (such as a theater, a café, the beach, or a gas station [1940]).[10] These variables can alter—in fact, they reduce, in Hopper's paintings—the space's degree of inhabitability. We might prefer not to sit in our favorite café when it is empty or when we perceive a cold atmosphere (Hopper, 1942, 1958). We would not choose the interior of a movie theater to absorb ourselves in our personal problems (Hopper, 1939). Similarly, we might prefer not to walk in the desolate streets of a Spanish town in August during siesta time (Hooper, 1930), or stay after hours by ourselves in an office lit by florescent tubes (Hooper, 1927). The activity, the light, and the presence and behavior of other humans can contribute to make us feel, as we often say, 'out of place'—or as if we were in a 'cold' place (as opposed to a warm or cozy one, proper of spaces with the quality of inhabitability).

Hopper's paintings partially exemplify the *lack* of fittingness that we should expect as casually responsible for the negative emotion which is *opposite to* the emotion about the inhabitability of spaces.[11] Common colloquial statements such as 'I could not be doing this in a better place', or 'I cannot be in a better place at this moment [i.e., doing this]' express well the opposite, that is, the fittingness proper of inhabitability.Whereas the experience of inhabitability results from the fittingness between 1) the activity we are doing as we occupy or fill that space, 2) our perception of the space (*via* both sensible features and their meaning), and 3) our ideal of life, *aesthetic boredom* emerges from their conflict.

Imagine you need a place to sleep while you attend a conference. You book a room in an average road motel (in, say, the United States). As you check in, you do not expect to find or to experience anything new. All you hope for is to have a clean and minimally functional space. If any hope for something better still existed, upon entering your room a strong impression of *déjà vu* drowns it immediately. Despite this, you still search for something somehow *exciting* (as

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[10] A crowded café and an empty café are different spaces (cf. De Matteis, 2021). The possibilities are different. Their meanings can also be different—and, thus, their felt quality. A crowded café in which people are interacting and a crowded café in which nobody is interacting may also have quite different meanings. And different meaning means different perceived capability to enhance the felt experience of what we want to do in the café.

[11] Although I am not arguing directly in this paper for the existence of the *emotion* of inhabitability, we can understand it, as I have suggested above, as the opposite of—i.e., the positive side of—the emotion I call here aesthetic boredom.

opposed to boring):[12] you play with the lights, open the curtains to look out of the windows (which happen to face, one an empty parking lot and the other a dirty white wall which is only one and a half meters away from your own window), let the light in, bring the small armchair closer to the window and sit on it for a few minutes, and so on. The place does seem to let you do basic things (sleep, read, revise your talk, use the bathroom) but does not appear to have the capability to enhance the felt quality of the experience of realizing any of them. In fact, just being in the room seems to be affecting your mood negatively: it makes you feel restless, and a bit angry. Noticing the pattern on the linens, the upholstery of the chairs and the wallpaper only makes things worse. Little by little, almost everything seems to be contributing to the impression that the room is boring. The whole space seems to be impregnated, to be *filled with* boredom; boredom *emanates* from everything.[13] And yet, you cannot say you are bored. You are mainly worried about the talk you must give the following day. Although you wished you could sit somewhere else to prepare for it, there is no place to go. Working on your paper distracts you but does not seem to completely isolate you from the emotional consequences of the *boringness* that seems to impose itself on you.

Let us now think about an alternative case. You have arrived in the same motel room with company in search of, among other things, privacy to live an affair that is becoming, say, more and more sexually intense (recall in the first case you chose the motel *as a place to sleep* while you attended a conference). The same features of the motel room result now in the perception of some unique *mysteriousness*, or *cozy familiarity*, or *anonymity*, or even *safe dangerousness*, all of which fit well within both the purpose of your stay and your ideal of life (as causally relevant at this very moment in your life). Thus, the motel room appears now as having good inhabitability. The same features that seemed boring before are not able now to *fill* the space with *boringness*. This might be so either because you perceive, in the same or in other features, some additional *meanings* (mysteriousness, coziness, isolation) which are *exciting*; or because you perceive primarily a non-boring supra-meaning in the space (one depending on but surpassing the meanings of individual features or objects). As a result, the same physical features enhance now the felt quality of the experience of realizing the activities—significant for your life—which you chose to do in that room. In fact, later on, as you will recall your time in that motel room, it might not appear as pleasant to the eyes (or to the nose or ears or touch) but you may remember you *felt well* in it. We usually think that this could be simply because of the association in our memory between the room and the good things that happened in it. But it could also be that it is because—which is what I want to suggest—you experienced a three-sided fittingness between space, activity, and moment-in-our-life which amounted to the experience of a good degree of inhabitability in that space.[14]

3.2. The Frustrated Desire

Boredom is different from “phenomenologically akin” (Elpidorou, 2018, p. 325) emotions, such as apathy, anhedonia, and depression. Probably the most relevant difference is that boredom

[12] “The opposite of boredom, in a word, is not pleasure, but excitement” (Russell, 1930, p. 57).
[13] Cf. Heidegger (1995, p. 92): “It [boredom] does not merely relate to the particular thing that is boring us, but settles over several things, over other things: everything becomes boring”.
[14] The lack of this three-sided fittingness is, I would say, what is behind Parreno (2019, p. 108)’s “boredom surfaces as a suspended synchronization between inhabitants and architecture”.

seems to result from a *frustrated desire*, a desire that does not find the possibility of realization. "Boredom is essentially a thwarted desire for events, not necessarily pleasant ones" (Russell, 1930, p. 57); "while situative boredom contains a longing for something that is desired, existential boredom contains a longing for any desire at all" (Svendsen, 2005, p. 42).

As to what causes this interruption, or frustration, or unsatisfied longing, Russell (1930, pp. 56–57) explains that "[o]ne of the essentials of boredom consists in the contrast between present circumstances and some other more agreeable circumstances which force themselves irresistibly upon the imagination". Elpidorou (2018, p. 334) says that boredom "informs us of a mismatch between what we desire and what is being offered to us" (see also p. 325). In Svendsen (2005, p. 32)'s terms, this desire is a "demand for meaning": "[w]ithout such a demand for meaning there would be no boredom".[15]

Can we find this "thwarted desire" (Russell), this "mismatch" (Elpidorou), this unsuccessful "demand for meaning" (Svendsen) in our experiences about boring spaces—and, in particular, in our *aesthetic* boredom about spaces? Yes, we can. I have argued (Franco, 2019) that our search for inhabitability is always, so to speak, ongoing. It does not require a decision or predisposition on our part. We are constantly actively searching for inhabitability in the spaces in which we find ourselves (regardless of whether we choose them or not) and for *better* inhabitability when we have the possibility to choose freely between spaces. I take this constant search to be the expression of the 'desire', the 'demand', we are looking for in this case.

Our behavior, once again, is the key to *observe* the presence of this desire. Very relevant in this sense is the importance we assign to our choice of spaces even for routinary activities. Choosing a bench in a park to have lunch or a table in a café does matter to us. We consider the options, we often *test* them (by sitting for a second on that bench or at that table), and we rectify if we think it might feel better to sit somewhere else. We also feel upset if we return another day to the same park or café and somebody has already taken *our* bench or *our* table. The same thing can be said as we choose a seat at a dinner table, or at a movie theater, or the side on which we prefer to walk in a street, or the orientation of the chair on which we plan to read for a bit in the sun. Similarly, finding ourselves in a new space we have not chosen usually triggers a desire to explore its potential inhabitability: a new park appears as a potential running course and its lake as a picnic area, a new square as the place for morning coffee, and a new riverbank as a place for a summer evening walk. One of the reasons why we want to go running in the new park the following morning is precisely because we want to know how it feels to run in that park.

This desire for inhabitability is the desire that, when frustrated, produces aesthetic boredom about spaces. The park, the square, or the riverbank that do not reveal any inhabitability to our desire's demand for it can be said to be an aesthetically boring park, square, or riverbank. This clash desire-reality does not leave us indifferent. We respond rather negatively, i.e., with negative affect, which is what we should expect if we are dealing with a form of boredom. Boredom is "unpleasant or undesirable" (O'Brien, 2014, p. 237).

[15] "[B]oredom is inhuman because it robs human life of meaning, or possibly it is an expression of the fact that such a meaning is absent" (Svendsen, 2005, p. 33); "boredom is not a question of work or freedom but of meaning" (Svendsen, 2005, p. 35); "The world becomes boring when everything is transparent" (Svendsen, 2005, p. 38).

How exactly the phenomenology of this negative response should be described might be a more complicated matter. In Elpidorou (2017a) we read that "feelings of dissatisfaction, attentional difficulties, and the perception of meaninglessness" are distinctive of boredom. O'Brien (2014, p. 237) talks about an experience of both "weariness", and "restlessness"—despite "pulling in different directions, restlessness towards movement and weariness away from it" (2014, p. 239). The restlessness could be explained by the ongoing failure of our desire (for inhabitability) to find satisfaction, that is, by the very weariness caused by the space we are occupying.

> I am weary with one thing and restless for another. I lack energy, interest, and patience to attend to what is at hand; but I do have energy to burn, and I long for something else to burn it on (O'Brien, 2014, p. 239).

The colloquial statements we use to refer to spaces that we consider boring reflect well this negative phenomenology in different degrees depending primarily on the length of our experience, the strength of the perceived *boringness* (the active source of boredom), the activities we are doing in them, and our freedom (or lack thereof) to both choose the activity and to stay in or leave the space. Notice that we usually refer to the more extreme cases—the most negative ones—with adjectives that express pain caused by some limitation or interruption, such as 'cold', 'deserted', 'desolate', or 'oppressive'. We may say things of the sort: 'it is painful to walk in downtown Los Angeles on a Sunday afternoon'; 'it is painful to sleep in an abandoned airport hangar'; 'it is painful to work under fluorescent lights in a windowless and a sparsely furnished office'. A boring talk and a boring movie are also 'painful' to listen to or to watch. But a painful space may exhibit unique causal features of our pain. A boring space, unlike a boring talk or a boring shirt, seems to exert limitations on our possibilities. A boring space *cuts*, *impedes*, *discourages*, *stops* life, the forward impulse of our present-moment life.[16] In other words, unlike a place that has inhabitability, an aesthetically-boring space is a space that we experience as not allowing our life to continue developing—and therefore, as impeding that our ideal of life continues its realization.[17]

This conclusion also suggests that we could distinguish in our (negative) aesthetic evaluations of spaces two degrees regarding the strength of our response, which might correspond to those we commonly consider *boring* and *painful* spaces. Notice that we do not usually choose boring spaces (we find ourselves in them) and that choosing the activity might not change the experience of boredom about the space. However, the lack of choice in this sense—the activity—can increase the negative effect of the experience. The latter cases seem to be the ones that result in the experience that we could call, more properly speaking, *painful spaces.* In other words, whereas enduring the experience of an aesthetically boring space usually implies the lack of free choice about the space on our part, enduring the experience of a painful space implies, in addition, the lack of free choice about the activity. A boring space becomes a

[16] Cf. Heidegger (1995, p. 87): "that which bores, which is boring, is *that which holds us in limbo and yet leaves us empty*". Being "held in limbo" means that "we are given over to it [the boring], yet not taken by it", which is what it means to say that the "boring" is "wearisome" according to Heidegger (1995, p. 86). "Being left empty" means, in the case of the boring railway station, that "[w]hat is at hand (the station) does not offer that which we expect of it in the particular situation. The station accordingly does not fulfill our expectation of it" (1995, pp.103–104).

[17] Notice that under the view I am presenting here the so-called 'hostile architecture' (e.g., Petty, 2016) would refer properly speaking, rather than to spaces, to certain architectonic modifications, usually of the urban built environment, aimed at limiting certain possibilities (e.g., skating, sitting, putting up a tent). This would not be, however, enough to talk about 'hostile spaces', and, therefore, of hostile architecture proper. 'Hostile spaces' could be an appropriate way of referring to boring spaces.

painful one—i.e., a still-more-unpleasant boring space—when the obligation to use it in a particular way is added.

3.3. An (Aesthetic) Emotion?

As to whether the experience I am describing here meets the requirements to be considered an emotion, we could submit it to an examination in search of the presence of the features that allow us to identify any ordinary emotion, namely, 1) the appraisal of an intentional object, 2) a distinctive phenomenology (subjective feelings and felt bodily changes) and expression, 3) a disposition (or action tendencies) towards its object, and 4) a particular function.[18]

That boredom is an affective state might not be very problematic. Standard definitions of 'boredom' (Oxford English Dictionary, 2022a) either include explicitly such aspect or include an affective state as *explanans* (e.g., 'ennui' in Oxford English Dictionary, 2022a). As we have seen above, Elpidorou (2017a, 2018) and O'Brien (2014) also consider it an affective state. Our experience and ordinary language seem to indicate it too.

But which type of affective state is boredom? According to O'Brien (2014, p. 238) boredom is "not a raw feeling" and "not quite an emotion"; "[i]t is closer to a mood than to an emotion". Svendsen (2005, p. 14) also considers it a mood, at least the state of being bored, the "nameless, shapeless, object-less boredom" (see also p. 93). Whereas "situative boredom" is "often an emotion", "existential boredom is always a mood" (Svendsen, 2005, p. 111). For Russell (1930, p. 56), "[b]oredom would seem to be a distinctively human emotion". Elpidorou (2017a) says there is "strong evidence" to consider boredom "an emotion in its own right" if we follow the research done by Van Tilburg and Igou (2012). As we saw above, Elpidorou (2017a) seems to be referring to what he calls the "state of boredom" as opposed to "the personality trait of boredom". Elpidorou (2018) has also defended that boredom has all the distinctive features ('components') of the 'component processes account of emotions' proposed by Scherer (1984).

Insofar as we are talking of boredom *about* something, or talking about *something* that *causes* boredom, we may already be taking a position in the mood-*vs.*-emotion debate. It is a common view that, unlike emotions, which have an "intentional object" (Svendsen, 2005, p. 110), moods are *not* about "determinate objects" (e.g., Sizer, 2000, p. 747)—they are "objectless" (Svendsen, 2005, p. 110). And even if it could be argued that moods can be about something, it seems difficult to defend that they can be about "determinate objects" or that they occur only in the presence of their object—as it is the case we are studying (i.e., boredom about spaces). We feel or experience boredom about a particular space *as we occupy and fill it*. The fact that we are talking about *aesthetic* boredom also supports the view that we may be dealing with an emotion—at least, insofar as 'aesthetic' here implies direction towards some (aesthetic) object, and the very idea of the existence of 'aesthetic moods' seems itself problematic.

On the other hand, given the nature of spaces *qua* objects, it seems plausible to say that boredom (the emotion) about a particular space might either affect or be a cause of the general 'shapeless objectless' boredom that we can identify as a mood (see, e.g., Parreno, 2019). This is, however, something, that we can probably say of most ordinary emotions—e.g., the joy about

[18] These criteria are quite similar to the five criteria which, according to Cova and Deonna (2014, p. 449) constitute "a good indication that we are dealing with a distinct emotion" (for a defense of these criteria, see Deonna and Scherer, 2010).

specific objects or experiences might contribute to generate a joyful mood. Aesthetic boredom *about spaces* might, in any case, exert a greater causal power to produce moods than emotions about other objects. This is so because of its capability to *intervene in* (i.e., stop, interrupt, in the case of aesthetic boredom) the continuous development of our life.

3.3.1. The Intentional Object: An Aesthetic Quality

When we occupy—or fill, with our presence—spaces we may experience boredom about other things (not space) or about other perceived qualities (not inhabitability). We may find boring certain visual features in an architectonic structure (e.g., the colors of the walls of a room), or the design of the furniture, or the shapes and arrangement of the different rooms in an apartment. These experiences would not qualify as boredom, or *aesthetic* boredom, about spaces.

There might be several reasons why we might perceive specific objects or sensible qualities as boring, e.g., monotony, familiarity, regularity, conventionality (e.g., Toohey, 2011). I mentioned above that we could talk about a sort of boredom that takes place only at the level of sensible perception. Shinkle (2004) has talked about "perceptual boredom" (e.g., pp. 168, 175), and given as an example the experience of seeing the photographs of Denver by Robert Adams in *What We Bought: The New World (1970-74)* (2009). Shinkle (2004, p. 177) describes this perceptual boredom like this:

> [T]he stifling, characterless interiors of suburban tract homes quash the activity of the eye, leaving it to slide aimlessly across bare white walls or terminate pointlessly in empty corners. Shot in the Denver metropolitan area, the landscapes in this series invoke the same kind of perceptual inertia: rather than acting as an enticement to the look, the horizon serves only to separate a bland, undifferentiated ground plane from a similarly featureless sky. Adams pictures the American West as a field of manufactured desires, where ideals of freedom are lived out in cookie-cutter fashion in endless rows of tract housing. The two-dimensionality of the American dream is actualized in the images themselves, in the way that they confine the gaze within a narrow wedge of space and time.

Another example Shinkle (2004, p. 177) provides is the interiors we can find in Lynn Cohen's *Occupied Territory* (Cohen et al., 1987): "[t]he eerie silence of these images gives the environments the feeling of archaeological relics rather than living—or livable—spaces".

Notice that in both descriptions, perceptual boredom reveals the (lack of) *livability* of the space—something which might share features with my idea of inhabitability. The lack of "enticement to the look" shows a "stifling" space which "confine[s] the gaze within a narrow wedge of space and time". It seems, then, that the experience described in this case is not just simply boredom about visual or sensible features. Perceptual boredom seems to be understood by Shinkle as related to, but not being only about, sensible perceptions—either because the perception itself is only partial cause, or because the effect is felt beyond the perception.

If we place this in the context of the constitutive structure of emotions, of which a central component is an evaluative perception of its object, it could imply that boredom (the emotion) about spaces requires *perceptual boredom.* The latter could be the evaluative perception which triggers the corresponding emotion (in the same way that perceiving dangerousness when we see a tiger results in fear). But if this only means that perceptual boredom is one of the causal links of (the emotion of) boredom, it looks like we have not made much progress.

The difference between the experience of simple boredom about a space and aesthetic boredom about that space is a subtle one. We can think of it as parallel to the difference between *perceiving* a space and *aesthetically appreciating* a space. Whereas, as I have suggested above, the former is a perception of possibilities regarding *what* and *how* I can do in that space, the latter would be a perception of the space's capability to afford significant activities and to enhance (qualitatively) the felt experience of realizing those activities in that space (i.e., what I have called the aesthetic quality of inhabitability). The clash of my desire for inhabitability against the lack of the first type of possibilities would be responsible for boredom *about the space*; the clash between my desire and the lack of possibilities of the second type would be responsible for *aesthetic* boredom about the space. Notice that without this clash, we may be forced to talk simply about a *lack of perceived* possibilities—which might result simply in indifference.[19] But if boredom is an emotion, it requires more than a perception: it requires an evaluative perception. A frustrated desire of the sort outlined above would include this type of evaluative perception.

Let us try to narrow things a bit more. A space may appear as boring because it affords zero significant possibilities. Our everyday evaluations of spaces—as unconscious, distracted, and quick as these evaluations might be—indicate, however, that the clash between our desire and those possibilities has more precise features: it is a clash that occurs *in me* and *at this very moment of my life.* This means that I may not see any *significant* possibilities in this space at this very moment in my life. Or that I may see *some* significant possibilities *to do* (i.e., for actions)—and, thus, the space would appear as less boring—but I may not see yet any possibilities regarding its *experience-enhancing* capabilities (i.e., the space may not improve the felt quality of the experience of realizing those possibilities). Such a space would not be a boring space (in the general sense), but it would be an aesthetically boring space.

3.3.2. Phenomenology

In practice, it might be difficult to distinguish the phenomenology of our experience of (only) boredom from that of our experience of aesthetic boredom (about a space). This might be due, in part, to the fact that a zero-possibilities space is also a non-enhancing (possibilities) space (or a space with no enhancing capability). A boring space is usually also an aesthetically boring space—but, as we have seen, not necessarily *vice versa*. Another reason for the difficulty to distinguish both *phenomenologies* might have to do with the fact that we are constantly either searching for the aesthetic value of the spaces we occupy or choosing spaces (for our daily activities) that are aesthetically preferable. This means that, as we ponder options about *where* to do something, we do not usually take into consideration spaces that we already know are boring. This is so because our daily preferences for spaces usually have the form of finding the appropriate space *for a particular task*. If the task cannot be done, the space is not even among the options we consider. If we are thinking about a space to do what we usually do in a café—i.e., all that that can fit within the *café experience* (i.e., to read, to write, to be among people, to listen to music, to immerse ourselves in the noise of the café, to have a coffee, etc.)—we do not usually doubt between going to a clothing store or to the 19th-century café in the main square, or between a *boring* café and a non-boring café.

[19] "We straightway take 'boring' as meaning *wearisome, tedious,* which is not to say indifferent" (Heidegger, 1995, p. 86).

As said above, this means that our experience of boring spaces is usually of spaces we do not choose; spaces in which we may find ourselves and which we cannot leave, at least not immediately. Any waiting space (waiting area in a doctor's office, airport, business), or any space in which we are transported (elevator, plane, train, etc.) and through which we are transported (e.g., our commuting route) meet these conditions. A hospital room, a motel room, a prison cell are also of this kind. Considering all this, that is, the conditions under which we experience aesthetic boredom, its distinctive phenomenology seems to correspond mainly to the experience of the frustrated desire described above *plus*, in this case, its directedness (more or less conscious) toward a precise object: the (inexistent) inhabitability of the space. Recall that, according to O'Brien "weariness" and "restlessness" define this experience (2014, p. 239). The weariness is "more mental than physical"—something closer to being "mentally exhausted" (2014, p. 240). But restlessness, the nervous agitation proper of boredom ('in boredom, there is no rest for the weary'), is also central (and, as O'Brien [2014] puts it, distinguishes boredom from languor, listlessness, or torpor).

3.3.3. Disposition and Function

Elpidorou (2018, p. 340) considers it a "recent trend" to take boredom "to be an emotional or affective state that serves a purpose in our everyday lives". This is a bit surprising, given the consensus that emotions do have a function, that is, that they serve a purpose. "Emotions and feelings […] have a useful function" (Fridja, 1986, p. 372); "[e]motions serve something, and presumably they serve it well" (1986, p. 475). About this function, Elpidorou (2018, p. 326) has argued that, in brief, "boredom promotes movement; movement is essential to well-being; ergo, boredom promotes well-being".

First of all, boredom is a negative emotion. "The state of boredom is unpleasant. Boredom is a form of dissatisfaction and discontent" (O'Brien, 2014, p. 241); "Boredom in the ordinary sense is disturbing, unpleasant and unbearable" (Heidegger, 1995, p. 158). Negative emotions, by definition, dispose us to go away from their intentional object, in this case, from boring spaces. It is proper of the state of boredom that "one wishes to do something else" (Elpidorou, 2017a); "it [the boring book] brings us into an attunement that we would like to see suppressed" (Heidegger, 1995, p. 87). In this sense, we can expect aesthetic boredom to have a beneficial function.

As mentioned above, we do not usually choose purposefully either boring or aesthetically boring spaces. We find ourselves in them. And when we find ourselves in them, we wish to be somewhere else. The time we spend in an aesthetically boring space is, rather than time wasted (as we usually put it), *space wasted* if we consider our ongoing search for better quality of life.[20] Each time we can choose among several spaces to do something, we have in our hands the possibility of improving the quality of our life (while we do that activity) by improving (*via* the space) the felt quality of what we are planning to do. In other words, each choice can bring our life closer to the realization of our ideal of life. Choosing the aesthetically *exciting* (as opposed

[20] This idea of 'wasted space' is somehow similar to Augé (1995)'s view of 'non-place': "If a place can be defined as relational, historical and concerned with identity, then a space which cannot be defined as relational, or historical, or concerned with identity will be a non-place" (pp. 77–78). The latter seem to be spaces where, according to my view, few people would find *inhabitability.* But we should not forget that the very personal character of this quality can make it always possible for someone to find it in almost any space.

to boring) café, the aesthetically exciting table at the café, the aesthetically exciting place or orientation at the table, means taking advantage of unique and unrepeatable opportunities to enhance the felt quality of—i.e., the experience of realizing—the activities we are doing. Aesthetic boredom about spaces, thus, alerts us of the danger of wasting space and disposes us to avoid placing our life in spaces that either interrupt it (i.e., do not allow for its development) or that do not enhance it qualitatively.[21]

4. Conclusions

I have tried to explain what we mean when we say in our everyday life that certain built spaces are 'boring'. I have proposed that this can be an aesthetic judgement and that, in such cases, we can talk about *aesthetic boredom* about spaces. As an emotion, aesthetic boredom is the corresponding negative emotion to what might be called our aesthetic *excitement* about a space. Whereas this positive affective response would be about the aesthetic quality of inhabitability, the negative one (aesthetic boredom) would be about its absence. In other words, unlike (simple) boredom about a space, aesthetic boredom would be boredom due to the absence of the aesthetic quality of inhabitability in the space we are occupying. (Inhabitability is the quality of a space which we experience as being responsible for 1) creating possibilities significant for us regarding what we can do and how we can do it in that space, and for 2) enhancing (qualitatively) the experience of realizing those possibilities).

Since, as it is commonly understood, boredom, unlike indifference, involves a frustrated desire, I have argued that, in this case, this is the desire that we experience in our constant search for inhabitability in any space in which we find ourselves, and for greater inhabitability when we can choose between spaces. The significance of the frustration of this desire for our life explains the considerable strength of our (negative) response to boring spaces. It is a response, not simply to not encountering significant possibilities to do and to enhance their felt quality (i.e., to the absence of inhabitability), but rather, to realizing that there are none where there *should be* some (for our life to continue well). Aesthetically boring spaces *deny* inhabitability. And in this sense, they are spaces which *interrupt* the progress of our individual life in an important sense: they

[21] Preissner (2021b) and Michaels (2021) have explicitly defended a 'boring' or 'dumb' architecture. But they do this after redefining 'boring' (and 'dumb') in a manner that would not quite fall within what in this paper has been considered such. Preissner (2021b, p. 168) sees boring architecture as opposed to architecture that exists "in the world of distinction and efforts to constantly capture our attention (through our eyes)", something which "tend[s] to make us unfree". As Preissner (2021b, p. 169) sees it "[b]oring things open the world up. […] Boring and dull things are empty. However, it is this void that allows for things which are normal, anonymous, and quotidian to become weird and strange and make space for the imagination. It's a free space in all the ways that interesting things are a closed room" (cf. Parreno [2021, p. 104]: "the boredom of Los Angeles […] nurtur[es] a field of possibilities and experimentation"; and Mihalache, 2020). Similarly, Michaels (2021, p. 164) acknowledges that although "boring means what it usually does (not interesting)", "not interesting" does not mean what it usually does: "not interesting means not that you can't be interested in it but that it doesn't demand your interest". And "dumb"—as in "aesthetically dumb"—"means not only not telling you what to do but also not caring what you do". Aesthetically dumb architecture "leaves us room to think for ourselves" (Michaels, 2021, p. 166); "aesthetically dumb architecture not only leaves you alone but must be understood as leaving you alone" (Michaels, 2021, p. 165). Thus understood, 'boring' or 'dumb' architecture would not fall, under the view presented in this paper, as architecture that conveys boringness. Another question is whether, as Preissner and Michaels defend, such architecture is desirable. Seeing significant possibilities in a space is, in fact, part of our search for inhabitability, and it does require the active (and free) engagement of the imagination. However, any created space, opens and *limits* possibilities. We cannot think of a created space that only opens possibilities. On the other hand, it seems that a good part of the attention a space attracts—as unfocused and diffused as it might be in our everyday life--has to do with the possibilities we (individually, personally) see in it. These possibilities, in turn, are limited by the power of our imagination which is itself conditioned by the space we perceive: we cannot easily imagine possibilities without *experiencing* the space whose possibilities we are imagining. Thus, saying that a 'boring' space lets us be free by not attracting our attention might make the freedom involved irrelevant, freedom that cannot be realized.

interrupt our desire and continuous search for spaces that allow for a better realization of our ideal of life. And by doing this they impede the continuous increase of the quality of our life.

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