



# Boredom, Suicide, and Postmodern Architecture: Life and Death at No. 1 Poultry

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**Abstract:** As the ultimate attempt to transcend, suicide relates to boredom. The intentional taking of one's own life constitutes the definite disregard of the self and the world—a crisis of existential meaning, heightened by the qualities of the environment. Resonating with the postmodern concern with space and inhabitation, the case of No. 1 Poultry, a building in London by James Stirling, Michael Wilford and Associates, finalized in 1997, suggests that boredom and architecture organize a flux of information that, in an extreme and fatal manner, surfaces in suicide. Throwing themselves off the public terrace, 25 meters (80 feet) above street level, six deaths have been reported since the economic downturn of 2007. In 2015, a restaurant critic jumped to his death. He wrote in his last blog post, “When a man is tired of London, he is tired of life; [...] [Samuel] Johnson was right, I am not tired of London and never have been [...] however I am tired of life”. In 2016, a salesman followed the same steps. In his phone, several unsent messages were found. The first read, “I am bored of life and the future possibilities disinterest me”; the second, “I no longer try to adapt myself to others”; the third, “I am not made for this world”; and the last, “I have cracked”. To explore the connection between boredom and architecture, this essay investigates these suicides in relation to the history and design of No. 1 Poultry. If boredom has many intensities and depends on what the surroundings can offer, then such incidents reveal its most radical moment.

**Keywords:** boredom, suicide, James Stirling, postmodern architecture, postmodernism, experience, space.

## 1. Introduction

The relationship between boredom and suicide has been explored in many cultural expressions and intellectual elaborations. David Hume, in *Of Suicide*, written in 1755 but printed posthumously in 1777, studied the sanctity of life by pondering on the human capacity to “provide for ease, happiness, and preservation”, if someone who, “tired of life and hunted by pain and misery, bravely overcomes all the natural terrors of death and makes his escape from this cruel scene” (2016, p. 84). In this manner, when negative situations arise—unwanted and inevitable, including boredom—they must be endured. Yet individual life also requires astuteness to grasp its importance in relation to oneself and the bigness of the world; to Hume, suicide as a flight from everyday sameness does not necessarily constitute a transgression of any duties, particularly if those duties have been accomplished and only the exhaustion of living remains. Exempting all from the anxiety of having to attain imposed versions of fulfillment, if self-annihilation would not be a crime,

both prudence and courage should engage us to rid ourselves at once of existence, when it becomes a burthen. It is the only way, that we can then be useful to society, by setting an example, which, if imitated, would preserve to every one his chance for happiness in life, and would effectually free him from all danger of misery (Hume, 2016, p. 92).

With comparable secular sentiment, in the following century, Gustave Flaubert employed boredom and suicide to structure *Madame Bovary*. In the novel, of 1856, boredom conducts to desperate, transgressive, and morally condemned actions, which only find resolution through the taking of the main character’s own life. Emma Bovary bears “insufficiency in life—this instantaneous turning to decay of everything on which she leant”; in her, “every smile hid a yawn of boredom, every joy a curse, all pleasure satiety, and the sweetest kisses left upon your lips only the unattainable desire for a greater delight” (Flaubert, 2001, p. 217).<sup>1</sup> As if willing to understand this desire, of life wanting to exceed itself, Émile Durkheim published, in 1887, *Suicide: A Study in Sociology*. The seminal treaty posits that high levels of anomie, a condition akin to social boredom, derived from over-industrialization and urbanization, were responsible for high numbers of these deaths.<sup>2</sup> In his view, suicide occurs not because of the poverty or affluence entailed in economic fluctuations, but because “they are crises, that is, disturbances of the collective order” (Durkheim, 2002, p. 206). And in the 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> centuries, especially since the early 1980s—coinciding with the rise of postmodernism, the cultural interest in conditions of space, and the focus on variety, creativity, and multiplicity—psychological analyses have associated boredom with many dysfunctional behaviors, counting suicidal tendencies among them (see, for instance, Beck et al., 1985; Brissett and Snow, 1993; Patterson and Pegg, 1999; de Souza et al., 2016; Vine et al., 2020).

These accounts, modern in tone and chronology, echo the medieval warnings of Thomas Aquinas about the power of *acedia*—a predecessor of boredom, combined with sloth—to induce pervasive and irrepressible discontent. In *Summa Theologica*, which appeared in 1485, he notes that *acedia* “weighs upon man’s mind” and makes him to want “to do nothing”, as a “sluggishness of the mind which neglects to being good” (Q. 35, Art. 1 [1947]). This sorrow is always evil

<sup>1</sup> For investigations on suicide and literature, see Ros Velasco (2021).

<sup>2</sup> Luigi Tomasi affirms that “Durkheim believed that he had proved that the suicide rate depended not on changeable human motives but on suicide-inducing processes. These collective forces operated independently of individuals, acting constrictively on them according to the logic of egoism, altruism and anomie” (2000, p. 17).

since it impedes spiritual closeness to God, “on account of the flesh utterly prevailing over the spirit” (Q. 35, Art. 1 [1947]). Since acedia is a sin that also produces iniquitous effects, it ought to be avoided through atonement. If not, it can overflow the sufferer with grief, and that surplus carries the risk of suicide—an unlawful deed that goes against nature, the community as a whole, and the godly gift of life. Voluntary death constitutes the definite disregard of the self and the immediate environment; the world becomes a realm of indisputable, unconquerable, and meaningless repetition.

This final attempt to transcend, driven by boredom and its discontinued and distorted relationship with the surroundings, becomes evident in cases of individuals who die by jumping from high places. Although some hotspots of suicide are natural, modest, and isolated, such as cliffs and ‘lover’s leaps’, most are architectural, iconic, and steeped in romanticism, for instance, the Golden Gate Bridge, the Eiffel Tower, the Campanile on the Duomo in Florence, the Empire State, and the Milan Cathedral (Colt, 2001). These so-called ‘suicide magnets’, which tend to be easily accessible and surrounded by open areas, not only facilitate the act because of their architecture but also serve as symbols that disclose an innermost suffering (Olson, 2014). They expose a circumstance that traverses the physical and the emotional, the individual and the communal, resonating intensely in the public and the history of the site. Entangled in this complexity, the built environment emerges as the context in which boredom and suicide occur as well as a process in which the interiority of the individual—the space of thoughts and sentiments—encounters exteriority—the space of the body and society. Architecture is therefore not a cause of boredom and suicide, but a situation that, through its configurations and eventual occupation, stimulates emotional states (Parreno, 2021).<sup>3</sup>

## 2. The Architecture of Six Deaths

No. 1 Poultry, designed by James Stirling, Michael Wilford and Associates, finalized in 1997, sits in the heart of the City of London, a historical financial district (Figure 1). Since the economic downturn of 2007, acquiring notoriety, it has seen a string of six suicides.<sup>4</sup> These were committed by young and mid-career professionals who threw themselves off the public terrace, 25 meters (80 feet) above the street level, where the upmarket Coq d’Argent eatery operates.

The first instance occurred on May 29, 2006, by a 33-year-old marketing executive from Leytonstone. Before crawling through a window and hurling himself off the ledge, landing on the top of a double-decker bus, he ordered a glass of mineral water and sat in the bar for ten minutes (Marketing Exec’s Restaurant Death Plunge, 2007). In the jacket of his suit, a note, protected in a plastic folder, read,

I have tried to please everybody all the time, including myself. I just can’t do it. I have had enough of everything in my life failing. I can’t see things improving, which is why I am doing what I’m doing. It is my fault and no-one else’s (Marketing Exec’s Restaurant Death Plunge, 2007).

<sup>3</sup> This paper derives from a section in *Boredom, Architecture and Spatial Experience* (2021, p. 118), which was expanded and presented during the 4<sup>th</sup> International Interdisciplinary Boredom Conference, held in June 2021. It has benefitted from research by Peter Quayle and Borys Aguirre.

<sup>4</sup> Durkheim observes, “it is a well-known fact that economic crises have an aggravating effect on the suicidal tendency” (2002, p. 201). Yet, in his view, economic distress is not a determining factor in suicide: “poverty-stricken Calabria has almost no suicides; Spain has a tenth as many as France. Poverty may even be considered a protection. In the various French departments, the more people there are who have independent means, the more numerous are suicides” (2002, p. 206).

In the post-mortem examination, no alcohol or drugs were found in his system. Three years later, on July 5, 2009, a 24-year-old stockbroker at Deutsche Bank, entrepreneur, and former BBC Radio presenter, wearing a Hugo Boss suit, plunged to his death while clutching a glass of champagne (Green, 2009; Press Association, 2009). At the time, he was being investigated for, according to his employer, “an inquiry into an IT matter” (Green, 2009). The rumor was that he was about to be disciplined over allegations he posted a prank message—“I am hot! I am hot!”—on a financial website, pretending to be somebody else; the day of his passing, managers suspended his Bloomberg account and confiscated his computer (Walker, 2010). The last friend to see him, hours before jumping, said that he was “completely normal” and that a celebration for his birthday had been planned for July 9 at an exclusive bar in Soho (Daily Mail Reporter, 2009; Press Association, 2009). In reference to his personality, including his final appearance and the place of his last drink, his parents expressed in a joint statement, “style meant everything to him and that’s how he chose his exit” (Green, 2009).

The third suicide took place on September 4, 2012, by a 29-year-old businesswoman who had been fired from her job at the British Library, and whose westernized lifestyle had been exposed to her Muslim parents by an online stalker. She, once “the soul of the party” but by then suffering from depression, confessed to her psychiatrist that she felt guilty about not living her life according to her family values and religion, fearing that she would be “punished for leading a bad life” (Blunden, 2012; Golden Room, 2013).<sup>5</sup> Despite undergoing cognitive behavioral therapy and being under the care of a community mental health team, she had attempted to take her own life previously, but was saved by her parents; she refused further treatment and promised never to try harming herself again. The day she died, a bystander at the restaurant reported, “the place was packed. There must have been 100 people. Everyone was just doing their usual, drinking and talking loudly. She walked to the corner and just jumped [...] It was extremely eerie” (Seales, 2012). Smartly dressed, she is said to have taken a sip of wine, placed her glass and handbag on the floor, carefully, and then toppling over the edge of the viewing platform, falling in front of pedestrians by the entrance of Bank Underground Station. In her handbag, she carried contact details for her next of kin and her address, antidepressants, and a bottle of vodka although she was not intoxicated; goodbye letters were found in her apartment (Blunden, 2012; Moore-Bridget, 2012; Seales, 2012). Not long after, on 18 October, at midday, a 46-year-old banker pulled a chair to the opposite side of the same terrace, climbed on to its wall and threw himself down into the internal atrium (Gye, 2013; Parry, 2013). Minutes before, the father of three had phoned his wife with whom held a long conversation, not disclosing his intentions (Cooper, 2013; Parry, 2013). He was under pressure in his new job at an investment bank, with headquarters close by No. 1 Poultry, and was struggling to pay school fees and coming to terms to relocating to his homeland, South Africa (Cooper, 2013; Gye, 2013; Martin and Osborne, 2012). During the inquest into his death, it was revealed that three weeks earlier he sent his wife a text message that said he had been contemplating suicide. The coroner in charge affirmed that his ultimate decision was deliberate—“I am sure that he intended to die by his actions. You don’t fall seven floors and go over a wall without that” (Gye, 2013).

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<sup>5</sup> The blog *Golden Room*, self-described as “an online journal for cross cultural relations”, observed: “Rema’s life is symptomatic not only of the purported cultural schism between Islam and the West, but also between celebrity, materialist values and inner values of spirituality and moral substance” (2013).



Figure 1. View from the junction of Queen Victoria Street and Poultry, 2022. Photograph by Peter Quayle. Courtesy of Peter Quayle



As a result of these instances, in 2013, 1.80-metre-high barriers of glass and wire were erected in the rooftop and around the atrium (Express, 2016; Sleigh and Davenport, 2016; Telegraph Reporters, 2013). In addition, security guards were employed to patrol, looking out for anybody seen alone, and staff received training by the Samaritans, a charity that provides support to those

in emotional distress;<sup>6</sup> No. 1 Poultry hence implemented all government guidance on suicide hotspots (Telegraph Reporters, 2013). Despite these measures, two years later, on February 9, 2015, a 39-year-old male blogger and well-known restaurant critic—a regular patron of the restaurant—jumped off the atrium, after smoking a cigar and finishing a beer (Smith, 2015). The day before, he tweeted, “final message [...] thank you everyone”, with a link to a blog post (Bryant and Davenport, 2015). Quoting Samuel Johnson, he wrote,

when a man is tired of London, he is tired of life; for there is in London all that life can afford [...] Johnson was right, I am not tired of London and never have been [...] however I am tired of life” (Boozedude [Wilkes McDermid], 2015).<sup>7</sup>

The message concludes, as if in a cartoon story: “That’s all folks, in the words of Dr Seuss, ‘Don’t cry because it’s over, smile because it happened’” (Boozedude [Wilkes McDermid], 2015).<sup>8</sup> In a separate entry, dated two years prior, which proves that he had been contemplating suicide in advance, he explains that the reason behind his death was romantic disappointment, asserting that he did not share the characteristics required for men to be considered attractive in the City, in terms of height, race, and power (Boozedude [Wilkes McDermid], 2013). The investigation into his death heard that he had tried to take his own life before by jumping from Table Mountain in South Africa, but he was overcome by his fear of heights (Culbertson, 2015; Smith, 2015). Almost a year later, on January 17, a 29-year-old salesman travelled from Dublin to follow the same steps. He had arrived the day before, as part of a break from his home in Stuttgart, where he was studying a business computing degree (Express, 2016; Shammas, 2016). Climbing the 1.80-metre-high fence, he leapt to his death. Unlike the publicness of the previous cases, this one passed unnoticed to diners and employees who only became aware of it when the police arrived. In his phone, several unsent messages were found. In the first, he wrote, “I am bored of life and the future possibilities disinterest me, nobody’s fault, nothing could be done to change it”; the second, “I no longer try to adapt myself to others”; the third, “I am not made for this world”, and the last, “I have cracked” (Osborne, 2016).

Out of the six cases, one was committed by a female and all by university educated individuals; three had a history of depression, which had led them to consider suicide previously; four had conflicts at work, and one had expressed disillusionment with personal relationships; three had consumed alcohol before jumping but were not inebriated, and only one was taking medication. Two instances occurred on a Sunday, two on a Tuesday, and the others on different days. All of them were treated as non-suspicious by coroners and police officers who agreed that the deaths were premeditated due to the crises being experienced—a profound and chronic boredom, overtly manifested in three cases and implicit in the rest, which became a destructive despair.<sup>9</sup> Although the six deaths appear as remonstrations against contemporary living, unveiling socioeconomic, cultural, and existential dilemmas, No. 1 Poultry was used differently

<sup>6</sup> The Samaritans was funded by Chad Varah, an Anglican priest, in 1953. His office was in the crypt of St. Stephen Walbrook, a block away from No. 1 Poultry.

<sup>7</sup> The line by Samuel Johnson, of 1777, reads, “Why, Sir, you find no man, at all intellectual, who is willing to leave London. No, Sir, when a man is tired of London, he is tired of life; for there is in London all that life can afford” (quoted in Boswell, 1791, p. 286).

<sup>8</sup> He recounted his life as a food commentator and the changing times of restaurants in London. He even mentioned his last dinner, observing that “there seems to be a fascination on ‘final meals’ with many people online... mine was at Hawksmoor Spitalfields”, another exclusive restaurant (Boozedude [Wilkes McDermid], 2015).

<sup>9</sup> Edwin Shneidman writes that “suicide is essentially a drama in the mind, where the suicidal drama is almost always driven by psychological pain, the pain of the negative emotions—what I call *psychache*. Psychache is at the dark heart of suicide; no psychache, no suicide”; elevated psychache “is a nexus of frustrated or thwarted psychological needs” (2001b, pp. 200–201).

due to the qualities of its location and design. Two deaths were spatially inward, through the atrium, whereas the others occurred toward the outside, as if symbolically confronting the values of the City.<sup>10</sup> In the subsequent inquests, the management and the architecture of the building—with its triangular plan due to its site, open court, rounded clock tower, horn-like jutting balconies and stripy façade, recognized as an exemplary postmodern monument in need of preservation—were cleared of any responsibility (Culbertson, 2015; Sleight and Davenport, 2016; Smith, 2015).

Figure 2. Axonometric diagram of No. 1 Poultry. Drawing by Borys Aguirre. Courtesy of Borys Aguirre



<sup>10</sup> Resonating with the symbolism of the City as a place of death, a newspaper article reporting the third case included the following message by an onlooker, published on Twitter: “That city square mile sucks the life out of you” (Seales, 2012). Furthermore, the complexity of these suicides resonates with Shneidman’s conclusions; to him, each suicide is “*sui generis*” as well as “a multifaceted event” with “biological, cultural, sociological, interpersonal, intrapsychic, logical, conscious and unconscious, and philosophic elements” (1985, p. 202).



### 3. Life and Death, the History of No. 1 Poultry

Surrounded by neoclassical edifices of the past—including Mansion House by George Dance the Elder, the Bank of England by John Soane, and St. Stephen Walbrook by Christopher Wren—No. 1 Poultry occupies a wedge-shaped plot, where the eastern ends of Queen Victoria Street and Poultry meet at Mansion House Street (Figure 2). The site, of 3,100 square meters (33,500 square feet), has a history of construction and destruction, death and rebirth, of constant but slow change. There is evidence that a Roman market existed in the place, with pig farms and wool production. In medieval times, as part of a parish, the St Benet Sherehog Church stood in use for over 500 years, since the 11<sup>th</sup> century until it was destroyed in 1666, in the Great Fire of London (Lockyer, 2013). The structure was never reconstructed, becoming instead its namesake's burial ground, which was originally intended for wealthy residents; the area had established itself as a center of domestic and foreign business, steered by bankers, insurance operators, and shopkeepers who decided to build after the fire. They promoted real estate capitalism, paving the way for the Industrial Revolution (Self, 2017; Sheppard, 1998; Thorold, 1999). However, since the rich preferred to be interred in St Stephen's vault, the cemetery was occupied by poor individuals working for wealthy employers—remains of these burials were found during the excavation for No. 1 Poultry. It was in use until 1853, when, as part of the urbanization of London and the implementation of public hygiene policies, the site was cleared and eight Victorian Gothic buildings were erected, contributing to the consolidation of the neighborhood as a zone of commerce and finance (Lockyer, 2013). The most famous of these edifices was the Mappin and Webb, completed in 1870, by John Belcher. Dedicated to luxury jewelry retail, it marked the corner with an elevated tower and a clock on the main entrance, a prow redolent of the capitalist maxim 'time is money'.

Figure 3. View of the open atrium, Bucklersbury Passage, 2022. Photograph by Peter Quayle.  
Courtesy of Peter Quayle





Figure 4. Entrance to Bucklersbury Passage, from Poultry, 2022. Photograph by Peter Quayle.  
Courtesy of Peter Quayle





In 1958, Rudolph Palumbo—one of the most influential property developers in London, working on Second World War bombsites—bought the first freehold of the site, spending the next 25 years obtaining 12 other freeholds and 345 leaseholds to form the plot. In 1962, he commissioned Mies van der Rohe, a doyen of modernist architecture, to design a skyscraper. It was called Mansion House Square, in reference to the adjacent building of the 18<sup>th</sup> century, and the open space designed to precede the new structure; the name legitimized the project through the resurrection of the history of the City (Rosso, 2020; Self, 2017; Watson, 2017). Featuring a prismatic geometry, of considerable similarity to the acclaimed Seagram Building in New York, opened in 1958 by Mies, the 18-storey steel and amber glass tower was presented to the public in 1969, shortly before the architect's death. The same year, the City Corporation gave conditional approval; however, after a battle of 15 years with conservationists, since the plot was included within a Conservation Area created in 1971 and the eight Victorian Gothic buildings gained protection, it was turned down at a public inquiry in which the absence of the architect impeded presenting a convincing argument. The event, lasting over ten weeks in 1984, renewed public interest. Palumbo was supported by important architects and critics, including John Summerson and Colin St. John Wilson, who emphasized the precision of the proposal and the outstanding talent of the designer; even James Stirling, the soon-to-be author of No. 1 Poultry, declared that

some consider the design old-fashioned, reflecting ideas current in the 1960s or earlier. In my opinion this is a viewpoint influenced by the journalists, showing an over-concern for both fashion and the style of architecture that is called 'post modernist' (quoted in Self, 2017).

In turn, opponents focused on the time that had lapsed since its design, noting that functionalism, anonymity, and contextual indifference were outdated, and that the design could not be attributed to Mies because there was no confirmation of his hand in the drawings (Hyde, 2019). Terry Farrell, a pioneer of postmodernism in London, described Mansion House Square as “repetitious, boring, and joyless” (quoted in Hyde, 2019, p. 144). And, in what can be considered as the most passionate attack, King Charles III, by then Prince of Wales, during a speech censuring modernist architecture due to its lack of commitment to tradition, termed it “a tragedy”, “another giant glass stump, better suited to downtown Chicago than the City of London” (1984).

Palumbo abandoned the design and, in 1985, hired James Stirling, Michael Wilford and Associates, a firm reputed for being one of the greatest exponents of British architecture. By 1986, the office of Stirling had prepared two alternatives—scheme A retained the Mappin and Webb building, and Scheme B proposed a total redevelopment, demolishing the set of listed structures. The second option was chosen because it facilitated the creation of open plans for offices; besides, Stirling believed that keeping the Victorian Gothic facades would make “the old look derisory while making the new inappropriate” (Office Building No. 1 Poultry, 1986, p. 145). In 1988, after a second public inquiry, the project was approved by the Secretary of State, with the Inspector commenting that it “might well be a masterpiece” (Twentieth Century Society, 2015, p. 2). Nonetheless, the consent followed a High Court dispute with conservationists, ending in 1991 when the House of Lords finally approved Palumbo's plans, passed to his son, Peter Palumbo. After one more public inquiry in 1993, which decided on the closure of Bucklersbury Road, a narrow path that crossed the site, and the preservation of four mid-Victorian terracotta panels depicting the Lord Mayor's Show procession, the construction broke ground in 1994 and

finished in 1997, after more than 35 years of controversy and five years after Stirling's sudden death.

Unlike the urban openness of the first proposal, No. 1 Poultry—Stirling's last significant work—revolves around a void, a cylindrical atrium or drum, with a lightwell open to the sky. Horizontally, at ground level, it marks a pedestrian passage that unites the bordering streets, and vertically, it links the lower level directly to the terrace. To the architect, seeking an association with medieval alleys, “it had to rain all the way through” (Twentieth Century Society, 2015, p. 5); though nodding to the present, the interior walls covered in shiny tiles and the neon-colored mullions of the windows resemble digital screens, demanding simultaneous attention (Figure 3). The building contains commercial areas at concourse and ground levels and five floors of offices that amount to 10,200 square meters (110,000 square feet), with a total height similar to the majority in the vicinity. In accordance with Palumbo's request to create an imposing presence, seen from all possible angles, the design incorporates features that simultaneously provoke and amiably relate to the intricate context. Stirling wanted the building to be “one of a group of monumental buildings around Bank. Its dialogue to its neighbors is an essential consideration” (Public Inquiry Proof of Evidence, 1988, paragraphs 3.9 and 3.14, quoted in Twentieth Century Society, 2015). Like the nearby facades, No. 1 Poultry has a monumental scale and articulated stonework, with a plan defined by an axis of symmetry directed towards the junction. In this side, a clock tower, reminiscent of the Mappin and Webb building, dominates, but this sign of time now appears below balconies that protrude towards the space of the City. Its two long facades combine, eclectically, oversized cornices and industrial windows. These surfaces are defined by the layering of angular and curved forms that integrate with the historic surroundings; contrasting with the monochromatic schemes of white Portland stone and honey-colored sandstone of the neighbors, they are clad in alternating bands of salmon-pink and pastel yellow sandstone—a “lively stone”, according to Stirling (Farr, 2013, p. 168; Twentieth Century Society, 2015, p. 5).<sup>11</sup>

The building is filled with playful wit, theatricality, flamboyancy, and confident humor, in consistent irreverence. It has been compared to “a fat hen” (Mull, 2015), “a submarine” (Eldredge, 2017), “a magnified Lego toy” (Baker, 2011, p. 231), “a pastel toybox” (Fowler, 2016), and “a large wedge of ripe cheese that has had a beer glass with a Toblerone in it pushed down through its top” (Twentieth Century Society, 2015, pp. 6–7); King Charles III, with contempt, described it as a “1930s wireless set” (Hopkirk, 2022). With this design, Stirling seemed to be amusing himself as an architect as well as aiming to astound the public (Baker, 2011). In line with the postmodern agenda of reincorporating communication into architecture, No. 1 Poultry makes enticing historical quotations, referencing but not aping Egyptian entrances and Roman rostral columns (Figure 4). Beneath the inventive surface, the composition has a classical structure that, according to the Inspector of the 1998 enquiry, resonates with Edwin Lutyens's idea of architecture as a ‘high game’—an ongoing actualization of the past that turns into a design grammar, transmitted from generation to generation, “from Wren and Hawksmoor and Dance to Soane and thence to Lutyens and from him to Stirling” (Inspector's Report, Public Inquiry, paragraph 5.59, 1998, quoted in Twentieth Century Society, 2015). Although Stirling,

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<sup>11</sup> According to Geoffrey Baker, the stripes in the facades are reminiscent of the work by William Butterfield, a Victorian architect, “much admired by Stirling” (2011, pp. 230-231).

an eccentric and even arrogant character, rejected the postmodern label, he did recognize that the style of the building was in direct opposition to the abstract modernism of the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>12</sup> In 1987, at the time of designing No. 1 Poultry, he declared with irony: “if we do another building in this country, it should be colorless, perhaps grey or brown—preferably the latter—or better still maybe just invisible” (quoted in Mull, 2015).

#### 4. Escaping Boredom, Unescapable Boredom

Under this light, of an architecture intended to procure liveliness and stimulation, avoiding monotony, the relationship between boredom and suicide in No. 1 Poultry remains diffuse, with a myriad of interpretations. Escaping stereotypes of somberness, it could be construed through the history of the site, as if its chronology would be powerful enough to infuse its inhabitants with the same cadence of demise and revival—life and death—passing from one period to another until reaching moments of manifestation. Another account could be related to the intention of the architecture to amuse through many historical references and sprightly surfaces, like a kaleidoscope of bygone eras, but failing to divert immediate conflict. Combining both, voluntary death at No. 1 Poultry would appear as the rejection of all those extremely boring social values embedded in its ideation and construction—evident in the emptiness of the vertical space of the atrium, the daunting panoramic view from the terrace toward the City, and the balconies that antagonize neighboring edifices.

These voids resonate with the postmodern interest in space, the ‘spatial turn’ of the 1970s, a response to a waning sensibility that prefers diversity and multiplicity; it stands against meta-theorizations and in favor of micro-narratives while trumping the modernist fixation with time. To Fredric Jameson, for whom boredom is a “very useful instrument with which to explore the past, and to stage a meeting between it and the present”, space is “the *novum* [...] the breakthrough into new forms of life itself, the radically emergent” (1991, pp. 154, 304).<sup>13</sup> In this quest, boredom becomes “a response to the blockage of energies”, “a reaction to situations of paralysis and also, no doubt, as defense mechanism or avoidance behavior” (Jameson, 1991, p. 72). In postmodernity, Jameson asserts, boredom is a “symptom of our own existential, ideological, and cultural limits, an index of what has to be refused in the way of other people’s cultural practices and their threat to our own rationalizations about the nature and value of art” (1991, p. 72). Boredom indicates the historical present, as a disposition that informs the production of architecture; in turn, the ‘where’ of boredom and the ‘where’ of suicide are not banal interrogations about location, for they intimate the situations, “the *locus of blame*, the area of *conceptualization*”, that allow their occurrence (Shneidman, 2001a, p. 5). By extension, No. 1 Poultry—the youngest listed building in the United Kingdom, a status obtained in 2016 after a campaign led by notorious architects such as Norman Foster, Zaha Hadid, and Richard Rogers—constitutes a device that aims to overcome boredom but inevitably returns to boredom, in a self-

<sup>12</sup> Charles Jencks described No. 1 Poultry as “a well scaled Post-Modern Classicist building” (1991, p. 9).

<sup>13</sup> For Jameson, “a certain spatial turn has often seemed to offer one of the more productive ways of distinguishing postmodernism from modernism proper, whose experience of temporality—existential time, along with deep memory—it is henceforth conventional to see as dominant of the high modern” (1991, p. 163).

referential manner and, perhaps, with more intensity.<sup>14</sup> Aligned with Durkheim's affirmation that "architecture is a social phenomenon", "embodied in houses and buildings of all sorts which, once constructed, become autonomous realities" (2002, p. 278), this landmark seems to enable the profound crises of some individuals but as part of a communal life; it is a situation that evokes through its materiality.<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> In 2015, Buckley Gray Yeoman was commissioned by the current owner, investment fund Perella Weinberg, to make amendments to the building. As a response, the architectural preservation group the Twentieth Century Society campaigned for the building to be protected. After a first rejection, the building was listed as Grade II under the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990 on November 28, 2016, entry number 1428881.

<sup>15</sup> Durkheim notes that a person who commits suicide "tends to employ the means of destruction lying nearest to his hand and made familiar to him by daily use. That, for example, is why suicides by throwing one's self from a high place are oftener committed in great cities than in the country: the buildings are higher" (2002, p. 256).

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