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REVIEWS

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PATRICK GAMSBY, *HENRI LEFEBVRE, BOREDOM, AND EVERYDAY LIFE*,
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Why are we bored? Numerous artists, philosophers, and psychologists have attempted to answer this complex question and propose solutions to it, but few sociologists have addressed it. In *Henri Lefebvre, Boredom, and Everyday Life*, Patrick Gamsby seeks to systematize and expand upon Henri Lefebvre's outline for a sociology of boredom. It is referred to as an "outline" since Lefebvre never fully developed this sociological field. Nevertheless, his central thesis on the internal dialectic of mass culture is clear—Lefebvre argued that there is a link between modern mass culture and the historical uniqueness of boredom as an experience. Gamsby picks up where Lefebvre left off, constructing a triad in the spirit of Lefebvre's dialectics: boredom, modernity, and everyday life.

Gamsby observes that, much like boredom has been neglected by social scientists as a complex social problem and a legitimate subject of sociological inquiry, Lefebvre himself has also been largely ignored—especially as a theorist of everyday life and boredom, despite studying these topics throughout his career. In this sense, the book also represents a contribution to the literature on Lefebvre's forgotten and overlooked

sociological legacy and serves as a kind of homage to Lefebvre as a theorist of everyday life. The book is organized into six chapters, following Lefebvre's approach of "thematic reading of an assemblage of texts". These chapters elaborate on six key elements of Lefebvre's proposed study of boredom, constructing an intertwined constellation from scattered fragments.

In the first chapter, *The Birth of Boredom in Modernity*, Gamsby highlights Lefebvre's dialectical view of the relationship between boredom and interest, which he sees as united in opposition. Unlike the common belief that boredom arises solely from a lack of stimulation, the dialectic of mass culture generates boredom through hyperstimulation and the bombardment of information and content, thus creating a monotonous "noise". This overabundance makes it difficult to distinguish the important from the irrelevant. In addition to examining underflow and overflow, Gamsby addresses the phenomenon of "what was once interesting and is now boring", arguing that the short lifespan of interest further blurs the boundaries between these phenomena.

The second and third chapters address the absence of style in modernity, which Lefebvre identifies as another key factor in the experience of boredom. In *The Absence of Style in Everyday Life*, Gamsby explores the paradox of modernity, where the abundance of available variations and the proliferation of styles ultimately lead to dullness. He examines seemingly interesting leisure activities, such as dinner parties and traveling, revealing how dominant lifestyles are devoid of any true style. This absence of style pervades modern life, but in *The Incredible Dullness of Urbanism*, Gamsby focuses on architecture and urbanism. Drawing on Lefebvre's theoretical framework of the production of space, he examines how dominant functionalist tendencies in urbanism—such as Haussmann and Le Corbusier's planning projects or the wave of “new town” developments—contribute to the monotony of modern everyday life. These spaces, created to combat boredom, ironically become archetypes of it, shaped by mundane aesthetics and the rationalization of urban space.

In the fourth chapter, *The Endless Yawn of the Suburbs*, Gamsby shifts focus from urban cores to suburban peripheries. He examines suburban sprawl, spaces of consumption such as shopping centers, and everyday suburban practices like commuting and long car rides, highlighting the emptiness of suburban routines. Gamsby contrasts this dullness with the vibrant yet monotonous architecture of European urban centers, showing how both spaces contribute to boredom in different ways.

The fifth and sixth chapters address production and consumption, tackling the “industry of culture” and the “culture industry” in reverse order. In *The Emptiness of Consumption*, Gamsby explores how the dialectic of boredom and interest is linked to consumption. He vividly illustrates how the standardization of popular music and its use as

background noise in consumption spaces transforms amusement into boredom. Speaking of the “consumption of emptiness”, Gamsby draws on Lefebvre's notions of the absence of style and art, emphasizing the need for everyday life to transform into a work of art through an authentic style of living. The final chapter, *The Numbness of Work*, addresses the boredom of bureaucratic labor and the repetitive routines of white-collar work, as well as workers' subtle strategies to reclaim moments of leisure during worktime, such as extended breaks or pretending to work, thereby reasserting their autonomy.

While Gamsby's attempt to build upon Lefebvre's outline for a sociology of boredom is ambitious, the book reveals notable shortcomings. A substantial portion is devoted to reviewing literature and analyzing other theorists, such as Heidegger and Adorno, rather than focusing on Lefebvre himself. Lefebvre's perspectives appear sporadically, through brief quotes and passing remarks, serving more as supplementary insights than central elements of the discussion. Additionally, Gamsby's sharp critique of Laurie Langbauer's *Novels of Everyday Life*—though valuable—interrupts the flow of the second chapter, making it difficult to distinguish his original contributions from his analysis of existing literature.

Despite these limitations, the book's most significant contribution lies in Gamsby's development of a triad of boredom-interest-utopia, introduced in the concluding chapter. Rooted in Lefebvre's Marxist perspective, this triad views boredom not merely as a social problem but as a quest for meaningful content and a potential driver of revolutionary change in everyday life. Although underdeveloped, this Lefebvrian utopian optimism offers a promising foundation for further conceptualization.

Another strength of the book is its organization, which systematically

assembles scattered fragments of Lefebvre's studies on boredom, modernity, and everyday life into a cohesive structure. Written in accessible language, the book appeals not only to students and

researchers in fields like critical social theory, urban studies, and sociology but also to general readers curious about the phenomenon of boredom.

