

# ‘#BOREDWITHMEG’: GENDERED BOREDOM AND NETWORKED MEDIA

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**Abstract** This article seeks to theorise boredom in the wake of the new technological modes of capture and commodification that have emerged in a digital network culture, by focusing on the popular ‘What to do When You’re Bored’ sub-genre of YouTube video tutorials that are addressed largely to female teenage audiences. Situating itself in relation to the fields of boredom studies, critical attention studies and feminist media studies, the article reads these videos as performing a variety of affective labour that is increasingly required of gendered subjects in the so-called ‘attention economy’ of twenty-first century media. As I will argue, platforms such as YouTube construct users above all as boredom managers - agents who are responsible for, and capable of coordinating, the affective texture of their own experience as it unfolds in real time. And yet, as I will suggest, this discursive construction of boredom overlooks the significant role that such media play, not only in producing and intensifying new cultural forms of tedium, but also in capturing and modulating the subject’s affective experience before she becomes aware of it. Reflecting on the blatant gendering of affect in these YouTube tutorials through the figure of the teenage girl, I go on to ask why this work of boredom management should fall so resoundingly to young women to perform. Why has the figure of the teenage girl been rendered so excessively visible in these YouTube tutorials as an ideal conduit for the monitoring and self-management of twenty-first century boredom?

**Keywords** boredom, critical attention studies, feminist media studies, YouTube.

Boredom has come to occupy a central, and yet vexed position within twenty-first century cultural life. In the popular culture of networked entertainment, sites such as *Bored Panda*, *Boreburn* and *Boredom Therapy* have consolidated boredom as the ultimate enemy of Internet ‘fun’. Positioning boredom as a global epidemic that may strike anyone, anywhere, at any moment, these sites promise to dissolve boredom in an endless stream of ‘funny gifs, videos, and pics’;<sup>1</sup> and by providing access to ‘must-read viral content’.<sup>2</sup> *Boredom Therapy*, for example, adopts a cod-philanthropic register to inform its readers that the ‘media startup’ organisation was founded ‘with the goal of fighting boredom worldwide’ by engaging the public with ‘incredibly shareable content’ and ‘inspiring and extraordinary stories from around the world’.<sup>3</sup> In a similar vein, the popular microblogging and social networking site *Tumblr* entices

1. *Damnbored* n.d., <http://damnbored.com/> [Accessed 4.11.16].

2. *Bored Panda* n.d., <https://www.facebook.com/pg/boredpanda/about/> [Accessed 4.11.16].

3. *Boredom Therapy* 2017, <http://boredomtherapy.com/about/> [Accessed 13.2.17].

potential users to sign up to their service, with the bold promise that, as a subscriber, 'You'll never be bored again'.<sup>4</sup>

Like many other forms of entertainment media in the twenty-first century, these sites discursively construct boredom as an unwanted experience that can be chased away through networked modes of communication. And yet, this promise - that boredom can effectively be banished once and for all through our media streams - is routinely contradicted by the sheer volume of boredom-related hashtags that recur on a daily basis across these same networking platforms. Indeed, hashtags such as #bored asf, #snapchatmeimbored, #boredomkills or #boredomstrikes are now firmly-entrenched within the affective vocabulary of Internet cultures. In its recent guise as a popular hashtag, #boredom indexes the more or less ubiquitous - and yet often obscured - condition of collective lethargy, flat affectivity, and stalled anticipation that we routinely experience, express and seek to displace through our engagements with networked media.

In the twenty-first century, digital technologies - and the capitalist structures and drives with which they are increasingly enmeshed - have come to play a vital role in mediating affective experience, including the experience of being bored. This article will consider how boredom is routinely monitored, modulated and produced in a digital network culture, by focusing on the extremely popular 'What to do When You're Bored' sub-genre of YouTube videos, which are produced by young female YouTubers for an audience of mainly teenage girls. Framing the experience of boredom as both an everyday reality of adolescent life and as a lurking affective danger; these videos model a range of activities that are intended to alleviate or to chase away incipient feelings of boredom. Situating itself in relation to the fields of boredom studies, critical attention studies and feminist media studies, the article reads these videos as performing a variety of affective labour that is increasingly required of gendered subjects in the so-called 'attention economy' of twenty-first century media.<sup>5</sup> As I will argue, platforms such as YouTube construct users above all as boredom managers - agents who are responsible for, and capable of coordinating, the affective texture of their own experience as it unfolds in real time. And yet, as I will suggest, this discursive construction of boredom overlooks the significant role that such media play, not only in producing and intensifying new cultural forms of tedium, but also in capturing and modulating the subject's affective experience before she becomes aware of it. Reflecting on the blatant gendering of affect in these YouTube tutorials through the figure of the teenage girl, I go on to ask why

4. Tumblr n.d., <https://www.tumblr.com/register> [Accessed 10.8.17].

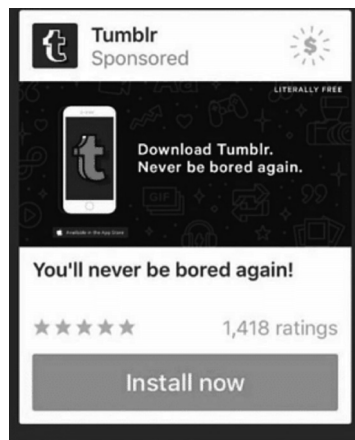


Fig. 1 Tumblr, 'You'll never be bored again', August 2017

5. Michael E. Gardiner and Julian Jason Haladyn (eds), *Boredom Studies Reader: Frameworks and Perspectives*, London, Routledge, 2017; Kenneth Rogers, *The Attention Complex: Media, Archeology, Method*, Palgrave Macmillan, New York, 2014. Herafter Rogers); Jonathon Beller, *The Cinematic Mode of Production: Attention Economy and the Society of the Spectacle*, Dartmouth College Press, New Hampshire, Hanover, 2006.

this work of boredom management should fall so resoundingly to young women to perform. Why has the figure of the teenage girl been rendered so excessively visible in these YouTube tutorials as an ideal conduit for the monitoring and self-management of boredom? Addressing these questions requires a careful evaluation of the constellation of relations between boredom, attention and gendered subjectivity as these are being (re)articulated in a twenty-first century context. At the same time, it requires a consideration of how human experience - including the experience of feeling bored - is being affected by nonhuman ways of sensing, and making sense of, the world.

#### 'NO ONE IS BORED, EVERYTHING IS BORING': BOREDOM AND THE ATTENTION ECONOMY OF TWENTY-FIRST CENTURY MEDIA

Writing in 2014, Mark Fisher argues that the paradox of boredom today is that while 'the boring is ubiquitous ... no one is bored'.<sup>6</sup> He notes that feelings of boredom that we once recognised as challenges, injunctions or opportunities have been effectively eliminated by the advent of the smartphone and its capacities for constant distraction. As Fisher remarks, the 'intensive, 24-7 environment of capitalist cyberspace' has replaced the boredom of empty or idle time 'with a seamless flow of low-level stimulus', such that today there is 'neither an excuse nor an opportunity to be bored'. In Fisher's account, the oppressive but potentially productive experience of 'empty absorption' in 'boredom 1.0' has been subsumed by a culture of compulsive communication, in which critical reflection and contemplative absorption are side-lined in favour of the injunction to interact, generate content and join the debate, to the extent that '[n]o one is bored, everything is boring'.

While Fisher seems to contrast the contemporary shallow boredom of digital networks with the profound phenomenological experience of classical boredom, it is important to note that boredom is a highly ambivalent conceptual category, which has been assigned a multiplicity of sometimes contradictory values across its critical history. As a conceptual category that is, according to Patrice Petro, 'at once empty and overflowing', boredom has been interpreted as a passive expression of 'sameness, disinterest, and apathy - a resignation to the status quo', but also as involving 'an uncomfortable yet creative self-consciousness', which might yield 'resistance and opposition'.<sup>7</sup> In the period of modernity, Walter Benjamin, Siegfried Kracauer and Martin Heidegger interpreted boredom as both a symptom and as a valuable critical resource. Capturing boredom's subjective dullness and its creative potential, Walter Benjamin describes boredom as both the 'dream bird that hatches the egg of experience', and as a 'warm gray fabric lined on the inside with the most lustrous and colourful of silks'.<sup>8</sup> Siegfried Kracauer writes about both shallow and profound experiences of boredom: there is the 'vulgar boredom of daily drudgery' that primes 'little shopgirls' and other modern subjects to seek out more 'pleasant' leisure pursuits, in an attempt to 'alleviate the

6. Mark Fisher, 'No One is Bored, Everything is Boring', *Visual Artists Ireland*, 2014, <http://visualartists.ie/articles/mark-fisher-one-bored-everything-boring/> [Accessed 4 August 2014].

7. Patrice Petro, *Aftershocks of the New: Feminism and Film History*, New Brunswick, New Jersey and London, Rutgers University Press, pp87, 89. (Hereafter Petro).

8. Walter Benjamin, *Selected Writings: 1935-1938*, E. Jephcott et al. (tr), H. Eiland and Michael W. Jennings (eds), Cambridge, Massachusetts and London England, Harvard University Press, 2002, p149; *The Arcades Project*, H. Eiland and K. McLaughlin (tr), R. Tiedemann (ed), Harvard University Press, Cambridge, Massachusetts and London, England 1999, p105.

boredom that leads to the amusement that produces the boredom'.<sup>9</sup> But beyond this perpetual feedback loop of vulgar boredom, Kracauer also alludes to an 'extraordinary, radical boredom' which might interrupt the 'state of permanent receptivity' that is demanded of subjects in the context of modernity, allowing them to experience time in a different way. Perhaps most memorably, Martin Heidegger posited 'profound boredom' - an experience of being left empty and being left in limbo - as the 'fundamental mood' of philosophy, which attunes individuals to the 'authentic' nature of their existence in the world, by exposing them to a temporalised process of self-reflection.<sup>10</sup> For these theorists of modern boredom, the criticality that is borne out of a slow and painful process of self-reflection serves as the crucial hinge between the shallow, complicit boredom of mass entertainment and the more 'legitimate' experience of existential boredom.

While for thinkers such as Kracauer and Heidegger, boredom was still understood to offer a space for critical reflection, reverie or revolt, it is precisely the subject's capacity to *feel bored* that, for Fisher and others, is seemingly being eroded in the era of digital networks. Fisher's account is useful for the way that it telescopes the range of contradictory claims that cluster around the experience of boredom in an age of digital networks: boredom is everywhere and nowhere; boredom dominates as a collective affective sensibility, at the same time that human subjects are losing the ability to reflect on, or even *feel* it; boredom coerces our involvement within networked circuits of data and information-processing - even though we are aware that such activities are profoundly tedious and even pointless - but without offering the opportunities for critical reflection or cultural resistance that were once delegated to boredom. Indeed, what Fisher's account of boredom 2.0 gestures towards, but doesn't fully grapple with, is the fundamental shift in human experience that has been catalysed by the emergence of twenty-first century media technologies that increasingly operate below or beyond the thresholds of human perception. As Mark Hansen and other media scholars have suggested, such technologies have brought about a decisive shift in the economy of experience, in which 'our (human) experience becomes increasingly conditioned and impacted by processes that we have no direct experience of, no direct mode of access to, and no potential awareness of'.<sup>11</sup> Whereas previous media formats such as photography and cinema correlated '*directly* to human modes of sensory experience', twenty-first century media operate 'without any necessary - let alone any direct - connection to human sense perception and conscious awareness' (pp6, 37). As many media scholars have likewise pointed out, this emerging regime of networked media operates through new micro-temporalities, which place increasing demands on human subjects to act in the absence of the time required 'to receive, reflect, and respond'.<sup>12</sup> In this context, Dominic Pettman argues, 'the very *capacity* for critical thinking, or enabling self-reflection, is being steadily eroded, tweet by tweet' (p49). Likewise, Mark Hansen suggests that 'conscious deliberation

9. Siegfried Kracauer, *The Mass Ornament: Weimar Essays*, T.Y. Levin (ed and tr), Cambridge, Massachusetts and London, Harvard University Press, England 1995, pp331, 296.

10. Martin Heidegger, *The Fundamental Concepts of Metaphysics: World, Finitude, Solitude*, Bloomington, Indiana University Press, 1995, pp144-148.

11. Mark B. N. Hansen, *Feed-Forward: On the Future of Twenty-First Century Media*, Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 2014, p8. (Hereafter Hansen).

12. Dominic Pettman, *Infinite Distraction*, London, Polity, 2016, p134. (Hereafter Pettman)

is increasingly side-lined from the scene of cultural solicitation', and is repurposed to function as a part of a 'feed-forward' circuit, in which the human subject's conscious awareness of any given situation is produced only after the fact - once their affective involvement in such circuits has already been solicited and modulated. Because of this, Hansen notes, 'the impact of twenty-first century media is and can only be felt *indirectly* and *after the fact* by higher-order modes of human experience, and only then in large part because of feed-forward loops that literally mediate the data of causal efficacy ... for future consciousness to *factor into its activity to come*' (p58). In this scenario, human experience is defined increasingly by 'a certain degree of cognitive opacity as our consciousnesses perpetually - and vainly - struggle to "catch up" to what is happening' (p59). This cognitive opacity is mined by media industries in order to extract the maximum profit from time-pressure and from the difference between human and machinic perceptual abilities. For Hansen:

It is precisely because today's data and culture industries can bypass consciousness and go directly to behavioral, biometric, and environmental data that they are increasingly able to capture our 'attention' without any awareness on our part: precisely because it places conscious deliberation and response out of play, microtemporal behavioral data that evades the oversight of consciousness allows today's data and culture industries to accomplish their goal of tightening the circuit between solicitation and response (*ibid*).

This side-lining of conscious deliberation and the re-tooling of attention and affect by contemporary media also has important implications for the way that we experience and understand boredom in the twenty-first century. In recent years, under the critical rubric of boredom studies, scholars have begun to ask how the experience and understanding of boredom has been impacted by twenty-first century trends, such as the emergence of real-time streaming platforms and imperatives to continuously curate and comment on one's experience online;<sup>13</sup> by neoliberal logics of self-management;<sup>14</sup> by the increasing erosion of divisions between work and play in screen-based media;<sup>15</sup> and by the 'real subsumption' of human affect in an age of 'semiocapital'.<sup>16</sup> As these commentators have noted, twenty-first century trends amplify and extend many of the historical legacies of modern boredom, but also put significant pressure on the 'profound' variety of existential boredom that thinkers such as Kracauer and Heidegger identified as a critical response to the modern culture of acceleration and mass entertainment. Whereas the value of 'profound boredom' for thinkers of modernity was premised on the distinctly human capacities for self-reflection and time-consciousness that the mood was understood to index, it is precisely such capacities that are targeted and restructured by twenty-first century media. Downgraded as a privileged

13. See David M. Berry, *Critical Theory and the Digital*, New York and London, Bloomsbury Academic, 2014, pp197-205 (Hereafter Berry); Martin Hand, '#Boredom: Technology, Acceleration, and Connected Presence in the Social Media Age', in M.E. Gardiner and J.J. Haladyn (eds), *Boredom Studies Reader: Frameworks and Perspectives*, Routledge, London 2017.

14. Mark Kingwell, 'Bored, Addicted, or Both: How We Use Social Media Now', in C.G. Prado (ed), *Social Media and Your Brain: Web-Based Communication is Changing How We Think and Express Ourselves*, Santa Barbara, Praeger, 2017. (Hereafter Kingwell).

15. Scott C. Richmond, 'Vulgar Boredom, or What Andy Warhol Can Teach Us about *Candy Crush*', *Journal of Visual Culture* 13, 1 (2015), pp21-39.

16. Michael E. Gardiner, 'The Multitude Strikes Back?: Boredom in an Age of Semiocapital', *New Formations*, 82, 2014, pp29-46.

form of self-reflection and as an existential mood that indexes extended circuits of lived experience, feelings of boredom now play an important role within the short term, 'media-assisted, capitalist operationalization of our desire' (Hansen, p58). As I will explore in what follows, networked media increasingly target boredom within these micro-temporal circuits, downplaying its value as a mode of critical introspection, and repurposing it instead as an agent of value extraction for capitalist industries. They do so in part, as I have suggested, through the discursive framing of boredom as an affective threat that must be swiftly discharged through media engagement and interaction.

But they also intervene at a more primary or structural level, affecting the experience of boredom through the new relationships that these technologies broker between affect, deliberation and action. Indeed, we can see how twenty-first century media technologies work to bracket out the kind of deep contemplative absorption associated with profound boredom, by exploiting the gap between what Hansen calls the 'operational present of sensibility' and the temporalised work of conscious awareness and reflection (p4). This 'feed-forward' structure ensures, as Fisher suggests, that we can only recognise boredom as a feeling that belongs to 'us' after it has been sensed, captured, analysed and modulated by twenty-first century technologies, and subsequently fed forward for us to recognise as 'our own'. The relationship between sensory experience and cognitive reflection is thus re-tooled through contemporary networked media, such that our awareness of 'feeling' bored never coincides (temporally) or aligns (qualitatively) with the affective sensations and intensities that structure it. Put bluntly, networked media work to ensure that by the time we recognise that we are bored, we are always-already-no-longer bored - or at least not in quite the same way.

Crucially, in the emerging literature around critical attention studies, such anxieties often converge around adolescents and teenagers, who are mobilised to illustrate concerns about shrinking attention spans, and to rehearse arguments about what happens when the human capacity to endure boredom is eroded in an era of digital networks. According to scholars such as N. Katherine Hayles and Bernard Stiegler, the new forms of 'hyper' or 'short-term' attention that have emerged in the twenty-first century raise significant questions about 'trans-generational ways of knowing' that impact on the very foundations of humanistic inquiry (Rogers, n.p.). According to Hayles and Stiegler, what we are witnessing in this context is nothing more than a battle for the intelligence of youth, against the 'short circuited' attention and low thresholds for boredom fostered by new digital technologies.<sup>17</sup> Channelling these same fears about the impact of digital technologies on a younger generation's ability to tolerate feelings of boredom, Sherry Turkle notes, 'What concerns me as a developmental psychologist is watching children grow in this new world where being bored is something that never has to be tolerated for a moment'.<sup>18</sup> As Turkle suggests, concerns about both

17. N. Katherine Hayles, *How We Think: Digital Media and Contemporary Technogenesis*, Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 2012; Bernard Stiegler, *Taking Care of Youth and the Generations*, Stanford, Stanford University Press, 2010.

18. Sherry Turkle, n.d., *Sherry Turkle - Interviews and Profiles*: <http://web.mit.edu/sturkle/www/interviews.html> [Accessed 7.10.17].



19. Adam Phillips, *On Kissing, Tickling, and Being Bored: Essays on the Unexamined Life*, Cambridge, Massachusetts, Harvard University Press, 1993, p68. (Hereafter Phillips).

20. Angela McRobbie, *Be Creative*, Cambridge, England, Polity Press, 2016, p95.

21. Jonathan Beller, 'Wagers Within the Image: Rise of Visuality, Transformation of Labour, Aesthetic Regimes', *Culture Machine* 13 (2012), pp19, 10.

attention and boredom converge around teenagers in particular because of the important role that boredom has long been understood to play within the formation of subjectivity during the period of adolescence. In his influential account of boredom, psychoanalyst Adam Phillips links adolescent boredom to a specific experience of temporality, defining it as a 'state of suspended anticipation in which things are started and nothing begins' and as a 'mood of diffuse restlessness which contains that most absurd and paradoxical wish, the wish for a desire'.<sup>19</sup> According to Phillips's psychoanalytic reading, the negative affective state of suspended anticipation that boredom indexes may be painful, but it is through the temporal process of enduring it that the groundwork for meaningful and sustained future encounters is secured. As Mark Kingwell has recently suggested, this psychoanalytic discourse on boredom shares significant ground with previous philosophical accounts of boredom, both of which view it as a 'crisis of selfhood and desire that must be embraced' (Kingwell, n.p.). In the twenty-first century, a growing sense of crisis relating to the human capacities for attention and boredom has converged in strategic ways around the media practices of teenagers, whose capacity for sustained critical reflection is imagined to be most at risk in the dangerous new regime of hyper-attention.

I want to suggest that there are also significant gendered implications of these debates, which are often overlooked in the critical literature on boredom studies, and within wider debates about the attention and affect economies of contemporary media. This short-sightedness about the role of gender in recent scholarship has been acknowledged by Angela McRobbie and Jonathan Beller in their respective interventions into debates about affective labour and the post-Fordist attention economy. As McRobbie notes, much of the recent work in the field of radical political theory that has addressed the centrality of immaterial and affective labour within the context of post-Fordism has largely failed to examine the significance of gender, in spite of the fact that what is premised in these trends is a 'feminization of work'.<sup>20</sup> In a similar vein, Jonathan Beller writes that the emerging scholarship on the attention economy of contemporary media has often entailed either a sidelining or an outright dismissal of the 'racial and gendered formations' that underpin the current re-tooling of attention, dismissing such identity markers as 'somehow epiphenomenal' to the process.<sup>21</sup> As Beller insists, dynamics of race and gender are not incidental, but rather *constitutive* of the technologies that emerge to manage and discipline attention in the twenty-first century. Although the technical operations that are used to extract value from work and attention continue to evolve in the twenty-first century, the gendered and racial dynamics of the political economy that drives them have remained largely unchanged. As Beller notes, 'the post-Fordist attention economy still depends upon the patriarchal, white-supremacist, imperialist organisation of the global imaginary to maximise returns' (p13). At the same time, it also depends increasingly on the affective labour of female subjects, as Angela McRobbie

suggests when she claims that 'the gender of post-Fordism is female' (p94). With these claims in mind, my article will now turn to a reading of boredom management as a vital form of affective labour that is routinely undertaken by teenage girls in the attention economy of twenty-first-century media. As I will suggest, the gendering of boredom through the figure of the teenage girl plays an important role in the way that emergent networked technologies seek to capture and capitalise on the attention of teenage audiences. Young girls are called on to manage boredom in this context *precisely because* they are the subjects who are *most required* to embody and produce value from boredom in an age of networks.

## #BOREDWITHMEG: BOREDOM MANAGEMENT AS AFFECTIVE LABOUR

The series of 'What to Do When You're Bored' videos made by megastar YouTuber Meg DeAngelis on her MayBaby YouTube channel address boredom as a commonplace, if decidedly unwelcome, experience for teenagers. Since July 2014, Meg has uploaded five boredom-themed videos to her YouTube channel, including: 'What to Do When You're Bored!', 'What to Do When You're Bored', 'What Girls Do When They're Bored!', 'Weird Things Bored People Do', and 'What to Do When You're Bored During Summer Break'.<sup>22</sup> Each of the videos, which range between six to ten minutes in length, follow a familiar structure, in which Meg briefly introduces and comments on her own experience of feeling bored, before guiding viewers through a numbered list of activities that they can try out when they are bored in a variety of different circumstances. Although Meg's videos explore a range of activities through which boredom might be successfully dispelled - for instance, building a fort, eating donuts, trying to see if you can lick your elbow - those that are either enabled or enhanced by networked media platforms are given a special priority in the MayBaby universe - for example starting a YouTube channel, downloading and exploring 'The Hunt' social media style app, researching via the internet, and then re-creating, the weird things people do when they are bored. Indeed, Meg's status as a self-styled 'social media superstar' - with (at the time of writing) over 5.5 million YouTube subscribers, 2.2 million Instagram followers, and a range of corporate sponsorship deals - is secured through, and depends on, her ability to engage the attention of her target audience of potentially bored teenagers, and to encourage clicks, likes, comments, and other forms of networked participation and consumption.<sup>23</sup>

It is important to note that while Meg's boredom videos are amongst the most popular of all the YouTube videos that address boredom in this way (ranging from around 2.1 million to 5.4 million views, and from 67,000 to 274,000 likes), they conform to what is a fairly standard generic formula that can be found in a whole host of other YouTube videos made by, or featuring, *female* teenagers, such as 'What Kaelyn Does When She is Bored!', 'What

22. MayBaby, 'What To Do When You're Bored!', 6.7.14: [www.youtube.com/watch?v=7edeMtCA6VU&t=424s](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7edeMtCA6VU&t=424s); 'What To Do When You're Bored', 13.12.14: [www.youtube.com/watch?v=uqv2t1LV5s&t=1s](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uqv2t1LV5s&t=1s); WTDWYB, 25.4.15: [www.youtube.com/watch?v=vEDqATXyM1s&t=422s](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vEDqATXyM1s&t=422s); 'Weird Things Bored People Do', 6.3.16: [www.youtube.com/watch?v=mRZ3CCFJQok&t=44s](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mRZ3CCFJQok&t=44s); 'WTDWYB During Summer Break', 18.6.16: [www.youtube.com/watch?v=yHt-jEZIVX8&t=11s](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yHt-jEZIVX8&t=11s) [All Accessed 23.11.16].

23. Meg DeAngelis, 'How to Become a Social Media Superstar with Meg DeAngelis' [Podcast], *Film Talk*, 16.2.16: <http://filmtalkpodcast.com/meg-deangelis/> [Accessed 18.12.16].



24. SevenSuperGirls, 'What Kaelyn Does When She is Bored!', 25.9.15: [www.youtube.com/watch?v=r1XC F7hqn7M](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=r1XC F7hqn7M); Alexa Mae, 'What to do When You're Bored at Home', 3.10.16: [www.youtube.com/watch?v=Jz3dcdsUjTo](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Jz3dcdsUjTo); Annie Rose, '10 Things to do when you are BORED this FALL, WITHOUT leaving the HOUSE', 6.10.16: [www.youtube.com/watch?v=q1Ebj4nSPvo&t=1s](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=q1Ebj4nSPvo&t=1s) [All Accessed 18.12.16].

25. Anita Harris, *Future Girl: Young Women in the Twenty-First Century*, London, Routledge, 2003, p6.

26. Jacqueline Darcy, 'Emotion Work: Considering Gender in Digital Labor', *Feminist Media Studies*, 16, 2, p365.

27. Brooke Erin Duffy, *(Not) Getting Paid to Do What You Love: Gender, Social Media, and Aspirational Work*, New Haven and London, Yale University Press, 2017, p10.

28. Don Slater quoted in Duffy, p17.

29. Amy Shields Dobson, *Postfeminist Digital Cultures: Femininity, Social Media, and Self-Representation*, New York, Palgrave Macmillan, 2015, pp1-2.

to Do When You're Bored At HOME!', and '10 Things to Do When you are BORED this FALL WITHOUT leaving the HOUSE'.<sup>24</sup> The gendering of boredom through the figure of the young girl is a very significant part of these YouTube tutorials, and plays a role within the wider mechanisms of discipline and control that structure power relations in a digital network society. As Anita Harris argues, 'Young women have taken on a special role in the production of the late modern social order and its values. They have become a focus for the construction of an ideal late modern subject who is self-making, resilient, and flexible'.<sup>25</sup> In the attention economy of networked media, women and young girls are increasingly called upon to produce value for media corporations, through the deployment of highly 'gendered skills of flexibility, networking and affective labor'.<sup>26</sup> As Jacqueline Darcy notes, although women have 'historically been tasked with affective and relational work', this expectation for women to perform emotion management 'is intensified in the digital realm' (ibid). It is important to add here that such expectations have expanded in the twenty-first century to include younger women and girls, who are a key demographic for platforms such as YouTube and Instagram. While social media platforms have created exciting new prospects for entrepreneurial young women - aspirations for attainment that are 'often physically embodied in the blogger, the vlogger, or the Instagrammer'<sup>27</sup> - these opportunities are accompanied by new forms of surveillance and discipline, which define the terms of their success. As scholars such as Wendy Chun, Brooke Erin Duffy and Amy Shields Dobson have suggested, widespread cultural anxieties about digital culture have also been framed in gendered terms, piggybacking onto longstanding stereotypes of teenage girls as either promiscuous and vulnerable, or 'whimsical and inconstant, flighty and narcissistic', and hence in need of protection from the lurking dangers of networked sociality.<sup>28</sup> As Dobson notes, 'girls and young women are seen as active users and media producers in the social media landscape, but they are often judged as being active in the "wrong" ways - thought to be engaged in projects of self-representation driven by vanity, or incessant communication driven by insecurities and trivialities'.<sup>29</sup> The attention of young girls is thus commodified as an important source of value for media corporations, at the same time as it is derided through perceptions of girl culture as trivial, shallow, narcissistic and flighty. In turn, such perceptions function to disguise the affective labour of boredom management as so much internet 'fun', reproducing instead the problematic idea that the young, entrepreneurial women who increasingly sustain the post-Fordist economy through their immaterial labour are only in it for the 'lolz'. The trenchant reality of this situation, as I will argue, is that while the post-Fordist attention economy feeds from the young girl's ability to perform the affective work of boredom management, it also frustrates a mobilisation of boredom as an active critical response.

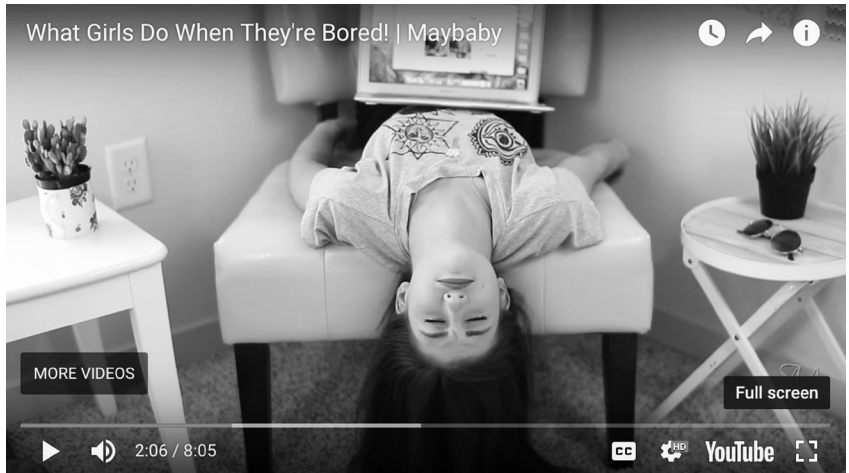
The boredom-themed videos that I examine in this essay are concrete

examples of the kind of affective labour that has been outsourced to young women in the context of post-Fordism. By relegating the affective labour of boredom management to young girls, these videos also re-activate historical gendered divisions between ‘a higher-valued form of boredom understood as male and a lower-valued boredom understood as female’ (Petro, p89). As Patrice Petro and Allison Pease have suggested, this specifically gendered understanding of boredom helped to catalyse important feminist responses in the early twentieth century, amongst modernist writers who described boredom as both a ‘chronological descriptor of women’s lived experience in time, but also as the dilemma of accessing a subjectivity that was without previous definition’.<sup>30</sup> As such, in literary modernism, boredom serves as an important ‘gauge of the feminist struggle’ and the ‘tremendous difficulty women experienced in realizing and pursuing their desires, and thus in realizing themselves as anything other than bored’ (Pease, p10). These videos and their treatment of boredom as an experience through which young women learn to navigate their new place within a post-Fordist attention economy suggest significant parallels with the context of literary modernism and the nascent feminist politics of boredom. However, as I will argue, as examples of boredom management, these videos work to neutralise the critical work of boredom and to disable it as a politicised feminist response. A conspicuous but key feature of all of these videos is that while they are devoted to the topic of boredom, and call on a shared understanding of the experience amongst their audiences, they do not prioritise the recording function of the YouTube platform in order to capture and reflect on the sensory and affective processes at stake in an experience of boredom. On the contrary, although the videos use boredom as a seemingly universal point of identification for their audiences, the sometimes complex and ambivalent sensations, feelings and thoughts to which boredom might give rise are rarely, if ever, alluded to, and never addressed in any great detail; instead, these videos evoke boredom only briefly for the sake of moving viewers past it. In these videos, then, boredom is targeted precisely for its value as a transitional state; videos such as these capture the attention of teenage audiences by intensifying and capitalising on the ‘wish for a desire’ that Phillips suggests is inherent in the mood, and by rapidly supplying the various authorised forms that this desire might take. The temporality through which these videos work plays an important role in this process: rather than highlighting boredom’s value as a mode of hesitant introspection, these videos seek to rework its temporality within the decidedly short-term circuits of networked desire, whose ephemeral objects of attention are endlessly re-invented and re-invested.

Meg’s videos stage-manage this temporality of boredom in particularly interesting ways. While the bulk of the running time in her videos is given over to illustrating activities through which her viewers might avoid boredom, they tend to feature brief segments in which Meg verbally describes, or even physically acts out, what it feels like to be bored.

30. Allison Pease, *Modernism, Feminism and the Culture of Boredom*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2012, pviii.

*Figs. 2-4, 'What Girls Do When They're Bored! | Maybaby'*



These segments call on audiences' previous familiarity with boredom, but also work to shape specific ways of thinking about and responding to it. In her first video, 'What to Do When You're Bored!', Meg addresses her audience by saying: 'Hey Guys, it's Meg. So, it's summer, and I don't know about you, but I'm bored of being bored because being bored is really boring; and also, I'm bored of being told that I'm a boring person, because I'm bored. You feel me?' What is noteworthy about this preamble is the emphatically tautological description of boredom it provides: she feels bored of being bored because being bored is boring. On the level of content, Meg's description - and the expression of slightly disgusted consternation that accompanies it - evokes boredom's condition of stalled agency, and the feelings of 'dreary agitation' and 'cramped restlessness' that it often arouses (Phillips, p74). These sequences gesture towards a phenomenology of boredom, in which Meg's vlog camera is charged with the task of conveying what boredom feels like - picturing the sensations, bodily postures and affective intensities that are



implicated in the experience. However, these performances are relentlessly stage-managed, in ways that are clearly intended to shore up the idea of the bored subject as bad subject: the condition of being bored is so unambiguously negative that it threatens to transfer its abject negativity onto the subject, defining the bored subject as boring - a quality that is clearly not sought-after within the MayBaby universe. In a similar vein, Meg's second video on 'What to Do When You're Bored' begins with her account of a 'special kind of bored' when 'you know you have stuff to do, but those things that you have to do are also boring ...and I know that if I do those things they'll just be boring too and I'll stay bored'. As with the tautological definition of boredom offered in Meg's first video, this evocation of boredom hints at the feeling of temporal suspension implicit in boredom: the idea of 'staying bored' evokes an image of stalled anticipation that continually circles back around to more boredom, rather than moving past, or away from, it. Like networked entertainment sites such as *Boreburn* and *Boredom Therapy*, these videos mark out boredom as the enemy of enjoyment, framing it as a problem that can and should be expediently managed through networked forms of attention and interaction. By contrasting the bored subject with the perpetually entertained subject, the videos also construct Meg's highly idealised lifestyle as both desirable and attainable for her teenage viewers. While the boredom-avoidance advice offered by Meg may seem relatively mundane, it serves an important role in establishing Meg's authority as a lifestyle expert - someone who embodies the image of the 'good life' to which her audience can aspire. As Tania Lewis notes of the emergence of 'lifestyle media' in the early twenty-first century, '[w]hat lifestyle programming sells to the audience are not just products but ways of living and managing one's life'.<sup>31</sup> As such, she notes, lifestyle experts 'represent a mode of collective identity that brings together optimal forms of consumption with a kind of rationalization or informationalization of everyday life'. Caught up within this informationalization of everyday life, these videos may allow us a glimpse at boredom's downbeat sensibilities, but they do so in

31. Tania Lewis, *Smart Living: Lifestyle Media and Popular Expertise*, Oxford and New York, Peter Lang, 2008, p138.

order to frame boredom as an object for lifestyle management - as an unruly feeling which must be properly addressed by their teenage viewers if they are to avoid being reduced to the abject status of the 'boring bored' person.

But while these descriptions evoke the idea of being bored, and mark it out as an unambiguously unwelcome experience, the dominant affective mode through which the videos perform boredom is anything but dull and listless. Rather, the videos double down on their promise of dissipating boredom right from the very start, through the excessively positive affectivity that they work to produce at every level. This positivity is communicated through Meg's distinctively hyperactive delivery style, which contrasts starkly with the performed boredom that we see in the opening sequences. She often remarks in these and other videos, for example, that she has had 'way too much coffee, again', and frequently speaks so quickly that her thought processes seem to lag behind her stream of words, to the extent that she often loses her place or gets tongue-tied. Boredom's sense of dullness is also countered by the bright, candy-coloured mise-en-scène of her bedroom settings, which are frequently updated and taken as the subject of other YouTube tutorials, such as '10 DIY Room Décor Project Ideas you NEED to try!', and 'DIY Room Décor Tumblr Room Makeover!'.<sup>32</sup> The fast-paced editing style and quirky sound cues also play an important role in affectively modulating boredom by eliminating any sense of dead time, and producing a sense of pace, rhythm and future-oriented anticipation within the static frame of Meg's vlog camera. Quite apart from the activities that these videos prescribe to alleviate boredom, the affective tone that they generate plays a key role in modulating boredom's sense of stuckness or ambivalence - translating it into the kind of positive affective encounter that is more likely to encourage continued viewer engagement, and to be spread through networked screens. In short, although Meg introduces boredom as the topic of these videos, feelings of boredom are scarcely found in them, since the point of these tutorials is precisely to find ways of making boredom disappear.

Indeed, as Meg swiftly reassures audiences toward the end of her prologue in 'What to Do When You're Bored', she is 'here to help'. Her goal, she says, is to get viewers 'unbored', by showing them 'silly little things' they can do when they are bored. The carefully constructed temporal structure of the videos also plays an important role in this process of affective modulation. In the first of her boredom videos, Meg's description of boredom is interrupted mid-flow by an extra-diegetic intervention in the form of a text pane (with accompanying harp music), which is inserted while the video is momentarily paused, to inform viewers that Meg is 'going through a face sticker obsession, so if you're wondering what is under neath [sic] my eyes they're stickers okay thanks bye!'

Even while Meg is rehearsing what it feels like to be bored, this performance of boredom's downbeat, killjoy affectivity is interrupted in favour of a (celestially-inflected) extradiegetic commentary from a present tense

32. MayBaby, '10 DIY Room Décor Projects you NEED to try!' 21.5.15: [www.youtube.com/watch?v=X1fVIYUxZIE](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=X1fVIYUxZIE); MayBaby, 'DIY Room Décor Tumblr Room Makeover!', 19.6.14: [www.youtube.com/watch?v=cho2M6Px18E](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cho2M6Px18E) [Both Accessed 12.1.16].



Fig. 5, 'What to do When You're Bored!' (6.7.14)

in which boredom has already been successfully displaced. This temporal disruption contributes to the processes of affective modulation that are the very *raison d'être* of these videos. Here, it has the effect of reassuring bored viewers that boredom can be easily upgraded into a more intensive affective experience - traded in, in this case, for a face sticker obsession. Other videos in the series seek to modulate the affective and temporal experience of boredom in slightly different ways. 'What to Do When You're Bored' and 'What to Do When You're Bored on Summer Break' contain short montage sequences that in each case *precede* Meg's ensuing verbal accounts of what she feels like when she's bored. In these opening sequences, we see in preview format a montage of the activities that will feature later as items on Meg's numbered lists. These brief segments use a rapid editing style and an upbeat soundtrack to illustrate 'future' Meg happily whiling away her time through various tasks that she is about to recommend to viewers in the tutorial. In 'What to Do When You're Bored', Meg first addresses audiences by telling them: 'Hey guys, it's your girl Meg, and I'm here to help you when you're bored'. This is followed by an eight-second montage which pictures Meg dancing around her room wearing a pair of bright pink Skullcandy headphones; Meg watching a video on her MacBook Pro while drinking a cold beverage out of an oversized Mason jar; Meg making coffee from her Mr Coffee-branded Keurig coffee brewer; Meg posing for iPhone selfies; Meg making iTunes playlists on her iPhone, and so on. Aside from the obvious point that the activities pictured here are all so relentlessly branded and eminently 'Instagrammable', the fact that they precede her description of what boredom feels like is crucial to the way that these videos seek to modulate this feeling: by the time we hear her talk about it, boredom's sense of temporal suspension and its location within the mundane



everyday has *already* been modulated by the affective anticipation of a time *after* boredom. In this way, the videos work to ensure that from the moment they commence viewing, audiences are always-already-no-longer bored. This mood of affective anticipation, meanwhile, is bound up with, and helps to reproduce, problematic ideas about gendered subjectivity in a social media context. The affective promise of no longer being bored is explicitly tied to the putative pleasures of presenting oneself as an object of socially mediated perception - an idealised and gendered object of the Instagram gaze.

However, this strategy of dividing the temporality of boredom into shorter and shorter micro-temporal circuits, which can be endlessly re-ordered and refreshed, also comes with a catch: while these videos send out the reassuring message that boredom can always be evaded through lists, they also imply that, once the video ends, boredom might return. In this way, boredom is produced as a looming future threat at the same time that it is foreclosed as a possibility within the present. Indeed, the nature of the video series itself suggests that the work of boredom management is never done, but needs to be continually refreshed through repeatedly renewed acts of networked interaction. In short, these videos produce a temporality in which boredom is relegated to the past (evoked as an experience that is already in the process of being left behind) and projected into the future (as a looming threat, which might return), but is never available in the real time of viewing. As Mark Fisher suggests, they produce a time in which '[n]o one is bored, everything is boring'.

If these videos succeed in their aim of converting bored viewers into swarms of what we might call digital 'unbored' - a term whose association with the undead usefully describes a state of being bored and incapable of feeling bored at the same time - they do so through a promise that they can protect viewers from the negative affectivity of boredom, by re-directing its obstructed agency and suspended temporality outward, dissipating it into the short-term circuits of networked participation. In the process, the complex negativities at play within the restless affectivity of boredom are captured and modulated *before* the viewer has time to fully process them; boredom is evoked in a brief window that is, following Hansen's understanding of twenty-first century media, 'long enough for viscosity but not long enough for contemplation'.<sup>33</sup> What counts most here is not the camera's ability to capture a time in which Meg *was* bored, but its ability, as Hansen suggests, to anticipate the future, and to thereby facilitate connections that are the foundations of social media. While these videos downplay the value of recording as a means of 'capturing durational traces of human experience', they rework it as a means of constructing 'the connections that underlie contemporary media networks' (Hansen, p40). Far from rendering an experience of boredom visible and palpable for their audiences, these videos work to disperse it into an amorphous structure of feeling that is everywhere and nowhere, and which belongs to everyone and no one. As such, the boredom that is specific to the exhausting and tedious forms of affective labour that are demanded especially of young girls in the

33. Sun-Ha Hong, 'Hansen - Feed-Forward' [Review], *Untimely: Anachronistic Commentary and Theory*, 2016: <http://untimely.co/?p=69> [Accessed 12.12.16].

context of YouTube is not legible as either a symptom of, or as a response to, the material conditions that produce it. These videos therefore work to disable a collective politics of boredom as a gendered condition, by re-working its temporality: making it appear generalised and subjectless.

A crucial factor in the success of Meg's videos is the way that they seek to capitalise on the affective feedback loop that is established between viewer and video by translating viewer agency into specific interactive commands. The videos exploit the affordances of networked media, explicitly enlisting audiences in the promotion of the MayBaby brand, by asking viewers to help get the videos to a specified number of likes - a gesture which bookends most of the videos. Similarly, many of the activities that Meg recommends for becoming 'unbored' refer viewers back to platforms and products with which Meg is associated. For example, items six and eight on the 'What to do When You're Bored!' video instruct viewers to watch all of Meg's videos, and to follow her on Twitter or Instagram - an operation, which, as she tells viewers, will take 'eight seconds' if they already have an account and 'sixteen seconds' if they need to create an account before then following her. It is significant that this video quantifies the gestural activities of liking and following in such specific terms, as part of its address to viewers as potentially networked agents. By framing these gestures as both quick and effortless, the video frames boredom within an explicitly networked attention and affect economy, in which reflex action is privileged over deliberation. In so doing, as Hansen suggests, videos such as these play a role in helping 'today's data and culture industries to accomplish their goal of tightening the circuit between solicitation and response' (p58). Similarly, the 'What to Do When You're Bored' video provides details about how viewers can create animal avatars of themselves using the 'Pocket Avatar' mobile app. Then, viewers are invited to upload their avatars onto Twitter using the hashtag '#BOREDWITHMEG'.

Others announce meetups at which her fans will have the opportunity to 'come hang out, chill, and take fun selfies' with Meg.<sup>34</sup> This possibility

34. MayBaby, 6.7.14.



Fig. 6, 'What to do When You're Bored' (13.12.14)]

of *being bored with* is both a decisive and deceptive aspect of these videos' appeal. On the one hand, the idea of being *bored with* Meg taps into one of the primal fantasies of networked communication, namely, that networks bring people together; that they forge communities that might overspill the boundaries between online and off; and that they might thereby compensate for, or eliminate, feelings of boredom and loneliness that are commonplace amongst teens. Indeed, the video 'What to Do When You're Bored!' makes this connection between boredom and loneliness explicit, as Meg recommends starting a YouTube channel when her viewers are bored, telling them: 'You can be lonely in your room, or you can be lonely in your room with a cam and internet friends, and I think the second option is a lot better'. As Meg indicates here, boredom and loneliness are often intertwined in adolescence, and networked media are framed increasingly as a means of attenuating both of these unwanted experiences. While most of the viewers of these videos will not necessarily follow Meg's advice about setting up their own YouTube channel, many of them do use the technical affordances of the MayBaby YouTube page, and other media channels that are linked through it, to comment on the videos, and to share them with others. Through these comments pages, users are able to generate a sense of being *bored with*, as opposed to simply being bored. Beyond the content of what is exchanged through such gestures, the activities of interactive multitasking - watching, scrolling, reading, commenting, sharing, liking - help to produce new rhythms that work to break up boredom's sense of cramped listlessness.

In this respect, the content of these videos is perhaps secondary to the connections they promise to foster, and to the sense of 'networked publics' that they may thus help to create. As danah boyd suggests, social media 'allows contemporary teens to envision themselves as part of a collectively imagined community'.<sup>35</sup> As an affective experience held in common, boredom holds the potential to operate as a very powerful social glue, bringing a diverse audience of teenagers together and connecting them through the range of communicative interfaces that are associated with the MayBaby brand - from online discussion forums and social media platforms, to live appearances at which fans can mingle with each other, and meet Meg in person.

However, as Wendy Chun reminds us, we may want to remain wary of the 'banal and impoverished notion of friendship' that often underwrites such promises of connection.<sup>36</sup> As Chun points out, the 'imagined connections' fostered by social media are grounded less in an established sense of solidarity *with* others than they are in the formation of specific *habits* - 'projected links based on frequent and potential repetition' (p53). In this context, she notes, 'the strength of a friendship - its weight - is gauged by the frequency of certain actions', rather than on more qualitative measures, such as a mutual sense of trust and support that might be tested and confirmed over time (ibid). In this way, networked media platforms such as the MayBaby YouTube channel capitalise on both the 'wish for a desire' that Phillips argues is at stake in

35. danah boyd, *It's complicated: the social lives of networked teens*, New Haven, Yale University Press, 2014 p10.

36. Wendy Hui Kyong Chun, *Updating to Remain the Same: Habitual Now Media*, Cambridge, MIT Press, 2016, p17.

boredom, and on the desire for connection that many teenagers experience as a normal part of their everyday lives. Although it is crucial to recognise this ‘wish for a desire’ as an important part of negotiating one’s sense of self in adolescence, it is also vital to see how platforms such as YouTube keep this search moving forward, never letting the viewer’s attention rest for too long on any one object. Indeed, as Hansen and Pettman suggest, today’s ‘data and culture industries’ profit largely from the sense of cognitive opacity that is produced as people vainly struggle to keep up with the rapid, short circuits of digital networks. Downplaying the value of boredom and loneliness as modes of critical introspection, which might help teenagers imagine and test out their relationships to the world and to other subjects, and deflecting the value of being *bored with* as a genuinely collective experience, the videos considered here discursively frame these feelings instead as unambiguous threats that must be quickly discharged through endlessly renewed, individualised acts of media engagement. In the process, the very complex affective and sensory experiences of feeling bored or lonely in adolescence are captured, modulated and rendered functional, translated into actions and gestures of staying in touch, constantly updating, contributing to the conversation. Framed in this way, the hashtag ‘#BOREDWITHMEG’ may resonate less as a collective expression of a shared affective experience and more as a mode of (micro-) celebrity branding, which monetises boredom by converting potentially bored teens into swarms of digital ‘unbored’ - networked subjects whose engrained habits, gestures and actions create value for both the MayBaby brand and the YouTube corporation. It is also important to acknowledge that these gestures of sharing are anything but gender-neutral, as Kyra D. Gaunt suggests when she notes that ‘numbers of views are the new currency in a digital attention economy, and girls are becoming this economy’s free distributed laborers’.<sup>37</sup> At the same time, the work performed by these young women is consistently disguised through the problematic notion that young girls are driven through some kind of ‘natural’ gender imperative to socialise on these platforms. In other words, the visibility of this work *as work* is compromised through the pre-established gendered infrastructures through which it is framed. This is something that Kimberly Ann Hall acknowledges when she writes that ‘the labor of performance within networked sociality ... is rarely characterized as labor, because it is typically theorized as social, or communicative, and thus outside the sphere of labor’.<sup>38</sup>

On a representational level, then, YouTube video tutorials such as these consolidate an affective grammar of twenty-first century boredom, which teaches teenage audiences to remain vigilant against signs of incipient boredom, and models appropriate and inappropriate ways of managing it. However, on an operational level, media platforms such as YouTube are able to intervene at a level prior to sensory or cognitive awareness, retooling the relationship between affect, deliberation and action. In this sense, Fisher is right to affirm that ‘there is no longer any subject capable of being bored’,

37. Kyra D. Gaunt, ‘YouTube, Bad Bitches and an M.I.C.’, in L. Travis, E. Gosa and Erik Nielson (eds), *The Hip Hop & Obama Reader*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2015, p214.

38. Kimberly Ann Hall, ‘The Authenticity of Social-Media Performance: Lonelygirl15 and the Amateur Brand of Young-Girlhood’, *Women and Performance: A Journal of Feminist Theory* 25, 2, 2015, p129.

since digital networks protect the subject from the full force of this affect, and work to dissolve boredom's constitutive negativity and its condition of obstructed agency into the injunction to interact. However, what the critical literature on boredom in the context of twenty-first century media has roundly failed to address is the gendering of this experience. As I have suggested, video platforms such as YouTube work through attention to also perpetuate highly traditional ideas about gender and to circumscribe the terms of the young girl's participation within this context. In doing so, they work to produce the category of young girlhood as inherently communicative and perpetually networked, and to disguise this affective labour as so much internet 'fun'.

Fisher's otherwise prescient account of boredom 2.0 falls short of engaging with the full implications of his own argument, perhaps because of the sense of nostalgia that his account conveys for a time when boredom was still commensurate with a (male) subject who could feel it, and who could in turn draw from it to 'produce something' of cultural value. Aside from their implicit devaluing of a 'shallow' boredom that is gendered female, these responses also run the risk of reducing a highly complex media attention ecology to a 'moral critique of the psychological subject' who 'can never pay *enough* attention to what *really matters*' (Pettman, p96). Indeed, as I have shown in my analysis of the MayBaby YouTube boredom tutorials, it is precisely this idea of the subject as fully commensurate with her own thoughts and emotions - and hence responsible for properly managing them - that the media and culture industries exploit in order to keep young girls ensnared within the attention and affect ecology of digital networks. Such networks rely on adolescent females as attention and affect managers, responsible for, and capable of coordinating, the affective texture of their own experience as it unfolds in real time. Social media platforms in particular thrive on this idea of the subject as fully commensurate with, and responsible for reporting back on, her own emotions and experiences. Young girls are positioned as the ideal subjects of boredom management precisely because the affective labour that they are called on to perform in this context can be passed off as just 'what girls do'. The shallow boredom that we experience increasingly in a networked culture is thus transferred over onto young girls, whose role it is to manage.

And yet, as I have also suggested, this overlooks the significant role that such media play, not only in producing and intensifying new cultural forms of tedium - e.g. the boredom that is involved in endlessly scrolling through feeds and navigating a potentially infinite system of networked links - but also in capturing and modulating the subject's affective experience before he or she becomes aware of it. Indeed, on a non-representational level, such videos also have the potential to expose us to a different kind of boredom and tedium, one that is connected to the technical affordances of streaming platforms such as YouTube, where videos with similar content

are joined together to form their own self-sustaining feedback loops. Over time, teenage viewers who subscribe to channels such as MayBabys may find themselves exposed to the structural boredom that is generated by YouTube's endlessly listing, endlessly looping aesthetic. Although digital media platforms such as YouTube rely on strategies of repetition and reiteration in order to hook audiences, and to intensify our engagements with screen-based media, they can also, as Carol Vernallis notes, produce a distinct feeling of being 'stuck in a loop', as the pulse of excitement or interest sooner or later segues into boredom, which is in turn re-invested in the search for new intensities, anticipations, and attachments.<sup>39</sup> Trying to keep up with, or make sense of, the pulse of networked media is in itself exhausting and profoundly tedious, and as David M. Berry claims, 'the constant flow of real-time streams of information and data that rush past us in increasing volumes' in a digital network culture can also produce a pervasive mood of bland indifference, as we try to make sense of our data feeds through something like what he calls a 'bureaucratic process of classification or filing' (Berry, p199). In a similar vein, Richard Grusin notes that while the 'anticipatory temporality' that is established through networked media can produce a heightened sense of alertness, it can also generate 'a muted or low-level affect of waiting or passing time'.<sup>40</sup>

As a result, the networked subject is faced with a double bind in which she is expected to manage feelings of boredom increasingly through the very same technical processes that produce and perpetuate them in the first place. As Mark Hansen suggests, these processes of affective mediation also take place well beneath the threshold of human perception, impacting on our experience in ways that are sometimes, but not always, available to conscious awareness. Because twenty-first century media have, as Shane Denson aptly puts it, 'a direct line to our innermost processes of becoming in time', we can no longer frame boredom as a resource that is somehow beyond, or resistant to, these forms of mediation.<sup>41</sup> Rather, it is only by acknowledging the distributed nature of boredom in the twenty-first century that we can begin to assess its impact and possibilities, as this hybrid experience of boredom is fed-forward for human consciousness to grapple with and to act on. At the same time, it is important to focus on how these technologies that target boredom through micro-temporal circuits are still stitched into a patriarchal imaginary, which relies increasingly on the labour of young women at the same time as it reproduces problematic gendered hierarchies and divisions. A vital task for both boredom studies and critical attention studies lies in acknowledging the significance of gendered subjectivity for the constellation of relations between attention and boredom as they are emerging in a twenty-first century context. Indeed, as I have suggested, an important first step towards re-imagining what a collective feminist response to boredom might look like today consists of rendering visible both the experience of boredom, and the work of boredom management

39. Carol Vernallis, *Unruly Media: YouTube, Music Video, and the New Digital Cinema*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2013, p131.

40. Richard Grusin, *Premediation: Affect and Mediality after 9/11*, Basingstoke, Palgrave MacMillan, 2010, p129.

41. Shane Denson, 'Crazy Cameras, Disrelated Image, and the Post-Perceptual Mediation of Post-Cinematic Affect', in S. Denson and J. Leyda (eds), *Post-Cinema: Theorizing 21<sup>st</sup> Century Film*, Falmer, ReFrame Books, 2016.



that teenage girls are regularly required to perform in a network culture, rather than passing it off as so much Internet fun.

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