

## On the Extrordinary: Problematism, Flatness, and Repetition

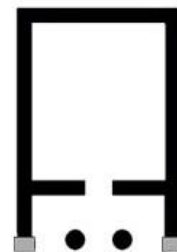
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## On the Extraordinary: Problematisation, flatness and repetition

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What makes a moment extraordinary—or even, what does it mean that a moment is extraordinary? How is the extraordinary assimilated by the subject, both in its presence and in its absence? It can be argued that the concept of the extraordinary is akin to the concept of crisis in the philosophy of history, insofar as the former is usually connoted in the latter—the indictment of a situation in which the previous ideas of the world loosen their grasp on reality is something characterised by not being inferable from that former set of ideas. But can we apply these categories to the narrative of an individual? The aim of this paper is to dwell into the realm of *everyday life*, to transpose these concepts to the intimate level of the individual: what happens when somebody complains about *nothing happening* in their life—why is it all quiet all of a sudden, and what is to be done? For that purpose, I will here draw on different theories on the epistemological nature of the event and on what may construct extraordinariness. Those theories mainly conceptualise the extraordinary in one of the three following terms: a) as an unlikely probability within a system; b) as a moment in which different potentialities unfold, therefore providing an occasion for fertility to the future through its connection to the past and present; or c) a moment of flat temporality—i.e., the assimilation of the extraordinary in the ordinary, thus presenting a feeling of loop-like crisis in which what is perceived as untenable for a subject merges with its daily existence. My analysis draws mainly on the oeuvre of Friedrich Nietzsche and Sigmund Freud for their different insights on the concept of repetition and the questioning it arouses on whether something repetitive may be extraordinary, as well as in the use of mainly aesthetic/artistic examples whose capacity of creating a moment or reflecting on a certain perception illustrates the subjectivity of the topic.

Actually, at the point of writing these words, I am all alone on a Sunday afternoon. I have several DIN-A3s containing a mind-map on this scattered on my bed, yet I cannot find a thread to start knitting. I look outside: what is it with Sunday afternoons? It happens while I think if I should maybe buy something sweet when I do my grocery shopping. I'm wrapped in the lame voice of the football commentators that comes from the living room, occasionally disrupted by the cries my flatmates utter when something apparently exciting happens. Sundays, in which I wilfully left all my work for the last minute; Sundays, in which we try to extend the weekend looking for cafes where we can drink by ourselves. Couldn't also a Sunday afternoon be extraordinary? In an economy guided by labour and the intrusion of the workplace into the affective sphere, in a stimulating consumerist lifestyle made of homogeneous little daily satisfactions, *can the flatness of a Sunday afternoon constitute something extraordinary?* I engaged into this brief digression before I started my argumentation to realise the versatility of the concept of the extraordinary, which can constitute (and combine) both something to

avoid and something we yearn for. I did so to remark the high degree of subjectivity of the topic, which is directly concerned with the struggle to start writing these words: can I give a unitary response to something that does not seem to be so? This speculative exercise is not interested in what the extraordinary is inasmuch as in what it means that something is extraordinary. In fact, precisely due to the fact that the concept is remote and yet ubiquitous, any study on the extraordinariness must slide through one's fingers.

### The problematisation of the extraordinary

The most common conceptualisation for the extraordinary as defined by dictionaries and usage is that of something unexpected or unlikely to happen within a system. In a rather analytical approach, challenged by defining the meaning of such an abstract concept, I draw upon the general use of the word —‘one must always ask oneself: is the word ever actually used in this way in the language-game which is its original home? What *we* do is to bring words back from their metaphysical to their everyday use.’<sup>1</sup> Even from its etymology (common in a wide variety of languages because of its Latin origin), the word is formed via the affixation of the prefix *extra-* (lat., ‘outside, beyond’) to *ordinary*, thus making its sense depend on the nuance of the latter.

This significance is also the one adopted by most analytical sciences, in which the idea of extraordinariness resonates in the statistical concept of the *outlier*: an observation that differs considerably from the overall pattern of a sample.<sup>2</sup> This kind of phenomenon is normally considered as an error, and therefore something to be ignored or even deleted—the outlier impedes to the analytical entity to make sense of a set of data. Similarly, one could treat the extraordinary in a more prosaic sense as that event that one intuitively less likely in a set of expectations of a linearity of events. Nonetheless, even supposing that intuition to be wrong, this interpretation depends on the expectations based on the assumption of a (ideally) coherent model of reality, therefore grounded on external values that determinate the segment of reality to be considered—a transposition regarded as preposterous by Nietzsche and Freud, as it will be argued in the next section. In this sense, there is nothing intrinsically extraordinary outside of probability and, hence, the more the unlikely repeats, the more extraordinary it is. The subjective standpoint taken by the analytical entity becomes manifest when the methodology is pushed to extremes: imagine one rolls a not-loaded dice various times obtaining always the same result, would that then change the mathematical model hitherto used?<sup>3</sup> What I am trying to point out in this reflection is the following: *can there be a moment in which, precisely because of a continuous repetition, the*

<sup>1</sup> Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, trans. by G. Elizabeth M. Anscombe (Oxford, Basil Blackwell, 1986), p. 48.

<sup>2</sup> See David S. Moore and George P. McCabe, *The Introduction to the Practice of Statistics* (New York: W. H. Freeman & Co, 1999).

<sup>3</sup> See, for example, the coin-flipping scene that opens *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are Dead*, in which the two main characters indifferently observe how a coin repeatedly lands on heads. The fact that it ends up becoming ‘a bit of a bore’ is relevant to the argument that will be developed here, insofar as it reveals the importance of an agent and its contextual circumstances in order to affirm the extraordinariness of a situation. Tom Stoppard, *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are Dead* (Stuttgart: Philipp Reclam, 1985).

*extraordinary becomes ordinary?* In these examples, the context and circumstances are controlled; there is an agency behind the indictment of the extraordinariness of an event according to a set of expectations derived from a particular logic of thought that this event contradicts. Contaminated by this sense, the extraordinary is a challenge to be avoided, but can one relegate this type of judgement on a non-controlled and open-ended situation? How can the extraordinariness be determined from an affective point of view, in our daily life?

## The repetition of the extraordinary

### a) Life

The extraordinary can also be regarded as *potentiality*, as a series of circumstances that trigger a shift in the mechanisms that had previously provided continuity to the subject. In this sense, the extraordinary can also be conceptualised outside of the category of *event*, for it rethinks the whole structure of representation in which it has occurred. Lauren Berlant uses the term *emotional intensities* in order to avoid the mirroring of the affective activity to the emotional state, thus escaping the plot-like structure normally used to describe these moments of unfolding potentiality—as it will be argued at the end of this essay.<sup>4</sup>

This conception of the extraordinary can be enhanced by relating it to Nietzsche's theory, which pushes the idea of an external cause to its limits via the *transvaluation of all values*, denouncing and, in a way, creating a crisis. His philosophy sees in the crisis and the consequent release of vital power the possibility to affirm life:

[...] Let us therefore limit ourselves to the purification of our opinions and value judgements and to the creation of tables of what is good that are new and all our own: let us stop brooding over the "moral value of our actions"! [...] We, however, want to become who we are—human beings who are new, unique, incomparable, who give themselves laws, who create themselves!<sup>5</sup>

This assessment departs from the negation of an external cause upon which values can be constructed. After the death of God—the dissolution of any transcendent value, intrinsic to its development—this can only be grounded on the world itself. Nihilism, the exhaustion of human possibilities, is rooted in the interpretation of the world provided by the Judaeo-Christian legacy of the Western culture.<sup>6</sup> In its unquestioning of a moral model that privileges the *resentful* by placing the end for emancipation on a cause external to this life, the value of the latter is negated. Therefore, in the lacking of an extrinsic moral guide towards whom values have to be oriented, only life itself can become the end to look forward to—the only knowledge is that which affirms life. Precisely, power is the unfolding potentiality contained in actuality and this, in a world

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<sup>4</sup> See Lauren Berlant, 'Thinking about feeling historical', *Emotion, Space and Society*, 1(2008), pp. 4-9.

<sup>5</sup> Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Gay Science*, trans. by Josefine Nauckhoff (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2010), p. 189.

<sup>6</sup> See Friedrich Nietzsche, *La genealogia de la moral*, trans. by Joan Leita (Barcelona: Edicions 62, 2009), pp. 68-69.

in which there is no external cause, ultimately can only will itself. This *will to power* is conceived as an impulse that goes beyond the organs that have created it, against one's own gravity and the layer of culture that covers our own insignificance—thereby, the idea of emancipation becomes a delusion precisely due to the lack of external values and, therefore, the impossibility to better ourselves. This argumentation is mirrored in the inorganic world, in which there is no possible disagreement between strong and weak, whereas the interpretation of the organic world allows error and certainty through signs, provided by the possibility of repetition and comparison.<sup>7</sup>

It is at this point of the conception of the extraordinary as providing an occasion for an opening towards the will to life's power that the concept of *eternal return* emerges. The eternal joy of becoming in the absence of external values must necessarily will itself as an affirmation of life in the world:

[...] to the ideal of the most exuberant, most living and most world-affirming man, who has not only learned to get on and treat with all that was and is but who wants to have it again *as it was and is* to all eternity, insatiably calling out *da capo* not only to himself but to the whole piece and play, and not only to a play but fundamentally to him who needs precisely this play—and who makes it necessary: because he needs himself again and again—and makes himself necessary.<sup>8</sup>

The concept is frequently interpreted as an ethical justification—since everything will repeat itself eternally, one must be disposed towards oneself and towards life as '*to long for nothing more fervently* than for this ultimate eternal confirmation and seal.'<sup>9</sup> However, the matter can also be regarded in parallel to a metaphysical enquiry according to which, in a Chaos covered by representation and perception, the will can never be fulfilled because it ultimately wills itself; this is where the Tragic/Apollonian dimension of the world resides, in willing this power of creation/destruction in spite of it being 'unfulfillable'. This latent power is what covers the void between being and appearance in the lacking of any external ideal: we create ourselves through the uniformity of language via our image of humanity the continuity is made possible by our everyday code upon which we ultimately depend.<sup>10</sup> However, this power is not that of the idea of humanity but that of life itself: 'we are only a succession of *discontinuous states* in relation to *the code of everyday signs*, and about which *the fixity of language* deceives us.'<sup>11</sup> The eternal return thus becomes a metaphysical *necessity*, something that needs to be in order to affirm life without external values, and it is in its *forgetfulness*

<sup>7</sup> See Pierre Klossowski, *Nietzsche and the Vicious Circle*, trans. by Daniel W. Smith (London: Athlone, 1997), pp. 39-44.

<sup>8</sup> Friedrich Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil*, trans. by Reginald J. Hollingdale (London: Penguin, 2003), p. 82.

<sup>9</sup> Nietzsche, *The Gay Science*, p. 195.

<sup>10</sup> In a way, Fernando Pessoa's words at the beginning of *The Book of Disquiet* resonate in this conception: 'I was born in a time when the majority of young people had lost faith in God, for the same reason their elders had had it—without knowing why. And since the human spirit naturally tends to make judgments based on feeling instead of reason, most of these young people chose Humanity to replace God.' Fernando Pessoa, *The Book of Disquiet*, trans. by Richard Zenith (London: Penguin, 2002), p. 76.

<sup>11</sup> Klossowski, p. 41.

when one realises that can be anything in the unfolding of all possible identities and potentialities, insofar as

All that remains, then, is for me to re-will myself, no longer as the outcome of these prior possibilities, no longer as one realization among thousands, but as a fortuitous moment whose very fortuity implies the necessity of the integral return of the whole series [...] to de-actualize myself in order to will myself in all the other selves whose entire series must be passed through.<sup>12</sup>

This argument can be related to Deleuze & Guattari's conception of philosophy—derived from the theory of the pure event—in which the task of the former is ultimately ethical rather than ontological, i.e., the creation of concepts in order to extract an event from the state of affairs so that it can be brought into conscience and made sense of. Nietzsche's argumentation engages in a dynamic also similar to Sartre's characterisation of existentialism, in which the realisation of the lack of a value for human existence other than itself does not make the individual powerless but, on the contrary, it invests it with responsibility towards its acts and the effect that they will unavoidably have on its relatives.<sup>13,14</sup>

What is relevant to our point in these theories is both the embracement of repetition as a condition for an ethical dimension of being and the idea of the creation of the moment (be it ordinary or extraordinary). In a sense, what we are facing here is that *the extraordinariness of the moment, in a life lacking any external agency or cause, can only be produced by its own indictment.*

At this point, some examples may clarify my argument. Consider the work of the conceptual artist On Kawara, especially his series *I Am Still Alive*, in which he would daily send a telegram bearing the message 'I am still alive' to his friends.<sup>15</sup> Now, this work could be interpreted as a reflection on the burden of existence. However, I argue, the key is in the word *still*—which brings into conscience the likely possibility of the premise not being fulfilled at a certain point—as well as the pattern of repetition: it is the insistency on the utterance of what could seem obvious what makes it extraordinary. Something akin happens with his series *I Got Up...*, consisting on a similar format in which he would send a postcard from the place where he was at that point with the message 'I got up at [time]' stamped on it.<sup>16</sup> The singularity of everyday—the hour, the place—is brought to conscience by the detail that differentiates apparently identical actions: the use of the same stamp. Even for the receiver, the routine imposes itself to the point that in order for Kawara to be alive the statement needs to be enunciated: this repetition of existence against its opposition enforces a *law of the extraordinary based on its own indictment.*

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<sup>12</sup> Klossowski, p. 58.

<sup>13</sup> See Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *What is Philosophy?*, trans. by H. Tomlinson and G. Burchell (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994).

<sup>14</sup> See Jean-Paul Sartre, *El existencialismo es un humanismo* (Barcelona: Edhasa, 2007).

<sup>15</sup> On Kawara, *I Am Still Alive*, 1973, ballpoint pen on four telegrams, MoMA, New York.

<sup>16</sup> On Kawara, *I Got Up...*, 1977, ink and stamps on postcards, MoMA, New York.

However, let us examine the example of the Jewish prayer *Modeh Ani*, to be uttered on waking up: ‘אָמְוֹנָהּ רַבָּה. בְּחַמְלָה נִשְׁמָתִי בִּי שָׁהֵחַזְרָתָּ. וְקוּיִם חַי מְלֶכֶּךָ לְפָנַיִךְ אָנִי (מוֹדָה) מוֹדָה [I thank you, living and Eternal King, for giving me back my soul in mercy. Great is your faithfulness.]’<sup>17</sup> Both examples celebrate the extraordinariness of existence via repetition, yet the second is justified by an external cause/authority and therefore, Nietzsche would object, does not ultimately make it necessary to re-will oneself but to will the faithfulness of that Eternal King. Also, one may argue, another significant difference between the two examples is its scope—from an individual ritual to a collective one—which situates the subject’s relevance in a different position. Thus, the exact degree of rituality (and thus, repetitiveness) perceived in any of the two practices is imponderable, but the comparison brings us back—as it repeatedly will—to an already uttered question that apparently constitutes the core of our enquiry in any of the contexts exposed: *can there be a moment in which, precisely because of a continuous repetition, the extraordinary becomes ordinary?*

### b) Death

Let us start with the example of another prayer, the Jesus Prayer—‘Lord Jesus Christ have mercy on me’—which J. D. Salinger’s character Franny articulates repeatedly: ‘if you keep repeating that prayer over and over again [...] the prayer becomes *self-active* [...] and then you’re praying without ceasing. Which has a really tremendous, mystical effect on your whole outlook’.<sup>18</sup> In the story, Franny suffers a nervous crisis (parallel to the one her brother Seymour had) when she realises the meaninglessness of the world around her—none of her relations with others can fill the gap left by the suicide of Seymour—in response to which she draws upon asceticism as her last resource to achieve spiritual peace: lying down in the dark, constantly repeating the prayer. The story presents an extreme situation in which the only way out she can conceive is nullification, entrusting herself to that external identity, all through *repetition*. At the end of the story, her brother Zooey reveals to her what their deceased brother told him: there is nothing out there ‘who isn’t Seymour’s Fat Lady;’ i.e., in the end, there will always be that ultimate reason—which is later compared to Christ, not *any* Christ but the one their brother bequeathed to them.<sup>19</sup>

What is interesting for our argument here is the use of *repetition* in a way opposed to the one addressed before: for Franny, whispering the same prayer incessantly while lying on the couch is a way of suspending her experience by entering a state of temporal flatness. Be her situation ordinary or extraordinary, and even though the force that is guiding her seems also powerful, in her present no possibilities unfold—rather, they are wilfully disintegrated.

<sup>17</sup> *The Authorised Daily Prayer Book of the United Hebrew Congregations of the Commonwealth*, trans. by Jonathan Sacks (London: HarperCollins, 2007), pp. 4-5.

<sup>18</sup> J. D. Salinger, *Franny and Zooey* (London: Penguin, 2010), p. 28.

<sup>19</sup> Salinger, p. 149.

Freud's theory of psychoanalysis regarded any kind of emancipation as an illusion perpetrated by the conscious ego, due to the mere fact that we cannot know ourselves entirely—an assumption that, at the same time, also presupposes an ideal of progress.<sup>20</sup> In his systematisation, the mental apparatus is preceded by the *id* and the urgency of its instincts: 'instinct in general is regarded as a kind of elasticity of living things, an impulsion towards the restoration of a situation which once existed but was brought to an end by some external disturbance.'<sup>21</sup> According to Freud, the main instincts are the pleasure principle—which moves the subject towards enjoyable experiences and provides an instinct of preservation of the living substance by joining it into larger units—and the death drive, whose main aim is the conservation of the mental apparatus, being its ideal state to remain on itself with as less external stimuli as possible. Therefore, the death drive instinct would seek to dissolve the larger units in which mental live engages led by the pleasure principle, hence appearing externally as an instinct of aggressiveness and destructiveness '[which] could itself be pressed into the service of Eros, in that the organism was destroying some other thing, whether animate or inanimate, instead of destroying its own self.'<sup>22</sup> Thus, the grounding phenomena of life are explained with this model of mutually opposed instincts, whose insistence and predominance are exemplified by its re-affirmation through the *compulsion to repeat*.

However, it is important to note that Freud establishes the precedence of the death drive to the pleasure principle:

[I]t would be the task of the higher strata of the mental apparatus to bind the instinctual excitation reaching the primary process. A failure to effect this binding would provoke a disturbance analogous to a traumatic neurosis; and only after the binding has been accomplished would it be possible for the dominance of the pleasure principle (and of its modification, the reality principle) to proceed unhindered.<sup>23</sup>

Therefore, the pleasure principle would actually operate under the death drive as a mechanism to maintain the level of excitation in the mental apparatus to as low as possible. This situates the death drive as somehow the prior impulse of the mental apparatus, which tends to its own conservation, and does so (because of the instinctual nature of the death drive) via the compulsion to repeat.<sup>24</sup>

To sum up, it can be argued that the main force in the Freudian mental apparatus is actually the death drive, which is concerned 'with the most universal endeavour of all living substance—namely, to return to the quiescence of the inorganic world.'<sup>25,26</sup> This

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<sup>20</sup> See Sigmund Freud, 'The Ego and the Id', in *The Freud Reader*, ed. by Peter Gay (London: Vintage, 1995), 628-658.

<sup>21</sup> Sigmund Freud, 'An Autobiographical Study', in *The Freud Reader*, ed. by Peter Gay (London: Vintage, 1995), 3-44, p. 36.

<sup>22</sup> Sigmund Freud, 'Civilization and its Discontents', in *The Freud Reader*, ed. by Peter Gay (London: Vintage, 1995), 722-772, p. 754.

<sup>23</sup> Sigmund Freud, 'Beyond the Pleasure Principle', in *The Freud Reader*, ed. by Peter Gay (London: Vintage, 1995), 594-626, p. 611.

<sup>24</sup> See Freud, 'Beyond the Pleasure Principle', pp. 601-605.

<sup>25</sup> *ibid.*, p. 625.



is carried out through a tendency to repetition that, because of the universality of the death drive, also occurs in non-neurotic people, either actively—triggered by a permanent trait of the subject—or passively, as an experience on which one has no agency.<sup>27</sup> The latter is consequent with Freud's understanding of the *uncanny*, which in its psychoanalytical perspective would be understood as an involuntary return of the repressed: 'the uncanny is that species of the frightening that goes back to what was once well known and had long been familiar.'<sup>28</sup> The emphasis on repetition allows a conceptualisation in terms of a fatefulness that overcomes the idea of free will, especially with those cases regarding the repetition of repressed processes.<sup>29</sup> Thus, probably, one of its ultimate forms is actually death itself, as in an element intrinsically present in our mental apparatus that, furthermore, is enacted in an instinct that tends to preservation through the lack of stimuli—i.e., towards inorganic life.

Franny's situation above offers a good example of a mental apparatus overtaken by the death drive, its uncanniness grounded on a barely repressed death wish fostered not only by the suicide of the brother but also by the fraying of her ideal of self-fulfilment provoked by the perceived idleness of everything that surrounds her. As a matter of fact, it appears that one's expectations of life—in terms of the cause that is leading it—will condition the extraordinariness of any event. Nonetheless, it seems that the Freudian theory of the death drive also points the extraordinary towards life itself—the fact of its existence notwithstanding its tendency towards inorganic matter.

In spite of the alleged extraordinariness of existence, hopelessness comes with the combination of thinking of oneself historically—i.e., in the horizon provided by causality, in the terms of a lifetime narrative—and the tendency to permanency enacted by the death drive. But can one bear with flatness? Even more, *in a system that fosters the submission to constant stimuli and distraction, can flatness become extraordinary?*

Consider Heidegger's theory on boredom—which can be related to this flatness provoked by a lack of extraordinariness.<sup>30</sup> The author describes it in terms of a basic structure for being into the world—rather than merely an affective activity or an emotional state—its main characteristic being the inhibition of everyday distractions for the *Dasein*. Accordingly, boredom lies underneath the tendency of the subject to *be-away* from the consciousness of its own existence: in a sense, boredom is presented as an uncanny state that, like the death drive, runs underneath the everyday distractions of the ego and only emerges once the other forces of the self—the pleasure principle—are

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<sup>26</sup> It is interesting to note how both Freud and Nietzsche make of the inorganic world a somehow ideal state, probably because, as argued before, there is no need of an external cause to explain its becoming: the lack of perception or signs annuls the possibility of an error.

<sup>27</sup> See Freud, 'Beyond the Pleasure Principle', pp. 604-605.

<sup>28</sup> Sigmund Freud, *The Uncanny*, trans. by David McLintock (London: Penguin, 2003), p. 124.

<sup>29</sup> The repressed is conserved through the traces left by the breach of trauma, which are only temporary in the conscious so that the ego can function but that nonetheless remain in other systems (See Freud, 'Beyond the Pleasure Principle', p. 607).

<sup>30</sup> See Martin Heidegger, *The Fundamental Concepts of Metaphysics: World, Finitude, Solitude*, trans. by William McNeill and Nicholas Walker (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1995), pp. 59-164.

neutralised. The author gives three main accounts of boredom, the third being an extension of the second: *becoming bored by something*, *being bored with something* and *profound boredom*. The main difference is that in the first one the cause of boredom is easily identifiable with the deference of the anticipated fulfilment that comes from an object, whereas in the other two it has a broader incidence. *Being bored with something* situates the self in an *isolated present*, in which existence becomes irrelevant for the self's life narrative, in spite of it being derived from the free decision of engaging into an existentially irrelevant activity. This is the kind of boredom that can accompany leisure activities, in which the subject is disconnected from its own history and its projects, just whiling the time away. If these symptoms are extended to the whole existence in general, then we encounter *profound boredom*, marked by a sense of hopelessness in which one feels that the world has nothing else to provide—indeed similar to Franny's situation. Nonetheless, Heidegger argues that it is only in this state where the *Dasein* encounters freedom: a horizon of unfolding potentialities is disclosed, and because of its critical situation the *Dasein* is urged into existence. The dynamic followed by Heidegger is similar to that of Nietzsche's theories on morality, in which the superman, due to the lack of any external cause for his existence, can only will his circumstances.<sup>31</sup>

Yet the question remains the same: can one cope with flatness? Two remarks need to be made about Heidegger's theory: firstly, it is easy to identify nowadays problematisation of this kind of *profound boredom* with the clinical category of *severe depression*, one of whose symptoms is precisely the lack of motivation to engage with any quotidian activity because of its perceived uselessness. As a matter of fact, one of the main pieces of advice given to depressed people is to try to be distracted (with friends, hobbies, and so on) in order to, potentially, move from the category of *profound boredom* to just *be bored with something* or, hopefully, not be bored at all. Depression would thus come from having no hope in any kind of fulfilment and making of it an obstacle to existence or action. Be it caused by a lack of stimuli whatsoever that impede the pleasure principle's functioning, or by the inability for the death drive to cope with them, it always arises from the fraying of an *absolute cause utopia*—such as that of the Neoliberal exaltation of free will, which actually operates under a wide range of variables providing different levels of privilege—in which the depressed person's forms of existence that had hitherto provided optimism collapse in the denial of the possibility of an unwavering system of (external) causality.

Secondly, is the *Dasein* urgently called into existence by state of *profound boredom* or can it (even wilfully) remain on the latter? Jan Slaby has already argued that *profound*

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<sup>31</sup> Nonetheless, one may argue, that at least in Heidegger's argument there is a clear possibility for change. On the other hand, Nietzsche's argument (only if taken literally) engages into a paradox: how can there be the possibility for changing one's values if an eternal recurrence of the same must follow—unless, of course, that change of values had already been performed and, therefore, it is not actually a *change* but just the recurrence of the same that has been forgotten. Possibly, this sterile and contradictory conundrum can only be solved by adopting an interpretation of the theory similar to the one argued on the first part of this essay, which is more in line with Nietzsche's oeuvre and the emphasis it poses on will.

*boredom* can be a state preferred by the *Dasein*.<sup>32</sup> His argument makes of Pessoa's diverse auto-fiction *The Book of Disquiet* an example of a glorification of boredom—as in a state that provides a truthful insight into the world.<sup>33,34</sup> I believe that this insight can be taken further simply by providing another literary example: Foster Wallace's *The Pale King*, a novel about boredom that arises a critique of capitalism and Heidegger's idea of boredom as a precondition for freedom.<sup>35</sup> In it, there is just no hope behind the capitalist inhuman world of labour: there is nothing creative about boredom; rather, it becomes the only resort for resistance against a life based on homogeneous small satisfactions.

### **Fragmented conclusion: the flatness of the extraordinary**

Berlant conceptualises the event as a *form* for feeling an unfinished situation in the present that can create different emotional states on the subject.<sup>36</sup> One of them is governed by *worried thought*, providing an environment in which one must re-think what had hitherto constituted ordinariness. The resulting emotional state is marked by the perception of unsustainability and the need for a change—a conceptualisation of affective intensities similar to the one used to refer to the extraordinary in the second section of this essay. However, the author here argues, this feeling of an unfinished situation in the present can also occur *without worried thought*, thus providing a feeling of *flatness* in which the atrocious is integrated in the ordinariness of a group of people that does not feel defined by the event and has no hope that re-thinking the situation will solve anything. Accordingly, the extraordinary *could* merge into the ordinary through a prolonged exposition and, up to a certain point, one could bear with flatness.

The argument, however, is confronted with the question of what becomes atrocious—extraordinary—for whom, and why. Potentially, since the extraordinary does not necessarily appear as self-evident, it can only be applied to individual subjectivities. For example, McEwan's novel *Saturday* starts when the neurosurgeon Henry Perowne unexpectedly wakes up on a Saturday dawn to witness—after thinking about his surroundings and all that he has planned for that day (the dinner with his daughter Daisy coming back from Paris, visiting her mother at the hospital, and so on)—a plane crashing in the centre of London.<sup>37</sup> The novel is a good example on how *the extraordinary does not need to be spectacular*. As the day goes by, all the affective activities and emotional states that take place in his private life take over the powerful

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<sup>32</sup> See Jan Slaby, 'The other side of existence: Heidegger on Boredom', in *Habitus in Habitat II — Other Sides of Cognition*, ed. by Flach, Sabine, Marguiles, Daniel, and Söffner, Jan (Berlin: Peter Lang AG, Internationaler Verlag der Wissenschaften, 2010).

<sup>33</sup> See Pessoa, *The Book of Disquiet*.

<sup>34</sup> A justification that appears nonetheless as problematic in the context of an oeuvre describable as an endless game of masks, by an author whose most remarkable singularity was the use of what he called *heteronyms*—i.e. the fictional identities he would adopt to write his books, personalities with a whole life-story attached to them, fictional persons that would actually sign his books.

<sup>35</sup> David Foster Wallace, *The Pale King* (London: Penguin, 2011).

<sup>36</sup> Berlant, pp. 7-9.

<sup>37</sup> Ian McEwan, *Saturday* (London & New York: Doubleday, 2005).

image generated by the event of the plane crash, to the point of it being reduced to a trace in his memory that will be absently remembered at the end of the novel as a vague remainder of the day. Here I reiterate the position I took at the beginning of this essay: the extraordinariness is a highly subjective topic that cannot be unitarily conceptualised without what we have hitherto called an external ultimate cause. Therefore, I re-affirm, *extraordinariness is always established by its own indictment.*

Yet the question comes up again in a terminal act of resistance, arguing the common linguistic use of the world: *can permanence become extraordinary?* The topic can even be pushed further: can the self, in a superman plot-twist, become extraordinary by indicting its own law for the extraordinary?

I am now again looking through the window contemplating London's landscape. I do not think I am waiting for a plane-crash, but in spite of all I have argued I cannot help but think about what will happen to me next year. As one of my colleagues said when discussing the topic, "people live waiting for something to happen like they are starring in *Pretty Woman*." The keystone of this argument seems to reside in the fact that life narratives can indeed adopt a classical plot-like structure, the expectation of them being not a plot twist inasmuch as a climax; a waiting imbued of a death-drive-like hope for a definitive turning point that resituates and gives a whole new meaning to the story.<sup>38</sup> I think about the phenomenon that made me begin question the idea of the extraordinary: the massive amounts of mostly young and well-educated people moving abroad, like me, sometimes even without a specific objective in mind their helplessness frequently deemed as a fault of their own by mental health professionals instead of as a systemic issue.<sup>39</sup> It is a kind of migration flow especially present in Southern Europe imaginaries, often termed by the media as *brain drain*. However, the scarce personal expectations of these groups are soon revealed as delusional, based on a hopeful vision of (Northern) Europe—or whatever their destination may be—, based on the development of individuals' potentialities rather than their exploitation. Ultimately, they are escaping from flatness to try to find that piece of rapturous ordinariness without realising the flatness they feel is systemic in a cognitive model of capitalism and that finding a way out of it ultimately depends on them. The topic slides through my fingers, as it is supposed to have done. *Practices of the extraordinary cannot be univocally situated, its indictment depends ultimately on an absolute cause—which may or may not be oneself.* In fact, to put it with another example, we can even be lost just by standing:

It was all as it had been,  
except for the weight of the present,  
that scuttled the pact we made with heaven.  
In truth there was no cause for rejoicing,  
nor need to turn around, either.  
We were lost just by standing,

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<sup>38</sup> See, for example: J. A. Cuddon, ed., and Preston, C. E., rev., *The Penguin Dictionary of Literary Terms and Literary Theory* (London: Penguin, 1999).

<sup>39</sup> Or even, as I once was told, deemed as "merely an existential crisis produced by *overthinking*, not symptoms of any clinical condition."

listening to the hum of wires overhead.<sup>40</sup>

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<sup>40</sup> John Ashbery, 'The Ignorance of the Law Is No Excuse', *The New York Review of Books*, 51 (2004, Mar 25). <<http://www.nybooks.com/issues/2004/mar/25/>> [accessed: 26 April 2015].

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