



# Things I Do When I'm Bored<sup>1</sup>

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## Things I Do When I'm Bored

The artwork *Things I Do When I'm Bored* from 2017–2022 addresses vloggers' relationship with feeling bored. The work is composed of a browser-based video compilation and a video installation that assembles found footage from YouTube vlogs with less than 100 views.

The work explores the feeling of boredom on social media and with daily life suffused with digital media technologies as part of a post-digital symptom of disenchantment in which social media and the internet fail to entertain these vloggers.

## The corporate web and digital folklore

The amateur web of the 1990s and early 2000s has transformed into our present hegemonic corporate web rich in social media platforms, real-time data streams and subscription services of ever-increasing high-definition video. With this incorporation of web services into everyday life, internet users have been expressing themselves in the form of amateur videologs, or vlogs, on popular platforms, such as YouTube, since the mid-2000s.

Vlogs are similar to blogs as both are online diaries that share personal experiences, but instead of using text, vlogs use video as the form of expression. The vlogger community has developed an audiovisual language that includes video, spoken commentary, text, graphics, animation, gaming – anything that can be performed in front of a webcam, camera, smartphone and even video screen captures.

Vlogs are a form of “e-folklore”, the electronic transmission of folklore that develops “new forms of written, oral, aural and visual folkloric phenomena”,<sup>2</sup> which circulate on the internet on popular platforms such as YouTube. Vlogs are a part of “Digital Folklore,” which refers to the aesthetic manifestations of popular culture and customs created by “users’ engagement with personal computer applications”.<sup>3</sup> Vloggers engage creatively with applications (or apps) for video editing and media manipulation as well as with pop-

2 Violetta Krawczyk-Wasilewska, “e-Folklore as a Part of Digital Culture”, in: *Folklore in the Digital Age: Collected Essays*, (Łódź/Kraków, Poland: Łódź University Press & Jagiellonian University Press 2016), p. 27.

3 Olia Lialina and Dragan Espenschied, “Do You Believe in Users?”, in: *Digital Folklore: To Computer Users, with Love and Respect*, ed. Olia Lialina and Dragan Espenschied. Stuttgart: Merz & Solitude 2009, p. 9.

ular references and internet culture. Vlogging is a popular online practice that entangles daily life and digital technologies in an audiovisual form. The practice has developed an aesthetics that differs from the audiovisual content available by the entertainment industry provided on video streaming services based on industry standards and modes of production, while vlogs follow an amateur approach to the production of audiovisual content.

### Vlogging because I'm so bored

Boredom, in German *Langeweile*, constructed from *Lange* (long) and *Weile* (while), literally translates as “a long span of time” – being bored in the German translation implies that boredom both lasts in time and stretches the experience of time.

The work *Things I Do When I'm Bored* analyses the vloggers' relationship with being bored through a collage of found footage from YouTube vlogs. The vlogs have been chosen from videos with less than 100 or zero views to emphasise vloggers' self-awareness in their performative statements of boredom as they look at their representation on-screen with the hope of being viewed, subscribed to, commented on, liked, shared and followed by their peers.

The vlogger looks at the screen as one who faces the “mirror in which the subject alienates himself in order to find himself, or stares at himself only to see his own death”.<sup>4</sup> On the one hand, the vloggers in *Things I Do When I'm Bored* stage boredom as producers, as both producers and consumers of vlogs. On the other hand, they stare at their deception as their vlogs do not reach an audience. Despite the lack of views, they continue to create vlogs as a practice included in their daily routines and as a mode of online expression that shares their personal life.

As social media platforms such as YouTube fail to entertain these vloggers, boredom is seen, in part, as a consequence of the experience of social media. Online time is reduced to the consumption and production of content that triggers boredom. Being bored is caused by the lack “of the Spectacular, the very power to appeal”,<sup>5</sup> a notion established by the entertainment industry.

4 Jean Baudrillard, *Seduction*, trans. Brian Singer, CultureTexts. Montréal: New World Perspectives 1990, p. 169.

5 Trinh T. Minh-Ha, “All-Owning Spectatorship”, in: *When The Moon Waxes Red: Representation, Gender and Cultural Politics*. New York: Routledge, 1991, p. 94.

Boredom experienced on the internet can be understood as part of a post-digital symptom of disillusionment with a daily life suffused with digital technologies. In the artwork, I address boredom from within the post-digital condition delineated by the social and cultural effects of digital technology. Besides boredom, other feelings and social anxieties related to social media usage are comparison, isolation, envy, depression or “fear of missing out” (FOMO).<sup>6</sup>

### I'm so bored so I decided to make a vlog

The work *Things I Do When I'm Bored* is composed of a browser-based (random) video compilation and a (linear) video-loop installation.<sup>7</sup> It explores the online/offline dichotomy as a diffuse state, since online time is now incorporated into daily life through the proliferation of portable devices such as smartphones and the wide availability of internet access.

To create this work, I first selected found footage from YouTube by searching the queries: “I’m bored” and “I feel bored”. Initially, I searched YouTube as any regular user would by using the search function and then downloading the videos using a browser extension. I had previously outlined the parameters to be less than 100 views as well as older than six months. These parameters would allow me to excavate YouTube as a (video) library and filter its huge number of videos.

However, a regular search on YouTube does not allow users to filter and sort the search results by the least viewed and makes it rather difficult to find videos with zero views. To reach videos with zero views, I had the help of the artist and programmer Brian Vogelgesang, who created a script to automate my search query using the YouTube API.<sup>8</sup>

6 FOMO, the fear of missing out, is a social anxiety related to a negative psychological condition with compulsive use of Facebook. Zuboff describes that: “FOMO sufferers obsessively checked their Facebook feeds-during meals, while driving, immediately upon waking or before sleeping, and so on. This compulsive behavior is intended to produce relief in the form of social reassurance, but it predictably breeds more anxiety and more searching”, Shoshana Zuboff, *The Age of Surveillance Capitalism: The Fight for a Human Future at the New Frontier of Power*. London: Profile Books Ltd. 2019, p. 463.

7 I started this work during my participation as a guest student in the seminar *Mindwandering and boredom in the arts* where I created an earlier version of this work, a seven-minute video-loop. The seminar was taught by the cognitive scientist Marjan Sharifi and the artist and professor Nina Fischer at the University of Arts in Berlin, Germany, during the winter semester of 2017/2018.

8 The script *youtubeSearchCli* collects links from YouTube with 100 or less views and is available here: <https://github.com/KidA001/youtubeSearchCli>.

With this script, I was able to directly scrape YouTube links with my desired parameters. From the large list of links, I proceeded by filtering and selecting the vlogs that I found most personal and then downloaded them using the Pytube library.<sup>9</sup>

In total, I borrowed around 200 vlogs from the excavation process, which amounted to around 8 GB of mp4 files or about eight hours of video. With this, I assembled the material to examine boredom online. In the browser-based work, the user can watch the archive of the vlogs and with a click skip to a random video which opens a space for a montage based on chance and requires the active participation of the viewer to create a new mash-up.<sup>10</sup> This is broadly associated with a “reflexive mash-up”<sup>11</sup> in which the browsing experience of vlogs are juxtaposed with new vlogs by the user’s click, who takes a critical role in subverting and recombining the vlogs to build a new mashup. The video-loop displays a 27-minute cut from the excavated boredom vlogs. The video editing follows the amateur aesthetics of vlogs through a simple collage technique of cut and paste to build a “reflexive remix”<sup>12</sup> that appropriates peculiar samples from the vlogs to subvert them and build a conceptual critique on online boredom. The aim is to introduce critical reflection and commentary on the effects of social media and challenges the viewer to “reflect on the meaning of the work and its sources”.<sup>13</sup> During the video editing, I assembled the vlogs from a process of trial and error in a dramaturgy that follows and remixes the four patterns of boredom that I describe in the following section.<sup>14</sup>

## Boredom vlogging patterns

Following the excavation process, the footage selection and the video editing, I found four main patterns in the boredom vlogs that I categorise as: (1) I am bored, (2) I am bored, what can I do, (3) What you can do when you are bored, (4) Mockery of boredom. The

9 Pytube library: <https://pytube.io>.

10 The browser-based work can be accessed here: <https://pedroferreira.net/thingsidowhenimbored>

11 Eduardo Navas writes that “[...] the reflexive mashup is a regenerative remix that opens the space for Remix to become discourse, because it allows for constant change much how culture itself keeps changing”, Eduardo Navas, *Remix Theory: The Aesthetics of Sampling*. Vienna: Springer 2012, p. 93.

12 Navas describes that “[...] the reflexive remix takes parts from different sources and mixes them striving for autonomy”, *ibidem*, p. 81.

13 *ibidem*.

14 The video-loop can be previewed here: <https://pedroferreira.net/moving-image/things-i-do-when-im-bored>

vlogs that fall into the last pattern “Mockery of boredom” are the vlogs higher in creative content and contrast the pattern (1) of spoken personal statements of being bored, which adhere to diary-style emotional self-reflection. The patterns (2) and (3) show a desire for online participation and community engagement where vloggers communicate with each other through comments and vlogs. But this desire for engagement fails because it requires views by users and participation by other YouTubers

The expression of feeling bored through vlogging may result in the vlogger’s pursuit for purposeful tasks to do, or rather a boredom that is comprehended as a feeling that takes a highly imaginative and creative path initiated by one’s boredom. These vloggers handle their boredom in a constructive and creative way by creating new vlogs. The browser-based video compilation and the video-loop installation aim to explore boredom and hopefully let the audience also experience boredom critically and to engage with it creatively and empathically with these vloggers.

### Let there be more boredom

*Things I Do When I’m Bored* explores the feeling of being bored as part of a post-digital condition in which daily life is enmeshed with digital media technologies that are no longer exciting new media gadgets. By lacking newness and the spectacular, these technical objects and digital platforms trigger boredom as they have become ordinary devices of everyday routine.

Boredom is interpreted here as one of the many effects of the post-digital age in which users are disenchanted, oversaturated and bored with digital technologies. What if users took the experience of this boredom as a chance to become more present instead of trying to separate themselves from it? What if users did not feel the need to kill time but, rather, befriend it? To engage with one’s boredom is perhaps to find oneself becoming more creative and imaginative. As the cognitive scientist Marjan Sharifi points out, there is a positive cognitive correlation between boredom, mind-wandering and creative thinking.<sup>15</sup>

With this work I introduce a remix montage of several vlogs that have not been seen before or have been pushed away from YouTube’s search results and suggestions. This

15 Marjan Sharifi, “Designing Mind Wandering”, <https://www.marjansharifi.com/mindwandering> [accessed: 02.05.2024].

goes to show that YouTube's algorithms are not neutral but serve corporate interests as videos with a few or zero views do not bring the company profit. YouTube algorithms mainly promote viral videos or the most viewed. This grabs user attention, influences what is seen, shown and propagated, all to exploit user data for targeted advertisement. By contradicting this algorithmic agency, *Things I Do When I'm Bored* can be understood as a way to grasp YouTube's infrastructure, its sociocultural effects and provide an alternative form to watch its contents by shifting one's attention to videos that have been ignored and neglected by its algorithms.

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