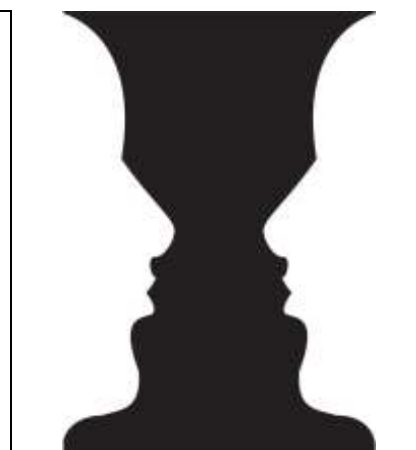


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## Motive, desire, drive: the discourse of force

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### **Abstract**

*A review of the original paper on motive by Blum and McHugh (1971) is used as an occasion to make transparent an approach to social theory as it has developed over the years in their work. This method, in treating motive as an illustration, engages it as an example of the status of the signifier as a symptom of interpretive conflict endemic to any situation of action, always inviting an analysis of the symbolic order and imaginative structure that sustains the distinction as a force in social life. In this paper, motive in particular is unpacked to show how it serves as an indication of fundamental ambiguity with respect to a problem-solving situation, revealing in this case constant perplexity in relation to the enigmatic character of what comes to view on any occasion and the recurrent contestation that is released.*

### **Keywords**

*Motive, desire, drive, self, boredom*

### **Introduction**

This review of the notion of motive, especially in relation to the paper that Peter McHugh and I wrote in 1971, besides being an opportune occasion to briefly engage relevant research since, serves as an incentive to rethink our approach to theorizing and to reflect anew upon the status of motive as a circuit of signification in collective life.

At that time, we did assume that motive appears as usage in which actions are presented as meaningful and justifiable for evaluation (see the *Compaso* call for papers on Motives and Social Organization) in a variety of contexts. In Plato's idiom such citation is "indefinitely expandable" and may be specified ad infinitum (whether as rhetorical,

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interactional, institutional), but any such citation that tries to typify or rationalize such an incoherent mix of uses can only confuse beginning for analysis if it tries to finalize what is simply the data (the usage) rather than to open it for analysis. Thus, the beginning, as superabundant as the signifier seems to its subject, can only be an empty speech (Lacan 1981) until its talk is measured by an analysis that works it through, in part, by revitalizing the provisional themes of the classification. The typologies are part of the initial posit that always needs to be developed. In terms of our method, they stand as formulae or clichés that open up the terrain for analysis.

We can agree that this usage on motive indicates the varied ways members methodically make sense of events, conduct, or of any appearance or coming to view that seems in need of clarification, and that these ways can be labeled as vocabularies, representations, interpretations, or whatnot in the names they assign to conventions that always provide for our initial scene of action. In our paper, we accepted such a view of motive as the signifier and its circulation as a starting point that we posited as a formula to unpack. Such unpacking constitutes our approach to theorizing motive and remains quite different from attempts to typify contexts of motive use as, say, interactional, rhetorical, and institutional in the way that unpacking differs from citation. Although theorizing makes lists too, this is its strategy for getting on to its work of analysis.

This of course leads to a view of the symbolic order of motive as if a provisional and implicit collective speech that needs to be worked-through. As the *Compaso* call for papers suggests, such work begins with usage that displays whatever motive comes to be seen as doing, causing, or making possible as if a force in everyday life. It is agreed that we use motive in various ways, to present, induce, persuade, justify, counsel, and as practices other than providing and examining accounts, many ways and means of sustaining an intelligible social environment. We treat such an order as part of an inherited collection of methods and procedures of making-do (de Certeau 1984) into which the social actor is invariably thrown (Heidegger 1962).

### **The motive paper**

We wrote our paper in part as an attempt to rethink the conventional exchange between views of motive governed by (so-called) “psychological” approaches that externalized it as behavior, and views ruled by “the linguistic turn” that sought to re-engage the tendency to theorize motive as such an object, not as if a transaction between signifier and signified, but as a relationship between signifiers. The “advance” in the so-called revolution was to recognize motive as a social construction that made possible all such views of its externality as an object. At the time, our dissatisfaction with motive as an external view of the signified led not only to a discomfort with the dualistic opposition (between subject, aka motive, and object, aka its externalized referent in behavior), but also with this semiotic model of an exchange between signifiers. Therefore, while motive seemed a referent by virtue of its necessary representation, in our terms this meant that it made reference to making reference, that is, to a processual version of language that

resisted determination in terms of explicit, objective variables. At the time of our writing, influences of Wittgenstein and Heidegger, among others, suggested that the complexity of language (its fundamental ambiguity, Being) exceeded social constructionist views of the production of speech. Indeed, Hegel's conception of consciousness as desire (and so, of speech as oriented to value), together with Freud's notion of the unconscious, joined to Heidegger's vision of Dasein's thrownness into the midst (*in medias*) of language, each disclosed speech as a complex relationship that was not only socially constructed, but something like a malleable field of application for value as a force driving conduct. This awareness was in accord with the implications of readings of Plato and his vision of language as harboring a surfeit or excess that remains indefinable (see Blum 1974). Wittgenstein imagined this force as visualized in an implicit picture of language. In this itinerary, the discourse would only come to disclose how such a force needs to be iterated to include its various inflections as motive, desire, and drive. That is, if motive was initially addressed as a causal force, a condition or reason for action, then the notion of such a force had to be developed and the conception of motive would come to be seen as only one of different shapes of the idea of causal force or grounds of action.

To appreciate the complexity of motive or of any signifier, consider teaching the meaning of a word such as motive to the child: any such reference cannot depend upon an atomistic action of pointing, naming, and the like because it is embedded in "know-how" that everyone needs in order to make sense of the connection in the first place. Learning to apply the notion of motive requires knowing more than this to do so in ways that led Wittgenstein to critique the idea that any calculus could enable reproduction of such knowledge. This circularity, cited to counteract the dream of ostensive definition, reveals in the most simple transaction that what is to be known must be known in advance, bringing to the surface questions raised by Plato's example of Meno's paradox (Meno: if we know why we are asking, why ask, and if we do not know, how will we recognize a criterion of an answer?).

### **Method of analysis**

Our method proposes that we develop in relation to such modes of adaptation to which we listen and from which we differentiate ourselves by virtue of this very procedure of listening that begins to unpack what it hears in the chain of signification. For example, in contrast to either accepting or rejecting these customary means of representation, and in contrast to lamely trying to remove ourselves from such a thicket of beliefs (which marks us inescapably as part of and apart from its order), we are tempted to observe and describe the system as if observing the moods and inclinations of a great beast, as in Plato's caricature of the Sophist (who simply observes and describes). These modes of adaptation—conformity (the man in the street), deviance (flight, escape, transgression), and sophistry (observation, description)—display voices in the discourse of any signifier. Instead of following these paths, we heed them for the purpose of imagining the symbolic order (and the speech of motive) as a text to read and/or to listen to. I have used this method over the years, for example in research on panic (1996), the city (2003),

health and illness (2011a), and in more recent studies of death (2011b), on caregiving for dementia sufferers (2012), of birth (forthcoming, “Born Again”), and of the passage of aging (forthcoming, “Aging as a Social Form”).

In what follows, this is the procedure of unpacking motive that I will try to demonstrate. I begin with the example “she left the party because she was bored” that was used in our paper. I set out not to accept or reject the account (overcoming this either-or alternative for what Rancière [2009] calls the neither-nor), and not to describe how it is put together, though such usage must be my initial “data.” I proceed to work-through the conception of boredom as a motive in order to unpack its force as a conversational resource that is persistently transformed in order to engage problems that stimulate perplexity recurrently in everyday life. We see motive as changing its shape as an “object,” from a particular state of affairs or referent, to its status as a concept or social construction, to an intimation of desire, to a trace of the drive for self-affirmation, to its reflection of the need to affirm the ongoing problem of enigma in the most mundane matters as a sign of the fundamental ambiguity of social life.

Motive then discloses the need and desire to listen to the irreparable impasse of speech and action, a tactful heeding of the undercurrents of language. The impasse requires tact, or what we think of as care for the representational structure of social action (see Gadamer 1975 for a discussion of tact). Such tactful listening to speech for its overtones is what makes possible and necessary our attempt to approach motive here as if its reference is centered neither upon the person said to be motivated, nor the one who imposes such a designation—neither one nor the other—but on the signifier itself, and on the relationship that is brought to life and invested with meaning as the focus of a discourse that we convert from a mute signifier to a lively relationship of meaning-making. This is what I attempt here. The following are some implications.

- a) Motive is not just a subject-object or word-concept transaction in isolation, but it is a relationship;
- b) its content as a commonplace is as a locus of collectivization as if an object of desire; it induces and attracts people (who read many things into it and invariably come into conflict); to say that it exists as in “motive exists” is to say it is *multis*, a focus of many possibilities (Aristotle: being has many senses);
- c) nevertheless, despite these differences, this existence relates those it touches by bringing them together, making them related or relatives by virtue of its existence;
- d) thus, speakers are as if connected at the periphery with respect to the center, invariably removed or separate from the undetermined meaning of motive that is withdrawn in a way that still unifies and differentiates them as if they seek to repossess its absence in the lifeless word (the concept).

## Trajectory

At the time, our interest in motive was stimulated in part by disciplinary pride. We wanted to reassert a sociological approach to the mind or psyche that psychology had colonized. This reflects the spirit in recognizing the concrete universal first enunciated by Hegel, that any universal—concept, distinction, signifier—was *eo ipso* a relationship. To concede this was to open a space for engaging the signifier not as a thing but as an oriented action. Motive, for example, was a case of action oriented to an order and governed in its course, that is, a way of relating to whatever content motive was assumed to reflect (Weber 1947). Since at the time we posited such content as giving or questioning reasons or causes of behavior, motive as a relationship could only be seen as the action of offering such accounts, that is, it was idealized in the collective speech as the practice of giving and receiving grounds. Thus, we brought to life a word—motive—by seeing it as a course of action rather than as a mute signifier. This treats speaking as a relationship between concepts rather than of one concept to an “external” state of affairs, always occurring in this way as a movement “within” language, topologically as a process of internal doubling.

Consequently, our approach to motive or to any such distinction always has to begin *in medias res*, in the midst of language and its inherited classifications, interdictions, and assumptions as if they preexist us as an automated order in terms of which we have very little space to navigate, only the possibility of acting, whether in agreement or not, always under the auspices of such conventions (Blum 2011a). In relation to such an order, motive tends to be approached as a personification of the theorizing of social actors that orients to overcome or compensate for conditions within such a configuration, typically through assessments of lack, loss, acquisition, and the various ways that seem intelligible for making a place in relation to a normative order. This approach identifies the “hole” in the symbolic order on any occasion of inarticulateness or tension, when an inability to give an account of oneself or of /for another is seen as coming to view as contentious, and on countless occasions of perplexity in offering satisfactory explanations of conduct or events in everyday life. In the paper, we offered examples such as accounts for actions that were apparently motivated and yet not self-evident. Again, the lack of self-evidence does not refer to the empirical question of whether, for example, jealousy for an action is the real motive (rather than something else), but to the ambiguity in the signifier itself, an ambiguity essential to the meaning of jealousy. Thus, the “hole” in the symbolic order makes reference to the need to surpass this opposition (created by the empirical puzzle of the “real” meaning in contrast to the false) and to engage the difference in meaning, the otherness it reveals in its ambiguity (and not its empirical status). So, following Hegel (Birchall 1981), we cancel the opposition (the question posed by the empirical status of motive that asks what is his/her real motive: jealousy, or something else?) and preserve the difference (the heterogeneity disclosed as the otherness of jealousy as a signifier, its many applications).

For example, misrecognition is a constant and recurrent phenomenon of everyday life in which motive is raised, whether as mistake or confusion, as infelicities observed and interpreted typically in the repair work studied by Goffman (1963) and ethnomethodology. From the standpoint of the symbolic order, what is decisive to misrecognition is not its particular injurious consequences raised by the question of whether the subject's true value is recognized, but the question of the extent to which the invariable and structural character of misrecognition is oriented and recognized as a problem-solving situation that can be causally effective for our own action. Healing seems to require the capacity to make this difference by seeing one's particular injury as part of a recurrent phenomenon that needs to be grasped for some degree of rehabilitation. Comedy often specializes in making such a difference by revealing persecution as one of the ways in which misrecognition materializes in everyday life.

Here again, in investigating the usage, the varied positions and views situated in collective life, we encounter the speech(es) of motive as observable attributions, assignments, inflections, not only as offering and asking after accounts and reasons for actions of others and of self, but as doing so as part of a regime of expectations, even demands, that idealize accountability in mundane and lofty affairs, accountability based on conceptions of trust and skepticism concerning self-observation, self-monitoring, in ways that make accessible actions of privatization, publicizing, and withholding, a virtual language game of accountability that is normatively coded. Thus, motive is not only grounded in a normative order that is observable in such automated gestures and interdictions, but is animated by an idealization of the social relationship as a process of mutual and reciprocal transparency where egos and alters are viewed as seeking to monitor selves and others in the hope of a reconciliation within and without that functions both as a standard and as an objective that is impossible to realize.

Pushing this further, we see that the relationship of motive to the Real is not simply an oriented recognition of the essential ambiguity of the signifier in the way motive seems to stand to the symbolic order, but it addresses the implications of such irresolution as a focus of contestation in collective life that invariably reveals the impossibility of any definitive resolution in action that leaves no remainder. Thus, irresolution manifests itself in any ethical collision disclosed in the materiality of social life through its contingencies, proclamations of deceit, gestures of accusation, pretexts, apologies, accounts, and the essentially indefinite residues of any action that must invariably qualify for reasonable doubt. The Real identifies the space wherein contingencies can be disruptive and appear as an assumed cause of collisions with respect to sincerity, deceit, law, lying, and attributions that are always maintained in the absence of agreement, in ways that sustain a constant skepticism towards oneself and always other.

The notion of the symbolic order as the ground of motive invites us to ask about the convention itself, the work of motive. By inquiring into motive as a genre we ask just what kind of activity does this signifier do or what kind of cause need we attribute to it? In this special sense, in addressing motive or any such signifier, we always begin in the midst of the legitimate order and its rules, even implicit, that partition and organize the

field of action and interpretation. Thus, if motive speech materializes first in offers to give and ask for grounds, reasons, justifications, Derrida's (1973) formulation of phonocentrism seems valuable because it makes explicit the imaginary relationship of the subject of such an order towards actions in ways that reveal how each of us seems to think of ourselves as closest to what we do and say and as having a privileged role in testimony. Goffman (1955) goes even further by saying that we assume and assign a sacred status to the self and work assiduously to maintain this illusion (see Blum forthcoming, "Durkheim's Ruse" in *The Canadian Journal of Sociology*). Thus, the imaginary engagement with motive can begin to be formulated through the figure of a self-observing and self-monitoring subject who idealizes in practice the prospect of bringing together his/her body and mind, ideality and actuality, in order to make consistent and intelligible a relationship to the world that orients to making connections and associations in such a manner.

In other words, we ask what the signifier motive does and what it causes in social life as if it is a significant force. If motive is a tool, a strategy in Kenneth Burke's (1957) sense of equipment for living, what kind of tool is it? We can say provisionally that motive does the work of enhancing the views of the related character of an event through its use as a means to discern and enforce intelligibility and the making of connections that characterize the interpretive arts, arts of detection, science, and all methods of doing association in collecting and segregating ideas and impressions. In its way, what motive does as a causal agent is to produce the propensity to connect as an aspect of human desire and, eventually, as a drive that is reflected not only in official and legitimated normative associations, but in disruptive attributions of enigma, mystery, myth, and in the works of great novelists such as Kafka and Poe where narrator and character are relentlessly engaged by such puzzles in relation to the mysteries of human conduct in very specific situations.

Thus, we could never be satisfied with an account that says simply that motive is a description of this-or-that, whether a process inside or outside, or a particular reason or cause for doing an action, because the complexity of motive locates it as a phenomenon of the unconscious, which means that it is symptomatic of a terrain of interpretive conditions that could remain unstated and yet active. From this perspective, it is not a question of empirically citing a motive for behavior that we do as in saying "this is the motive!" because our relationship to motive begins with its enigmatic character as a problem of meaning. Motive is then an occasion causing us to address the discourse that it is posited as covering over in its prosaic circuit of significations, say, the problem of assigning causal texture, moral requiredness, looking for connections, and speculating upon associations. Motive is then an occasion to plunge into the investigation of a discourse without any intention of making some final empirical assertion about whatever is the cause. To understand motive we have to begin from its usage within a ritual structure (symbolic order) that is animated in turn by expectations for self and other (imaginary) that can begin to account for its emergence and maintenance. If Goffman called such aspects by the names of ritual and face, we note that there is nothing psychological about such designations as they interrelate to provide grounds for the

symbolic and imaginative structure of social life as both definitive and fundamentally ambiguous.

### **Force: motive as Oedipus**

Though we are particularly engaged by the notion of motive, its status as an “object” to be analyzed is common to any signifier. This means that, as we track down motive as a notion we need to preserve its similarity to any concept while being alive to its singularity as a distinction. We have already suggested that we need to rethink motive not simply as a cause in the prosaic sense or even as an effect of other causes: to escape such a vision of exchange we ask ourselves what kind of force the notion of motive might exercise in social life. In this way we ask after the value of the notion, of motive in this case. At the most general level as a universal, motive is typically treated as orienting to compensation or to a way of overcoming deprivation, lack, loss, as in an Oedipal model that sees the behavior as either striving to maintain what it has or to acquire what it lacks. The Oedipal model of motivation resembles what Bataille (1985) calls a restricted economy, animated by a fear of castration or desire for emulation: if we have a penis, we fear losing it; if we lack a penis, we covet its attainment. In this model there is nothing “beyond” such alternatives of maintenance and acquisition, and the anxieties correlative with these orientations. If pleasure in this phallic model is commensurate with maintenance and acquisition, sociologists such as Durkheim (1951) have noted that acquisition is never a final solution to desire because what is attained only stimulates continuous striving (see also Blum forthcoming, “Durkheim’s Ruse” in *The Canadian Journal of Sociology* and also forthcoming, “Death, Happiness, and the Meaning of Life” in *The Journal of Classical Sociology*). Even if the lack is replenished, it is constantly in need of renewal. This notion of anomie posits a restlessness that is compatible with Derrida’s conception of the pharmakon in which the antidote to the disease requires a further antidote and dates back to Hegel’s conception of medicine (Blum and McHugh 1984). In this way the Oedipal model plays off a longstanding sociological vision of social change that reveals how any problem once solved only becomes a new problem to be solved (Swanson 1971). What Lacan (1981) identifies as the gesture of refusal in the unconscious depicts the dramatization of ambiguity in relation to Oedipus itself, that is, in relation to the phallic conception of possession and loss that animates this picture of motive. Citing boredom as a motive for leaving the party treats the motive in terms of an Oedipal model that assumes that deprivation or not having enough stimulation is the cause, or as if the actor is trying to achieve something lacked: the party lacking enough to provide stimulation and staying power, and the person lacking resources to endure such deprivation.

### **Force: Motive as desire**

A subject conceived in such a way is assumed to leave because of being oriented to the quality of the party as unsatisfying, and so, as animated by the desire for quality. This citation of motive assumes that the desire for quality, whether of party or time spent, causes the subject to leave, but this desire is still ruled by a sense of lack and acquisition.



The notion of the symbolic order as the ground of motive invites us to ask about the convention itself, the work of motive. Here we note that in the example of boredom as a motive for leaving the party, we are instructed to resist treating this as an empirical problem instead of an occasion of problem-solving insofar as the use of motive in this case allows us to think about what a party is or should be and to enter into that kind of discourse and, even more, in the discourse on the place and force of boredom as a stimulus in social life. Boredom seems to be invested with quality to a greater extent than in the Oedipal model of acquisition, as if the subject is ruled by a concern for quality. The work being done then begins to point to an engagement with the meaning of social action. If leaving the party because of boredom or in order to escape boredom seemed to be the motive, then this would appear to make mind or connecting in thought the related character of party and boredom to be the true motive(s) for leaving. One leaves either because of the quality of the party or because of the inability to see something of value in the party, making the party and the person the two alternative or interrelated grounds for leaving. Thus, if boredom is not the motive, then this begins to equate motive with talk that cites the reason for boredom, setting up an infinite regress: whatever factors possible for causing the person's departure are thinkable as indefinitely expandable from preferences, taste, thoughtfulness, to neurology or genetics. Even more, this begins to suggest that the expectation of what a party should be produces this sense of its failure, revealing, in Lacan's idiom, that the motive could reside not in what the party lacks, but in the expectation itself, that the idea of what the party is and should be makes the lack appear. Thus, this sense of lack (really of expectation about the party) lacks grounding and it is this lack that is central. Here then, motive is neither boredom as a state of mind nor boredom as a representation or concept, but an upshot of the symbolic order that collects and differentiates terms and actions according to various rules of signification. In leaving the party because of boredom, the motive would not be identified as boredom because this kind of account, this connective tissue that includes signifiers such as motive, cause, reason, and the like, is embedded in a symbolic order as a regime of distinctions and ways of partitioning, an order G.H. Mead (1967) called the Generalized Other, and Jacques Rancière (2009) called the distribution of the sensible. This is to say that it is not boredom that motivates the subject, because being bored is a symptom of a concern for how the quality of time and action frames the problem-solving situation that boredom and such consequences symptomatize. It is the symbolic order that provides for a web of signification including terms and their associations, a web that makes motive talk, its coherence, legitimacy, and presence and absence a matter to be taken up, investigated, evaluated, and appraised. Such a subject could protest that he or she did not leave because of boredom, because that seems to reinforce the view of the subject as shallow. Rather, he or she could claim to have left because of high standards, being more demanding about his or her time and its uses. What the ambiguity of boredom as a motive shows is not only the limits of that signifier, but of motive *per se*, since its meaning and/or presence and absence is not clear and indubitable, but is always a sign of the perplexity of the signifier. Motive, not different

than boredom, confirms the inadequacy of any declarative assertion that simply identifies a motive without further ado.

### **Force: motive as drive**

Over the years we have proposed that analysis of a distinction such as motive has to begin by working-through its usage. But as noted, such work does not just repeat its repetitions, but instead tries to translate them in ways that can reiterate their presuppositions out of an interest in engaging and reforming the subject. In the original paper we did this by inspecting examples of motive talk that used it as a cause, as in “she left the party because she was bored.” We suggested that boredom was treated in such examples as if an external force “outside” of the actor that imposed itself upon him or her, instead of being seen for what it was as a speech act, a socially constructed representation of the reason or cause of behavior. Yet, this seems to reduce motive to one of two alternatives: either a concrete state of mind (which is always dependent upon constructive activity), or the activity of social construction itself. If this latter alternative seems an “advance,” it still simplifies motive by reducing it to an effect of language that leaves its analytic status untouched. Is motive simply a custom or way of speaking, a form of address, or does it need to make reference to more than making reference, but to a problem with a degree of causal force in collective life? This is the question I posed in renewing an interest in motive as a signifier.

Using the example of boredom as a motive for leaving the party, we appreciate that it is an account that appears to be an intelligible move within the symbolic order (an account, explanation, whatever), its imaginary structure disclosing a complexity that must exceed any such description. This complexity is independent of any further specification that might try to pin down boredom descriptively (psychologically, physiologically), say, as depression, fatigue, or whatever. These causes are insufficient and any further questioning of what causes the cause still preserves a phallic economy in anticipating a final solution. In this way, citing boredom as the motive for leaving the party comments on the quality of the party or perhaps on the imagination of the one who leaves, but might very well be a symptom of a fundamental anxiety that serves as a tool for preserving an image of the self and for counteracting other possibilities. Renata Adler (1983) captures this in her novel in an aside on boredom.

It's not just that it corrupts their attention, makes them less capable, in other words, of being patient with important things that require a tolerance, to some greater purpose, of some boring time. The real danger lies, I think in this: that boredom has intimately to do with power (110).

Whether or not the party is (really, truly) boring is not the issue and neither is the subject's impatience, intolerance, or imaginative incapacity. When we consider boredom as a signifier that is a force in life by asking what it does, we ask for the message it delivers. Adler suggests in this case that it is an exercise of power that makes a disturbing invidious claim about the one who is bored and in relation to the situation towards which

such a one seems to show distance. In this sense, boredom as a motive in the way of a cause would not do justice to its status as desire, perhaps as a way of doing self-affirmativeness and, even more, to the drive of maintaining the positive value of the face of the subject.

Adler's observation resonates with René Girard's (1966) conception of the instinct to mastery reflected in detachment, revealing in its way how boredom might be a means of showing mastery through distance. Detachment in such ways begins to appear as a message or means for affirming the value of the self by demonstrating its capacity to withhold commitment from any present engagement as if a statement about its priorities and interests that elevates its bearer in relation to the others who are engaged in any endeavor. Thus, boredom can "speak" about one's autonomy by virtue of its diffidence towards the enthusiasms of others. Girard finds such detachment to function in this way as a kernel of narcissism (as in the colleague I recall who always wore her coat to sociable occasions as if showing a readiness to depart for other engagements). Still, what this shows is that we never ask if she was "really" bored, in the sense of being exhausted or of simply showing off her superiority, because these are empirical questions that deflect us from treating the collision they might create between truth and falsity as an occasion to address the ambiguity in boredom as an opportunity for reflection. Our concern lies in addressing the meaning of boredom as an interpretive terrain and force in social life and not in the empirical final solution.

### **The real**

In our original paper we glossed what I take to be the significance of motive as a figure that formulates the primordial tie to life, the connection that led Gadamer (1996: esp. 64-65) to identify the most important contribution of Prometheus to humankind as not the gift of fire, but the capacity to conceal from ourselves the fact of death, making the desire to live coeval with the denial of death. The denial of death is then motivated to enhance the capacity to live life in any present just as the desire to live is motivated to repress the thought of life. This suggests to me that the repression of death is sustained by the motive to discover and attach oneself to some worldly preoccupation in a way that makes motive truly what Kenneth Burke (1957) calls "equipment for living" by virtue of its being a method for putting aside the thought of death. Yet, such a view risks rationalizing motive as a function of will, instead of seeing its libidinal character. This glosses what we can understand as the erotic force of any such attachment, an image that dramatically comes to view in the contribution of Lacan that recognizes the need for the inversion of the repression of death in its shape as the motivated attachment to some preoccupation, the necessity of investing life with the affect that can sustain its illusory force. This connects motive not simply to jouissance, but to its function in commitment, and in its way, to aesthetics as the capacity to perform at life as if its moment is eternal. We thus conclude by reopening the Real as a path, motive evoking an image of the as-if as the secret story of life.

This leads me to appreciate now that the fundamental ambiguity of motive and its primordial status in relation to life and death was “repressed” in our paper in ways that can only make reference to the *jouissance* of our preoccupation with our ambition that seemed to overwhelm our capacity to recognize this motive. In rethinking the paper, I see that boredom becomes a crucial signifier that we treated with respect, but not yet in a way that showed appreciation for its character as part of a running commentary on the ways in which life is limited by the need to be motivated towards its mundanity. The importance of boredom, then, is twofold: first, it appears as a sign of the weakened preoccupation with whatever makes life seem meaningful, and so, it appears with the disappearance of the investment in affect, or *jouissance*, that helps us repress death; second, as such a sign, it leads us to search for new ways of being motivated (even unconsciously) and of tying ourselves to worldly affairs.

Therefore, our concern is empirical in its way because it allows us to begin to engage motive, and in this case boredom, as an occasion of problem-solving raised by any routine engagement where demands are made on participants to spend their energies and commitment in normatively coded means for expressing involvement. The force of motive as drive invites us to consider the need expressed by boredom as possible distancing or involvement, as if a continuous demand made upon any subject to negotiate the ambiguity of abstraction and its relation to goodwill on each and any occasion. The impossibility of securing a definitive and final solution *here* is quite different than that of discovering the real motive for an action, and the temptation of seeing abstraction as boredom is a possibility intrinsic to the fundamental ambiguity of the signifier, and so, a constant opportunity for reflective action.

In this respect, it is no accident that Walter Benjamin (1999: 111) was exercised by the coexistence of boredom and games of chance, especially gambling. Games of chance seem to rescue humans from inexorable boredom and its quintessential mode of adjustment in waiting. In some way, the lure of the game of chance and the anticipation of adventure, surprise, fortuitous contingencies and its happenstance is seen as an antidote to boredom. Thus, in life, waiting does not simply await death as the formula suggests, but anticipates entertainment, excitement, the adventure, as what is just around the corner (Blum 2003: 262-293). This means that the problem of life as waiting for a continuous aporia is like the expectation of adventure as the difference that promises to make a difference. In this sense, boredom and the diffidence it communicates seems to be a way of problem-solving, but such a pretext can only defer reflection upon whatever it might symptomatize.

I have used boredom (cited in the original paper as a motive for leaving the party) as an example of motive as an occasion for continuous analysis rather than as an effort to empirically conclude an account. If on the surface motive seems like part of a question-answer game, it can be understood as a provocation to rethink a signifier and, specifically, to expose its status as a way of engaging the important concern for force or influence upon conduct and action that is so essential to social life. Indeed, the necessity of motive as such a focus seems forced upon us by the perpetual perplexity of the signifier and by the enigmatic status of action and interpretation as if the enigma forces

us to ask after force itself, to reveal motive as part of this discourse on force (along with desire, drive) that needs to go beyond what comes to view and seems settled.

For example, if we understand the citation of boredom as a pretext for leaving the party, then the motive is still true in the way of a pretext and false in not being the whole story. In Lacan's idiom, its truth is seen as an imaginary conception that must be both false because of its undeveloped partial character and yet true as an idealization for the subject. This means that the true motive stands to be discovered as the subject's sublimation that uses the pretext as a gesture for expressing mastery through diffidence, but our version of that as true must only be partial, and so, false in its way. Motive as any signifier must leave a remainder, but this does not deprive our analysis of its critical force. In disclosing how motive must serve as a pretext, we honor the pretext itself as a gesture that clarifies for all who are touched by it the stakes in the discussion.

In this sense, the fundamental ambiguity of the signifier, in dramatizing its use as pretext, alerts us to a path for reflecting upon it in our accounts and representations of self and others. This function of motive as pretext is a continuous topic in all programs of rehabilitation, such as Alcoholics Anonymous, in which motive is treated often as an undeveloped expression of something else, its citation itself as a symptom. Thus, if I know that my use of boredom as a pretext for leaving the party conceals another (second) speech about myself, and my sense of its fragility and need to be affirmed and protected, then such "knowledge" might tell me that I have more work to do in sizing up my actions and interpretations. In this way, the ambiguity of a signifier, such as motive in our present case, is never a dead end, unless we decide to play dead because we are in position to animate it in thought and action. Motive is only a mute distinction if we decide to let it lie.

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