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### BOREDOM AND ANALOG NOSTALGIA

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*SCUM Manifesto*, nostalgia

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THERE IS NOSTALGIA today not only for the supposed aesthetic warmth of analog cinema but for the experience of actually, physically going to movies rather than having them come to you via home theater systems, the internet, and mobile devices. Paradoxically, the home video era—which heralded the end of the classical cinematic experience—was also an era of boredom, memorialized in punk’s anthems (the Ramones sang “now I wanna have something to do” while the Sex Pistols sang “oh we’re so pretty/oh so pretty we’re vacant”). In 1972 *National Lampoon* devoted an issue to boredom, featuring Bonnie Boredom on the cover, staring out at readers like a demented Betty Crocker, and wearing a badge that proclaimed, “I’M BORED.” In the opening editorial, George W. S. Trow considered the boredom of self-criticism sessions, Grateful Dead concerts, organic vitamins, Yoko Ono, Woodstock, and “your tedious Multi-Media in the Third World Studies program” (1972, 4). Later in the issue, a list of boring topics included air-pollution statistics, cancer research, counterculture, cult murders, disarmament talks, economic sanctions, emerging nations, famines, gay liberation, generation gap, goodwill missions, holiday-death-toll predictions, juntas, labor unrest, nonviolent protest, nuclear holocaust, penal reform, police brutality, population explosion, poverty programs, race riots, sexual revolution, sky-jacking, Third World struggle, urban renewal, wage and price controls, and welfare cases. The sheer weight of “issues” had become too much as cities in

Britain and the United States were faltering and crumbling in economic distress; the utopian idealism of the 1960s had been drained off, leaving a bitter residue of guilt, narcissism, and boredom, a vacuum that punk filled. In 1976 the Buzzcocks wrote a song called “Boredom”: “You know me—I’m acting dumb/you know the scene—very humdrum/boredom—boredom.” These lines had the ringing endorsement of truth, and that was punk’s solution: to transform boredom into a premise of modern life.

In the *SCUM Manifesto*, radical-feminist would-be-assassin of Andy Warhol Valerie Solanas included an entry on boredom that read: “Life in a society made by and for creatures who, when they are not grim and depressing are utter bores, when not grim and depressing, an utter bore” (1968, 8). It was as if the Great Society had produced nothing so much as boredom, as the idealism of the 1960s deflated into realization that even though Richard Nixon was on his way out and the Vietnam War was over, not that much had changed, after all. “The Great American Soap Opera,” declared the cover of the *Village Voice* in 1974, a week after Nixon resigned the presidency on August 9, the Fords replacing the Nixons. Alexander Cockburn wrote: “Now we’re talking here strictly about iconography: the new images, not the new political realities. And alas the new iconography is, at first sight, not encouraging. In the great American soap opera we’ve gone from grand guignol to family charades in a couple of days, from Key Biscayne and San Clemente to the boring good cheer of a Washington suburb” (1974, 8).

In that same issue, the *Village Voice* ran an advertisement for a Panasonic Concord half-inch videotape recorder that recorded and played back from “any CCTV camera or monitor.” Although Sony’s Betamax would not be introduced to markets until 1975, followed shortly thereafter by VHS, the dawn of affordable, compact home taping and viewing had arrived. The advertisement for the Concord, with its sleek, box-like structure and tape reels that demystified the apparatus behind video images, appeared alongside advertisements for *Serpico*, *The Conversation*, and *Chinatown*, movies today associated with the Technicolor warmth and boldness of the New American Cinema. There is nostalgia not only for the content of these movies but for their mediums as well, which conjure boring, hot

summer days of wandering around the city, taking in a movie to escape the heat in the dark. The boredom of the day, and the boredom of the long, slow takes in *The Conversation*, were soon to be replaced by the fast-forward and rewind capabilities of the VCR, and then the instant-everywhere of digital, which leaves no space for boredom.