

"THE FOG OF BOREDOM: DOWNWARD MOBILITY AND SOCIAL SUFFERING IN POST-COMMUNIST BUCHAREST, ROMANIA"



Bruce O'Neill
Doctoral Candidate
Stanford University

Romanians are bored (*plictisit*). They describe themselves as bored all of the time. Yet, the boredom that bombards this post-Communist country does not attack only its leisure class. Contrary to the instincts of literary greats from Charles Dickens (1853) to David Foster Wallace (2011), boredom's most vulnerable victim is not the *petit bourgeoisie* but the homeless. Romania's troubled post-Communist economy, compounded by the global financial crisis, left a glut of unwanted laborers unemployed and living on the streets. Once there, the language of boredom abounded, capturing homeless people's alienation from work and family but also from the pleasures of consumption. Drawing upon 30 months of ethnographic research that shuttled between homeless shelters, squatter camps and day labor markets in Bucharest, this talk investigates the experience of downward mobility by foregrounding the felt reality of boredom. What, this PAPER asks, does the formation of the bored subject reveal about the violence of downward mobility? This is a historical, ethnographic question that attends to a crisis-generated shift in the so-called global economy, one that has forced millions of people the world over to come to terms with diminished economic capacities. .

Bruce O'Neill is a dissertation writer in the Department of Anthropology at Stanford University. His current research centers on a 30-month ethnographic study of boredom in post-Communist Romania. Based on fieldwork with Bucharest's new homeless population, Bruce's dissertation investigates downward mobility and the experience of being cast aside in an era of radical economic crisis. Bruce is also interested in the politics behind the production of new urban spaces to accommodate Romania's growing homeless population. This includes research on formal institutions like homeless shelters and day centers as well as informal spaces such as squatter camps and black markets.

**Friday,
October 19th, 2012, 12:00PM
Encina Hall West, 208**

RSVP encouraged by 10/16, Free and open to the public / Lunch will be served

DEPARTMENT OF ANTHROPOLOGY