

A PSYCHOANALYTIC ETHICS FOR SCREEN AESTHETICS? THE CASE OF *SPRING
BREAKERS*

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INTRODUCTION

Robert Sinnerbrink suggests that film-philosophy and film-ethics converge around cinema's production of an "aesthetic experience" preoccupied with "the human figure in action, the individual in relation to the community, the human being against nature, or the interpersonal world of psychological and emotional conflict."¹ Within this broad definition any film might be the subject of ethical-philosophical inquiry where, Sinnerbrink further notes, film-ethics is broadly evident in approaches to film that examine the ethics "*in* cinema (focussing on narrative content)," questions "*of* cinematic representations" (the politics of representation), and cinema's role as "a medium" of political and ideological ways of seeing.² As Jinhee Choi and Mattias Frey suggest, despite the discipline formalising around "three major ways of seeing the relationship between film and its ethical functions: the revisionist, the perceptionist, and the cognitivist perspective," each category works within "the two traditional realms within ethics—goodness and morality."³ Seemingly in contrast to notions of goodness and morality, Jacques Lacan posits the work of the psychoanalytic clinic as an "ethics of the singular": a practice that aims not at revealing "a universal truth" but the "particular truth" of self-knowledge that "appears to everyone in its intimate specificity."⁴ Indeed, a psychoanalytic ethics places special emphasis on the specificity of knowledge regarding the subject's particular mode of *jouissance*—how one "enjoys" beyond the limits of pleasure and reality principles—where, as Lacan puts it, "in the last analysis, what subject really feels guilty about" is not immoral action per se, but "the extent to which he has compromised his desire."⁵ Can such an ethics have a place in an ethics of film aesthetics? The difference in approach is perhaps smaller than first approximation for, as Choi and Frey note, many contemporary approaches to cinematic ethics prioritise "affectivity over rationality, and ethics of the particular over ethics of moral imperatives," where "the particular effective nature of film spectatorship" and "perceptual and sensorial engagement with film" can be "considered ethical in and of itself, not merely as a moral ground to connect reality and others outside the self."⁶

This paper therefore considers what a psychoanalytic ethics of aesthetics might add to current approaches to film as an ethical experience. I take a film that, at first glance, must appear singularly unethical—Harmony Korine's *Spring Breakers* (2013)—to ask how its aestheticized experience of transgression might explicate something of the intimate specificity

found in the clinic in ways that nevertheless resonate with a collective ethical project. Specifically, I ask how cinema, as a modern industrial art-form creating uniquely aestheticized experiences, may be positioned to perform the important work of synthesizing an individual into the collective ethics of civilisation following Georges Bataille's notion of "sacrificial art."⁷ Tim Themis has argued that a psychoanalytic ethics aligns with Bataille's on the latter's formulation of a "taboo-transgression" dialectic found in art (most notably Palaeolithic art), where man is seen transitioning from animal to human "and back again,"⁸ a phenomena that maps onto Lacan's registers of the real, symbolic, and imaginary in ways not insignificant to our understanding of cinema's aesthetic experience. This establishing of taboos on violence, sex, and death (taboos transgressed in *Spring Breakers*) creates a world of social bonds and culture, what Themis follows Freud in describing as a process of "humanising a world of work" founds a "respect for taboos, awareness of mortality, and concomitant developments of tools for controlling and understanding nature."⁹ This new world of taboo might be said to cut us off from the (Lacanian) "real"—that time associated with our animal being prior to taboo, complex language, and culture—and ushers in, for Themis, the same "symbolic register" of Lacan's tripartite schema.¹⁰ Here, the language of the symbolic is "used to communicate law, morality, knowledge, and reason" but is only "made possible by [the] space created by taboo, to found *an order of things* that every newborn repeats our species entry into" where, Bataille observes psychoanalytically: "what are children if not animals becoming human?"¹¹ In all this, art—often taken to be the "imaginary" register in the Lacanian schema, of image and illusion—plays an important function in offering momentary transgression of the taboos laid down for our advancement.¹² For though we find happiness (enjoyment) in the comfort and rewards made possible by taboo, Themis notes that Bataille precedes Lacan's seminar on ethics in identifying a "contrary need for transgression."¹³ For where "taboos create a distance from the real of our animal-bodily drives registered in terms of enjoyment," this distance builds "a debt that also, periodically, needs to be repaid."¹⁴

As I want to show in this paper, Bataille's work offers a useful compliment to Freud and Lacan's on ethics insofar as we can comprehend the function of art—and in this instance, cinema—in reconciling the individual to the group. Those who take *Spring Breakers* as a serious work of cinema (it was number two in *Cahiers du Cinéma's* top ten films of 2013) tend to see it as "aesthetically gorgeous" but ultimately a "deconstruction" of narrative cinema and a commentary on various aspect of contemporary life (as I detail later).¹⁵ Described by Jason Wood as "a neon-infused tale of crime, sisterhood and debauchery,"¹⁶ *Spring Breakers* follows a quartet of university students—Faith (Selena Gomez), Candy (Vanessa Hudgens), Brit (Ashley Benson), and Cotty (Rachel Korine)—in pursuit of the pleasures of spring break. Here the film animates something of the transgressive experience of the sacred festival that Bataille follows Friedrich Nietzsche in relating to the Dionysian "god of transgression."¹⁷ In the feast of

Dionysus, as with the festival depicted in the film, “the suspension of taboos sets free the exuberant surge of life,”¹⁸ where “what is ordinarily excluded” during taboo time is “allowed and even required” in an orgiastic excess that “culminates in ecstasy.”¹⁹ Once in St. Petersburg, Florida, the four embrace the excesses of enjoyment found in the festival: drugs and alcohol flow freely facilitating uninhibited sexual experiences. But the film pushes past this sanctioned (even expected) form of transgressive activity to examine what lies beyond the limits of law and justice founding the collective good, prefaced by the actions of Brit, Candy, and Cotty, who rob a diner (wielding a fake gun) to finance the trip. The spring break festivities are halted when the quartet are arrested for drug offenses, only to be bailed out by a stranger, Alien (James Franco), a drug and arms dealer/rapper who invites the girls into his criminal world. Here they begin to transgress in more violent and fatal terms, joining Alien in armed robberies. While Faith and eventually Cotty come to the limit of their transgressive capacity and return home to the order of things, Britt and Candy pursue transgression beyond the reality and pleasure principles—concluding in a murderous spree of Alien’s rival Big Arch (Gucci Mane) and his entourage. Such a film challenges our perception of ethics, given the singularly amoral actions of the individuals within, not to mention the film’s representative strategies which, as I will suggest, transgress the normative limits of narrative cinema to lift tabooed enjoyment to the surface. What can such a film offer the collective ethical praxis of civilisation? Moreover, what can psychoanalytic discourse disclose about this project?

The singular psychoanalytic ethics of the clinic may appear narrowly focused on the particular mode of enjoyment the subject can find within the limits of the social group: the degree to which one may access *jouissance*, regardless of others. As Dylan Evans notes, however, though at first Lacan uses *jouissance* to refer to “enjoyable sensation that accompanies the satisfaction of a biological needs such as hunger” (and later sexual pleasure/orgasm), the term comes to refer to the subject’s pursuit of enjoyment at the limits of (or beyond) the pleasure principle (the embargo on unlimited pleasure) such that “pleasure becomes pain.”²⁰ In this, one’s particular mode of *jouissance* may not appear to others (or even to the individual) as “enjoyment” but may manifest in forms of deep un-pleasure or unhappiness (motivating one to enter analysis). But though the psychoanalytic clinic may focus on coming to understand an individual subject’s particular mode of enjoyment (felt paradoxically as “suffering”),²¹ such a singular praxis can arguably never be separated from a broader ethical project since the subject must always come to operate within a community (as I discuss further shortly). But perhaps the most radical discovery of the clinic—that of the unconscious, as a consequence of which the subject is “inevitably cut off from full awareness of its own inner workings”²²—is what makes psychoanalysis of such value to a collective ethical praxis.²³ As Peter Dahlgren argues, recognition of this divided subject must alter how we engage with any (ethical) ideal based on the “rational,” “reflexive,” “transparent,” and “contingent” subject optimistically imagined in

Enlightenment thinking.²⁴ This is evident, for example, in Freud's "Thoughts for The Times of War and Death," in which the disillusionments of war (the atrocities inexplicably perpetrated by friends and neighbours), are felt most keenly in the optimism of Enlightenment thinking.²⁵ Thus, while many have left psychoanalysis behind in the "cultural turn"—where, as David Bordwell puts it, "much freer agents" are allowed (and positions of resistances theorised)²⁶—I suggest the problem of the split subject remains central to understanding our moral/ethical experience.²⁷ And though this split subject is problematic to theorise and apply—representing an "impossible" knowledge for scholars in any quantitative sense²⁸—the findings of the clinic must be part of any ethical project that engages with human experience in the establishment of reasonable expectations, standards, and values. Moreover, psychoanalysis' "singular" knowledge does not exist in insolation from the collective.

Indeed, it is striking how much of Freud's work underwrites an ethical praxis where it is concerned with the *psychical* impact of the human animal's transition into a collective social group wherein certain quantities of libidinal energy and instinctual impulses must be redirected and "sacrificed" to the community.²⁹ The consequences of this sacrifice are examined at length in *Civilisation and its Discontents*, where Freud observes that "a good part of the struggles of mankind centre round the single task of finding an expedient accommodation—one, that is, that will bring happiness—between this claim of the individual and the cultural claims of the group," and further questions, moreover, "whether such an accommodation can be reached by means of some particular form of civilization or whether this conflict is irreconcilable."³⁰ The singularity of a psychoanalytic ethics is thus not only interested in the economic problem of redistributing and regulating libido to the satisfaction of the individual—via forms of sublimation—but for the community at large insofar as Freud is equally interested in the particular *forms* of society's directions for libido (both socially valued forms of sublimation and the ideals *for which* one must sacrifice) and in the consequences of failing this task for the individual (neurosis, psychosis), and society (war).³¹ Accordingly, in *The Ethics of Psychoanalysis*, Lacan considers this project through Sophocles' tragic play *Antigone* to explicate the role of law—the foundations of civilization, befitting a collective social good—where it is excessively (hubristically) enforced. Georges Bataille similarly takes up Freud's interest in the demands of culture on our instinctual disposition to consider how impositions on individual libido tie into collective economic structures invested with quotients of energy and, as both Freud and Lacan do, asks what role art may play in the exchange.³² Here, if there is an excess of taboo—as with the neoliberal demand for constant accumulation—an equivalent excess of libido "dams up," seeking satisfaction.³³ For Bataille this excess "must be spent, willingly or not," either "gloriously" in art or, if ignored, "catastrophically" in war.³⁴

Freud similarly argues that art "offers substitutive satisfactions for the oldest and still most deeply felt cultural renunciations, and for that reason it serves as nothing else does to reconcile a

man to the sacrifices he has made on behalf of civilisation.”³⁵ It is in this light that psychoanalysis may contribute something to our understanding of cinema as an ethical experience. Todd McGowan has more recently renewed the case for theorising cinema psychoanalytically, positing cinema as a “dream factory, a form of public dreaming” where “[t]he filmmaker creates a film to satisfy the spectators desire” and, like dreams in the clinic, we are invited to analyse a film’s “formal structure to show how the film speaks to the desire of the spectator and what the film reveals about this desire.”³⁶ Here, the “crucial parallel lies in the position of the subject in the dream and in the cinema [which] marginalizes conscious will and privileges unconscious desire more than any other artistic medium.”³⁷ This reinvokes older applications of psychoanalytic thought to film where, Stephen Heath puts it, the spectator was understood to take “pleasure from the desires allowed through film’s scenes and images while at the same time distanced from the disruptive force of those desires.”³⁸ This is often where ethical approaches address a film’s representational and ideological strategies (as I detail further later) rather than the desire it expresses, however, it is important to note that while a viewer may enjoy the film’s content, it does not mean they have no control over their response or, equally, have no ability to distinguish it from the reality principle—to *evaluate* its morality. Rather, film-as-public-dreaming only licences the viewer to enjoy the dream’s content without feeling responsible for producing this content as it is (seemingly) authored by someone else. The ethical potential of viewing unethical action in film may, at least in the first instance then, be in its inspiring of ethical reflection (as I explore further shortly). As Robert Samuels notes, however, if art can manifest our desire, “it [usually] does so without analysis” and does not constitute the *work* of analysis.³⁹ We cannot therefore presume watching a film (ethical or otherwise) will inspire reflection. Indeed, as McGowan observes, frequently “the most important films are the ones that are the least popular” because we do not always want to confront the desire reflected there.⁴⁰

Here we recall cinema first theorised psychoanalytically as a “technology of the imaginary,”⁴¹ where McGowan puts it, the “pseudo-dreamworld of the cinematic spectator represents the key political problem of the cinema.”⁴² Because instead of “making spectators aware of the functioning of ideology,” cinema’s imaginary register functions “as a crucial ingredient in the propagation of an uncritical subjectivity” in the way it can “suture” us into ideological identification with the film’s world view.⁴³ In this, as Freud pre-empted, though “the creations of art heighten feelings of identification” with the community “by providing an occasion for sharing highly valued emotional experiences,” insofar as “those creations” *only* focus on civilization’s “ideals” we encounter a “narcissistic satisfaction.”⁴⁴ It is therefore, as McGowan explicates, cinema’s capacity to approximate the register of the Lacanian real where cinema’s ethical experience may be most equated with a psychoanalytic praxis. But if Lacan’s real refers to that which is *prior* to our entry into the symbolic register of language and meaning

(and thus, incomprehensible to us), it must seem unlikely cinema could simulate its qualities. McGowan suggests that if the imaginary “is the order of what we see,” and the symbolic “the structure supporting and regulating that visible world,” the real emerges as an “indication of the incompleteness of the Symbolic order” and is that “place where signification breaks down.”⁴⁵ The real may be affected in cinema then, where a film exposes a point of failure in the logic of the symbolic or imaginary that normally “hides the real.”⁴⁶ Lisa Downing notes that for Slavoj Žižek, the Lacanian real is central to the ethics of cinema, most notably animated in the *noir* universe which examines “the risk the subject takes with regard to encountering the Real of his or her desire.”⁴⁷ The real here may correlate to that aspect of our being that predates our development of collective community; it designates that part of us that, as Marc de Kesel puts it, as “impossible pleasure animals” that must come to regulate pleasure and mitigate un-pleasure in our confrontation with the external world of language, law, and culture.⁴⁸ It is this real we “sacrifice” as part of our commitment to the collective group and symbolic dimension of experience, and the effect of the sacrifice—its successes and failures—that Freud, Bataille, and Lacan find animated in art. Subsequently, as Themis puts it, a psychoanalytic ethics seeks an ethics “of the real—as opposed to an imaginary ethics, caught in the imaginary.”⁴⁹

This marks out aesthetic experience as potentially ethical according to a psychoanalytic praxis, insofar as in aesthetics we may find dramatized the conflicts between law and desire. As Lacan notes, however reasonable that law might be, the *jouissance* of transgression—when one “tramples” such laws “under foot”⁵⁰—plays a part in our understanding of the function but also the *limit* of the law, because the transgression reveals its “imaginary structure.”⁵¹ Richard Capobianco notes that on this point Lacan critiques Aristotle’s virtue ethics “for ‘cleaning up’ desire” in “the service” of ideals—whether in the service of economic, political, or religious gain.⁵² It is also where Lacan sees the law (that places a taboo on desire) become preoccupied with what he calls “the service of goods”:⁵³ the reductive accumulation of goods, resources, and power without limit (or, as Bataille might add, without appropriate *expenditure*), such that “[a]s far as desires are concerned, come back later.”⁵⁴ This is the antithesis of what Bataille argues we seek in aesthetic experience, because we need, Themis summarises, “separate times for work and play, politics and art, or reason and the unconscious.”⁵⁵ Consequently, where the *jouissance* of transgression becomes foreclosed in art (through a tightening of taboo) such enjoyment is easily co-opted by politics, evident in the rise of fascist leaders who express and/or facilitate a *jouissance* of transgression (personified, for example, in the rise of Donald Trump). Such a predicament inspires Bataille’s ethical project, what Patrick French describes as the question (so prescient to our current time): “how is it possible to counter the threat of fascism when the latter thrives on an exploitation of the *jouissance* that is foreclosed in the Marxist schema?”⁵⁶ Here, if cinema were to only accede to the demand that we ‘tighten’ “the moral standard to the greatest possible degree,” it may lead, in Freud’s terms, to a greater “estrangement” from our

“instinctual disposition” that results in the catastrophes of neurosis and, as Bataille later agrees, the collective catastrophes of war.⁵⁷

As I argue in this paper, what distinguishes the ethical experience of *Spring Breakers* is its animation of what we have “sacrificed” for the good of the social group that nevertheless reasserts the value of taboos transgressed therein without, importantly, enforcing ignorance toward our sacrifice or our forms of *jouissance*. It does so not merely in its diegesis, but through its unique aesthetics of transgression: one that erodes the temporal coherence of symbolic and imaginary narrative, such that what is tabooed pushes to the surface in a spectacle of the sacrifice—that is, it offers an aesthetic experience of and as “sacrificial art.” It is here that a psychoanalytic ethics opens up additional facets in ethical thinking insofar as it insists on confronting knowledge of, rather than maintaining ignorance toward, our instinctual life, approaching the subject, as Marc de Kesel puts it, with a “moral indifference of the polymorphous-perverse drive[s].”⁵⁸ That is, psychoanalysis begins by recognizing that libido lacks a socially ascribed aim or (moral) object where, as Freud puts it, “the sexual instinct does not originally serve the purposes of reproduction at all, but has as its aim the gaining of particular kinds of pleasure.”⁵⁹ I suggest that the escalating excess of transgressions in the film culminating in the taking human life provides a warning against ignoring *jouissance*, and highlights the importance of transgressive expenditure found in aesthetics.⁶⁰ I examine the tension in the film between the pleasure provided by its aesthetic experience (including its sublimation of the pornographic), at the interface of its irredeemable action (violence, robbery, murder). As Themis argues, where art may only offer a “simulation” of transgression, we may perceive it to be a “weaker” form of ethics than our own “participation” in the festival, yet through our experience of it, he further notes, a “knowledge” emerges “that more than compensates for any lack of physical agency” such that, “with better knowledge of desire we can sublimate it toward better ethics.”⁶¹

AESTHETIC EXPERIENCE AND THE CLINIC

No doubt many view *Spring Breakers* as an unethical film, insofar as its main characters neither act morally nor offer morally good representations, evident in popular criticism. Heather Long performs a standard feminist critique of the film as “a terrible movie,” for example, because its “lewd” scene of “debauchery” openly objectifies women, reinforces “rape culture,” and undermines the work of feminist discourses to regulate public spaces.⁶² From a psychoanalytic perspective, evaluating a film purely from a question of its moral representations overinvest its diegesis with a remit to only animate those most noble achievements of civilization, rather than a work of art from which other aspects of our existence may be dramatized. That is, such a review measures the film against our *imaginary* ideals of civilization. To approach art from a

question of its morality equates to inhibiting the work of analysis in the clinic to the examination of only those conscious ideas we have that dovetail to our ideal image, of the self as purely altruistic.⁶³ This is not to say that the “moral indifference” to desire found in the clinic rejects morality’s value to civilization, rather, it recognizes that self-knowledge sought in the clinic would remain occluded if intimidated by a moral framework. As de Kesel puts it, if we begin analysis from the position of moral ideals, we risk “fill[ing] out in advance the drive’s open, polymorphously perverse nature with one’s own [ideological or political] wishes and fantasies,” leaving the subject in ignorance of their own (and other’s) motivations.⁶⁴ For cinema to shed (ethical) light on the human condition it must likewise not submit to moral intimidation.

A moral-ethical critique of *Spring Breakers* as an American form of “extreme cinema” ventures beyond a simple rejection of its amoral diegesis toward its potential as a form of deliberate ethical provocation. I want to suggest, however, that a psychoanalytic investigation of the film’s *aesthetic* experience takes us further yet in this provocation. “New French Extremity” cinema or what Time Palmer calls “French Cinema of the Body” is noted for its “tendency to the wilfully transgressive” and “unflinching” “depictions of physicality” at a limit, often including full penetrative sexual intercourse in addition to bodily violence.⁶⁵ But as Frey argues, these “extreme” forms of cinema “create critical and popular controversy” that is (ironically) “in the service of [a higher] morality” — creating a moral-ethical dialogue about the limits of cinema and art.⁶⁶ The transgressions animated in *Spring Breakers* vary from the seemingly harmless (to others) and barely (if at all) illegal activity of the Dionysian spring break festival—nudity, excessive consumption of drugs and alcohol, multiple sexual partners, and public sexual activity—to those of the most significant consequence: armed robbery and the taking of human life. What response might be expected (if not demanded) of a viewer here? Many have argued the film offers critiques of all that it seemingly celebrates. It has been critiqued as a meditation on gun-control in America, as too of the sexual exploitation of young women and celebrities like Britney Spears (whose oeuvre punctuates several of the film’s key moments).⁶⁷ Here Jennifer Keishin Armstrong suggests the film’s moral message is that “we got off easy with a mere public head-shaving and umbrella-bashing” in Spears’ public meltdown.⁶⁸ And yet, though transgressive, violent, and highly sexual (if lacking genital and penetration shots), *Spring Breakers* offers an altogether different aesthetic to extreme cinemas (even if it inspires similar ethical reflection), one that entails a specifically *erotic* dimension. It is here, I suggest, following Sinnerbrink, where there may be “a conflict or dissonance between aesthetic expression and moral-ethical meaning,” one that “we [may] find the most challenging, thought-provoking cases of cinematic ethics.”⁶⁹

Aesthetic experience becomes important to an ethical project where, Freud notes, though art sits alongside science and technology as our most celebrated achievements, it goes beyond the “utility” of progress and reminds us that civilization consists in a “striving towards the *two*

confluent goals of utility and a yield of pleasure.”⁷⁰ Nowhere is this more evident than in our non-utilitarian fascination with “beauty,” which he observes, “civilization could not do without.”⁷¹ In this impulse for pleasure Freud notes that “every individual is virtually an enemy of civilization” because despite our efforts to raise ourselves “above [our] animal status” there remains in all a “destructive, and therefore anti-social and anti-cultural” instinct.⁷² If through art we attempt to satisfy this instinct—to sublimate it—what type of art might provide satisfaction while also securing our commitment to the community in which we live? Sinnerbrink’s examination of melodrama points to the way its “expressive mode” inspires an “affective responsiveness and emotional engagement that open up a space for *sympathetic* ethical understanding.”⁷³ Vivian Sobchack’s phenomenological approach goes further to suggest that a film’s aesthetic experience engenders a type of “response-ability,” an embodied response to “the charge of the real” that calls for “aesthetic valuation” and “ethical judgment.”⁷⁴ In adding a psychoanalytic approach, with its emphasis on understanding *jouissance* of transgression, we might further explicate how an amoral film may nevertheless offer an aesthetic experience toward an ethics of civilization.

In the clinic, Lacan notes, “[m]oral experience” comes to concern the “relation” of a subject “to his own action” as regards both the “articulated law but also [...] a good that he appeals to,” in the form of “an ideal conduct”;⁷⁵ however, the effect of this demand from outside can produce conflict in the subject if not the “omnipresence, of a sense of guilt” where external moral censorship is internalised as a super-ego injunction that results in guilt—not for one’s moral shortcomings, but for “giving ground relative to one’s desire.”⁷⁶ For while “[b]oth analyst and analysand aim for the good, in the highest moral sense of the word,”⁷⁷ Lacan notes that “we nevertheless find” in the clinic an “irreducible margin as well as the limit of [the subject’s] own good.”⁷⁸ The “irreducible margin” between desire and the external good is not a question of desire for *things*—objects, wealth, success, or satisfaction found in obtaining any of these substitutes—rather, a question of enjoyment, specifically, *jouissance*. And it is “the attraction to transgression” and subsequent “paradox of *jouissance*” present in the clinic that Lacan posits as quintessential drama of the human condition—the “tragic sense of life”—found in certain works of art.⁷⁹ Put simply, the ethical paradox that psychoanalysis “leads” to is, for Lacan, “the relationship between action and the desire that inhibits it” where, in the end, the subject must confront a limit: “[w]ill it or will it not submit itself to the duty that it feels within like a stranger, beyond, at another level?” and let this “half-unconscious, paradoxical, and morbid command of the superego” inhibit action and desire?⁸⁰ On the other hand, could one abandon the obligations to society entirely? In a descriptive passage that strikingly recalls the list of transgressions animated in *Spring Breakers*, Freud speculates precisely this question: what “if, then, one may take any woman one pleases as a sexual object, if one may without hesitation kill one’s rival for her love or anyone else who stands in one’s way, if, too, one can

carry off any of the other man's belongings without asking leave—how splendid, what a string of satisfactions one's life would be!"⁸¹ Such a fantasy is clearly impossible but reminds us, Freud notes, that "[t]he first requisite of civilisation, therefore, is that of justice—that is, the assurance that a law once made will not be broken in favour of an individual."⁸² Recognising this root of desire, Lacan seeks to redefine ethics against the humanist tendency to view man as naturally or inherently "good," and, rather, de Kesel notes, to construct an ethics from "that sudden flash of light" in the Freudian experience, into "the polymorphous perverse" origins of desire.⁸³ Perversion here, Lacan notes, does not refer to an "anomaly contrary to good morals" or "deviation" from "the reproductive finality of the sexual union"⁸⁴—*qua* heteronormativity—but Freud's discovery that in the beginning (infancy) libido is "characterised by the absence of any pre-given natural order."⁸⁵ A psychoanalytic ethics begins with this knowledge of the clinic but does not, however, promote unlimited action on it; rather, it acknowledges the gap between the law—our ideals—and the real of our desire such that we may examine the necessary force and ultimate value of the law. That is, if our libido has no original moral aim, we must find one for it—but not in ignorance of its constitutive force in our life.

Where a psychoanalytic clinic may be transposed onto cinema is in our understanding of Hollywood's imaginary, ideological mode, and the function of a cinema of the real. In classical film theory, as McGowan puts it, "the illusory qualities of film" are linked to "the process through which subjects enter into ideology" by "misrecognising themselves" in the image on-screen—a device of the imaginary.⁸⁶ Film theorists seeking to critique ideological genres and films thus formed around a process Christian Metz describes as wresting "the cinema-object from the imaginary" so as "to win it for the symbolic."⁸⁷ Where cinemas of the imaginary interpolate us is thus also where they fail on ethical grounds, for empathy in the form of our own imaginary identification can block our access to truth, "sheltering" us, McGowan notes, from the real and symbolic dimensions of experience.⁸⁸ Likewise in the clinic, the ethical potential of analysis requires relinquishing imaginary ways of perceiving ourselves and others to embrace a truth that, as Anna Freud puts it, must be placed "higher than any discomfort at meeting unpleasant facts, whether they belong to the world outside or to your own inner person."⁸⁹ This is counter, Bruce Fink observes, to the *mis*conception that the analyst must empathise with the analysand in order to build a "therapeutic alliance" as the latter undermines opportunities to "hear" the analysand's discourse.⁹⁰ Fink argues this stems from our "usual" *imaginary* "way of listening" to other people where we "assimilate" the story of the other into "stories that we have heard others tell" "or that we could tell about ourselves."⁹¹ If art—and cinema—is to be psychoanalytically ethical, then, it needs to show us, Samuels notes, "what we don't want to see, by forcing its gaze upon us" and disrupting our illusion of imaginary identification with (in this case) the screen.⁹² Here McGowan suggests that the "filmic gaze can function in the same way as the analysts interpretation, provided that we as spectators fully

invest ourselves in the filmic experience,” and “interpret” what we have felt there “after the traumatic experience of it.”⁹³

THE EROTICS OF TRANSGRESSIVE EXPENDITURE IN *SPRING BREAKERS*, OR, “SACRIFICIAL ART”

The attraction to the “*jouissance* of transgression” found in the clinic is what distinguishes the aesthetic experience of *Spring Breakers* over other forms of transgressive cinema, in that the film’s aesthetic lifts what is tabooed to the surface, allowing us to appreciate (and vicariously participate) in the transgression. Ed Cameron argues that though the film eschews Korine’s usual realist aesthetic, the shift is not toward escapist “fantasy” (*qua* the imaginary) but an *inward* turn toward a form of psychological realism.⁹⁴ Here the film’s offering of transgressive expenditure is achieved via a convergence of its diegetic and aesthetic components. The film’s diegetic transgressions become erotic, in Bataille’s terms, where they express “desire dam[med] up” against the taboo, showing where transgression is *structurally* aligned with taboo.⁹⁵ In this regard, “transgression does not *deny* the taboo but transcends it and completes it,”⁹⁶ showing us where the line of the law is situated such that transgressing it works to re-affirm it. Accordingly, *Spring Breakers* animates, tests, and exposes the limits of *jouissance* found in the modes of transgression offered in the neoliberal economies of the West. Jacob Glazier argues that the film’s anarchic project inverts “the ‘classic’ iconography of spring break: naked girls, frat guys” and other popular commodity signifiers of late modernity to create a “dangerous point of rupture” around (and critique of) neoliberal cultures of enjoyment.⁹⁷ Cameron further argues the film explores (at least) three modes of *jouissance*: a normative “institutionalised” *jouissance* found in the spring break festival, animated via Faith, who enjoys the sanctioned space for transgression as a “break from reality” before returning to the symbolic order; the imaginary *jouissance* of Alien, who dutifully pursues enjoyment-through-accumulation espoused in The American Dream (denoted in his “look at all my shee-yat”) which transforms into a perverse *jouissance* as he becomes the object of enjoyment for the other in the gun-fellatio scene; and, finally, the *jouissance* of the real found by Brit and Candy (and to some extent Cotty), who transgress the limit of the law to find satisfaction “somewhere beyond the pleasure principle” evident in their pursuit of transgression without aim—accumulation, power, or advancement.⁹⁸ As Korine puts it, while in the institutional space of the spring break festival “[k]ids go off, cut loose, destroy everything and then go home as if it didn’t happen,” Britt and Cotty “are a little extra,” they “transcend.”⁹⁹ For while they first approach transgression as a means of advancement and enjoy the feeling of power as they rob other holiday makers, by the final shoot-out, it is Brit and Candy who kid Alien that he is scared of what may lie ahead, and take no back-step as he dies, moving unflinchingly towards their own self-destruction. Thus, while

Alien appears to represent what McGowan calls the “hidden enjoyment” of the “criminal” in late capitalism,¹⁰⁰ it is Brit and Candy who carve out an ethics of *jouissance* in transgression that leaves behind the institutionalised symbolic enjoyment of the festival and the imaginary enjoyment of The American Dream, to find a *jouissance* in the real as they “expend” themselves without pretence of utilitarian purpose, such as, in Richard Brody’s terms, returning from the festival “refreshed, reenergized, and reeducated.”¹⁰¹

Insofar as the film vividly animates both minor and major transgressions the film-as-dream might be summarised as a simple (psychoanalytic) ‘what if’: ‘what if I did *not* have to submit myself to the law?’ What would the consequences be? Though our protagonists are not punished for their crimes (Korine has said that their denouement is implied), it is arguably clear that the answer to this question is “catastrophe”: for its protagonists and the community they live in.¹⁰² The film’s metaphoric ‘what if’ is thus, not a call to action, but a meditation on those transgressions for which a law exists that we could not do without—murder, robbery, violence—while registering those for which a law is required (in the order of things, individual and collective cohesion and advancement) but should not be imposed excessively: that is, that point at which our enjoyment in transgression may be satisfied, without consequence to the collective.

Significant here is the film’s sublimated pornographic aesthetic that invites us to enjoy it as an aesthetic experience, not in spite of but as *part* of its ethical value. As I have argued elsewhere, the affective experience of pornography reminds us of the “sensual interest” invested in all art, however unconscious it may be and, indeed, however distorted its expression.¹⁰³ This follows Nietzsche’s observation that our interest in aesthetic objects finds libidinal interest “transfigured” in that project central to psychoanalytic thought: sublimation, where libido is no longer “consciously” felt in the form of “sexual excitement” but finds satisfaction in aesthetic substitutions.¹⁰⁴ And where pornography may be distinguished from other artistic expression by its “intractable Real referent”—its explicit depiction of body-parts around which our libidinal substitutions first orient themselves (i.e., the breast, mouth, and phallus)—it no doubt offers a *reduced* form of sublimation.¹⁰⁵ But in doing so, I argue, it offers ethical value in confronting us with reminders of our status as “pleasure animals”—though we may reject such reminders where they do not correlate with our ideal notions of self and civilisation.¹⁰⁶ The point here is that such knowledge is not a requisite to *acting out* fantasies invoked in pornography (or *Spring Breakers*), but to act with greater understanding—and humility—toward our human condition as we strive for a better society. As Freud notes, where the demand of morality on sexual instinctual life becomes too great, the ensuing neurosis can become “paralysing” such that, the individual “would have been more healthy if it could have been possible for them to be less good.”¹⁰⁷ The question is not whether people will act out the impulses brought to light in the film (or in the clinic) but, rather, of how one will act if such impulses remain repressed from

conscious thought: how will such (repressed) instincts be satisfied and at what cost to the individual and to society?

The film thus pursues its aesthetics of expenditure through its integration of an intra-diegetic *jouissance* of transgression and eroticised *aesthetics* of transgression, what Korine calls “beach noir”:¹⁰⁸ an aesthetic release from the taboos placed on the order of things. Though some critics wrote the film off as a work of “surface” rather than depth,¹⁰⁹ Korine consciously sought to create a primarily *aesthetic* (rather than narrative) “impressionistic reinterpretation” of spring break, striving for a “liquid narrative” and “drug [like] experience” of “transcendence, reaching a peak before disappearing into black.”¹¹⁰ In this the film animates a type of vicarious festival, abandoning—*transgressing*—narrative form for sensory enjoyment. As Cameron notes, despite mixed reviews of the film’s lack of coherent “narrative,” “moral compass,” “subtlety,” and “sense,” reviewers nevertheless “seemed to have enjoyed the film”; indeed, he suggests that in an inversion of classical and neo-noir aesthetic tropes “the excess of the visuals” over “conventional linear narrative” effectively “places Korine’s film somewhere beyond the pleasure principle.”¹¹¹ Here I suggest the film’s “surface” offers an aesthetics of transgression by releasing the viewer from taboos on eroticism and nudity evident from the opening to closing frames of the film. The film opens on the spectacle of spring break with hundreds of young, tanned, near-naked (and naked) bodies pulse to music on the beaches of Florida. Immersed in the action, the camera picks out particularly eroticised bodies, parts, and acts in a slow-motion montage that captures the libidinal quotient of the festival: hips gyrate invitingly, crotches thrust exuberantly, bare-breasts shimmy under drink-simulated bukkakes. Indeed, on this last the camera cuts closer, lingers on the pornographic explicitness of the image as if to emphasise the barrier that is being crossed: not only that of propriety, but public discourse on “good” representations of women (especially in film). In this, Cameron puts it, “Korine’s heroines seem to travel to a neon-lit ethereal dream world of Freudian wish fulfillment.”¹¹² For contra to the harsh lighting of traditional noir *mise en scène* which signifies a “background [of] repressed enjoyment,” Korine lifts enjoyment “to the foreground through the overt use of coloured florescent lighting,” such that “what was repressed in the original film noir diegesis” is allowed “to flourish unfettered” in a realm of “unlimited enjoyment.”¹¹³

Though this erotic dimension to the film’s aesthetic approximates pornography, it departs from the explicit depiction of (real) genitals, body-fluids, and penetration found in mainstream pornography and instead, effects something of the loss of symbolic meaning through its discontinuous montage. The eliding of reality through flash forwards and back, and the switching between impressionistic focus and sharp contrast, gritty documentary style footage and a hyper-real neon world eschews narrative cinema’s (imaginary) realism (via continuity editing) and calls attention to the way the image is explicitly loaded with forms of enjoyment that relentlessly work against meaning. As Cameron puts it, the *jouissance*, or enjoyment, of the

film itself, is experienced in the way it “overflows any principle of reality to which most mainstream cinema [...] conventionally cling[s].”¹¹⁴ Unlike most feature films that “substitute” or “displace” libido into the intrigues of its narrative, *Spring Breakers*’ adopts pornography’s purview to “engage the viewer openly with those earliest, originary substitutions” of “part-objects and aims”: of the “oral, anal, genital, invocatory, and especially scopic” drives.¹¹⁵ Our heroines are always either in string bikinis or semi-naked, with few overgarments to conceal the erotic appeal of their bodies. Their arrival in St. Petersburg is shown through a montage in which they surrender inhibition to the festival as if returning to the innocence of childhood where the polymorphous perversity of the drives is not yet co-opted into the order of things. They dance impishly in the shoreline, sing with abandon songs of adolescence, and take a collective piss squatting on the side of the road, backs arched, buttocks thrust back to the camera’s gaze. They touch, embrace, and fondle in the spirit of intimate girlhood, and the camera openly seeks to capture if not underscore the erotic potential of each gesture, explicitly inviting a gaze onto what is ordinarily tabooed in mainstream cinema and often degraded in the explicit sexual violence of art-house (Extreme) cinema. Sexual explicitness is nevertheless partly sublimated in *Spring Breakers*, not via narrative substitutions (per narrative feature film), but in the *degree* of substitutions that aestheticize or veil the real in a beauty effect without completely displacing its affect. As Freud notes, the distinction of beauty in the art of sublimation is its fundamental distinction from the actual genitals as sources of libidinal interest, “the sight of which” though “always exciting” is “hardly ever judged to be beautiful.”¹¹⁶ Bataille follows in saying that “the further removed from the animal is [woman’s] appearance, the more beautiful they are reckoned,” such that a woman becomes of erotic interest precisely where her beauty “promises” to “reveal a mysterious animal aspect” of sexual being that remains hidden: “the private parts, the hairy ones.”¹¹⁷ Much has been made of the matching unicorn ski-masks Brit, Candy and Cotty wear when they participate in Alien’s armed robberies, but as Cameron argues, though the masks make the girls “indistinguishable” the effect is not objectifying as much as it denotes their willingness to “obliterate their individual egos” in pursuit of “boundless *jouissance*.”¹¹⁸ I further suggest the masks function as a reminder of the humanity that is being transgressed in this *jouissance*, akin to those animal masks donned in paleolithic art where, Bataille notes, man hides “behind an animal mask” to designate the “shame” of leaving this realm of animal sovereignty—without taboo—behind.¹¹⁹ In *Spring Breakers*, by contrast, transgressive *jouissance* requires humanity to be (momentarily) relinquished, hidden behind the mask. Additionally, the girls don matching tiger-print swimsuits that cover the real (hairy, animal) body-parts in such a way as to nonetheless remind us of their return to animality and the eroticism of this transgression. Here the film allows us to perceive the pornographic effect of transgression as part of the film’s sublimated aesthetic experience.

No doubt one could object here—as Long does—that the film’s erotic component is an oppressive if not sadistic (in Mulvey’s parlance) heterosexist male fantasy, as if, by virtue of the appeal to a theoretical male viewer, the fullness of the bodies on display were not beautiful but a representational deception of the patriarchal apparatus. One is reminded of Michel Foucault’s reflections on objectification in cinema where, he suggests, it is a “vulgar Freudianism that reduces to sadism this way of celebrating the body and its wonders.”¹²⁰ Yet even if we can appreciate the ethical importance of the critique—of not reducing any subject exclusively to one aspect of their being—such an approach also reminds us, as Bataille argues, that the ethical potential of aesthetic experience is closed down “when the political game” (exclusively) occupies aesthetic space, leaving the door open for our unfulfilled *jouissance* to be co-opted by others.¹²¹

The film’s eroticized aesthetic becomes ethical where it insists without retreat, refusing to bend to the taboos required of us in the collective good (during ordinary work times) as staged in the girl’s meeting with Alien. After bailing the group from jail, Alien asks what they have done at the festival (“did you get crazy? Smoke some weed? Cocaine? ... Bitches all up on each other?”), and the camera cross-cuts between flashbacks to the night before (in which the girls participate in all the things Alien suggests), the onlooking twins (Thurman and Sidney Sewell) with whom the girls partied, and Faith’s worried face. Faith’s reaction reintroduces the moral taboo placed on such transgressions during ordinary times, particularly where Alien and the twins are positioned as a menacing “male gaze” on these activities. The liberated orgy of the night before is transformed in light of this gaze—Alien reveals the twin’s real agenda is “double penetration”—from which Faith openly recoils, signalling the return of taboo. Despite this, the film does not retreat but pushes forward like a tragic hero who, as Lacan describes, “trembles before nothing, and especially not before the good of the other.”¹²² Here it may be useful to note that for Bataille, “eroticism is analogous to a tragedy” because to confront eroticism one must face and transgress “taboos” that are “the price of a sacrifice” the hero must confront in the destruction of his own limits.¹²³ In its refusal to take a backward step from the explicit display of eroticism the film thus does not ask its viewer to be intimidated by the taboo required in ordinary times—however necessary such taboo may be to the order of things.

In contrast to the explicit eroticism of the opening scenes, the film’s critique of the possibilities of enjoyment in neoliberal economies also posits the restrictive force of capitalism in increasingly familiar scene: young people channelled into institutionalised education in preparation for a life of accumulation in an equally ascetic workforce. We cut to Brit and Candy sharing a marijuana bong in a darkened college dorm-room while cartoons run mindlessly in the background, a scene of depressed enjoyment soon replaced with establishing shots of the university campus. We then cut to the interior of a darkened lecture theatre where a sea of anonymous students look-on dully, faces barely illuminated by the uniform glare of open

laptops. The lecturer describes the effects of war on those who return “transformed” by the violence they have witnessed, while Brit and Candy share notes to amuse themselves: Brit writes “I heart penis” and Candy returns an outline of a penis filled with “Spring Break Bitches!” toward which she mimes a blow-job.¹²⁴ They later bemoan with Cotty and Faith “we really need to get out of here.” The scene illustrates how transgression—eroticism, violence, and aesthetic expenditure—has no place in the order of things and must be sought elsewhere, but also hints at the suffocating *excesses* of the order of things especially where, as McGowan outlines, desire is co-opted under capitalism (with its “ideological commitment to utility”) towards accumulation and consumerism with its promise of providing “the object that would provide the ultimate satisfaction for the desiring subject.”¹²⁵ Spring break here becomes yet another form of consumption—of consuming the idea of transgression rather than a dissolution of the self and the good, where, Maryn Wilkinson suggests, the girls are at once “ideal objects and subjects of contemporary hyperconsumerism.”¹²⁶ Brit and Candy show us the limits of enjoyment in this milieu when, as Cameron notes, they re-enact their robbing of the diner for Faith (left out of the crime), such that their enjoyment is revealed to be in transgression (not its commodification), an expression of the drive satisfied beyond its functional aim (of acquiring the funds for further consumption or transgression).¹²⁷ And after enjoying the orgy of spring break itself, it is clear that such sanctioned transgressions are not sufficient to our heroines. The religiously devout Faith returns home, while Candy, Brit, and Cotty push toward a “lethal” kind of *jouissance*.¹²⁸

Consequently, Brit and Candy’s escalating transgressions provide a warning against ignoring *jouissance*, and highlight the importance of transgressive expenditure found in aesthetics, where, in Bataille’s economy, art provides the appropriate outlet for “loss, sacrifice, eroticism, and violence” in a post-secular society.¹²⁹ The escalation of violence in the girls’ murderous finale is also suggestive of an excess that responds to the increasing violence of neoliberalism on the individual and collective economy. Whereas in “primitive” society the sovereign power would celebrate the “potlatch,” a “process of expenditure, “the lavish loss of an object given up,”¹³⁰ in modern capitalism Bataille argues that the ruling class “repudiates this obligation to excessive expenditure” and insists, instead, on “an ethic of accumulation and utility.”¹³¹ In neoliberal economies, this ethic becomes a demand without reprieve, where all energy is spent in the utility of accumulation little is left for the expenditure of aesthetic experience without (economic) gain. The tragic tone of the final scene is suggestive of a violence that reacts to a demand that has become excessive in a moment of ruinous expenditure—of sacrificial transgression. That is, I suggest the film’s aestheticized transgressions approximate a sacrifice to make good our own sacrifice of libido to the community. The moment of ruination is completed in the final montage, with its ironically juxtaposed dialogue (a phone call home to grandmother) playing over the image, noting “it was

way more than just having a good time.” Images of the opening scene’s beach party are intercut with those of Brit and Candy’s victims in their neon-lit graves, Brit and Candy drive into the sunrise, pausing at the water’s edge to reflect. In flashback the camera cuts to a contorted close-up aerial shot of Alien’s face where he lies dead on the jetty, the camera so far over his head as to be almost looking back at him upside down. As Brit and Candy lean over to kiss him farewell they appear from the lower edge of frame, and the camera then tilts to follow them to a true 180 degrees upside down, creating a final shot of the girls in an overturned image as they leave Alien to begin their shooting spree, quite literally now on another plane—no longer part of the order of things.

CONCLUSION: THE ETHICS OF “SACRIFICIAL ART”

As I have tried to show in this paper, the film offers a warning against ignoring *jouissance*, but perhaps its most ethical feature is in animating this warning without censoring or reductively moralising desire in the process. Korine’s reluctance to stage the final denouement of Brit and Candy is suggestive of the analysts position toward an analysand. He does not punish them—or the viewer—for their desire, as he puts it, “I don’t like to invent characters and then condemn them” which is “not to say that there isn’t condemnation present in the film but I don’t necessarily feel I have to punish people.”¹³² In film as in the clinic, I suggest, censure of our desire does not lead to self-knowledge. And if cinema as a modern art-form can affirm the taboos that keep civilisation in check, it should also acknowledge and affirm the real of our being, for if not it may further mislead us as to the real dimension of experience and thus, make the sacrifice of libido all the more unsatisfying.

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¹ Robert Sinnerbrink, *Cinematic Ethics: Exploring Ethical Experience Through Film* (New York and London: Routledge, 2016), 7.

² Sinnerbrink, *Cinematic Ethics*, 10, emphasis original; see also, Asbjorn Grønstad, *Film and the Ethical Imagination* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan 2017), 18.

³ Jinhee Choi and Mattias Frey, “Introduction,” *Cine-Ethics: Ethical Dimensions of Film Theory, Practice and Spectatorship*, 1-14 (New York: Routledge, 2013), 2.

⁴ Jacques Lacan, *The Seminar of Jacques Lacan, Book VII: The Ethics of Psychoanalysis 1959-1960*, trans. Dennis Porter, ed. Jacques-Alain Miller (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1997), 24.

⁵ Lacan, *The Seminar of Jacques Lacan, Book VII*, 319.

⁶ Choi and Frey, “Introduction,” 1-2.

⁷ I take this term from Michèle H Richman, in *Sacred Revolutions: Durkheim and the Collège de Sociologie* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2002).

⁸ Tim Themi, "Bataille and the Erotics of the Real," *Parrhesia* 24 (2015): 312.

⁹ Themi, "Bataille and the Erotics of the Real," 313; and Georges Bataille, *Eroticism*, trans. Mary Dalwood (London: Penguin Books, 2001), 44, 54.

¹⁰ Bataille, *Eroticism*, 44; Themi, "Bataille and the Erotics of the Real," 313.

¹¹ Themi, "Bataille and the Erotics of the Real," 313, emphasis original; Georges Bataille, *The Accursed Share: An Essay on General Economy, Volumes II The History of Eroticism, and III Sovereignty*, trans. Robert Hurley (New York: Zone Books, 1991), 65.

¹² Themi, "Bataille and the Erotics of the Real," 312; Tim Themi, *Lacan's Ethics and Nietzsche's Critique of Platonism* (Albany: State University of New York Press), 21-22.

¹³ Tim Themi, "Bataille, Literature, Happiness, and Evil," *Continental Thought & Theory: A Journal of Intellectual Freedom*, 2, no.3 (2019), 190, 195.

¹⁴ Themi, "Bataille, Literature, Happiness, and Evil," 190, 195.

¹⁵ See Jamie Dunn, "Spring Breakers," *The Skinny: Independent Cultural Journalism*, 01 April (2013): <https://www.theskinny.co.uk/film/cineskinny/spring-breakers>; Jennifer Keishin Armstrong, "'Spring Breakers': An Appreciation of the Movie-Length Meditation on Britney Spears," *Billboard*, 15 March (2018): <https://www.billboard.com/articles/columns/pop/8247403/spring-breakers-britney-spears-everytime>

¹⁶ Jason Wood, *Last Words: Considering Contemporary Cinema* (Columbia University Press, 2014), 67.

¹⁷ Georges Bataille, *The Tears of Eros*, trans. Peter Connor (San Francisco: City Lights Books, 1989), 70-74; and Bataille, *The Accursed Share: Volumes II and III*, 131-32.

¹⁸ See Bataille, *Eroticism*, 113.

¹⁹ Bataille, *The Tears of Eros*, 71-72.

²⁰ Dylan Evans, *An Introductory Dictionary of Lacanian Psychoanalysis* (London and New York: Routledge, 1996), 91-2.

²¹ Evans, *An Introductory Dictionary of Lacanian Psychoanalysis*, 92; Lacan, *The Seminar of Jacques Lacan, Book VII*, 184.

²² Peter Dahlgren, "Tracking the Civic Subject in the Media Landscape: Versions of the Democratic Ideal," *Television & New Media*, vol. 14, no.1 (2013): 81.

²³ See also, Elisabeth Roudinesco, *Why Psychoanalysis?* trans. Rachel Bowlby (New York: Columbia University Press), 53-54.

²⁴ Dahlgren, "Tracking the Civic Subject," 73.

²⁵ Freud, "Thoughts for The Times of War and Death," *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud Volume XIV (1914-1916)*, ed. James Strachey et al., 275-288 (London: Vintage Books, 2001).

²⁶ David Bordwell, "Contemporary Film Studies and the Vicissitudes of Grand Theory," in *Post-Theory: Reconstructing Film Studies*, ed. David Bordwell and Noel Carroll (University of Wisconsin Press, 1996), 10; see also David Bordwell and Noel Carroll, "Introduction," in *Post-Theory: Reconstructing Film Studies*, ed. David Bordwell and Noel Carroll (University of Wisconsin Press, 1996), xiii.

²⁷ As I have shown elsewhere, failure to engage with this split subject has significant consequences for political life, as I take up in later sections of this paper, see Alison Horbury, "Digital Feminisms and the Split Subject: Short-Circuits through Lacan's Four Discourses," *Communication and Media Journal* XI, 38 (2016): 135-166.

²⁸ Excepting a noteworthy project by Jacob Johanssen in *Psychoanalysis and Digital Culture: Audiences, Social Media, and Big Data* (New York: Routledge, 2018).

²⁹ See Sigmund Freud, "Civilization and its Discontents," in *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud Volume XXI (1927-1931)*, ed. James Strachey et al., 59-145 (London: Vintage Books, 2001), 95; and Freud, "'Civilised' Sexual Morality and Modern Nervous Illness," in *The Standard Edition of The Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud Volume IX (1906-1908)*, ed. James Strachey et al., (London: Vintage Books, 2001), 181.

³⁰ Freud, "Civilization and its Discontents," 96.

³¹ Freud, "Thoughts For The Times of War and Death," 284; Freud, "'Civilised' Sexual Morality and Modern Nervous Illness," 181.

³² See Georges Bataille, *The Accursed Share: An Essay on General Economy, Volume I: Consumption*, trans Robert Hurley (New York: Zone Books, 1991); Bataille, *The Accursed Share:*

Volumes II and III; Georges Bataille, *Prehistoric Paintings, Lascaux or, The Birth of Art*, trans. Austryn Wainhouse (Lausanne: Skira, 1955).

³³ Bataille, *The Accursed Share, Volume I*, 21.

³⁴ Bataille, *The Accursed Share, Volume I*, 21.

³⁵ Sigmund Freud "The Future of an Illusion," In *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud Volume XXI (1927–1931)*, ed. James Strachey et al., 5-56 (London: Vintage Books, 2001), 14.

³⁶ Todd McGowan, *Psychoanalytic Film Theory and The Rules of the Game* (New York: Bloomsbury), 8-11.

³⁷ McGowan, *Psychoanalytic Film Theory and The Rules of the Game*, 8.

³⁸ Stephen Heath, "Cinema and Psychoanalysis: Parallel Histories," in *Endless Night: Cinema and Psychoanalysis, Parallel Histories*, ed. Janet Bergstrom, 25-56 (Berkeley: University of California Press), 32; see, in particular, M Masud R Khan, "Dream Psychology and the Evolution of the Psychoanalytic Situation," *International Journal of Psychoanalysis*, 48 (1972): 424-32.

³⁹ Robert Samuels, "Art and the Position of the Analyst," in *Reading Seminar XI: Lacan's Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis*, ed. Richard Feldstein, Bruce Fink, and Marie Jaanus, 183-186 (Albany: State University of New York Press 1995), 186.

⁴⁰ McGowan, *Psychoanalytic Film Theory and The Rules of the Game*, 10.

⁴¹ See Christian Metz *The Imaginary Signifier: Psychoanalysis and the Cinema* (Indiana University Press: Bloomington and Indianapolis 1982); Todd McGowan, *The Real Gaze: Film Theory After Lacan* (SUNY: Albany, 2007).

⁴² McGowan, *The Real Gaze*, 13.

⁴³ McGowan, *The Real Gaze*, 13.

⁴⁴ Freud, "The Future of an Illusion", 14.

⁴⁵ McGowan, *The Real Gaze*, 3.

⁴⁶ McGowan, *The Real Gaze*, 3.

⁴⁷ Lisa Downing, "The Cinematic Ethics Of Psychoanalysis: Futurity, Death Drive, Desire," in *Film and Ethics: Foreclosed Encounters*, ed. Lisa Downing and Libby Saxton, 133-146 (New York: Routledge 2009), 135.

⁴⁸ Marc de Kesel, *Eros and Ethics: Reading Jacques Lacan's Seminar VII*, trans. Sigi Jöttkandt (Albany: State University of New York, 2009), 186.

⁴⁹ Themí, "Bataille and the Erotics of the Real," 312.

⁵⁰ Lacan, *The Ethics of Psychoanalysis*, 243, 195.

⁵¹ Lacan, *The Ethics of Psychoanalysis*, 197.

⁵² Richard Capobianco, "Lacan and Heidegger: The Ethics of Desire and the Ethics of Authenticity," in *From Phenomenology to Thought, Errancy, and Desire*, ed. Babette E Babich, 391-396 (Kluwer Academic Publishers, 1995), 393.

⁵³ Lacan, *The Ethics of Psychoanalysis*, 315.

⁵⁴ Lacan, *The Ethics of Psychoanalysis*, 315; see also, Bataille *The Accursed Share: Volumes II and III*, 45.

⁵⁵ Themí, "Bataille, Literature, Happiness, and Evil," 196.

⁵⁶ Patrick ffrench, "Dirty Life: London – Paris – Barcelona – Trier – Frankfurt" in *The Beast at Heaven's Gate: Georges Bataille and the Art of Transgression*, ed. Andrew Hussey, 61-72 (Amsterdam and New York: Rodopi, 2006), 63.

⁵⁷ Freud, "Thoughts For The Times of War and Death," 284; Bataille, *The Accursed Share, Volume I*, 21.

⁵⁸ de Kesel, *Eros and Ethics*, 48.

⁵⁹ Freud, "'Civilised' Sexual Morality and Modern Nervous Illness," 186.

⁶⁰ See Richman *Sacred Revolutions*, 156.

⁶¹ Themí, *Lacan's Ethics*, 59.

⁶² Heather Long, "Spring Breakers Isn't Just A Terrible Movie, It Reinforces Rape Culture," *The Guardian*, March 13 (2013), 01.30 AEDT: <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2013/mar/28/spring-breakers-movie-wild-girls-rape-culture>

⁶³ See Bruce Fink, *Fundamentals of Psychoanalytic Technique: A Lacanian Approach for Practitioners* (New York and London: W. W. Norton & Company, 2007), 1-5.

⁶⁴ See de Kesel, *Eros and Ethics*, 48; Freud, "Civilization and its Discontents," 84.

⁶⁵ James Quandt, "Flesh & Blood: Sex And Violence In Recent French Cinema" *Artforum* Vol. 42, Issue 6. (Feb. 2004), 127; Tim Palmer, "Style and Sensation in the Contemporary French Cinema of the Body," *Journal of Film and Video* 58, no.3 (2006): 22.

- ⁶⁶ Mattias Frey “The Ethics of Extreme Cinema,” in *Cine-Ethics: Ethical Dimensions of Film Theory, Practice, and Spectatorship*, ed. Jinhee Choi and Mattias Frey, 145-162 (Routledge, 2013), 145, 151.
- ⁶⁷ See, Lilia Kilburn “Blow Guns: Escapist Erotics in *Spring Breakers* (Harmony Korine, 2012),” *Senses of Cinema*, Issue 83 (June 2017); <http://sensesofcinema.com/2017/feature-articles/spring-breakers/>; and Armstrong, “Spring Breakers.”
- ⁶⁸ Armstrong “Spring Breakers.”
- ⁶⁹ Sinnerbrink, *Cinematic Ethics*, 82.
- ⁷⁰ Freud “Civilization and its Discontents,” 82, 94.
- ⁷¹ See Freud, “The Future of an Illusion,” 6; and Freud “Civilization and its Discontents,” 82.
- ⁷² Freud, “The Future of an Illusion,” 6-7.
- ⁷³ Sinnerbrink, *Cinematic Ethics*, 110; my emphasis.
- ⁷⁴ Vivian Sobchack, *Carnal Thoughts: Embodiment and Moving Image Culture* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004): 284-86.
- ⁷⁵ Lacan, *The Ethics of Psychoanalysis*, 3.
- ⁷⁶ Lacan, *The Ethics of Psychoanalysis*, 3, 321.
- ⁷⁷ de Kesel, *Eros and Ethics*, 2.
- ⁷⁸ Lacan, *The Ethics of Psychoanalysis*, 237; de Kesel, *Eros and Ethics*, 53.
- ⁷⁹ Lacan, *The Ethics of Psychoanalysis*, 2, 313.
- ⁸⁰ Lacan, *The Ethics of Psychoanalysis*, 313, 23.
- ⁸¹ Freud “The Future of an Illusion,” 15.
- ⁸² Freud, “Civilization and its Discontents,” 95.
- ⁸³ de Kesel, *Eros and Ethics*, 4; Lacan *The Ethics of Psychoanalysis*, 4.
- ⁸⁴ See Jacques Lacan, *The Seminar of Jacques Lacan Book I: Freud’s Papers on Technique 1953-54*, ed. Jacques-Alain Miller, trans. John Forrester (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1991), 221.
- ⁸⁵ See Evans, *An Introductory Dictionary of Lacanian Psychoanalysis*, 138.
- ⁸⁶ McGowan, *The Real Gaze*, 1-2.
- ⁸⁷ Metz, *The Imaginary Signifier*, 3.
- ⁸⁸ McGowan, *The Real Gaze*, 3.
- ⁸⁹ Quoted in Heinz Kohut, “The Evaluation Of Applicants For Psychoanalytic Training,” *The International Journal of Psycho-Analysis And Bulletin of the International Psycho-Analytical Association* 49 (1968): 553.
- ⁹⁰ Fink, *Fundamentals of Psychoanalytic Technique*, 3.
- ⁹¹ Fink, *Fundamentals of Psychoanalytic Technique*, 3-4.
- ⁹² Samuels, “Art and the Position of the Analyst,” 184-85.
- ⁹³ McGowan, *The Real Gaze*, 14.
- ⁹⁴ Ed Cameron, “Harmony Korine’s ‘Break from Reality’: *Spring Breakers* as Candy-Coloured Neon Noir,” *Mosaic* 49, no. 4 (2016): 91.
- ⁹⁵ Themi, “Bataille and the Erotics of the Real,” 314; Bataille, *Eroticism*, 65.
- ⁹⁶ Bataille, *Eroticism*, 63; my emphasis.
- ⁹⁷ Jacob W. Glazier “Spring Break Forever, Bitches! Neoliberal Identity Politics Undergoes Schizoanalysis,” *Rhizomes: Cultural Studies in Emerging Knowledge*, 28 (2015): <http://rhizomes.net/issue28/glazier.html>
- ⁹⁸ Cameron, “Harmony Korine’s ‘Break from Reality,’” 89-105.
- ⁹⁹ Harmony Korine, quoted in Jason Wood, *Last Words*, 68; Harmony Korine, “Commentary,” *Spring Breakers*. Lionsgate, 2013. Film.
- ¹⁰⁰ Todd McGowan, *The End of Dissatisfaction? Jacques Lacan and the Emerging Society of Enjoyment* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2004), 52.
- ¹⁰¹ Richard Brody, “The Life Lessons of ‘Spring Break,’” *The New Yorker*, accessed June 13 2019: <https://www.newyorker.com/culture/richard-brody/the-life-lessons-of-spring-breakers>
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- ¹⁰³ Alison Horbury, “A psychoanalytic ethics of the pornographic aesthetic,” *Porn Studies*, vol. 6, no. 1 (2019): 89-90.
- ¹⁰⁴ Friedrich Nietzsche, “On the Genealogy of Morals,” in *On the Genealogy of Morals and Ecce Homo*, ed. Walter Kaufmann (New York: Random House, 1989), 111.
- ¹⁰⁵ See Alison Horbury, “A psychoanalytic ethics of the pornographic aesthetic,” 95.
- ¹⁰⁶ Horbury, “A psychoanalytic ethics,” 94, 96.
- ¹⁰⁷ Freud, “‘Civilised’ Sexual Morality and Modern Nervous Illness,” 190-91.
- ¹⁰⁸ Cameron, “Harmony Korine’s ‘Break from Reality,’” 93.

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- ¹⁰⁹ Maryn Wilkinson, "On the Depths of Surface: Strategies of Surface Aesthetics in *The Bling Ring*, *Spring Breakers* and *Drive*," *Film-Philosophy* 22, no.2 (2018): 222–23.
- ¹¹⁰ Korine quoted in Wood, *Last Words*, 68; Korine, "Commentary."
- ¹¹¹ Cameron, "Harmony Korine's 'Break from Reality,'" 93.
- ¹¹² Cameron, "Harmony Korine's 'Break from Reality,'" 92.
- ¹¹³ Cameron, "Harmony Korine's 'Break from Reality,'" 93.
- ¹¹⁴ Cameron, "Harmony Korine's 'Break from Reality,'" 93.
- ¹¹⁵ Horbury, "A psychoanalytic ethics," 91.
- ¹¹⁶ Freud, 'Civilization and its Discontents,' 83.
- ¹¹⁷ Bataille, *Eroticism*, 143.
- ¹¹⁸ Cameron, "Harmony Korine's 'Break from Reality,'" 100.
- ¹¹⁹ Bataille, *Prehistoric Paintings*, 115, 125; Themis further notes the return to animal sovereignty is present in pre and non-Christian religions where deities take on animal form in transgressive activity, such as Zeus' divine rapes, see "Bataille and the Erotics of the Real," 322.
- ¹²⁰ Michel Foucault, "Sade: Sergeant of Sex," in *Aesthetics, Method, and Epistemology*, ed. James Faubion, trans. Robert Hurley et al., (New York: The New Press, 1994), 224.
- ¹²¹ Bataille, *The Accursed Share: Volumes II and III*, 230.
- ¹²² Lacan, *The Ethics of Psychoanalysis*, 323.
- ¹²³ Themis, "Bataille and the Erotics of the Real," 315; Bataille, *The Accursed Share, Volumes II and III*, 107, 109, 119.
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- ¹²⁵ Todd McGowan, *Capitalism and Desire: The Psychic Cost of Free Markets* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2016), 112, 21.
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- ¹²⁷ Cameron, "Harmony Korine's 'Break from Reality,'" 99.
- ¹²⁸ Cameron, "Harmony Korine's 'Break from Reality,'" 101.
- ¹²⁹ See Richman, *Sacred Revolutions*, 156.
- ¹³⁰ John Brenkman, "Introduction to Bataille," *New German Critique*, No. 16 (Winter, 1979): 61.
- ¹³¹ Brenkman, "Introduction to Bataille," 61.
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