Philosophers of boredom such as Heidegger and Agamben have tended to theorize a split in boredom, between a vulgar boredom arising from everyday life under capitalism or modernity, and an authentic, profound boredom, a path philosophy. This split is mirrored in the critical discourse on Warhol. Works like his serial silkscreens, or Empire and his other early “stillies” - these are good-boring, commenting on the bad-boring of ordinary commodity objects and deadening mass culture.

In this paper, I consider Warhol’s profoundly-boring Kiss (1963) alongside Christopher Nolan’s vulgar-boring blockbuster Inception (2010). To be sure, many found Nolan’s film captivating; my own boredom is rather data for a phenomenological and psychoanalytical theorization of boredom as an affective and aesthetic disposition for film viewers. What happens when we watch boring media? And why should we want to do so?

Using psychoanalyst Thomas Ogden’s scheme of psychic positions, I argue that boredom as aesthetic response belongs to the depressive position, marked by a sense of distance from the world. This depressive distance is itself ambivalent, as it can lead either the possibility of aesthetically redeemed profound boredom, attended by critical or interpretive distance; or, it entails the slackened, alienated, and affectively reparative vulgar boredom.