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Fifth Commentary on Bergson

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Como Citar | How to cite:

Ferreira, F. (2025). *A Imagem-Morte: : Quinto Comentário sobre Bergson*. *Revista De Comunicação E Linguagens*, (63). <https://doi.org/10.34619/jjaq-ovvl>

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.34619/jjaq-ovvl>

Editor | Publisher:

ICNOVA - Instituto de Comunicação da NOVA

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The Death-Image: Fifth Commentary on Bergson

A imagem-morte: quinto comentário sobre Bergson

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Abstract

Following Deleuze's gesture, in his *Cinema* project, where he introduces his "film-philosophizing" with commentaries on Bergson's philosophy (in order to think the movement and time-image), I propose a new commentary on Bergson, this time having in view a new category, not mentioned at least explicitly by Deleuze, the "death-image". This is my way of responding to Susana Viegas's inspiring article on "Death as Film-Philosophy's Muse", which sparks the call for papers, set on revisiting, in the sense of expanding creatively, also for historical reasons, Deleuze's *Cinema* project. Added to the four commentaries Deleuze includes, this fifth one turns to Bergson's remarks on the "panoramic vision of the dead", to the situation where, brought back to life again, after dying, or going through a death experience, the dying person states they saw, in a very short time, all the forgotten events of their lives passing before them with great rapidity, with their smallest circumstances, and in the very order they occurred. Demonstrating this "moving panorama" of our lives is virtually present every time the past is remembered, whether in recollections or even dreams, I relate this "vision" not only to Bergson's metaphysics of time (which he himself does not), but also to what Deleuze defines in *The Time-Image* as "sheets of past", being it in terms of this panorama that I conceive the convergence between death and these sheets, or the death-image and the time-image. My point is that the panoramic vision carves a lacuna between the "pure past", or how the past preserves itself in time, independently of us, and how it is remembered, or even dreamed of, where the dead not only survive, but can have their existences prolonged, even if only virtually, in a past which is no longer theirs, but ours (and which cinema, as a practice of images and signs, is especially suited to actualize, this time, as death-images). This fifth commentary on Bergson's philosophy is preceded by more general considerations on the ontological status of the death-image, at least when framed within Deleuze's philosophy.

Keywords

semiotics | metaphysics | film-philosophy | non-philosophy | time

Resumo

Seguindo o gesto de Deleuze, no seu projeto *Cinema*, em que introduz a sua «filme-filosofia» a partir de comentários sobre a filosofia de Bergson (para pensar as imagens movimento e tempo), proponho um novo comentário sobre Bergson, desta vez tendo em vista uma nova categoria, não abordada explicitamente por Deleuze, a «imagem-morte». Esta é a minha maneira de responder ao inspirador artigo de Susana Viegas sobre «A morte como musa da filme-filosofia», e que motiva a chamada de artigos, onde se apresenta o objetivo de revisitar, no sentido de expandir criativamente, também por razões históricas, o projeto *Cinema* de Deleuze. Acrescentado aos quatro comentários que Deleuze inclui, este quinto volta-se para as observações de Bergson sobre a «visão panorâmica dos mortos», a situação onde, regressado à vida, após morrer ou passar por uma experiência de morte, o moribundo afirma ter visto, num curto espaço de tempo, todos os acontecimentos esquecidos da sua vida a passar diante dele com grande rapidez, com as suas mais pequenas circunstâncias, e na mesma ordem em que ocorreram. Demonstrando que este «panorama em movimento» das nossas vidas está virtualmente presente sempre que o passado é recordado, seja em recordações ou mesmo em sonhos, relaciono esta «visão» não só à metafísica do tempo de Bergson (o que ele próprio não faz), mas também ao que Deleuze define em *A imagem-tempo* como «lençóis do passado», sendo nos termos deste panorama que concebo a convergência entre a morte e estes lençóis, entre a imagem-morte e a imagem-tempo. Digo que a visão panorâmica abre uma lacuna entre o «passado puro», ou como o passado se preserva no tempo, independentemente de nós, e de como ele é lembrado, ou mesmo sonhado, os mortos não apenas sobrevivendo nesta visão, mas podendo também ter a sua existência prolongada, mesmo que apenas virtualmente, num passado que já não é o deles, mas nosso (e que o cinema, como prática de imagens e signos, está especialmente talhado para atualizar, desta vez, como imagens-morte). Este quinto comentário sobre a filosofia de Bergson é precedido por considerações mais gerais sobre o estatuto ontológico da imagem-morte, pelo menos quando enquadrado na filosofia de Deleuze.

semiótica | metafísica | filme-filosofia | não-filosofia | tempo

Palavras-chave**Beyond the time-image?**

I want to begin with a comment on the call for papers on “death-Images”. Generally speaking, while aiming to revisit “Deleuze’s Time-Image in Cinema after 1985”, it gives the impression of wanting to extend Deleuze’s *Cinema* project beyond both sets of images structuring it, and dividing the project into two parts, the first dealing with *The Movement-Image*, and the second with *The Time-Image*. Besides movement-images and time-images, there would be a third category of images, death-images. Does this imply, perhaps, the ambition of adding a third volume to Deleuze’s project, one he did not write, or was in the position to set in motion in 1985, which is when *The Time-Image*

originally appeared in France? If this were the case, the “death-image” would be “beyond” the time-image just as the time-image was, for Deleuze, “Beyond the Movement-Image” (which is the title of *The Time-Image*’s opening chapter). One would perhaps also expect the post-1985 historical context to be at the origin of such a novelty at the level of the image, just as postwar Europe gave way, for Deleuze, to a new kind of image (beginning with Italian neorealism), the time-image, following the proliferation of “situations and spaces ‘we no longer know how to describe’—buildings deserted but uninhabited, cities undergoing demolition or reconstruction—and the new race of characters who emerged from this rubble, mutants, who ‘saw rather than acted’” (from the back cover of the English edition of *The Time-Image*—these situations were defined by Deleuze as “pure optical and sound situations”, in contrast with the “sensorimotor” ones of the movement-image). Finally, if great cinema authors (Welles, Resnais, Robbe-Grillet, Marguerite Duras, and so on) were able to give us *direct* time-images with their works, and break with “classical” cinema, what would be expected is for these death-images to appear in the works of contemporary authors, perhaps also, for reasons to be determined, in ones outside the scope of Western film generally (which seems to be a wager of the call, in its special welcoming of “non-Western” cinema, including “several major figures in recent so-called ‘World Cinema’ [who] engage deeply with the ‘time-image’, and in a lot of cases their cinemas relate to death and to the ‘death-image’ too” (from the call for papers).

Yet, can we really speak of a “beyond the time-image”, at least in what the death-image is concerned?

In actual fact, if we keep close to Deleuze’s text, at least explicitly (as there is not a single mention of “death-images” in *The Time-Image*, as far as I can tell), we do find an effort, on his behalf, to make the time-image converge with a new kind of image, but it is not the death-image. Instead, such convergence, or intersection, occurs with “thought-images”, or “images of thought”, and, for that matter, it is not limited to time-images, including movement-images as well. From as early as his book on Nietzsche (1962), but developed more specifically in *Difference and Repetition* (1968) and (with Félix Guattari) in *What is Philosophy?* (1994), that is, throughout his entire career, Deleuze insisted that the very act of thinking presupposes an image of what it means to think, to orient oneself in thought, the nature of the image being, therefore, “pre-philosophical”, and which is of the highest importance for philosophy, for even while appealing to a non-conceptual comprehension of what it is to think, open to “non-philosophers”, the image nevertheless conditions the act of thinking, and what such an act is meant to fabricate, for Deleuze, at least philosophically, which are concepts (1994, 37 and 40-41). Finally, in what perhaps marks the apex of the relations established between “thought and cinema” in his *Cinema* project, we will find cinema casting *its own* images of thought, two at least, corresponding to “classical” cinema, the movement-image, and to “modern” cinema, the time-image (it is in this sense that images of thought, crucial to Deleuze’s understanding of what it is to philosophize,

converge or intersect with *both* the movement and time-images). In other words, the movement-image converges with one image of thought (largely worked out on the basis of statements by Eisenstein), while the time-image with another (where Artaud's writings on cinema figure centrally).¹

And on a more general note, precisely on the relation of “thought and cinema”, it is also evident that such a relation is not limited to images of thought, which represent, as I suggested, only the apex of this relation, but is transversal to the *Cinema* project as

1 On the point dealing with the way the time-image intersects with the thought-image, or the image of thought developed by Deleuze in *The Time-Image*, there is much more to add and explore. My basic argument is that a new image of thought is developed on the basis of the time-image, or a direct presentation of time, just as an initial image of thought was developed in relation to the movement-image, anchored on an indirect presentation (mediated by movement). *The Time-Image's* chapter on “Thought and Cinema” (chapter 7) deals with both these images mostly in terms of a confrontation between Eisenstein and Artaud's writings on cinema. In what the image of thought arising from the movement-image is concerned, at stake is the revolutionary belief on behalf of great “classical” authors such as Vertov, Eisenstein or Gance, “that cinema was capable of imposing the shock, and imposing it on the masses, the people.” (157) That is, the image of thought is precisely the one of a “shock to thought, communicating vibrations to the cortex, touching the nervous and cerebral system directly” (156), one relating closely to *Difference and Repetition's* critique (chapter 3) of the moralizing dogmatic image of thought (which Deleuze defines as the “object” of his critical philosophy insofar as it is an image thinking should literally *destroy* as a condition for philosophical thought, that is, of a true creation in philosophy. In any case, “everyone knows that, if an art necessarily imposed the shock or vibration, the world would have changed long ago, and men would have been thinking for a long time. So this pretension of the cinema, at least among the greatest pioneers, raises a smile today.” (157) More generally, in my view Deleuze will dedicate the final part of his career and life to the question of the image of thought, namely, to the image his own philosophy presupposes, in a reflection beginning in *The Time-Image* (where the new image appears as an intersection or development of it), and which reaches its full expression in his final major work, his *oeuvre ultime*, written with Félix Guattari, *What is Philosophy?* From the point of view of the question of time, or the time-image, the problem to which this new image responds is the one of the very relinking of past and future (also expressed as a new “link with the world”) beyond sensorimotor schemata, that is, “beyond the movement-image”, and in terms of Deleuze's theory of the event. Deleuze's conception of the brain is also crucial in this sequence. Here a new image is developed, where the power of thought gives way “to an unthought in thought, to an irrational proper to thought, a point of outside beyond the outside world, but capable of restoring our belief in the world.” (183) It gives way, in short, to the “thought of the Outside”, where thinking plunges into chaos, into the interstice, beyond sensorimotor “shock”, to create, from itself, and in itself, not only its own beginning but also a new interval, or the very Earth, body without organs, as interval between the always already past and the eternally yet to come (and in light of which the philosopher appears in in Lazarian fashion, as someone who has returned from the “land of the dead” (207-208). In any case, the development of all these points would have to be the object of another (much longer) essay, which I am in fact currently developing. I can therefore confirm the need for greater development, and respond by adding that, for the purpose of an introductory discussion on the death-image, my objective is modest, limited to ontologically situating this image relation to the other major images dealt with by Deleuze, namely the movement-image, time-image, and thought-image, to then further determine its specific nature, especially in relation to the time-image.

a whole, that is, to cinema as a practice of images and signs on the basis of which philosophy, as a practice of concepts, is able to determine the nature of these images and signs, and to conceive their distribution or “classification”, organized broadly speaking in terms of two different kinds of images, the movement-image and the time-image. Thought, or at least philosophical thinking, traverses the *Cinema* project as a whole, at the level of the classification of images and their respective signs, but also at the level of images of thought, insofar as the movement-image, as a general category, and the time-image as another, each institute their own pre-philosophical image of what it means to think, to orient oneself in thought.

In my view, if there is such a “beyond” in Deleuze’s philosophy, beyond both the movement and time-image, it would no longer refer to the ontological dimension of images (and pre-linguistic signs) generally, but to a new dimension, which is the one of *sense*, following Deleuze’s transcendental reflection on language, *on its very possibility*, in *The Logic of Sense* (which appears many years prior to the *Cinema* project, immediately after *Difference and Repetition*, in 1969). This is a complex point, which, in any case, remains, I believe, in line with Deleuze’s thinking. As he makes clear, right from the second chapter of *The Time-Image* (1989) onwards, where he asks “under what conditions should cinema be considered a language?” (25), but which refers, in fact, to a crucial thesis (ontologically speaking) reinforced in the Conclusion, for Deleuze

Cinema is not a universal or primitive language system [*langue*] nor a language [*langage*]. It brings to light an intelligible *content* [my emphasis] which is like a presupposition, a condition, a necessary correlate through which language constructs its own ‘objects’ (signifying units and operations) ... It consists of movements and thought-processes (pre-linguistic images), and of points of view on these movements and processes (pre-signifying signs). It constitutes a whole ‘psychomechanics’, the spiritual automaton, *the utterable of a language system* (my emphasis) which has its own logic. The language system takes utterances of language, with signifying units and operations from it, but the utterable itself, its images and signs, are of another nature. (262)

In other words, language, or the “language system”, presupposes the dimension of images and signs, which constitutes, for this system, the “utterable”, just each utterance produces sense (a “pure incorporeal effect” as analyzed by Deleuze in *The Logic of Sense*, in particular the third series, “Of Propositions”, where sense appears as its own dimension in the proposition, not to be confused with signification).² From this more general

2 This distinction between *content* (constituted by images, with their pre-linguistic signs, that is, with its own “substance and form”) and *expression* (constituted by sense, and supposing its own “form and content”, that is, language) is conceived largely in terms of the linguist Louis Hjelmslev’s work, the “Danish Spinozist geologist” (from a linguistic point of view), and is central to Deleuze and Guattari’s conception of “stratification” in *A Thousand Plateaus* (1987, 43).

ontological perspective, there would be a domain of images (constitutive of a “pure semiotics”, or the “language of cinema”, contrary to the insistence in viewing it as a semiology, internal to the language system), and another dimension, truly “beyond” it, precisely by no longer pertaining to images, but to sense (it would be at this level, between images and propositions, that the very fate of thought is played out in its full extension, at least in Deleuze’s philosophy, or how I read it, that is, in its three major forms, those of art, of science, and of philosophy, as (finally) made explicit in *What is Philosophy?*—this implies, therefore, that internal to “sense”, we would find different “planes”, of composition for art, of reference for science, of immanence for philosophy, with their respective “objectivities”, percepts, affects (not to be confused with perception and affection-images), functions, prospects, and also, concepts. I believe there is a third, and final dimension, in Deleuze’s ontology, which is the one of desire (or “desiring-production”, of “intensities”), whose fullest expression is *A Thousand Plateaus*, all of which, images, sense, and desire, constitutive of an ontology of the nascent, of life in its *nascent state*, or as “Immanence: A Life...” (the title of Deleuze’s final essay, 2001, 25-33).

Death between time and thought

What is the death-image? If it is not “beyond”, how does it intersect with the time-image? And what does it tell us about death? Or more precisely, the dead, or what Deleuze himself calls, in *The Time-Image* (1989, xii and 208), “the land of the dead”?

I would like here, for the purposes of this paper, to consider the ontological status of these images, death-images. I take for granted they exist (I would not be writing this to claim the contrary), and was, in fact, initially thinking of analyzing them in the work of David Lynch, besides Apichatpong Weerasethakul, but came to the realization that the very question of what are death-images deserves to be considered, at a philosophical level, in its own right, it alone exhausting the space I have here available to explore it.

And how do I propose going about it? In what Deleuze’s philosophy is concerned, one would perhaps be tempted to consider what he himself has to say about death. Again, the call for papers also alludes to it, when stating that

To some extent, this convergence [between time and death-images] can be regarded as Deleuze’s contribution to a strand of French 20th century thought (e.g. Georges Bataille, Maurice Blanchot, Jacques Lacan, among others) fruitfully elaborating on what lies ‘between two deaths’, i.e. between the subject’s symbolic and real deaths.

That is, there would be a theory or philosophy of death in Deleuze's work, structured in terms of a conception of two deaths, one "symbolic", the other "real" (or what Maurice Blanchot, who largely inspires it, called the "double death").³

In what his thinking on the "symbolic" death is concerned, to which he dedicated most (if practically not all) of his attention, Deleuze's major interest, beginning in the final chapters of *Coldness and Cruelty* (1991b), his study on perversion, published in 1967, almost two decades prior to the *Cinema* project, was to engage with Freud's speculation in *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, in an attempt to "critically and clinically" revise his hypothesis of a "death instinct" (which he postulated in 1920, in the aftermath of the Great War). Freud's mistake was double, in Deleuze's view: first, in relation to the very conception of death associated to the instinct, which with Freud is the material or biological conception, the "real" or common one we all know about, that we grieve with the passing of loved ones, which one day we shall too live, and whose model is the corpse; and second, in relation to the drives, where the death instinct stands in opposition to Eros, the life instinct, in a constitutive duality (Freud had a taste for them). Deleuze, on the other hand, believes there is no such duality precisely because, *at the level of the unconscious*, the death instinct does not refer to a biological, extensive model, but to a psychological, intensive one. "Freud strangely refused any other dimension to death, any prototype or any presentation of death in the unconscious, even though he conceded the existence of such prototypes for birth and castration." (1994, 111) It is in this context that Deleuze's study on perversion is important, and this for the following: the pervert reveals 1) what the intensive nature of this "symbolic" death consists of, 2) that this experience is invested as such, and, therefore, 3) that there is no duality of instincts or drives, but only a perverse way of sexualizing the unconscious, which in fact reveals Eros in its truth or "elemental" dimension, at least in what thought, and the questions of sublimation and symbolization, are concerned (perversion appearing as "the elemental aspect of neurosis" [1990, 304]). From Deleuze's point of view in *Coldness and Cruelty*, but which is a perspective traversing major works such as *Difference and Repetition* and *The Logic of Sense*, lasting until his crucial encounter with Guattari, in 1969, when it was, finally, abandoned, what sadism and masochism reveal is a death instinct modeled on the *dessexualization* of the unconscious (following an alternative take on what Freud defined as "secondary narcissism" [1994, 11]) and not the corpse, being this dessexualization invested by thought (and therefore constitutive of it). The sadist and masochist repeat this perverse *ressexualization* of the unconscious, but do so in very different ways, so distinct, in fact, that no dialectical unity, or reversion from one to the other, is to be admitted (that is, no "sado-masochistic entity"). They reveal, contrary to Freud, that there is such a phenomenon as an "experience of death", specific to the

3 *The Space of Literature*, chapter 4, "Death as Possibility", especially the section, "The Strange Project, or Double Death", 103-105.

unconscious (dessexualization, intensive), and not to the organism (corpse, extensive).

It is also worth emphasizing, clinically, or “critically or clinically” speaking, that after relaunching Freud’s death instinct on radically new terms, even if ones not foreign to Freudian theory, Deleuze will nevertheless abandon it entirely, after meeting Guattari, which is also the extent to which he turns on psychoanalysis generally, not without a bang, in *Anti-Oedipus*. We can in this way say Deleuze uses two distinct clinical models to conceive this symbolic death, the first “psychoanalytic”, the second, with Guattari, “schizoanalytic”. Privileging the pervert, the death instinct refers to a dessexualization of the unconscious, while privileging the “schizo”, the “conceptual persona” arising from the Deleuze/Guattari encounter, and who I believe is the main reason for their collaboration, the symbolic death experience is now associated to what they call the “schizophrenic process”, in other words, to “desiring-production”, insofar as it is in the immanence of this experience, or what Deleuze and Guattari also define as the “*schizophrenization* of death”, that this “production”, with its “process”, operates.⁴

Needless to say, the complexity with regard to this symbolic death is striking. Yet, in what seems to make matters worse, at least in what the death-image is concerned, this complexity would only constitute one of its poles, as the other pole is defined by death in its extensive or organic reality. We have, therefore, time-images, thought-images, but also death-images, which would include two distinct poles, a real pole, and a symbolic one. How do they relate? Or rather, what role does the death-image have in this triad?

As I indicated (even without detailing any of them), to the key transition analyzed by Deleuze, from the movement-image to the time-image (or both volumes of the *Cinema* project), correspond two distinct images of thought, one for the movement-image, the other for the time-image. In what the death-image is concerned, and while rejecting that it be “beyond” the time-image, I understand, on the contrary, it to “intersect” with the time-image, and not the movement-image (which, in fact, is a point also advanced by the call, insofar as it specifically relates the inquiry into death-images to *The Time-Image*). Now, if the time-image suggests a new image of thought, we could ask what role death, or “the death-image”, plays in this context. And, in response, I would like to suggest the following: in my view, the death-image mediates the relation between the time-image and the new image of thought it originates. That is to say, the death-image is between the time-image and its thought-image; on one of its poles, the one of “real” death, it intersects with the time-image, while on the other pole, the one

⁴ In *Anti-Oedipus* (329-331), Deleuze and Guattari speak of “*schizophrenizing* death” in terms of intensities, in the double sense that every intensity envelops a degree zero which it invests, and is followed by the experience of its finitude, as it is extinguished. Death appears at both ends of intensification, as a primordial zero (which Deleuze and Guattari relate to catatonic schizophrenia as absence of intensity) and as undoing (in that the degree of intensification is dissipated). Insofar as desiring-production produces these intensities (as schizophrenic process), it supposes this death (which is “symbolic”, or “schizophrenic”) as affirmative of its eternal return—“The Eternal Return as experience, and as deterritorialized circuit of all the cycle of desire.” (331)

of “symbolic death”, it originates a new image of thought, pertaining to the time-image, and no longer to the movement-image (this new image would be populated with concepts, on a different dimension, which is that of “sense”). From time to thought we find the death-image, converging with the time-image on one of its poles, and conditioning the emergence of a new image of thought, on its other pole—it is in terms of the death-image, therefore, that a new image of thought is constructed; or, put differently, the new image of thought, formed in the transition of the “classical” movement-image to the “modern” time-image, does not intersect directly with the time-image, but only indirectly, by means of the death-image (which, in turn, converges directly with the time-image).

How does this sequence play out, from time to thought, by way of death? We shall have to go from one pole to the other, in an adventure Deleuze also speaks of in terms of a “return from the land of the dead” (in *The Time-Image* as I already pointed out, but in other texts as well, such as in *What is Philosophy?* [69, 202]). This “land” corresponds, in our terms, to the first pole, while the “return”, to the second. It is in terms of this return that a new image of thought is instituted, of what it means to think, to orient oneself in thought, one “beyond the movement-image”. If we began asking about the ontological status of the death-image, I propose to think it internally to the time-image generally, and not “beyond” it, as are “time-images” to “movement-images”, reserving for the death-image a very special role in instituting the new image of thought. This image already appears in the *Cinema* project (in the association of thinking to an “unthought” internal to it, and in terms of which a philosophy of immanence plays out), but, in my view, is only truly realized, in its fullest expression, at least in what Deleuze’s thought is concerned, in his final major work, also his last with Guattari, *What is Philosophy?*

The panoramic vision of the dead: fifth commentary on Bergson

It is important to bear in mind that, explicitly at least, Deleuze does not attribute this role to death-images, of converging with the time-image so as to originate a new orientation in thought, the institution of a new image. In fact, he does not seem to make explicit mention of the death-image at all, as already indicated. Even when speaking of death, distinguishing two poles, real and symbolic, he does so in a different context, which is the one of an attempt to offer an alternative (“acentered”, 211) conception of the brain (and which he develops more fully in *What is Philosophy?*, in the Conclusion).⁵ Can we truly speak of death-images? Suppose they, in fact, are presupposed in *The Time-Image*? And all the while assuming, following the spirit of the call, that the

5 Even if initially, I deal with what I understand to be Deleuze’s “metaphysics of the brain” in “The Story of the Brain’s Becoming-Mind” (2023)

post-1985 context suggests such a “revision”, one perhaps, even, robust enough to cast new light on Deleuze’s philosophy?

At least this, it seems, we can take from the initial consideration of the ontological status of the death-image, and which refines our overall hypothesis: it has two poles, one intersecting or converging with the time-image, the other originating a new image of thought corresponding to it, in the transition from the movement to the time-image. For the purposes of this paper, I will not consider this adventure, into the land of the dead and back, from one pole of the death-image to the other, in its full scope. I will only deal with the first pole, with the question of how the death-image intersects with the time-image, and in what sense we may conceive such a convergence as taking us into the land of the dead, to the realm of Hades, the underworld. And to be precise, in what the time-images worked out by Deleuze are concerned, I believe it is in terms of one of them in particular that the death-image intersects with the time-image. This is the first (direct) time-image Deleuze defines, the one of the “sheets of past”. In fact, I propose that for this convergence to be considered, a new, fifth “commentary on Bergson” would have to be added to the four Deleuze introduces in his *Cinema* project. There we find a commentary on Bergson’s theses on movement, one on the varieties of movement-images, another on forms of recognition, and, finally, on Bergson’s theory of memory. All of these commentaries are crucial in structuring the *Cinema* project as a whole, at least philosophically. If we follow Deleuze’s gesture, in the context of the death-image, we would also turn to Bergson in search of some kind of indication on how to proceed philosophically, a way, in his philosophy, of conceiving how death, the “real” one, converges with the sheets of past. We would embark, then, on a further commentary on Bergson, to add to the ones included in both *The Movement-Image* and *The Time-Image*.

a) the “moving panorama” and its psychological mechanism

I suggest we turn to a conference delivered by Bergson, in London, on May 28, 1913, on the occasion of his “Presidential Address to the Society for Psychical Research”. He titled it “Phantasms of the Living and Psychical Research” (1920, 75-103). In it, Bergson deals with the question of telepathy, but also, more generally, with what he understands by “psychical research”, in the context of the Society’s investigations, where we find him also mentioning a phenomenon he had already alluded to, twice at least, in *Matter and Memory* (which appeared in 1897), and in another conference he delivered, in 1911, this time at the University of Oxford, on “The Perception of Change” (2007, 127). The phenomenon is the one of a death experience, more specifically, of the “moving panorama”, or “panoramic vision of the totality of their past”, the dead, or more precisely, those who returned from death, the “real” one, claim to have perceived.

It is true Bergson's position oscillates in what the cause may be of this "vision", belonging to the dead themselves. Of course, one could simply say the very event of death triggers it. In any case, this does not explain the psychological mechanism at work. The problem hinges on a key conception introduced by Bergson, as early as *Matter and Memory* (1991, 173), which is the idea that consciousness has its own "tension", or what he calls "attention to life". What such an attention allows for is the adaptation of consciousness, by way of the body and its different attitudes, to reality, or at least to the sort of reality that is given in the continuity between perception and action, but also, at another level, between memory and perception. Bergson will famously reject that memories (or recollections) survive in the brain, but he does, obviously, reserve a special role for the brain in *actualizing* recollections in perception, besides also *learning* the movements of the body (motor-memory). "Attention to life" refers to this crucial role of the brain in guaranteeing the sensorimotor equilibrium of a "'well-balanced' mind" (153), adapted to the exigencies of material life, that is, to action. In this sense, any break with the continuity of this attention, whether in different cases of amnesia, the ingestion of drugs, or insanity, figure as examples of a diminished attention to life precisely by affecting brain function (in this sense, such a diminution does not refer to situations in which the body alters its attitude, hesitates upon its action, as in this latter case one does not lose the continuous tension constitutive of that "well balanced mind", and assured by the brain).

Bergson's initial oscillation refers to the question of this attitude. In "The Perception of Change" (2007), when considering the psychological mechanism originating the panoramic vision of the dead, he conjectures

An attention to life, sufficiently powerful and sufficiently separated from all practical interest, would thus include in an undivided present the entire past history of the conscious person,—not as instantaneity, not like a cluster of simultaneous parts, but as something continually present which would be something continually moving.

On the other hand, in "Phantasms of the Living", he approached the problem from its opposite end (much as he did in *Matter and Memory*, 1991, 154-55), saying

The truth is that our whole past is always present behind us, and to perceive it we have but to look back; only, we cannot and we must not look back [in what recalls the story of Orpheus and Eurydice]. We must not, because our end is to live, to act, and life and action look forward. We cannot, because our cerebral mechanism is fashioned to this end,—to mask from us the past, to let at each moment only so much pass through as will throw light on the present situation and favor our action ... Should, however, the attention to life grow weak for a moment (I do not mean voluntary attention, which is momentary and individual, but that continuous attention common to us all) ... then our mind, which has of force been kept till then looking forward, loses the tension which strains it and by the

recoil is made backward-looking; it surveys its whole history. The panoramic vision of the past is due, then, to a sudden *disinterestedness of life*, born of the sudden conviction that the moment is the moment of death. Therefore, up to then the business of the brain, so far as it is the organ of memory [in the sense of actualizing, and not storing it], has been to keep attention fixed on life by usefully contracting the field of consciousness” (1920, 94-95).

Between these opposing interpretations, the latter one is dominant, not only because Bergson returns to it after having begun with it in *Matter and Memory*, but mainly due to the fact that the detour where we find him associating attention to life with the separation from “all practical interest”, seems only to contradict what he himself says of this notion in the first place. If there be such a phenomenon as the vision of the dying, where, as he puts in *Matter and Memory*, “when brought to life again, [the dying man] states that he saw, in a very short time, all the forgotten events of his life passing before him with great rapidity, with their smallest circumstances and in the very order in which they occurred” (155), then such a vision must represent, on the contrary, a fundamental break from any practical interest, being such a movement better explained, therefore, by the very loss of tension constitutive of attention to life, and not its intensification. In fact, if in evoking recollections, one supposes a change in the attitude of the body, allowing it to withdraw partially from its immediate action, in terms of which the mind will undertake the backward-movement allowing it to evoke the past, then, in the moment of death, following the kind of loss of attention to life it presupposes (which does not occur in the case of the actualization of this or that recollection), the very backward-movement would be of such a radical degree as to extend all the way back to include the totality of one’s past, and therefore to set in motion the sort of “panoramic vision” attributed to the dead, where the events of one’s existence become conscious all at once, “in a very short time”⁶.

b) innermost limit, outermost envelope

In *The Time-Image*, Deleuze will consider the question of how far this backward-movement (as psychological mechanism) takes us into the past, which is to say, what is the “outermost envelope” of memory. He does so indirectly, while questioning the ontological nature of the virtual image (memory) accompanying the actual image (perception)—in his third commentary on Bergson. In what the actuality is concerned, Deleuze will define its nature in terms of a new kind of actuality, the one of the “pure optical and sound situation”, which replaces the actuality of the “sensorimotor

⁶ I have benefitted from the analysis of an article by Hisashi Fujita (2023) on Bergson’s panoramic vision of the dead, included in his attempt to conceive a Bergsonian variant to Kant’s schematism, and following Heidegger’s take on it (in *Kant and the Problem of Metaphysics*, 1991)

situation”⁷. As Bergson clarifies in *Matter and Memory* (chapter 2), the latter situation refers to a specific kind of recognition, which is *inattentive* or motor-based, while the first to recognition of an attentive kind, precisely by supposing the body wakes up from its everyday somnolence, on the basis of which perception is heightened, singularities apprehended, and the mind, in the aforementioned backward-movement into the past, actualizes memory-images, deepening the perceptive field (it is also to this extent that, for Deleuze, the pure optical and sound situation refers to a cinema of the “seer”, while the sensorimotor situation to the one of the “agent”).

What are these memory-images actualized in perception? The nature of their virtuality? Different possibilities will be entertained, beginning with the recollection itself: after all, if what we recall are recollections, how wouldn’t they be? The flashback will also be considered, as a special variant of the recollection-image (memorably in the analysis of Mankiewicz’s work), as well as dream-images, and even world-images, which relate to “states of reverie, of waking dream, of strangeness or enchantment” (58), where Deleuze includes (no less memorably) Minnelli’s work (musical comedy figuring here as a privileged example given the way dance links bodily states to a dreamlike world).⁸

This is not the occasion to go into the details of this progression towards more and more expanded envelopes of memory, from recollections to world-images. And neither is it the moment for us to detail Bergson’s extraordinary second chapter of *Matter and Memory*, which structures Deleuze’s third commentary. In what Deleuze’s general strategy is concerned, let us say he does not find what he sets out to look for in the outward direction, towards the outermost envelope of memory, but, on the contrary, in the opposite one, towards the “innermost limit” of memory and perception, virtual and actual images. As Bergson makes clear, in *Matter and Memory* certainly, but more at length in a remarkable essay titled “Memory of the Present and False Recognition” (1920, chapter 5), where he analyzes cases of what is commonly called *déjà vu* (paramnesia), the actual image presupposed in attentive recognition, that is, in pure optical and sound situations, supposes a mirror-image doubling it, whose nature is virtual precisely by belonging to the past and the actual image to the present. The *déjà vu* experience reveals the doubling of the actual image with *its* virtual image, where what is perceived is both the perception of the actuality of the present, and its memory, which it reproduces automatically, without any kind of actualization.

7 The purely optical and sound situation (description) is an actual image, but one which, instead of extending into movement, links up with a virtual image and forms a circuit with it” (1989, 47).

8 “What counts is the way in which the dancer’s individual genius, his subjectivity, moves from a personal motivity to a supra-personal element, to a movement of world that the dance will outline” (61). Philosophically, Sartre (*L’Imaginaire*, 1940) plays a special role in the conception of world-images: “Every image”, Sartre said, “is surrounded by an atmosphere of world”, “in the sense that each dream is a world, and even each phase or image of dream” (63, 60).

In any case, the *déjà vu* only makes explicit, from an experiential point of view, what a simple analysis of passing time already allows us to conclude. We can always understand passing time to be a succession of instants, where one instant disappears entirely for another one to appear, no less fully, as if by magic, but this is meaningless. The passage of time does not operate by the succession of instants, rather in terms of the passage of presents which are both already past and still present: already past in that the present is passing, and still present in that the new present has not replaced the present entirely, part of it still to come in the new present replacing it. “If it was not already past at the same time as present, the present would never pass on” (1989, 79). Again, the *déjà vu* only makes this no less obvious conclusion patent, as what is perceived is both the actual image (passing present) and *its* virtual image (passed present), the image being present and past simultaneously, actual and virtual, “still present and already past, at once at the same time” (79).

c) the pure past

From this “memory of the present”, Bergson will conclude that recollections survive independently of whether they are actualized, that is, remembered: they survive automatically, in time itself, by the very nature of its passage, as revealed in the (clinical) phenomenon of paramnesia. Of course, to the extent that recollections are actualized, whether in perception, in dreams (where they are actualized virtually, from one virtual image to another), or in dreamlike “movements of world”, one supposes the mobilization of the past, its organization having in view our own continuity, of our existence, in time, in its passing. But the memory of the present is independent of our memory of it; being contemporaneous with the present, it survives not as this or that recollection, which has a date and would, therefore, suppose its actualization to be situated temporally (as a former present), rather it endures as a “pure recollection”, in the past itself, independently of any actualization. In other words, surviving in itself, the past survives as the *past in general*, with “no date”, as Bergson says (1920, 166). It is contemporaneous with the present, but not limited to the memory of the present, as it also includes the totality of the past, or past in general (Bergson’s famous figure of the “inverted cone”, where the tip refers to the memory of the present, or most contracted level of the past, and the base to the totality of the past, or past in general). The past appears, then, as the form of the “always already”, as what preexists our own memory of it. With Bergson, if there is an “ontological difference”, it is between the past in general, or “pure past”, as “Being” (or “Spirit”), pure virtuality, and the multiplicity of “beings” that actualize it, and which differ—human and non-human life forms alike—merely in degree (and not in nature), nothing other than the degree to which they are capable of recollecting the past, of actualizing memories, be it in recollections or dreams, but memories, nevertheless, always already there independently of our recollection, and also, cerebral activity generally.

It is in terms of these observations, with regard to the nature of the past, of the very virtuality constituting it, and which suppose a “metaphysics of time”, that Bergson will conclude, famously, what still today, or better said, especially today—if we take into consideration the establishment and rapid growth (from around the 1960s) of the so-called “brain sciences”, well beyond the “psychophysics” of Bergson’s day⁹—namely, that memories (so-called “extended memories”, or recollections, in Bergson’s terminology) do not survive in the brain as a material substrate. According to Bergson, the brain obviously does play a crucial actualizing memories, whether as recollection-images, dream-images, or even world-images (to use Deleuze’s categorization), but this does not mean these memories were stored up in the brain in the first place. As we have just seen, they cannot be in the brain as they are in time, in the past itself (which is “where” we go to look for them in the first place, giving the recollection the “mark” of the past). Again in the second chapter of *Matter and Memory*, Bergson will analyze, this time, different clinical cases of aphasia, or disturbances of memory in terms of this pathological condition (and which structure his theory of recognition), to detail just how brain lesions (localized in the hippocampus, neocortex and amygdala, even if the stress on “localization” is more fuzzy today) may impair the actualization of memories (providing him with a conception of the actualization process as a whole), without supposing the untenable hypothesis, for Bergson at least, of a destruction of memories, or of the past as such.

In what *The Time-Image* is concerned, Deleuze’s strategy will be to focus on this pure virtuality, of Bergson’s “pure past”, in order to arrive at “time-images”, or images of time itself, while emancipated from movement, or no longer subordinated to it. He will begin with the memory of the present, fabricating an extraordinary concept, the one of the *crystal*, “crystals of time”, conceived as “bits of time in its pure state”, Proust’s poetic formula serving here as inspiration (1989, 78-83). It is from within these crystals, which reveal the split grounding time, between past and future, that time, its “images”, may be perceived *directly*.

Again, this is not the occasion to detail these points, covering the central chapters of *The Time-Image* (3 to 6), just as I only introduced Bergson’s theory of memory (he develops it in chapter 3 of *Matter and Memory*). I have delimited what I believe is needed to conceive the convergence of time and death-images.

9 Nikolas Rose and Joelle M. Abi-Rached provide a compelling overview of the development of neurosciences generally in their *Neuro: The New Brain Sciences and the Management of the Mind* (2013), where special attention is given to its broader social and political implications, at the level of conceptions of mental health, or approaches to criminality, but also in terms of questions of identity and personhood.

d) *converging the vision with the sheets*¹⁰

Let us return to the question of the outermost limit of memory. We saw that Deleuze associates it with dreams, generally speaking. If it is true that the panoramic vision is of the totality of one's past, then it is not the dream, but this vision, that should trace the contour of this limit. At the outermost limit of memory we would find, then, a panoramic vision, even if only actualized in death. Would this not imply, in any case, that the vision remains present, virtually, every time a recollection is evoked, in every dream? Contrary to what occurs with recollection, dream or world-images, the panoramic vision cannot be evoked, precisely by referring to a total vision of the past. Furthermore, being actualized all at once, in a flash, it would depend on the event of death for its actualization. Still, the vision presupposes the same backward-movement of the mind, just as much as recollection, dream or world-images: the difference is the extension of the movement, its radical or even absolute nature (from a psychological point of view), in that it includes the totality of the past, reaching the outermost limit of memory. In this respect, if every evocation of the past supposes the backward-movement of the mind, we may assume, then, that the panoramic vision is there, at all times, as the vision of the totality of one's past; were the backward-movement of the mind to leap into the past as far as it does in death, following the loss of the tension constituting attention to life, then such a vision would be actualized; but being the backward-movement at play in recollections or dreams not so extreme, or absolute, while presupposing a mere change in bodily attitude, and not death, or a radical loss of tension, the moving panorama remains virtual every time the past is evoked.

We are carving a lacuna between the pure past, or past in general, which survives automatically in time (its passing), independently of how we remember it, and the memory we have of it, whether in recollections or dreams: this is the "region" occupied by the panoramic vision, presupposed unconsciously every time the past is remembered, in the sense that any recollection would suppose the totality of one's past (the backward-movement of the mind extending to the outermost envelope), just as it would suppose its own actualization, even if in the extreme limit of death (again, the "real" one).

Now, following Bergson (in the fourth commentary), Deleuze also adds that, in actualizing the past, one should suppose the past *coexists* as a whole, in its totality, at different levels of the past. Bergson's (and Deleuze's) point is that, at every level, it is always the entirety of one's past that is present, coexisting at different levels. In other words, when recollecting, or even dreaming, it is the entirety of one's past that is *repeated* at each level. The levels may be organized chronologically from the point of view of what we actually remember, but in itself, every level includes the totality of the past, where this totality, that is, our own psychological existence, is repeated as a whole (and,

¹⁰ I would like to thank Marta Guedes for sharing her views on this "convergence" with me.

therefore, non-chronologically). The past survives independently of how it is remembered (pure past), but in remembering it, we suppose the totality of our past is repeated at different levels, being it by leaping into the past generally, and then to a level of it, where the totality of my past is at play, that I arrive at this or that recollection-image, remembered by me as a former present (and only now organized chronologically).

Deleuze calls these coexisting levels “sheets of past” (the first direct time-image he distinguishes). Regardless, he does not link these sheets to the panoramic vision of the dead (and neither does Bergson). Yet, would this vision not be presupposed at each of these levels? In the sense that if it is true that every sheet of past condenses the entirety of one’s past at different levels, what such “condensation” presupposes is precisely the panoramic vision of one’s life, attributed to the dead, or only actualized in death?

Are we going too far with this association? Can we really affirm that it is this moving panorama of our lives that is at play every time we evoke the past? That the totality of our past coexists at different levels, non-chronologically, precisely due to this panoramic vision of our lives, presupposed virtually, every time we evoke the past, remember it, even if only actualized in death?

I do not see why such would not be the case. In fact, I believe it clarifies a relatively complex—yet crucial—point, at least in what “Bergsonism” (the title of Deleuze’s book on Bergson) is concerned (and which includes, in my view, Deleuze’s philosophy as its fullest expression or realization). It relates to the transition of the psychological to the ontological in Bergson, to the discovery, that is, of a new kind of memory “at the heart”, as Deleuze puts it, “of recollection-memory” (1991a, 74). This new form is “contraction-memory”. It was already alluded to in the final chapter of *Matter and Memory*, as the entry point to a new problem for Bergson, which is the one of life itself, and the role memory plays in its “creative evolution” (the title of Bergson’s book). Again, I will not go into the details. Even if I do not think it appears clearly in *The Time-Image* (especially in the initial pages of chapter 5, which is where Deleuze introduces the coexisting levels of the past, its “sheets”), what I want to point out is that there are two ways the past coexists in itself at different levels, in terms of recollection-memory and contraction-memory, which corresponds to the division, cutting through Bergsonism as a whole, between the psychological and the ontological (motor-memory, also psychological, endures in the memory the body retains of its movements). In my view, the panoramic vision of the dead refers to recollections, to the coexistence of different levels of the past *at a psychological level*, being the very boundaries of this level defined, in its “innermost limit”, by the crystal-image, or the paramnesiac doubling of the present, where one has the vision of the recollection of the present, and in its “outermost envelope”, whereby the vision of the dead, corresponding to the moving panorama of the totality of one’s past. In this light, the very conception of the “sheets of past” would correspond to a psychological viewpoint and not to “contraction-memory”, which, in turn, refers a different kind of interiority, more internal than any sheet or layer of the past (or

to what Bergson will conceive as the *degrees of difference* understood as degrees of “contraction-relaxation” of the past, or what Deleuze also calls “intensities”, but which is not the object of our concern here).¹¹

Broadly conceived, the past is contemporaneous with the present in the innermost limit, being it the past in general or the totality of the past generally speaking (the “already there”) that is preserved, the past surviving or pre-existing in itself. Making this impersonal generality coexist at different levels, every time the past is evoked and remembered psychologically, what is presupposed, in my view—being this what I suggest adding, in a fifth commentary on Bergson—is the panoramic vision of the dead. It is this vision, or moving panorama, that is repeated at every level as the totality of *my* past, or psychological existence as a whole. Every sheet of the past, therefore, is constituted by the panoramic vision of the dead, being it in terms of this vision, and of the images making up this moving panorama, that the death-image converges—so goes our hypothesis—with the time-image.

Death-image? In light of these considerations, of an ontological nature, we say it has two poles, converging with time, its sheets of past, on one of them (of “real” death), and originating a new image of thought, on the other (death appearing here “symbolically”). And in what the convergence is concerned, we also conclude it operates by way of a panoramic vision of the dying, of the totality of one’s past, psychological in nature, being precisely these moving panoramas that bring us to the death-image. As they converge with time, death-images are the images making up these visions. The dead survive in them, in this “land of the dead”, looking on us (I am recalled of the Karajia Cliff Tombs, with standing sarcophagi, of the Chachapoya, *cloud warriors*, in Peru), and dancing their presence into the moving picture of our lives, of our memories, every time we evoke the past, that we remember and dream, repeating the totality of our past at different levels, all the way to our deaths, a bit like Matisse’s dance, with the dancing figures effortlessly reaching out to each other, forming a circle, but where, in this case, a new figure would join in, moving with the other bodies just as effortlessly, as if always already there (film authors revealing to us how the dead dance with us all along, actualizing this virtuality in the vision itself).¹² In any case, it is cinema, with its practice of

11 I cannot overemphasize the importance of this distinction between the psychological and the ontological, both in the reading of Bergson’s philosophy and for Bergsonism generally, in terms of which I have to say I read Deleuze’s philosophy (even if a little crudely, I understand his thinking to be moved affectively by Spinoza, politically by Nietzsche, but, metaphysically, that is, properly philosophically, by Bergson)—and this also in the sense that “Bergsonism”, in a point that becomes especially evident in Deleuze’s philosophy, recasts Western metaphysics beyond the three major “phenomenologies” structuring its “modernity”, those of Spirit (Hegel), Consciousness (Husserl), and Being (Heidegger), in an effort, if we were to recall Bruno Latour, both confirming *We Have Never Been Modern*, and allowing us more than a mere glimpse of what may be at stake, philosophically or metaphysically speaking, for such “modernity” to be realized...).

12 I have to say this essay could have included the analysis of cinema-authors, and explore the nature of

images and signs, which may confirm, creatively, whether the convergence I propose, of time and death-images, as worked on the basis of a new, fifth commentary on Bergson, this time on the panoramic vision of the dead, has good reason to be pursued. And, more generally, perhaps why it is today, in this deeply necropolitical age, that we turn to *The Time-Image*, asking about death-images.

images and signs specific to the death-image. My initial objective was to do so, of course, especially with David Lynch, and perhaps in terms of a contrast with Apichatpong Weerasethakul, and also turning to Bioy Casares's "The Invention of Morel", which I feel dramatizes what I have in mind by death-images. I ended up framing the essay more philosophically, in terms of a supplementary comment on Bergson's philosophy (to the ones conceived by Deleuze), so as to think a specific category of images, the death-image, very much in Deleuze's spirit, who accompanied his own film-philosophizing with commentaries on Bergson. In this sense, the essay I proposed should be read as a stepping stone for further research dealing with the analysis of contemporary film-authors, very much in the same way Deleuze's commentaries on Bergson prepared his own film-philosophizing on the movement and time-image respectively.

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Declaration of conflicting interests

The author declared no potential conflicts of interest with respect to the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.

To cite this article

Ferreira, Filipe. 2025. "The Death-Image: Fifth Commentary on Bergson." *Revista de Comunicação e Linguagens* (63): 34-54. <https://doi.org/10.34619/jjaq-ovvl>.

Received Recebido: 2025-05-28**Accepted** Aceite: 2025-11-03

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