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Como Citar | How to cite:

Ferraço Nassif, L., Grosoli, M., Marques, V. B., & Viegas, S. (2025). Introdução: "Imagens-Morte: Revisitando a 'Imagem-Tempo' de Deleuze no Cinema Depois de 1985". *Revista De Comunicação E Linguagens*, (63).
<https://doi.org/10.34619/h49h-ckx3>

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.34619/h49h-ckx3>

Editor | Publisher:

ICNOVA - Instituto de Comunicação da NOVA

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Death-Images: Revisiting Deleuze's 'Time-Image' in Cinema after 1985

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Before the publication of *Cinema 1: The Movement-Image* (1983) and *Cinema 2: The Time-Image* (1985), Deleuze devoted four years of lectures to the question of cinema (from November 1981 to June 1984). In the following academic year (1984-1985), he continued to explore cinema, but now in connection with the image of thought. Through cinema, Deleuze was questioning philosophy itself: "I suppose that all thought

presupposes an image of thought, a variable image,”¹ he states in the first session of his 1984 course (Deleuze 1984). This temporal coincidence opens up a broader question about the mutual shaping of cinema and philosophy in Deleuze’s thought: what is really at stake in these two volumes, and between them? And even in what precedes and follows the historical period encompassed by Deleuze’s reading of cinema?

In her article “Death as Film-Philosophy’s Muse: Deleuzian Observations on Moving Images and the Nature of Time,” Susana Viegas has shown that Gilles Deleuze’s concept of the “time-image” is inseparable from the philosophical thinking on death. She claims: “More than images that directly represent death, film suggests its own version of a *memento mori*, but this time in a more complex way, understood as a narrative ellipsis (from the Greek *élleipsis*) or omission, as a cryptic image of death. This is an indirect, oblique way of expressing future nonexistence: a death-image” (2023, 235). In other words, the “time-image,” as a mode of presenting time that breaks with the conventional understanding of it as a sequence of discrete moments, each mechanically linked to the previous and the next, inherently involves a conception of death beyond the mere interruption of linear life.

Thus, the “death-image” not only anticipates a cinematic death before it occurs, exceeding the simple interruption of linear life, but also resonates with the renewed philosophical concern with death that marked the twentieth century.

Indeed, twentieth-century philosophy witnessed a renewed interest in death, as existential and phenomenological approaches explored the paradox of reflecting on one’s own mortality and its role in shaping authentic existence. Heidegger (2000) argued that awareness of one’s own death gives life meaning, while after World War II thinkers such as Lévinas (2000) and Jankélévitch (2017) shifted attention to the death of the Other and to the meaning of action, respectively, thereby connecting mortality to ethics. Cinema has engaged with these philosophical reflections by portraying what Deleuze theorized as the “Lazarean subject” (2008, 201) best exemplified in Alain Resnais’s *Night and Fog* (1955). This figure illustrates the convergence of the “time-image” and the “death-image” and exemplifies what lies “between two deaths,” symbolic and real, revealing the profound affinities between cinema and philosophy in confronting mortality, the passage of time, and ethical living.

But even if we accept that death lies at the core of Western philosophy, we often find ourselves avoiding this engagement, creating a fundamental disconnection between the affirmation of life and the evidence of death. Such existential disengagement can result in apathy or even thanatophobia. Yet, given death’s omnipresence in films, television, and other media, there is a unique opportunity to revisit and reexamine this philosophical engagement.

1 Original in French: “Je suppose que toute pensée présuppose une image de la pensée, image variable” (our translation).

Within the FILM AND DEATH project, we explore the intersection of moving image and mortality, questioning the thesis that films are a distraction from life; on the contrary, we argue that moving images prompt reflection on life and death, offering a space to meditate on ethical living and the temporal nature of existence. Its central hypothesis is that to film-philosophize is, in a sense, to learn to die (or to train for dying) and that film, like philosophy, has its own strategies for giving meaning to common questions and doubts about life and death. Ultimately, the FILM AND DEATH team investigates the paradoxical situation of contemporary life: while death permeates our media, daily news, and audiovisual popular culture, we tend to avoid confronting its significance and, just as death has long been regarded as the muse of philosophers, it can equally be seen as the muse of film-philosophers, inspiring both thought and cinematic practice to meditate on the transient, finite, and meaningful nature of life.

For instance, Marco Grosoli has shown how Deleuze's crystal-images (a term designating, among other things, "all those games of mirrors between real and imaginary, past and present, actual and virtual and so on and so forth that artistic modernity had by that time long rehearsed"; Grosoli 2025, 9) substantially inform the structure of Paolo Taviani's testament film *Leonora addio* (2022). The film even features "a mannerist imitation of Italian neorealism in terms that are specifically reminiscent of Deleuze's take on neorealism" (Grosoli 2025, 9) in a long scene approximately halfway through the film and consisting entirely of what Deleuze called "pure optical situations" (Deleuze 2008, 2), "emerging as a result of the blockage of sensory-motor schemes brought forth by [Second World] war" (Grosoli 2025, 9).

Reflecting the broader materialist turn in contemporary film studies, and drawing on an analysis on two films by Bill Morrison (*Decasia* [2001] and *Tributes-Pulse* [2011]), Vasco Baptista Marques (2025) coined the concept of the "dying-image": an image that exposes aging and death as forces directly inscribed in its own material support (the film stock). Understood in this way, the dying-image extends Deleuze's taxonomy of the cinematographic image by seeking to think what it left unthought — the singularity of an image that emerges from the destructive action time exerts on filmic matter, thereby revealing the perishable, or dying, nature of that very matter, which, like all matter, is inevitably destined to decay.

In the abundant scholarship on Deleuze, along with works generally fleshing out the philosophical and cinematic richness of the diptych (Bogue 2003; Zabunyan 2011), others have focused on its potential for politics (Marrati 2008; Fujita 2018), gender (Rizzo 2012; Davis 2013), genre (Powell 2005) and film analysis (Esquenazi 2017); on its relationship with structuralism (Dawkins 2025), with semiotic (Dymek 2015) and not least with other, non-strictly-cinematic Deleuzian concepts (e.g. "sensation", Kennedy 2000; "affect", Del Rio 2008).

More to the point, several scholars have sought to clarify the boundaries between "images in movement," "movement-images," and "time-images." Among them, David Martin-Jones (2011) expanded the geographical and historical range of film examples,

proposing the concept of the “attraction-image” to support a non-continuous conception of time in early cinema and to highlight the limits of a strictly diachronic division between the two regimes. In turn, Cristóbal Escobar (2023) introduced the concept of the “intensive-image” to articulate the overcoming of a false division through cinematic intensities, extending Deleuze’s framework into the contemporary period. Similarly, Susana Viegas examined Deleuze’s apparent neglect of early cinema. For Deleuze, the birth of cinema properly begins with the “pioneers” such as Dziga Vertov, D. W. Griffith, and Abel Gance, associated with “montage, the mobile camera, and the emancipation of the point of view” (2009, 27). Through a historiographical approach to pre-Griffith and avant-garde self-reflexive films, Viegas identifies a historical shift that “allows us to understand film modernity before modern cinema” (2016, 248).

While seeking to highlight what seems to be a structural and recurring crisis between the two regimes, both David Rodowick and Daniela Angelucci emphasized that the transition between the two semiotic regimes is not merely historical but conceptual. Rodowick argued that Deleuze’s readings are informed by two distinct philosophical orientations toward time, movement, and thought: in *The Movement-Image*, the influence of the Hegelian “will to truth,” in *The Time-Image*, that of the Nietzschean “will to power” (2001, 172–202). Angelucci, by contrast, described the transition as one from an organic totality (culminating in Hitler’s totalitarianism) to a “vacuum” or gap, that is, the impossibility of thought itself (2014, 372–373).

Jacques Rancière, however, offers a contrasting view. He argued that there is not even a clear distinction between the two semiotic regimes (2001, 151–152). According to Rancière, the complexity of this distinction is not confined to the nature of the relationship between image and time—whether direct or indirect—but concerns two different perspectives on that very relationship. It is in this sense that he finds it unsurprising that Robert Bresson’s films appear in both of Deleuze’s cinema books without contradiction: the cinematographic images remain the same. There is no hierarchy or historical succession in the rupture of regimes, but rather a difference in point of view—the way time is presented.

It is true that Deleuze himself never clarified this ambiguity. For example, he points to different moments as inaugurating the time-image: at times locating the rupture within Hollywood cinema, with Orson Welles, and at others within European cinema, with Roberto Rossellini.

The relationship between Deleuze’s cinematic taxonomy and history is indeed a complex one — suffice it to mention the paramount importance of World War II qua ultimate, collective trauma (Deamer 2016; De Courville 2024) in structuring his classification, down to the very division between his two tomes, *Cinema 1* and *Cinema 2*. Without going into the intricacies of this relationship, to affirm that a relationship of some kind with history is there in Deleuze’s taxonomy in the first place is safe enough for the following question to be legitimate and, arguably, inevitable: what happened to the “time-image” after the publication of *Cinema 2*?

The second volume ended on a hesitant note. Television, video, eventually new media, were rapidly opening vast horizons, and the extent to which they may have fit Deleuze's diptych was then left pending. On the other hand, the book not only ended with crisis, but started with it too, as it is the crisis of organic representation that paved the way for the time-image, and for new ways of conceiving the inseparability between the organic and the inorganic as opposed to their distinction qua grounding of the movement-image.

By the same token, the very idea of linear time was questioned, implying that the very idea of the future should possibly be replaced by that of an unceasing movement from crisis to crisis. A few crises down the line, this special issue collects recent filmic examples of inextricability between organic and inorganic: arguably, *this* is the point of *Cinema 2* if ever there is one, not least because Deleuze had been working at a redefinition of their relationship since at least the times of *Difference and Repetition*, inaugurating a strand that will then continue with the book on Leibniz (1988) and beyond. That these examples rely on forms that are recognizably different from those collected in 1985 is not accidental. Our goal has been to show that *Cinema 2* remains extremely useful for identifying new forms — ones that were not yet available forty years ago and were therefore uncharted by Deleuze —, into which the tangle between the organic and the inorganic, ensuing from Deleuze's historical "point of no return" between the two volumes (roughly: the Second World War, Auschwitz, Hiroshima, etc.) has been, may have been, or still may be continuously reshuffled. We have, in other words, focused on the convergence between "time-image" and "death-image," and on ways in which that convergence can emerge that are not perfectly coincident with how Deleuze formulated it in his cinema books, but may nonetheless illuminate it from the hindsight of a later historical perspective.

Yet, we should also highlight the crises in the moving image that are articulated according to a more schizoanalytic approach.

One such approach has been developed by Patricia Pisters in *The Neuro-Image: A Deleuzian Film-Philosophy of Digital Screen Culture* (2012), where, as the title itself indicates, Pisters proposes a new type of image: the neuro-image. Building on Deleuze's reflection on "the cinema of the brain" (2008, 189-204), Pisters shows how the time-image responds both to the evidence provided by the neurosciences and to the phenomena generated by the digital revolution — particularly the rampant multiplication of screens (which, she argues, are already deeply entangled with political, economic, and media assemblages), as well as the ensuing acceleration and fragmentation of perception. The result of this reflection is a third type of cinema, defined by an image that goes beyond the duality Deleuze established between the movement-image and the time-image. The image referred to here is a *neuro-image* which, formed in the likeness of the immense brain that our digital world has become, no longer merely translates the functioning of the brain, but also proves capable of creating new circuits within it (Pisters 2012, 96), according to a movement of reciprocal influence flowing from the brain to the screen and back again. Through this new taxonomic category, Pisters expands the

scope of Deleuze's time-image by connecting it to new forms of audiovisual representation of the brain and time, while highlighting the role of the former as an image-producing device within the framework of modern and postmodern cinema.

The other approach, more concerned with the sexual body, builds on Deleuze's intersection with Guattari and their readings of both Freud and Lacan. This approach underlines new crises of the moving image at the crossroads between the unconscious, its immanence, animism, and the fragmentation of the body as it occurs in multimedia, capitalism, and semiotics. Influenced by *Capitalism and Schizophrenia I and II: Anti-Oedipus* and *A Thousand Plateaus* (1972 and 1980), this approach operates within an epistemological framework in which moving images are not representation. It is an animistic undertaking that bridges thinking and feeling within a vitalist, machinic ecology of *intensity*. Moving images intervene in our own thoughts and feelings through the unconscious investments of the libidinal body, in its physiological folds of *microperceptions* (Deleuze 1988).

Moving images have agency that becomes entangled, through the libido, with the audience's own agency. This produces both a perspectivist and non-metaphorical shift in our understanding of technology and art — one that disrupts the Cartesian Western divides between nature and culture, as well as between subject and object. Deleuze and Guattari refer to these processual assemblages that lead to metamorphoses as the “war machine” (1980, 434); in *What is Philosophy?* (1991), they conceptualize the object of art as an active being of sensation, composed of *percepts* and *affects*.

As an example of a contemporary conceptualization of the moving image in post-Lacanian debates, we must underscore the research of Thomas Lamarre. In his book *The Anime Ecology: A Genealogy of Television, Animation, and Game Media* (2019), Lamarre introduces the term “signaletic animism” when analyzing screen-based media complexes, infrastructures, and their transmissions within *milieus* of Japanese pop-culture. He investigates the crises of the moving image in a political middle ground that is neither nature (physiology) nor culture (society), but certainly both (2018, 74). In an interview (2024), Lamarre highlighted the epistemological importance of the “Pokémon Incident”. In 1997, hundreds of children in Japan experienced epileptic seizures while watching the anime's episode “Electric Soldier Porygon.” The “Pokémon Incident” amplifies discussions about the ontology of television, haptic images, synesthesia, and *haecceity* in relation to both narratives and screens.

Drawing on Lamarre's work, Lucas Ferraço Nassif has been writing about the *metamodelization* of narcissism and the structure of the unconscious, both of which are complicated by the connection between moving images and libidinal bodies. Nassif is concerned with the entropy of the symbolic and the short-circuits linking the psycho-analytic categories of the real and the imaginary. He elaborates on non-reproductive sexuality alongside non-representation in proposing a contemporary *screen-based unconscious*. Nassif conceptualizes the death-image between the organic of the body and the inorganic of televisual narratives (2025).

Unlike the cinema theater, television possesses a machinic body ecologically embedded in the *midst of things*. In the environment of ordinary contemporary life, television functions as an element of individuation that must be clinically examined within the framework of discontents and anxieties. Due to the animism of electromagnetic signals, one must adopt a pragmatic approach and work with the singularity of intensive alliances between the organic and the inorganic. Screens can conjure electromagnetic death-images that fragment the *gestalt* of the body. As crises, death-images in screen-based media emerge within domestic spaces or during ordinary daily activities via personal devices.

As is well known, Deleuze is concerned with image(s) in general, not necessarily with one medium in particular; no less evidently though, he does acknowledge that the art of motion (hence: *life*) qua philosophical paradox par excellence is specifically cinema. Accordingly, our special issue gathers primarily, *though not exclusively* (TV, most notably, is there too), cinematic examples. What all these examples share is that death is in the foreground in all of them, as something that can best clarify the actual stakes of Deleuze's "time-image." The selection of filmmakers from different latitudes and cinematic traditions (including Rithy Panh, Pedro Costa, Abbas Kiarostami, Nuri Bilge Ceylan, Tsai Ming-liang, and Guiomar Ramos) for this special issue reflects an effort to assemble a corpus that may help reconsider Deleuze's concept of the "time-image" in cinema after 1985.

Filipe Ferreira's article "The Death-Image: Fifth Commentary on Bergson" is a problematization of the concept proposed by the FILM AND DEATH project in the call for papers. He investigates the notion of the death-image in a philosophical exploration of Gilles Deleuze's books on cinema and his partnership with Félix Guattari in *What is Philosophy?*. Ferreira articulates both a fifth commentary on Henri Bergson's work and a dialogue with Susana Viegas' question: "What lies beyond the time-image?" The author indicates that the death-image is a mediation between the time-image — populated by concepts — and a new image of thought that is originated by the time-image itself.

In turn, in "El Genocidio Como Tiempo Suspendido. Deleuze, la Imagen-Tiempo y la Imagen-Muerte en *Rendez Vous Avec Pol Pot*" ["Genocide as Suspended Time: Deleuze, Time-Image and Death-Image in *Rendez-vous avec Pol Pot*"], Álvaro Martín Sanz analyzes Rithy Panh's representation of the Cambodian genocide in the film mentioned in the title, placing it in dialogue with Deleuze's philosophy of cinema. The author shows how, in the film (2024) — through the suspension of chronological time and the creation of numerous "gaps" in representation — Deleuze's time-image is transformed into a death-image that seeks to confront the unrepresentable: the historical and political trauma of contemporary Cambodia.

In "«La puerta está abierta». Alusión al inframundo y a la muerte en el cine sustractivo" ["«The Doorway Is Wide Open». Allusion to the Underworld and Death in Subtractive Cinema"], David Ferragut draws inspiration from an image in the *Aeneid*, when Cassandra announces the arrival of death by pointing to the emptiness on the threshold of a door, taken as a metaphor for the off-screen space as a zone of absence.

From this point, three modes of representing death in subtractive cinema, defined by what is reduced (and leaves a trace, a void) within the shot, are outlined: (1) direct spectral presence, in which death crosses the boundary between the living and the dead and manifests itself through spectres (images of death); (2) selective allusion, in which death is not shown but the framing directs the gaze toward where it ought to appear, thus creating an interior off-screen space; and (3) absolute subtractive allusion, in which death cannot be located in space or in the image, persisting only as a pure temporal presence, akin to a residual presence, that is, a death-image.

Death as form, and not as a represented object, is at the core of “Dirt in the Lungs: Specters of Death-Images in Nuri Bilge Ceylan’s *Once Upon a Time in Anatolia* (2011)”. Drawing from Deleuze’s time-image, Viegas’s death-image and Derrida’s hauntology, Ömer Derdiyok dissects three scenes of the Turkish film, to show that the presence of death therein has to do chiefly with the way time is organized and, accordingly, with the way (textual, narrative, temporal) closure is denied.

“The Death-Image and the Ethics of Time: Kiarostami’s Cinema of Life, Absence and Duration,” by Farshad Zahedi, examines the modalities of the death-image in Abbas Kiarostami’s work. Zahedi argues that Kiarostami’s counter-martyrography is not simply a modernist cinematic gesture but is deeply rooted in Persian cultural and poetic traditions, especially in the writings of Omar Khayyam (1048–1131) and Forugh Farrokhzad (1934–1967). Blending Khayyam’s hedonistic fatalism with Farrokhzad’s melancholic vitalism, Zahedi shows how *Taste of Cherry* (1997) and *The Wind Will Carry Us* (1999) resist the glorification of martyrdom and sacrificial transcendence and how, by avoiding explicit on-screen death, these films position Kiarostami against state ideologies that instrumentalize the corpse and sanctify death as a pathway beyond earthly life.

In “O Movimento de Reencontro em Documentários Autobiográficos: Retornar aos Corpos, Arquivos e Objetos de uma Vida” [“The movement of reunion in autobiographical documentaries: returning to the bodies, archives, and objects of a life”], the authors Ingrid Rodrigues Gonçalves and Fabiana de Amorim Marcello focus on three works: *Visita ou Memórias e Confissões* (1981), by Manoel de Oliveira, *Por Parte de Pai* (2016), by Guiomar Ramos, and the exhibition *Ritornare* (2024), by Vasco Araújo. They establish a connection between these works through the idea of a “movement of re-encounter,” carried out via personal archives and life objects, questioning whether the screen itself might function as a body capable of absorbing something more — another materialization of the projected filmic objects. The artists under study attempt to reconnect with the past through the use of personal archives and objects, establishing a Lazarus-like relation to death and in this process, they propose reflecting not only on the filmic objects themselves but also on the concept of filmic bodies, that is, the distinction between the image as a support and the image as a projection.

Methodologically relying on a crystalline constellation between Walter Benjamin’s own theorization of the crystal and Deleuze’s crystal-image, David Fleming (“Monstrous, Alienated, and Still Labouring Dead Philosophers: Karl Marx (with ‘Chinese

characteristics’ and ‘chthulumedia features’) meets Confucius ... in a crepuscular theory crystal”) investigates the ethical, aesthetical and political implications of resuscitating through AI such influential dead figures as Karl Marx’s and Confucius’s (as in Chinese 2023 “TV Theory Film” *When Marx Met Confucius*).

In “Cidade-tempo: imagem, duração e as poéticas do viver urbano no cinema contemporâneo” [“Time-City: image, duration, and the poetics of urban life in contemporary cinema”], Paul Newman dos Santos and Paulo Cesar Castral put forth a relation between the time-image and urbanism. Thinking about Gilles Deleuze’s concept with Milton Santos, Rem Koolhaas, and Giuliana Bruno, the article is an elaboration about bodies in space. Via cinema, dos Santos and Castral underscore the claim for a living present. They conduct a debate about minimal narratives of contemporary characters inhabiting spaces of nebulousity, hesitation, and fragmentation.

Finally, in “In Between Two Deaths: Hauntological Negative Time-Images in Third World Cinema,” Enxi Liu considers three films from the Global South — Apichatpong Weerasethakul’s *Memoria* (2021), Jia Zhangke’s *Still Life* (2006), and Jayro Bustamante’s *La Llorona* (2019) — in order to analyze them through the original concept of the “negative time-image.” By means of this concept, and in dialogue with the thought of Deleuze, Derrida, Lacan, and Mark Fisher, the essay seeks to show how the three aforementioned films create a non-chronological temporality, in which the present is haunted by a past that obstructs the emergence of the future, with the aim of reflecting on different forms of historical trauma.

This issue also includes two visual essays that delve into the concept of the crystal-image.

The first, authored by Catarina Patrício, brings into relation two catastrophic events separated in time, namely: the Lisbon earthquake (1755) and the Sumatra-Andaman earthquake (2004). To this end, the author considers J.A. Bayona’s film *The Impossible* (2012) — which tells the story of a family affected by the 2004 earthquake — as the crystal-image of the 1755 earthquake, for which, for obvious reasons, no images exist. The result is a work of plastic montage that juxtaposes and contrasts seven hand-drawn engravings by Catarina Patrício with five film stills from Bayona’s movie.

Authored by Giselle Hinterholz and titled “Juventude irresoluta: entre o devaneio e o ecrã” [“Unresolved Youth: Between Reverie and the Screen”], the second essay explores the concept of the crystal-image in relation to both interior spaces and youth desire. Hinterholz takes inspiration in Bernardo Bertolucci’s film *The Dreamers* (2003). Mixing elements of pop-culture with television screens, tiles, and interior windows that compose Portuguese homes, she observes that the collage is “an archaeological gesture, an oneiric method, a montage of the unconscious.”

Funding

Funded by the European Union (ERC, FILM AND DEATH, 101088956).

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Declaration of conflicting interests

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

To cite this article

Ferraço Nassif, Lucas, Marco Grosoli, Vasco Baptista Marques, and Susana Viegas. 2025. "Introduction: Death-Images: Revisiting Deleuze's 'Time-Image' in Cinema after 1985." *Revista de Comunicação e Linguagens* (63): 8-19. <https://doi.org/10.34619/h49h-ckx3>.