Introduction to Voragine's Special Dossier "Death, from Painting to Film: Philosophical Conversations"

**Introducción al dossier especial de *Vorágine* "Muerte, de la pintura al cine: conversaciones filosóficas"**

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Vorágine's ninth issue contains a special dossier on possible philosophical conversations between death and the arts, in particular regarding their transition from painting to photography and film. It includes four articles dedicated to exploring the ways in which death has been represented and imagined by the visual arts, prompting future film-philosophical conversations within aesthetic, cultural, and political studies.

The challenge was not only to clarify death's unquestionable omnipresence in film—for example as a simple narrative motif that triggers the story or as something that is intentionally theorized as the film's ontological structure—but to offer a critical analysis of the proposed closeness between philosophy and film and of film *as* a contemporary version of the trope of *memento mori* (in Latin, "Remember that you must die"): that is to say, of film as a meditation on death. What is particularly interesting about exploring this subject with moving images is their duration, or as Andre Bazin would say, the fact that in films "the image of things is likewise the image of their duration" (1958/1967, p. 15).

Death has been a central tenet of philosophy in general and of aesthetic investigations in particular. Indeed, since its foundation, philosophers from different traditions and theoretical frameworks have considered death the reason for doing philosophy. Thus Socrates would claim that "the one aim of those who practice philosophy in the proper manner is to practice for dying and death" (*Phaedo* 64a), and Schopenhauer would say that "without death men will scarcely philosophize" (1844/1966, p. 463). Our present moment has given rise to new problems. The Anthropocene has forces us to face and find meaning not just to individual, anthropocentric, death, but to the end of the world. Both
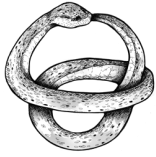
endings are not the same though (Cavalletti 2018). But the main idea is not just to create a new mythology of the end, one more final 'catastrophe' chapter, but to better understand by which other means death enters and frames our life. We need a process philosophy of death, of how things happen, that is, of events or becomings seen as the ontological dynamic of being both *a* and *b* 'at the same time' (Deleuze 1995, p. 170).

If death and its 'enigmatic' power are the supposed reasons why we philosophize, then this philosophical perspective could be strengthened with death's multiple imaginative representations and the way we think *with* them. Such is the case with films and moving images in general. How have films been reworking and reinterpreting well-established painting and visual tropes of death? How does looking back to the many examples of fictional and real films give us insight into our present moment? Why does the relationship between death and the visual arts matter to us?

The link between film and representations of death is, in a way, imaginatively consolidated in Ingmar Bergman's *The Seventh Seal* (1957). In it, Death (Bengt Ekerot) plays chess with Antonius Block, a knight who has recently returned from a crusade (Max von Sydow). Unlike the frescoes by the medieval painter Alberto Pictor—in particular the painting of a personified Death playing chess (still visible in the church in Täby, Sweden) from which Bergman took his inspiration—this representation of Death is fully dressed, his face painted white, in a departure from the original image, which featured a naked body and a cadaverous visage. In such a game, a smiling Death has every chance of winning.

Besides that, there is a long tradition of connecting films with death. Most theorists have tried to explore it through a specific film genre—for example Andre Bazin (1958/1967), Emma Wilson (2012), Benjamin Bennet-Carpenter (2018) and Laura McMahon (2019), who examine documentary films that both feature dead (human and nonhuman) bodies and reflect on such representations—while others have tried to explore *avant-garde* films and the media's ontology (for example Catherine Russell [1995] and Laura Mulvey [2006]). The purpose of this issue was not to be restricted by a single genre or industry. After all, the phenomenon is transversal, as Michele Aaron's analysis of death's invisible ubiquity in even mainstream films makes clear (2014).

This issue thus comprises four articles that consider the relation between death and the dead body in painting, photography, and film by exploring contemporary philosophers such as Deleuze, Benjamin, Han, and Derrida, among many other thinkers. A double personal and impersonal death, the symbolism of the dead eye, real captured footage of dead bodies, and the theatrical real death of the Other are just some of the innovative approaches analyzed in this dossier.
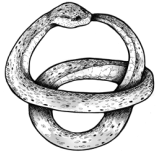
In "Deleuze, reader of Blanchot: On the immortality of death in and as cinema," Diogo Emanuel da Nóbrega e Silva investigates, in all its complexity, the negotiation between Maurice Blanchot and Gilles Deleuze. The author explores Blanchot's ontological idea of a 'double death', a personal and impersonal death, which, consequently, also doubles time. This is viewed as having been the theoretical background for Deleuze's interest not in death *per se* but in dying. To prove this, the author appeals to a Deleuzian classic: Samuel Beckett's screenplay for a 1965 short film featuring Buster Keaton, *Film*. Deleuze considered *Film* a perfect example of the extinguishment of the three types of images that composed the matrix of movement-images—an 'endless exhaustion, involution' which is thoroughly examined as if cinema did 'not finish dying'.

The double process towards death and immobility is also at the core of the ethical analysis of the 'aura' in "Nobody's aura: The mimesis of death in cinema", by Sara Francisca Calhau Teles Varela. The dead eye, a notable trope in cinema, including Hitchcock's 1960 *Psycho*, is the impossibility of the returning gaze. The dead eye, like the skull's black orbital cavities, is a blank, inexpressive gaze. The author thus challenges Walter Benjamin's claim that the aura cannot exist in cinema by dialoguing with Byung-Chul Han's many human 'faces of death' (which we try to avoid like a disease). On Han's approach, which overcomes the individualistic care for the I-subject, death is not at the end of life but always there from its beginning, introducing us to an important intersubjective, ethical, perspective.

In "Capturing death: Cinema and representation", Jossué Baquero Gallardo also explores film's 'aura', but through Walter Benjamin's philosophy of photography. A world captured is a new world perceived as new modes of representation. The author claims that to capture a death is to duplicate the event: whereas a painting is a valid way of copying the world from the painting's perspective, independent of reality, a photograph does something else, as the camera's lens not only copies the world but is a testimony of the event captured. Editing manipulates images and their meaning, mixing fiction and reality, suggesting new meanings, but to capture is also to represent (a capturing that 'doubles'). With such mediated and reproducible images, the equation is not that simple. What is really represented and present to us? Thus, images are no longer separated from power and politics.

The last article, written by Fabián Videla Zavala, connects the representation of death and war with the political dimension of film. He brings us the story behind Colombia's recent past. "*Pirotecnia* or theatricality at war: Visual guerrilla in the Colombian film essay" analyses the impact of Federico Atehortúa's essay film *Pirotecnia* (2019) on problems such as the semantic uncertainty between
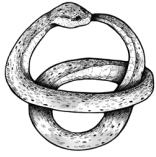
fiction and real images and the reasons behind image manipulation. The author grounds his analysis mainly on Jacques Derrida's explanation of the archival violence of the archive itself. Preserving *and* interpreting the past explains how the war is experienced through moving images. The article considers public and private moving images, national and personal memories, and questions how these images are perceived. If death is a political weapon and people are killed in staged and filmed executions prepared for spectators—to be seen—then there is a need to critically assess each moving image.

One final note goes to the editors of *Vorágine*, to whom I am very thankful for their enthusiasm about (and confidence in) the proposed subject but also for their ceaseless support throughout the peer review process.

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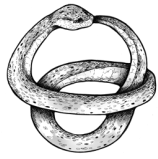
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