Image and Intuition in Beckett’s *Film*

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Working from a detailed diary Beckett wrote of his thoughts on painting while travelling through Germany and visiting art galleries before World War II, and directed by comments made by Beckett himself, James Knowlson has convincingly displayed how Beckett used images from paintings that had had a forceful impression on him, reconfiguring them in developing his own striking images in later works (256-258). Might the same be claimed for Beckett’s use of philosophy? In a 1933 letter to Thomas MacGreevy, Beckett identifies an interest in philosophical images even if divorced from the systems in which they are used: “Leibniz a great cod, but full of splendid little pictures.”

Beckett discusses the “image” a number of times in *Disjecta* (28, 90, 94, 123, 130), and Gilles Deleuze sees the use of the image as key in coming to terms with Beckett’s works. As is well known, Deleuze develops a reading of Henri Bergson, especially *Matter and Memory*, in developing his own concept of the image in the *Cinema* books, and as I will attempt to establish below, Beckett knew Bergson’s work well and drew upon it in developing his own ideas about the image and its relationship to thought.

The Legacy of Bergson

In *Matter and Memory* Bergson draws heavily upon the concept of “the image,” a term with a long history in philosophy tying it to inadequate modes of understanding. Yet rather than “the image” being a secondary category, linked to the inferior kinds of understanding derived from the testimony of the senses, the image, in Bergson’s system, is given a much more prominent place.

Matter, in our view, is an aggregate of “images.” And by “image” we mean a certain existence which is more than that which the idealists call a representation, but less than that which the realist calls a thing—an existence placed halfway between the “thing” and the “representation.”

What Bergson proposes is not, on the one hand, using the image to displace terms such as “the idea” or “thought”—terms often set up against the image as “superior” mental processes, and both of which are implicit in the term...
“representation.” Nor, on the other hand, does he propose the image as a means of dissolving the reality of “things” external to one who perceives. Rather, he proposes understanding “the image” as a bridge between those objectively existing things and our thoughts. A bridge, because the image exists both in the thing that has or projects an image consistent with the nature of its own being, and in our minds, which receive the projected images in the manner of a screen. “This is as much to say that there is for images merely a difference of degree, and not of kind, between being and being consciously perceived.” (ibid., 37)

For Bergson, my body too is an image, though different from all others in that it is one that I not only perceive externally through perceptions, but internally through my affections (ibid., 17). So the brain is more than a screen that passively receives a projection from outside: it is a screen that in turn acts, and acts in two ways. It both analyses the images projected upon it, and itself selects the movements it executes within its body: “The brain appears to us to be an instrument of analysis in regard to the movement received and an instrument of selection with regard to the movement executed” (ibid., 30). The brain does not produce representations in the manner understood by idealism (bringing the world into being [ibid.,19-22]); rather, it receives and acts upon images (ibid., 19-22, 74).

Representations do occur, but they are not the result of our brain adding something to perceptions of images; rather, conscious perception, for Bergson, involves the process of realizing representations by subtracting what does not interest us from an image (that is, the way in which it is linked to all other images, which comprises its real action) and concentrating on those aspects of it with which we might potentially interact (the virtual action) (ibid., 35-36). Such a subtraction, focusing only on those elements of the image on which we might act or which might act on us, relates (and Deleuze underlines this point) to the motor-sensory circuit of perceiving and acting. That is, there is a stimulus, and then there is an action or reaction. This involves a selective causal chain, one based on a logic through which the effects one perceives are understood to be first causes. In turn we isolate these causes in considering what will act on us and what we might act on. This process in turn provides the structure on which narrative (which develops through tracing selected causal chains) is built.

The brain, then, is a screen in two senses: in one sense it is the repository for the images of things that it reflects in the manner of a cinema screen, in another it filters or sifts, screening out what is not able to be understood in terms of motor-sensory interest. Presentations, on the other hand, would relate to images that have not yet been interpreted or screened: images that carry with them the full weight of potential meaning.
Fluctuating Fortunes of the Image

The supposed conflict between the knowledge (considered dubious, unworthy) offered by the senses and that offered by the light of reason alone (which alone might lead us to the truth) has long drawn a distinction between images and ideas or concepts. We see this, of course, in the celebrated image of the cave in Plato’s Republic: the truth, the Idea, is like the light of the sun, and is only open to us through Reason, whereas we are habitually caught up with the play of images that are illusory and misleading, like the shadows on the wall of the cave. Perhaps still more famously, Descartes opposed the light of Reason (which delivers us clear and distinct ideas or concepts) to the confused impressions we are given by the images offered to us by the senses. Here, of course, images and the imagination (as with the Stoics and others such as Spinoza) are understood as all those things offered to us by the senses. Beckett, too, uses the word “imagination” in this sense, in works such as Imagination Dead Imagine and All Strange Away. Following this well-worn trail, such images are the province of the arts, while ideas and concepts emerge through the true thought of Philosophy.

Yet if one looks slightly closer it becomes apparent that the image and the idea are also closely linked. Nietzsche, in the Birth of Tragedy points out that Plato not only attacks art and artists, casting them out of his Republic, but provides a life-raft for art with his Dialogues (69). So too, Stephen Gaukroger has brought to light Descartes’s interest in rhetoric — the vividness of images — as a way of expressing truths. Gaukroger argues that Descartes developed his notion of clear and distinct ideas from his reading of the classical rhetoric of Quintilian, who speaks of the image that is so striking that it instantly convinces us of its truth (119-123). Here, then, literature and philosophy come together; the vivid image expresses truth after all, and leads us to the immediate light of understanding, something taken up in turn by Spinoza when he speaks of “the third kind of knowledge” (sometimes understood to involve intuition), which alone allows us access to eternal truths. Rather than being a despised remainder, a certain kind of image allows the kind of rupture of the surface (of impressions, of words, of received ideas, of habit) to take place, revealing what lies behind.8

Beckett and Bergson: Intuition and Image

Perhaps the most striking equation of the image and intuition is to be found in Bergson. In 1911 Bergson delivered a paper to the Philosophical Congress in Bologna entitled “Philosophical Intuition,” where he offers the most explicit and concise outline of his concept of intuition and its importance to philosophical thought.
When, after long study, we really begin to understand a philosopher’s thought, he suggests, its complications lessen and its various parts fit into one another so that, in effect “the whole is brought together into a single point” (1946, 128). Within this point there is the intuition, that spontaneous element that began the whole process for the philosopher, and the impossibility of expressing this intuition or the desire to express this inexpressible is what drives the philosopher to develop his or her system. Because the “attitude of the body” (to use Bergson’s phrase) that expresses this notion, seems somehow to approach attitudes expressed slightly differently by Beckett — who claimed to be striking at the same couple of nails all his creative life,9 attacking over and again the same ideas given at the outset without managing to adequately convey what must be conveyed (The Unnamable offering the most striking formulation of this dilemma) — I will quote from Bergson at length:

In this point is something simple, infinitely simple, so extraordinarily simple that the philosopher has never succeeded in saying it. And that is why he went on talking all his life. He could not formulate what he had in mind without feeling himself obliged to correct his formula, then to correct his correction: thus, from theory to theory, correcting when he thought he was completing, what he has accomplished… has been to convey with an increasing approximation the simplicity of his original intuition. All the complexity of his doctrine, which would go on ad infinitum, is therefore only the incommensurability between his simple intuition and the means at his disposal of expressing it. (ibid., 128)

Bergson then goes on to explain that while in studying the thought of the philosopher, we cannot ourselves find the intuition that eluded the philosopher, we can arrive at an approximation of it, an approximation that is, precisely, the image.

But what we shall manage to recapture and to hold is a certain intermediary image between the simplicity of the concrete intuition and the complexity of the abstractions which translate it, a receding and vanishing image,10 which haunts… the mind of the philosopher,… and which, if it is not the intuition itself, approaches it much more closely than the conceptual expression, of necessity symbolical, to which the intuition must have recourse in order to furnish “explanation.” (ibid., 128-129).

One might ponder the exact nature of the relation between “the image” Bergson describes in Matter and Memory (1896) and “the image” discussed in relation to intuition in this essay (1911). If one is to assume that they remain strongly related, then the intuition image described here is not a weak reflection, but has intense power, occurring to the philosopher with the immediacy and force of a real presence. It is hardly surprising that Bergson’s notions of intuition and the image proved attractive to artists, as it not only forges a road between the direct
perception (or “apprehension,” to use the word Beckett favors in speaking of Joyce [Disjecta, 28]), which equates to artistic insight, and the conceptual understandings offered by philosophy, but validates the importance of “the image,” the creation of which, in various forms, has long been many an artist’s goal. It implies that in producing an image, an artist might get to a source of understanding, finding a terrain where intuition can be expressed through sensation. What concerns us here, then, is the relevance of Bergson’s ideas to Beckett, and Beckett’s use of the image as a means of translating philosophical ideas into an artistic language.

That Beckett knew of Bergson in general and this understanding of intuition and its influence on French literature in particular is incontestable. During the Michaelmas term of 1931 Beckett taught a course on Gide and Racine at Trinity College Dublin, and notes to these lectures, taken by Rachel Burrows, have survived. Parts of these explicitly touch upon Beckett’s understanding of Bergson’s concept of intuition, and its influence on art and literature in France.

conflict v. intelligence & intuition. Bergson — interested in this. ... Suggests that intuition can achieve a total vision that intelligence can’t. Philosophical visionary — position like [...] – Rimbaud. Passionate justification of “La vision intuitive” … ‘originalité, feuillete [above this Burrows has written ‘disorder’], imprévisibilité, as artistic attributes. Flaubert had last. Taken up Symbolistes and Dadaists — last interested in his [Bergson’s] idea of inadequacy of the word to translated impressions registered by instinct. (Burrows, 4, 5)

Beckett, Bergson, Berkeley

Bergson’s “intuition” and his “image that seeks to translate this intuition” were clearly known to Beckett. As one progresses further through Bergson’s essay, however, the points of correspondence become still more striking, because when Bergson develops an example of how one might work from the “image” one can discover in the attitude of the philosopher, he chooses one of the philosophers Beckett knew best, Bishop Berkeley. Such a discussion could only have intrigued Beckett, who not only studied Berkeley in the 1930s but indicated a keen interest in the relation between the artist and the philosopher in discussing this reading with Thomas MacGreevy.

As I have been reading the sacré évêque I was alive to the badness of Colum’s attempt in the last D. M. [Dublin Magazine] to relate him to the artist. Colum makes him [Berkeley] make perception an act of will. Berkeley is at pains, in the principles [Treatise Concerning the Principles of Human Knowledge] and Dialogues [Three Dialogues between Hylas and Philonous], to insist on the contrary. (Beckett, 1936)
One might suggest, then, that Beckett borrowed the title for his most famous work of aesthetic criticism (*Three Dialogues with Georges Duthuit*) from Berkeley’s “Three Dialogues…” One might further suggest that he had read Berkeley’s work closely, and so would have been unlikely to reduce him to the role of idealist buffoon, best brushed aside with the vigor of a Dr. Johnson (whose image of kicking the stone to “refute” Berkeley’s system, Beckett characterizes in a 1934 letter to MacGreevy, as “mièvre,” or puerile). Rather, one might suggest that in using Berkeley, as he does most famously in *Film*, Beckett would have been genuinely interested in the attitude adopted by the Bishop in formulating his *esse est percipi*, even while, as the attitude of the artist requires, wishing to express no confidence in the truth value of the formula.

Bergson too considers Berkeley worth some effort, and what is perhaps most interesting in relation to Beckett is the image he isolates as coming closest to expressing Berkeley’s philosophical intuition. Berkeley’s system, Bergson contends, resolves into four fundamental theses: affirming a) that matter is a cluster of ideas, (idealism); b) that general ideas are merely words, (nominalism); c) that minds are real and characterised by will (spiritualism); and d) through a consideration of matter that God exists (theism) (1946, 134). Bergson then goes on to show how Berkeley’s idealism “signifies… that matter is coextensive with our representation of it” (ibid., 136); that is, that matter is all surface and so is completely revealed and realized. Bergson suggests that for Berkeley the term “idea” designates a completely realized existence, an existence that “is indistinguishable from its seeming” (ibid., 137) while the word “thing” designates a reservoir of possibilities. It is the supposed hiddenness or unrealized nature of “things” that Berkeley objects to, and so he prefers to call those bodies that exist “ideas” because everything that exists is, for him, completely realized and laid out on a surface that is completely visible (at least to God). Therefore, Bergson concludes, Berkeley’s idealism coincides with his nominalism, since abstract and general ideas have no real existence, because nothing can be abstracted or extracted from the continuous surface that is matter. Yet if the links between bodies are only words, the link between God and bodies is real for Berkeley, who places God behind all manifestations of matter. Finally, it is God who gives us perceptions or “ideas,” yet we must gather together or move towards these ideas in being. What characterizes us in this movement, then, is the “reverse of an idea;” it is will that is “constantly limited by divine will,” and “The meeting-place of these two wills is precisely what we call matter” (ibid., 139).

In this way, then, Bergson attempts to show how each of Berkeley’s four theses interpenetrate with one another in the manner of “a living being” (ibid.,
139). So, we are being led toward the point that Bergson promised us lies at the heart of the philosophical system, and is drawn from an original intuition, an intuition we can only approach through an image that approximates it. This image is powerful in and of its own right, but it is still more interesting for our purposes, because of the oblique angle at which it strikes the surface of Beckett’s work *Film*, which develops images around Berkeley’s *esse est percipi*. Bergson claims that the image that strikes him most from Berkeley is the following:

…that Berkeley perceives matter as a *thin transparent film* situated between man and God. It remains transparent as long as the philosophers leave it alone, and in that case God reveals Himself through it. But let the metaphysicians meddle with it, or even common sense in so far as it deals in metaphysics: immediately the film becomes dull, thick and opaque, and forms a screen because such words as Substance, Force, abstract Extension, etc. slip behind it, settle there like a layer of dust, and hinder us from seeing God through the transparency. (1946, 140)

**A Thin Transparent Film**

Images, of course, are only sometimes linked to philosophy in Beckett, and are not always of the same kind even when they might be linked with concepts. That Beckett does at times link images to philosophical concepts, however, is made explicit in the 1963 treatment for *Film* (*Complete Dramatic Works*, 323-334; *Film: Complete Scenario*, 9-61). This treatment differs from the majority of Beckett’s other works for theater or television in that it includes some unusually explicit general comments about the rationale or structure of the piece.

*Esse est percipi*

All extraneous perception suppressed, animal, human, divine, self-perception maintains in being.
Search of non-being in flight from extraneous perception breaking down in inescapability of self-perception.
No truth value attaches to above, regarded as merely of structural and dramatic convenience. (*Complete Dramatic Works*, 323)

Elements of the above, taken from the “General” section of this treatment, have often been quoted, with emphasis generally placed on the statement that “no truth value” is to be ascribed (see, for example, Henning, 6). This statement is important since it indicates elements of Beckett’s *modus operandi* when using materials from philosophy (that is, not to take them seriously with respect to the systems from which they are drawn, but rather to use them for his own aesthetic purposes). However, it would be foolish to then read this as indicating that the philosophical figure is no longer present (Berkeley’s “To be is to be perceived,” as well as perhaps elements of the figure of Berkeley himself [see Deleuze, *The
Rather, the formulation is undeniably borrowed for “structural and dramatic” purposes: the entire work explores this idea, and it does so by describing a series of events and a series of images that relate directly to this idea (which is done both with rigor and without caring about whether or not the premises involved in the formulation might be true).

There can be little doubt about the answer to the question, then, as to whether Beckett makes use of philosophical ideas in his works, even though he rarely indicates his points of reference so explicitly. There can also be little doubt that one way in which Beckett transforms these rational ideas into lived sensations is through the use of images. Film explores the contours of Berkeley’s idea through feeling: sensations of concepts that describe a concept of sensation.

Deleuze, who draws upon the work of Bergson in isolating his concept of the movement-image in his Cinema books, begins his essay on Beckett’s Film by stating that he will propose “un découpage (ou une distinction des cas) un peu différent de celui de Beckett lui-même” (36).\(^\text{12}\) That is, whereas Beckett divides his treatment into three parts: 1) The street; 2) Stairs; and 3) The room, Deleuze divides his essay into three cases: 1) The Wall and the Staircase, Action; 2) The Room, Perception; 3) The Rocking Chair, Affection. Whereas Beckett’s divisions relate to changes of scene, Deleuze’s relate to the shifts he perceives in types of cinematic image—the action image, the perception image, and the affection image—which he identifies in his writings on cinema as the three elemental kinds of movement-image of which cinema is capable (Cinema I, 66-70; “The Greatest Irish Film,” 23-26).

Deleuze, in his reading of Film, pays special attention to its cinematic qualities and its relation to an understanding of the potential of the film form. This focuses on one side of the concept of image as it occurs in Beckett’s work, but leaves aside a number of issues that concern the manner in which images interact with the philosophical concepts with which they have been drawn into relation. Deleuze’s approach seems to be encouraged by the choice of title—Film—which leads the viewer to consider what this work has to say about the film form and the functioning of the cinematic image (further underlined by Beckett’s decision to make this film almost completely silent).

Yet we have seen above how Bergson in his essay on Berkeley has identified an image of matter as a “thin transparent film” situated between God and man, and this image moves us in a slightly different direction from Deleuze. In Murphy, Beckett begins his famous chapter on Murphy’s mind with a quotation from Spinoza “…Amor intellectualis…quo Deus se ipsum amat…” (the intellectual Love with which God loves himself)\(^\text{13}\) but alters the quotation by replacing Spinoza’s reference to God with one to Murphy, “Amor intellectualis quo Murphy
se ipsum amat” (the intellectual Love with which Murphy loves himself [63]). So, too, one might contend that Bergson’s image of Berkeley might be seen to operate in Beckett’s Film, although Beckett has altered the formulation so that the transparent film is no longer matter but pure consciousness, penetrated by perception and no longer situated between God and man, but between O and E, the two sides of a single being. E wishes to gaze through the thin film of consciousness at being itself, whereas O wishes to cloud the film, to throw up obstacles to it so that his being may not be perceived (Complete Dramatic Works, 323-324; Film: Complete Scenario, 11-12)

Further, through the attention undoubtedly still drawn to the filmic medium itself by the title, the “thin transparent film,” might also be seen to stand between the split self O and E and the viewer who is able to perceive the agony inherent in a consciousness of being (through being perceived). One sits in the dark in the auditorium and is not perceived, so identification with the audience is of unequal force, but a similarity with the late play Catastrophe, which ends with the protagonist staring back out at the audience (which is precisely the catastrophe or overturning within the play), emerges here. Film both begins and ends with a big close-up of the eye, an image that directly hails the viewer as complicit, in the manner of Baudelaire’s “hypocrite lecteur.” It is important to note that Beckett’s written treatment and the final filmed version differ in a number of ways. Certain opening scenes had to be cut due to technical difficulties, and Beckett compensated for these lost scenes by inserting the image of the eye in close-up (see the chapter on Film in Schneider 1987, and Schneider’s essay in Beckett 1969, on which that chapter is based, 63-94).

As has often been noted, Beckett chose the title Film after toying with the idea of calling the work “The Eye” (Schneider, 355). “The Eye” rather than referring the viewer back to the functioning of the filmic medium, would refer the viewer back to the philosophical image, because it is the image of the eye that most succinctly encompasses Berkeley’s formulation. The filmed “eye” cannot see the audience, and the audience knows this, treating it at the same time as an object (with the shape of an “O”) to be inspected. Here then, is a clear example of a philosophical image, one that offers a précis of the entire project. The eye as image, at once E and O, itself includes a transparent film or lens through which we feel the presence of being. The “eye” leads us towards an obvious pun with “I”; but one of the things that Beckett’s Film makes us see with regard to Berkeley’s formulation is that it does not allow or involve any simple connection between the eye and the I. According to Rimbaud, another favorite of Beckett’s, “Je est un autre” (I is another). One might note how O (and E who confronts him) both, with their eye patches, lack an eye. Indeed the shape of Berkeley’s formulation...
esse est percipi involves reflection between two sides of being, but reflection that never allows a simple coming together into a complete subject.

The shape is circular, yet strangely it seems to involve a gap that causes that circle to fail to close: while it refers to being and perception, two key attributes of conscious beings, it estranges them from self identity. The gap is infinitesimally small—a thin transparent film—but unbridgeable or impenetrable nonetheless, and this logic of the unbridgeable gap is already present in Berkeley’s formula. The film is also a surface.

Esse [to be] is an active infinitive, yet remains incomplete in itself, since its active nature depends on the passive infinitive that follows; further, it refers to no grammatical person. As for est [is], while it suggests immediate identification between the two sides of the formulation, it is a third person singular, understood in an impersonal sense; as such it embodies the transparent film between the two sides E and O, being and being perceived. Percipi [to be perceived] is a passive infinitive, again referring to no grammatical person. Any (active) being, then, is reflected in (passively) being perceived, and this being in reflection is necessarily impersonal or detached from immediate identification with an “I.” Importantly, Beckett calls neither element a subject in this work: O stands for Object and E for Eye (Complete Dramatic Works, 323; Film: Complete Scenario, 11). Any “I” would somehow either have to emerge between these two (yet as we have seen, the “is” that comes between also eludes the first person), or would somehow have to escape their correspondence. The incompletable circular shape is drawn from Berkeley, but Beckett uses it to underline structures that reflect his own concerns.

The eye, however, is not the sole image in Beckett’s Film, which, in the absence of any language but the whispered “shhh!,” Beckett referred to as composed of “ideograms” (Beckett and Schneider, 166). Deleuze claims Beckett brings the elemental movement-images of cinematic form to light by exhausting them, and in a similar way Beckett might be said to bring Berkeley’s concept to light by attempting to negate it. That is, if to be is to be perceived, how does one escape being? How does one escape being perceived? In each case the exhaustion of the type of film image identified by Deleuze is connected to notions of perceivedness. Deleuze’s “action image,” through which a moving camera follows a moving figure, is exhausted or negated by the fact that the figure is fleeing from the notion of perceivedness that the pursuing camera embodies here. So, too, we are made conscious of the “perception images” supplied by the various sets of eyes that watch O (the animals, the image of God, the mirror, the window) because O attempts to extinguish, remove, or cover them. Finally the “affection image”—the close-up through which emotion is conveyed—is negated because
the process of perceivedness that it represents itself causes the horrified emotion conveyed—a horror to which, again, one can only respond to with flight or the attempt to hide (see Deleuze, “The Greatest Irish Film”).

“The Agony of Perceivedness”

A number of images directly relate to Berkeley’s formula, yet one that stands out is the facial expression of an “agony of perceivedness” (Complete Dramatic Works, 325; Film, 16) apparent three times (once in each of Beckett’s three sections) in Film: once when E confronts O at the film’s climax, and twice when E confronts others—the couple in the street and the flower woman on the stairs. The flight from perception, the agony of perceivedness, and the relation of self-perception to this agony of perceivedness, are all tied to Berkeley, though all are also clearly filtered through Beckett’s own understandings. That is, the agonies of perceivedness clearly relate being to being perceived, but the trauma involved in this is not implicit in Berkeley’s concept. Rather, Film seems to involve a refashioning of the image in line with a different intuition. The thin transparent film Bergson identifies in Berkeley no longer rests between ourselves and the wonder of God (in the manner of Kant’s Sublime or Schopenhauer’s Idea); rather, now representing pure consciousness instead of matter, it stands between and forever separates being and being perceived (two sides of a single self in the case of O and E, but something else in the case of E and the others), revealing, as it is penetrated, horror rather than ecstasy.

Deleuze asks at the outset of his essay on Beckett’s Film what it is that is so horrible in perceivedness. He concludes at last that the fear stems from the perception of self by self, which can only be escaped in death. Yet there is something inexplicable in the horror, reminding us, perhaps, of the final words of Conrad’s Kurtz in Heart of Darkness (121), which also stem from a revelation that is not everyday, but may relate to the equivocal images that emerge as one confronts the endeavor to end, and pursues a final recognition of the nature of one’s being. While similar situations occur throughout Beckett’s works, in some ways Deleuze’s answer remains unsatisfactory, since the horror of perceivedness cannot be entirely related to a perception of self by self in this work, since it not only occurs with O and E, but also with the others.

Watching Film, we are made aware that the process of understanding, or being confronted by agony, is not an everyday process; rather, it seems to be a limit experience, linked with an intuition of an end to being. This conjecture might explain why O checks his pulse, once on the stairs, and once in the rocking chair (apparent in the film itself though never mentioned in the treatment, and only in passing in Beckett’s correspondence with Alan Schneider [161]).
Furthermore, while Deleuze maintains the opposite, the evidence of both the finished film and the treatment indicate that it remains unclear (typical with Beckett), as to whether or not we are supposed to think O dies at the end. It is clear, however, that a consciousness of perceivedness and the consciousness of being it implies is such an uncommon and an uncommonly unpleasant sensation that it brings with it a threat of death or non-being, not so much as an escape or solution to being perceived (as Deleuze contends) but as a simple consequence of it. The question as to whether it can ever be escaped remains, as is typical of Beckett, unanswerable.

One assumes the others (the couple in the street, the flower woman on the stairs) who confront E and feel the horror of his gaze are not looking at an image of themselves, but at the perceiving side of the E/O protagonist. Just as O’s horrified attempts to escape being perceived must be considered atypical or at a limit point, so, too, the intentness or intensity of E’s perception is atypical or at a limit point, and it is this intensity that must affect the others, forcing a way through the film of their consciousness and penetrating their being. As Beckett stated to Schneider and others before production began, neither O nor E has a “normal” perception, and it is E’s abnormally intense gaze that horrifies the couple and the flower woman (causing harm to the latter). O’s abnormality, then, inversely reflects E’s abnormality, and a unity is only obtained by leaping across the gap between. As Beckett told Schneider:

...the space in [the] picture is [a] function of two perceptions, both of which are diseased… [which] enable one to deform normal vision. Unity is the quality of this apprehension. (quoted in Gontarski 187; see also 191)

Rather than the perception of self by self alone causing horror, then, it is this process taken to a limit, a limit at which a penetration through consciousness to being is possible, coming at or bringing on a moment near the end of life.

“It’s done I’ve done the image”

This is not the only unbridgeable gap that must be traversed, however. Making the image is difficult since, in being realized, images can come loose from the intuitions that brought them forth and become something else. Beckett seemed to make this point in writing to Alan Schneider about Film and the differences between what he imagined at the outset (and tried to circumscribe in his written treatment) and what was finally captured on film.

...after the second [viewing of a rough cut of Film] I felt it really was something. Not quite in the way intended, but as a sheer beauty, power and strangeness of image... In other words and generally speaking, from having been troubled by a certain failure to communicate fully by purely
visual means the basic intention, I now begin to feel that this is unimportant and that the images obtained probably gain in force what they lose as ideograms and that the whole idea behind the film, while sufficiently expressed for those so minded, has been chiefly of value on the formal and structural level. (Beckett and Schneider, 166)

What we witness perhaps in these comments is a statement similar to that made by Bergson when he considers how the philosopher continually fails to express the intuition. Beckett’s point seems to go further. Adding complexity to the well known discourse of “failure” that surrounds his work because of certain points of emphasis in his aesthetic writings (Three Dialogues with George Duthuit in particular), he goes on to suggest that the failure of intention loses its importance, since what has been created, while still linked to the intuitive intention that engendered it, takes on a life and validity of its own separate from that intuition and intention.

I described it to Barney after the first screening as an “interesting failure.” This I now see as much too severe. It does I suppose in a sense fail with reference to a purely intellectual schema, but in so doing has acquired a dimension and a validity of its own that are worth far more than any merely efficient translation of intention. (166)

As Bergson suggests, there is a gap between the “intuition” and the image. A gap inherent in the word “intention,” through which the mind, projecting itself into a void, strives at an elusive expression of that which it is barely possible to grasp. A gap we experience in negative image in the equally perilous endeavour at understanding or re-experiencing the sensation sent out towards us. A gap reflected in variations between the “intentions” expressed in the film treatment and other texts and the finished film itself.

The image eludes the intuition, which it never completely expressed in any case. Furthermore, once it has come into being as artistic expression, the image is no longer a mere approximation of the artist’s intention (or intuition). The artist fails to fully express the intention, but succeeds in creating an image. This image, in turn, carries with it an attribute shared by all images: it does not convey a single meaning, but, rather, is open to interpretations, interpretations that may overlap with but also exceed or elude the intended meanings. Each of these interpretations, however, will in turn be exceeded or eluded by the image, which offers still further potential meanings than those circumscribed by the interpretation of any given reader. A dynamic interplay, then, is set up between the image, the intentions that founded the image, and the interpretations that relate to the image. One place we might search for the power of artistic expression is in the series of gaps and the efforts to bridge those gaps that are implicit in any artistic image.
What *Film* in part offers is the exploration of a medium that draws its power—the power to produce sensations—through gaps. Yet images provide sparks that leap from one side to the next, like messages across synapses, thereby allowing the formation of a unity among difference: intuition and sensation, intuition and the idea, intention and reception, philosophy and literature.

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Notes

1. See also Abbott and Oppenheim. For an interesting understanding of interrelations between literature and the pictorial arts see Tooke.

2. Deleuze mentions Beckett frequently in his works with Guattari, often citing images from Beckett to illustrate concepts of sensations. He also dedicates two important essays to Beckett: ‘The Exhausted’ (Deleuze, 1997b) and “The Greatest Irish Film” (Deleuze, 1997a), which both discuss Beckett’s use of images. Another work, Francis Bacon: logic de sensation, also draws parallels between the use of image in Beckett and Bacon.

3. For discussions of Deleuze’s use of Bergson, see Zourabichvili, and Martin.

4. A number of philosophers, however, including Nietzsche, Henri Bergson (1946) and Michèle Le Doeuff have demonstrated how important the image is within philosophical thinking.
5. In The Logic of Affect Paul Redding underlines how a key distinction, or point of contention, in both 19th- and 20th-century debates about the nature of cognition, concerned the problem of whether sensations should be considered “presentations” or “representations.” “Direct Realists” consider that sensations are impressed upon us (in the manner of the famous metaphor of the signet ring in wax) and directly perceived by the nervous system. Such presentations are understood to have being in their own right (and therefore one looks to ontology when considering their nature). Others, including idealists such as Fichte and Schelling argue that what occurs in our experience of the world is the production of “representations.” That is, they contend that the immediate process of sensation is always lost and out of reach and what remains is the interpretation of the sensation and such interpretations or representations involve or produce knowledge (and so one looks to epistemology when considering their nature). Such a process of interpretation clearly presupposes both thought and abstraction, or the development of ideas. (pp. 90-123).

6. This difference of degree, however, is nevertheless extremely important because without noticing it one is in danger of falling into the trap of simply equating the image with Being. This conflation, of course, is made by Berkeley, but it must be noted that Berkeley develops his system before Bergson develops his, and that Bergson wishes to incorporate a series of subtle distinctions that places him between idealists (such as Berkeley) and realists (such as Fichte). Martin Schwab exemplifies the problems that stem from failing to recognize the subtle distinction Bergson has introduced between Being and being perceived (taken up by Deleuze) in his reading of Deleuze, and of Beckett’s Film.

Although he makes a number of interesting points, Schwab’s failure to recognize the distinction leads to a series of errors and confusions that renders Deleuze’s understanding of “the image” nonsensical (and not surprisingly Schwab, in developing his error, concludes that Deleuze’s understanding of the image is indeed, nonsensical). The distinctions, and the manner in which Schwab fails to grasp them, relate to Schwab’s failure to directly consult Bergson (whom he reconstructs purely through his reading of Deleuze). Schwab identifies “the movement-image” with Being (109-112), failing to take account of the extent to which this is a concept developed by Deleuze specifically in relation to the cinema as a mode of representation. That is, “the movement-image” is strongly linked to the concept of “the image” developed by Bergson, identical with “being perceived” rather than with Being (to which it has a difference of degree), but it is not to be simply equated or conflated with “the image.” Rather, it is a kind of image that Deleuze discusses specifically in relation to the cinema. Because Schwab conflates the two, he logically needs to further confuse “the movement-image” with the “time-image” (135) because the distinctions developed by Deleuze through Bergson obviously become lost when one begins to think that Being equals the image which equals the movement-image. On the contrary, the movement-image is a kind of image (equated with being perceived). In order to recognize the distinctions (and it is their very subtlety and their resistance to simple conflation that makes them interesting to Deleuze, Bergson and Beckett) it is useful to pair it with “representation,” while the “time-image” might be paired with “presentation” as two kinds of being perceived (with the distinction between the representation and the presentation understood in the sense described in previous footnote). Deleuze makes this distinction explicit in Cinema 2: 274-275.


10. This aspect of the nature of the image brings to mind Deleuze’s description of Beckett’s use of the image in “The Exhausted”: “What counts in the image is not its meager content,
but the energy—mad and ready to explode—that it has harnessed, which is why images never last long" (160-161). Deleuze, of course, takes Bergson as one of his points of departure.

11. Although I have strong reservations about the essay as a whole, which I detail in footnote 6 above, Martin Schwab makes a useful set of connections that relate to the notion of “the film”: “This model is... reminiscent of the ancient materialists’ conception of icons (idols, simulacra) as material films (!), ‘effluences’ that emanate from the objects, travel toward the sense organs, ‘influe’ on those organs, and are perceived when these are transformed by the iconic matter...” (135).

12. The translation of Smith and Greco—“a cutting of the film (or a distinction of cases) that differs slightly from the one proposed by Beckett himself”—renders this point slightly confusing by inserting the phrase “of the film” in translating “découpage,” thereby giving one the impression that Deleuze is proposing a reading of the completed film, Film, whose form has been changed from that given to us by Beckett and Schneider. We should, rather, understand this comment to refer to the structure of Deleuze’s essay and its points of emphasis, in relation to the structure of Beckett’s written treatment.


15. See Complete Dramatic Works, Film: Complete Scenario, correspondence with Schneider, and Gontarski.