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# Flashforward: The Future is Now

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## Abstract

In *The Future of the Image* (2007) Jacques Rancière states that the end of images is behind us. He argues for an aesthetics of the image that acknowledges the continuing power of images as educating documentations of traces of history, as directly affecting interruptions, and as open-to-combining signs of the visible and the sayable ad infinitum. But does Rancière's claim also concern the future of cinema? His cinematic references, in a Deleuzian sense, are mostly to modern time-images. Is the future of film indeed a form of the time-image, or has the 'heart' of cinema moved beyond this image-type? This paper proposes to look at a third category of cinematographic images, based in the third synthesis of time as developed by Deleuze in *Difference and Repetition*. This filmic image, that could be called the neuro-image, is connected to the impure regime of images typical for the database logic of the digital age. By comparing Alain Resnais's *Hiroshima Mon Amour* (1959) to the television series *FlashForward* (2009), I will analyse the temporal operations of the image of the time-image to these images of a new regime of images, the image of and from the future.<sup>1</sup>

**Keywords:** time-image, neuro-image, brain is screen, database logic, flashback, flashforward, future of the image

## I. The Death of the Image is Behind Us

Starting with the observation that 'a certain idea of fate and a certain idea of the image are tied up in the apocalyptic discourse of today's cultural climate', Jacques Rancière investigates the possibilities of 'imageness' or the future of the image that can be an alternative to

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the often heard complaint in contemporary culture that there is nothing but images, and that therefore images are devoid of content or meaning (Rancière 2007: 1). This discourse is particularly strong in discussions on the fate of cinema in the digital age, where it is commonly argued that the cinematographic image has died either because image culture has become saturated with interactive images, as Peter Greenaway argues on countless occasions (see for instance, Greenaway 2007 and 2010), or because the digital has undermined the ontological photographic power of the image but that film has a virtual afterlife as art (Rodowick 2007). Looking for the artistic power of the image, Rancière offers in his own way an alternative to these claims of the 'death of the image'. According to him, the end of the image is long behind us. It was announced in the modernist artistic discourses that took place between Symbolism and Constructivism between the 1880s and 1920s. Rancière argues that the modernist search for a pure image is now replaced by a kind of impure image regime typical for contemporary media culture.

Rancière's position is free from any technological determinism when he argues that there is no mediatic or mediumistic catastrophe that announces the end of the image. The qualities of an image do not depend on the fact that they are seen on a canvas, a cinema screen, a television set or computer window. For Rancière there is a certain imageness (that can even be evoked by words) that continues to influence our perception and understanding. Rancière defines the cinematic images in particular as a manifestation of 'operations that couple and uncouple the visible and its signification or speech and its effects, which create and frustrate expectations' (Rancière 2007: 5). Images on the one hand refer to reality, not necessarily as a faithful copy, but as to what it suffices to stand for. And then there is also the interplay of operations between the visible and invisible, sayable and unsayable, an alteration of resemblance and dissemblance which is the way by which art constructs images that have affective and interrupting power. Rancière argues that (filmic) images in our museums and galleries today can be classified in three major (dialectically interrelated) categories according to the dominant type of operations: the naked image, the ostensive image and the metaphorical image.

Naked images are those images that do not constitute art, but which testify to reality and trace history; they are images that primarily witness and testify. Ostensive images are images that also refer to reality but in a much more obtuse way, in the name of art, with dissemblances that perform an operation on reality. The final category of images, the metaphorical ones, follow a logic that makes it 'impossible to delimit

a specific sphere of presence isolating artistic operations and products from forms of circulation of social and commercial imagery and from operations interpreting this imagery' (Rancière 2007: 24). These are images that employ various strategies (play, irony, metamorphosis, remixing) to critically or wittily interrupt and join the media flow. Taken together, these image-types constitute the operational power of the image in contemporary culture, while the last category especially seems to indicate the dominant impureness of the new image regime. It is the last category that is relevant for discussing the future of the image as a third type of image in a Deleuzian sense. But this is in fact a flashforward of what will come later in this paper.

First, I should like to address a problem that seems to be hidden in the categorisation of the images in respect to the future of the cinematographic image. While Rancière refers to the new image regime of contemporary culture, his filmic examples almost always refer to modern cinema of the sixties, or, to put it in Deleuzian terms, to time-images. And when Rancière speaks of more contemporary cinema, such as the films of Pedro Costa, these films also follow the irrational and crystalline logic of the time-image (Rancière 2011: 137–53). But one can wonder if the 'heart' of cinema today still resides in modern time-images. Of course, time-images exist in contemporary cinema. But is the impurity that Rancière describes as typical for the new image regime really a form of the time-image? A comparison of two 'apocalyptic images', one from the sixties and one from contemporary media culture, might help to investigate this question further.

## II. Flashback: The Time-Image Grounded in the Past

First, a flashback to Alain Resnais's *Hiroshima Mon Amour*: not only a classic modern time-image in a Deleuzian sense, but also a film that investigates the (limits of the) power of the image. The famous phrases 'I have seen everything in Hiroshima' and 'You have seen nothing in Hiroshima' indicate the struggle between the visible and its significations that Rancière announces. Considered according to his categories of naked, ostensive and metaphorical images, we can see that on one level the film is a naked image that traces the catastrophic event of the atomic bomb attack on Hiroshima in 1945. In the first instance, Resnais was asked to make a documentary about this apocalyptic event. And some of the images, such as the images in the Hiroshima Memorial Museum, are 'naked' in that witnessing sense. However, *Hiroshima Mon Amour* is not a purely, nakedly documenting image. As Resnais tells in an interview

on the DVD edition of the film (Resnais 2004), he quickly found out he was not capable of making a documentary on this traumatic moment in history. Not finding any solution to transform the disaster into images that would add something to the existing Japanese documentaries and news reels, he asked Marguerite Duras to write a script. During their long conversations, the filmmaker and writer were wondering about the strange fact that while they were talking about Hiroshima, life took its usual course while new bombs were flown over the world. This is how they got the idea to focus on a small-scale personal event, a love story of a Japanese man and a French woman, with the catastrophe constantly in the background.

And so we see how Resnais and Duras render the naked image obtuse, witnessing, but also transforming the image by colliding words (Hiroshima – Amour), bodies (the famous opening sequence of the ash-embracing bodies), seeing and not-seeing ('You have seen nothing in Hiroshima'), countries (Nevers in France, Hiroshima in Japan) and times (the past and the present that start to collapse into each other). I will return to these temporal dimensions of Resnais's film, but at this point it is important to see how this temporal confusion as one of the 'dissemblance' techniques is typical for the artistic ostensive image. As far as Rancière's last image category is concerned, the metaphoric image, it is more difficult to see where Resnais's film intervenes ambiguously in the flow of media images. Even though the images of agonising/loving bodies in 'ashembrace' at the beginning of the film are in themselves images that allow metaphoric (or allegorical) readings, they are not part of the playfully critical artistic and commercial images Rancière ranks under this category (the term metaphoric is perhaps not the most well-chosen in that sense). Therefore, it is fair to say *Hiroshima Mon Amour* moves between naked and ostensive images, but cannot be categorised under Rancière's last category of metaphoric images so typical for today's audio-visual culture. So is the time-image then the most explicit and typical expression of this typical imageness of contemporary culture?<sup>2</sup>

*Hiroshima Mon Amour* is a time-image in the Deleuzian sense. As is well known, in all his work Alain Resnais is preoccupied with time. Practically all his films present a battle with the ravages of time, with echoes of the past that keep on resonating in the present. *Hiroshima Mon Amour* audio-visually translates the Bergsonian thesis that the past coexists with the present. The love story the French woman has with the Japanese man in 1950s Hiroshima makes her relive her first love affair with a German soldier during the Second World War. The Japanese

man becomes the German lover from the past. She becomes Nevers in France. *Hiroshima Mon Amour* is a crystal of time, which gives us the key to the time-image in general (Deleuze 1989: 69). As Deleuze argues, ‘what the crystal reveals is the hidden ground of time, that is, its differentiation into two flows, that of presents which passes and of pasts which are preserved’ (98). *Hiroshima Mon Amour* translates the untranslatability of the apocalypse and the unimaginabilities of the traumas of the (collective and individual) past into ostensive images that are fundamentally Bergsonian in their conception of non-chronological time, the pre-existence of a past in general, the coexistence of all sheets of the past and the existence of its most contracted degree: the present. Now, in order to understand the temporal dimensions of the time-image in respect to the future, it is useful to make a connection between the cinema books and Deleuze’s philosophy of time as developed in *Difference and Repetition*.

### III. Temporal Dimensions in the Passive Syntheses of Time

In chapter 2 of *Difference and Repetition*, Deleuze develops the idea of the passive syntheses of time. As in the cinema books, here too, Bergson is the main reference point, although the starting point of his reflections is Hume’s thesis that ‘repetition changes nothing in the object repeated, but does change something in the mind which contemplates it’ (Deleuze 1994: 70). Repetition has no ‘in itself’, but it does change something in the mind of the observer of repetitions: on the basis of what we perceive repeatedly in the living present, we recall, anticipate or adapt our expectations in a synthesis of time, which Deleuze calls in Bergsonian terms ‘duration’. This synthesis is a passive synthesis, since ‘it is not carried out by the mind, but occurs in the mind’ (71). The active (conscious) synthesis of understanding and recollection are based upon this passive synthesis that occurs on an unconscious level. Deleuze distinguishes different types of passive syntheses of time that have to be seen in relation to one another and in combination with active (conscious) syntheses. The conception of the syntheses of time is incredibly sophisticated and complicated, which James Williams recently has demonstrated brilliantly (Williams 2011). Here I will only be able to refer to the basic elements of Deleuze’s conception of time because it offers the possibility of conceiving the ‘future-image’.

The first synthesis Deleuze distinguishes is that of habit, the true foundation of time, occupied by the living present. But this passing present is grounded by a second synthesis of memory: ‘Habit is the

originary synthesis of time, which constitutes the life of the passing present. Memory is the fundamental synthesis of time which constitutes the being of the past (that which causes the present to pass)' (Deleuze 1994: 80). Moving to the cinema books, it is possible to argue that the first synthesis of time, habitual contraction, finds its aesthetic expression as movement-images, the sensory-motor manifestations of the cinematographic brain-screen. The second synthesis of time can be related to the dominant form of time in the time-image, where the past becomes more important and shows itself more directly as the ground of time, as the time within which time operates. Time-images are based in the 'pure past' of the second synthesis of time. Now, while arguing that the movement-image is mainly based in the first synthesis of time, and the time-image is predominantly grounded in the second synthesis, this does not mean that the movement-image cannot open up to the second synthesis, even if this does not happen very often. And in the time-image there can be moments that are based in the first synthesis of time. So it is more a matter of a sort of 'temporal keynote' that is different in the movement-image and the time-image. Moreover, each synthesis has its own composition of past, present and future.

So the present that is based in the first synthesis of time is a contracted synthesis, a particular stretch in the present, as with the lovers embracing in *Hiroshima Mon Amour*: 'It's crazy how soft your skin is,' the woman tells the man in the first scene after the long opening sequence when we finally see the lovers in a hotel room that is presented as a little stretch in the present of the film. In difference with that, the present as a dimension of the past (grounded in the second synthesis of time) is the most contracted degree of all of the past, which is the more dominant temporal dimension in *Hiroshima Mon Amour*: the Japanese man becomes the German lover of the past, he becomes Hiroshima, the woman becomes Nevers in France. The present as a dimension of the past is its crystallising point.

But the past also has its own temporal manifestations: as a dimension of the present (in the first synthesis) the past is always related to the present as a clear reference point from which it differs. One can think of the flashback in the most famous impossible love story of the movement-image, *Casablanca*, which constitutes the shared memory of Rick and Ilsa: the recollection of their love affair in Paris which explains the drama of the situation in the present of *Casablanca*. But in the second synthesis of time, the past is sheets of all of the past that start to float and move, such as the collective and individual pasts in *Hiroshima Mon Amour* that mix up. Or the mosaic of memory snippets in other Resnais films,

such as *Muriel, or the Time of Return* (1963), where memories of the Algerian War of Independence and personal memories of the characters connect in fragmentary and ambiguous ways.

And then there is of course the problem of the future. If we look from the dimensions of the first and second syntheses, the future is expected either from a point in the present, or from the past. Usually, in the first synthesis of time the future as a dimension of the present is an anticipation that departs from the present, an anticipation that in movement-images motivates goal-oriented behaviour, such as the pursuit of happiness in melodrama or the various goals of an action hero. It could also be argued that the future in the movement-image starts after the film ends, such as the 'happily ever after' moment of the wrapping up of classical Hollywood narratives. The future is that which comes after the present of the film has ended. An end that in the movement-image we usually anticipate through genre conventions that give us what we expect.

#### IV. The Future as Dimension of the Past

In the time-image, the future becomes a dimension of the past. Here it becomes less an anticipation of an action, but the expectancy of a repetition of an event whose outcome is based on the past. Each layer of a coexisting past implies its own possible future. Deleuze mentions Resnais's *Je t'aime, Je t'aime* (1968) as one of the few films that show how we inhabit time. As the poster of the film announces: 'The past is present and future in Alain Resnais's new time machine.' In other words, the present and future are dimensions of the second synthesis of time. *Je t'aime, Je t'aime* is the strange science fiction of a man who has tried to commit suicide after the death of his girlfriend. He survives, collapses into a catatonic depression, and at his release from mental hospital, he is recruited as a guinea pig for a scientific experiment. He is brought to a remote research centre where scientists tell him that their only subject of research is time. They have built a machine, which looks like a giant brain. The idea is that the scientists send him back in time exactly one year (to 5 September 1966 at 4.00 p.m.) for the duration of one minute. Before he enters the brain-machine the man is heavily sedated with drugs that, as is explained to him, make him 'completely passive though still capable of receiving memories'. As if the scientists had read *Difference and Repetition*, they seem to have created a machine for literally travelling into the second passive synthesis of time.

The inside of this machine is soft and lobe-like. The man lies down, sinking into the velvet folds of the brain-machine, and waits for the memories to come to him. The scene to which he returns is at the seaside during a holiday with his girlfriend in the south of France. He is snorkelling and gets out of the water. His girlfriend, who is sunbathing on the rocks near the water, asks him, 'Was it good?' This scene is repeated several times, but always with slight differences and subtle variations, both in the order of the shots within the sequence, its variable beginnings and ends, and the slightly different camera angles and shot lengths. It is as if his brain is looking through a kaleidoscope to see all the possible combinations of the mosaic snippets of memory, possibly looking for a new outcome, a new future perhaps. Another important scene repeated with variations is in a hotel room in Glasgow where the man and his girlfriend are on holiday. This is the moment where she will die because of a leaking gas heater. Was it an accident or not? The memory is not clear and changes slightly each time. The first time, we see the memory of this hotel room scene and the flame of the heater burns. His memory is transformed by his feelings of guilt, and at the last return, we see the flame is extinguished. His future changes accordingly: when this 'memory' arrives, he will die. So the future in this film is a dimension of the past.

In *Hiroshima Mon Amour* there are also futures related to the past. At several instances, it is said that the traumas of war and other disasters will be repeated in the future, which is based on the idea that we have seen nothing, that we will forget, and everything will start all over: '2,000 dead bodies, 80,000 wounded, within nine seconds. The numbers are official. It will happen again,' the woman says in voice-over over images of a reconstructed Hiroshima. Also in the love story, the future is raised as a function of memory and forgetting, as the man says, 'In a few years when I have forgotten you, I will remember you as the symbol of love's forgetfulness. I will think of you as the horror of forgetting.' The woman, too, when she recalls her first love, trembles at the fact that the intensity of such shattering love can be forgotten, and a new love can be encountered again.

It is important to note that in *Hiroshima Mon Amour* everything happens a second time: the unimaginable disaster was repeated in history already in Nagasaki. The impossible love of the Second World War is repeated a second time with another passionate love affair in Japan. Even film history returns as the film recalls, both thematically and stylistically, other impossible love affairs of the cinema: Michael Curtiz's *Casablanca* was already mentioned, but Hitchcock's *Vertigo* can also be recognised.

Not only do Hitchcock and Resnais share the theme of a love affair haunted by the past, but some of the scenes in *Hiroshima Mon Amour* are composed in a strikingly similar way to *Vertigo*. On all levels, we can see in *Hiroshima Mon Amour* a variation of the idea of the future that is based in the past: I will forget you, we will forget (love, war). And it (love, war) will happen again. Repetition and difference, the future as grounded in the past, this is the temporality of *Hiroshima Mon Amour*.

## V. The Future as Eternal Return

In *Difference and Repetition* Deleuze also distinguishes another idea of the future, the future as such as the third synthesis of time: 'The third repetition, this time by excess, [is] the repetition of the future as eternal return' (Deleuze 1994: 90). In this third synthesis, the foundation of habit in the present and the ground of the past are 'superseded by a groundlessness, a universal ungrounding which turns upon itself and causes only the yet-to-come to return' (91). In this third synthesis the present and the past are dimensions of the future. The third synthesis cuts, assembles and (re-)orders from the past and the present, to select the eternal return of difference. The third synthesis is the time of (endless) serial variations and remixes of pasts and presents. My basic argument is that contemporary cinema can be understood as a 'neuro-image', cinema predominantly based in the third synthesis of time, and hence has a particular relation to the future. Only the third synthesis can include the first and second syntheses of time. This, as I hope to show, can explain some of the neuro-image's impurity and manifestations in different modes of filmmaking. But let me first return to Deleuze's discussion of the third synthesis of time.

For the development of the third synthesis of time in *Difference and Repetition*, Deleuze does not refer to Bergson any more. Now Nietzsche has become the main reference point. In *The Time-Image* Bergson also seems to disappear at a certain moment in favour of Nietzsche's appearance, though in the cinema book Nietzsche is not *explicitly* connected to the question of time (not to the third synthesis of time, in any case). In the chapter on Orson Welles and the powers of the false (chapter 6 of *The Time-Image*), Nietzsche is an important reference to understanding the manipulating powers of the false. However, they are discussed as a consequence of the direct appearance of time, which is until that moment in *The Time-Image* mainly elaborated in terms of the pure past (all of the past) of the second synthesis of time. At the

end of the discussion of Welles's cinema, the powers of the false are connected to the creative powers of the artist, the production of the new (though not explicitly to the eternal return and the future). The series of time (characteristic of the third synthesis) are also mentioned in *The Time-Image*, especially in the chapter on bodies, brains and thoughts (chapter 8). Here the bodies in the cinema of Antonioni and of Godard's films relate to time as series. In the conclusion of the book Deleuze explains this special chronosign of time as 'a burst of series' (Deleuze 1989: 275). But after all the insistence on the Bergsonian temporal dimensions of the movement-image, the time-image and Deleuze's extended commentaries on Bergson, this form of time remains rather underdeveloped on a theoretical level in *The Time-Image*. Referring to *Difference and Repetition*, we can now understand that the powers of the false and the series of time that can be sensed in some time-images perhaps might belong to the third synthesis of time. We have seen that Alain Resnais's films, *Hiroshima Mon Amour* in particular, are firmly rooted in the second synthesis of time, even when they speak of the future. Is it perhaps possible to find glimpses of the third synthesis of time in Resnais's films, where the images speak *from* the future? As Deleuze suggests at the end of 'The Brain is the Screen', cinema is only at the beginnings of its exploration of audio-visual relations, which are relations of time (Deleuze 2000: 372). This suggests the possibilities for new dimensions of time in the image and perhaps clearer openings to the third synthesis of time.

In *My American Uncle* (1980) Resnais mixes fiction with scientific findings about the brain. Here the genre is less 'science fiction', where scientists invent strange experiments to reveal truths about the nature of time and memory as in *Je t'aime, Je t'aime*, but more a 'docufiction' where French neurobiologist Henri Laborit discusses (in voice-over and in direct address from behind his desk) findings about the workings of the human brain that by and large match with contemporary cognitive neurosciences. Laborit discusses the brain from an evolutionary perspective from which it is possible to distinguish three brains (a primitive, reptile one, which is the brain for survival; a second affective and memory brain; and a third brain, the outer layer or neocortex that allows associations, imagination and conscious thoughts). Throughout the film, Laborit explains how these three layers together in constant exchange with one another, and constantly influenced by others and our environment, can explain human behaviour. These scientific intermezzos are seamlessly connected to the stories of three different characters, who tell and enact their story and whose lives will meet at certain

moments. These fictional stories translate the scientific discourse of the neurobiologist quite literally, sometimes too literally for a contemporary audience. Nevertheless, *My American Uncle* also gives a moving insight into what ultimately motivates the filmmaker, the philosopher and the scientist: to understand more profoundly why we do what we do, and to find ways to improve not only individual destinies but also the fate of humanity.

The last images of *My American Uncle* present a particular political coda to the expositions and dramatisations that went before. This last scene follows directly after we have heard Laborit in voice-over declaring in a future conditional tense that as long as we do not understand how our brain works, and understand that until now it has always been used to dominate the other, there is little chance that anything will change. What follows are images of a travelling camera through a ruined city landscape, and because the words that just preceded these images still resonate in the following sequence, we comprehend that this war-ruined landscape might be understood as an image from the future: the eternal return of the series of war and disaster. The images are in fact from riots in the Bronx in the 1970s, when Resnais filmed them. But the images also immediately remind us of a desolate bombarded Sarajevo and Grozny (still future urban warzones at the time of filming) and Boulogne (the city that heavily suffered during the Second World War, and the setting of *Muriel*). So the past, the present and the future are now a dimension of the future. Then at the end of the final sequence of *My American Uncle*, the camera suddenly detects a ray of hope and holds at the only colourful image in the deserted streets: on one of the sombre walls a forest is painted, a wall painting by American artist Alan Sonfist; a sort of city screen as a hopeful sign of a possible future, a rebeginning. While the camera zooms in, the forest turns into pure green, fragments and colours that have to look for new connections. As such, these last images of the film, as a sign of death and rebeginnings, belong perhaps to the third synthesis of time, the future, the image related to the inevitability of death and repetitions of death, but also the possibility of the creation of the new.

## VI. Database Logic of the Neuro-Image

So Resnais's cinema, although mainly based in the second synthesis of time (with its particular future), also seems to be open to the third synthesis of time that speaks from the future as such. And, not coincidentally, as I will try to show in a moment, his films also express

a 'digital logic' *avant la lettre*, which shows some of cinema's internal struggle with informatics. The necessity of cinema's internal positioning towards the digital is an important remark made by Deleuze in *The Time-Image* to assure its rebirth and developments in the future (Deleuze 1989: 266). It may seem like a far stretch to think of Resnais as a Web 2.0 filmmaker. But for one, it can be argued that there is a kind of very contemporary 'database logic' in Resnais's work. Database logic is described by Lev Manovich in *The Language of New Media* as a typical characteristic of digital culture (Manovich 2001: 212–81). Contemporary culture is driven by databases, from which time and again, new selections are made, new narratives can be constructed, in endless series. As Manovich explains, this does not mean that the database is only of our time: the encyclopaedia and even Dutch still lifes of the seventeenth century follow a kind of database logic. It is just that with the seemingly endless storage and retrieval possibilities of digital technology, the database seems to become a dominant cultural form. And it allows very explicitly for endless series of new combinations, orderings and remixes of its basic source materials, which on a temporal scale matches the characteristics of the third synthesis of time, the future as eternal return.

The database logic in Resnais is often developed from within the second synthesis of time: in *Hiroshima Mon Amour*, *Last Year in Marienbad*, *Muriel* and *Je t'aime, J t'aime*, for instance, the past presents itself in different variations. But there are also some moments where the future as the third synthesis of time presents itself in a glimpse as the ungrounded ground from which it is spoken, such as the last images of *My American Uncle* discussed above. Or, at some moments in *The War is Over*, where the main character imagines in a sort of 'database flashforward' the unknown girl that has helped him to escape from the police at the Spanish border (he only heard her voice on the phone): a montage of flashforwards with female faces gives various possible options of what the girl would look like. These kinds of database-options of various futures return at other moments in the film as well. *My American Uncle* is also database-like, when at the beginning of the film several objects are shown without any clear meaning or connection between them. Later in the film, some of these objects will be suggested in relation to different stories and characters, and obtain (symbolic) meaning, only to return in a mosaic of many different objects and persons at the end of the film. Here Resnais's film-screen really becomes a typical web page that offers multiple entrances that each hide other possible future stories.

Taking this database logic one step further, what I suggest is that this third synthesis of time that already appears in the *Time-Image* (in a more or less disguised form) is the dominant sign of time under which cinema's images of the digital age are formed much more explicitly, and which allows for the conceptualisation of a third image type, that I propose to call the neuro-image. The serial and remixing logic of the database has become the dominant logic, corresponding to the temporal logic of the third synthesis under which the neuro-image is constructed. Of course there are still movement-images that operate under the logic of the rational cut, continuity editing and the integration of sequences into a whole (Deleuze 1989: 277), and are based in the first passive synthesis of time. And obviously time-images also find new directors whose work is grounded in the second synthesis of time reigned by the incommensurable or irrational cut of the coexisting layers of the pure past (277). But, arguably, the heart of cinema has moved into a database logic connected to the third synthesis of time. It is an impure image regime, because it repeats and remixes all previous image regimes (the movement-image and the time-image) as well as its temporal orders, but ungrounds all these orders due to the dominance of the third synthesis. In the larger project from which this paper is derived I explain more fully why these third type of images, could be called neuro-images.<sup>3</sup> Put in a very concise way, this has to do with an explicit reference to Deleuze's suggestion that 'the brain is the screen' and his call for looking at the biology of the brain for assessing the audio-visual image. Here, I simply want to emphasise that the starting point of the neuro-image is a change in cinema, where we slowly but surely have moved from following characters' actions (movement-image), to seeing the world filtered through their eyes (time-image), to experiencing directly their mental landscapes (neuro-image).

## VII. Flashforward: The Neuro-Image from the Future

Some typical examples of contemporary neuro-images where we have moved quite literally in the character's brain world include *Source Code* (Jones 2011), which is announced with the pun 'an action flick with brains', and *Inception* (Nolan 2010), where a whole team of dream invaders try to implant (or incept) one little thought in someone's mind that might change the future. *Avatar* (Cameron 2009) is another case in point of 'brain power' in cinema, where the avatars are operated by brain activity. And of course there is the world of the precogs appearing on the tactile screens in *Minority Report* (Spielberg 2002)

that predict future crimes. Typically in these films we see people hooked up to a kind of brain-scanning machine. Yet even when this is not so literally emphasised, contemporary cinema has become a mental cinema that differs in major ways from previous dominant modes of filming. Focusing only on the temporal dimensions of these images, it becomes evident that the future plays an important role that can be expressed on many different levels. In *Minority Report*, crime prevention is based on crimes that are about to happen, predicted by savants with the power of predicting the future. So the future is part of the narrative. The main character in *Source Code* acts with increasing knowledge of the future, every time he relives a variation of the past. If we think of *Inception*, it is possible to argue that the whole story is actually told from a point of view of the future. At the beginning of the film, the main characters meet when they are very old. At the end of the narrative, we return to this point, indicating that actually everything was told from this future moment of old age and even the moment of their death. Here, the future structures the narration. In a different way, *Avatar* is told from the point of view of the future of the planet. These are all examples from contemporary Hollywood, by and large still characterised by the movement-image (so we also still have typical characteristics of the temporal dimensions of the first synthesis of time, such as the sensorimotor orientation and genre expectations). But a different temporal order of repetition and difference, eternal return and serialisation with much more complexity typical for the digital age has definitively made its way to the cinema screen.

The American television series *FlashForward* is another interesting contemporary example of a neuro-image (with movement-image tendencies) that is told from the point of view of the future. *FlashForward* is based on the science fiction novel of the same name by Robert Sawyer (1999) in which the main character is a scientist who works at CERN, where the Large Hadron Collider particle accelerator is performing a run to search for the Higgs boson, with the side effect of a global blackout during which all people on earth have a flashforward of twenty-two years. The television series adds other main characters and changes the leap forward in time into six months, but the basic premise remains the same: everybody is confronted with an image from the future. The show questions the idea of what it is to live and act from a vision of the future. Since the future as such is always speculative (we just simply cannot know for sure what will happen in the future so it is not a matter of determinism even though destiny becomes an important

problem), some fear their vision will come true, others fear it will not come true; but all have to act in respect to their flashforward. As in *Hiroshima Mon Amour*, in *FlashForward* there is a collision between a collective fate and the fate of individuals, but the television series presents us with a much more mosaic story that is typical for the neuro-image's database narrative (presenting the countless possible variations of the future). Quite literally we see here how the idea of the future has now started to inform our image culture. We can also see this perspective of our present and past from an idea of a vision of the future more broadly in culture: since 9/11 the War on Terror has marked the moment of preventive war, tests that measure the telomeres in our DNA can predict the age of death, and the ecological future of the planet is more uncertain than ever. Again, there is more to say about the ways in which the neuro-image resonates with larger developments in contemporary culture.

At this point I will just make a few more comparative observations between the future in *FlashForward*, or, more generally, the future from the third synthesis of time in the neuro-image and the future in *Hiroshima Mon Amour*, or the future based in the second synthesis of time. In both *Hiroshima Mon Amour* and *FlashForward* the disaster is in fact caused by a scientific invention: the atomic bomb and the Large Hadron Collider, respectively. However, in *Hiroshima Mon Amour*, as we have seen, future disasters are imagined from this past event: it has happened; it will happen again. *FlashForward* actually deals with speculations about a future disaster: we do not know if the Large Hadron Collider will create any effect as described. Most scientists agree that it will absolutely not provide anything like a blackout, let alone a leap in consciousness into the future. Nevertheless, it clearly poses the whole narrative as a dimension of the future. On a more individual scale, *Hiroshima Mon Amour* deals with the horror of forgetting the most intensive and unforgettable love affair of the past or that will become past. In *FlashForward* the horror (or surprise) is situated in the future. Some characters see themselves in the future in another love affair, something unimaginable in the present. In all cases, the future influences the present in *FlashForward*, just as much as the past influences the present in *Hiroshima Mon Amour*.

Now, one may object that *Hiroshima Mon Amour* and *FlashForward* are absolutely incomparable. And of course this is true. *Hiroshima Mon Amour* is an absolute masterpiece of modern cinema, a pure time-image in the Deleuzian sense, and an ostensive image (with naked references) in Rancière's terms. As I have argued at the beginning of this paper,

*Hiroshima Mon Amour* does not seem to fit Rancière's own classification and arguments for modern cinema as playfully critical, and impure in the sense that commercial and artistic images are mixed. I have tried to argue that Rancière's very useful classification does not match very well with the cinematographic examples upon which he draws, which are all time-images based in the second synthesis of time. The future of the image, as defined by Rancière, asks to move beyond the time-image into a new and impure regime of imageness where the commercial and the artistic are increasingly mixed. The neuro-image I here propose, in following Deleuze's suggestions to explore cinema's temporal dimensions (Deleuze 2000: 372) as part of the contemporary Hollywood machine, is such an impure image. But the neuro-image can also present itself in a more artistic way, which remains perhaps closer to the time-image, but which is rather found in the museum, gallery or on the Internet.

*After Hiroshima Mon Amour* (Kolbowski 2008) is a digital film presented as a museum installation that can also be viewed online. This film is an example of a critical and artistic remixing and operation on the image that would be closer to Rancière's third category of future-images. But, just like the key films in contemporary Hollywood, this film is a neuro-image in its temporal dimensions. Kolbowski's film repeats *Hiroshima Mon Amour* from the point of view of different future disasters (in this case the War in Iraq and the Katrina disaster in New Orleans); the allegorical love affair of the French woman and Japanese man is serialised and played by ten different actors of various ethnicities, races and genders. The famous opening scene of the 'ashembrace' is slowed down, made to stutter and filtered with colours; various scenes of the original film are recreated in black and white; contemporary material downloaded from the Internet is added, and the score and sound design of the original film is remixed. In this way the audio-visual relations become relations of time: while the texts address the past by recalling the exact dialogues of *Hiroshima Mon Amour* ('You have seen nothing in Hiroshima'), the images speak from repetitions in the future (images of soldiers' video diaries in Iraq), of multiplication of the wars and love affairs in an eternal return. With the concept of the neuro-image, that can take both artistic characteristics of the time-image and classical Hollywood characteristics of the movement-image, but which remixes, reorders and serialises these images in new ways, we can see how we have entered an image-type of the third synthesis of time, which speaks from the future, but which itself also indicates that the future is now.

## Notes

1. This paper is a companion piece to 'Synaptic Signals' (Pisters 2011), which focuses on the schizoanalytic aspects of the neuro-image.
2. I do not mean to say that Rancière and Deleuze make a similar argument about the image. Rancière is more concerned with a political-aesthetical dialectics between the visible and the sayable, the visible and the invisible. Deleuze addresses the ontological problem of the complex temporal dimensions of cinema, the virtual and the actual (which is not the same as a play between the visible and the invisible). In a way, I try to develop a temporal ontology for the future of the image described by Rancière on a different level.
3. A fuller argument on the neuro-image is developed in Pisters (2012, in press).

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