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The global repositioning of the city symphony: sound, space, and trauma in *11'09"01—September 11* (Alain Brigand 2002)

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The public process of memorializing the events of September 11, 2001 has taken a variety of forms. Some involve conventional frameworks for expressing grief and solidarity, based in architecture and public space, whereas others depend upon emerging digital media genres such as the web memorial.

The most visible (and contentious) efforts at traditional commemoration include the erection of memorial architecture at two geographical locations, Ground Zero in lower Manhattan — site of the National September 11 Memorial and Museum — and Shanksville, Pennsylvania — the planned location of the Flight 93 National Memorial, for which the U.S. Park Service purchased land in 2009. The World Trade Center Site Memorial competition garnered 5,201 submissions from 63 nations: the winner was a design by Michael Arad and Peter Walker entitled Reflecting Absence. A number of critics charged that the design was too costly and complex, and many rejected the idea of a memorial situated below ground level (a feature of the original plans, which have been modified). When construction began in March of 2006, protesters appeared at the site. Despite ongoing controversies, construction continues on both the tower and the memorial. As of June 2010, the WTC Memorial is slated to open on September 11, 2011, while the Freedom Tower opening has been delayed until 2013.

Web projects that seek to memorialize 9/11 include Exploring 9/11, a series of streaming videos developed under the auspices of the National September 11 Museum, and the Sonic Memorial Project, a sound archive that contains recorded material drawn from the aural history of the World Trade Center (WTC). The architecture of web memorials is grounded in sounds and images and in language and rhetoric rather than in bricks and mortar; as such, they use their own medium-specific strategies to commemorate and memorialize traumatic events. They cannot cordon off a physical space to engulf and position visitors as ideal witnesses in the way that memorial architecture can. Instead, the visual and aural attributes of the web site are employed to construct a psychic space and to offer a quasi-cinematic experience that promises immediacy, interactivity, and repetition as the sites orchestrate and recycle sounds and images to provoke the visitor to "re-live" moments in time. In the case of 9/11, visitors to web memorials are returning to events that they may well have witnessed on computer screens or television monitors in the first place. Simply by virtue of their formal and technological attributes, these web memorials are capable of powerfully

recapitulating the way that media broadcasts of images and sounds were central to the real-time experience of the 9/11 terrorist attacks for many people.

Institutionally generated memorial sites like the two I have mentioned are by no means the only web memorials that commemorate 9/11. Aaron Hess examines individually constructed 9/11 memorials in the essay, "In digital remembrance: vernacular memory and the rhetorical construction of web memorials," where he argues that individual memorials "offer a unique forum for discussion of the vernacular experience" (828). Because individual sites are frequently interactive, offering opportunities for visitors to leave comments or join conversation threads, Hess stresses the way the sites amplify vernacular voices and thus pose a counterpoint to institutional sites that emphasize official concerns (828). Hess concludes that, while these sites are "unique to the expression of vernacular voice," they also invoke a rhetoric of durability and permanence, utilizing the "material functions of physical or off-line memorials" (816).

My primary aim in this essay is to analyze an attempt to produce a cinematic rather than a material sense of duration —one that proposes a shared, global sense of time and space— as part of the project of memorializing 9/11 in the omnibus film *11'9"01-September 11* (Alain Brigand 2002). I focus specifically on visual and sound techniques that condense and expand time and space. Most of these strategies have long been associated with experimental cinema, and here they are marshaled in the service of remembering and reconsidering a traumatic experience.

Before turning to my analysis of the film, I briefly return to The Sonic Memorial Project because its spatial and temporal architecture bears similarities to that of *11'9"01*. In fact, the Sonic Memorial shares attributes of both the officially-sanctioned architectural memorial and the commemorative film project. The Sonic Memorial assumes a formal responsibility for creating a space for public memorialization like the former, but it uses cinematic techniques to manipulate space and time and perhaps to create new experiences of space and time. The Sonic Memorial Project and *11'9"01* draw upon visible and, perhaps more notably, aural evidence as they explore the potentialities of their own media forms in order to contribute to the cultural work of remembrance.

Condensing space and expanding time: the Sonic Memorial Project

As a sound archive, the experience of the Sonic Memorial Project offers an experience based in a sense of temporal duration. Memorialization takes place in the ephemeral time of listening because it depends upon the time-bound transmission of sound waves to produce an effect on its listener. This contrasts with the (seemingly) permanent temporal duration associated with memorials built around physical structures and objects. Among many types of recordings contained in Sonic Memorial, the sounds that perhaps most poignantly evoke the tragedy of 9/11 are recorded telephone messages left by individuals in WTC that morning. These are the last words that those at the WTC who perished in the terrorist attacks communicated to their loved ones. They are also, interestingly, sound bytes associated with repetition and with everyday life — they are documents that each of us makes and remakes on a daily basis. In this sense these recordings pull listeners away from the monumental time of official remembrance and into the brief, irregular time frame of the fragment, the coincidence, and the quotidian.

Despite or perhaps because of the memorial's inherent temporal elusiveness, its design speaks to a desire to establish a tangible and even physical space of remembrance. The Sonic Memorial Project condenses the diverse spaces associated with the 9/11 attacks that took place in Washington, DC; Shanksville, Pennsylvania; and New York City into the empty space formerly occupied by the WTC, renamed Ground Zero after the attacks. There certainly are reasons to emphasize Ground Zero when commemorating 9/11: the magnitude of the loss of lives, and the fact that television and cable broadcasts captured the attacks virtually as they happened, for example. Another factor to consider is the difference in the type of loss experienced at each location. In addition to the thousands of

lives lost at the WTC, 10 million square feet of architectural space were obliterated when the towers collapsed (Sorkin 222). The loss of human life — in most cases without any physical remains — was compounded by what seemed to television viewers to be a near-instant erasure of the buildings that housed and contained those lives. Michael Sorkin describes Ground Zero as a "great theater for the formalization of grief" (215). The few remaining structural elements of the buildings became so important, he writes, because the

> "horrific vaporization of bodies gave these surviving remnants representative force" (217).

The vaporization of bodies and buildings lends Ground Zero a particularly chilling and dramatic weight. However, it seems odd that the other two geographical sites where attacks occurred on 9/11 have been completely erased or, perhaps more accurately, silenced within the Sonic Memorial Project.

The spatial condensation that the Sonic Memorial enacts — casting Ground Zero as the synecdoche for the United States under attack — works to situate the 9/11 events within a rubric of traditional warfare, where martial aggression occurs through focused geographical incursions. Another rubric, not used, would have been to cast the events within a framework of asymmetrical conflict, where diverse, smaller scale disruptions attempt to destabilize the enemy socially, economically, and psychologically by undermining the very social and technological systems by which the more powerful entity (in this case, the United States) achieves and wields power.

Although the Sonic Memorial condenses the space of 9/11 by confining its archive to sounds related to the WTC, the project shapes and expands the temporal dimension of remembering. The memorial offers an aural history of the WTC spanning several decades rather than confining itself to the day of the attacks. This feature underscores the notion that 9/11 represented an assault on the American way of life by reinforcing the idea that the WTC was a microcosm of New York, or even the United States itself at work and at play, functioning harmoniously for decades prior to the attacks. These surviving aural remnants that acquire "representative force," in Sorkin's words, are digitally preserved sound waves that memorialize a particular set of social interactions — parties, the day-to-day grind of a job — that took place at the WTC from the 1970s through September 2001. Whereas the Sonic Memorial fixes the space of 9/11 through its focus on the WTC, it magnifies the time span associated with the tragedy by decades. In some sense, the memorial reconfigures time and space in ways that exert control over historical events that refuse to conform to conventional spatial and temporal standards for war. Distinctions of space and time are relevant here. In traditional conflicts, battles are planned and ordered in time and space (even if the reality of combat exceed those designs). In terrorist asymmetry, acts are random, irregular, and unforeseen.

Ultimately, the Sonic Memorial creates a paracinematic cohesion of fragments rather than providing the apparent permanence, linear time, and monolithic space of the architectural memorial. This design underscores the fact that the 9/11 attacks were, and were intended to be, televisual and cinematic events, witnessed on T.V. screens but modeled after familiar film genres. The memorial also invites its users to experience memory not as information retrieval, but as a process of reconstruction that may be informed by the continued production of memorials across various media.

Web memorials are not the only modes of commemoration that invoke cinematic experiences. 9/11 has also been unofficially memorialized through documentaries and fiction films, some of which reconstruct the terrorist attacks of 9/11 while others trace (or imagine) the U.S. military's exploits in Afghanistan and Iraq. As they explore these traumatic events, these films create an unofficial archive of sounds and images that contributes to the collective memory of the events and aftermath of 9/11. If, according to Marianne Hirsch, photographs are "fragmentary remnants that shape the cultural work of postmemory" (116) for those too young to witness the historical events of the Holocaust first hand, I would propose that the sounds and images that have acquired iconic status

in post-9/11 films shape the cultural work of remembering 9/11, both for those who witnessed the events and their media dissemination and for those who were too young to experience 9/11.

Reconfiguring global space and time in *11'9"01*

11'9"01—September 11 exhibits several of the strategies used in the Sonic Memorial and, in turn, these techniques later appear in fiction films about 9/11. All of these media forms shape the cultural work of remembering 9/11 as an emotional, political, and aesthetic event. Just as the Sonic Memorial shapes a series of complex events by manipulating time and space, *11'9"01* constructs certain temporal and spatial frameworks that bear implications for the way that day is remembered.

An international omnibus project that combines the work of 11 different filmmakers, the film comprises documentary, fiction, and experimental modes. The project draws heavily upon two experimental cinema traditions — the omnibus film and the structural film — while a number of the short films contained within it recall a third, the city symphony. Although the film relies upon avant-garde strategies to restage the trauma of 9/11, the project manipulates sounds and images and space and time in ways that have increasingly come to signify and to memorialize 9/11 in both documentary and fiction films.

The film's production history makes it clear that French producer Alain Brigand's priority lay with project's formal design, assuring each director's autonomy by refusing to impose expectations or limitations upon content. Working toward a release on September 11, 2002 at the Toronto Film Festival, whose program had been severely disrupted by the events of 9/11 the year before, Brigand charged 11 filmmakers with the task of creating a film with a duration of 11 minutes, nine seconds and one frame. (The film's title in French is *Onze Minutes, Neuf Secondes, un Cadre)*. This rigorous formalism reflects the legacy of structural cinema, a mode of experimental film in which the structure or organization of the work is at least as important as, if not more important than, narrative or thematic concerns. Structural film "insists on its shape," P. Adams Sitney has famously written; "what content it has is minimal and subsidiary to the outline" (Sitney 227). In Brigand's collection, content is not fully subsidiary to the outline, yet the fact remains that the conceptual design of *11'9"01* provides a transparent and symbolic organizing principle, enforces a material limitation, and imposes uniformity on a diverse group of films.

Brigand's logistical specifications encompass both temporal (minutes and seconds) and spatial dimensions (the single frame) and thus hint at the amalgamation of time and space that characterizes the film's overall approach to remembering the 9/11 attacks. Like the Sonic Memorial Project, the film uses the site of the twin towers of the WTC, whose collapse was broadcast around the world on television and radio, to represent, by condensation and synechdoche, the multiple and geographically diverse tragedies of that day.

The film's focus on the space of lower Manhattan and the attack on the WTC serves to unify a cluster of disparate events, and it also lends coherence to the inherently fragmented genre of the omnibus film. As participants in a project that Brigand hopefully describes as "cinematographic mosaic" (Brigand), filmmakers Youssef Chahine, Amos Gitai, Alejandro González Iñárritu, Shohei Imamura, Claude Lelouch, Ken Loach, Samira Makhmalbaf, Mira Nair, Idrissa Ouedraogo, Sean Penn and Danis Tanovic all interpret 9/11 through different genres as well as from diverse political, cultural, and geographical vantage points.

11'9"01's political resonances immediately evoke two precursors within the omnibus tradition, namely *Deutschland im Herbst* (*Germany in Autumn* 1978), a film that brought together 10 German directors, including Alexander Kluge and Rainer Fassbinder, and who weave together documentary and dramatization to address the Red Army Faction's (RAF) kidnapping and murder of Hanns-Martin Schleyer. The second precursor is the "newsreel collage" film (Adler) *Loin du Vietnam* (*Far From Vietnam* 1967), made by Claude Lelouch, Jean-Luc Godard, Joris Ivens,

William Klein, Chris Marker, Alain Resnais, and Agnes Varda, which served as a protest of the U.S. war in Vietnam.

These two films raise questions of cinematic form in conjunction with issues of radical political philosophy and activism, placing particular emphasis on the persistence of fascism and imperialism. In the opening segment of *Deutschland im Herbst*, Fassbinder "plays" himself as a filmmaker struggling with his paranoia, anger, and his inability to work. Woven throughout the many vignettes that comment on German attitudes toward political dissent in general and the Red Army Faction in particular are scenarios that highlight complex political and aesthetic conundrums. In one example, television network executives debate the proper "frame" for a presentation of *Antigone* as they seek to minimize the comparisons between Sophocles' play — which features a "violent" woman who defies the official edict refusing the burial of the rebel leader of the recent civil war (Polyneices, her brother) — and contemporary Germany, where a controversy erupted regarding the burial of members of RAF members who died in prison under questionable circumstances. Here, few distinctions can be drawn between the politics of representation and "real" politics. The out-of-work filmmaker is personally and professionally devastated by the failure of the radical left in Germany to challenge contemporary fascism, embodied in the person of former SS leader Schleyer; and television network employees express their anxieties about a classical Greek play that bears a remarkably charged significance for contemporary politics.

In addition to these two overtly political omnibus films, another recent film, like Brigand's, combines structural cinema and the omnibus tradition: *Lumière and Company* (*Lumière et compagnie* 1995). *Lumière and Company* is more interested in probing the nature and durability of the cinematic medium than it is in interrogating global politics. The project — which numbers among its contributors three *11'9"01* participants, Chahine, Lelouch, and Ouedraogo — is a collection of short films by 41 directors that presents itself as an aesthetic investigation of the art of cinema. Its filmmakers pointedly (and poignantly) address the imminent possibility of the death of cinema 100 years after the first Lumière brothers' *actualités* were filmed. Like the *11'9"01* project, *Lumière and Company* imposed structural film-inspired technical restrictions on contributors. They were enjoined to use the Lumière brothers' hand-cranked *cinématographe* to make a film of no more than 52 seconds in three or fewer takes, without a synchronous soundtrack. The devices that unify the disparate entries include brief interviews with each filmmaker and the presentation of "making of" documentaries (of 52 seconds in length) for each 52 second film.

Given the political and aesthetic heritage of the omnibus film, and given the political and media inflections associated with 9/11, it's not surprising that the individual films in *11'09"01* address both political and aesthetic questions in their work. The majority of the films in the collection are narrative dramatizations that explore the responses of individuals or small groups at the moment they first hear about or experience the attacks (Makhmalbaf; Lelouch; Chahine; Gitaï; Tanovic; Penn). Others employ narratives that span a few days or weeks after the attacks, tracing their short-term impact (Ouedraogo; Nair). Several reject narrative altogether (Loach; Gonzáles Iñárritu) or work in an allegorical mode (Imamura). Even the most conventional narratives call attention to aspects of film form:

- in Chahine's film, the director carries on a conversation with a ghost soldier, reminding viewers of the capacity of the moving image to bring the dead to life;
- in Gitai's film, a layered structure turns the broadcast media into a hall of mirrors, as a reporter covering a fatal car bombing in Tel Aviv finds that her report has been pre-empted by news of the 9/11 attacks;
- in Lelouch's film, sound and image are used disjunctively, competing for the spectator's attention, as a hearing impaired woman living in New York remains unaware of a television in her living room that is broadcasting footage of the WTC attacks as they happen.

In all these instances, the formal capacities of the film medium are given enhanced emphasis because some conventional attribute of sound and image, such as legibility or synchronization, is violated.

The most important formal issue for *11'9"01* is that, like all omnibus films, it must contend with its own inherent fragmentation. According to David Scott Diffrient, who has written extensively on the omnibus film,

> "Containment is one of the central issues appertaining to cinematic episodicity, which seeks some middle ground between unchecked excess and absolute boundaries. How does one mark off one self-contained narrative from another in a package feature or omnibus film?" (Diffrient 529).

Brigand's containment strategy, like the choices made in designing the Sonic Memorial, manifests the desire to condense the time and space of 9/11. Containment here takes the form of an overarching graphic device that opens the film and re-appears between each of the 11 segments. The "clock-map" of the world is a dynamic, ethereal graphic that superimposes a large, bright white analog clockface onto a dark, starry background. In the opening of the film, small luminous clockfaces, with sections of continents etched in them, glide across the dark background. After they move into place, forming the continents, all the clocks stop ticking. A bright red glowing dot illuminates New York City, signifying the moment of the attack on the WTC. The various times on the clockfaces record the same instant in different time zones. Finally, the clock and maps dissolve into the title.

This device, which would look right at home on a network or cable news broadcast, attempts to unify the 11 fragmented films and indeed the complex event itself by compressing the time and space of one moment of the attack across the globe, signified by the static clockfaces, the jigsaw-puzzle continents, and the fiery red glow. Yet it remains unclear which moment on that day was or should be designated as "time zero": the first plane slamming into the north tower (8:46 am EST), the second plane hitting the south tower (9:03 am), or the collapse of the towers (9:59 am—south tower—and 10:28 am—north tower) even if we momentarily set aside the question of how to account for the Pentagon and Pennsylvania crashes. The clock map appears to use the first crash into the south tower to synchronize the film's representational clock: no clockface reads 8:46 am, but two clocks located over the North American continent read 7:46 am and 6:46 am.

Before each of the 11 films, this graphic returns with the same black background and white continent silhouettes, but without the clockfaces. In these introductory segments, after New York glows red, the national map of the filmmaker whose work is about to be shown is illuminated in white. The repetition of the graphic suggests equivalence among the disparate films, but several obvious dislocations arise. Some spatial disjunctions are meant to be obvious; for example, the fact that New York appears geographically distant from some of the nations from which the filmmakers hail (Iran, or Burkina Faso, for example). The fact that New York—a city—is presented as the equivalent of entire nations introduces an incongruity as well. Yet another spatial discrepancy remains invisible: the fact that some films made by directors who are citizens of countries other than the United States are not necessarily set in those "other" countries. For example, Lelouch, Iñárritu, and Nair's films are set in New York rather than in France, Mexico, and India, respectively —so the illumination of those national maps undermines the ability of the graphic to introduce these films (set in New York) because that ties the director and the film to a specific, "non-American" national identity.

With this graphic device, Brigand envisions a global empathy that can be both aroused and expressed through media forms: the graphic implies that the moment at which the first plane crashed into the WTC (which, of course many people in the United States and around the world did not witness) produced instantaneous, worldwide reverberations and a sense of empathetic identification. *9'11"01* articulates this connection through a firmly rooted sense of nationality, and national identity becomes the defining feature of global diversity in the project. The film's resort to

notions of cultural difference based on national origin contradicts one potentially progressive feature of the omnibus film. By virtue of the collaborative process, the omnibus film "problematizes conventional paradigms of authorship and nationhood" (Diffrient 2005 19). By constructing a moment on 9/11 as a mechanism for global synchronization and asserting the importance of the national cultures of the directors, Brigand ratifies traditional paradigms of authorship and nationhood rather than questioning them. In fact, during the film's opening credits several passages of text introduce the 11 participating directors by associating them with specific national locations and perspectives. The text reads:

> "11 directors from different countries and cultures. 11 visions of the tragic events that occurred in New-York City on September 11, 2001. 11 points of view committing their subjective conscience. Complete freedom of expression."

The Internet Movie Database refers to all of the individual films except for Makhmalbaf's (entitled "God, Construction and Destruction") according to the filmmaker's national origin, so that Iñárritu's entry is titled "Mexico," Lelouch's "France," and Nair's "India," although they are all set in New York. In its use of global space, the map graphic suggests that each film offers a perspective emanating from a specific national-physical location, even when the directors themselves feel no injunction to provide such nationally coded or spatially situated representations in their films. If anything, many of the films intentionally elide national identity and imply that war, migration, transportation and emerging communication technologies erode traditional ideas of nationality. In Samira Makhmalbaf's film, Afghan refugees are living in Iran; in Nair's and Lelouch's films, a Pakistani family and a French emigrè, respectively, live in New York.

Brigand's unifying framework thus reiterates political and aesthetic assumptions regarding national cultures that the filmmakers themselves seem hesitant to endorse. The comparison with *Deutschland im Herbst* is particularly instructive. The earlier film's apparently solipsistic focus on German culture permitted its contributors to question whether or not the idea of a national culture is always fascistic, whereas the nationally decentered *11'9"01* project is paradoxically framed by devices that marshal the ideology of nationality to serve a notion of global empathy, if not solidarity, with the United States. This logic, much like the spatial emphasis of the Sonic Memorial, reiterates a desire to recast 9/11 in terms of traditional warfare—and thus perhaps implicitly endorses the U.S. invasions of Iraq and Afghanistan: friends and enemies alike assume the form of nations (Afghanistan, Iraq) rather than that of a multi-national, multi-nodal terrorist network.

Whereas the omnibus film tradition presents a clear lineage for Brigand's project, it's a somewhat more challenging proposition to argue that *11'09"01* also lays claim to the heritage of the city symphony film, a merger of documentary and experimental cinema that treats the modern city as its subject. In some ways the events themselves, as depicted by the broadcast media, unfolded as a surrealist collage (a genre that influences city symphonies) in that the coverage juxtaposed the top floors of a modern office building and the jumbo jet; the box cutter and the cell phone; a cave in Tora Bora and the sidewalk shrine.

More concretely, one stated intention of Brigand's film—to present diverse responses to 9/11—insists that viewers reflect on New York City in the context of global finance/world trade and transnational terrorism. *11'9"01* encourages us to reconsider the city symphony through its relentless return to New York in the graphic that introduces each film and also within the films themselves. Only one film—Imamura's—avoids acknowledging the New York attacks. And another film—Gitai's—shows us important events occurring in other locales that are aurally though not visually upstaged by the New York events. In Tanovic's film, Bosnians draw connections between the destruction in New York and their experiences of the massacre at Srebrenica, and the film's protagonist and her colleagues choose to conduct their weekly silent protest in honor of those victims as well as their missing family members.

11'09"01 sheds some light on the contradictory meanings ascribed to New York at the beginning of the 21th century. If Dziga Vertov's *Man with A Movie Camera* (1928) presented a coherent vision

of the Soviet city as a utopian merger of human and machine, then *11'9"01* offers fragmented images of modernism's successes and failures. New York is often described as "paradigmatic of a distinctive American modernity" (Shiel 165). It spawned the first city symphony film, Paul Strand and Charles Sheeler's *Manhatta* in 1921, and inspired numerous others, including works by Robert Flaherty, Jay Leyda, Irving Brown, Herman Weinberg, Shirley Clarke, and Marie Menken, among others. New York has been so closely associated with modernism that by 2000 it had been eclipsed on screen by postmodern megalopolises, including Los Angeles, Phoenix, Houston, and Las Vegas (Shiel), and Beirut, Buenos Aires and Lagos (Beattie). In narrative cinema, New York came to represent unbridled capitalism, ably serving as the setting for Oliver Stone's *Wall Street* in 1987 and for Bret Easton Ellis's yuppie satire, *American Psycho*, adapted for the screen by Mary Harron in 2000 (and shot in both New York and Toronto). At the time of the 9/11 attacks, Wall Street seemed to have ratified the politics and economics of neoliberalism, with the Dow Jones rising to a "Clinton" dot.com high in January of 2000 and with the much discussed Disneyfication of Times Square.

Because it situates New York as a global city without explicitly addressing its role as a locus for the negotiation of global capital flows, *11'09"01* paradoxically erases the spaces of the city beyond the WTC. New York becomes synonymous with the towers (in the films that are set in the U.S. and abroad) and thus becomes symbolic of the way that the successes of modernity and capitalism are also its failures. Such an association occurs despite Brigand's attempts to shape the project as a meditation on global unity through its synchronized time frame, its presumption that global attention and empathy were fixed on New York, and the equalization of urban New York with national spaces envisioned by a mapped silhouette.

Sound and space

In addition to *11'9"01*'s globalized spatial and temporal focus on New York through the graphic device, several individual films take New York as their point of departure. Here the city symphony's reliance upon musical form and rhythmic editing is made manifest. As implied by the term symphony, these films are generally not organized by a narrative thread, but through repetition and motifs that speak to emotions without the apparatus of an organizing narrative logic. In *11'9"01*, the symphonic model is referenced and ruptured by filmmakers who place special emphasis on sound-image relationships. Several films feature oral and aural modes of communication, including radio broadcasts (Ouedraogo and Tanovic) and reading/writing aloud (Loach).

Not coincidentally, I would argue, the films that might be described as New York stories—by Lelouch, Iñárritu, Nair and Penn—all emphasize sound. Sound waves and light waves become the means for the transmission of trauma—with literal concussions and reverberations in the films by Lelouch and Penn. But it is as if all four directors seek to avoid the "visible evidence" of the events around which Brigand has organized the project—with iconic footage of the attacks on the WTC and the subsequent collapse—and, instead, investigate the role of aural evidence. Sound may be central to 9/11 in these films because iconic televised images represent the public, monumental, overwhelming and distanced aspect of 9/11 whereas sound has the ability to function on a more personal, even intimate level. As Christian Metz argued, sounds are not anchored in space the way that projected moving images are; they are ambient, mobile, and difficult to locate (30). Furthermore, sound waves literally vibrate parts of the listener's body—initially, at least, the tympanic membrane—so even as film viewers work to fix the visual source of ambient sounds on screen, the vibrations seem to have escaped from the confines of the representation and to occupy the same bodily space as the spectator. Emphasizing sound in these New York films, then, may permit individual viewers and auditors to break from the official, visual constructs that surround the representation of 9/11 that were securely in place by the fall of 2002 (the time of the film's release) and to re-experience 9/11 on a different perceptual and emotional level. David Simpson suggests that

"rituals of memorialization exist to assimilate these intense and particular griefs into received vocabularies and higher, broader realms than the merely personal" (2).

The *11'9'01* films that shift their emphasis from the visual to the aural realm reject the "received vocabularies" and speak to audiences through an intensely personal soundscape of trauma.

Claude Lelouch's film makes use of the televised images of the WTC, yet it smothers the images in silence. His film depicts the potential breakup of a relationship between a hearing-impaired woman and her lover through flashbacks, sign language, and the printed text of a farewell letter composed on a computer screen. Midway through the film, after the man leaves for his job as a tour guide at the WTC, the woman writes her letter. As she types, she is positioned so that she cannot see the images of the blazing towers that play on the television in the next room, in the foreground of the frame. The woman registers the shock wave of the collapse of the towers only by witnessing the turbulence of her coffee cup, which trembles at the concussion of the tower's collapse. She does not realize its significance even after her partner returns, ghost-like with ash covering his body. Her inability to comprehend what has happened without having witnessed it through visual means could be interpreted in several ways. In one reading, her personal drama distracts her from political events (an interpretation that parallels the view that the attacks were a wake up call for the United States). In another, one's ability to comprehend events is not necessarily correlated with one's physical proximity to those events, but instead to the visual and aural representations of the events.

Lelouch distances the woman from the events (despite the fact that she is living in the midst of them) and then situates the viewer at a distance from her character because we have a greater knowledge of the day's events than she does. We know the man is headed into the inferno and suspect he might perish; we recognize the television images of which she is oblivious; and we serve as her proxy as we begin to grieve for her lover before she knows to do so. Lelouch's manipulation of sound and image—or, more precisely, his orchestration of their disconnection—has been criticized as recapitulating 9/11 as a private melodrama (Lim). The film's dampening of sound engulfs viewers and encases them within a private story and its potential for melodramatic excess, while at the same time the images of the WTC in the foreground force a reckoning with the "outside" world. Visually and sonically, the film creates an inner and an outer world and probes their lack of congruence. Absences become palpable in the gap between sound and image: the lover's absence, the woman's lack of knowledge of the attacks, the destruction of buildings and lives at the WTC. The film elicits feelings of loss on behalf of the woman protagonist based on assumptions that prove faulty: she does not experience the losses viewers may anticipate because she never knows her lover is in jeopardy or that the attacks have occurred. By conjuring shared memories of 9/11 within an aural cocoon and a visually disjointed frame, the film offers viewers a way to re-experience the trauma through a character (who never experiences it) and from a distance.

Sean Penn's film similarly manipulates sound to re-create 9/11 as a distant event for someone living in New York who is already grieving. The film opens with a black screen accompanied by the monologue of a widower (played by Ernest Borgnine) who carries on a continuous one-sided conversation with his dead wife. The sound of television cooking shows plays in the background and a jarring alarm clock buzzes for a full minute before being silenced. As the man sleeps, television images of the WTC in flames are paired with the ticking of the same alarm clock, recalling the clock-map device and the suspension of time. When the towers fall, they do so only in silhouette: the shadow of the towers slowly rolls down the outside of the widower's apartment building, and a withered plant miraculously blooms in the light of the sunshine now permitted through his apartment windows. Dennis Lim writes of this moment as "either a mind-boggling injunction to look on the bright side (literally) or a deeply sick joke about Tribeca real estate" (Lim). But here again, Penn, like Lelouch, attempts to represent 9/11 through alternative visual and sound techniques that ask viewers to re-examine their own understanding of the events, and particularly, the images and sounds that have become synonymous with 9/11. The fictional

characters in Lelouch and Penn's films are closer to the attacks in New York than most Americans were on 9/11—yet they fail to witness, experience, or comprehend them according to the standard media iconography . If memory is a constructive process, as neuroscientists have increasingly argued, then these films experiment with memory by marginalizing the visual images that seem to transparently explain the events (at the WTC) and by exploiting the intimate nature of sound in ways that might shape the process of memorialization.

In Mira Nair's dramatization of the true story of Salman Hamdani, a young American of Pakistani heritage who is initially investigated as a terrorist, then proclaimed a hero for volunteering to help at Ground Zero, sound elements produce a cacophony of cultures. Phone calls from Karachi, from the FBI, and television news reports create an aural surround that reiterates the fear and chaos immediately after September 11. When those voices clear, and the literal and metaphorical dust settles, the sound design also resolves into a more conventional mode. Throughout, the film highlights the role of the omnipresent television set and emphasizes its capacity to serve as aural wallpaper. Television broadcasts inform the Hamdani family about what the authorities believe is true about their son (they suspect he was a terrorist because he was present at Ground Zero), but the television screen makes no claim to representing reality or truth, visually or verbally. Salman is finally recognized for what he was—a hero who had rushed to the scene to help—also on a television segment. When Mrs. Hamdani delivers her son's eulogy at the mosque, formally voicing her anguish, pride, and grief at raising a son with such character that he would risk his life for others, she stands before another screen. This screen—glimpsed earlier when Mrs. Hamdani had prayed alone at the mosque—offers a not so subtle reminder that, regardless of their purported transparency, screens are also barriers. In this film, sound and space are used to signify but also to unsettle expectations about cultural differences. Mrs. Hamdani speaks before all of those assembled for the memorial service, but the women of the congregation sit behind the screen.

In each of these New York films, a separation, distancing, or breakdown between sound and image mediates the relation of individuals to the terrorist attacks. The films propose that the experience of 9/11, even for people living in New York or standing at Ground Zero, can only be comprehended as ruptured cinema, through experimental techniques that undermine the flow of the narrative on film and in viewer's memories.

Perhaps the most-remarked upon and the most controversial contribution to *11'9"01* is the submission by Alejandro González Iñárritu. This film draws its images exclusively from footage recorded on 9/11, although not all of them have been televised. Whereas *The Village Voice*'s Dennis Lim rejected Lelouch and Penn's films as "moral black holes [. . .] presumptuous enough to situate themselves in Lower Manhattan on that very Tuesday morning—in the service of enlisting the actual disaster as a plot twist," he writes of Iñárritu 's film that "it's hard to say if this devastating, nakedly exploitative work has a larger point beyond the evocation and infliction of trauma" (Lim). The fraught emotions associated with 9/11 and an ambivalence regarding any representations of trauma are apparent in Lim's sentiments and they leave little room for artists to maneuver. To use the events within a larger story is reprehensible; but to try to wrest new meanings from the very images that documented the trauma amounts to naked exploitation.

At the film's opening, Iñárritu confounds cinematic legibility by sonically accompanying a black screen for more than two minutes with nothing but rhythmic chanting in an obscure language. Despite its emotional charge, the chanting cannot be directly connected to the day's events: according to Allison Young, the voices belong to the Chamulas Indians of Chiapas, Mexico who are chanting a prayer for the dead (Young 41). After two minutes, the black screen is occasionally, yet also rhythmically, interrupted by brief glimpses of the blazing towers and people jumping out of them. A layered soundtrack contains prayers, news reports, individual testimonies, and sirens. At first hearing, the film seems to conform to documentary conventions of location sound, yet there is a disjunction even here between the aural and visual elements. Various individual voices describe the scene at the WTC, for example, yet the sound is not linked to specific images and often plays against the black screen, creating the kinds of fissures commonly associated with experimental

filmmaking practices. Temporal disjunctions are prevalent as well. The sound of a plane crash is heard after the scenes of people jumping from the towers have been made visible and immediately before the towers fall to the ground in silence. The film rejects the synchronization of "Time Zero" and the global situating of Ground Zero within Brigand's graphic device.

The film's similarly fragmented compilation soundtrack draws from recordings and broadcasts from far-flung locales including Vietnam, South Africa, Poland, and Portugal (Young 41). They are commentaries from individuals who could not have witnessed firsthand the visible evidence of the tragedy, yet the pairing of images and sound positions implies that the sound comments on the images. Allison Young argues that the effect "aurally regenerates" 9/11, compressing it into a few minutes of cinematic time (41). She continues,

> "Such accelerated repetitions, have the character of trauma, dwelling on and in a memory without resolution or respite" (41).

What is most compelling to me, however, is that the soundscape "aurally regenerates" the experience through prayer and through media commentary, the latter representing some official voices of reaction to the events. The film thus uses experimental techniques to contrast once again the intimacy of oral and aural expression—the chanted prayers—and the public, legible, and official statements of broadcast media. Here the experience of "dwelling in memory" looks more like a process of reconstructing memory by moving between the personal and the public.

The sound design in Iñárritu's film presages the sound conventions of narrative fiction films released after *11'9'01* that deal with the U.S. war on terror. Corey Creekmur examines a number of such films and notes the frequent use of a "respectful silence" or "muted tones" to replace the roaring and screaming associated with the events (3)—and indeed Iñárritu's penultimate scene depicts shots of the towers falling, accompanied by complete silence. In addition to this combination of silence and image to convey the awe-inspiring horror of the sublime, Creekmur identifies the way Muslim prayer is used as shorthand for

> "the sound of Islamic fundamentalism rather than a common cultural practice: it anticipates political violence while masquerading as religious ritual" (9).

The chanting in the opening moments of Iñárritu's film narrativizes this temporally disjointed film by acting as a prelude. The praying has an eerie quality to it—certainly unfamiliar enough to U.S. audiences to come across as exotic and perhaps sinister. Thus it seems to call forth the trauma of the towers' collapse, as do those sounds in the films Creekmur examines. This example of Michel Chion's *acousmetre*—the use of voices linked to bodies that are never made visible—also references certain religious injunctions against looking (Creekmur 9) and thus dovetails with the ambivalent gaze that must be associated with the fragmented footage of falling bodies. By using footage that was censored, Iñárritu implicates notions of taboo in a variety of contexts relating to 9/11. In the New York films of *11'9"01*, what can be seen and heard has little to do with technical failures but instead are related to our individual limitations as well as our ignorance and refusal not only to confront but also to interpret and even reinterpret the visual and aural "evidence" as we continue to construct our memories of 9/11.

By reanimating the city symphony in a way that questions our ability to apprehend and comprehend the space and sound of New York on September 11, 2001, *11'9'01* offers one direction for the future of the city symphony and the experimental documentary. In these films, the experience of the city has less to do with the visual and instead acquires the status of the aural object theorized by Christian Metz—no longer grounded in space but transmitted through sonic, digitized codes, more intimate and yet more ineffable than any visual evidence.

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