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# Bombarded by soundful images: An audiovisual account of 9/11

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## Abstract

*Images have become an important aspect of, and shaping force on society. However, the evolving articulation taking place between images and sounds tends to be undertheorised. This article argues that, as images have become more 'soundful', that is, as images have become naturalised as a 'source' of sounds, and as sounds are increasingly seen to emanate directly from images, mediated sounds have come to reinforce images in hegemonic fashion. In this essay, a discussion of 9/11 as a televisual event will be used as a starting point to investigate implications of the interactions between images and sounds in increasingly audiovisual cultures.*

## Introduction

It can be observed that Western capitalist societies have become domains of control marked by flows of information. Deleuze and Guattari (1994) complain that "now even the disciplines of mass communications" are becoming "the creators of 'events'" (p. 10). Indeed, the 9/11 attacks on the World Trade Centre were widely circulated and consumed as a televisual event. Much commentary was made available regarding the imagery of 9/11, and, troublingly, it can be understood as an event curated and exhibited by the audiovisual media.

However, mass media have, for some time, not just been restricted to simply churning out visual images, despite the continuing rhetoric of assorted commentators and theorists. What about the sounds, voices, and noises of 9/11, which, fused with the moving images, have been essential components of the chain of events?

The attacks on New York's World Trade Centre were followed and accompanied by the broadcast of images and sounds sparking emotional reactions among a global audience. People across the world watched and heard the images and sounds, which were largely consumed as a 'live' audiovisual event and spectacle from a safe distance. As Fredric Jameson noted, we have become accustomed to "the transformation of reality into images" (1988, p. 20).<sup>1</sup>

In mass media, images are often paired with hyperreal (or realer-than-real) sounds, becoming more persuasive, more powerful, and infused with more depth, life, and dimensionality. Arguably, this also deepens their ideological impact; subsequently, our lasting impressions of 9/11 are those portrayed through mass media, which have become in many cases more 'real' to us than less mediated experiences.

## Imperialism of sound and image

In our present times, sounds and images are frequently supplied to us through the television set. In his book *The World Is Sound* (first published in 1983), Joachim-Ernst Berendt argued that our television-obsessed culture has become overly focused on the visual sense, reducing the ears to, in Berendt's terms, an auxiliary organ (Berendt, 1991). Rick Altman has a different perspective, observing that we often listen to rather than watch television, as we undertake some other activity (1986).

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<sup>1</sup> See **Appendix 1** for a sample of just some of the audiovisual materials about 9/11 still available online at time of posting this article.

The television industry was slower to develop an appreciation for quality sound than, comparatively, the film industry. However, since the early 1980s, televisions have evolved into 'high-fidelity' home entertainment centres as consumers have become more discerning and audio aware. Home theatre set-ups are now available with features such as surround sound in relatively affordable ready-made systems. Television soundtracks now possess "as great, and in some cases greater, dynamics and vitality than those produced for your local cinema" (Yewdall, 1999, p. 217).

Television theorist John Thornton Caldwell argues that prime-time TV dramas have become increasingly cinematic since the 1980s (cited in Pierson, 2002), with one of the consequences an increased attention to television soundtracks. The previously dominant naturalism, which aimed for unspectacular or 'invisible' audiovisual style, has increasingly been displaced by an aesthetic derived from the cinema (ibid.).

Today, with the advent of high definition video, high-quality television sound is now mandatory; television sound performs many of the same roles as film sound. Jeremy Butler suggests that television sound has four functions: capturing viewer attention, manipulating viewer understanding of the image, maintaining televisual flow, and maintaining continuity within individual scenes (1994).

Certainly, we live in an increasingly, arguably now predominantly, audiovisual culture. We are surrounded not only by pseudo-concrete images, fleshed out and extended by sounds, but also by machined sounds that connect to images. The machined fusion of sounds and images has led to ways of seeing and hearing that have gradually become second nature. Theorists have commonly spoken of the imperialism of the image—now, however, it might be more precise to speak of an imperialism of sound and image. More and more, sound is making meaning in conjunction (connection, synthesis, and/or counterpoint) with the image.

Sounds animate images by supplying a sense of presence and physicality, helping to build a 'natural', distinctive audiovisual illusion. Sounds operate as punctuation and guide for the flow of images, providing acoustic environments that underpin, anchor, and impose a rhythm for the parade of images. Sounds operate in combination and in conjunction with images, shaping the meaning of images, either in support or in counterpoint. Images can be re-sounded and reinforced—this has been an important transformation—and have generally become more audible in their new proxemic relationship with sounds.

Sound designer David Sonnenschein observes that, when "sound works well with image, the impression is that sound is already contained in the image itself" (2001, p. 168). We are presently confronted with "the problems of matching sound and image in an age when every sound comes equipped with its own stereotypical image" (Toop, 1999, p. 21), and when images now resonate with the sounds with which they are fused.

### **Speaking images**

The image has undergone a variety of analyses and debates from different theoretical approaches as a site of meaning-making that continues to grow in influence. It is time to acknowledge that images are now soundful, and that this aspect also requires investigation. Which images speak audibly? What are they saying? What kind of emotional depth is conveyed by the sounds which fuse with the images? What manner of dimensionality and 'presence' is supplied to images by sounds? Noise and silence are issues of power. Who decides what is silent/silenced, what is noise, what is soundful? Do particular soundful images now literally clamour for our attention? What is 'silenced' by the impact of soundful images?

We live in a world where images and sounds overlay one another, interacting, blending, and bumping against the other. Two French

filmmakers (Jules and Gedeon Naudet) were filming a documentary on a rookie New York City fire-fighter when they noticed a plane overhead. That plane would hit the World Trade Centre. The fire-fighter and the Naudets rushed immediately to the scene. The Naudets filmed throughout 9/11 and the days afterward from the firemen's perspective; this remains the only known footage from inside the Twin Towers that day. The images of September 11 are now familiar. The sound, however, is not. Jules and Gedeon Naudet's documentary film, *9/11* (2002), draws on 180 hours of footage, and is punctuated by the disturbing sounds of bodies falling one after another (miniature bodies, which looked so unreal on TV), and landing outside the lobby of Tower One where Jules was filming the fire crews. The dull thumps, heard in the background, supply a particular poignancy to the images that are seen on the screen, lending the images an additional affective dimension. How do these kinds of almost linguistically indescribable soundful images speak to us? What is their effect?

### Mass media events

In his 1962 book, *The Image*, Boorstin describes the creation of a modern world "where the image, more interesting than its original, has itself become the original" (1992, p. 204). The image becomes reality: "the image becomes the thing" (p. 197). Boorstin suggests that the overwhelming impact of mass media has given rise to the pseudo-event (pp. 7–44). These pseudo-events transform actual lived experience into reassuring, intelligible and digestible images (pp. 185–194), which are "more vivid, more attractive, more impressive, and more persuasive than reality itself" (p. 36). Boorstin concluded that "the multiplication of images has had a revolutionary effect on all our imaginations, on our concept of verisimilitude, on what passes for truth in common experience" (p. 212).

This is evident with the repeated screenings of the 9/11 attacks on New York's Twin Towers. At first, the severity of the implications of not just one, but two planes flying into the buildings was

difficult to comprehend. Following the repeated exposure and dissemination of televisual footage, the images become synonymous with the devastation, fear, and terrorism: much more significant an event.

The impact of mediated sounds must be taken into account when considering the continuing development of our audiovisual culture. For instance, Michel Chion described the onset of an important transformation, where we are now almost totally immersed in "mediated acoustical reality", where sound is relayed to us by amplifiers and loudspeakers. This new and naturalised sound reality has become a familiar and standard form of listening, "supplanting unmediated acoustical reality in strength, presence, and impact". This form of listening becomes perceived "as a more direct and immediate contact with the event" (1994, p. 103).

### Mass media warfare

Media theorists such as Paul Virilio (2005) have come to conceive of the mass media apparatus itself in terms of warfare, where we are bombarded with images and sounds, or supplied with images and sounds through a "logistics of perception" (p. 1). As images now speak to us in voices not necessarily their own, how has the sonorisation of images affected the way we see, hear, and make sense of events around us?

Baudrillard and Virilio both claim that human beings have been losing control of their objects and the object world, particularly in the form of mass media representations and signs, which have been taking on a life of their own (extending the classic theory of reification), thereby threatening the subject with loss of power and agency. But, of course, it is important to carve out a conceptual space for the way we, as subjects, engage with these media representations and signs; after all, we should not forget the importance of theorising just how we produce, circulate, and receive media representations and signs.

Virilio's gloomy proposition that media presentation acts as a *substitution* for immediate reality can be compared to Baudrillard's reading

of *simulation*, where signs have come to produce reality, where immediate reality is centred on the production, transmission, and proliferation of signs, and where the production of objects as the motor of social life has given way to the production and proliferation of mass-mediated signs.

Unlike Baudrillard, Virilio believes reality does not disappear, but is rather displaced by another mode of reality, where media presentation has come to replace (or substitute for) an immediate reality, such as photography substitutes itself for real life, or film substitutes the static representation of the real with moving images, or virtual reality substitutes itself for 'real life' (see Armitage, 2000, pp. 25–55).

For Baudrillard, "reality disappears into hyperreality, [and] for Virilio new technologies provide a substitute reality, a virtual reality which becomes more powerful and seductive than ordinary reality" (Kellner, in Armitage, 2000, p. 115). Despite their disagreements, Baudrillard and Virilio provide similar dystopian readings of the powerful technological, mediatised forces reshaping social experiences. Their interpretations can be compared to Marshall McLuhan's (1964) more benign notion of media 'massage', which offers a more positive and utopian reading of the powerful technological, mediatised forces reshaping social experiences, as media technologies are interpreted as productive 'extensions of man'.

### **Infusion of mediated sound on images**

An important, influential, and evolving articulation and interaction is taking place between images and sounds. We now rarely consume images or sounds separately, for sounds are made by images, and we have become accustomed to images that sound 'realer-than-real'. Sounds act to reinforce images, resulting in soundful images, where images are reinforced with a performed sense of authenticity and presence, where images sound more real, more powerful, more authentic; as images are seen as the 'natural' source of sounds, and as sounds

have come to emanate seamlessly and unproblematically from images. Sounds do not just duplicate what we see but contribute to how we perceive images; sounds draw us into images, markedly contributing to the depth and dimensionality of the images. The infusion of mediated sounds has created a more effective image, as sound supplies the image with what Michel Chion would term 'added value' (1994, pp. 5, 21). Chion has reminded us that if sounds are altered or removed "*the image is no longer the same*" (emphasis in original, 1999, p. 4).

### **An audiovisual experience of 9/11**

The broadcast began with just the one grey distant shot of the towers on that September morning, the panicked voices of the announcers, and the billowing smoke, as minutes passed irrevocably with no cutaways and no changes in camera angle. Many people were transfixed before their television sets, caught up in the spectacle unfolding before them. Lee Ranaldo, guitarist with the band Sonic Youth, was living in close proximity to the World Trade Centre with his family:

I was in our apartment a few blocks from the WTC towers when the planes hit. The first plane's impact did not register as the event it was. There are always loud booming sounds on the street here, and yet it seemed somehow more significant than the usual sounds of trucks rolling over big metal plates on the streets, etc. (Cited in Toop, 2004, p. 80)

Nevertheless, "If the first plane did not register as something completely out of the ordinary, the second certainly did. Even from inside the shower the sound of the sky ripping wide open followed by the explosive impact was without a doubt not the normal sound of a Manhattan morning" (p. 80). Despite being so close, because the apartment's windows did not face the towers, Ranaldo and his family "watched the entire thing on the television" (p. 80), thus illustrating Paul

Virilio's comment that there has been a "generalized rise of pictures and sounds in the static vehicles of the audio-visual ... *From now on everything will happen without us moving, without us even having to set out*" (emphasis in original, 1989, p. 112).

After both planes had hit, Rinaldo left his apartment and took the elevator to the rooftop, to look at the two towers, with "gaping holes and black smoke looming immediately over my head ... Within seconds of my sighting them ... there was a sound in the air unlike nothing I'd ever heard before, a giant roaring noise that I could not place or identify" (cited in Toop, 2004, p. 80). This sound was "the sound of the building about to fall that I'd heard – just the sound, for while it was in my view it was not in the process of crumbling just yet". Sight is faster than sound, so what Rinaldo actually heard was the sound of the implosion of the building, its internal collapse, but he came to conflate that sound with the external collapse after watching televisual footage. As Rinaldo confessed, "the experience I had of hearing it had been so qualified now by images of the buildings falling that I don't know if I can separate the sound as it exists in my memory from the images that now inevitably accompany it" (p. 81).

### **Society of the spectacle or surveillance society?**

In his influential *The Society of the Spectacle* (first published in 1967), Guy Debord argued that we are now presented with "an immense accumulation of *spectacles*" (emphasis in original, 1994, thesis 1). He continued, "The spectacle is not a collection of images; rather, it is a social relationship between people that is mediated by images" (thesis 4). Michel de Certeau has echoed Debord's rhetoric about our society of the spectacle, in arguing that "from TV to newspapers, from advertising to all sorts of mercantile epiphanies, our society is characterized by a cancerous growth of vision, measuring everything by its ability to show or be shown and transmuting communication into a visual journey" (1984, p. xxi). Nevertheless, this 'visual journey'

is not silent. We now live in an era "when the audio-visible of the mass media reigns" (Virilio, 2003, p. 82).

It is somewhat disconcerting reading de Certeau's book now, as the well-known chapter on 'Walking in the City' (written approximately two decades before the 9/11 attack) begins by discussing the experience of looking down from the top of the World Trade Centre:

On this stage of concrete, steel and glass, cut between two oceans (the Atlantic and the American) by a frigid body of water, the tallest letters in the world compose a gigantic rhetoric of excess in both expenditure and production... The 1370 foot high tower that serves as a prow for Manhattan continues to construct the fiction that creates readers, makes the complexity of the city readable, and immobilizes its opaque mobility in a transparent text. (1984, p. 92-93)

"Our society is not one of spectacle," Michel Foucault insists, "but of surveillance" (1979, p. 217). However, surveillance should not be understood as being mutually exclusive with the spectacle. Rather, surveillance and the spectacle are connected (becoming increasingly interrelated) as the proliferation of media spectacles are subject to our constant (even if inattentive or blasé) surveillance. In our contemporary age, where acutely sensitive microphones have multiplied, it must be said that surveillance is, of course, as much aural as visual.

Electronic and cinematic media have effectively enabled us to watch and be watched, hear and be heard. Virilio has explained that we now have "a world that is constantly 'tele-present' twenty-four hours a day, seven days a week" (2000, p. 13). The world has become a series of soundful images, under constant surveillance, subject to our voracious gaze, made into spectacle; "our society has begun to offer us the world" (Jameson, 1992, p. 1) as collectable and consumable images and sounds.

## Cinematic representations and cultures

The normalisation of the audiovisual spectacle is why Baudrillard insisted that we have moved beyond “the society of the spectacle” (1994, p. 30). For Baudrillard, the spectacle is no longer spectacular, but rather commonplace and diffused throughout reality. The spectacle is no longer extraordinary, and hence has become an everyday aspect of how we view and engage with reality. It is no exaggeration to say that “we are all part of a moving-image culture and we live cinematic and electronic lives” (Sobchack, 2000, p. 67).

Indeed, cinematic representations and cultures have had an immense impact on the ways we interact with and perceive the world. Our frequent encounters with cinematic and televisual discourses affect us in the most profound, socially pervasive, and yet personal way; cinematic media have contributed to shaping a significant evolution of our modes of temporal and spatial consciousness, as well as transfiguring our embodied sense of subjectivity and existential ‘presence’.

“In sum,” Sobchack argues, “as they have mediated our engagement with the world, with others, and with ourselves, cinematic and electronic technologies have transformed us so that we currently see, sense, and make sense of ourselves as quite other as than we were before them” (2000, p. 69). Our cinematic age’s ‘moving-image culture’ is not just about how we have come to see in different ways. Rather, we live in a dense audiovisual environment, a world filled with resounding images, re-embodied sounds, soundful images, which have affected our ‘cognitive mapping’ (Jameson’s term, 1998) of the world through the mental connections that are enabled by images and sounds.

### ‘Real reality’

In an article written a few days after 9/11, Slavoj Žižek refers to the 1999 movie *The Matrix*:

[W]hen the hero (played by Keanu Reeves) awakens into ‘real reality’, he

sees a desolate landscape littered with burned ruins – what remained of Chicago after a global war. The resistance leader Morpheus utters the ironic greeting: ‘Welcome to the desert of the real’. Was it not something of a similar order that took place in New York on September 11? Its citizens were introduced to the ‘desert of the real’ – to us, corrupted by Hollywood, the landscape and the shots we saw of the collapsing towers could not but remind us of the most breathtaking scenes in the catastrophe big productions. (2006, p. 271)

Typical Hollywood action blockbusters have, in an ironic reversal, come to provide a model, a framework, from which to comprehend the traumatic event of September 11 – itself an occurrence which has been defined by the images and sounds that have been broadcast and circulated throughout the world. After all, as Susan Sontag remarked, “notions of reality and spectacle precisely reinforce and infuse each other”, as the spectacle becomes “the universal category through whose forms the world is seen” (2000, p. xxix) – and, of course, heard. Baudrillard has implied that film and reality are fusing: “life is cinema”, he says (1988, p. 101).

Perhaps one of the features that helped make the terrifying and unbelievable televisual images of a plane flying into the side of the World Trade Centre seem more real for many viewers was the poor, ‘unrealistic’ sound quality. As David Toop pointed out, “Unlike the satisfying tidy impact and ‘closure’ of a Hollywood explosion, the sounds heard on television rolling news as the towers collapsed were fragmented, seemingly boundless, chaotic, resistant to understanding, intensely painful” (2004, p. 80).

Perhaps frequent engagements with cinematic events have accustomed many of us to the shock and impact of spectacular sounds and images, which have been diffused into our mass-mediated environments, absorbed and become commonplace. Were the images and sounds of 9/11 simply unreal, or unconvincing (like a bad

movie, and as compared with a good movie, which presumably would be realer-than-real, and convincing in its unreality)? Were these images and sounds not quite as seamless, not sufficiently spectacular, not containing enough transparent 'presence' as measured against a typical cinematic presentation? Were the images and sounds too painfully 'raw', presented in terms of flawed, imperfect shots and sounds, as opposed to the unreal perfection and hyperreality of the typical Hollywood blockbuster?

### **Perfecting sound**

Mediated sounds – now louder, more powerful, more pristine, more detailed, fuller and more spectacular – contribute to the perfection and presence of the virtual, realer-than-real image. Mediated sound now provides an essential dimensionality and presence to the virtual, 'perfect' image – sound is now packaged with the image. After all: "Great sound will make the picture *appear* to look better and be more visually exciting" (Picture Editor Howard Smith, cited in Yewdall, 1999, p. 86).

Sounds have come to extend, reinforce, and stabilise images in certain ways; the reassuring perfection and interpenetration of images and sounds have become established aspects of our everyday reality. Images have become incredibly noisy (louder, more aurally spectacular, in the quest for dimensionality, presence, and attention). Soundful images have provided reinforced sounds and alluring soundscapes. Soundful images act as templates for audiovisual perception, interacting with image to provide a lure for our attention. Our audiovisual culture has been supplied with a sound-image repertoire with which to stock our memories. Soundful images can be interpreted as a symptom of the clamour of our contemporary times.

### **Machine-mediated sound as hyperreal sound**

What is the wider impact of soundful images? How have sounds—facilitated by the invention

called sound film—come to infuse images? What does hyperreal sound silence, as it supports the now-familiar impact of an audiovisual spectacular? To borrow Baudrillard's formulation, hyperreal sound silences and murders the real, in a perfect crime. However, it also acts to idealise, transform, and present what was apparently silenced. Hyperreal sound modifies our conception of the past, just as it transfigures our present and future by establishing new relationships, memories, narratives, and dialogues.

With the proliferation and spread of machined (recorded; manipulated; transmitted; replayed) sound, we are now unavoidably immersed in a contemporary acoustic environment of mass-mediated sound; with the 'sonorisation of the image', mass-mediated sounds and voices are even clamouring to speak for images, to comment on images. Virilio mused darkly, "Machine for *seeing*, machine for *hearing* ... *Media presentation* dominates everywhere you turn" (2003, pp. 77, 82).

The power of images has been reinforced by mediated sound. Hyperreal sound acts to silence through processes of selectivity and transformation and by providing a compelling realer-than-real spectacle that mediates the way we perceive other sounds and noises. This 'problem', of course, is in addition to the more widely known discussions of how images have accumulated and proliferated, circulating through a profusion of screens. (Deleuze comments that "(t)he brain is the screen" (2000, p. 367).)

### **Impact of broadcast media on audiences**

Arguably, broadcast media audiences have undergone a bombardment of images which have now superseded words in terms of their influence. Images are now soundful, resonating with sounds, noises, and voices. Virilio cynically described television as "a ventriloquist's art" (2005, p. 38), which description can be productively related back to Michel Chion, who tells the story of an anchorman commentating on a live television transmission of an air show.

Forced to improvise, at one stage the anchor remarks, 'Here are three small airplanes' – and indeed, the image that is seen is of three tiny airplanes against a blue sky. Chion's point is that the anchor's commentary is not redundant – if the anchor had said, 'The weather is magnificent today', then "that's what we would have seen in the image, where there are in fact no clouds" (1994, p. 7).

In other words, the redundancy of the commentary "is illusory, since in each case these statements would have guided and structured our vision so that we would have seen them 'naturally' in the image" (1994, p. 7). The words that we hear provide added value to the images, rigorously framing what we see. Chion concludes: "if the film or TV image seems to 'speak' for itself, it is actually a ventriloquist's speech". The image of the three small airplanes in a blue sky therefore can be taken to be "a puppet animated by the anchorman's voice" (1994, p. 7). The image itself does not offer a simple depiction of reality; the image does not really speak for itself.

Images, rather, offer a particular mediated perspective on the world, a perspective that is nevertheless understood through the discourse of the realistic depiction of reality. For the moving image, elements of montage, methods of framing, shot selection, lighting, etc., work to shape particular processes of making meaning, influencing specific ways of seeing, and providing a specific reading or interpretation of events.

The point to emphasise here is that images are animated, shaped, and framed by voices, music, and sounds – which operate to anchor the flow of images by subliminally (or even blatantly) informing the audience just how the visual narrative ought to be interpreted and received. Perhaps part of the reason why the initial, formless, images of the 9/11 attacks were so traumatic was because the sounds and noises were fragmented and untidy; the voices that normally operate to anchor the images for us did not speak; and when they did, their words were chaotic, not

settling until later into the more polished patter to which we are accustomed.

### **Extending the image**

After 9/11, America would embark on the 'War on Terror'. On 19 March 2003, an attack was launched on Iraq. In contrast to the Gulf War of 1991, characterised by the images of a computer-guided projectile hitting its target, the Iraqi war of 2003 was distinguished by the presence of 'embedded reporters', who stayed with the troops, providing live coverage of their day-to-day life and the battles themselves. As other images began to emerge—of tanks and troops rolling into Iraq, of fighter planes and bombers taking off from aircraft carriers to soar over Baghdad (accompanied by the dull crack of retaliatory anti-aircraft fire), of bombs detonating—these images spoke to us in particular ways. Supplied by the Western media, these images spoke persuasively of the 'liberation' of Iraq by the 'coalition forces'. However, the images aired by the Arabic news network Al-Jazeera spoke to its viewers about the 'invasion' of Iraq and the 'invasion forces'. As Žižek observed in his book *Iraq* (2005), "the ideological struggle is fought out not only at the level of arguments but also at the level of images" (p. 2). These images are infused with voices, sounds, music—today, images are rarely silent, but speak out in resounding fashion.

Sounds now typically operate to hold images open in specific ways, to finalise images by fixing or freezing a particular sound-image articulation. However, this reification should not be understood as complete. While sound has typically come to be used to add a stable, standardised, predictable dimensionality and presence to the image, sound still possesses the potential to productively extend the image. As Siegfried Kracauer wrote several decades ago:

Supposing shrill screams or the blasts of an explosion are synchronized with images of their source and/or its environment: much as they will leave their imprint on the spectator's mind ...



they may prompt him to scrutinize the [images] in a mood which increases his susceptibility to their multiple meanings. (1997, pp. 127–128)

Kracauer has been often unfairly criticised as a naïve realist. However, as Miriam Hansen has pointed out, “Kracauer’s concern is not with authenticity or verisimilitude but rather with film’s ability to discover and articulate materiality” (in Kracauer, 1997, p. xvii). For Kracauer, the true potential of the cinema, which has been “so greatly increased by technical innovations and scientific discoveries”, lies in its capability “to open up new, hitherto unsuspected dimensions of reality” (p. 8). He observes that the “motion picture camera has a way of disintegrating familiar objects and bringing to the fore – often just in moving about – previously invisible interrelationships” (p. 54).

Sound also possesses this capability, engaging in a sophisticated and evolving articulation with the image, working to spark associations, revealing “previously invisible interrelationships”, prompting “memories of the senses” and “cataracts of indistinct fantasies and inchoate thoughts” (pp. 165–166). Sound retains the potential to open up images. With the fusion of sounds and images, sounds can operate to quicken images, to vibrate images, to bring images to ‘life’. Sounds and images amplify each other, as sounds load up images with soundful connotations and presence.

### **The functioning of thought**

Gilles Deleuze outlined his Bergsonian reading of the image in his cinema books (1986; 1989), and also talks there about sound. (There is a useful secondary account of Deleuze’s arguments about sound and film in Pisters (2003, pp. 175–215).) Rodowick observed of Deleuze that he:

... is quite sensitive to the ways in which contemporary culture is becoming fundamentally an audiovisual culture. For him, the semiotic history of film is coincident with a century-long

transformation wherein we have come to represent and understand ourselves socially through spatial and temporal articulations founded in cinema, if now realized more clearly in the electronic and digital media ... The emergence of an audiovisual culture is concomitant with the history of cinema and the history of film theory”. (1997, p. xiii, 172)

Deleuze remarked that sounds become “*a new dimension of the visual image, a new component*” (1989, p. 226, original emphasis). Sound can operate to make something visible in the image that was previously buried, opaque, or occluded. He observed that “all the sound elements, including music, including silence, form a continuum as something which belongs to the visual image” (p. 226). However, this sonic continuum can also possess the “specific autonomous power” of a “foreign body” (1989, pp. 240–241). Sound is capable of echoing and reinforcing the flow of images, but also of engaging in an interaction with the images that is “independent of any common structure” (1989, p. 239).

For Deleuze, “modern visual images and sonic images must be ‘read’, in the sense that these images, disengaged and disconnected from their standard contexts, must be reconnected, re-enchained in ways that cannot be anticipated ahead of the appearance of the given images” (Bogue, 2003, p. 188).

Compared with Baudrillard and Virilio, Deleuze has proposed a more optimistic interpretation of the power of images to set thought in motion. For him, the image (which includes sound) “has as object the functioning of thought, and ... the functioning of thought is also the real subject which brings us back to the images” (1989, p. 165). Rodowick argues that:

Because our contemporary everyday life is immersed in an audiovisual and information culture, cinema’s ways of working through the relations of image

and concept have become particularly significant to our strategies for seeing and saying. This is not because cinema is the most popular art. Television and video games now have arguably a far greater economic and 'aesthetic' impact. However, cinema's history of images and signs is nonetheless both the progenitor of audiovisual culture and perhaps the source of its unfounding as a simulacral art. To think otherwise, from the outside, or to find the subtle way out, means thinking through the history of the audiovisual. (1997, p. 202)

### Conclusion

As we are bombarded with and immersed in images and sounds and soundful images, there is a continued and pressing need to think through our everyday engagement with them. Baudrillard and Virilio can be read as providing us with warnings about the reification and fascism possible with our audiovisual culture; however, it should not be forgotten that soundful images possess the potential to provoke us to think the unthought.

A final observation: At this point in time, more films about 9/11 are starting to hit the cinema. A cynic might comment that these cinematic products, with the passing of what has been deemed to be an appropriate amount of time, are now beginning to commercially exploit the soundful spectacle of 9/11. Perhaps a more optimistic account would remark that the images and sounds in these films can enable and provoke a more thoughtful encounter with the event than the printed word alone.

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## **Appendix 1: Sample audio-visual images of 9/11**

The September 11 Digital Archive: Saving the Histories of September 11, 2001: <http://911digitalarchive.org/>

The Sonic Memorial Project: <http://www.sonicmemorial.org/sonic/public/index.html>

The Sights and Sounds of 9/11: <http://www.newsday.com/news/local/newyork/ny-sept11,0,7071104.flash>