Image and Inscription:
Sonification as an Interpretive Methodology
in Transmedial Biblical Study

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John Harvey

Professor of Art, Aberystwyth University, UK

Abstract

This article explores the transformation of Scripture, through practice-led research, within the framework of biblical studies and hermeneutics, biblical painting, landscape studies, music, and film adaptations and scores portraying the story of Moses and the Israelites.

It discusses a sound composition by the author entitled *Image and Inscription* (2016). This is a sonic oratorio based upon Exod 19:1–34:45, and part of *The Bible in Translation / Y Beibl Mewn Cyfieithiad* album. The narrative relates the events surrounding the delivery of the Decalogue, principally. Initially, they sounded out as an ephemeral speech act, prior to becoming an inscribed text. *Image and Inscription* represents a suite of acoustic landscapes that summons the terrain, cataclysmic phenomena, loud noises, music, ritual, and figures featured in the narrative. The central text (or libretto) on which the artwork is based derives from the principal clause of the Second Commandment, forbidding graven images (Exod 20:4).

Here, the clause – taken from the *Welsh Bible* (1588) and *Authorized King James Version* (1611) – is sonified in three ways: 1. Mechanically engraved on a metal matrix (the term 'graven' [Hebrew: *pæsæl*] means 'to engrave'); the sound of the process was stretched, digitally, and modified through synthesizer filters in order to generate tonal characteristics apposite to the mood of the text's context. 2. Recorded speech. The text, spoken in Welsh and English, was engraved on two 33-rpm vinyl records, and manipulated on record player decks. 3. Pictorial engravings depicting Moses on Mount Sinai – derived from 19th century Welsh and English pulpit bibles – were converted into a data-stream capable of being processed on sound software.

In returning one of the Ten Commandments to the condition of sound (noise and speech), the composition reverses the process by which it first came into being, and evokes the acoustic character of the context of the Decalogue's original reception.

This article is a situated self-reflection on *Image and Inscription* – a programmatic sound composition that forms part of *The Bible in Translation / Y Beibl mewn Cyfieithiad* album (Fig. 1).[1] The piece is based upon the Exodus account of Israel's encampment at Mount Sinai, Moses's encounter
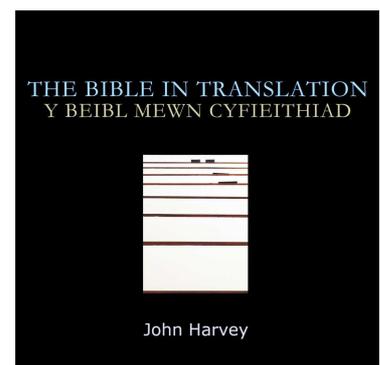
Fig. 1: J. Harvey, The Bible in Translation / Y Beibl mewn Cyfieithiad, 2 CDs (The Aural Bible II), 2016.

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[1] Harvey, The Bible in Translation / Y Beibl mewn Cyfieithiad; Image and Inscription, Disc 1, Scene 8; Image and Inscription, Disc 1, Scene 3; Image and Inscription, Disc 1, Scene 7.

with God, and his reception of the commandments (Exod 19:1–34). The context under consideration is the transmedial tradition of the Bible. This will serve as an interpretive framework that sheds light upon and gives definition to the composition's distinctive characteristics, function, and contribution to the composition.

1. Introduction

My research field is the visual and sonic culture of religion, with specific reference to aniconic traditions of Protestant Christianity. From 1995 to 2015, I examined, from an art-historical perspective, the impact of Calvinist Reformed theology on the visual expression of Wales's dissenting and nonconformist churches.[2] More broadly, the study has explored the relationship between the Bible and visuality and sound. These themes have also been addressed through practice-based visual research predicated on the prohibitions of the second of the Ten Commandments (Exod 20:4) and the Reformation principle of *sola scriptura* ('by scripture alone'). The works, made in response to these strictures, aimed to develop abstract images derived from the semantic concepts and the literal (word-for-word, letter-for-letter) content of biblical texts.[3] More recently, I have dealt with the Judaeo-Christian scriptures as the written, spoken, and heard word. The artefacts explore the intrinsic and implied sound content of the Bible, as well as its cultural articulations and adaptations in technologically recorded examples of preaching, reading, and praying.[4] This is with a view to engaging a critical, responsive, and interpretive intervention with aspects of biblical sound culture.

Some of this research has been informed by interdisciplinary collaboration with biblical studies scholars who have explored the afterlives of characters, stories, and events in the Bible[5] – that is to say, the posthumous re-presentation, additions, expansion, and elaboration of these in mediums, modes, and merchandise produced during the period since the canon of Scripture closed. This body of postmortem material can also be conceived within the discourse of transmediality also.[6] The Bible is dispersed beyond the bounds of the original texts, across multiple channels and formats, such as painting, sculpture, stained glass,

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2   Harvey, The Art of Piety; Image of the Invisible; The Bible as Visual Culture.
3   Harvey, The Pictorial Bible I; The Pictorial Bible II; The Pictorial Bible III & The Aural Bible II.
4   Harvey, Ʀ Ʀ Ɓ Ʋ Ǝ Ǝ Ʈ Ɲ ƨ Ơ Ą**;** The Bible in Translation.
5   Exum, Plotted, Shot, and Painted; Leneman / Walfish, The Bible Retold; O'Kane, Imaging the Bible; Bible, Art, Gallery.
6   Jenkins, Convergence Culture, 199–200. A thorough approach to this body of material within a transmedial framework has not been conceived within either biblical studies or mainstream Christianity. Some American fundamentalist groups have been resistant to notions of convergence and multiplicity in culture, while others have actively embraced the opportunities that interrelated platforms and modes of communication offer in terms of evangelism and teaching.

illustration, film, TV, animation, and video. One could add to these the numerous apocryphal, extra-, para-, and post-biblical stories, Jewish and Christian legends, poetry, plays, sermons, visions, dreams, supernatural visitations, commentaries, theological works, hymns, songs, oratorios, and operas that have grown around, out of, and into the corpus of canonical writings. Collectively, these adjuncts represent a transmedial tradition of staggering complexity, duration, and durability, although one that is neither conscious, systematic, consistent, coordinated, or unified. Moreover, it is a tradition in which the scriptures assume the status of, variously, the primary or core modality, the touchstone of authentication and authority, and the stellar centre of a planetary ontology.[7]

This article examines one contemporary and sonic manifestation of one part of the canon within the tradition's nexus. *Image and Inscription* brings to the scriptures a historical knowledge of the religious, cultural, and technological contexts of their production with a view to interpreting their acoustic content and form, and enabling such to illuminate those contexts in return. Three questions (derived from the fabric of the current transmedial narratological debate) will serve to situate the composition within this biblical transmedial tradition:

1. What new insights or perspectives does this composition contribute to an understanding of the narrative within the nexus?
2. How does the technology and medium either extend or illuminate that narrative?
3. What gaps in the transmedial nexus does the composition fill?

These interrogations represent a set of interrelated perspectives and, therefore, will be discussed as such.[8]

At the outset, there is a complication. An understanding of the composition's narrative has been already constructed within a unimedial, but nonetheless complex, multi-authorial, intertextual matrix of the sixty-six books that comprise the Christian scriptures.[9] The source text has undergone a hermeneutic process of cross-referring with other relevant texts elsewhere in the Bible, following the principle of *Scriptura sui ipsius interpres* ('Scripture interprets itself'). This is an interpretive methodology that, as some Jewish and Christian traditions hold, the scripture itself advocates (1Cor 2:13).[10] For the purpose of composition, the circle of intertextuality was drawn tightly around a focal text: the second commandment (Exod 20:4–5). This circle includes contexts too, that is, the texts that come before and after it in the Scripture. They are, most immediately, the

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[7] Brown, Engaging Biblical Authority, 27, 56.
[8] Leavenworth, Transmedial Texts; Thon, Transmedial Narratology, 131–147.
[9] Hayes / Alkier / Huizenga, Reading the Bible Intertexually.
[10] Luther, Assertio Omnium Articulorum, 16–29.

Decalogue (Exod 2:3–17) and, more broadly, the narrative surrounding Moses's many ascents and descents of the mountain (Exod 19:1–34).

The second commandment prohibits making engraved or carved simulcra of supernatural or natural entities with a view to worshipping them:

> Thou shalt not make unto thee any graven image, or any likeness of any thing that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth: Thou shalt not bow down thyself to them, nor serve them: for I the Lord thy God am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children unto the third and fourth generation of them that hate me. (Exod 20:4–5) [King James Version].

In the sixteenth century, the reformer John Calvin (1509–1564) insisted that the commandment restricted the setting up of images in Protestant places of worship.[11]

This principle is foundational to the broader narrative too. Indeed, it is the only commandment to be restated, on two further occasions, and exemplified (albeit negatively) in the incident of the golden calf (Exod 20:23; 32:1–24; 34:17). The focal and broader texts of the Sinai narrative radiate outwards towards a wide range of transmedial modalities, foci, and interpretive perspectives. By concentrating on the sonic landscape in which the events took place, *Image and Inscription* operates within a triangulated framework whose vertices are music, fine art, and cinema.

2. The Ten Commandments in Music

In the classical repertoire, the Decalogue has a small but distinguished representation. Gioachino Rossini's (1792–1868) opera *Mosè in Egitto* (1818) opens with the plagues upon Egypt and ends at the shores of the Red Sea. Anton Rubinstein's (1829–1894) oratorio *Moses* (1885–1891) deals with the patriarch's flight from the Egyptian court, through the Sinai desert, and finally across the River Jordan. In Arnold Schoenberg's (1874–1951) *Moses und Aron* (1932), an incomplete 12-tone, three-act opera, the narrative that I have been concerned with takes place off-stage between Acts 1 and 2. Dave Brubeck's (1920–2012) *Ten Commandments* (2005) concentrates on the Decalogue, and the prohibition on killing especially. Patrick Leonard's and Maribeth Derry's *The Ten Commandments: The Musical* (2006) begins with the birth of Moses and, like Rubenstein's work, closes with the Israelites' preparation for the promised land. There are also cinematic and televisual soundtracks, such as Elmer Bernstein's (1922–2004) music for Cecil B. DeMille's (1881–1959) second film of *The Ten*

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[11]   Calvin, Institutes of the Christian Religion, 120–127.

Commandments (1956).[12] DeMille's earlier silent version, released in 1923, appears to have had no dedicated score.[13] These orchestral, choral, and instrumental works are character- and event-driven, for the most part, following a libretto adapted from the source. In *Image and Inscription*, what would normally serve as the libretto (the text of the second commandment, in this case) serves, rather, as the raw materials for sonification. However, in keeping with prior musical approaches to the story, the composition focuses upon the principle incidents of the narrative.

3. Image and Inscription: Text and Sonification

The second commandment embodies both the substance and the generative ideas that governed the conception and development of *Image and Inscription*. My intention was to honour the commandment's stricture and to adapt the method of imaging making suppressed therein to the process of sonification. In this way, the text's negative prohibition was turned into a positive compositional means. The term 'engrave' in the source text approximates most closely to the English word 'graven', which translates the Hebrew פֶּסֶל *pæsæl*, meaning 'to cut into shape'. However, for the purposes of composition, I adopted the Hebrew כָּתַב *kātav*, meaning 'to write' (a term that is synonymous with both engraving and inscription). In the source text, it is used to describe both God's inscription of the first set of tables (with his own finger) and Moses's own inscription of the second set, following his destruction of the original on seeing the golden calf (Exod 31:18; 32:19; 34:1).

Image and Inscription focuses on the second commandment's first clause (Exod 20:4). Welsh and English translations of the verse, derived from Bibles published around the same time as each other, formed the basis of the composition. The Welsh translation is taken from Bishop William Morgan's (1545–1604) *Y Beibl Cymraeg* (The Welsh Bible) of 1588: 'Na wnait ddelw gerfiedic, na llun dim a'r [a sydd] yn y nefoedd oddi vchod, nac a'r y [sydd] yn y ddaiar oddi isod: nac a'r [y sydd] yn y dwfr odditann y ddaiar'.[14] The English rendering is taken from the *Authorized King James Version* (1611): 'Thou shalt not make unto thee any graven image, or any likeness of anything that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the

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[12]   Stern, Bible and Music, 23–27.
[13]   Higashi, Cecil B. DeMille and American Culture, 26. In the era of silent films, the score, in all likelihood, would have reflected the prevailing taste for high-cultural forms of music, such as opera. Classical operatic scores were sometimes adapted to be performed as accompaniments to silent films.
[14]   Lloyd Jones, Y Beibl Cymraeg.

earth' (all biblical quotations are from the *Authorized King James Version*[15] unless otherwise stated).
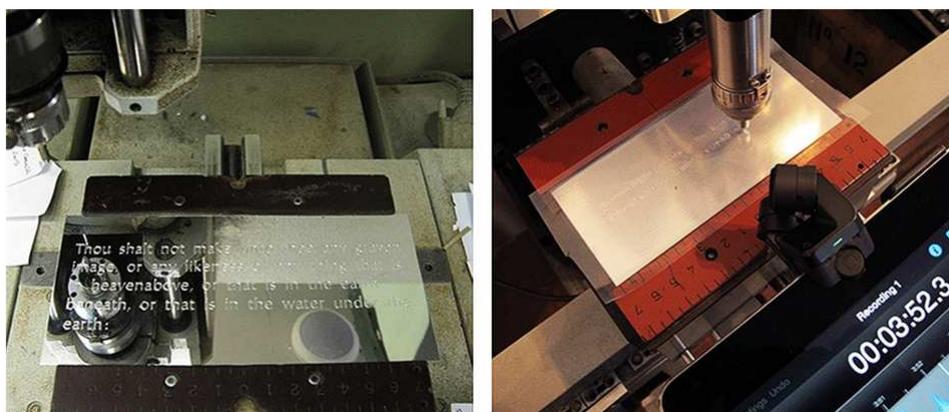
Fig. 2: Matrix engraving of the second commandment in English (left) and Welsh (right), 2010 and 2015.

In translating the texts into sonic samples, three different methods of engraving were addressed. In the first, each version of the verse was mechanically inscribed in English and Welsh on an aluminium plate (evoking, incidentally, the two tables of the law) by commercial engraving machines, and the sound of the process captured digitally (Fig. 2). Slowed-down versions of the recordings were then modified through a network of analogue and digital synthesizer filters in order to generate tonal characteristics appropriate to the general mood of the narrative – which is one of threat, awe, and gloom, for the most part.

The second method involved recording the text, spoken by a woman and man in Welsh and English respectively, and then transferring the digital capture to two copies of a 33-rpm vinyl disc by the intaglio process of engraving a groove into acetate. In the context of a 24-hour open-studio event held at the National Library of Wales, Aberystwyth, in 2015, the discs were manipulated on a pair of record-player decks, and the voices filtered through a series of digital samplers and filters. By these means, fragments of the original recordings were inverted, repeated, overlaid, interpenetrated, and otherwise modulated.

In the third method, two nineteenth-century pictorial engravings depicting Moses on Mount Sinai – one taken from a Welsh Bible and the other from an English Bible – served as the source. These were John Martin's (1789–1854) mezzotint 'Moses Breaketh the Tables', from *Illustrations to the Bible*, and an anonymous steel-plate engraving depicting the same subject, printed in *Bibl yr Addoliad Teuluaidd* (Family Worship Bible) (Fig. 3).[16] Digital renderings of the illustrations were converted into bitstreams in order to be manipulated, using a

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15   The Bible: Authorized King James Version, 1993.
16   Bibl yr Addoliad Teuluaidd; Illustrations to the Bible.

Fig. 3: J. Martin, Moses Breaketh the Tables, from: Illustrations to the Bible, mezzotint, 1883.

databending technique, by sound-editing software.[17] Thus, the source text, having been translated through three distinct processes, converged as a single medium or state: digital sound. The resultant three sonifications, and only these, became the substance of 11 scenes descriptive of the narrative – scenes in the sense of not only a sequence of events or actions (such as one might encounter in an opera or a play) but also prospects or views (as in the tradition of landscape art):

> 'Scene 1: The Wilderness' (Exod 19:1–2)
> 'Scene 2: The Mountain' (Exod 19:3–6)
> 'Scene 3: The People' (Exod 19:7–8)
> 'Scene 4: A Thick Cloud' (Exod 19:9–14)
> 'Scene 5: The Sanctification' (Exod 19:15)
> 'Scene 6: The Third Day' (Exod 19:16–25)
> 'Scene 7: The Decalogue' (Exod 20:1–20)
> 'Scene 8: The Two Visions; The Two Tables' (Exod 20:21–32:15)
> 'Scene 9: The Golden Calf' (Exod 32:1–20)
> 'Scene 10: The Forty Days and Nights' (Exod 32:21–34:29)
> 'Scene 11: The Face of Moses Shines' (Exod 34:29–34:45)

Paradoxically (given the commandment's censure), as the scenes evolved they presented to my mind's eye a series of 'graven image(s)' or, more particu-

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[17] Databending is the act of converting a digital file from its original medium to another. One of the techniques involves altering raw or MIDI data in such a way that it can be interpreted by computer programs in any medium. It is commonly used to convert images into sound (sonification) and vice versa.

larly, biblical landscapes reminiscent of those depicted in engravings by Martin and his contemporaries. Subsequently, their visualization of the narrative informed my own creative considerations as much as a hermeneutical study of the text did. The narrative is full of loud and dreadful noises, but pictorial engravings (like most all visual artworks) are incongruously silent – incapable of either encoding or conveying the sounds suggested within them.[18] Within the transmedial nexus, *Image and Inscription* responds as much to the engravings' sonic absence as to their visual presence. The composition and the engravings share certain analogical commonalities: the evocation of reverberant distances, perspectives, orientations, and spatial proximities; moods of brooding terror, discomfort, suspense, and strangeness; darkness and monochromacy; and an emphasis on Moses's encounters with God and the people.

4. The Ten Commandments in Cinema

The visual style of DeMille's 1923 and 1956 versions of *The Ten Commandments* owe a conspicuous debt to the graphic vision of Martin and Gustav Doré (1832–1883), and to the colouration of Lawrence Alma-Tadema (1836–1912). The earlier film's silence is quelled by the accompanying music, but only in part. Speech remains mute; it can be made visible only as text on caption boards. Likewise, the ambient sounds described in the source are rendered either as an illuminated text or, in the scene in which Moses's received the Ten Commandments, onomatopoeically, by the instru-

Fig. 4: C.B. DeMille, The Ten Commandments, 1923.

mentation. For example, in one contemporary version of the sound track a glissando played on a theatre organ accompanies God's revelation to Moses of each commandment (Fig. 4). In *Image and Inscription* a single speech act – God's pronouncement of the second commandment (spoken in Welsh and English, recorded, and rendered unintelligible through processing) – provides the raw materials for the construction of the supernatural signifiers.

The commandment also supplied the compositional material used to evoke the sonic landscape, referred to in the broadest context of the text. In the bibli-

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18   Harvey, The Bible as Visual Culture, 86–89.

cal account, this has a far greater presence than the geographical landscape – which is described only generically, or typically, in terms of a wilderness and a mountain. Physical features such as its geology and terrain are not mentioned. But, then again, they are not crucial to the narrative and would not have been unfamiliar to the original readership. One of the composition's contributions to the transmedial nexus of engravings, paintings, and films is in terms of fleshing out and giving emphasis to this aspect of the biblical landscape. In the text, the descriptive visualization of the anomalous, sublime, spectacular, and fugitive aspects of the scene – lightning, darkness, thick cloud, smoke, earthquakes (being the dramatic visual and physical manifestations of God's presencing) – is to the fore. In my rendering, the acoustic dimension associated with these aspects dominates exclusively. The composition strips away the flesh, skeleton, and organs of the text's corpus to present its fibrous nervous system alone. Sound stands in for everything; there is only sound.

DeMille's 1956 version of *The Ten Commandments* emphasizes both the visual and the putative sonic attributes of the narrative. In the scene where Moses receives the Decalogue, Bernstein's strident musical score is overlaid with the voice of God (spoken by an actor) and a sound effect that evokes the noise of the inscription.[19] The actor's voice is slowed down (in order to lower its register) and bathed in reverberation. The 'swoosh' of the comet-like projectiles, as they emerge from the fiery column to engrave each of the commandments in the rock face, is the work of foley artists and sound engineers, no doubt using entirely earthbound means – transformed by tape-recording technology – to evoke the spiritual phenomenon.[20] These particularizations of God's sonic presence are not indicated in the text. We read that his voice was objectively audible but not what it sounded like, other than terrifying (Exod 20:19). Likewise, the only visible externalization of God on the mount was in the form of a thick cloud (Exod 19:9). DeMille's conception of the latter, while unsupported by the text was not unbiblical. He drew upon the iconography of the pillar of fire – a theophanic manifestation of God's presence that led the Israelites through the wilderness to the mount – mentioned earlier on in the Book of Exodus (Exod 13:21). DeMille, in effect, allows scripture to interpret or, rather, to illustrate itself in order to fill the gap in the text's description and convey the concept cinematically.

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[19] TCM, The Ten Commandments; Reinhartz, Bible and Cinema. DeMille was notoriously secretive regarding the production of the visual and sound effects in his films. Some sources suggest that he himself supplied the voice of God and that the rumble of thunder used in *The Ten Commandments* (1956) was derived from the recording of an atom bomb test.
[20] Gomery, The Coming of Sound, 23–46.

5. *Image and Inscription*: Voice and Trumpet

Image and Inscription draws upon sounds that are explicitly mentioned in the text, as well as upon those that are either implicitly present or likely to have been heard. Explicit sounds include thunder; God's voice; Moses's voice; the people speaking, singing, shouting, and dancing (which Joshua compared to the noise of war); Joshua's voice; and the sound of a trumpet (Exod 19:13,16,18). The implicit sounds are the rumble of earthquake, the carving and inscription of the tablets, the fashioning or graving of the golden calf, and the destruction of both (Exod 32:2–4,19–20). There are also speculative sounds (those not referred to in the text that may, nevertheless, have been experienced). They include electromagnetic emissions from lightning discharges, propagating shock waves, and vibrations in the air, which often precede or accompany earthquakes and storms. Furthermore, there are metaphoric sounds. They represent my sonic interpretation of visual phenomena, impressions, and actions, including the thick cloud, Moses's and the elders' visions of a sapphire pavement and of God as a devouring fire, the shining face of Moses after he returned from forty days and nights on the mount, and his various ascents and descents (Exod 19:9; 24:10,17; 34:29). Moses's peregrinations are rendered by the leitmotif of an upward and downward glissando, suggested by the noise made by one of the engraving machines when it was turned on and off.[21] In adapting pre-existing material, the composition extends foley-based techniques for constructing sound equivalents of auditory biblical phenomena.

The mood of the *Image and Inscription* is anxious and tense for the most part, in keeping with the tone of the narrative which, barring several sections of extensive law giving, is fraught and full of dread throughout. The composition's province and field of endeavour, both emotionally and spiritually, is the *mysterium tremens*: the evocation of the numinous, dreadful, sublime, holy, and whole otherness of God in confrontation with humankind. This sublime (in the Burkean sense) aspect of the composition's sound profile is, in part, informed by a film that lies at the boundary of the text's transmedial nexus.[22] Moses's ascent of and God's descent to Mount Sinai provides the trope at the conclusion of Steven Spielberg's (b. 1946) *Close Encounters of the Third Kind* (1977). The protagonist, Roy Neary, climbs Devil's Tower, Wyoming, to confront the alien mothership, which comes down from the starry heavens to meet him. The vibrant, low-frequency drone associated with the approaching spacecraft, exerted a consider-

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[21] Harvey, Image and Inscription, Disc 1, Scene 8. In Michael Tippett's (1905–1998) opera *New Year* (1988), a glissando is used as a sound metaphor for the arrival and departure of a spaceship in acts 2 and 3.
[22] Burke, A Philosophical Enquiry.

able influence on the dominant undertones of my composition.[23] The sound pervades the scenes of the composition, variously summoning a tremor or deep resonance; a constant, distant thunder; or water coursing under pressure and ready to blow. The location of the sound in *Image and Inscription* is non-specific, simultaneously appearing to originate in the heavens, on the earth, and under the earth, in keeping with the extent of the second commandment's prohibition.

The two other sonic components that contribute to the composition's fearful mood and emotional content are the sounds of God's voice and a trumpet. In conceiving a sonic evocation of God speaking, the composition eschews the traditional orthodoxy of the stern, resonant, low-toned patrician in a capacious room, which DeMille and others had envisioned. Instead – and applying the principle of scripture interpreting scripture – the component grew in response to, first, what is suggested in the text. God's voice was appallingly loud and terrifying, even when heard at some distance from the mount. The Israelites beseeched Moses: 'Let not God speak with us, lest we die' (Exod 20:19). But this is all that one can glean from the source. Outside the Sinai narrative, however, the Bible records other, sometimes contrasting, vocal manifestations and characteristics. For example, when God spoke to the prophet Elijah, it was in the manner of a 'still small voice' (1Kgs 19:11). The young Samuel mistook his voice to be that of Eli, the high priest of Israel (1Sam 3:1–7). Metaphorically, God's voice is elsewhere in the Old Testament compared to the 'roar' of a lion (Hos 11:10). In John's Gospel, some of the people who had witnessed God the Father speaking to God the Son testified that the former's voice thundered. However, others heard, the same sound and 'said, An angel spake to him' (John 12:29). Thus, in the case of actual auditions, what was perceived by those present at the scene could be ambiguous: a confluence of the source and the audient's subjective apprehension of it.

Linguistically, the concepts of speaking, roaring, sounding, and thundering imbricate in biblical thought. The Greek word for thunder (βροντή *brontē*) originates from βρέμω *bremō*: "to roar like an animal". The verb 'to sound' or 'to make a loud noise' (ἠχέω *ēcheō*, from which the word 'echo' derives), is also that used to describe the roaring of the sea. In Hebrew, the word for 'voice' (לֹק *qôl*) is the same as that for 'thunder', 'to roar', 'loud', and 'noise' (Exod 20:18). Outside the canon of scripture, and within the multiplex of transmedial textual commentary, the rabbinic writing *Shemot Midrash Rabbah* states that the voice of God came down from Mount Sinai as one voice and language that fractured into seventy voices and languages, resounding together.[24] This idea of choral speech, coupled with a Babel-like multiplicity of linguistic systems, informed the manner in

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23 Harvey, Image and Inscription, Disc 1, Scene 3.
24 Web Veshiva, Online Seraphim.

which human voices were modulated. The sonic realization of God's voice in *Image and Inscription*, rather than choosing from among the many auditory modes and manifestations in and outside of the Bible, integrates them all in order to suggest a divine utterance of incomprehensible otherliness. The reverberation, for its part, is used to convey a conception not of an intrinsic characteristic of God's voice (as in DeMille) but, rather, of its acoustic properties in situ: the reflections and resonance of the voice among the rocks and outcrops on Mount Sinai's summit.[25]

The other sonic component is a trumpet. What the people heard emanating from the mount is likely to have been the sound of the shofar (שׁוֹפָר): the ram's horn trumpet – one of the earliest forms of wind instrument – which the Israelites played on ceremonial occasions (Lev 25:9; Josh 6:20). For certain, the text says: 'the voice of the trumpet [was] exceeding loud … sounded long, and waxed louder and louder' (Exod 19:19). These attributes of duration and incremental amplitude informed my conception of the trumpet in the composition. Recordings of the shofar are readily available in the form of field recordings. My objective was to imitate the sound using only the sonic material derived from the three engraving processes. The character of the instrument was said to resemble the cry of human voice.[26] In the Exodus text (Exod 19:1-34:35), the Hebrew word for 'voice' (קוֹל *qôl*) is the same as that for sound.

For this reason, I explored the potential for transforming the voice recordings, derived from my 24-hour open-studio event, into a blaring and supernaturally loud shofar. Portions of extended vowel enunciation were sampled from the speakers' words (which had been originally intoned by God's voice, in Hebrew), stretched by 800 per cent, and treated with a chorus modulator in order to produce a throaty timbre. While the result was a reasonable approximation to the sound of the ram's horn, it was insufficiently close to the sound that I had in my head when reading the text. For my second attempt, I extracted the sound of a prolonged screech made by the engraving machine that had inscribed the English version of the second commandment as it returned from the right-hand side to the left-hand side of the plate to begin each a new line. The sample was then slowed down and dropped in pitch by two octaves. Four distinct carriage returns treated in this manner were subsequently superimposed and filtered through external modulators in order to modify the timbre of the composite and thence to produce more breathy and hollow sonority. This construction was then combined with the original voice-based extraction to create the completed sound.[27] The trumpet 'voice' that was in my head was also strongly informed by the dis-

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[25] Harvey, Image and Inscription, Disc 1, Scene 8.
[26] David, The Significance of the Shofar.
[27] Harvey, Image and Inscription, Disc 1, Scene 7.

tant and reverberant honk of the three three-foot long foghorns installed on the Golden Gate Bridge, San Francisco, which I had heard and recorded in 2013. The three horns sound as two blasts, each with a distinct tone (Fig. 5).[28]

6. Image and Inscription: Past and Present

The Bible's transmedial nexus spans thousands of years. Over that period, the technologies of its presentation and transmission have diversified and mutated to an extraordinary degree. With the introduction of each new platform, method, and system of

Fig. 5: J. Harvey, Golden Gate Bridge, San Francisco, 2016.

encoding, there is a fusion of the historical and the contemporary. To reverse the biblical adage: old wine has been poured into new wine skins (Matt 9:17). The ancient text has been variously adapted, extended, interrogated, applied, translated, and stylized; cast in celluloid, sensitized emulsion, magnetic tape, vinyl, shellac, polycarbonate plastic, digital medium, painting, sculptural, and drawing mediums; and performed through dramatic acts, vocalizations, and instrumentations. At each intersection of the source and its latest embodiment, new possibilities, insights, and significances have emerged.

One of motivations for this progressive updating of the Bible is to demonstrate the continued relevance of an otherwise historically specific text. In DeMille's 1923 version of *The Ten Commandments*, the conflation of, and continuity between, past and present is articulated in two ways: first, in the realization of the historic drama – set in period costume and a realistic locale – using the then relatively new motion-picture technology; and, second, in respect to the film's intrinsic narrative structure. It is divided into two parts: part one is the account of the biblical story, and part two presents a morality play about the consequences of disobeying the Decalogue, set in contemporary America. The transition from the historic to modern represents an elision of over three thousand years.

The story centres on two brothers and their mother (summoning a relationship with the parable of the prodigal son, his brother, and his father: Luke 15:11–32). One brother is an unscrupulous building contractor who erects a church built with concrete made on the cheap, so that he can pocket the savings for himself. His mother visits the work site. The church, which has been made more insecure by the vibrations from heavy trucks rumbling on the road close by, col-

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28   Golden Gate Bridge, 'Fog Horns at Mid Span'.

lapses on and fatally wounds her. God's collapses on and fatally wounds her. God's judgement on the son's avarice appears on the one architectural ornament that has survived the calamity. The tables of stone described in the Exodus narrative are, in the film, converted into concrete slabs (Exod 24:12; Fig. 6). Likewise, the commandment's inscription is reconceived as a projection upon them. (God communicated

Fig. 6: C.B. DeMille, The Ten Commandments, 1923.

cinematically in this context.) The technological transformation of the source through rematerialization and revisualization is not the only mode of transposition evident in DeMille's film. The noisesome tumult surrounding Mount Sinai is here naturalized in terms of the very traffic that caused the building to fall – a sound that, in the silent film, is summoned only by the caption board's text.

In *Image and Inscription*, the sounds associated with the Sinai narrative have been made the exclusive vehicle for its interpretation. The composition is an inversion of the notion of silent film: variously 'an image-less sound film', to coin Rudolf Arnheim's (1904–2007) description of Walter Ruttmann's (1887–1941) sound collage *Wochenende* (1930), a series of invisible scenes, and a sonic narration in which the story is only heard, and what is heard are only sound effects or, rather, the effects of sound.[29] Within the transmedial nexus of the Decalogue and its contexts, *Image and Inscription* draws out a single strand of the narrative, one that is occasionally present in cinematic representations but is more often accompanied by music. The composition makes what is present in part in film to stand for the whole.

7. Conclusion

Like almost every platform, technology, and modality within the transmedial nexus of the Bible, the composition not only extends beyond but also reaches back towards the text. It honours the development and salient incidents of the narrative, but without proffering a putative reconstruction of events. In so doing, Image and Inscription does not overlay meanings that are not already intrinsic to the text. Rather, it makes present, fills out, and amplifies those aspects of the source that words and images (either static or kinetic) cannot. Within biblical

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[29]   Higgins, Arnheim for Film and Media Studies, 12.

hermeneutics, the composition represents the sonic afterlife of the text or, more specifically, the sounds present in and implied by it. The composition is, in this respect, an acoustic echo of the source. In returning the second commandment to the condition of sound, Image and Inscription both reverses the process by which it first came into being and evokes, imaginatively, the sonic character of the context of the Decalogue's original reception.

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Fig. 1: J. Harvey, The Bible in Translation / Y Beibl mewn Cyfieithiad, 2 CDs (The Aural Bible II), 2016

Fig. 2: Matrix engraving of the second commandment in English (left) and Welsh (right), 2010 and 2015

Fig. 3: J. Martin, Moses Breaketh the Tables, from: Illustrations to the Bible, mezzotint, 1883

Fig. 4: C.B. DeMille, The Ten Commandments, 1923

Fig. 5: J. Harvey, Golden Gate Bridge, San Francisco, 2016

Fig. 6: C.B. DeMille, The Ten Commandments, 1923

Impressum

Herausgeber / Editors:
Prof. Dr. Brad Anderson, brad.anderson@dcu.ie
Prof. Dr. Régis Burnet, regis.burnet@uclouvain.be
Prof. Dr. Susanne Gillmayr-Bucher, s.gillmayr-bucher@ku-linz.at
Prof. Dr. Klaus Koenen, koenen@arcor.de
Prof. Dr. Martin O'Kane, m.okane@tsd.ac.uk
Prof. Dr. Caroline Vander Stichele, C.H.C.M.VanderStichele@uvt.nl

„Bible in the Arts" is a project of the German Bible Society.
„Die Bibel in der Kunst" ist ein Projekt der Deutschen Bibelgesellschaft

Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft
Balinger Straße 31 A
70567 Stuttgart
Deutschland

www.bibelwissenschaft.de