

DIVINATION BY *THE TEN COMMANDMENTS*:
ITS RHETORICS AND THEIR GENEALOGIES

By

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ABSTRACT

As American and other modern practices of recirculating hegemony perform, particularly through nodes of nationalism and racism, the resolving of lived, social contradictions, mass cultural texts tend to deploy rites of divination in what I explain as “mantic practices.” Herein I investigate the mantic practices of Cecil B. DeMille’s 1956 film, *The Ten Commandments*. After a close reading of these practices in the film, the dissertation proceeds to analyze their genealogies.

The film’s mantic practices work on several levels, the most basic of which includes depictions of rites of divination such as astrology or cleromancy (casting lots). Furthermore the film’s deployment of certain rhetorics, such as “manifest destiny,” function as divination. Overall the film positions its viewers as if performers of rites of divination.

In addition to original diagrams, the dissertation features a set of frames captured from a digital video disk of the film. These appear as illustrations in the text and are duplicated in diptychs as a “Slide Show,” attached.

Relative to prior interpretations, this dissertation brings increased depth, scale, detail, and suppleness to critiquing *The Ten Commandments*’ cultural performance—its shape and provenance, as well as its impact and contribution to “mass mediumship.” The genealogies here feature Judaism and Christianity, rhetorics of Black and White, performative modes such as melodrama, and modern technologies of mass mediation.

Across currents of lore and tradition, masterful mediators particularly have used the Decalogue—metonymic for law—in reaching determinations of sociocultural identity. From the ancient Israelites and Greeks through the rise of modern nationalism, as formalized rites have mediated uses of Bibles, such practices have helped constitute peoplehoods.

This dissertation demonstrates divination as a paradigm that links diverse texts, including literature and film, music and advertising, popular discourses and academic critiques. This investigation’s findings help to challenge prevalent notions that anything has superseded premodern patterns of cultural performance; and articulates the role of supersessionism in peoples’ framing of their own mantic practices.

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All reproductions of images from *The Ten Commandments* (1956) herein are captured frames from the digital video disk (DVD), *The Ten Commandments: Special Collector's Edition*, copyright 2004[1956], Paramount Pictures Corporation, all rights reserved. Reference here to other specific images and sound of the film, including also the 1966 trailer for the film, come from this DVD. However, unless otherwise specified, "*The Ten Commandments*," herein refers primarily to the 1956 film in its cinema release and in television broadcasts.

I conducted additional research in March, 2000, at the DeMille Archives, 5072 Harold B. Lee Library, Brigham Young University, Provo, Utah. I am grateful to curator James V. D'Arc.

Bible quotations and references herein, unless otherwise specified, refer to the *New American Standard Bible*, mainly because it is the default internet reference Bible, and this dissertation concerns mass mediation of the Bible.

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“A philosophy that does not include the possibility of soothsaying from coffee grounds and cannot explicate it cannot be a true philosophy.”

—Walter Benjamin¹

“So, let it be written. So, let it be done!”

—Pharaoh Rameses (Yul Brynner)

¹ Walter Benjamin, quoted in Scholem 1981, 59.

PREFACE

MANTIC CHILD'S PLAY, AUGUST 1974

I first learned the social power of modern divination when I was seven. In a nutshell, the story is that one neighbor nicknamed another using a spontaneous rite of cartomancy, divination-by-cards. It happened in suburban New Jersey in 1974, in a secular milieu when I was seven years old. The block's boys used to gather daily on the front lawn of the house of our leader, an older boy named Brian Cohen.

One afternoon the block's boys were gathered on Brian's front lawn when an unknown young boy wordlessly approached. Brian guessed, correctly, that the boy's family that day had moved into the house across the street from mine. The boy's name was Paul. "We already have a Paul here," Brian pointed out, "so I'm going to have to give you a new name." Actually, now that the boys my age were school age, Brian was trying to make us cohere: he had recently nicknamed all the boys, and though we liked having gang names, we never remembered to use them—we just continued using our real names as we were used to them. So this arrival presented a special opportunity.

Brian had given each boy a nickname that rhymed with our names, but for the new boy, he unexpectedly announced that he would perform a divination. "Today at the drugstore I bought a pack of Wacky Packs," he intoned. These were a kind of trading cards, distributed—like baseball cards—by the Topps Chewing Gum company, but these were hand-drawn by the creators of *Mad* magazine.² "I haven't

² The "Wacky Packages" were first released in 1967.

opened the pack yet. Whatever card is on top,” Brian said to the new boy, “that’s going to be your new name.” This was an exciting rite for us, so when Brian produced the pack from his pocket, we crowded around as he unwrapped it.

As it so happens, Wacky Packages themselves were an exercise in counterhegemonic renaming. Each card pictured a hand-painted, gross parody of the packaging of a widely advertised product—for example, instead of Tinker Toy, there was one for “Stinker Toy.” Because each card was also a peel-off, adhesive sticker, they also functioned as instant graffiti, enabling reterritorialization not only of our corporatized discourse but also of our physical surroundings.

When Brian unwrapped the pack, the top card was a parody of Duco Cement: “Ducko Cement.”³ Ducko Cement? It didn’t sound like a great nickname to us. “Your new name,” Brian coolly told the boy, “is Ducko.” Ducko! Hey, Ducko! The name stuck. (In fact, henceforth we noticed that when his mother called him for dinner, she called, “Paul . . . ! Paul . . . !” until perforce she called “Ducko!” and he came home.) We were now surely the only gang with a mascot-member named Ducko.

UNPACKING THE WACKY PACKAGE

In conclusion, it seems that Brian performed a divination: one that corresponded closely to fortunetelling and other ancient rituals of divination. For example, much as Brian did by deducing that the unknown boy was the new inhabitant of the house across the street, a diviner may begin by making logical deductions about his clients, as a firm point of departure towards divining more information, and moreover to cultivate clients’ credulity in his divinatory powers and their eagerness to play along.⁴ Finally, by omitting the word “cement” from the indicated card, Brian performed an interpretation. Indeed, many practices of divination depend on such interpretation.

Moreover, Brian’s naming ritual fits the seven characteristics of divination as enumerated by J. Samuel Preus, a scholar of religion. Ours was a “dicey” situation because Brian already had failed at his prior, ambitious attempt to bond us as a group

³ See Grant 2006.

⁴ Turner 1980, 375.

with nicknames; plus we had never incorporated any new neighbor into our gang under Brian, so we faced uncertainty. For the need to rename the new boy, it seemed the usual forms of inquiry did not apply.

Though Preus does not highlight divination's dependence on indeterminacy, he does note its role: "the credibility and plausibility of the whole system depends absolutely on structures and rules that prevent (or appear to prevent) manipulation." That is, the question of which card would be revealed—as the top card under the wrapper—had an indeterminate answer. Brian could not have put the card there, and none of us, including him, knew what the card said. So Brian posed as a medium of an external voice.

"Although the client-diviner transaction is one-on-one"—Brian spoke directly to the new boy—"it is at the same time a social ritual act, bounded by public, culturally-constituted, clearly-understood rules and procedures." So Brian publicly declared the simple rules of the ritual, which we immediately recognized. The ritual allowed us "actively to determine [our] own situation or behave as if [we] could do so," and to some degree, "to assume responsibility for [our] own . . . destinies."

Finally, this divination-by-Wacky-Packages profitably can be interpreted as a rite of divination by a canon. (See Chapter One. For example, an oneiromancer relies on a canon of dream-symbols, and in bibliomancy the book is the canon. In cartomancy the deck is the canon.) In this case, the Wacky Packages constituted a canon in several respects. First, corporate advertisers had canonized a set of household labels. Next, the Wacky Packages series restricted that canon to its own satirical canon. Then the satire proceeded Rabelaisianly according to a canon of wet or smelly bodily functions.⁵ Based on the form of baseball cards, the distributor invites buyers to collect the whole canon of cards. Finally, Brian used the pack as a deck.

Not unlike the Tarot, the set of Wacky Packages cards is designed not for games, but for helping one locate oneself in relation to situations. In fact, if a user was not inclined to collect the Wacky Packages as cards, a user could literally *apply*

⁵ The duck of Ducko Cement ejaculates from the tube, embodying a seminal, white geyser.

them to marking one's environs, because the card's illustrations were printed on removable, adhesive stickers.⁶

This is not a matter of *commodity fetishism* so much as it is *divination by commodity*. With the coinage of *commodity fetishism*, Marx primarily critiqued a mere symptom—the overinvestment in an object's exchange-value. But his larger point—that capitalism as a system *mediates* social life—corresponds more fully with divination. Indeed, more deeply Marx characterized the commodity as a “social hieroglyph,” a trace calling for decipherment of the “secret doctrine” of the “message of capital” behind it.⁷ Horkheimer and Adorno later found that cinematic “pictures showing . . . moving clouds make these aspects of nature into so many cryptograms for factory chimneys and service stations.”⁸ These are not the rites of a consumer-as-fetish-bearer, so much as the rites of a consumer-as-diviner.

A model of *commodity manticism* can account for, among other things, the *canonization* of brands through self-locating rituals that have gained importance since Marx's day. Where ever one may go in late capitalism, self-locating proceeds through commodities.⁹

RITE OF SPRING 1977

My approach to this dissertation came from my father. Other than eating dinner, watching television was our only daily rite as a family: one night in early spring of 1977, when I was nine, with a serious tone he invited me to stay up late to join him and my mother to watch a special film on television. He had never invited

⁶ Such indeterminate application, according to critic Greil Marcus, is a prime method of determination in systems of mass-media promotion and consumption. In his discussion of a film about the dawn of rock and roll, *American Hot Wax*, Marcus finds its premise is that pop culture is about shared access to feeling, through “*the unpredictable interplay* between three-minute utopias of sound and ordinary life” (Marcus 1995, 140, emphasis added). In Marcus's articulation of strategies of interpretation associated with the film by its promoters and users, the shared access comes through ritually pure indeterminacy to get striking and memorable statements.

⁷ Marx 1975[1887], 1: 74-75; on the commodity as social hieroglyphic see also Mitchell, 1986), Ch. 6, and Hansen 1992.

⁸ Horkheimer and Adorno 1987, 149.

⁹ One example from American conversational discourse is the comment, “I'll buy that for dollar!” With this phrase, often uttered in a cracker-barrel accent, the speaker parodies shrewdness as a “buyer” of claims.

me to stay up late, nor to watch anything on television, so of course I accepted his offer and watched the film.

The film, *The Ten Commandments*, seemed too serious and stiff, and after two hours, . . . then three, nearly four hours, it felt almost interminable: yet in parts its drama struck me. Overall it made indelible memories (and not only because my father never again found anything on television that seemed to merit his specially inviting me). These circumstances shaped my notion of *The Ten Commandments* as a rite.

One of the main aims of this dissertation is to articulate *how* this film works as a rite. In his state-of-the-art book on relating media with ritual, Ronald Grimes (2006) notes that using “the TV as centerpiece of family gatherings” is ritualistic activity.¹⁰ Moreover, treating a film “as classical, canonical or required viewing” ritualizes the film.¹¹ This is how the television network presented *The Ten Commandments* to the network’s viewers. My father in turn ritualized the presentation via his invitation to me.

Moreover the film-as-rite spoke directly to my religion and identity. The story of the Exodus from Egypt, which this film portrays, is the heart of Jewish religious and tribal identity. At the synagogue at which my family held membership—Temple Shari Emeth, in Manalapan, New Jersey—I’d heard the refrain in English: “. . . the Lord, our God, who led us out of Egypt to *be* our God.” Moreover, in our household the annual festive meals for extended family were two: first each autumn’s Thanksgiving dinner, then each spring’s Passover Seder. Thanksgiving dinner was a rite preceded by watching on television the Macy’s parade in New York, followed by college football games. So even if the television program was not on the exact day of Passover, it seemed only fitting that Passover should have its television rite, too. As at each Passover Seder—when my father told the story of the Exodus and my family followed along in the *haggada*, turning the pages of these booklets printed and distributed by the makers of Maxwell House coffee, gazing at the oversaturated, color illustrations—the television rite of Passover told, in outline, the same story with similarly serious tone and oversaturated colors. Although they could feel stiff and interminable, I loved all these rites.

¹⁰ Grimes 2006, 4.

¹¹ Grimes 2006, 55-56.

The Ten Commandments as a rite seemed to resolve tensions of my dual identity. Part of the tension was that Passover, like everything else about Judaism, seemed very different from the Thanksgiving rite. Thanksgiving seemed all-American. We studied the story of Thanksgiving in school each autumn and produced a school-wide, annual Thanksgiving pageant at Marlboro Elementary School (in which I'd portrayed Miles Standish). Thanksgiving was very much a part of the world as seen on television. While about half my schoolmates, including all the ones born in Marlboro, were Christian, not Jewish, Thanksgiving seemed to be the holiday for us all. But Thanksgiving didn't seem Jewish.

Moreover, though we all sang Christmas carols in class at school, there seemed to be nothing Jewish about school nor the world as seen on television. My people were the Americans—the giant, world-beating, righteous incarnation of modernity astride the globe and on the moon. I was in America, I was American, I loved America. My father worked as a Deputy Attorney General for the state of New Jersey, he had gone to Harvard Law; America was the best. It was us. To be American meant power and knowledge, television and radio, civil society, school, the library—everything I could see or hear that wasn't Jewish seemed American.

Yet my people were the Jews—the ancient people of the book, of the Yiddish words and Hebrew chants evoking very distant, very old worlds. My identity was in my family's gathering around candles for Hanukah, our sweet wine in silver cups at the Seder. My identity was in my family and the families of most of my friends. *The Ten Commandments* seemed to unite Jewish and American identities.

Even as a young boy I felt paradoxes of *triple* identity, needing resolution. America, which supposedly was about inclusiveness, seemed to include Christian identity but not Jewish identity. Moreover, not only did my tribe seem to have no part in the great American way, but also my Jewish way stood me apart from my Jewish schoolmates. That is, in order to affiliate with a branch of Judaism that emphasized inclusiveness, my family excluded itself from the town's Conservative Jewish community of Marlboro Jewish Center, the Conservative synagogue in our town, where each male wore a *yamika* (*yarmulke*, or skullcap) and all the prayers were in Hebrew. My classmates were tied into their fathers' way of Judaism, and the town's Jewish gathering. My family went instead to a neighboring town's Reform synagogue where families from surrounding towns gathered to say many of the prayers in

English, and not so many males elected to cover their heads. Our way was a new, progressive liberation from the Jewish way my parents had learned. Ours seemed an elective affiliation.

I deduced that these paradoxes all somehow related to modernism because my father had hung modern paintings in our home; the cars he drove—a white Camaro, a beige Peugeot—looked more modern-styled than our neighbors’ dark, General Motors, 1970s’ sedans; and our synagogue’s iconography was styled modern. Furthermore, it seemed my father’s special job as a lawyer for the government, and his special interest in talking of contemporary government and politics, linked all these paradoxes to ongoing developments in American civics at the bicentennial.

Actually *The Ten Commandments* as a rite seemed to resolve all these conflicts. That is, electing to watch this film seemed boldly to represent and affirm the components of my identity *all at once* in a rite joined on that spring night of 1977 by a modern audience constituted as if a mass, by the medium of a national television network.

The Ten Commandments, like our Reform Judaism, brought a righteous, contemporary *political* message—it served to raise political consciousness.¹² Like our congregation’s solemn prayers on the holiest day, *Yom Kippur*, this film enacted the will to feel the suffering of our contemporary world’s unfortunates—with the implication that we should try to help them.

My father never interpreted the film for me, nor did he ever explain about religion, except on one occasion that came to shape my understanding of *The Ten Commandments*. One night after dinner, to my mother he voiced disgust about someone he had heard make a racist remark. I did not follow his gist, yet was interested in the emotional content of what he was saying so I asked him for some explanation: what was so bad? He told me that some people don’t like Black people and say bad things about them, but as Jewish people, we should support Black people because they had been slaves too and their situation resembled ours. I was glad to hear it, because during a family trip to Washington, D.C., I had felt the Lincoln Memorial to be holy, and emancipation of the slaves to be a great, American story.

¹² For example, our Reform synagogue’s liturgy was phrased to be egalitarian towards women. That is, especially, it avoided referring to God as He; and always named the matriarchs along with the patriarchs—that is, Abraham and Sarah, Isaac and Rivka, and Jacob and Leah and Rachel. I recognized this egalitarianism as more modern than any other rhetoric I had encountered.

Since 1977 I have felt *The Ten Commandments* as a rite of resolving conflicts of my own identity and America's identity. Like "the story of Thanksgiving," this film seems to be a big, founding story America tells itself. In both cases, apart from my belief or disbelief I felt strong *communitas* about my family's role in the national rite. Meanwhile on several levels *The Ten Commandments* can seem to be my people's story: not only does it portray the Jewish story of Exodus from Egypt, but moreover it tells the Reform story of modern, elective affinities, and of our faith's relevance to America's righteous history and contemporary politics.

The reasons why my father invited me to watch *The Ten Commandments* seemed patent: it was our story of glorious liberation. It resolved tensions of identity by compounding all of the following:

- America's foundational liberation of itself from British rule, through rebellion against tyranny;
- Hebrews' foundational liberation of themselves from Egypt;
- American Jews' liberation of themselves, just two generations ago, from Old World oppression;
- American Jews' liberation of themselves from the oppressions of their own pre-modern religion;
- America's liberation of its Negroes;
- America's contemporary liberation of its spirit from oppressive forces, through democracy and righteous faith;
- America's ongoing liberation of the world's people, by valorizing liberation and spreading the modern good news; plus,
- America's liberation of humanity from the dark days before modernism, before the American Way of cinema and television.

In 1977, television seemed to me the most modern of media, which here through *The Ten Commandments* resolved tensions between my ancient, tribal, family identity versus my modernist, American identity. Furthermore it resolved basic

conflicts in nationalism's portrayal of America as the embodiment of contemporary modernity, even as that same nationalism evokes ancient Israel, Greece, and Rome. This film—this glorious, national-scale, storytelling rite—was resolving all these components of my identity and my peoples' identity.

If this film resolves anything, how might it work? Is it a ritual of Hollywood magic, which duped my father, me, and other viewers?

DIVINING AS A LIBERAL ART

As an undergraduate from 1985 to 1989 I practiced liberal arts under John Barlow, a professor of music and American Studies at Wesleyan University. Barlow, a disciple of a disciple of John Cage, taught semiotics, baseball, and the metaphysics of play and domain. A self-proclaimed “West Virginia coal-mining anarchist, born and bred,” Barlow generated and investigated moments of seeing masses of truth together in a wide field.¹³ His explorations focused on what he called *multi-brained activity*, insisting that not one of us, including him, should understand more than about sixty-five percent of the classes.

As an ensemble, our episteme was collective and contingent. In this way Barlow taught me about divination. Actually he never mentioned divination—he just used it.

Like Cage, Barlow also developed useful rites of divination. That is, he composed, taught, and conducted us in several classroom “exercises.” Discussion always followed an activity, as part of the exercise.

Meanwhile I studied English social history and Foucault; six integrated units of Western Civilization, mainly through Great Books; American cultural studies, including poetry and film; West African and African-American folklore, theology, ethnomusicology, and literature; I became especially interested in the power of spirituals and gospel songs in their rites of performance, in the ways these songs deployed rhetorics of Exodus, and in their patterns of channeling interactions through a rhetorical ecology.

¹³ “Usually when we have a wide field we rejoice, for we then see masses of truth together” (James 1902[1985], 231).

In this research I was always a *participant* observer. Particularly, I wrote poetry, and sang in Wesleyan's gospel choir and the Connecticut Mass Choir, and in Wesleyan's West African Drumming and Dance ensemble. My research questions were usually on the order of "How does it work?"

Because my study with Barlow enabled pursuit of the liberal arts as I had hoped it could be done, since 1985 I have remained committed to a wide-view, area-studies approach to the liberal arts, which I attribute to Wesleyan University as a special place for mantic practice.¹⁴

My pursuit of ethnomusicology led me to ethnopoetics, and an M.A. under anthropologist Dennis Tedlock. For my thesis on the poems of Jack Kerouac, for several months I spent at least an hour a week with Leslie Fiedler, freely discussing ideas about the roles of those who channel cultural currents.¹⁵

Eventually in a doctoral seminar taught by Cheryl Lester, divining literary traces of the African-American Great Migration, I decided to research *The Ten Commandments*. From the start, my question was simply, "How does this film work?" Clearly the film worked in "racy" ways, and it worked as a rite. This seemed like a good start. How does the film work as a racy rite?

I devoted some more years to scholarship on the Bible, and on film; as well as to relevant studies of anthropology, folklore, and religion, yet failed to find any scholarship that provided me a satisfactory answer. Indeed, to my surprise I did not find a lot of very advanced scholarship connecting the study of rites (or, more broadly, "ritual") with the study of films.

I analyzed the film's work with diverse cultural discourses, but could hardly unify such analysis. I faced three options: I could abandon the project, or write up what I had found, or keep trying to answer my questions. I chose to keep trying, even though by that point already I had been working on this project for twelve years.

¹⁴ Indeed, divination is one legacy of Wesleyanism. Wesleyanism in England was a "movement of counter-enlightenment" [whose] missionary vocation incorporated and affirmed popular ritual practices such as bibliomancy" (Tambiah 1990, 23 quotes Thompson, 1971/72, 41-55).

¹⁵ In the late Leslie Fiedler, I felt a kindred spirit and a friend; I had a persistently strong, uncanny sense that he and I recognized each other because we had each developed our iconoclasm in public school in New Jersey. My affinity with him has motivated my work on this dissertation.

Eventually, for my separate research on Kerouac, I came to focus on divination as a rite of talking, writing, and reading. I discovered Kerouac had based his entire writing project on Alain-Fournier's pre-World-War-I novel, *Le Grande Meaulnes*—a novel translated into English under the title *The Lost Domain*. Kerouac's writing "works" by getting the reader to join the speaker (or the text itself) in relocating a lost domain. In fact, it works as a form of divination.

As I reflected on the array of cultural theory which—during the twenty years since I had started studying with Barlow—I had gleaned, I realized that it all led to this articulation of divination. Moreover, I realized that *The Ten Commandments*, too, similarly works as divination! At last I saw the light at the end of my long tunnel.

All I had to do was analyze the film's process in terms of divination; define divination suitably; historicize my account; and show how several key cultural theories fit my articulation. I could see this outline clearly, and already had readied a bulk of the components that would fill it, so I would reach the light at the end of the tunnel smoothly and soon. So I thought.

First, defining divination is no easy task. Several academic disciplines lay claim to it, but none with an authoritative gloss on divination. (See Chapters One and Seven.) Moreover, almost none of the studies on divination was adaptable to my purpose, especially because almost none of them focused on indeterminacy as the key. Most of the studies considered divination false, and/or something that only other peoples did. Of the research by self-identified diviners, all of the writers considered divination to be true, and they hardly explained its workings in terms of cultural processes.

My working definition of divination accounted for a lot of practices of musicians, writers, rhetors, and other people I knew as a fellow practitioner; as well as a lot of the cultural theory I valued, especially Linda Williams's and Eric Lott's. It fit very well with the key lessons I had taken from my teachers. So why did I have so much trouble finding suitable, scholarly documentation of my model of divination?

It seems the "habitus" of academic disciplines provides no substrate for such an approach. The point of divination is to channel a warranted bit knowledge, while barring that any individual should control the process. Conversely, the point of academic scholarship is to *control* some knowledge.

On reflection, I realized that my unusual training had situated me rather oddly, concerning divination. I had learned about divination when I first entered university, and practiced it for four years under a master, without ever calling it “divination” or thinking of it in such terms. Barlow was primarily a musician. He labeled his research as metaphysics. From Jacques Attali’s *Noise: The Political Economy of Music*, I had moved to studying the rules of baseball, in terms of semiosis, field, and the demarcation of a play. All the while, Barlow’s main lessons were “exercises.” Where did those valuable lessons leave me, as a doctoral student in American Studies?

The bottom line was that my investigation required me to construct my own working model of divination. There was no other way, and so I have done it. But even this task was relatively easy—compared with the task of “historicizing.”

In order to show how *The Ten Commandments* works as divination (or “mantic practice”), I must explain the provenance of such workings. That is, the film’s cultural work of course has a background; one which helps explain how the film came to work this way. But the question of provenance is a can of worms. My working model of divination came to draw on diverse sources, almost none of which offered much direct help with my investigation’s question. That is, in the first place, I already had found almost no scholarship that accounted very adequately for mantic mediation as a basis for understanding what I am investigating: so there was almost nothing handy to account for its provenance.

So I needed to reframe parts of diverse scholarly accounts, and cobble them together into genealogies of this film’s mantic practice. This leads to a piecemeal approach, grounded in transdisciplinary articulations.

Unfortunately, this is a poor way to construct a doctoral dissertation, which is supposed to show controlled mastery of a discipline. If I were starting over, I might instead write an analysis of scholarship on divination published within a narrowly delimited framework.

However, as I am nothing if not tenacious, I never let go of my initial goal of articulating how *The Ten Commandments* works. Sometimes it may be required to answer an inquiry to the best of one’s ability, rather than asking a different question.

In order to construct genealogies for this film's mantic practice, my task has included framing—in terms of political ecologies of mediation—several major strands of Western thought and civilization. However regarding epistemology and communication—their strands mostly I have treated as they intersect with the run of the discussion, without explicitly delineating those fields. Regarding poetics or hermeneutics, but I only mention them explicitly once or twice herein.

Regarding history per se: I hardly aim to make historical claims here. The bulk of this dissertation consists of genealogies of one film's mantic practice. I do not necessarily claim these genealogies are continuous nor authoritative nor exhaustive; only that they are germane.

The big challenge here lies in my framing mantic practices of Western religion, law, and modern science. Though this challenge is too far reaching, the undertaking was nonetheless necessary in order to show how *The Ten Commandments* functions as divination.

I emphasize here that I learned respect for divination from a self-identified anarchist. For me, the political implications precede much else. The imperative of labeling certain kinds of practices according to terms of an academic discipline—for me this is a relatively recent priority.

In referring to political implications of divination, I use “hegemonic” and “counter-hegemonic” as convenient handles, and as entrances through which to conceptualize divination. However, I do not posit the Gramscian notion of hegemony as prior to divination. Rather, I suppose Gramsci was drawing on his understanding of mantic process—much as Mussolini was doing, in imprisoning Gramsci. (See Chapter One.)

I suggest that my model of divination can profitably enhance an understanding of what sometimes is labeled “hegemony”—that is, particularly the dynamics of the referent of that term. Largely this is why I do not offer an explicit gloss of the term.

My use of the term, meanwhile, is somewhat unconventional in implying that hegemony is ancient. While some scholars indeed have

described ancient cultural processes in terms of hegemony,¹⁶ in cultural studies, Gramscian critiques of modernity generally emphasize modern processes as if they had superseded the “pre-modern.” This problem is not limited to Neo-Gramscians.

All too often, I find, critiques of modernity tend to subscribe to such supersessionism. Indeed the overarching conceptual challenge of this investigation has been navigating supersessionism. This challenge applies most explicitly to initial charting of the genealogies herein, but moreover it has applied to my selecting and reframing sources, and to use of terminology.

More than a few scholars posit that Judaism or Christianity or modernity superseded the pre-Judaic, the pre-Christian, or the pre-modern, thereby making divination obsolete, or at best, retrograde. However, *The Ten Commandments*' mantic practice has seemed anything but obsolete, and in its function (if not its style) no more retrograde than many powerful practices widely considered au courant. So—without denying cultural change, nor the salience of localized conditions—towards a satisfactory investigation here, it is useful to hypothesize that in some key ways, the more mantic practices have changed, the more they have remained the same.

I pose *The Ten Commandments* not as an intrinsically exceptional film, but more as an artifact embodying some key, modern practices. So if the film positions viewers as diviners, this finding may suggest that divination is a core practice of modernity.

However, I am hardly aiming to advance claims about the core texts or core practices of modernity per se, because I am not positing the core of modernity as characteristically different from pre-modernity. I am not claiming it is the same, either. I am merely charting a deep genealogy for one kind of practice of this one film.

Though I am not aiming to compare modernity with anything, in the end I can hardly dodge an insistent question: What is *new* about the mantic practices of modernity? This dissertation's responses to any such question are part of the story here—but not necessarily a major part of my argument that

¹⁶ See especially Fontana 2000.

The Ten Commandments can be satisfactorily understood in terms of mantic practices and their genealogies. Nevertheless, regarding the characteristically modern aspects of divination, some answers may be gleaned particularly from Chapters Ten, Eleven, Fourteen, and Fifteen. Of course, some of modernity's most powerful mantic practices involve unprecedented numbers of people, and depend less on face-to-face interaction.¹⁷

A reader might infer that I posit my own experience of this film as a baseline on which my other claims depend. But this is not the case. Although my report is sincere, I do not cite it for its truth or reality. (Like any self, mine is subject to interpellation and imagination.) In order to introduce my critique, the Preface portrays “ten-year-old Evan Heimlich” as a model subject, constituted by the film's rhetoric.

Herein I am describing how the film addresses, positions, and coaches its own *interpellated auditor*. I do not claim that viewers necessarily have submitted to such coaching as I did—nor in any specific ways.

I offer only limited, generalizations about the film's actual audience. Primarily, it is safe to say that most viewers of Hollywood films do apprehend that the film hails them, the viewers, as part of a collective audience. Even Adorno, who hated film, spoke of “the constitutive subject of film as a ‘we.’”¹⁸ Indeed the very definition of sanity, in modern society, requires one to recognize oneself as part of a collective audience, when auditing the mass media. (That is, if a viewer finds, in a film, messages directed at him in particular, psychiatry considers this response a symptom of schizophrenia.) So unless one argues that the majority of viewers are clinically insane, then one must admit that their response proceeds from acquiescence to getting hailed as part of a collective audience.

Next, it is uncontroversial to claim that auditors make some sense of a text. This is not to say they make the same sense, nor even that they make it

¹⁷ In Japan, where I teach cultural studies, the relation between divination and industrial modernity may be more readily apparent. When I explained to students my interest in divination's role vis-à-vis modernity, one student immediately brought up “omikuji jido hanbaiki”: these are fortune-vending machines, commonly found at shrines, for use by visitors on New Year's Day.

¹⁸ Adorno 1970, vol. 3 (whose published English version is “Transparencies on Film,” in Adorno 1991, 154-161, translated by Hansen 1992, 70.

in the same way; but merely that one can generally characterize diverse responses as “making sense of the text.”

If indeed viewers are making sense of the text, and if indeed viewers are at the same time apprehending that the text is hailing them collectively, then perhaps these two processes are interrelated. Perhaps viewers make some sense of a film from the perspective of the audience that the film hails—puzzling out the sense from the perspective of a collective audience.¹⁹

To wit, if one declares one likes a given studio-era film, this declaration is tantamount to counting oneself among the “we” who is targeted to like the film—because the filmmakers have palpably aimed to foster audiences’ senses of almost every film as one “its public” would like to see.

As I argue in Chapter Fifteen, filmmakers, by deploying “cine-mantic” rhetoric early and often, acted as if it helped their films succeed. Inasmuch as my reading of the film’s rhetoric may indeed correspond with the mental processes of the film’s actual viewers, then my interpretation accords with Peter Brooks’s and Linda Williams’s claims that melodrama tends to involve its auditors in divining moral verdicts. But anyway—even if it were unrelated directly to the films’ success, mantic rhetoric still is salient as part of rites by which a film attempts to hail subjects.

By showing interest in movie stars, and by buying tickets, customers on the whole have honored Hollywood’s performance. Regardless of whatever customers may believe, or how else customers respond, customers’ participation—our performance—*warrants* Hollywood cinema, and its rhetoric, as a cultural practice.

That is, of course the crucial purpose for studio-era films is to profit the studio primarily by attracting a vast audience of paying viewers. In a sense, unless one wants to argue that a film is completely derivative of its precedents, one might say filmmakers’ task of gauging what will attract a film’s audience is always a rite of divination.

In the capitalistic context of the rite, where efficacy is measured in profits, *The Ten Commandments*’ receipts, and its continuing popularity of this film for television audiences each spring (see Appendix herein), attest

¹⁹ See Howe 1993, who discusses the medieval Anglo-Saxon tradition of reading as a collective practice of riddling.

that *The Ten Commandments*, which invites its viewers to divine things, itself divines a route to attracting its audiences. By achieving great and lasting currency and influence, it has fulfilled its instrumental, main purpose.

HAILING THE MASS

This film effectively poses its auditor as part of a mass. This is how DeMille's work is closely linked with wider developments of 20th-century advertising, amusement parks, and department stores.²⁰ Mantically, "as hieroglyphic signs, the characters of film and television rehearse the compulsive assimilation of human beings to the commodity."²¹

This cultural rhetoric is especially important to understand because it has intensified with the increasingly corporatized mass-mediation of consumption. An explicit example of such fulfilling rhetoric came in the late 1990s as an advertising campaign for Miller Genuine Draft beer: "Time for a good old macro-brew."

The advertisement appeared often during national-network broadcasts of American football games, America's most mass-audience oriented broadcasts. It made an appeal to consumers by linking—to the enjoyment of one's immersion in the audience of the broadcast—an enjoyment of one's role as a non-elitist consumer of a mass-commodity beer.

"Time for a good old macro-brew," which is self-parodic, evokes an older, parodic, beer catchphrase: "You must consume mass quantities." In a recurrent skit on the network television show *Saturday Night Live* circa 1978, suburbanites Beldar Conehead and Prymaat Conehead (Dan Aykroyd and Jane Curtin) would insist robotically that everyone had to consume mass quantities.²² The skit parodied the suburban culture of postwar affluence, which had been developing since the 1950s.

²⁰ Higashi 1994.

²¹ Hansen 1992, 54, discussing Horkheimer and Adorno 1972.

²² See for example, "The Coneheads at Home," Michaels 1978.

By analyzing how DeMille's 1956 film positions its audience as a mass, like Higashi I aim to trace certain operations of mass-mediation. I suggest there is some linkage between this rhetoric of the film, the film's success, and wider trends of mass-mediation.

However mainly, herein, I am demonstrating that the film's rhetorical strategies proceed *as if* getting viewers to respond as diviners were a desirable and achievable goal. The degree to which the film's rhetorical strategies are successful, and how one might demonstrate such success—these are interesting questions, but not among the top questions here.

I argue that this film hails viewers *to divine our sociopolitical role as mass-consumers*. Even if auditors posits themselves as above such rhetorical practices of divination, or immune to them, or against them, still we tend to get ensnared. Indeed “the word *fate* comes from the Latin *fatum*, literally, ‘that which has been spoken.’”²³ We auditors get positioned in relation to current mantic practices, because they constitute the available discourse.

I have not undertaken a formal study of this film's specific reception by audiences. However, I do treat some elements of the film's reception.

For the preview-version of *The Ten Commandments*, Paramount had conducted its own reception study. The DeMille Archives contain records of written and oral comments at the film's first preview. As I discuss in the Conclusion, those comments underscore this dissertation's critique.

For now I note that Paramount's audience-reception study seemed to confirm that this film's discursive strategies succeeded with preview audiences. That is, the records attest that while the film's success was far from perfect—because viewers were restless and distracted during some scenes, and showed unserious reactions to other serious scenes—overall, the audience responded with abundant signs of acknowledging, accepting, appreciating, and participating in the film's basic discursive modes, such as melodrama.²⁴ (See Chapter Twelve and Conclusion.)

²³ Wojcik 1997, 18.

²⁴ For example, in his notes on the audience reception of one screening in Salt Lake City, one of Paramount's observers reports that when Dathan first appears onscreen, a child in the audience gave a Bronx cheer, showing that the child immediately recognized the villain. The strategy of melodrama, with its simple, Manicheanly good and bad guys, was working

Regarding details of the film's *critical* reception, this already has been addressed by other scholars, notably Melanie Wright. I note moreover that strong, organized resistance to this film did not materialize—and this was key. By filming a realistic, melodramatic, star-studded, racy, Hollywood version of Exodus, DeMille expected success, unless conservative leaders of organized religion castigated his film. The film's promotion could not afford major hindrance in securing the film's audience. DeMille painstakingly managed to avoid such hindrance.

Instead, where it most counted for his film's success, *The Ten Commandments* won him accolades. (See also the Appendix herein.) For *The Ten Commandments* DeMille was awarded the Order of Holy Sepulchre from the Patriarch of Jerusalem, and a distinguished achievement medal from the Grand Lodge of Free and Accepted Masons of the State of New York; he won awards from *Look* magazine and *Photoplay* magazine, as well as the Al Malaikah Temple of Los Angeles; from the Federation of Motion Picture Councils; he won an award from the General Federation of Women's Clubs as well as from the Daughters of the American Revolution; he won the B'nai B'rith Award as well as the Christopher Award. Such accolades helped *The Ten Commandments* to become, in its day, after *Gone with the Wind* the second highest-grossing film of all.

Subsequently in 1958, for *The Ten Commandments* the Salvation Army declared DeMille "Man of the Year,"²⁵ and the Religious Heritage of America—the organization which had recently led the lobby to add "one nation under God" to the Pledge of Allegiance to the United States—in 1958 declared DeMille "Lay Churchman of the Year."

as planned. That is, even if their reactions were at times unserious, the audience recognized the types. The promotion of this film has emphasized such immediately recognizable patterns of melodrama. Archived documents on this film's audience-reception study by Paramount include detailed reports—thick description—by Paramount's appointed experts who observed each audience's reactions during preview screenings; thousands of response-cards handwritten in 1956 by viewers, starting with the first preview of *The Ten Commandments* in Salt Lake City; as well as correspondence by Paramount staff, distributors, exhibitors, and viewers at large, referring to the film's audience-reception in term of its correspondence with the film's rhetorical strategies.

²⁵ Essoe and Lee, 246-247..

Finally, this dissertation's Conclusion does not expressly interrelate all the main topics of all the chapters—partly because each chapter has its own conclusion, but also because some of the syntheses would necessarily carry beyond this project's scope. Particularly, it might well be germane to discuss the Black Atlantic's rhetoric of relation (See Chapter Fourteen) vis-à-vis the mantic practices of Protestantism: however such discussion would require a substantial, extra chapter. (Alas, already this dissertation has even more pages than *The Ten Commandments* has minutes of running time.) Of course the Conclusion does synthesize my argument's main components and moreover, discusses their import.

One of the pitfalls of doing interpretation, of course, is that the reader may claim that my interpretation of the film's rhetoric is merely my own. Yet undeniably the film features astrological and necromantic divinations, and poses inquiries on which the film itself, in the form of trials, endeavors to reach a verdict.

My account's use is that it fits with some key criticism, and accounts for many aspects of the film and more. My assertions about the film's rhetoric, I support with close reading, with citations of other critics, with genealogies of such rhetoric, and with analysis of the oeuvre and remarks of DeMille.

STRUCTURE OF THIS DISSERTATION

Part I contextualizes this investigation. Part II catalogues the aspects of *The Ten Commandments* that I characterize as mantic, then develops a working model of divination. Parts II and III provides genealogies for *The Ten Commandments'* mantic practices, both in form and content. Part V discusses the development of this film's mantic cinema. The chapter breakdown is as follows.

After Chapter One introduces and contextualizes this dissertation's main ideas, approach, thesis, and methods, Chapter Two then frames *The Ten Commandments*, scholarly literature on it, and this dissertation's argument that the film functions as a rite of divination.

Chapters Three through Six present a multi-leveled inventory of mantic aspects of *The Ten Commandments*. First, Chapter Three inventories some of this film's mantic tropes and cinematic devices. This means that in addition to tropes that portray divination *in* the narrative—e.g., rites of astrology or necromancy, performed by characters—and in addition to divinations performed by the narrator, this film *enacts* rites such as nephelomancy (divination by clouds) by positioning the viewer to perform them. The narration is one channel on which the film solicits and coaches its auditor's mantic participation. Moreover I analyze the film's cross-fades, and one instance of a reverse-shot, as divinatory.

Furthermore Chapter Three shows how this film invokes and depends on other structures of mantic practice: strict adherence to rules preventing manipulation, and reliance on a canon. Finally Chapter Three situates DeMille's own performance of unoriginality as a key part of his role as diviner.

Chapters Four, Five, and Six continue cataloguing the mantic aspects of *The Ten Commandments*. Four and Five respectively chart the film's rhetorical motifs of what Leslie Fiedler called “inter-ethnic flagellation” and “inter-ethnic rape.” Especially since *Uncle Tom's Cabin* (1852), these are two prime, paradigmatic motifs of American mass-culture. *The Ten Commandments* deploys them heavily and mantically. It does the same with key motifs of *the trial* and of *the news*, as Chapter Six catalogues.

Chapter Seven reviews some of the more relevant scholarship on divination, in order to develop a working model of divination for investigating this portentous film.

In Parts II and III as genealogies (in the Foucauldian sense) describe how and why *The Ten Commandments*' mantic practice came to be, the conclusion of each chapter discusses particular aspects of *The Ten Commandments*. Chapter Eight tracks, from ancient rites of divination, developments of mantic exegesis and typology as used in *The Ten Commandments*. Chapters Nine, Ten, and Eleven further this genealogical project by investigating ancient allegory, Christianity, modern science, and modern media in terms of divination. Such exploration, which is rarely done, is conceptually challenging yet necessary to understanding how *The Ten*

Commandments—or any American medium—relies on self-searching and jeremiad in reading the nation's fortune.

Part IV focuses on another set of genealogical strands. Its Chapters Eleven and Twelve focus on mantic usage of certain tropes, genres, and modes. After addressing the figures of the *slave* and *the folk*, I develop my model of racial cartomancy, based particularly on reframing Linda Williams's account of *Playing the Race Card*. The dissertation's mantological inventory finishes with Chapter Thirteen. It addresses Oedipal process, colonization, and conspiracy—all under the mantic framework of *the trial*.

Part V more specifically investigates the *cinematic* provenance of *The Ten Commandments*' form of mantic practice. It unpacks and extrapolates from James Snead's account of the linkage between Black rhetoric and the rhetoric of cinema in terms of divination. Chapter Fifteen resolves the focus onto Cecil B. DeMille, Jesse Lasky, Sr., and a few other main developers of mantic cinema.

PART I: RESOLVING

CHAPTER ONE: GETTING IT RITE

OVERVIEW

In graduate school I realized my favorite cultural critiques—including those of Leslie Fiedler, Fredrick Jameson, and Eric Lott—followed from Karl Marx’s 1867 articulation of commodity fetishism, and moreover Emile Durkheim’s 1915 finding that “ritual offsets the structural strains in society caused by the competing interests of clan or lineage groups.”²⁶ Each critique refers to cultural forms’ supposed power in terms of “magic,” thereby posing the masses as credulous believers in what amounts to hocus-pocus²⁷—because in Anglophone cultural criticism, magic is outside the realm of the valid.

To say a resolution happens magically is to say it does not *really* happen—any “resolution” of cultural conflicts was a sham through which producers duped consumers of mass-cultural texts. In such a model, a mass-cultural rite draws power from the mistaken belief, by masses of users, that certain kinds of texts actually do resolve some lived, social contradiction. Behind the mirage, the critic reveals the reality. That is, in Marxist critique of mass-cultural texts, they do not resolve social

²⁶ My overview of anthropology in this paragraph is indebted to Nelson 1990. According to Durkheim’s *The Elementary Forms of the Religious Life*, a social group constitutes its solidarity through religious rituals “”(Durkheim 1915, 226).

²⁷ For example, Fiedler’s *Love and Death in the American Novel* concludes that American men have used popular literature and film as if putatively to resolve their conflicts over homosociality versus homophobia, between domesticism and rugged individualism, etc. Lott’s 1993 title, *Love and Theft*, is a riff on Fiedler’s title, *Love and Death*. See also the Conclusion of this dissertation for a discussion of Jameson’s 1981, “Magical Narratives.”

contradictions—therefore the supposed resolutions must have been, in terms of truth-value, naught but a harmful mirage of false consciousness.

In the American imagination’s performance of resolutions of social conflicts, according to Fiedler, archetypal dyads—such as Huck and Jim, Ishmael and Queequeg, Mel Gibson and Danny Glover—function as if to resolve conflicts over America’s need for male domesticity versus its need for rugged individualism, and conflicts over the White man’s desire and fear of the dark man²⁸ But for Fiedler these dyads do not *actually* resolve anything social.

Later, following Fredric Jameson’s analysis of early-modern “Magical Narratives” (see Conclusion of this dissertation) and Jameson’s broader account of “the production of aesthetic or narrative form,”²⁹ Eric Lott claims that “the function of cultural forms is not only to mediate but symbolically or “magically” to resolve lived social contradictions.”³⁰ Lott uses quotation marks³¹ as if to say there is no resolution *really*. (Or at least, certainly in America these forms do not resolve *away* the conflicts—they actually maintain and exacerbate interracial conflicts, even while they help bond White men as hegemons.)

For these serious critics of mass-cultural dynamics, part of the problem with their reference to “magic” is that their critiques simultaneously address different audiences. That is, these writers address fellow intellectuals at the forefront of criticism, even while they also address intellectuals “unconverted” to this mode of criticism. Against anthropological best practice, they hardly disclose their own investments in any mass-cultural practices. They avoid appearing to celebrate the cultural practices they analyze, and so—as if only “the masses” lived *inside* mass culture—these critics can tend to interpret mass culture as if from *outside* it. Meanwhile on another level, as proponents of relatively radical criticism, they as *insiders* interpret radical criticism for *outsiders* who need illumination. So in explaining how a cultural practice resolves social contradictions, Lott’s quotation marks—“magically”—signify this term as one only the masses—or perhaps a heretofore benighted reader—could endorse.

²⁸ Fiedler 1979.

²⁹ Jameson 1981, 1979.

³⁰ Lott 1993, 250, note 31, cites the following: Lévi-Strauss 1976; Hall 1976, 9-74; as well as Jameson 1979, and Jameson 1981, 77-80. Lott 1993 analyzes the cultural dynamics associated with blackface minstrelsy and its legacy.

³¹ That is, Lott uses single quotation-marks, or what British and Commonwealth scholars call “inverted commas.”

This key model of cultural criticism calls for enhancement through more rigorous use of anthropology. Primarily, investigators should take care to try to distinguish between articulation of their own perspectives and articulation of a perspective of a group they investigate. This is the differentiation between the *emic* versus *etic* perspectives, as in “phonemic versus phonetic”: “an ‘emic’ account of behavior is a description of behavior in terms meaningful (consciously or unconsciously) to the actor while an ‘etic’ account is a description of a behavior in terms familiar to the observer.”³²

Though Fiedler’s, Jameson’s, and Lott’s references to magic purport to be accounts of what culture-users at large themselves have done (emically), those references confusingly introduce—in articulating a perspective of text-users *inside* a given culture—a term, magic, which in a modern academic context strongly tends to mean “false.” But this falseness is the perspective of outsiders to the practice, unless they are somehow arguing that practitioners have used key texts mistakenly.

Are Fiedler, Jameson, and Lott saying that certain practices function, for their users, as magic? If so—if scholars should understand the use of mass-cultural forms as rites of magic—then to take these rites seriously one should analyze what they mean for their users as rites of magic. Yet they hardly try to define what *magic* might have meant to audiences. By default this omission amplifies that they are using *magic* as a term familiar to their reader as an outsider to mass-culture. That is, they are saying that their readers should understand the behavior of mass (or popular or national) audiences in terms of “magic”—a term which in serious scholarship refers to the unreal.

However, in terms of current anthropological or sociological practice, for interpreting a culture there is almost always a basis more rigorous than ascribing false consciousness (or mistakenness) to a class of cultural actors. Especially after Durkheim, an investigation of a culture’s rites should hardly proceed from assumptions about the participants’ beliefs at all, much less from any premise that the people being studied are using cultural practices mistakenly. Cultural outsiders may judge certain rites as lacking in truth-value, but such judgment is not necessarily

³² Turner 1980. The distinction is from Pike. See Headland, *et al.* 1990, and Pike 1993.

relevant to scholarly investigation in the mode of anthropology of rites—especially if the rite’s users saliently prioritize something else over positivist truth.³³

In fairness, critics such as Fiedler, Jameson, and Lott have faced formidable barriers against distinguishing divination from magic. Primarily, the distinction can boil down to *discovering* versus *changing*. It seems that as long as a critic’s priority is to advance the tenet that *knowledge is not discovered; it is constructed*, then there is hardly room for such a critic to explain that actually one must emphasize performances of discovery (such as divination), in order to interpret cultural texts according to their uses (*emic* interpretation).

However I do not aim here to help convince anyone that knowledge is constructed. Thanks to the widespread acceptance of the arguments of my scholarly forebears, I consider myself to have the luxury of proceeding from this tenet as an axiom, in order to articulate *means* of authorizing discourse within a community. Perhaps only by doing so can I profitably distinguish magic from divination in my own critique.³⁴

In order to deepen understanding of how the use of *The Ten Commandments* or any mass-cultural text functions as a rite, one must look at rites of magic, and moreover at other kinds of rites. So, what is magic? What, if anything, does magic have to do with mediation or resolution? Actually this dissertation has only the briefest of answers to these questions. A paradigmatic use of magic is to say “Open sesame!” to command a door to open. Magic, which connotes the channeling of numen (unformed mystery), aims at an instrumental purpose of changing something.

Cultural mediation may proceed through mystification of its own process, but such mystification does not necessarily make the process “magical.” It is hardly apparent how instrumental magic relates to the performance of social resolutions, nor to other processes of mediation—except to say that the process is not fully transparent to its users and is in that sense working like magic.

In anthropological terms, it is not clear that mediation functions like a rite of magic. In scholarship of mass media that expressly describes it as ritual, according to

³³ See Cryer 93, which refers to *ideologiekritische* as a “Marxist version” of “a sophisticated form of ethnocentrism.”

³⁴ Of course, if the term, “divination,” also is too widely and irredeemably associated with the pejorative sense of false consciousness, then the term is less advantageous here. Particularly, perhaps defenders—of Judaism, Christianity, Black culture, or modern science—can hardly help perceiving insult in my characterization of their life-blood as a form of divination. If so, then I hasten to say, sincerely, I intend no insult with the characterization.

anthropologist Ronald Grimes, a great deal of it declines to specify any category of ritual or rite.³⁵

The main goal of the present investigation is to demonstrate that analyzing *The Ten Commandments* in terms of divination can be useful—indeed, in some ways can be more useful than prior analyses of this film. Even if the reader finds my claims herein unproven, still overall this investigation’s approach may be useful for opening a new door for textual analysis.

Mainly this dissertation investigates how *The Ten Commandments performs* the authorization of discourse. So the evidence presented in this dissertation mainly shows this film’s performance-pattern as congruent—on several levels—to a rite of divination.

ANOTHER KIND OF RITE?

Typically when citing a rite, cultural critiques refer to fetishism or spectacle, without reference to the archeology of those terms—as if Karl Marx and Guy Debord had coined the terms.³⁶ Actually *Fetishism* comes into scholarly discourse through pejorative contexts in which Western Europeans have attributed to West Africans a paradigmatically “primitive” religion of idolatry. Before the Situationists embraced the spectacle, it already had been an important component of culture and criticism at least since the Renaissance.³⁷ In a more anthropological vein, critiques after Bakhtin do map connections between medieval carnival and the modern carnivalesque.³⁸

Critiques of *The Ten Commandments* have named all these categories of rites—magic and commodity fetishism, spectacle and carnival. Two of these critiques (by Ilana Pardes and Sumiko Higashi), show not only that these ancient rites shape modern uses of mass-cultural texts, but moreover also show the converse—that mass-

³⁵ Grimes himself does both when he analyzes *Fiddler on the Roof* in terms of the rite of the wedding. There are precious few other precedents.

³⁶ Virno 2003 expressly claims that Guy Debord invented the term, *spectacle*.

³⁷ See Lascombes 1993.

³⁸ See Stallybrass 1986.

cultural texts shape our understanding of miracles and magic, of spectacle and of commodity fetishism.³⁹

However, none of the critiques of *The Ten Commandments* has included any substantive, anthropological or religious gloss of magic or commodity fetishism, nor of pageant, carnival, nor spectacle. Higashi intriguingly argues that DeMille reconfigured the cultural roles of commodity fetishism and of spectacle, but her critique hardly articulates how those roles functioned prior to DeMille's work. Ilana Pardes goes the furthest by investigating *The Ten Commandments* in terms of magical or miraculous *spectacle*,⁴⁰ drawing on the role of miracles since Biblical times. Her critique, while offering some account of the ancient role of miracles in religion, hardly elaborates on its own model.⁴¹

Finally, no prior critique of *The Ten Commandments* has described the cinematic techniques by which this film performs resolutions of social conflicts; nor has any provided a genealogy for this function of the film's performance. This is mainly because, in the hermeneutics of historical materialism, patterns evoking ancient or folk rites are merely residual, hollow shells—signs of alienation. Meanwhile these prior critiques of *The Ten Commandments* scarcely acknowledge each other, nor the landmark cultural critiques by Fiedler, Jameson, or Lott.

THIS DISSERTATION AND ITS THESIS

What kind of rite is *The Ten Commandments*? It is surely a spectacular rite of storytelling, and in some ways it functions as a rite of passage, as it did for me in 1977 and is still doing in my career as a doctoral student. In itself the story of the Exodus enacts a multitude's rite of passage into its peoplehood. Scholars including Sacvan Bercovitch cogently have analyzed the relationship between American cultural hegemony and the pattern of rite of passage. So I am not going to discuss this film as a rite of passage.

³⁹ This is what Grimes 2006 says is necessary in relating modern media to ancient rites.

⁴⁰ Pardes 1996, 27.

⁴¹ This shortcoming contrasts with Grimes's 2006 reading of *Fiddler on the Roof*, in which he lays out some of the archeology of wedding rites, and details how mass-cultural texts have shaped popular uses of such rites. (However, unlike my critique, Grimes's does not claim *Fiddler* itself functions like a wedding.)

More saliently, *The Ten Commandments* is another kind of rite: it is a rite of divination. This film resolves conflicts by divining social determinations—e.g., of the identity of the one who will serve in a leadership position—in order to enable action.

Moreover the film's canonicity—from its foregrounding of the Decalogue to its pose as a mass-cultural Bible—functions divinatorily. According to an influential theory of the role of the canon in divination,

A canon is a sub-type of the *list*—an inventory of items, usually very ordinary, but rendered “sacred” by being set apart—canonized—for divinatory purposes. Once canonized, such a list or catalogue cannot be added to or subtracted from. But this radical reduction and restriction in turn gives rise to the most remarkable ingenuity in adapting the canon to every new situation.⁴²

This is the point of canonization—to make a set of texts binding on the unfolding lives of a group of users. Such rhetorical use of the Decalogue always partakes of “the oracular nature of the earliest records of legal exegesis in the Hebrew Bible.”⁴³

DeMille's concern with this kind of divination shows starkly in his 1923, silent version of *The Ten Commandments*. Unlike the 1956 version, the plot-scheme of the 1923 film is the Decalogue itself: its premise was to adapt the Decalogue's commandments, one by one, to characters' modern situations as they arose in the narrative. The 1956 version advances a much more elaborate tradition of masterful mediation in which the Decalogue—and the life-story of Moses—each become “mantic canon” against which determinations are divined from prevailing currents of lore, ideology, and identity.

My investigation advances understanding of media in terms of ritual, because the kind of rite most directly concerned with mediation and resolution is not fetish use nor spectacle, nor pageant nor carnival, nor miracle nor wedding, nor rite of passage

⁴² Preus 1991, 443-444, cites Jonathan Z. Smith 1982, 44.

⁴³ Fishbane 1985, 4.

nor magic: it is divination. The connection appears in the currency of the word *medium* to refer not only to one of the (mass) media but also to a mediator between “this world” and another. The silver screen invites the viewer to gaze into it as if into a crystal ball, to see what shapes resolve.

Furthermore, according to scholars of divination, divination specifically is a rite that attempts to channel circulation and flow of traces, in order to resolve lived, social contradictions. Thus “divinatory concerns are like ‘radioactive traces in an x-ray,’ indicating in which areas the stresses in a community or individual lie.”⁴⁴ To use another metaphor, these areas are the “squeaky wheels” getting the grease of *mediation*.

When a problem from an other-worldly realm seems to be vexing a community, divination is “a way of *redirecting* the problem out of one of these other worlds and into the everyday world where one is better able to solve it with human skills.”⁴⁵ For example, “Once the Pythia had spoken Apollo’s words to the Athenians, Athenian energies were redirected toward publicly debating what those words *meant*—and civic debate was an exercise in which they felt confident. Delphi, then, steered the Athenians out of perplexity and into a venue where they could apply their native talents.”⁴⁶

In the case of Hollywood’s studio-era cinema—which encompasses the production, distribution, and promotion of films in a Fordist system whose stylistic norms reigned from 1917 to 1960 or so⁴⁷—the goal is not civic debate, but performing resolutions of the American dream. Because such performance has been an exercise in which Americans, primarily, have felt confident, thus *The Ten Commandments* redirects concerns into its realm.

Divination provides answers which, one can truly say, do not resolve social stresses: however, the key to such a rite is its performance. Divination “accomplishes its work as much by *performing* an answer as it does by *providing* the answer itself.”⁴⁸

⁴⁴ Johnston 2005b, 22.

⁴⁵ Johnston 2005b, 22.

⁴⁶ Johnston 2005b, 22.

⁴⁷ Bordwell 1985.

⁴⁸ Johnston 2005b, 22-23.

“HEGEMANCY”

Moreover, from a Marxian perspective of neo-Gramscianism, mass-mediation features processes of hegemony: so a general theory of media rites, unless it eschews neo-Gramscianism, must account for hegemony. Hegemonic processes—which seem inexplicable in terms of magic, instead seem closely patterned on the function of rites of divination.⁴⁹ Here I define hegemony as an ongoing process of tracing various signifiers, in order to channel their flows through power-struggles over discursive currency. That is, hegemony’s ultimate determination is of “what must be accepted” moment to moment as natural.

Hegemony of course is the process by which a historical bloc (for example, “the military-industrial complex”) maintains its supremacy moment to moment by co-opting potential threats of resistance. In order to maintain the upper hand on shifting discursive currents, hegemonic processes mediate backward-facing currents of *history* and *tradition*, as well as forward-facing currents and conflicts of *destiny*. Both divination and hegemony insistently channel contingency into determinations. Ultimately a divination-centered model can account particularly well for flows and counterflows of hegemony because divination, as a category of popular practice, has always been incompletely co-opted.

My investigation here, in regarding *The Ten Commandments* as mantic practice, emphasizes this film’s work with powerful discourses of nationalism and racism—which as discursive regimes are not natural orders but contingencies demanding the ongoing cultural work of hegemonic processes in order to maintain given strata of social supremacy.

⁴⁹ In ancient Egypt, “divination simultaneously was able to adapt itself to changing conditions without losing its authority and thereby to serve, in turn, as a means of maintaining cultural integrity” (Johnston 2005b, 20).

WHAT IS DIVINATION?

Unlike prior critiques of *The Ten Commandments*, the present dissertation does theorize the rite I say the film performs. My generic model of the rite of divination emphasizes the significance of particular aspects of it. However rather than delve deeply here into a review of that research of anthropology, folklore, and religion, instead this dissertation postpones such accounts until after cataloguing the elements of the film to be analyzed. (See Chapter Seven.) For now, basic glosses on divination must suffice. Here we begin with two glosses, one from a scholar of ancient, Middle Eastern religion, and the second from a folklorist.

According to Joel Sweek, divination is, for its users, “a means of authorizing discourse.” Because my investigation concerns discursive politics, I have chosen this gloss as a benchmark. The etymological association of divination with divinity indicates divination’s “capacity ‘to process—to criticize and legitimate—acts of social significance’ by contextualizing them within a divine arena.”⁵⁰

According to Barbara Tedlock, a leading folklorist, “divination is a way of exploring the unknown in order to elicit answers . . . to questions beyond the range of ordinary human understanding.”⁵¹ I find her gloss is useful in reference to a paradigm, but not exhaustive.⁵² Moreover, I emphasize that a rite of divination *performs* an exploratory sifting of traces. Tedlock notes that divinatory inquiry tends to pose

questions about future events, past disasters whose causes cannot be explained, things unknown hidden from sight or removed in space, appropriate conduct in critical situations, including the healing of illness, determining the times and modes of religious worship, and *making choices of persons for particular tasks*.⁵³

⁵⁰ Johnston 2005b, 22-23.

⁵¹ Tedlock 2001, 189.

⁵² For example when someone pulls petals off a flower to divine whether—“She loves me; [or] she loves me not”—this question is not necessarily beyond the range of ordinary human understanding.

⁵³ Tedlock 2001, 189, emphasis added.

Towards answering such questions, forms of divination, as a category, employ variously a very wide range of means. All, I argue, channel traces across ritually pure indeterminacy, into a determination. These means include “water and crystal gazing, the casting of lots or sortition, the reading of natural omens [or other events], the taking of hallucinogenic drugs, dreaming, and the contemplation of mystic spirals, amulets, labyrinths, mandalas and thangkas.”⁵⁴

Divination historically—notably from the ancient Israelites and Greeks, Etruscans, Romans, and Christians—has played a direct role in political mediation. I address political mediation momentarily.

DIVINATION IS NOT MAGIC?

Even if divination *were* a form of magic, it still would be necessary to specify that “‘magically’ resolve” more specifically means “‘mantically resolve,’” and necessary to lay out the function of divination. However, because actually divination is not a form of magic, it is crucial to specify the difference, and why the difference matters in describing cultural practices.

One difference is that divination is expressly concerned with the social realm, unlike magic. Firstly, “the process of transmission and formulation of ‘technical ideas’”—in which category I count divination—“is collective . . . whereas magical tradition goes from individual to individual.”⁵⁵ Moreover, according to Sweek,

Magic, whatever else it may or may not be, is not a means of authorizing discourse. One may use one’s status as a magician to arrogate authority to oneself, but this is not the same thing as the content of the divined warrant or the procurement of that warrant.⁵⁶

⁵⁴ Tedlock 2001, 189, emphasis added. See Chapter Seven herein.

⁵⁵ Cryer 60 paraphrases Mauss 1975[1902-1903], 82-83.

⁵⁶ Sweek 1994, 726.

Certain discourse does get authorized within a community. When an outsider judges that some discourse was falsely authorized (or wrongly, mistakenly, or invalidly authorized), such judgment hardly illuminates the functioning of the actual authorization. Moreover, such a critique (which tends to shade into polemic) may compare authorizers with magicians because they have arrogated authority to themselves, but such comparison can hardly explain what got authorized, either.

So in order to understand how authorization works, it makes sense to bracket consideration of magic, because it may be all but unavoidable that academics associate magic with credulousness. Such assumption derails focus on the patterns of the rite itself.

This is a major advantage from the start, for scholarship on divination. Relative to “magic,” analysis of divination hardly need depend on positing users’ beliefs.

If a rite functions to procure a warrant for a certain piece of discourse, then the efficacy of the rite does not necessarily depend on truth-value: the measure of the rite’s efficacy is simply whether or not (or to what degree) a community performatively honors a procured warrant. If users demonstrably are indeed constellating such patterns *as if* they were significant, then it is not necessary for an investigation to evaluate users’ beliefs at all. The salient fact is that users *participate* in such rites of divination.

For example, suppose the cultural function of pop music is for users to constellate patterns between their everyday life and the pop songs they hear. If this is so—pop’s function is constellating, which is to say, divining patterns—then users’ dis/belief in anything does not necessarily matter to an investigation.

It is well known that many listeners tend favor hearing their favorite songs unpredictably (on the radio, from the bandstand, or using a “shuffle” feature of a player of compact disks or MP3s), and that many of these listeners tend to find fortuitousness when hearing “their song.” Indeed, the lyrics of more than a few pop songs concern this kind of constellating. It is not necessary to posit anything about *what* anyone believes, in order to analyze how a given song (e.g., “You Had A Bad Day,” or “Reason to Believe”) performs as if divining patterns of listeners’ lives.

This kind of practice “has been diffused across Western culture through numerous channels and integrated with various types of attitudes and experience so

that it is difficult to isolate and separate it from our own spontaneous experiences.”⁵⁷ Such diffusion, which parallels what Hent de Vries calls the diffusion of the category of “religion,”⁵⁸ has yielded rites which are generally not recognized as rites. “Like a language” the diffused practice of divination “has a socially-constituted grammar that participants seem to know intuitively,”⁵⁹ so that diviners often do not realize they are performing divination.

I characterize, as a practice of divination, *the category of human action in which someone exposes herself to a consecrated degree of indeterminacy, en route to constellating a determination*; or else positions someone to perform such constellating.

APPROACH AND METHOD

My approach to *The Ten Commandments* parallels Bakhtin’s use of *Gargantua and Pantagruel* to introduce his ideas of carnival and the carnivalesque.⁶⁰ Much as Bakhtin situates Rabelais as adapting older practices of carnival for carnivalesque literature, I situate DeMille as adapting older practices of divination for the mantic cinema.

However my approach to divination differs somewhat from Bakhtin’s approach to carnival. Bakhtin suggests that carnivalesque literature superseded carnival itself. I reject such an argument concerning divination, which has hardly been displaced, much less replaced. Moreover I do not posit mantic rhetoric generally, nor mantic cinema, nor *The Ten Commandments* as ultimately liberatory.

While the few critical theorists who have dealt with divination have tended to regard it as a premodern residual,⁶¹ or mainly as a metaphor,⁶² I am interested more in its function within a cultural dominant, and am wary of referring to divination

⁵⁷ Foucault 1988a here is discussing technologies of the self in general which I consider to overlap considerably with mantic hermeneutics.

⁵⁸ de Vries 2001b, 30.

⁵⁹ Preus 1991, 441. Preus refers specifically to Christendom.

⁶⁰ Rabelais 1564[1994]; Bakhtin 1965[1984].

⁶¹ For example, see Adorno 1994.

⁶² See, for example, Gates 1988, 53.

metaphorically. Labeling a rite as metaphor tends to cancel out the sense in which signifier and signified here overlap. For example, when scholars speak of Blackface minstrelsy in terms of *masquerade*, one might say *masquerade* is being used metaphorically, but saying so would obscure the sense that the burnt cork *is* a mask; the performance is indeed a form of masquerade. Similarly, rather than referring to ancient divination rites as metaphors for other cultural practices, I say that the deployment of a mantic rhetoric *is* a form of divination rite. Ultimately the main reason I avoid labeling divination as a metaphor is because such claims smack of supersessionism, as if to say, “Their primitive rite is a metaphor for our modern form, which superseded the primitive rite.”

My approach has the Durkheimian advantage of bracketing questions of beliefs to focus on rites, and the Wittgensteinian advantage of bracketing any judgment of “falseness” by those who do not use the rite. That is, as thinkers including Wittgenstein—in his essay “On Certainty”—have emphasized, in an investigation of truth-warranting, *there are no grounds* for saying that users of divination are “wrong.” If a scholar of culture insists that divination rites are illusory, then the scholar is wrong—and not just wrong but “crucially wrong.”⁶³

Yet many contemporary academics, heavily invested in the production of [scientific] knowledge, seem all but unable to bracket, in research, the truth-value of pre-modern rites (false!) and of modern science (truth!). This limitation is drastic when the investigation at hand tackles the warranting of answers, as this dissertation does. The problem is that if truth is part of the question—“How do these untrue rites determine warranted answers?”—then one can hardly proceed to investigate the warranting. To proceed one must suspend one’s disbelief. Furthermore, in order to investigate modern science and technology as part of a genealogy—as this dissertation does—one must suspend one’s *belief*, because the question cannot be “How do those true rites determine warranted answers?” When those are the starting questions, the only possible answers are “falsely,” and “truly.”

This approach—the bracketing of truth-value—requires one to think flexibly. If one’s thinking is wedded to a proposition that part of what is under investigation is true, or is false, then one can hardly apprehend how that proposition’s own truths get warranted.

⁶³ Bruns 1992, 5, quotes Winch 1964.

It should be clear that I am not asking the reader to believe in the truth of divination. Neither am I requiring that the reader surrender any truth-value *as a matter of faith*. The suspension of dis/belief (“radical relativism”) is required, rather, only as a matter of investigative method. While controversial, this is nevertheless a well-established and widely respected method in anthropology and sociology, as well as in the history of science.

The suspension of dis/belief is a research method, not a creed. Some readers may well suppose that they are being asked to suspend their disbelief, as a matter of faith, however, neither belief nor faith is required—only the flexibility to bracket truth-value while proceeding to investigate certain practices. Such bracketing should enable a reader to follow this chapter’s investigative method.

More than a few moderns indeed have treated radical relativism as a challenge to their faith. Of these, many characterize its proponents as if they were unwilling to differentiate between a surgeon and a practitioner of leech-craft. Such arguments come from both religious and scientific quarters.⁶⁴ If one deploys radical relativism, the counterargument goes, then one fails to accept the value of truth. One is anti-truth! This counterargument however is mistaken. I do not promulgate any claim or belief that truth has no value.

Finally there is no way to get past the sense of divination as superstition unless one interrogates the truth-warranting of modern science. An investigation such as mine, if it does not bracket and interrogate the warranting of the truths of modern science, would be a sham, because any contemporary dissertation in the “secular” humanities is seen by default as deploying a scientific paradigm, and science by default regards divination as, *prima facie*, unscientific. So an investigation such as mine, if it did not bracket and interrogate the warranting of the truths of modern science, would be putting the cart before the horse.

So next, against any supersessionist notion of modernity—e.g., “What we moderns do is not divination, because modern science superseded superstition”—I sketch the manticness of modern science. Science warrants its truth-claims via

⁶⁴ The religious castigation of relativism is so ubiquitous as to need no citation. For the scientific castigation of radical relativism, see, for example, Sokal 1998. This is not to claim, however, that divination, religion, and science are the same. A comparison of science with religion is beyond the scope of this project.

practices of observation, experiment, and evidence: but even so, the key is always in the practice of scientific *interpretation* of evidence.

MODERN SCIENCE, MANTIC PRACTICE

It should be a commonplace that science itself is, in some deep ways, a practice of mantology. Scholars have documented how in large part, proto-modern science arose from the medieval bridge between astrology and astronomy. Overall, regarding seventeenth-century natural philosophy—that is, what in the twentieth century became routinely called *science*—historians of science since the 1990s routinely assert that it was *continuous* with its medieval past.⁶⁵

However, framing science in terms of mantic practice is not commonplace at all, in scholarship. Why not? A contextual reason is science’s longstanding tensions with folk practices and with religion as superstition.⁶⁶

Moreover, science particularly takes issue with divination. This is largely because, across exposure to ritually pure indeterminacy, divination aims to perform *channeling*, which is precisely *beyond what anyone controls*. Chapter Thirteen, “Mantic Rhetorics of the Black Atlantic and of Cinema,” further addresses models of *control* versus *channeling*, so for now it may suffice to quote anthropologist Pablo Wright: “Because *control* is a paradigmatic word of modernity, its opposite appears as pre- or anti-modern,” but this evolution-narrative is inaccurate.⁶⁷

Moreover, this evolution-narrative is supersessionist, and as such, divination’s role in modern science parallels its role in Judaism. That is, it comes to seem that any part of the practice of Judaism becomes unrecognized as a practice of divination. We

⁶⁵ Shapin 1996, 4.

⁶⁶ Between science and religion, divination (which does not necessarily posit an intelligent designer who knows the universe’s whole pattern) can be an epistemological third way.

One relevant orientation of science is apparent in a remark in 2006 by a leading astronomer who noted that “something fundamental is going on in people’s minds when they confront things they don’t understand” (Neil deGrasse Tyson, director of the Hayden Planetarium, quoted by Johnson 2006). In praise of his own epistemology, Tyson noted that “science is a philosophy of discovery; intelligent design is a philosophy of ignorance.” This stark dichotomy seems to shape some scientists’ struggle to apprehend divination. Science tends to view monotheistic religion as its epistemological cock-blocker—not only because of intellectual history, but moreover because religion appears to depend on, settle for, and promote mistaken faith that structures unexplained by science are simply manifestations of God’s will, requiring faith rather than investigation.

⁶⁷ P. Wright 2004, 111, emphasis added.

can note first that in the Hebrew Testament, Joseph asks, “Do you not know that such a man as I can indeed practice divination?” (Genesis 44:15). Moreover, God commands that the Jewish high priest, Aaron “shall cast lots for the two goats, one lot for the LORD and the other lot for the scapegoat” (Leviticus 16:8).⁶⁸ On the other hand more directly the Hebrew Testament abominates divination. That is, “You shall not . . . practice divination nor soothsaying” (Leviticus 19:26), and “Now a man or a woman who is a medium or a spiritist shall surely be put to death” (Leviticus 20:27; see also Deuteronomy 18:14, Isaiah 2:6, and 2 Kings 21:6). In Christianity too, Matthew is chosen as the twelfth apostle, by lots (Acts 1:26), and even Augustine portrays his conversion as a result of bibliomancy, yet the Church tends to abominate practices of divination, as paganism.

With this legacy, science too co-opts functions of divination-rites, even while categorizing such rites as abominable superstitions which it claims to have superseded. Much as rabbinical Judaism co-opted classical prophecy, early Christianity co-opted functions both from the oracles (who legendarily fell silent the moment Jesus was born)⁶⁹ and from Judaism, before Protestantism supposedly superseded all outmoded practices of religion: similarly early-modern science supposedly has superseded all religion as “superstition.”

In *The Road to Delphi: The Life and Afterlife of Oracles*, Michael Wood reduces the Christian treatment of divination to the following paraphrase: “Anything that looks like another religion is really just the bad side of our religion.”⁷⁰ I would add, “Anything that looks like another science is really just unscientific.” (Wood points out, furthermore that “Cold War thinking” parallels such hermeneutics, “where the present enemy not only is everywhere but always was everywhere, absorbs all previous enemies as mere prefigurations or disguises.”)⁷¹

⁶⁸ Furthermore “Joshua cast lots . . . in Shiloh before the LORD, and there Joshua divided the land to the sons of Israel according to their divisions” (Joshua 18:10; see also 18:6 and 18:8) Saul commanded the use of lots to divine an offender’s guilt before God (1 Samuel 14:40-43). According to 1 Chronicles, people “were divided by lot, the one as the other; for they were officers of the sanctuary and officers of God” (24:5); and then “cast lots for their duties, all alike, the small as well as the great, the teacher as well as the pupil” (1 Chronicles 25:8; see also 26:13). See also Nehemiah 10:34 and 11:1; and Micah 3:6.

⁶⁹ See Wood 2003, 136-151.

⁷⁰ Wood 2003, 144.

⁷¹ Wood 2003, 144.

When modern scholars do speak seriously of modern science in terms of divination, often it is to characterize the *social* sciences as soft, unscientific. For example in a volume edited by Umberto Eco, Carlo Ginsburg concludes that “most of the so-called human or social sciences are rooted in a divinatory approach to the construction of knowledge”—as if the hard sciences were not.⁷²

But is hard science a bedrock or bulwark against divination? Rather, I argue that modern science—including hard science—from its beginnings is mantological. The manticness of modern science is a function of modernity’s need, in channeling its “uncontainables,” to favor practices that modernity itself developed.⁷³

Early-modern claims of *revolutionarily newness*, and claims of *revolutionary archeology*, each lastingly shaped modernity in term of mantology. As early-modern rhetoric of discovery, these were two sides of a coin. Early-modern claims of science’s *revolutionarily newness* hardly require a gloss here, because such supersessionist claims are, ironically, traditional. Such claims have posed modern discoveries as discontinuous with conventional knowledge of their era. That is, supposedly modernity established a new day.

Moreover the mantology of early-modern science is especially legible on the other side of the coin, where scientific discoveries heralded not a new day, so much as the recalling of an ancient, lost day. In early modernity such claims were far more common. They promised a return to the path of “natural right” and originary knowledge. This tendency followed an ancient hermeneutical method of textual purification aimed at relocating for humanity its lost domain of certainty. (See Chapter Eight herein.)

During the Renaissance, scholarly humanism had maintained such traditional method as “a cultural practice that aimed at reforming the public stock of knowledge by close scholarly reinspection of the original Greek and Latin sources.”⁷⁴ However the humanists dispensed with the ideal (if not the habitus) of elitism: navigating through the volatile terrain of “corruptions” by earlier Christian and Arab writers, the

⁷² Ginsburg 1988, 113, n. 24.

⁷³ See Bauman 1989, 46.

⁷⁴ Shapin 1996, 75.

humanist method performed the channeling of verdicts (validations or redactions) as if for the common good.⁷⁵

In line with this approach of humanism, Copernicus and many of his followers presented heliocentrism as an ancient view they had relocated, and the Flemish anatomist Andreas Vesalius (1514-64)—“celebrated as *the inventor of rigorous observational methods* and as the critic of ancient anatomical claims”—himself claimed to have relocated the long-lost, “pure medical knowledge of the Greek physician Galen (A.D. 129-ca. 200),”⁷⁶ of Pergamum, where the technique of textual purification itself had been perfected. This is a key association, in so far as modern reality is so closely associated with the rigor of observational methods.

At their advent these methods were framed in mantological terms. Galileo held that Solomon and Moses “knew the constitution of the universe perfectly,”⁷⁷ as if his own challenge were to return humanity to the patriarchs’ domain of certainty. Newton too aimed at “the recovery of the lost wisdom of the ancients.”⁷⁸ As if the ancient domain of certainty meanwhile had receded further into the distant past, “among the moderns Bacon was far from alone in wholly accepting that before the Fall Adam had possessed “pure and uncorrupted natural knowledge.”⁷⁹

In this era, while Scripture increasingly spread in Europe as a valorized referent for a sense of peoplehood,⁸⁰ the investigations of these natural philosophers was imbricated by what later moderns would call spiritual concern, for reading and interpreting, appreciating and teaching God’s second book, after Holy Scripture: the Book of Nature.⁸¹ Galileo said “this grand book, the universe, stands continually open to our gaze,”⁸² but he must have been addressing his fellow diviners because this

⁷⁵ Shapin 1996, 75.

⁷⁶ Shapin 1996, 67, emphasis added.

⁷⁷ Shapin 1996, 74. As many scholars, including some early scientists, have valorized ancient knowledge and technology as superior to their own, “the ruins of still-unsurpassed Greek and Roman engineering works appeared to strongly support that idea” (Shapin 1996, 76).

⁷⁸ Shapin 1996, 74.

⁷⁹ Shapin 1996, 74.

⁸⁰ See Anderson 1991, 13. In his general theory of the cultural role of a sacred script, Benedict Anderson finds that relative to more directly embodied forms of speech, scripture seems more abstract thus more pure, and less localized thus in principal more universal.

⁸¹ Shapin 1996, 125; and 78, n.: “The metaphor of nature’s book was present in the early Christian period, Saint Augustine notably giving voice to it in the late fourth century. However, it received new emphasis and point in the Renaissance and early modern period.”

⁸² Shapin 1996, 69.

book was hardly readable in any straightforward way. Indeed in the 1660s—an era when hieroglyphs were all but unreadable—Boyle wrote that “each page in the great volume of nature is full of real hieroglyphs.”⁸³

These “natural philosophers,” as they called themselves, patterned their practice—at least rhetorically—on the role of Bible-readers because in their day, Bible-scholarship was the most highly valued form of knowledge-production. Eventually, largely through acceptance of scientific claims to read *the real* like a book, science displaced Biblical scholarship.

It did so by *co-opting* mantology. It is a mistake of late moderns to suppose that the early moderns neatly divided spiritual practices from real ones.

Rather, England’s early-modern scientists, in joining their project at first to Protestantism, would perform as the readers of hidden signs—that is, as diviners. In gaining social acceptance for their science they needed to wear recognizable badges of social authority as knowledge producers, and in England at least, Protestantism held the franchise on such badges. Thus Francis Bacon wrote that in order to set Christianity back onto its proper path of “its primitive purity,”⁸⁴ the reformers of natural knowledge — “priests of nature”⁸⁵—would serve also by reading the “badges of antichrist” in corrupted, Christian practice.⁸⁶

Conversely, these reformers would come to read badges of social authority, in order to warrant the validity of scientific reports. From such mantological practices of badge-reading, the reformers’ own practice developed collective procedures for empiricism and the experimental method.

⁸³ Shapin 1996, 69.

⁸⁴ Shapin 1996, 138.

⁸⁵ Shapin 1996, 153.

⁸⁶ Meanwhile early science ran into trouble with Christianity. It seems Christianity—which (I note) had superceded forms of nature-worship—maintained “the religiously crucial distinction between the natural and the supernatural” (Shapin 1996, 43), so that Christians should worship God and not nature. But early science’s notions of the universe as God’s machine seemed, to some Christians and Christian leaders, a slippery slope to worshipping nature.

One site of this struggle, Shapin suggests, was early science’s changing use of the word occult. “The description of explanatory accounts as occult was widely used by mechanical philosophers as a form of accusation. For example, mechanically inclined practitioners who refused to offer a specific causal account of how a certain physical effect was produced might be accused by others of reintroducing discredited occult powers, as was the case in the early eighteenth-century disputes over gravitation between Newton and Leibniz It has even been argued recently that, by shifting the meaning of occult qualities from what was hidden and insensible to what was visible in its effects but unintelligible in mechanical and corpuscular terms, modern natural philosophers actually reintroduced occult qualities by claiming to reject them” (Shapin 1996, 42, n2).

It seems that the experimental method was overlaid on the older science of divination, as the template for systematically accessing information inaccessible by other means. In his book, *The Scientific Revolution*—concerning a revolution he claims never occurred—Thomas Shapin’s account of epistemic changes during the sixteenth century, mainly in England, emphasizes the valorization of the experimental *method* as mechanized, so that “method was represented as a machine for producing reliable and shared knowledge,”⁸⁷ *warranted* by the machine.

These early moderns engendered a system that conforms to older divination systems: mainly, the system deploys rules appearing to bar manipulation. From where else could they have drawn, in formulating such a system? They were borrowing heavily from religions already. What other field of practice offered such a system of warranting verdicts?

In experiment as in classical divination, for warranting verdicts, *the rules* are necessary as a canon, in order to secure “agreement that the knowledge in question truly was . . . above all *disinterested*.”⁸⁸ According to the rules, the experimenter, like the diviner, should mediate but not author the verdicts.

Masters of the experimental procedures—who may aim “to use the resulting reformed natural knowledge to achieve moral, social, and political ends”⁸⁹—perform as if *the rules* bracket their personal investment in those ends. Indeed early modern experimenters of the sixteenth century began to develop and deploy “explicitly formulated rules of method [for] managing or eliminating the effects of human passions and interests.”⁹⁰

But actually, as a means of overcoming serious challenges, the rise of the experimental method has depended on socially-*invested* interpretation by an elite, as the mark of the truth-teller was . . . the mark of the gentleman. That is, as the early scientists excluded what their class deemed “vulgar,” they privileged reports that abided by the social rules of their bourgeois, adult, educated, genteel, sane, White,

⁸⁷ Shapin 1996, 130.

⁸⁸ Shapin 1996, 13, emphasis in original.

⁸⁹ Shapin 1996, 13, emphasis in original.

⁹⁰ Shapin 1996, 13, emphasis in original.

male, Protestant, civil society.⁹¹ This privileging helped resolve their struggles towards authoritatively interpreting their own sensory impressions—especially of things that were unfamiliar, or too familiar to notice sharply—and towards a system of authorizing anyone’s reports of observations.

They had strained “to sift and evaluate experience reports” for credibility.⁹² Finally, in order to distinguish acceptable reports from “what were widely called “old wives’ tales,” it seems that especially in England, largely this problem of sifting was “solved by a device as apparently simple as the gentlemanly code of honor.”⁹³

This experimental method—grounded in socially acceptable performance of propriety—enabled experimenters to trace “effects that were not at all accessible to normal human experience,”⁹⁴ as in other practices of divination. (The foundational experimental tool was Robert Boyle’s air pump: it created a vacuum in which one might observe the conditions prevailing literally *outside* the earth’s atmosphere.)⁹⁵

Finally, the procedures of experiment and divination each depend on ritualized exposure to ritually pure indeterminacy. That is, even in the absence of random sampling or double-blindness, experimenters must await without certainty, for their experiment’s verdict on their hypothesis.

To Gottfried Herder by 1768, two basic forms of inquiry—cognitive interpretation and natural science—seemed comparable, as “divination.”⁹⁶ Divination persisted as a prime way of knowing, even for moderns, even when we do not recognize it as divination. So it should come as no surprise that cinema deploys divination.

⁹¹ See Shapin 1994; and Shapin 1996, 8: “The half of the European population that was female was in a position to participate in scientific culture scarcely at all, as was that overwhelming majority—of men and women—who were illiterate or otherwise disqualified from entering the venues of formal learning”

⁹² Shapin 1996, 88; see also 72.

⁹³ Shapin 1996, 88-89, n.; 94.

⁹⁴ Shapin 1996, 98.

⁹⁵ Shapin 1996, 98. I note that a difference between experimental science and divination is that modern science aims to bring the known to penetrate the unknown, while conversely divination channels the unknown to penetrate the known. (One result is that compared to other kinds of diviners, positivist scientists may appear reluctant to acknowledge their reliance on significant patterns beyond their ken.)

⁹⁶ See Herder 2002[1768].

CHAPTER CONCLUSION

In the following chapters the advantages of my method include that it does not require the reader's familiarity with a whole set of primary texts. Many readers will have seen *The Ten Commandments*; some may see it in order to prepare to read this dissertation. Even of readers who have never seen this film, all know the outline of the story of Exodus. Almost all know who DeMille was, and are familiar with the general context of Cold War cinema.

Also many readers will recognize most of the basic components of the genealogies here, including jeremiad, melodrama, psychoanalysis, and racial representation. All have familiarity with some practices of divination, such as coin tossing.⁹⁷

Overall, my method parallels Michael Fishbane's 1985 exegesis of the Hebrew Bible in *Biblical Interpretation in Ancient Israel*, a landmark work of Biblical scholarship, and perhaps the most sophisticated attempt to discuss the role of divination within narrative and within *the use* of narrative. Like Fishbane, my exegesis features "mantology, by which is meant the study of material which is ominous or oracular in scope and content."⁹⁸

Like Fishbane, I focus on how the text—for him the Hebrew Bible, for me *The Ten Commandment*—presents itself as portentous and oracular. Like in Fishbane's "inner-biblical mantology,"⁹⁹ my investigation tracks tropes of divination in the Biblical narrative, performance of divination *by* the text, and mantic uses of the text. We each focus on the role of "inner-biblical typologies"¹⁰⁰ on all three levels—that is, how some characters and events manifest other ones; how the text poses some things as if they should become manifest for the user; and how some users indeed have used the text within mantic practices.

It is advantageous that my analytical method is congruent to Fishbane's, not only because his book is a scholarly breakthrough, but moreover because he is highly

⁹⁷ See Buckland 2000.

⁹⁸ Fishbane 1985, 443.

⁹⁹ Fishbane 1985, 459.

¹⁰⁰ Fishbane 1985, 351.

accomplished at employing modern theory in articulating how historical events, texts, and exegesis relate to cultural imagination.¹⁰¹ He concludes that “typologies serve . . . as the means whereby the deeper dimensions perceived to be latent in historical events are rendered manifest and explicit to the cultural imagination.”¹⁰²

Some of Fishbane’s issues are ones I also engage, so it is fitting that my methods should match his. Particularly, as if influenced by Benjamin’s “Theses on the Philosophy of History,” Fishbane focuses on how the “redemptive event which constituted Israel’s particular destiny has become the prototype by which a more universal, messianic reconciliation is envisaged.”¹⁰³ Not only on universalizations is Fishbane highly relevant to this dissertation. Moreover Fishbane’s take on mantological exegesis corresponds to Benjamin’s emphasis on *messianic time*—which is highly relevant herein. That is, “the pivotal power of mantological exegesis” comes from putting at stake “the very rational order which gives cognitive coherence to time and its terrors.”¹⁰⁴

Finally, it is beneficial that my method parallels Fishbane’s, because our political analyses correspond. We each show how our “Bible” positions its addressee so that “the addressee is rhetorically co-opted and his attitudes are disengaged and rechanneled.”¹⁰⁵ Finally we each conclude that the *traditum* (the content of tradition) becomes “the screen upon which national hope and renewal is contextualized, even imagined.”¹⁰⁶

Of course, my approach also differs considerably from Fishbane’s, especially because *The Ten Commandments* is modern and American. Moreover I develop a model of divination herein, primarily because many of my readers, outside the field of religion, may not be familiar with any research on divination; and moreover because for analyzing mass-mediation in terms of divination, one cannot depend on prior scholarship on divination. (See Chapter Seven.)

My method features partial genealogies of relevant forms of divination rites, keyed to a close reading of this film. Close reading is effective because the film’s

¹⁰¹ For example, he cites Volosinov 1978 (Fishbane 1985, 436 n., 437 n.).

¹⁰² Fishbane 1985, 360.

¹⁰³ Fishbane 1985, 367-368. See also von Rad 1962.

¹⁰⁴ Fishbane 1985, 511.

¹⁰⁵ Fishbane 1985, 427.

¹⁰⁶ Fishbane 1985, 413. *Traditum* is opposed to the *tradio*, or process of transmission (Fishbane 1985, 6).

matic aspects do not become apparent on mere analysis of the narrative or of any one level of the film. Genealogy relates pre-modern and modern practices of divination.

Overall, by demonstrating divination as a paradigm linking diverse texts and discourses as rites, this investigation's conclusions help to challenge any common sense that American, modern forms have superseded premodern practices of cultural performance.

CHAPTER TWO: CECIL B. DEMILLE? SERIOUSLY?

OVERVIEW

This chapter contextualizes *The Ten Commandments*; further summarizes its reception; then concludes with a more thorough review of this film's published critiques. A study of hegemonic mediation might well focus on work of Cecil B. DeMille. From 1914 through 1956 he achieved unrivaled fame and longevity of commercial success as a director of Hollywood feature films. As much as any other individual, DeMille helped make cinema the first industry in which the U.S. achieved global supremacy, and in some ways global culture's prime medium.¹⁰⁷

His legacy matters. Not only does Hollywood begin with DeMille, who co-founded a studio and made America's first feature film, *The Squaw Man* (1914); moreover he is the only Hollywood director to make blockbusters over the course of five decades. His legacy shows, for example, in perennial U.S. controversies over the civic displays, in schools and courthouses, of granite monoliths inscribed with the Decalogue—displays which can be traced back to a campaign facilitated by Paramount from 1955 for promoting DeMille's *The Ten Commandments* (1956).¹⁰⁸ Moreover, according to critic Sumiko Higashi, DeMille's legacy matters because it fostered “the increasing dominance of representation in twentieth-century economic,

¹⁰⁷ The first global vernacular, according to Kracauer, was cinema.

¹⁰⁸ Hoffman 2005.

political, and cultural life,” as “fabricating spectacle became a form of commodity fetishism.”¹⁰⁹

Finally the release of DeMille’s opus, *The Ten Commandments*, came at the close of America’s postwar decade. By 1956, according to critic W.T. Lhamon in his book *Deliberate Speed*, American discourses had coalesced lastingly.

DIVINATION BY EIGHT-FOOT CHORUS GIRL

In 1956 Paramount successfully managed to avoid a ruinous backlash from religious leaders, yet the critics as a set did not give *The Ten Commandments* two thumbs up: the grandeur of the production, but not the film overall, impressed critics. Typical of the critical response in 1956, *Newsweek* deemed the film educational and impressive, yet trying.¹¹⁰ *Films and Filming* noted that, as DeMille did with his previous films, with this one he “moulds religion into a set pattern of Hollywood conventions.”¹¹¹ *Variety* said the film sometimes lacked “emotional tug,” was conventional, and “neither awesome nor profound” despite its spectacle.¹¹² Though the film was a must-see, at nearly four hours it seemed much too long. *Time* found it

roughly comparable to an eight-foot chorus girl—pretty well put together, but much too big and much too flashy. And sometimes DeMille is worse than merely flashy. It is difficult to find another instance in which so large a golden calf has been set up without objection from religious leaders. With insuperable piety, Cinemogul DeMille claims that he has tried “to translate the Bible back to its original form,” the form in which it was lived. Yet what he has

¹⁰⁹ Higashi 1994, 203. She continues her arguments in a 1996 essay, “Antimodernism as Historical Representation in a Consumer Culture: Cecil B. DeMille’s *The Ten Commandments*, 1923, 1956, 1993,” in *The Persistence of History: Cinema, Television, and the Modern Event*.

¹¹⁰ *Newsweek*, Nov. 5, 1956.

¹¹¹ Gow 1956.

¹¹² *Variety*, October 10, 1956.

really done is to throw sex and sand into the film-goers' eyes for almost twice as long as anybody else has ever dared to.¹¹³

The critics faulted DeMille for this film's bad taste, shallowness, and lack of originality.

Yet despite the critics, the film achieved enormous success at the box office. Adjusted for inflation, *The Ten Commandments* was the fifth most successful film of the twentieth century.¹¹⁴ Television broadcasters later made *The Ten Commandments* a film with perennial popularity like no other, a rite of spring from New York to Manila. More recently it has become a popular home rental, promoted by vendors as "very likely the most eventful 219 minutes ever recorded to film."¹¹⁵

This film's success indicates some lessons about cinema, yet very few critics have pursued this indication in depth. Instead critics generally have slighted all DeMille's work as unserious. The great *auteurs* of cinema have overshadowed him artistically from the start: DeMille achieved his first and perhaps biggest critical success with *The Cheat* in 1915, which nevertheless was eclipsed that same year by D.W. Griffith's masterpiece, *Birth of a Nation*.

Compared with cinema's more markedly artful directors, it has hardly seemed that DeMille even tried to make his films artistic, so much as he seemed plainly to pander to unsophisticated tastes. DeMille's critical regard particularly has suffered from his film's reputation for what seemed frivolous sexual titillation. For decades he was primarily associated with displaying women in the bathtub. Finally, some critics' hostility, and much of scholars' disregard for DeMille's films, stem from deserved disdain for DeMille's extrafilmic politics—his union-busting and vigorous leadership of HUAC's McCarthyite fascism in Hollywood.¹¹⁶

Following DeMille's autobiography (1960), general-audience treatments of his life and/or work were authored by Myers and Burnett (1963), Mourlet (Paris,

¹¹³ *Time*, November 12, 1956.

¹¹⁴ Jeffery A. Smith 2001.

¹¹⁵ Erickson 2007.

¹¹⁶ Birchard 2004.

1968), Ringgold (1969), Essoe and Lee (1970), and Higham (1973). Other treatments of *The Ten Commandments* include Silver's *Images of Moses* (1982), Kirsch's *Moses: A Life* (1998) and one full book, Orrison's "Making of . . ." paean to the old guard of Hollywood, *Written in Stone: Making Cecil B. DeMille's Epic, The Ten Commandments* (1999).

Most of the serious scholarship on *The Ten Commandments* has been left to scholars outside of film departments, partly because few film scholars have been trained in Biblical hermeneutics, so this particular film's uses of typology and "manifest destiny" lies outside most film scholars' expertise.¹¹⁷ Moreover film scholars hardly could use DeMille in arguing that academe should take Hollywood cinema seriously as an art form akin to high art. Meanwhile film scholars have tended to specialize in either silent films or "talkies": because he was far more influential during the silent era, when he made fifty-two of his seventy films, by rights he must be regarded primarily as a director of silent films—even though his most legibly lasting influence came from *The Ten Commandments* (1956)). DeMille straddles the divide. Indeed, as a sign of publishers' neglect for criticism of the roles of DeMille and of his trademark genre, at least two of the best books on these topics are presently out of print. I refer to Anne Edwards's *The DeMilles: An American Family* (1988), which offered well-considered criticism on cultural contexts of DeMille's work; as well as a book by Bruce Babington and Peter William Evans, two British film scholars who provided the first in-depth account of *The Ten Commandments*' generic context—*Biblical Epics: Sacred Narrative in the Hollywood Cinema* (Manchester UP, 1993).

Treatments of *The Ten Commandments* focusing on American culture began with Michael Wood's *America in the Movies* (1978), which claimed the "Hollywood Biblical Epic" as historically pivotal,¹¹⁸ and regarding this genre DeMille had developed, scholarly criticism continued with high theorist Gilles Deleuze, a Frenchman who in *Cinema 1: The Movement-Image* (London, 1986) proposed the

¹¹⁷ As an example of press critics getting out of their depth, many have faulted DeMille for his representation's deracinating and Protestantizing of the Hebrews, their language, and their religion: this is overall an excellent point, however more than a few critics claimed that the inscriptions on Moses's stone tablets were in a nonce language when they should have been in Hebrew. Actually according to Orrison the inscriptions are in Aramaic, which is historically appropriate.

¹¹⁸ Babington and Evans 1993, 11 cites Michael Wood 1978.

“Hollywood Biblical Epic” together with the Western as the key to the American cinema. In Deleuze’s articulation of Hollywood rhetorics of typology and manifest destiny, referring to DeMille he finds “the doublings connoted in the Epics (the Israelites, the Christians as, if not Americans, then the spiritual precursors of America) are the other side of the parallelisms running through . . . especially the Western, with its enacting of America’s coming to birth as the Promised Land.”¹¹⁹

Part of Alan Nadel’s essay on *The Ten Commandments*—which merited an MLA prize—traces some of the Mormon church’s influence on *The Ten Commandments*’ iconographic typology. Nadel says the artistic link was Arnold Friberg, at that time perhaps the greatest religious illustrator alive, whom DeMille lured from Utah to Los Angeles to work on the film. Friberg had illustrated scenes from the Book of Mormon representing Native American, Polynesian, and indeterminately marked peoples as the lost tribes of Israel—as prefigurements which Mormon types redeemed.¹²⁰ Friberg’s involvement in *The Ten Commandments*—his presence, plus his set designs, costume designs, sketches and oil paintings, facilitated American-typological readings of DeMille’s film¹²¹—such as, I note, the film’s concluding image of Moses as the Statue of Liberty, which Friberg painted.

While Nadel already had inventoried *The Ten Commandments*’ typological allusions to the New Testament, as a Bible scholar Chattaway cites more specific, more mantological references. For example, observing that in *The Ten Commandments* Pharaoh Rameses I kills the newborn Hebrews following the astrological divination that their deliverer was to be born, Chattaway details the correspondence of this trope with “Matthew’s version of the Nativity story, in which a special star signifies the birth of Jesus, provoking Herod to kill the infants in Bethlehem.” Later in the film, when adult Moses meets his Hebrew mother, “her beatitude echoes the Magnificat of the Virgin Mary: ‘Blessed am I among all mothers in the land, for my eyes have beheld the deliverer.’”¹²²

¹¹⁹ Deleuze 1986, vol. 1, 151. For precedents in literary criticism see P. Miller 1952 and Jehlen 1986.

¹²⁰ Nadel 1993, 423.

¹²¹ See Nadel 1993, 423.

¹²² Thirdly, regarding an elderly character who declares to Moses that he had always wished to “behold the deliverer who will lead all men to freedom,” Chattaway links this character to Simeon, “the righteous man in Luke’s Gospel, who recognizes the infant Jesus and prophesies that [he] will one day bring salvation to the gentiles and thus to the whole world.” Orisson reveals that the actor who had played this elderly man was H. B. Warner, who played Jesus in DeMille’s silent film, *King of Kings*. This is an example of DeMille’s typological use of actors.

Melanie McAlister describes how the mass-culture industry's treatments of the Bible—which began with the first printed books, and continued through the popular stage, panoramas, and other entertainments—shifted into high gear with what she calls “epic” cinema. As Babington and Evans historicize and analyze the major, critically neglected genre they call “Hollywood Biblical Epic,” they follow Wood and Deleuze in arguing for it as the paradigm of secular America's “redefinition of its distant spiritual sources.”¹²³ Their work advances film scholarship's ongoing project of accounting for cinema in terms of its genres. They show how, as the popular stage already had been doing, early Hollywood used the Bible for its cultural capital, in successful bids to sell many tickets even while transcending the cinema's low-brow pigeonhole.

Peter Chattaway's “Lights, Camera, Plagues!: Moses in the Movies” (*Bible Review* 1999), frames *The Ten Commandments* in context of motion pictures about Moses. Chattaway's filmic genealogy begins pre-Hollywood with the Pathé studio's short, *Moses et l'Exode de l'Egypte* in 1907, followed by French productions of *Israel in Egypt* (1910) and *The Infancy of Moses* (1911). In the U.S., Vitagraph released a five-part series of films, *The Life of Moses* (1909-1910). But Cecil B. DeMille's 1923 *Ten Commandments* was “the first truly remarkable film on the subject.”¹²⁴

Babington and Evans note that largely Hollywood had begun with the two Biblical films of D.W. Griffith: *Judith of Bethulia* (1914), and *Intolerance* (1916), whose re-creation of Babylon inspired Hollywood's performance of its own cultural role. Yet, and though the first version of *Ben-Hur: A Tale of the Christ* (directed in 1925 by Federico Nobile) was also a major success, it was DeMille, taking over from Griffith, who firmly established the Biblical genre through three big hits. After his first version of *The Ten Commandments* (1923) came *The King of Kings* (1927) — which in release to churches and civic organizations became “one of the most viewed films of all time”¹²⁵ — then *The Sign of the Cross* (1932). According to Babington and Evans, each of Hollywood's subsequent treatments of the Bible falls into one the three sub-types established by these DeMille films respectively: Old Testament,

¹²³ Babington and Evans 1993, 16.

¹²⁴ Chattaway 1999, 36.

¹²⁵ Babington and Evans 1993, 5.

Christ Film, or “Roman/Christian Epic (of the beginnings of post-Christ Christianity).”¹²⁶ However during the Great Depression and wartime, as Hollywood toned down its performance of decadence, it took a hiatus from budgeting for lavish re-creations of the Biblical world.

Then amidst postwar prosperity, when the Biblical epic served as a showcase in the Hollywood studios’ struggle against the incursion of low-budget television into America’s leisure,¹²⁷ DeMille relaunched the Hollywood Bible film with his *Samson and Delilah*, which during the year 1950 sold more tickets than any other. In its wake followed a succession of Biblical blockbusters, dominating the 1950s’ box office with three out of the top four places as best-grossing films of the entire decade. These were *The Robe* (directed by Henry Koster in 1953), *The Ten Commandments* (DeMille, 1956), and the remake of *Ben-Hur* (William Wyler, 1959).

According to Babington and Evans, the Biblical genre rose and fell with Hollywood’s strict censorship of sex. For Hollywood producers a main appeal of the Biblical genre was that censors permitted the showing of period-appropriate partial nudity and orgies, as long as these films’ own morality tales condemned the licentiousness. Later when censors permitted Hollywood to show as much skin and sex in other genres of films, the Biblical genre declined.¹²⁸

Moreover, Nadel argues that *The Ten Commandments*, and Hollywood’s contemporary Biblical films, aided U.S. foreign policy during the Cold War by helping to channel and to validate a certain consensus.¹²⁹ A scholar of literature and of Cold-War pop culture, Nadel authored the first, and still the most thorough analysis published heretofore on this film, his essay, “God’s Law and the Wide Screen: *The Ten Commandments* as Cold War Epic” (which appeared in *PMLA* in 1993, the same year as the book by Babington and Evans; Nadel later expanded the essay in his 1995 book, *Containment Culture: American Narrative, Postmodernism, and the Atomic Age*). Nadel compares the film’s narration and dialogue with contemporary U.S. foreign-policy memos, noting striking correspondences between

¹²⁶ Babington and Evans 1993, 4.

¹²⁷ Babington and Evans 1993, 7.

¹²⁸ Babington and Evans 1993, 8.

¹²⁹ Nadel 1993, 91-92; see also McAlister 2001, 56-57.

“God’s Law” as portrayed by DeMille, and Washington’s policy of containing Communist expansion.

By expanding its own reach and influence, geopolitically America’s cultural imperialism aimed to help symbolically *contain* the perceived, subterranean threat of Communism: Nadel concludes that directors literally projected this mission onto film screens by expanding the view. The technological advance of wide-screen film formats, which were developed in the 1950s, meanwhile also served U.S. foreign policy by reinforcing the contemporary claims of American technological supremacy. Nadel points out that *The Ten Commandments* (1956) used Vistavision—a new, wide-screen process that photographed sixty degrees of horizon onto seventy-millimeter film—to frame a more epic, more imperial vision.¹³⁰

Furthermore in two paragraphs on *The Ten Commandments*’ representation of Blacks Nadel emphasizes that in *The Ten Commandments* “‘Ethiopia’ is a cover, a code name, for black America,”¹³¹ through which this film’s interracial, sexual tensions partake of American anxieties.¹³² As Melanie McAlister expands on this dynamic in her book, *Epic Encounters: Culture, Media, and U.S. Interests in the Middle East, 1945-2000* (University of California Press, 2001), she argues that Hollywood’s Bible films, including *The Ten Commandments*, “stage a complicated series of parallels and displacements that evoke the racial connotations of slavery, only to (partially) dispose of them via normative marriage.”

¹³⁰ Meanwhile though Nadel’s essay hardly deals with questions of genre, nevertheless his reading of the widescreen format should be taken towards justifying the persistent references to the category of especially large-scale films as the Hollywood *epic*. In casual parlance, epic simply refers to grandeur, and as *The Ten Commandments* has a bigger budget, grander sets, and bigger cast than other films, it seemed more essentially epic.

¹³¹ Nadel 1993, 419. “The distinctly American accent of [the film’s] black royalty” can blow the hidden subtext’s cover, he finds. But, many of the White characters have similarly American accents. Babington and Evans 1993 cites criticism of the British accents of the Egyptian rulers, which greatly enhances the role of Moses’s abolitionism as an American Revolutionary jeremiad.

¹³² Nadel 1993, 419.

PRIOR SCHOLARSHIP AND LACUNAE

Though all the previously published scholarly critiques suggest *The Ten Commandments* as a modern, American rite of masterful mass-mediation, none of those critiques adequately account for this film. In analyzing this film's structure and its elements, its contexts and continuing cultural work, none of those critiques combine Biblical commentary with in-depth critique of rites.

One of the main problems with the state of scholarship on *The Ten Commandments* is that the various writers, even when they have read each others' work, hardly seem to process each other's perspectives. This is partly because they have published only brief essays on this film, and moreover because they come from divergent academic fields. Because so many diverse discourses intersect in *The Ten Commandments*, critics have analyzed it from various perspectives without their work adding up to a cumulative whole.

None of this film's prior critiques apply anthropology of rites, and overall none bring a broad enough perspective on mediation. Meanwhile the scholarly treatments tend to lack breadth. Specifically, on one hand the Bible scholars' critiques tend to lack expertise at using modern critical theory; on the other hand the critiques of the film in terms of modernity tend to ignore Biblical commentary.

By theorizing mediation, Nadel, Higashi, and Pardes each offers a provocative critique of postwar modernity. Nadel suggests "containment" as a key dynamic. Higashi details the fetishization of commodity spectacle. Pardes suggests that cinematic "special effects" and ancient accounts of miracles need to be understood on each others' terms.

When I suggest that self-divination is a salient function of commodity rites, I join Pardes in arguing that ancient and modern discourses need to be understood in relation to common patterns of cultural dynamics.

Undoubtedly Cold War politics, and a culture of *containment* of threats, mutually reinforced each other, so Alan Nadel's articulation of Cold-War mediation in terms of *containment* is germane. In his essay, "God's Law and the Wide Screen: *The Ten Commandments* as Cold War Epic" (1995[1993]), his model of cultural

containment—as a ritualized process of “channeling” social threats—gestures towards an account of *The Ten Commandments* as a rite of divination.¹³³

Less fortuitously, Nadel’s tight focus on the Cold War era, eschewing deeper genealogy of that era’s practices, risks framing mediation itself as if it were a contemporary invention. For example, he claims of cinema that “inherently, the wide-screen format attempted to suggest the sublime”: however, to interpret the cultural role of such a new format, rather than analyzing its supposedly particular, inherent essence, a critical genealogy might mention that promotions of many a new medium’s power—particularly of the power of *imperial* mediation—has invoked the sublime.¹³⁴

On the whole, as a 1993 critique of America’s Cold-War-era pop culture, Nadel’s analysis was excellent, yet much work still remained for a scholar theorizing the mass-mediation of modernity. Relative to Nadel, who kept a firm grip on articulating and detailing particular cultural dynamics, Sumiko Higashi theorized more deeply and ambitiously, with a wider historical window.

Of all published critiques of *The Ten Commandments*, Sumiko Higashi’s—which seems grounded in Lukács’s theory that in capitalism the role of commodities hybridizes aesthetics and economics—makes the most sophisticated use of modern critical theory. She addresses this film in her book—*Cecil B. DeMille and American Culture: The Silent Era* (University of California Press, 1993); and in essays including “Antimodernism as Historical Representation in a Consumer Culture: Cecil B. DeMille’s *The Ten Commandments*, 1923, 1956, 1993,” in *The Persistence of History: Cinema, Television, and the Modern Event* (Vivian Sobchack, ed., 1996). Higashi presents *The Ten Commandments* as a modern spectacle and as a culmination of the twentieth-century’s public fetishization of the commodity. However she does not analyze spectacle or fetishization in terms of religion or rites.

Higashi’s genealogy of DeMille’s practice of mediation focuses on the visual components of DeMille’s cinematic rhetoric, especially his usage of tableaux. She traces this usage back to Victorian England, claiming it bears the antiquated legacy of

¹³³ In this regard see also on Cold-War American Culture see May 1989. The title of the excellent anthology *Recasting America* features a pun on *casting* as in bronze production (say, of the Statue of Liberty), the casting of performers in a drama, and casting as in throwing dice for divination. The cover shows a man looking at a Pollock painting. On Pollock’s painting as a sign of the times, see Lhamon 1990.

¹³⁴ See accounts especially of the telegraph’s introduction in the nineteenth century U.S., such as Sollors 1983. See also Redfield 1999, who quotes a nineteenth-century proclamation that “the divine boom of the telegraph allowed man to become more godlike.” On spiritualist mediums and colonization, see Viswanathan 2000. See also Chapter 10 herein.

“Victorian pictorialism.” Though DeMille’s use of tableaux surely descends in part from the performances of pictorialism in Victorian England’s parlors, more saliently it comes from melodrama—the melodrama which America largely imported in the form of Charles Dickens’s novels, and the melodrama DeMille later learned from his youthful reading of pulp fiction and from his involvement in the New York theater world where his family worked.¹³⁵

Because film scholars tend to disregard DeMille’s later films as especially unworthy of serious attention, some of the most provocative criticism on *The Ten Commandments* as mediation comes from the scholars grounded in other disciplines, led by Ilana Pardes, the first Bible scholar to author a serious essay on this film. In “Moses Goes Down to Hollywood: Miracles and Special Effects” (*Semeia*, 1996) Pardes begins with the counterintuitive claim that “Hollywood is central to our understanding of the Bible and of biblical exegesis.”¹³⁶ Her primary point is that in order to understand the importance of miracles to people since the ancients, scholars should analyze the importance of miraculous special effects to moderns.

Miracles are meant for the people. When Moses is sent on his first mission and dreads the incredulity of the people, God supplies him with the rod of wonder, the key to the people's heart (Exod 4:1-6). Indeed, to God's dismay, the children of Israel always crave more miracles. Gideon's provocative question illustrates this point: “And where be all his miracles which our fathers told us of, saying, “Did not the Lord bring us up from Egypt? but now the Lord hath forsaken us, and delivered us into the hands of the Midianites” (Judges 6:13). What Gideon's question also makes clear is that stories of

¹³⁵ See Sobchack 1996, 9. In the same volume as Higashi’s essay Vivian Sobchack’s “Introduction: history happens” chides Higashi’s account for slighting melodrama. Sobchack—articulating DeMille’s work as “akin to “sermonization”: the narration of past events and nation-building in coherent moral tales”—suggests that “to narrate “the nation” tends to involve melodrama. In this regard, Sobchack cites Elsaesser’s 1996 observation that “much of the force of the injunction against misrepresentation . . . relies implicitly on a religiously grounded *Bilderverbot* (iconomachy), itself at least in part an acknowledgment of the power of images to elicit “effects of melodrama, sentimentality, prurience.” Elsaesser’s observation suggests a connection between Linda Williams’s work on pornography and her work on melodrama—both forms widely opposed as overweeningly compelling forms of imagery.

¹³⁶ Pardes 1996, 15.

miracles formed part of Israelite oral culture and were precisely the kind of stories that were passed on from parents to their offspring (see Zakovitch and Ben-Amos: 48). Such traditions were popular for good reason. Miracles, particularly in Exodus, are collective scenes of divine revelation that include breathtaking triumphs over the Egyptian oppressors, from the victory of Aaron's rod in the competition with the Egyptian magicians to the drowning of Pharaoh's soldiers in the Red Sea. These rare carnivalesque moments mark temporary liberation from the prevailing order.¹⁰

Pardes's essay, which is the most relevant to the present dissertation's approach, here highlights ancient rites of divine revelation and brings Biblical hermeneutics to bear, even while citing the Bakhtinian *carnavalesque*—which is the main, now-canonical critical theory of modern mediation in terms of an ancient rite. However, the salience of the magicians' competition she cites from Exodus, I argue, is not the magic but the framework of the competition itself as a duel—a practice of divination.

Pardes's critique helps establish a conversation of scholars using modern critical theory in researching correspondences between ancient and modern textual criticism: indeed the present dissertation responds to her call for close examination of DeMille's *interpretive strategies*.¹³⁷ This is to emphasize that in significant ways the film “interprets itself.” Even as *The Ten Commandments* foregrounds its own performance of interpretations, it foregrounds interpretative strategies—as if to say “the film is divining things by these means”—and solicits viewers to employ relevant means of divination. Indeed in this way it is like Scripture. As Bible scholars often have claimed—and Michael Fishbane magisterially has demonstrated of the Hebrew Bible—Scripture interprets itself. This applies also to DeMille's cinematic Scripture.

I would argue that while all texts work similarly, this dynamic is especially emphatic in *The Ten Commandments*, especially because at every level, including

¹³⁷ Pardes 1996, 21, emphasis added.

its paratexts (promotional materials, etc.) this film proclaims that “America has now mastered the best strategy of “proclaiming liberty throughout the lands’: motion pictures.”¹³⁸ As the strategy of liberation—the *locating of the path* out of Egyptian bondage—this hegemonic, Hollywood film trumpets its own means of divination.

Most deeply, in terms of the mediation of modernity, Pardes’s critique like my own is very much concerned with what might be called “the folklore of industrial society”—however I find Pardes all but overlooks hegemony. She begins from Lawrence Levine’s careful observation that “the folklore of industrial society” is “not indifferent to or detached from its audiences.”¹³⁹ However then she claims “one of the keys to the success of *The Ten Commandments*, . . . lay . . . in its capacity to resurrect the biblical *vox populi*,”¹⁴⁰ that is, the voice of the people.

Of course, a serious critique, especially of a studio-era, Hollywood film, should specify firstly what it signifies as “the biblical *vox populi*,” because even positing such a thing at all is hardly uncontroversial. Anyway Pardes may be referring here to viewers’ *perspectives* of the film’s capacity to bring the populace together with the Bible as its contemporary text.

Even so, it is not clear here how the film potentially engaged the “voice of the people” nor, even if it did, what it might mean that an offering from the film industry would delimit the speech-act.

It might be at least as reasonable to suppose the film’s success lay in its capacity to relieve the populace of its voice, because filmgoers, to receive the modern revelation, would sit silently. Indeed in DeMille’s narrative, Moses, on hearing the multitude orgying at the golden calf, does not fear he hears the sound of battle (as in the Book of Exodus), but rather—before he even learns about the apostasy—he condemns what he recognizes as “the sound of song and revelry.” The voice of the people is expressly unwelcome under his God’s law!

Nevertheless, I do find Pardes is onto something here, which is a sense of cohesion-in-mediation. Chapter Eleven herein addresses such a sense.

¹³⁸ Pardes 1996, 20. Pardes quotes the Bible—“throughout the land”—rather than DeMille’s more imperialist “throughout the lands.”

¹³⁹ Pardes 1996, 18, quotes Levine 1992.

¹⁴⁰ Pardes 1996, 25.

Pardes's critique of *The Ten Commandments* is mainly incisive, except for its claim to "trace the desires, hopes, and beliefs of the audience as reflected in the film."¹⁴¹ If this film is a mirror, it is no mere reflector. It is the kind of mirror used for divination—as in *Snow White*, telling the user who is the fairest one of all.

Finally in accounting for mediation, Pardes's critique focuses on the miraculous and the divine. This focus is fitting in so far as some kinds of revelations usually are framed as divine miracles.¹⁴² Yet even when so framed, "miraculous" and "divine" do not, from my perspective, most saliently characterize rites of revelation—especially not in terms of their *politics* of mediation.

Indeed I find revelations function effectively the same even when they are non-divine and/or non-miraculous. As Durkheim held, religion is society worshipping itself: therefore my own account of *The Ten Commandments* as divination traces the social dynamics of revelation-making, rather than focusing on divinity or miraculousness.

Unlike Pardes's, my own critique need not and does not claim that this film's viewers believe any of the same things in any of the same ways. Indeed I argue conversely that this film achieved global, perennial popularity since 1956 largely because of its very openness to variant interpretations. Like a Rorschach test—a four-hour, multi-matrixed, non-abstract version of a Rorschach test—*The Ten Commandments* invites viewers to divine what they see and hear.

In extrapolating from and aiming to surpass prior critiques of *The Ten Commandments*' work as cultural mediation, I use several recent advances in media scholarship, including developments in cinematic genre theory, and new technology for DVDs and desktop publishing.

Regarding genre, almost all the critiques of *The Ten Commandments* misleadingly call it an epic—a "Cold War Epic," a "historical epic," a "Hollywood Biblical Epic," an Orientalist "Epic Encounter," etc. While Hollywood's grand, "historical" blockbusters do poach some cultural capital as if they were epics, other than in terms of grandeur they hardly compare to the ancient genre of verse epic. Indeed no genre critic has claimed that the Bible Films are generically epics, akin to

¹⁴¹ Pardes 1996, 15.

¹⁴² See also Hent de Vries 2001b, 23-29, on special effects as miracles.

Homer; it rather seems critics have accepted the terminology from contemporary press accounts of “historical epics” and “Biblical Epics.”

However I call them Biblical Melodramas, because the salient genre (and generic mode) of *The Ten Commandments*—like almost all Hollywood blockbuster films— is melodrama.

DeMille’s work played an undeniably major role in the establishment of Hollywood melodrama. While film scholars in recent years increasingly have been analyzing melodrama, still this film’s melodrama is important to analyze especially because scholars still tend to feature the work of directors who patently brought filmic innovation or sophistication to melodrama, such as Sirk or Minnelli, while overlooking DeMille’s use of melodrama.

Finally, advances in technology allow me to present digitized images captured from a DVD of *The Ten Commandments* to illustrate key points. For example, many critics have cited Michael Wood’s observation that the film’s last shot poses Moses as the Statue of Liberty, but seeing is believing.



Figure 2.1. Moses—painted by Arnold Friberg, the master-illustrator of typology—posed as the Statue of Liberty.

Indeed much of this dissertation consists of a mantological reading of this film's series of parallels and displacements that first evoke the racial connotations of slavery, then resolving that valence into something sexual: *The Ten Commandments* is always divining some occulted vectors of racial and sexual displacement. Chapter Six and the Conclusion unpack the significance of critics' findings that *The Ten Commandments*' villain, Dathan—played by Edward G. Robinson, who was blacklisted for his Communist sympathies—is the orchestrator of the covenant-breaking orgy around the golden calf, thus “embodying the identification of Communism with the evils of Free Love.”¹⁴³

My argument characterizes DeMille's antimodernism as part of his role: his films evoke melodramatic nostalgia for premodernity, very modernly. I do not frame *The Ten Commandments* as un-modern or antimodern, though I describe it in ancient terms of a rite of divination. Indeed I argue that this film functions as a *modern* rite of divination.

As such, it exploits techniques of realism—in what my Conclusion articulates as a divination-by-the-real. In addition to the points I already cited of Pardes's critique, relevantly she further suggests *The Ten Commandments* matters because as Biblical treatment this film is unprecedented in its mode of realism.¹⁴⁴ A second Bible scholar, Melanie Wright, provides what I take as part of the genealogy for a *realistic* treatment of the life of Moses: she describes how organized Protestantism especially in the late nineteenth-century U.S. became closely linked with social scientific method. In that era, Social Gospellers “increasingly informed and were informed by the developing social sciences,” amidst a broad push towards updating Christian religion to achieve greater relevance in newly industrialized America.¹⁴⁵

I read Wright's *Moses in America: The Cultural Uses of Biblical Narrative* (Oxford University Press, 2003) as suggesting DeMille's use of realism bears that modern legacy. Moreover my critique reframes—in terms of a modern, political mantology of “the news”—Alicia Ostriker's argument that Hollywood interprets the Bible to “give the audiences the spiritual *spin* they need.”¹⁴⁶

¹⁴³ McAlister 2001, 76.

¹⁴⁴ Pardes 1996, 16.

¹⁴⁵ Wright 2003, 22.

¹⁴⁶ Ostriker 2003, emphasis added.

On the legacy of this film, Chattaway compares *The Ten Commandments* (1956) briefly to subsequent treatments such as the made-for-television movie starring Burt Lancaster, *Moses, the Lawgiver* (CBS, 1975); two episodes of an NBC miniseries, *Greatest Heroes of the Bible* (1978-79); an Emmy-winning episode of a British-Russian miniseries, *Testament: The Bible in Animation* (1996); the made-for-cable-television movie starring Ben Kingsley, *Moses* (TNT, 1996); as well as the animated feature film starring the voice of Val Kilmer, *The Prince of Egypt* (DreamWorks SKG, 1998).

More provocatively, Ostriker's essay, "Whither exodus? Movies as midrash" (*Michigan Quarterly Review*, 2003)—which glosses midrash felicitously as "a Jewish genre whose essence is sacred play with sacred text for the sake of communal need"—opens a door to investigating how *The Ten Commandments* might function as midrash. Ostriker's suggestion of film as midrash, however, is not a whole lot more than a suggestion, especially because her essay does not question how film-as-midrash might function at large in gentile contexts.

Higashi concludes that DeMille's films helped Orientalize commodification by emphasizing Eastern valences of "the exercise of hypnotic power through the sheer accumulation of objects displayed as spectacle."¹⁴⁷ (Following his first version of *The Ten Commandments* (1923), DeMille had "established a series of box office records with historical epics about Orientalized empires," including *The Sign of the Cross* (1932), *Cleopatra* (1934), and *The Crusades* (1935)).¹⁴⁸ That is, not only did DeMille work under the influence of mass-commodity advertising: conversely DeMille's cultural work helped shape American commodity advertising itself.¹⁴⁹ In her account of the 1956 film as broadcast in 1993 on television, Higashi suggests such currents legibly recombine around DeMille's legacy.

¹⁴⁷ Higashi 1994, 201 cites Said 1979, 123. For discussion of DeMille's role in "the increasing dominance of representation in twentieth-century economic, political, and cultural life," see Higashi 1994, 203.

¹⁴⁸ Higashi 1994, 202.

¹⁴⁹ Higashi 1994 further finds that DeMille's filmic legacy lives "in the form of television commercials and infomercials as didactic texts and in theme parks with interdependent media reconfiguring or erasing the line between spectacle and spectator" (203). Though it is hardly clear how those dynamics might be different if DeMille had never lived, still he is perhaps more responsible for them than any other individual.

CHAPTER CONCLUSION

Finally, in DeMille's Orientalism and his use of pictorialism, Higashi identifies his antimodernism: however on antimodernism I find her critique misleading. Antimodernism for DeMille is a key rhetoric to co-opt for the advancement of technological, industrial modernity.

Paradoxically, as a modernist DeMille by the end of his career is "a classic."¹⁵⁰ Meanwhile against the encroachments of television, he was defending the status of cinema now as "classic," mass-mediation.

This is another of the implicit inquiries of *The Ten Commandments*: how can mass mediation co-opt and supersede "the classic," the premodern, and even the antimodern? This film wastes little time, because it has a lot of divining to do. From its outset this film markedly generates "a special atmosphere"¹⁵¹—the atmosphere of a rite.

¹⁵⁰ This problem relates to film scholars' more recent debates over the nomenclature for referring to the cinema of the studio era: can one reasonably call it "classic Hollywood"? That is, as Miriam Hansen 1999 points out, strictly speaking, film scholars should stop referring to any form of cinema as "classic," if cinema has epitomized the modern.

¹⁵¹ Pardes 1996, 21.

PART II: CANONS

CHAPTER THREE: MANTOLOGICAL CATALOGUE OF CINEMATIC DEVICES

OVERVIEW

The Ten Commandments on several levels performs as a rite of divination: this chapter identifies its basic tropes, devices, and techniques. Herein I inventory certain aspects of the film and gloss the correspondence of each to an aspect of divination. Later chapters describe divination itself in some depth, and the significance of particular aspects of divination, such as how a systemology depends on canons and on indeterminacy, in making determinations of such things as social identity.

In addition to tropes that portray astrology and necromancy in the narrative of *The Ten Commandments*, DeMille himself—through this film’s credits and title cards, and in his spoken preface, plus in his role as narrator of *The Ten Commandments*—performs rites including nephelomancy (divination by the formation and direction of clouds). Overall this prefatory section of the film strongly invokes two key aspects of a rite of divination: dependence on canonicity, and strict adherence to rules preventing manipulation of the process. Finally, the film deploys certain cinematic techniques—namely, the cross-fade and “shot-reverse-shot” of crowds—as if dramatizing the results of rites of scrying. (Scrying is divination by gazing at a shining and/or translucent object, such as a flame, a crystal (e.g., a crystal ball), some water or a mirror.)

THE FILM'S OPENING GAMBITS

After *The Ten Commandments*' preliminaries, the characters' first dialogue is their divining of astrological portents. This dialogue is the first undeniable evidence that this film concerns divination. The film's preliminaries, moreover, enact a rite of divination, and instruct the viewer to perform as a diviner. Indeed people may look to the cinema for resolutions they cannot imagine by more usual means.¹⁵²

DeMille's opening gambit—highlighting the necessity of a special procedure to answer questions unanswerable by usual means—positions the film itself as a rite of divination.¹⁵³ Before the opening credits roll, *The Ten Commandments* (1956) begins with a spoken prologue by DeMille himself, standing on a stage and speaking into a microphone: he opens, “Ladies and Gentlemen, young and old, this may seem an unusual procedure—speaking to you before the picture begins.” By referring to the usual procedure for Hollywood cinema, from which he deviates here, he directs viewers' attention to such procedures as a canon against which interpreting proceeds. “We have an unusual subject,” DeMille continues.

As if beginning a rite of divination, DeMille ritualistically states the subject of inquiry:

The theme of this picture is whether men ought to be ruled by God's law or whether they are to be ruled by the whims of a dictator like Rameses. Are men the property of the state or are they free souls under God? This same battle continues throughout the world today.

After the credits, DeMille continues following classic procedure for a rite of divination. But first as the credits finish rolling, the film marks the entrance of its own, ritual voice in title-cards referring to DeMille in the third person.

Here at the credits' end DeMille—embodying Hollywood cinema¹⁵⁴—casts himself in the role of a medium who enables the viewer to descry the ancient Holy Land. Here DeMille actually claims that his film is for viewers a kind of rite—not a

¹⁵² See J. Z. Smith 1980, 125; see Grimes 2006, 12.

¹⁵³ Preus 1991.

¹⁵⁴ Of directors, the only one recognized nearly as widely was Alfred Hitchcock.

divination, however, but a pilgrimage. “THOSE WHO SEE THIS MOTION PICTURE—PRODUCED AND DIRECTED BY CECIL B. DE MILLE—WILL MAKE A PILGRIMAGE OVER THE VERY GROUND THAT MOSES TROD MORE THAN 3,000 YEARS AGO.” His foregrounded point here is to claim the authenticity of strict correspondence to what he supposedly could not have invented—here, the very ground that Moses trod. He did shoot exteriors in Egypt.

While such efforts primarily served to avoid having religious authorities condemn the film as inauthentic, they meanwhile serve to make DeMille’s interpretation more divinatory, because in a system of divination “the credibility and plausibility of the whole system depends absolutely on structures and rules that prevent (or appear to prevent) manipulation.”¹⁵⁵ Extrafilmically too, Paramount propagandized that the film adhered strictly to canonical sources—in 1956 Paramount even had Henry Noerdlinger’s scholarly research for the film published as if to prove this point.

After the credits have revealed (to anyone paying attention to the credits) that several contemporary writers authored the script based on several modern novels, they conclude that what matters is that DeMille is transmitting the received story,

IN ACCORDANCE WITH THE ANCIENT TEXTS OF
PHILO
JOSEPHUS
EUSEBIUS
The MIDRASH
AND—
The Holy Scriptures.

Here DeMille casts himself as a medium who enables the viewer to descry traces of the story of the ancient texts. (The shooting script makes this opening claim as a vow: its cover page says simply, “All these things are as I have found them, in the Holy Scriptures, the glorious Koran, the ancient Hebrew Writings, and in the annals of modern discoveries. Cecil B. DeMille.”) These extensive efforts to situate

¹⁵⁵ Preus 1991.

DeMille as non-originator¹⁵⁶ position him as the diviner, who “does not originate his speech, does not speak for himself or presume “authorship.” He defines himself as a *medium*, or mediator, of an external voice The diviner is not the author of the story; he claims to receive it from an external source.”

After the preface, credits, and title cards, the motion of this picture dawns with a slowly shifting cloudscape, over which the voice of DeMille—now disembodied as narrator—addresses the inquiry he posed in his spoken preface—that is, “whether men are to be ruled by a dictator.”

THE FILM BEGINS BY PERFORMING DIVINATION

As narrator DeMille portentously performs readings of portents, here as a rite of nephelomancy. The sun is streaming, downward and leftward to earth, through a few red-tinted clouds moving leftward towards the foreground. This nephelomantic rite is following an ancient structure common to many rites of divination: a formal statement of the inquiry, followed by a reading of the portents, concluding with a pronouncement of the portents as either favorable or unfavorable.¹⁵⁷ (The pronouncement—“And God heard them”—will be favorable.)

As the clouds are moving slowly toward closing the gap through which light streams, DeMille announces, “And from this light, God created life, upon earth. And man was given dominion, over ALL things, upon this earth.” Next the cloudscape cross-fades—that is, the established shot fades out, as a second shot resolves—into a different, now blue-tinted cloudscape.

Here the film is divining from the clouds the story of humanity in terms of the story of the Decalogue—even while on another level this film is divining its own role as modern, complex, cinematic enlightenment. In the newly resolved shot the sun is no longer streaming through the cloudscape. It has become a complex matrix of more differentiated, smaller clouds, bottom-heavy with rain. Clouds now occlude the light.

¹⁵⁶ Indeed, just as DeMille never took writing credits for his films, this film too prepares viewers to watch “this motion picture—produced and directed by Cecil B. De Mille,” but not written by him.

¹⁵⁷ Long 1973, 492. This outline of procedure is common to many forms of divination. Specifically scholars such as Burke Long have noted this procedure as generic in ancient records of extispicy. (Extispicy is the practice of divination by animals’ entrails; scholars believe the form came from the courts of Assyrian kings into proto-Italy via the Etruscans, who were practicing it by 800 B.C.)

The clouds roll toward the foreground more quickly and now rightward. As if reading this shift in the cloudscape, the narrator announces that humanity was given “the power to choose, between good and evil” but evilly “each sought to do his own will. Because he knew not the light of God’s law.”

In the more complex cloudscape, the narrator seems to read the more recent world in which individuals seek to do their own will. The narrator’s censoriousness towards individualistic unruliness comes at a time when, by the end of the nearly-fifteen-minute-long credits and titles, some viewers at screenings in cinemas were becoming restless: so here the film reads its own imagined audience as ignorant of “the light of God’s law.” The light of God’s law is the Decalogue: and the light of God’s law is this film, to which, the narrator implies, those who do not choose evil must pay attention.

This film opens by positioning the viewer as the end-link in a chain of diviners. That is, this film positions the viewer as diviner of the story DeMille in turn has divined.

One way DeMille marks his own divination as prior to the viewers’ is with the cross-fades, which according to cinematic convention signify a time-lapse: the *recit*’s elision of passages of time in the *histoire*. As the storyteller, DeMille positions the viewer to divine from his *recit*.

That is, DeMille as narrator summarizes the story of humanity, posing as if he has read humanity’s political history—men ruled by dictators—in the shifts of cloudscape since the dawn of time: but the viewer divines the story from the images on and “beneath” the screen. So DeMille’s rite here is nephelomancy, while the viewers’ rite is of scrying. The cross-fade dramatizes the *experience* of a rite of scrying, as the diviner’s gaze sees shapes dissolve and resolve.

The narrator’s divining at the film’s start coaches the viewer into position as diviner. That is, the film’s opening links—to its imagined viewer’s experience of this film’s cross-fades—the narrator’s mantic inquiry, reading of portents, then pronouncement. As the film progresses, the narrator’s voice drops out, leaving the viewer to continue divining. Repeatedly in *The Ten Commandments* the signs of the flag and the whip appear as if for viewers to divine by them a hidden tale of American slavery.

THE CROSS-FADE AS A MANTIC DEVICE

First, from the cloudscape pregnant with portent—cross-faded from red to blue, then back into a fiery red, the color associated with Communism—the screen resolves by another cross-fade to a tableau of a mass of dark-skinned, wooly-haired slaves hauling a gargantuan, Egyptianesque idol: “The WEAK, were made to serve the strong.” As the soundtrack portends whips cracking: “And *freedom* . . . was gone from the world.” *The Ten Commandments*’ frequent cueing of such sound effects as if significant portents positions the viewer to perform klednomancy—divination by audited remarks or noises.¹⁵⁸

Because DeMille favored pro-U.S. propaganda—e.g., his *Land of Liberty* (1939)—one might expect this film, from its start, simply to dissociate the U.S.A. from Egyptian dictatorship: but instead, the film first occults such a reading, in order to enact the *liberatory process of divining the answer* that resolves. Always the stated inquiry is whether men are “the property of the state,” “to be ruled by a dictator like Rameses.” As this applies to “the world today” circa 1956, this inquires whether men are to be ruled by the premier of the USSR; or else “are they free souls under God,” who “ought to be ruled by God’s law,” the Decalogue? When a red-and-white striped cloth resembling a U.S. flag appears, it belongs to the enemy of God’s law. The flag is the headdress of an Egyptian overseer¹⁵⁹—Rameses’ enforcer (see figure 1, below). As the overseer enters the foreground—in position as if someone in the cinema were interposing his head between the audience and the screen—he turns his head a couple of times, flaunting his beefy paleness and his headdress.

The association of America with slave-driving Egypt of course makes historical sense, as America too was a slave-driving nation: but in this film, the figure of slave-driving America dissolves, resolving into America’s shining virtue. The film realizes this resolution through a cross-fade in which the screen-space occupied by the flag-headdress yields to a blinding light, which in turn resolves into a brazier’s

¹⁵⁸ See Fishbane 2005, 456.

¹⁵⁹ The term “overseer” is one the film itself uses.

bright flame in the slave cabin of Moses's parents. The flame here is the sign of the birth of Moses—and of the U.S. At this point DeMille, the narrator as diviner, pronounces the signs favorable: “And their cry came up unto God. And God heard them.”

These opening cross-fades correspond directly to scrying, in which a diviner typically gazes into something translucent and/or shiny. Not only the sunlit clouds onscreen, but also the cross-fading screen itself appears shiny yet translucent. The onscreen images are shiny on several levels. In the image of a shining flame—flame is something by which scryers typically scry—appears Moses.

Here the cross-fades position the viewer to scry that America is slave-driving Egypt only at the surface of its pre-history.¹⁶⁰ From beneath the surface emerges the real story of America as Moses. So the *image* of Moses here is the liberator. It supplants the old story.

CHARACTERS AS DIVINERS

After all these opening preliminaries, the characters' first dialogue divines the portents of an astrological divination: the High Priest (Anthony Eustrel) tells Pharaoh Rameses I (Ian Keith), “Divine One—last night, our astrologers saw an evil star . . . enter into the house of Egypt.” The Pharaoh answers with his interpretation of this sign: “Meaning war?” But instead the courtiers interpret the portent as indicating a local conspiracy—a slave revolt. “The enemy to fear is in the heart of Egypt: the Hebrew slaves in the land of Goshen.” To support their interpretation of the portent, the courtiers also interpret history, noting, “Chains have been forged into swords before now.” Moreover they correlate their divination's result with what their slaves' themselves have divined. “Among these slaves there is a prophecy of a Deliverer who will lead them out of bondage. The star proclaims his birth!”

Here the Egyptian court processes several alternative meanings of an astrological divination: the omen could simply indicate war is imminent; or, as

¹⁶⁰ See Wojcik 1997, 81-85. Wojcik discusses the practice of “miraculous photography” circa 1996, particularly by Catholic pilgrims to a shrine in Bayside, Queens. Their use of Polaroid or other self-developing cameras enables them to watch unexpected images resolve. This “photodivination” “has become the technology of prophecy, providing a lens through which God's plan is revealed and brought into focus, literally unveiling images of the endtimes” (85). Wojcik himself sees the practice itself resolving into view as a Catholic “folk tradition” that is “emerging” (83).

correlated with a “divination by history,” the omen could indicate a conspiracy to revolt; and as correlated with the slaves’ prophecy, the omen could indicate the birth of the slaves’ redeemer.

Furthermore the High Priest’s reference to Egypt’s heart metaphorically makes his divination analogous to a medical diagnosis. This association is significant not only because more than a few scholars have noted the similarity between medical diagnosis and divination. Moreover when, as here, the body is a divided nation, the divination of an internal threat is a biopolitical act that can lead to the severest consequences.

Of course, in the film as in Exodus, to exterminate the perceived threat the Egyptian rulers attempt the mass infanticide of Hebrew males. To escape infanticide Moses’s parents float him to Nefretiri. The story of Exodus suggests that the Hebrews did not conspire against the Egyptians, but because the Egyptian rulers perceived and tried to pre-empt a threat, the Hebrews reacted with defensive conspiracies—the midwives conspired to help hide Hebrew babies (an episode which is not in *The Ten Commandments*), and Moses’s parents conspire to save his life.

In *The Ten Commandments* the round of actual conspiring is more extensive, and more inclusive of Egyptians. In order to conceal Moses’s origin, Nefretiri conspires with her servant, Memnet, to hide—to occult—Moses’s basket beneath the surface of the river. But actually Memnet conspires against her master’s wish: Memnet, who recognizes in the basket “the Levite cloth of a Hebrew slave,” does sink the basket with one hand, yet with the other hand she saves out, and hides for herself, Moses’s Hebrew swaddling cloth.

This tell-tale, visual sign of Moses’s identity—like America’s identity—now lies hidden, waiting to be divined.¹⁶¹ The name “Moses” derives from the phrase, “to draw forth [from water]”: in a sense, the figure of Moses is scried from the river dividing the royal palace from Goshen, where the Hebrew slaves live.

Apart from the above techniques, the opening of *The Ten Commandments* deploys another cinematic technique of visual mediation as divination: crowd scenes.

¹⁶¹ Midrash reports that Midianites recognized Moses’s speech as Egyptian; the film reports they divined his Egyptian identity from his clothes.

DIVINATION BY CROWD SCENES

In addition to the preliminary shot of massed slaves hauling the idol, the film's opening features other scenes contrasting dark-skinned crowds with pale onlookers in the foreground or background. Chief among these are the crowds attending adult Moses's first two appearances—in a military parade, then in Pharaoh Sethi's court.

In adult Moses's military parade, in contrast to the flag-headdressed overseer, Moses presides mainly over happy, tawny women; yet, like the overseer, Moses, now the hero of Egypt, gets an American flag motif. Moses appears bedecked with red-white-and-blue bunting. Already the opening narration has foretold that Moses, as "One man! To stand alone, against an empire," would be a revolutionary messiah. Now, as a character commenting on Moses's parade remarks that there's been no noise like it since Egypt became a nation, the allusion is to the fireworks when America became a nation—the American Revolutionary War. As if at a Fourth of July parade, there appear Colonially clad, pale onlookers wearing blue, tri-cornered hats, and star-spangled tops. (See figure 3.1, beside Moses's right hip.)

These Colonial onlookers—the only pale men in the scene—are the only ones posed directly to mirror the gaze of the film's actual viewer. The film positions its imagined viewer here as if one were scrying in a mirror and seeing one's reflection, in costume, behind a scene.



Figure 3.1. “Moses! Moses!” Note the palm tree, the red-white-and-blue motif, and the mirroring gaze of the pale-skinned figures against the wall.

In most of the shots of the next scene, the action transpires in the space that seems midway between the whole, facing crowd—of onlookers in the back of Pharaoh Sethi’s throne room—and the viewer of the screen.¹⁶² Moses presents a large delegation of conquered Ethiopians to Pharaoh Sethi—who speaks in a British accent, in keeping with the Revolutionary War motif.

Moreover, this scene integrates the role of Blacks into *The Ten Commandments*’ levels of allegory, first as Sethi divines, from Moses’s presentation, that the Ethiopians, who came from Egypt’s South, are “our new friends” and allies. As the Ethiopians all pay tribute to Moses, Pharaoh Sethi further divines that “It is pleasing to the Gods, to see a man honored by his [former] enemies.” The alignment has shifted. Perspectives are changed.

¹⁶² That is, DeMille shot the parade at an oblique angle, but the next scene he shot head-on with the entire background crowd mirroring the perspective of the film’s viewers.

Finally this scene ends with a startling “play of a race card,” literally situating the cinema’s audience as if part of the crowd of Ethiopians. In this way the film invites viewers to identify with American Blacks’ emancipation-narrative. Until this point in the scene, the crowd of courtiers in the background was all White, with the exception of a lone Ethiopian or two, who did not directly face the viewer’s gaze (that is, the camera). But this final, anomalous reverse-shot puts the crowd in the foreground, and transforms the crowd’s race . Now it is the White onlookers who appear marginalized. Now the Ethiopians fill the room—positioned sitting, seen *from the actual audience’s own perspective*, as if they constituted the audience also for the film itself.



Figure 3.2. Note the palm tree. As Moses reels the Queen of Ethiopia (Esther Brown) from the King (Woody Strode), only one of the eighteen background figures is dark-skinned.



Figure 3.3. In this concluding shot of the same scene as figure 3.2., two of every three onlookers—and all those not marginalized in the frame—are dark-skinned.

CHAPTER CONCLUSION

This film's divinations work on several levels: as these levels slip into each other, they are tricky to track. The viewer observes performances of divination by the film itself, by DeMille as introducer and narrator, and by the film's characters. Meanwhile the film positions its viewer to divine national answers—via allegories, as well as devices of spoken and visual rhetorics.

Such slippage is part of the procedure of rites of divination. (See Chapters Seven, Ten, and Fourteen.) The client's ultimate inquiry typically is "how do I apply the oracle (answer) to my life-choices?" Meanwhile, a *mantis* (diviner) may preside over the rite. However even if the *mantis* delivers the answer, it was the *procedure* that produced the answer. Moreover, the procedure traces the movement of a divine hand or the pattern of the universe, or the path to a lost domain: in a sense, the hand or pattern or path is manifesting itself.

The Ten Commandments evince the mantic much like Rabelais embodies the carnivalesque: on several slippery levels. A reader might well ask whether it is Rabelais, his characters, his rhetoric, or Rabelais's reader who makes the carnivalesque. Or does the carnivalesque partake of the relation between the reader's experience of the text, and the reader's experience of her world? Or does the carnivalesque inhere in a generic mode, such as "satire"? Why might the multiple levels slip?

The slippage between these levels enables the text to suture its viewer.¹⁶³ One moment the narrator is divining for an audience. Next the narrator is divining something about the audience itself. Next the film's characters are performing rites of self-divination.

Meanwhile these levels tend to position the viewer as diviner. As the film's levels and layers slip, the slippage all but requires the viewer actively to determine some sense from the sounds and images.

It is challenging to catalogue examples of such slippage, because if my dissertation deploys a congruent technique to the film—by allowing for abundant slippage—then my analysis may seem disorganized. But on the other hand if I were to articulate these various levels as if they functioned quite distinctly, I could hardly do justice to what I am trying describe.

By mingling the levels on which divination is proceeding, as mantic cinema *The Ten Commandments* exposes its auditors to a ritually necessary degree of indeterminacy. If a film featured no slippage between levels of divining, it would lack suture. So by presenting characters performing rites of divination, the film slips its imagined viewer in and out of a role of observer of divinations; and moreover coaches the viewer to slip in and out of an active role as a diviner.

As it instructs its audience in collective self-locating, the film positions its viewer to join onscreen crowds, who model certain kinds of determinations. For example, at the parade for a crowd's first hailing of adult Moses, an off-screen voice remarks, "There's been nothing like it since Egypt became a nation." (The line evokes Exodus 9:24, a description of a plague: "So there was hail, and fire flashing continually in the midst of the hail, very severe, such as had not been in all the land of

¹⁶³ See Heath's 1981 chapter, "On Suture," particularly its discussion of shot/reverse shot (95-101).

Egypt since it became a nation.”) For its viewers’ constellating, the film here offers a rich array of associations, including America’s commemoration of its birth with Fourth of July parades; a legacy of Puritan typology in which Moses is America (see Chapter Ten); as well as rhetorics of race-based slavery and of Ethiopians.

Indeed in its following scene the film positions its viewers to join a crowd of Ethiopians, portrayed as glad to have been seduced by Moses and brought, conquered, into the national fold. (This crowd tellingly includes a character credited as “Ethiopian Witch Doctor,” which means “diviner.”¹⁶⁴) The film positions its viewers as if, like American Blacks as a people do, they are sharing a national *melos* of Exodus.

Moreover with its slaves and its Ethiopians, *The Ten Commandments* aims to resolve the conundrum of what America’s legacy of race-based slavery portends. The film’s stated inquiry—about the status of men as property, or as free—must come to terms with this portent, in order to divine that America is Godly.

¹⁶⁴ See entry for “Witch doctor” in *The Oxford Companion to the Body* 2001. For a popular use of “witch doctor” as “diviner” see Van Peebles 1972, 84. Like Van Peebles, C. Brown (1969, 56), in discussing competition between Whites and Blacks, tropes on the witch doctor in his articulation of the power of psychoanalytic divination.

CHAPTER FOUR: MANTOLOGY OF INTERRACIAL FLAGELLATION

OVERVIEW

In his influential critique, *Love and Death in the American Novel*, Fiedler identifies paradigmatic motifs of American mass-cultural discourse since 1852, when *Uncle Tom's Cabin* featured two, especially powerful categories of tableaux: of “inter-ethnic flagellation” and “inter-ethnic rape.”¹⁶⁵ Lott’s *Love and Theft* extends and very much deepens understanding of how, through these motifs, cross-racial desire wraps around to meet cross-racial repulsion, separation meets identification, and liberation wraps around to meet exploitation.

Of each pairing of black and white as two sides of the same coin, the flip of the coin constitutes a socialization rite. From the “flickering” observed as the sides of the coin alternate, participants divine a sense of American Whiteness.

In *Playing the Race Card*, Linda Williams implies that the paradigm of this key rite is not the coin toss so much as cartomancy, a divination by a deck of cards. Each of the tableaux of inter-racial abuse becomes a card in a deck. Rhetors deploy the deck in discourse of race relations. “The race card” is metonymic for the cartomantic deck.

As she addresses the most powerful categories of tableaux, she specifies that the first is the flagellation of a Black man by a White man. The second is “the responding ‘counter’ vision of the white woman endangered or raped by the

¹⁶⁵ Fiedler 1979, 30.

emancipated and uppity black villain.”¹⁶⁶ Though in formation these two visions are entwined, I treat the “miscegenation” vision—the biopolitical defense of racial purity—in the next chapter.

As the present chapter continues to catalogue aspects of *The Ten Commandments* to be analyzed in this dissertation, it builds on the previous chapter’s argument that this film aims to condition its own reception by positioning audiences as diviners. The present chapter argues that in further positioning viewers as diviners, this film’s “shot/reverse-shot” sequences solicit viewers’ cross-racial identifications.¹⁶⁷

There are several reasons this film very much concerns Blackness. First is that America developed its national popular culture largely through *Uncle Tom's Cabin* and blackface minstrelsy, whose articulations of Blackness have been lastingly influential. As DuBois put it, “the problem of the twentieth century [was] the problem of the color line” demarking White from Black. Hollywood cinema concerned itself with this demarcation not only via the traditions from *Uncle Tom's Cabin* and minstrelsy, and not only because cinema got started in “black and white,” but moreover because the color line perennially posed major social challenges in the lives of American filmmakers and audiences.

Hollywood led the stigmatization of Blackness, until the Second World War, when American filmmaking abruptly shifted course. As Thomas Cripps magisterially details, during World War II American filmmaking’s relatively pro-Black stance was part of “necessitarian” progressivism, after Japan struck the U.S. with propaganda as a wedge to discourage Blacks, who composed ten percent of the Army, from fighting for the U.S. Japanese propaganda claimed that the U.S. regime’s abuses had made it undeserving of Blacks’ loyalty. The American military spurred filmmaking to counter Japanese propaganda and “grease the skids” for deployment of Black troops into segregated battalions. That heyday of “the social problem film” was short-lived. As the dawn of the Cold War powered persecution of American anti-fascists, it derailed

¹⁶⁶ L. Williams 2001, 5.

¹⁶⁷ On “shot/reverse shot” as a cinematic mechanism of in soliciting viewer’s identification across characters’ roles (which are themselves reversed sometimes in the narrative) and across social roles, see L. Williams 1984, Modleski 1987, Siomopoulos 1999, M. Smith 1994.

and co-opted the trend to make Hollywood a leading force for progress in race relations.¹⁶⁸

During the Cold War, the Soviet Union's propaganda picked up where Japan had left off, portraying the U.S. as reprobate particularly for its abuse of Blacks.¹⁶⁹ Such claims fed America's Cold War concerns that the legacy of slavery, and the publicity of struggles by African-Americans for civil rights, were hindering American efforts to woo unaligned nations tempted by Communism. Moreover, defenders of the United States from invasion or loss of power have tended to fear that socially progressive movements were undermining the social order.

In order to divine whether the U.S. is indeed reprobate (Egypt) or elect (Israel), this film joins Hollywood's effort to interpret the historical role of Blacks not as America's Achilles Heel, but rather as part and parcel of America's Christian greatness. This effort aimed to contain Soviet expansion especially in the Third World.¹⁷⁰

As the cultural Cold War focused on the role of Americas' Black citizens, Hollywood's Bible Films sought to portray Black citizens sharing in American ideals of Protestant, Godly freedom as opposed to Communists' "godlessness" and religious oppression.¹⁷¹ These efforts aimed to contain the threat of domestic spread of Communism, and moreover to contain Soviet expansion in the Third World.¹⁷²

I argue that in the wake of Paul Robeson, a Black American star who sang Gospel, starred in Hollywood films, and had won a Stalin Prize in 1954 for his praise of Soviet Communism over American racism—from that same year DeMille revived the push for a pro-Black stance, in order to put the best face again on Black participation in U.S. society, as a military necessity.

¹⁶⁸ Cripps 1993 is the source for this paragraph. As Cripps describes, Hollywood's racial representation continued to develop, through a phase that tended to feature "the lone black in a White circle." "Some key shots of *The Ten Commandments*, discussed below, evince this pattern.

¹⁶⁹ See Cripps 1993; see also Heimlich 2005.

¹⁷⁰ Babington and Evans 1993, 55.

¹⁷¹ Hodgson 1978, quoted by Babington and Evans 1993, 225. Though Hodgson was referring to the 1960s, nevertheless Babington and Evans 1993, finds his words also illuminate the racial thematizations of the 1950s. I've adapted Hodgson here to focus on representation, rather than on the imperative actually to extend ideals and civil rights.

¹⁷² Babington and Evans 1993, 55.

Within the narrative of *The Ten Commandments*, Egypt's external enemies are completely forgotten: meanwhile Pharaoh Sethi's court develops into a battle royal pitting Moses against Rameses. Their balance of power tips back and forth, depending on who can command the power of slaves and Ethiopians.



Figure 4.1. Moses, “Commander of the Southern Host.”

The clearest evidence of *The Ten Commandments*' concern with this kind of necessitarianism appears in the attitude of Egypt's leaders towards the Ethiopians. Moses, “Commander of the Southern Host,” announces Ethiopia's “friendship as an ally to guard our southern gates.” That is, Egypt, having conquered the Ethiopians, should treat them well only out of necessity: not in fellowship but merely in “friendship as an ally,” for tactical advantage against a common enemy. References to Egypt's south here strengthen the linkage between Ethiopians and African-Americans.

As Moses first enters Pharaoh's court, drummers surrounding the doorway of Pharaoh's throne room wear red, white, and navy blue outfits spangled with white-stars. Moses appears within a concentric series of frames-within-frames culminating in a pair of parti-colored palm trees—a reference to Hollywood. A herald proclaims Moses “Commander of the Southern Host.” The connotations of the American South resonate when the High Priest Jannes (Douglas Dumbrille) proclaims that Moses “has *brought down the pride of Ethiopia*”—*Ethiopia* since the nineteenth-century was a White American designation of African-America. By conquering it militarily, Moses has diminished the pride of Ethiopia.¹⁷³

“Brought down” can also mean, in the vernacular, that he brought *here* the pride of Ethiopia. Moreover it can refer to the sense in which Moses channels the bonds of the slave.

In the process of maintaining America's sole determination over the meaning of Black oppression, DeMille has Moses claim the Ethiopians as under his sole determination. In response to Prince Rameses's hard-line demand that Moses command the Ethiopians to kneel before Pharaoh, Moses tells him to “Command what *you* have conquered.”

As it elaborates this film's cross-racial divinations, the present chapter focuses on the trope of the whip. The whip is emblematic of what Linda Williams calls “American racial melodrama”—more specifically, what I call “miscegenation melodrama.”¹⁷⁴

THE WHIP

In *The Ten Commandments* the whip, significant right at the start and at many key junctures, is the sign of power, often linked to miscegenation. Primarily it marks the overseers of the slaves. The Book of Exodus itself does not mention the whip. Nevertheless as we have seen, the film's Egyptian overseers—as if a platoon of Simon Legrees crossed with ancient Egyptian Uncle Sams—each carry a whip and

¹⁷³ See also Ezekiel 7, where, “the oracle is given in v. 24 that YHWH will bring on enemies who will destroy “the pride of the strong” (quoted by Fishbane 2005, 494).

¹⁷⁴ Other critics using the phrase “miscegenation melodrama” include Kruger 2001, Wollstein 2007, and “Grip of Jealousy: Plot Description” 2007.

wear the U.S. flag headdress. The soundtrack resounds with their harsh commands and cracking of whips.

As this film's romantic subplot begins, Joshua (John Derek), the lover of Lilia (Debra Paget) hears of her fear of Dathan (Edward G. Robinson)—“the Hebrew overseer”: Joshua exclaims, “If he touches you, I'll strangle him with his own whip.”

Later at the construction site, when Yochabel, Moses's birth mother, gets caught beneath a stone slab which is about to crush her, overseers cruelly whip the “push-pole men” towards continuing to push the slab onto the suffering, innocent victim. Lilia tries in vain to restrain one overseer's whip. When Joshua attempts to intervene, the overseers subdue him with their whips.

When Prince Moses intervenes to restrain the hand of the abusive overseer, this is the step that makes legible his siding with the Hebrew slaves against their Egyptian masters: because it is the key mantic moment that determines Moses's identity, DeMille portrays it with a striking cross-fade. Immediately after learning from Lilia of the whipping of Joshua, Moses decides to intervene: this cross-fade elides the brief passage of time between his decision and his actual intervention at the site of the abuse.

DeMille, reterritorializing African-Americans' appropriation of Exodus as revealing *their* story, with a cross-fade reveals a Black overseer hailing Moses (see Figure below). Because the role of Moses here is as the American liberator of slaves, actually two Black figures hail him. These are the two figures in the center of the frame, facing forward. The slave with the headband will reappear momentarily, expressly to condition the viewer's reception of the scene.

If *The Ten Commandments* sutures a viewer's identification with Moses, it happens here. This is the moment that Moses resolves into a Hebrew, into the nation of America, into the righteous giver of law. Here, from the indeterminacy of America's allegorical identity-role, identity is offering itself for a determination. “*They are on our side,*” the film seems to say here by showing the Black overseer. Moses is Egyptian but Hebrew-by-birth and becoming-Hebrew: here he straddles the boundary. In this moment America too straddles the boundary. America here is *both* the rebellious slave *and* the flag-headdressed overseer.

In this moment of liminal transition, the figure of the Black overseer greets the viewer, who momentarily shares the point of view of Prince Moses approaching the scene in Goshen. This overseer is highly anomalous in several ways: as the only

Black overseer; as the only Black character in the entire film with a speaking part; and as the only overseer who does not speak with an American, working-class accent. In a recognizably African-American timbre, in refined yet thrilled diction he hails “Prince Moses!” Furthermore although like other overseers he is wearing a flag headdress and holding a coiled whip, unlike them his attitude radiates self-possession.



Figure 4.2. As Lilia watches, overseers use whips to subdue Joshua.



Figure 4.3. A cross fade reveals the Black overseer hailing “Prince Moses!” The headbanded slave also awaits.



Figure 4.4. Headbanded slave cringes as overseer whips Joshua. Baka and Moses also react.

When the headbanded, Black slave¹⁷⁵ next materializes, he rises from a crouch from the bottom of the screen in the foreground—the space where, in the cinema, the audience sits. Like the Black overseer who hailed the radicalized Prince Moses, the headbanded slave, too, seems invisible to other characters. Moreover in his recognizing Moses as liberator, he too seems to foreground the film’s reception by audiences.



Figure 4.5. Instead of strangling Dathan with his whip, Joshua gets strangled by an Egyptian overseer’s whip. Yet his defiance spurs the headbanded slave to clench his fists.

¹⁷⁵ Rus Conklin, who in Westerns played an Indian.

While overseers prepare to whip Joshua, this whip-scarred figure appears, wearing woolly hair and very dark body-paint. He watches the scene's action, alternately cringing in apparent identification with the victim's suffering, then thrilling at the rebellion against tyranny. As Joshua speaks and struggles rebelliously, the



foregrounded slave arises clenching his fists. After Moses rescues Joshua from a whipping by taking the whip in hand himself, when Moses tosses the whip back to the overseer—and commands the overseers to release Joshua—the watching slave turns, displaying to the viewer his own fresh scars from a whipping.

Figure 4.6.
Whip-scarred.

CHAPTER CONCLUSION

In this film, as a broadside at Soviet propagandists, DeMille effectively says “Command what *you* have conquered.” He aims to put the meaning of Black oppression all but beyond Soviet command.

For this mission, no other filmmaker was as well positioned as DeMille, the right-wing son of a lay minister. With the start of the Cold War, Hollywood had snuffed its own series of social-problem films, which could be accused of aiding the

new enemy on the Left:¹⁷⁶ yet DeMille had a relatively free hand to portray Blackness however he saw fit, because his role as a leading Red-baiter made him almost above suspicion. Furthermore as his health was poor, this film was meant to be his last hurrah, anyway.

In order to win the Great Audience, perforce DeMille took cues from *Uncle Tom's Cabin*: he made *The Ten Commandments* concern the slavery's abolition, which the Book of Exodus never mentions. Particularly he capitalized on the power of two interlinked tropes: the whip, and Passover. As *Uncle Tom's Cabin* had traced a path to the moral domain, Simon Legree's whip had "lent Uncle Tom a paradoxical visibility and dignity as a suffering, and thus worthy human being."¹⁷⁷

Indeed the overseer's whip literally made Tom visible to Harriet Beecher Stowe, according to an inspirational vision which her son, Charles, has reported. In the winter of 1851, in the First Parish Church in Brunswick, Maine, "during the Eucharistic celebration of the body and blood of the suffering Christ, a vivid picture of a whipped and bleeding male slave appeared before her eyes. "It seemed as if the crucified, but now risen and glorified Christ was speaking to her through the poor black man, cut and bleeding through the blows of the slave whip."¹⁷⁸

If her son's 1911 reportage here is to be believed, Stowe's novelistic vision came during the Eucharist—which re-enacts Jesus's last supper, often understood to be a Passover Seder, which is a commemoration of the Exodus.¹⁷⁹ DeMille too adapts an ancient rite of Passover—the channeling of remembrance into communion—for a mass-cultural text. Because much of the mantic power of *The Ten Commandments* comes through Christian and Jewish typology, I address those mantic forms in Chapters Eight, Nine, and Ten; and their role in mass-mediation, particularly in Chapter Eleven.

To divine a superhighway for cultural hegemony, *The Ten Commandments* mediates meanings of U.S. slavery and Blackness. As a Cold War allegory, it serves

¹⁷⁶ See Cripps 1993. See also Heimlich 2005.

¹⁷⁷ Williams 2001, 43, 57. See also Fiedler 1979.

¹⁷⁸ Charles Stowe, quoted by Williams 2001, 49.

¹⁷⁹ It seems that in early Christianity theology, the Eucharist sometimes functioned as a divination of guilt. In the verse of Paul 11:24-27, after narrating the Last Supper, Paul concludes, "Therefore whosoever shall eat this bread, or drink the chalice of the Lord unworthily, shall be guilty of the body and of the blood of the Lord."

as propaganda. It shuffles the deck of race-cards in the course of divining whether the U.S. is reprobate or elect. These are the stakes of the film's inquiry.

CHAPTER FIVE: MANTOLOGY OF MISCEGENATION

OVERVIEW

The Ten Commandments, much more than *Uncle Tom's Cabin* or even *Birth of a Nation*, united an image of interracial flagellation with a vision of interracial rape, making these two visions more legible as two sides of the same coin. Why? I argue that the advent of Hollywood censorship had fed this uniting. Only a Bible film had special dispensation to portray an orgy, or interracial desire—not only because the Bible films portrayed the whipping of interracial desirers, but moreover because these films reified censors' own religio-cultural power to condemn licentiousness.

Nobody had more experience than DeMille at navigating the censorship of Hollywood's Production Code, which commanded, Thou shalt not portray interracial desire between Americans (especially U.S. Black with U.S. White).¹⁸⁰ DeMille's films had long helped lead Hollywood filmmakers facing the Code—which was in effect from the era of censor Will Hays, whom the *Nation* magazine in 1922 called “Moses of the movies,”¹⁸¹ until a few years after Charlton Heston's turn as Moses of the movies.

The rhetorical linkage of the Code with Moses evokes not only a sense of the Code as Commandments, but also a story about slavery. That is, according to

¹⁸⁰ See Cripps 1993, Klein 2003, and Courtney 2005.

¹⁸¹ *Nation* quoted by Courtney 2005, 113.

film scholar Susan Courtney, the Code's prohibition mainly aimed to repress any cinematic references to a historical, semi-open secret: stories of sex between White masters and Black American slaves. Always Hollywood filmmakers occulted this secret story.

Courtney suggests that rather than simply disappear, the repressed story returned, transformed into motifs such as the Oriental despot disporting with his harem—like Yul Brynner famously played in *The King and I* before DeMille cast him as Rameses.¹⁸²

As Courtney documents of “the late fifties interracial films” in particular, they rely on “elaborate interracial maneuvers,”¹⁸³ with characters including some whose racial identity appears indeterminate. As in blackface minstrelsy since the late nineteenth century, the rite of guessing *channels* inquiry through indeterminacy, towards determining a national sense of peoplehood. Thus regarding *Island in the Sun* (1957), *Life* described “a lush Technicolor romance with so many interracial subplots that telling white from black becomes a guessing game.”¹⁸⁴

This same guessing-game dynamic cited by *Life* moreover shapes *The Ten Commandments* (1956), in which telling White from Black becomes a rite of divination. As this film shifts between its multiple, racialized allegories, so do characters' switch their allegorical-racial identities—now Black, now White; now British, now Communist.

CAT'S-CRADLE DIVINATION

This film's racy triangulations repeatedly reconfigure like a mantic cat's-cradle.¹⁸⁵ The narrative begins by triangulating Prince Rameses versus his father, Oedipally over Nefretiri, “the throne princess.” Father chides son for coveting his father's crown, with its associated prize of Nefretiri. Next the film triangulates Rameses versus Moses for the same prize; they also struggle over the Ethiopians,

¹⁸² See Klein 2003 and Courtney 2005.

¹⁸³ Courtney 2005, 201-202.

¹⁸⁴ Courtney 2005, 193.

¹⁸⁵ See Foster 1941.

and over the Hebrew slaves. In the subplots, Moses faces the King of Ethiopia over the Queen of Ethiopia, then Nefretiri faces the Queen over Moses, then Nefretiri faces the King over the Queen.

Moreover in the subplots, Lilia, the Hebrew Water Girl, represents *both* the White woman threatened by the virile slave, *and* the slave woman defiled by a master. Like Moses—who becomes iconographically Negroid when he converts from Egyptian to a slave, but then gets White when he cleans up—Lilia’s color is unfixed: she visibly changes color to contrast with her mate. (See Figures in next chapter.) She starts as Joshua’s relatively pale lover, threatened by Dathan (Edgar G. Robinson, as an overseer who, the film subsequently reveals, is a swarthy Hebrew). Next Lilia, beloved of fellow slave Joshua, becomes the dark concubine of Egypt’s pale Master-Builder (Vincent Price). After Baka takes Lilia from Dathan’s clutches, Joshua faces Baka for Lilia. Finally when dark Dathan takes Lilia, her sign becomes the lily, “the purity of WHITE” womanhood under threat.¹⁸⁶ (See Figure 5.4.)

¹⁸⁶ Dathan’s dialogue expressly calls attention to the flower of her name, lily, whose whiteness contrasts with other colors.



Figure 5.1. Pale Lilia with dark Joshua behind palm fronds.
He clenches a water-skin's spout.



Figure 5.2. Pale Baka prepares to shame and defile dusky Lilia.
Swarthy Dathan awaits his chance. Palm trees
silhouetted.

The Ten Commandments compounds twin visions—interracial rape and interracial flagellation—at each moment of conflict over Lilia. As mentioned in Chapter One, when Joshua, the lover of Lilia, hears of Lilia’s fear of Dathan’s advances, Joshua threatens to strangle Dathan with Dathan’s own whip. Then when Lilia is first taken into sexual slavery by Egypt’s Master Builder, in protest of that taking—and of an overseer’s striking Lilia with his whip—a wizened Hebrew slave protests. The Egyptians “shame and defile our women!”, he cries: in response an overseer whips him, then kills him. Later when Joshua attempts to rescue Lilia, he instead gets caught by Baka, who whips him with homoerotic sadism. In the nick of time, Moses comes to Joshua’s rescue by grasping Baka’s whip, then strangling him with it.

In *The Ten Commandments* the desirous Rameses, Baka, and Dathan each work under the sign of the decadent, Oriental despot. Chivalric Moses tells Nefretiri that “a man stupid enough to use you as a footstool,” as Prince Rameses would, “does not deserve to rule Egypt.”

As the films’ opening narration foretold, Moses struggles “against an empire”: however at this point, his anti-imperialism justifies his own ascent to the imperial throne. Meanwhile Moses advances Egypt by conquering Ethiopia, and by successfully commanding the Hebrew slaves to complete Egypt’s new, imperial city.

At first Rameses’ rhetoric presents himself and Nefretiri as the White couple, threatened by Nefretiri’s desire for an interloping Moses. Later in the narrative, Sephora—one of the Midianites, whose people Moses calls “Bedouins”—casts Nefretiri as a paragon of womanhood, “white as curd.” Sephora’s own skin appears very dark, as she offers herself and her sisters: “Our hands are not so soft but they can serve, our bodies not so white but they are strong.” Nefretiri meanwhile has cast herself and *Moses* (not Rameses) as the White couple, threatened first by Rameses as the Oriental despot, then the interloping Queen of Ethiopia.¹⁸⁷

¹⁸⁷ When Nefretiri sees Moses ignoring her in favor of the Black woman, she growls resentfully at the Queen of Ethiopia, “What a *beautiful* enemy!”, and in response, the King makes an intimidating lunge at Nefretiri, as if protectively. His threatened violence against the White woman echoes anti-miscegenation rhetoric, but DeMille gives it several twists. The first twist is that the Black man’s threat of violence is in defense of his woman (which would correspond to historical fact). However, rather than protecting the Black woman from the White man, here as if in a White man’s fantasy this African acts as the White man’s enabler, protecting the Black woman *for* the White man *she* desires, against the



Figure 5.3. Baka (Vincent Price) prepares to whip Joshua (John Derek)



Figure 5.4. Dathan’s slaves present him with Lilia—wearing a lily to demark “the purity of WHITE.”

encroachment of the possessive White *woman*! According to the script, she is his sister—but this detail was left out of the film’s recorded dialogue and credits.

In tribute to the sexiness of the Ethiopians and of the whole business of America’s racy erotics, Moses winds the Ethiopian Queen’s necklace around the hilt of the dagger at his waist: standing directly before an enormous pillar, he strokes a rolled scroll he holds, then presents the scroll erect before Pharaoh: “Here is the full count of Ethiopia’s tribute.” Just as desire gets projected as if coming from the Black woman, so does the film read its sexual tribute *to* Ethiopia as a tribute *from* Ethiopia. Meanwhile a trace of historical concubinage surfaces here: Moses announces he brings “twenty full barges of such wealth as you see here,” as a lone Ethiopian woman kneels gazing at him.



Figure 5.5. “They shame and defile our women!” The whip cracks.



Figure 5.6. Murderous overseer with star-spangled banner over whip.



Figure 5.7. "I need Another OARSman." Note the contrast between the blonde bearers and the dark slave in the lower right corner.



Figure 5.8. Nefretiri beds "large, strong, very dirty" Moses.

“There is grave danger here,” Bithiah warns her son—referring ostensibly to the urgent need for Moses to go deal with Goshen’s unruly slaves, but moreover commenting on the interlinked triangulations through which the film is divining occulted answers. Nefretiri—who warns Moses that he faces trouble from her—during this scene wears and fondles the same necklace the Queen of Ethiopia gave to Moses.¹⁸⁸ “There is grave danger here” also functions momentarily as a divination—Bithiah has divined danger which hangs for a moment unspecified, soliciting a guess from the viewer.

On the level of miscegenation-divination, the film’s formal inquiry is stated by Memnet (the servant of Moses’s adoptive mother) to Nefretiri: “Would you mingle the blood of slaves with your own?” In order to highlight itself as mantic inquiry, *The Ten Commandments* once again here makes divination a trope: Memnet necromantically divines that she hears “all the kings of Egypt cry out to me from their tombs: “Let no Hebrew sit upon our throne!””

As Nefretiri is selecting diaphanous cloths for her wedding night with Moses, Memnet forebodingly offers her “a cloth that is more revealing.” Memnet, who has kept it hidden all Moses’s years, now hails Nefretiri—and the viewer—to divine what cloth she has.

Of course it is from Moses’s infant basket, the swaddling cloth “torn from a Levite’s robe.” Bithiah long ago swore Memnet to secrecy about it, foretelling that the day Memnet revealed the secret would be “the last [Memnet’s] eyes shall ever see.”

The answer to Memnet’s inquiry is Yes, Nefretiri is desperate to mingle Moses’s slave-blood with her own: so desperate that in order to keep Moses’s identity occulted, she kills Memnet. Now that Bithiah’s oracle has been fulfilled, the camera pauses for a slow close-up on the swaddling cloth, the deadly sign of occulted identity.

Similarly later when Moses approaches the well at Midian, Jethro’s bevy of aroused daughters bemoan the absence of men: “If only sheep were men!” Sheep are not men, of course, yet these characters are considering members of another

¹⁸⁸ Presumably Moses in turn has given the necklace to Nefretiri.

species as potential mates . . . until one of the women finds “a man!”—Moses, lying unconscious.

“What kind of a man?” They read the signs, which are indeterminate: “His sandals are Egyptian, his robe is not.” All the women seem to be literally panting with lust for Moses, whom they identify only as “The Egyptian.” “Who cares, he’s a man!” purrs one of the woman, in a marked Southern drawl. The surfacing of the Southern drawl here strongly signals the allegory of sex in the U.S. South.

CHAPTER CONCLUSION:

This film’s dialogue insistently sexualizes the biopolitical project of divining racial identity (see Chapters Twelve, Thirteen, and Fifteen) because to descry the hidden operations of the body politic is itself a thrill, not merely because of sex, but moreover because of the thrill of occlusion-and-revelation. So the association with the diaphanous cloth is telling.

The process of descrying an underlying form is presented as fiercely compelling. Ultimately this is the purpose of the film’s positioning the viewer as diviner: seduction. Glimpses of the film’s allegories manifest beneath the titillating sense of the narrative surface.

“Here is a cloth that is more revealing,” says Memnet, the necromancer. The film invites the viewer to look into the cloth—to look into the screen, into its woven layers of allegory, to descry something powerful.

Finally it is relevant that in this scene Nefretiri is shopping. The revealing here comes in the context of what she will buy. As critic Sumiko Higashi concludes, DeMille’s cinema of Oriental display is directly linked to commodification—of objects displayed, and of cinematic spectacle. Moreover as this scene is revealing, the concentrated cultural investment in commerce links it to divination.

“Would you mingle the blood of slaves with your own?” Inquiring diviners want to know, and so acquisitive corporations are selling the means to self-divination. Here is commodity manticism.

CHAPTER SIX: MANTOLOGY OF THE TRIAL AND THE NEWS

OVERVIEW

The preceding chapters have emphasized that subsumed under the narrator's inquiry of theological politics—"whether men ought to be ruled by God's law or whether they are to be ruled by the whims of a dictator like Rameses. Are men the property of the state or are they free souls under God?"—*The Ten Commandments*' characters makes inquiries of racial and sexual politics, and of identity. Specifically the narrative inquires which prince, Moses or Rameses, deserves "the throne princess"; Pharaoh Sethi inquires whether Moses can command the Hebrew slaves better than Rameses; and Memnet, who knows Moses as the son of slaves, inquires of Nefretiri, "Would you mingle the blood of slaves with your own?" Also the Midianite women inquire "what kind of man" is Moses—is he Egyptian?

The narrative disposes of all these inquiries relatively simply. Of course the film determines that men ought to be ruled by God's law, not by the whims of a dictator like Rameses: rather than property, men are free souls under God. Moses determines that he himself, not despotic Prince Rameses, deserves the throne princess. Pharaoh Sethi's test determines that Moses can command the slaves successfully; therefore Sethi divines that Moses indeed does deserve the throne princess. Nefretiri so desperately desires to "mingle blood" that in response to Memnet's inquiry—and Memnet's subsequent disclosure of Moses's parentage—Nefretiri kills Memnet in an attempt to keep Moses's parentage occulted. The Midianite women—unable to divine whether or not Moses is Egyptian—determine

anyway that he is a man, which, as they are desperate for a man, is all that matters to them.

In presenting the characters' processes of divining answers to these inquiries, the film furthermore positions the viewer to make moralistic determinations, beyond what the characters themselves divine. That is, Prince Moses's noblesse oblige towards the slaves, the film presents as evincing his virtue. Nefretiri's murderous response characterizes her as crazed and dangerous. The film similarly presents the Midianite women—eager to overlook their mates' group identity—as so mad with lust, they long to mate with sheep.

The present chapter addresses five more inquiries posed by the film's characters, each of which the narrative portrays as a judicial trial. First, after Moses hears the tale of his parentage, he inquires of his adoptive mother whether she is indeed his mother. Next he inquires of his birth mother whether he is indeed her son. If so, what is his identity? Then Pharaoh Sethi inquires whether Moses is guilty of treason against Egypt. Finally, at the scene of the golden calf, Moses inquires of the assembled Hebrews, "Who is on the Lord's side?"

Each of these inquiries ultimately produces a determination. In the end Moses divines what the viewer already should know—Moses is indeed the son of slaves. His identity is "Deliverer of the Hebrews." Pharaoh Sethi divines that Moses—along with Bithiah (Nina Foch), Moses's adoptive mother—are guilty of treason. All along, and finally, *The Ten Commandments* positions the viewer to divine that—just like the Black overseer and the headbanded, whip-scarred slave—the Black man is on the Lord's side, which is the side of virtue, America's side.

Finally the present chapter addresses this film's mantic practice of *the news*.

THE TRIAL AS DIVINATION: WHO'S YOUR MAMMY

In its drama over Moses's occulted parentage, *The Ten Commandments* takes the form of what Freudians call "family romance fantasizing." I explain this further in Chapter Thirteen; meanwhile here I will point out the following respects in which this film's narrative corresponds to this psychoanalytic paradigm of Oedipal fantasy. First, starting when he takes command of the slaves, the film foregrounds Moses's

challenge to paternity, as represented by Pharaoh Sethi, who calls Moses his son. Moses orders a minor rebellion against the Pharaoh's rule when, in order to feed the slaves, he commands "the push-pole men" to penetrate the Pharaoh's granary. Mainly, DeMille's narrative not only follows the Book of Exodus, replacing Moses's parents with superior ones,¹⁸⁹ but moreover it portrays Moses's adoptive mother as the committer of secret infidelities. She has concealed Moses's parentage from everyone including Pharaoh Sethi.

The Ten Commandments presents Moses's confrontation with Bithiah—the only mother he has known—with iconography inviting the viewer to divine Oedipal overtones. (See figure 6.1.) Sethi eventually characterizes Moses's relation with his mother as illicit, and orders Moses's name stricken from every "pylon and obelisk," figuratively castrating his son.



Figure 6.1. Moses confronts Bithiah. His mother?

¹⁸⁹ As Ilana Pardes points out, the replacement of Moses's Egyptian parents with Hebrew ones produces social superiority in the sense that the Hebrews become God's chosen people.

As Moses—who has been “passed” as Egyptian—now confronts his adoptive mother and his birth mother—the film’s first judicial trials proceed as if in family court. Characters prosecute, defend, testify, and perform cross-examinations.

Just as the opening of the film itself presents Moses as God’s promised gift to the Hebrews, here the judicial trials position the figure of the Black man as the key to the film’s larger inquiries. The film makes this linkage explicit via a shot later in the film, when during the plague of death on Egypt’s firstborn, Bithiah takes refuge with Moses in the cabin of his slave family, bringing along her guardsmen. Exactly coinciding with Moses’s reference to “God’s promise,” an anomalous shot shows her Black guardsmen. (See figure.)

Meanwhile first, when Moses visits the slave cabin to confront his biological mother, Yochabel (Martha Scott), he is joined there by his adoptive mother, Bithiah: the presence of Bithiah’s Black guardsmen—foregrounded in this scene, too, without narrative purpose—positions viewers to divine something about the role of the Black, male figure, parallel to the divination of Moses’s identity.

After the “family-court-trial” determines his *slave* identity, *The Ten Commandments* portrays Moses’s trials as if they divine his *Black* identity. Indeed during this trial, Bithiah argues that Moses should not descend into the pits of slavery: though the shooting script refers to “brick pits,” Nina Foch with momentary tongue-tie refers to “the black pits of slavery.” In Moses’s subsequent trial-by-ordeal in the sunny brick-pits, as the mud itself—which is not black but brown—comes to darken Moses’s skin, he wears an unusual cap, closely resembling the cap worn by Bithiah’s Lead Guardsman (Woody Strode).

Verbal attempts to divine Moses’s slave-identity meanwhile proceed by the trace of the whip. Privately Yochabel first justifies her abandonment of infant Moses on the grounds that his heritage from Yochabel herself “could only have been misery, poverty . . . and the lash!” But publicly during the trial, she disavows her motherhood of Moses: as if reading a substitute for the tribal sign of circumcision, she says he is not her son because her son’s back “would be scarred from the taskmaster’s whip.” The occulting of his parentage, she maintains through the sign of Moses’s unmarked flesh.

Next Yochabel cross-examines Moses to determine on which end of the whip he belongs. Does Moses believe “men and women are cattle, to be driven under the lash”? Only as an abolitionist can he be her son.

This scene meanwhile features Christian rhetoric and iconography. When Yochabel calls Moses, “my Deliverer,” Aaron—who in this scene very much resembles a Dutch Master’s painting of Jesus—looks heavenward.

Once Moses knows his parentage, the film shifts into inquiring more deeply about identity in relation to the moral order. Moses ritualistically declares he will inquire “to find the meaning of what I am,” which in turn will reveal, “why a Hebrew, or any man, must be a slave.” The racialization proceeds in this scene explicitly when Moses asks himself how he can feel shame for “the *race* that bred” him. He inquires, “What change is there in me? Egyptian or Hebrew, I am still Moses. These are the same hands, the same arms, . . . the same hair, the same face, that were mine a moment ago.” His assigned task—and the viewer’s—is to read the signs.

GUILT DIVINATION

In Pharaoh Sethi’s court, when Moses undergoes a guilt-divination, facing the charge of “treason,”¹⁹⁰ at the trial Moses appears as a captured slave, iconically Negroid—very dark-skinned, with kinky hair, bound in chains. Rameses formally accuses Moses. “Treason?” the crowd murmurs: “Is this a trial?” Bithiah testifies that the deception—Moses’s passing as Egyptian—was her fault, not Moses’s. Moses defends himself with anachronistic, abolitionist rhetoric against enslavement of a people “only because they are of another race.”

For Egypt the trial divines Moses’s guilt. Pharaoh Sethi’s verdict banishes both Moses and Bithiah, for her secret infidelity. Then Pharaoh Sethi awards Rameses the throne and Nefretiri’s hand. Moses must wander, the narrator says, “without a country.” Rather than refer to tribes and kingdoms, the film divines roles for modern races and countries.

Of course, the film positions the viewer to divine that Egypt’s verdict of guilt, and Moses’s subsequent trial-by-ordeal-of-wandering, both evince Moses’s *virtue*. The film’s typological parallel here is the conviction and crucifixion of Jesus. Indeed as the film uses a cross-fade to show Moses’s punishment—banishment to the

¹⁹⁰ The rhetoric here echoes DeMille’s extrafilmic attacks—with Walt Disney and Ronald Reagan—against Hollywood labor leaders as communist traitors.

wilderness— for a subliminally brief shot, he resolves into focus, silhouetted as if crucified. (See figure 6.2.) Soon after this point, bearded Moses resembles traditional, European representations of Jesus.

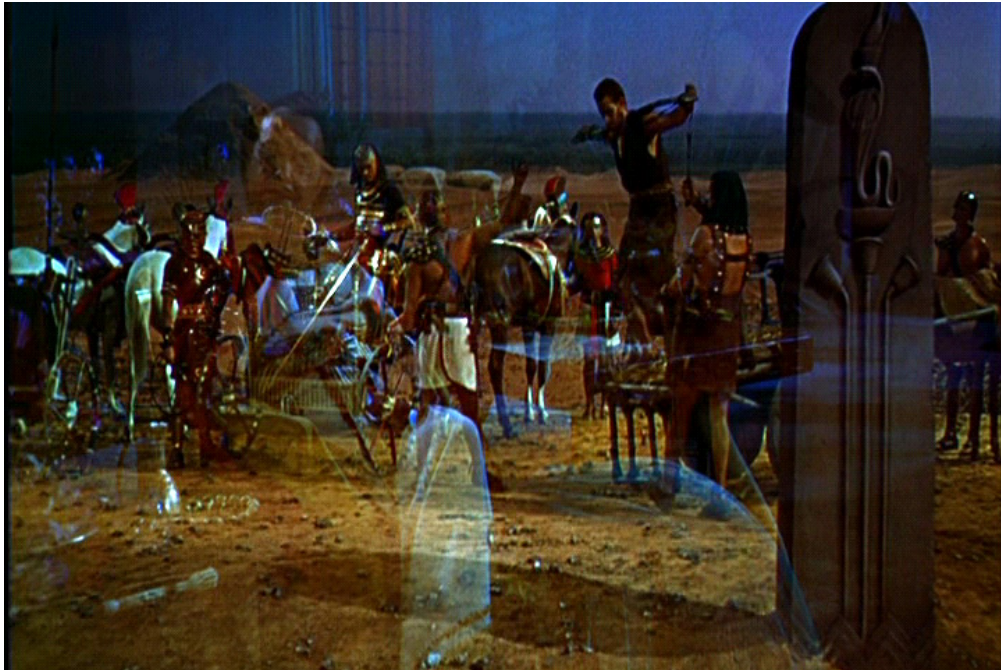


Figure 6.2. Cross-fade to Moses's punishment, here as crucifixion.

Pharaoh Sethi's trial—determining who is not on his side, Egypt's side—foreshadows Moses's trial determining who is not on *his* side, Israel's side. Ultimately *The Ten Commandments* inquires—quoting Exodus 32:26—“WHO IS ON THE LORD'S SIDE?” This inquiry comes when Moses returns to break up the orgy at the golden calf. In the reverse-shot of the Hebrews, the most visible figure in the frame is Bithiah's lead guardsman.



Figure 6.3. Moses in “the black pits of slavery.” Note the cap here and in figure 6.4.



Figure 6.4. Bithiah, Moses, and Bithiah’s guardsmen.



Figure 6.5. Bithiah's guardsmen: "God's promise."

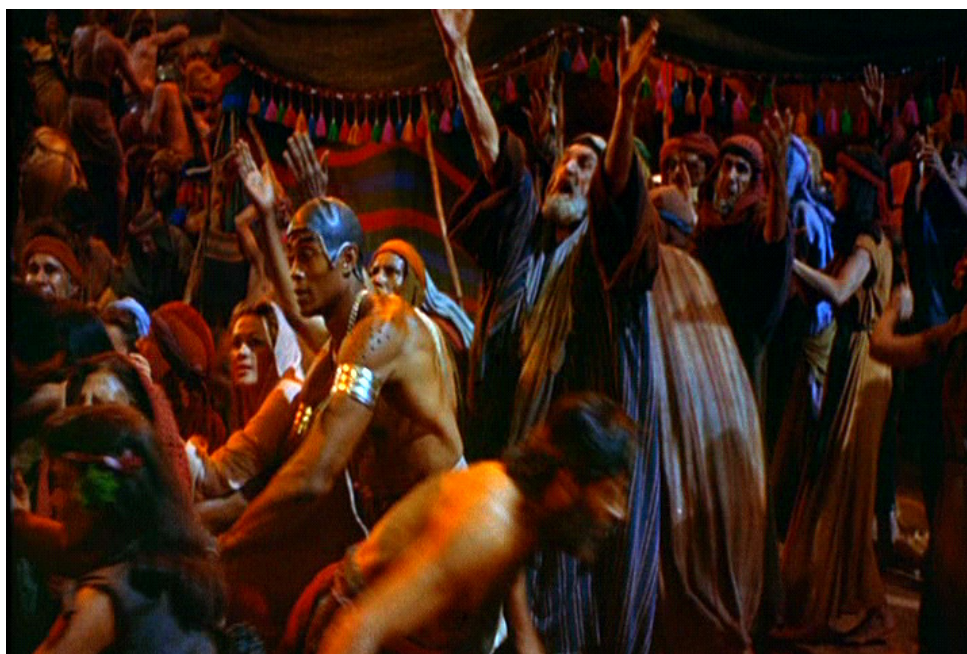


Figure 6.6. "WHO IS ON THE LORD'S SIDE?" The trailer for *The Ten Commandments* featured this shot, originally and then more prominently when Paramount re-released the film in the United States in 1966.

DIVINATION BY THE NEWS

Most saliently the film's inquiry is how to read the signs of its own times. As DeMille himself says in the prologue, the ancient challenge "continues throughout the world today."

The signs of *today* appear in the film as current events: these are mediated by newspapers, from which characters read aloud, attempting to divine from the signs of the times a verdict to guide their actions. (These props, which are ostensibly papyrus blueprints for construction, characters handle as newspapers.) In this way the film coaches the viewer to perform divination by *the film's* signs of the times. While actual viewers *make sense* of the plethora of events—onscreen and in the multilayered allegories—this film portrays characters as making sense of the newspaper. (See Chapters Eleven and Thirteen.)



Figure 6.7. Rameses faces the challenge of current events.



Figure 6.8. Divination by *the news*.

The divination-by-news takes over when *The Ten Commandments* at one point abruptly shifts into the idiom of a newsreel. The shores of the Nile, as if the Mississippi, are “teeming” with black bodies loading bales. Over anomalous background music, its narration begins with the spoken headline, “Making Straw, for the Bricks of Egypt,” accompanied by the crack of a whip. The newsreel—on the topic of the laborers of Egypt’s straw industry—in its concept, discourse, and imagery evoke America’s slave labor in its cotton industry. The narration’s rhetoric mixes King James with antimodern, anti-industrial, pro-labor rhetoric (which DeMille surely learned during his struggles *against* labor unions); and with rhetoric of slavery as a trial by ordeal.



Figure 6.9. “Straw!” Industrious Egyptians load bales “on the backs of countless slaves” in this newsreel-within-the-film.



Figure 6.10. Negroid Moses decries race-based slavery. Note the palm tree, and the facing crowd.

CHAPTER CONCLUSION

In enacting Augustine's claim that "in the Old Testament there is a concealment of the New," this film makes it manifest, most literally with the cross-fade momentarily revealing Moses as if crucified. (The movie's New Testament associations further include the following: Moses is called the "Deliverer"; his betrayer, Dathan, acts like Judas; when adult Moses meets his Hebrew mother, "her beatitude echoes the Magnificat of the Virgin Mary: 'Blessed am I among all mothers in the land, for my eyes have beheld the deliverer'";¹⁹¹ he returns from the desert at age thirty; Sephora washes his feet; his Passover tableaux resembles the Last Supper; and Sephora says that Moses taught that "man does not live by bread alone."¹⁹²)

Moreover, in the film's narrative and iconography there is a concealment of Hollywood cinema itself, particularly in the ubiquitous palm trees. By the mid-1950s—in the ongoing corporate projects of hailing a global public, and of elevating U.S. culture to global hegemony—Hollywood cinema was using all its mantic technologies to retain and expand its leading role as diviner of discursive domains. The practice of *divination by current events* is not only what the characters do, moreover it is what the film positions the viewer to do.

By portraying the role of the Black American loyalist, the aim was not only to navigate domestic tensions around integration, but moreover to rechannel Soviet criticism of U.S. racism. In the rhetorical competition, especially before the tribunal of the unaligned world, the figure of the Black man is "Exhibit A" for both Communists and capitalists.

Ritual exposure to the volatile indeterminacy of "mantic raciness" allows for the *rediscovery* by which DeMille puts America's past—the colonial past, slavery,

¹⁹¹ Furthermore, regarding an elderly character who declares to Moses that he had always wished to "behold the deliverer who will lead all men to freedom," Chattaway links this character to Simeon, "the righteous man in Luke's Gospel, who recognizes the infant Jesus and prophesies that [he] will one day bring salvation to the gentiles and thus to the whole world." Orrison reveals that the actor who had played this elderly man was H. B. Warner, who played Jesus in DeMille's silent film, *King of Kings*. This is an example of DeMille's typological use of actors.

¹⁹² Nadel 1993, 423-425.

imperial adventures, and the recent news—on trial. Such trial is typical of the Hollywood Bible Film, as Gilles Deleuze finds.

The ancient or recent past must submit to trial, go to court, in order to *disclose* what it is that produces decadence, and what it is that produces new life, what the ferments of decadence and the germs of new life are, the orgy and the sign of the cross, the omnipotence of the rich and the misery of the poor. A strong ethical judgment must condemn the injustice of ‘things,’ bring compassion, herald the new civilization on the march, in short, constantly *rediscover America*.

In sum, *The Ten Commandments*’ jeremiadic verdicts herald a continuing discovery, redirecting the next cycle of hegemony as if onto its destined path.

Towards unpacking this finding, now that I have catalogued the mantic aspects of *The Ten Commandments*, I next specify my working model of divination.



Figure 6.11. With Rameses in the background, Moses watches Pharaoh Sethi (Cedric Hardwicke, who resembles DeMille) find the view, as if shooting a film.



Figure 6.12. Moses, with assistants, finds the view.



Figure 6.13. Moses shares the viewers' perspective: a cloudscape, behind a large double-screen, which is behind a crowd arrayed in rows, behind a picture window curtained like a movie-screen, behind the newspaper.

CHAPTER SEVEN: ON DIVINATION

OVERVIEW

Towards analyzing *The Ten Commandments* in terms of the divinatory aspects I have highlighted, the present chapter glosses “divination,” and contextualizes its genealogy.

According to folklorist Barbara Tedlock,

questions about future events, past disasters whose causes cannot be explained, things unknown hidden from sight or removed in space, appropriate conduct in critical situations, including the healing of illness, determining the times and modes of religious worship, and making choices of persons for particular tasks—all these are common subjects of divinatory inquiry.¹⁹³

Regarding procedures, Tedlock writes that “in some instances, the diviner undergoes physical or psychological changes so as to be able to serve as a vehicle for divinatory

¹⁹³ Tedlock 2001, 189.

power, while at other times, animals, objects, and events are themselves considered signs of an external superhuman power.”¹⁹⁴

When I claim *The Ten Commandments* positions its auditor in the role of diviner, this claim may seem radical and perhaps confusing, because while the film targets a “mass audience,” typically the role of diviner is specialized, not generalized. Indeed, perhaps for much of human history and pre-history, people have considered “diviner” a specialized role, not a role freely available at any time to anyone.

Yet anyone who has opened a book to read from an indeterminate page; anyone who has noticed a radio or television station saying something that seems fortuitously significant at the given moment—such a media-user positions herself as a diviner. Today at Amazon.com, when searching inside a book, the search interface offers the user a button for “Surprise Me!”, which links to an indeterminate page, much as in the medieval practice of bibliomancy.¹⁹⁵

Without some genealogical account of the universalizations of the role of diviner, one can scarcely begin articulating mass-mediation in terms of mantic practice. So, in the following chapters, as I sketch a genealogy of mantic rhetoric, I emphasize moments when the role of diviner was posed as if openly accessible. At least potentially, access to mantic mediation expanded via early Judaic exegesis; via Christian practices of self-divination, and through the Reformation’s inviting each reader to approach the Holy Bible—now, industrially produced—without mediation by priests.

The genealogizing herein—tracing how Judaism, Christianity, and modernity have deployed mantic practices—is challenging not only because its scope is sweeping, but moreover because these traditions each tend to abominate what they categorize as “divination,” while not acknowledging the role of divination in their own practices.¹⁹⁶

¹⁹⁴ Tedlock 2001, 189.

¹⁹⁵ My point is that the interfaces of these search engines solicit participation as if of a diviner. That is, the offer of search at Amazon.com under “Surprise Me!” is directly patterned on the ancient practice of bibliomancy—opening a book to an indeterminate page, to reach a determination—a practice which the Chinese famously undertake with the *I Ching* and Europeans have done with the *Aeneid*, *The Holy Bible*, and other books.

¹⁹⁶ The policing against divination also comes to encompass allegory. Dawson and Luxon credit the Reformation for the fierceness of this policing. See Dawson (1992, 15); and Luxon (1995, ix and 40) on typology as a “dodge” by which Protestantism continued the work of allegory even while abominating it. See also Shepley 2000, who discusses divination as exegesis. On typology and the figuring of identity, see Dawson 2002.

Because divination tends to seem un-Jewish, un-Christian, or un-modern, scant scholarship posits divination as constitutive of modernity. Nevertheless herein, in order to explain *The Ten Commandments* satisfyingly one needs to develop new articulations in *some* manner. So, through bracketing any sense that *divination is not a core practice of Western tradition*, the following chapters proceed.

Divination, or mantic practice, is defined differently in the different fields I bring to bear in glossing it—that is, in the fields of folklore, religion, anthropology, and literature. Because I consider divination primarily a popular practice, I have begun this chapter with a definition by a trained folklorist—Tedlock, who is also an anthropologist.

On various levels, “divination” overlaps with other categories of practices: so I endeavor to differentiate divination here. Indeed, this dissertation’s main, working definition of divination comes from a religion scholar’s differentiation of it from magic:

Divination, founded on a presentiment about the structure of knowledge and explanation, is a means of authorizing discourse within the community.

Mantic practice, then, mainly addresses not magic but “the content of the divined warrant or the procurement of that warrant.”¹⁹⁷

The next category from which I endeavor to differentiate divination is “shamanic work,” which of course means the work of shamans. The primary difference is that “shaman” tends to refer to someone who *leads other people* in mantic practice. Thus, to say “everyone is a shaman” is like saying “everyone is a leader”—it can hardly be useful. One might characterize DeMille as a shaman. Yet the practices *The Ten Commandments* positions its auditors to perform are less shamanic than mantic.

¹⁹⁷ Sweek 1994, 726.

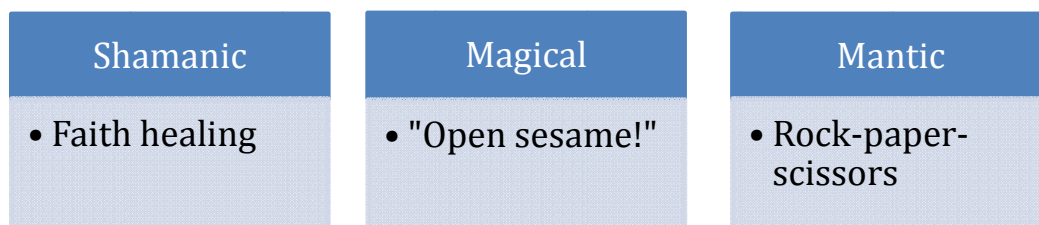


Figure 7.1. Paradigmatic practices, by category.

Another distinction is that the term “shaman” tends to refer to someone who performs, among other things, magic. So if one attributes an intrinsic power of healing to a given, human agent, one may call him a “shaman.” Unlike a mere diviner, a shaman “can mend broken limbs or heal sickness. He can converse with animals, they understand and obey him.”¹⁹⁸ A diviner merely can determine the necessary knowledge—proper diagnosis and treatment. The application—actually healing someone—is separate work from divination.¹⁹⁹

Now that this discussion has differentiated between the magical, the shamanic, and the mantic, next it can discuss some overlaps, perhaps without undue confusion. For example, in Chapter Fifteen herein, I posit that the genealogy of mantic cinema features Jesse Lasky’s work with the touring magic show of Herman the Great. This is not to pose magic and divination as identical, but merely to account for their overlapping usages in cultural formations.²⁰⁰

Moreover, although I am discussing divination as distinct from shamanic work, nevertheless some of the research on shamanism is germane, because much of shamanism concerns divination. If “a shaman has access to hidden knowledge: he can prophecy or discover things hidden in the past,”²⁰¹ this means he is a diviner. Although most divination—especially what Preus calls “divination of self”—is performed by people other than shamans, on the other hand it seems all shamans perform divination.

¹⁹⁸ Douglas 2004, 113.

¹⁹⁹ Arguably the division of labor between doctors and nurses follows this differentiation.

²⁰⁰ See Flint 1991.

²⁰¹ Douglas 2004, 113. See also Guthrie 2004, 97.

NATURAL HISTORY OF DIVINATION

I have cited Barbara Tedlock's claim that divination is a universal practice, common to all human cultures: as Michael Winkelman, an anthropologist of prehistoric religion, attempts to prove and explain such a claim, he posits a "detection instinct."²⁰² However for him shamanism subsumes divination. He argues that "shamanic gifts are part of a universal human endowment," and convincingly dismisses "the possibility that it was discovered in one historic place from whence it spread through the world."²⁰³

In the present chapter I address the "Review Forum" of the *Journal of Ritual Studies* in 2004 concerning Michael Winkelman's *Shamanism: The Neural Ecology of Consciousness and Healing* (Westport, CT: Bergin and Garvey, 2000). It features commentary from five leading anthropologists—Stewart E. Guthrie, Richard J. Castillo, C. Jason Throop, Pablo Wright, and Mary Douglas—plus a response from Winkelman.²⁰⁴

Not unlike Winkelman and his commentators develop a "shamanic paradigm," I must develop a mantic paradigm, in order to suggest *The Ten Commandments* as a mantic text.²⁰⁵ So, though the main goal of this dissertation is not to make a contribution to natural science, still my aims overlap considerably with Michael Winkelman's "neurotheology." Meanwhile like Winkelman's, my statement of a paradigm is initial; it is aimed not at a general audience of scholars but at scholars researching where religion and anthropology intersect with the study of mass-mediation; and it aims to stimulate scholars to re-think "the social importance of practices that have been maligned throughout most of Western academic history."²⁰⁶

Shamanism is prevalent in societies where people survive through hunting and gathering food, which is a rather ancient form of livelihood. Indeed, Winkelman

²⁰² Winkelman 2004, 120-121.

²⁰³ Douglas 2004, 113.

²⁰⁴ It makes sense to treat this Review Forum here, rather than Winkelman's book directly, not only because the Review Forum is more current, including from Winkelman, but moreover because its writing is less technical than Winkelman's book.

²⁰⁵ By referring to "a mantic text," I am riffing on Roland Barthes's 1976 articulation of the "writerly text" and "readerly text."

²⁰⁶ Winkelman 2004, 125.

claims that shamanism “was the earliest form of religion (an opinion now common, largely because of the prevalence of shamanism in gathering and hunting societies).”²⁰⁷ The basic argument for this common opinion starts from a few findings that are uncontroversial in contemporary physical anthropology. On the one hand, peoples who today survive by hunting and gathering, according to anthropological regard also tend to be peoples who practice shamanism. On the other hand, ancient peoples survived by hunting and gathering, and practiced something that resembled shamanism. Winkelman and others have combined such findings as a correlation, which for Winkelman is even a causation.²⁰⁸

Physical anthropologists cite one key transition in the development of ancient peoples: about 40,000 years ago (at the Middle/Upper Paleolithic transition) human cultures developed markedly symbolic work with fertility figures.²⁰⁹ Despite my general ignorance about what happened 40,000 years ago, nevertheless of this pre-historic transition’s few specific markers, there are two—the advent of the sewing needle, and of cave painting—that correspond to my account herein of “suture” as a function of mantic cinema. Perhaps the genealogy of the mantic “screening” is about 40,000 years long.

Winkelman’s key theory is that “shamanic ritual activities promoted group bonding and identity formation.”²¹⁰ The pioneering anthropologist Mary Douglas further concludes that “the shaman’s art uses rituals to restructure consciousness; it *produces* a collective consciousness and manipulates individual consciousness.”²¹¹

For my own working model of divination, I adapt those articulations as follows. A rite of divination performs *as if* tracing a collective consciousness. *Divination rites make a collective consciousness legible and accessible, both collectively and to individual consciousness.*

²⁰⁷ Guthrie 2004, 98.

²⁰⁸ In making this correlation he implies that moderns do not survive by hunting-and-gathering, nor practice shamanism directly. Winkelman casts modern religion as bearing the legacy of shamanism. However, the assumption that contemporary forms of religion have inherited “features of their progenitor” is not quite justified, because if a third determinant—such as a “detection instinct”—were operative all along, then it could have engendered both pre-historic and contemporary religions, even without inheritance.

²⁰⁹ See Winkelman 2004, 120.

²¹⁰ Winkelman 2004, 120.

²¹¹ Douglas 2004, 114, emphasis added.

As Mary Douglas puts it, “the central question is what these [shamanic] talents are for. What has been their evolutionary role” as an advantage?²¹² One might think it is plain that hunter-gatherers need to detect traces of food outside the body—they have to know where to look, and how, in order to follow patterns in locating food to eat. However actually according to Winkelman the basic dynamic is about interrelations *within* human consciousness itself.

It seems mantic actions tend to serve a “centralizing role in integrating bodily and mental functions.”²¹³ That is, following Hunt (1995), Winkelman intriguingly suggests that

human consciousness is *multiplex* in nature;
differentially organized according to the conceptual and
abstract contents of linguistically *mediated* thought *and*
the imagistic, perceptual and somatosensory contents of
presentational forms of awareness.²¹⁴

Winkelman “grounds these various forms of awareness in the differing structural and functional strata of the human brain.”²¹⁵ Though I am not qualified to evaluate a claim of a neurological basis for shamanic practice—and despite my skepticism regarding accounts of human consciousness in terms of universals—nonetheless this model seems significant. Regardless of its accuracy, perhaps models such as this arise from investigators’ impulse to see consciousness and the brain in terms of divination—notably after psychoanalysis.

Winkelman’s model of consciousness as “multiplex” matches the film’s model viewer who scries through of layers of identity. Perhaps these resolutions on the screen parallel resolutions between strata in shifting of modes of mind. One layer dissolves from view and another layer cross-fades into place. In both cases, some

²¹² Douglas 2004, 113-114.

²¹³ Douglas 2004, 113-114.

²¹⁴ Throop 2004, 106, emphasis added.

²¹⁵ Throop 2004, 106. The biocultural paradigm of shamanism extends the perspectives of Laughlin 1974 and d’Aquili 1979.

particular function must continuously *make sense*. Some function must reach a determination, in order to enable action.

According to at least one scholar of religion and at least one scholar of film, this is the function of divination—to reach a determination, in order to enable action.²¹⁶ Perhaps the structure of the brain does shape cinematic divination. And/or, perhaps mantic cinema itself has shaped Winkelman’s model of mediation at the multiplex? If so, it has quite similarly shaped the models of unrelated neuroscientists.

As if a soothsayer, Winkelman in 2001 predicted that advances in neuroscience would soon bear out his findings—by isolating component structures of consciousness in certain regions of the brain, and by documenting his account of a pattern-resolving function. It seems such discovery indeed has come to pass.

In early 2007 neuroscientists studying addiction located what I call the seat of divination. They located it not in the cortex of thinking, but in a prune-sized region of the brain near the ear, the insula,²¹⁷ which previously was known mainly for its role in recognizing facial expressions. According to Antonio Damasio, director of the Brain and Creativity Institute, the insula “*maps . . . signals from the body’s physical plant, and integrates them so the conscious brain can interpret them as a coherent emotion.*”²¹⁸ The insula is not the seat of verbal language, nor the seat of culture, so much as the seat of making sense of social interaction, and of the unpredictable signals the body itself generates.

As the recognizer of faces and their expressions, the insula is the brain’s reader of social patterns. As the cartographer of signals into emotions, it literally structures one’s feelings.

²¹⁶ One is Preus, quoted at the end of Chapter Seven. The second is Thomas Elsaesser, a leading scholar of film. Elsaesser, who is German, is cited—regarding cinematic melodrama of Schindler’s List—near the end of this dissertation’s Conclusion. I discuss melodrama as a mantic practice in Chapter Twelve.

²¹⁷ Naqvi 2007.

²¹⁸ Carey 2007, 4.

FRAMING A NEW PARADIGM

In the wake of Winkelman's book, the dominant set of anthropological paradigms for articulating collective epistemes, to some came to seem, more clearly, rather narrow.²¹⁹ Other fields may allow for similar expansion.

The present account of mantic practice transcends any true-or-false question, or a pitfall such as "*vox populi* versus false consciousness." That is, when considering the mass-cultural success of a text—especially a text of fortune-telling or religion—critics tend to frame the success either as reflecting the true voice of the people, or else as capitalizing on the false consciousness of its users. (See Chapter One.) It is rare to transcend this dichotomy.

Indeed in certain academic circles it can seem all but compulsory to ascribe false consciousness. Those who disagree go out on a limb which others relish shooting down. Eventually the corrective to this situation, it seems to some, is to substitute "true" for "false."

Scholarship on divination—some of which I address directly in the next section—tends to suffer from the true-or-false dichotomy, though not as plainly as scholarship on shamanism, which is illustrative. As Mary Douglas suggests of scholarship even as recently as 2004, "shamans have been presented as imposters who deceive a superstitious clientele"—however Winkelman shows shamanic practice as "not fraudulent."²²⁰ He was able to achieve this advance in research because for an anthropologist "it is new to assume from the outset that the shaman can really do the things he claims to do and actually has some of the powers his people accredit to him."²²¹

However, regarding a valuation of falsity *or* of truth, *neither* fits a mantological investigation. The point is to study the content of the divined warrant, and moreover its procurement.

Finally, the study of ancient shamanism can provide an ancient, "usable past" for mantic cinema. Next in order to develop a model of mantic practice one needs not biology so much as sociopolitics. Indeed, with Pablo Wright I conclude that

²¹⁹ Throop 2004, 106.

²²⁰ Douglas 2004, 114.

²²¹ Douglas 2004, 114.

furthering the study of mantic practice specifically requires a stiff dose of Durkheimian, Marxist, and Foucauldian critique.²²²

SCHOLARSHIP OF DIVINATION PER SE

Even scholars who claim “all known peoples on earth have practiced some form of divination”²²³ have tended to pose divination as if it were not characteristic of Western modernity.²²⁴ Anthropologists study divination in *non-Western* cultures. Perhaps largely because, as Foucault puts it, “Christianity has always been more interested in the history of its beliefs than in the history of real practices,”²²⁵ scholars of religion have characterized divination as pre-modern and especially pre-Christian.

Such approaches reify supersessionist notions of the relations between modernity and its premodernity; and of the West versus the rest. Yet some of the most ancient forms of divination, such as cleromancy, have persisted ubiquitously, for example in the practice of flipping a coin to make a decision, or drawing straws to select a “volunteer.”

In early modern, European scholarship, the key pioneer of mantology is Giovanni Battista Vico, the eighteenth-century political philosopher best known for his *Principles of the New Science Concerning the Common Nature of Nations*, who recognized, as human civilization’s peoplehood-making root, “the archaic and central role,” of “divination.”²²⁶ As a Hellenist, Vico noted that for the Greeks, divination “was called theology, meaning the science of the language of the gods.”²²⁷

Vico argued that positivist Cartesianism is inapplicable to the civic sphere—where human affairs are ruled by indeterminacy. In the wake of this argument came

²²² P. Wright 2004, 110.

²²³ Tedlock 2001, 189.

²²⁴ As near-exceptions see M. Wood 2003, who titularly refers to modern uses of oracles as not part of their life but merely their “afterlife”; Goldberg 1994, who in a subsection on “Modern Parallels” mentions the divinatory use of standardized tests to predict people’s futures, as “analogues . . . for folk traditions,” (187) as if a tradition cannot involve both folk and industrial valences; and Lessa 1952, who begins by taking pains to show that he can distinguish between “legitimate science” versus “supernaturalism” (355)—yet concludes that in the West “for the layman, diagnosis of disease by the expert in medicine is quite comparable to Tallensi divination” (421). See also Fortes 1966. In addition to the exceptions this dissertation treats, as other exceptions see Fox 1984 and Feingold 1995.

²²⁵ Foucault 1988a.

²²⁶ Preus 1991, p. 441 cites Vico 1744, par. 378.

²²⁷ Preus 1991, p. 441 cites Vico 1744, par. 378.

the major work of Montesquieu, Fustel de Coulanges, William Robertson Smith's landmark, 1889 tome, *Religion of the Semites*; and especially Emile Durkheim.²²⁸

In 1915 Durkheim famously concluded that “ritual offsets the structural strains in society caused by the competing interests of clan or lineage groups.”²²⁹ Furthermore Karl Marx, Johann Gottfried von Herder, and Antonio Gramsci also each read Vico.²³⁰ Vico's influence thus shaped the approach I identify herein primarily with Jameson, Fiedler, and Lott.

It also seems Vico's account of divination as a people-making practice has shaped some political leaders' perspectives. As Mussolini suggested circa 1926, “*political like artistic creation is a slow elaboration and a sudden divination.*”²³¹ That is, when the cookie crumbles, a political leader, to generate authority, must ritualistically demark the signs in order to tell the collective's fortune.

DIVINATION AS SOCIAL MEDIATION

Of the anthropologists of religion who have framed divination in broad terms of sociopolitical mediation, the prime, canonical article is George Park's 1963 “Divination and Its Social Contexts.” Park, a British anthropologist who analyzes divination especially in various parts of contemporary Africa, frames “divination as a practice closely related to the problem of controlling and channeling public opinion and belief.”²³²

Park finds divination appears to play a “‘structural’ role, sanctioning by depersonalizing the various types of action which may normally be required in the process of sorting and resorting local living arrangements.”²³³ (Surely this can explain the social function of certain American party games—spin-the-bottle, Twister, or the

²²⁸ Preus 1987 links Vico to Durkheim. See also, for example, Gans 2001, Tagliacozzo 1969.

²²⁹ Nelson 1990. “”

²³⁰ Vico's influence on Marx is fairly well known. According Joseph A. Buttigieg, translator and editor of the Columbia University Press edition of the *Prison Notebooks*, Gramsci was familiar with Croce's *La filosofia di Giambattista Vico*, 1922, a book which links Vico and Hegel. Buttigieg 1996, vol. 2, p.584, n. 5. See also Mitchell 2005, and Diamond 1974.

²³¹ Quoted by Armstrong 2007, without citation.

²³² Park 1963, 200.

²³³ Park 1963, 197.

grab-bag; or the cartomantic naming of Ducko²³⁴—in terms of depersonalizing and sanctioning the resorting of local living arrangements.)

Victor Turner concludes more specifically that such re-sorting operates “in the field of local descent groups.”²³⁵ Here, a diviner “acts as a mechanism of redress and social adjustment, since he locates areas and points of tension in their contemporary structures.”²³⁶ From this account of divination’s function with “descent groups,” I extrapolate a model of racial divinations. (See Chapters Twelve through Fifteen herein.)

Turner moreover frames divination’s power in terms of moral norms. He finds that a diviner “exonerates or accuses individuals . . . in terms of a system of moral norms.”²³⁷ It seems that in both Europe and Africa, it is typical for divined warrants to provide a determination in terms of transcendent *morality*.²³⁸

Furthermore in Turner’s paradigm, a rite of divination is *judicial*. The divined warrant functions as an indictment or verdict. (See Chapters Nine, Ten, Thirteen, Fifteen, and the Conclusion herein.)

Finally Turner addresses the effect of divined warrants—their compellingness—in terms of feeling. Because the diviner “operates in emotionally charged situations” at fault lines, his divinations restate norms “in a striking and memorable fashion.”²³⁹ This is not simply a matter of ongoing social tensions, but of emotional charge, present with currency. If not at geological fault lines, the sites may be thought of perhaps as electrified fences, or perhaps as high-tension wires on which a diviner walks. The strikingness is memorable as a flash that hits its auditor.²⁴⁰

This strikingness, in my account, comes through the *risk* in heightened exposure to indeterminacy. The present chapter’s next section focuses on developing this aspect of divination.

²³⁴ See Preface herein.

²³⁵ Turner 1979 [1968], 375. Turner specifically analyzes the Ndembu diviner.

²³⁶ Turner 1979 [1968], 375.

²³⁷ Turner 1979 [1968], 375.

²³⁸ On Europe’s moral divination, see Chapter Twelve.

²³⁹ Turner 1979 [1968], 375.

²⁴⁰ A Google search on May 1, 2007 for “it hit me” yields “about 1,080,000” hits. A review of some of these hits reveals that people indeed tend to remember what strikes them, mainly because the strikes, which came in emotionally charged situations, re-state norms. (This sense of “strike” works also in French, but of course not in every language.)

Meanwhile to conclude the present section—on divination as social mediation—I turn to the heart of Preus’s model of divination, which proceeds from indeterminacy. Preus identifies divination’s decisive features as follows.

1. Divination frequently takes place when people . . . find themselves . . . in “dicey” situations of uncertainty in which usual forms of inquiry do not apply.
2. The diviner does not originate his speech, does not speak for himself or presume “authorship.” He defines himself as a *medium*, or mediator, of an external voice The diviner is not the author of the story; he claims to receive it from an external source.
3. The credibility and plausibility of the whole system depends absolutely on structures and rules that prevent (or appear to prevent) manipulation.
4. Although the client-diviner transaction is one-on-one, it is at the same time a social ritual act, bounded by public, culturally-constituted, clearly-understood rules and procedures. . . .
5. Incorrect prognosis is not regarded as a challenge to the system
6. [Paradoxically, despite dependence on what seems to be a notion of indeterminism] the process enables individuals actively to determine their own situation or behave as if they could do so . . . to assume responsibility for their own . . . destinies.”
7. Finally, there is no doubt that divination “works,” in that it is psychologically and socially efficacious. It relieves anxiety, enables effective action, and

negotiates social strains not amenable to other solutions.²⁴¹

The first three features I have begun to address. The third—*the rules*—especially I address in subsequent chapters. Fourthly, the model of divination as a process *both* individual *and* collective, which fits Preus's model of the reader and readership of Puritan novels, I adapt for cinema.

Preus's fifth through seventh features of divination all navigate the tendency of holders of the *etic* perspective (that is, the perspective of non-participants in a given rite of divination) to evaluate divination itself in terms of truth or falsity. That is, though the contents of divined warrants often may be incorrect, for users such incorrectness is not tantamount to falsity. The investigator—bracketing any question of whether divination, in any absolute sense, yields truth-value—can evaluate only its use-value.

The use-value ultimately is not only in the performed resolution of social strains, but moreover in what can follow. By enabling individuals actively to determine their own situation or behave as if they could do so, divination enables effective action.

EXPOSURE TO RITUALLY PURE INDETERMINACY

Now that I have outlined the basics of my working model, I can address the heart of practices of divination: exposure to ritually pure indeterminacy. One might well expect—given that all forms of divination partake of indeterminacy—that all the serious accounts of divination would address indeterminacy.

However, it seems that modern scholarship on divination has been unable to maintain much controlled focus on indeterminacy. The basic challenges for the investigator are the same as I already have outlined (in Chapter One and above): the challenge of bracketing one's assessment of truth-value, and the need to distinguish carefully between attributions of *emic* and of *etic* perspectives.

²⁴¹ Preus 1991, 444-445; Preus's item number six quotes Jackson 1989, 60.

It seems even in the leading articulations, scholars tend to produce overviews such as this:

In one way or another, all forms of divination partake of randomization.²⁴²

To her credit, this Classics scholar, Sara Iles Johnston, demonstrates her awareness that “what scholars of divination call ‘randomization’” actually is *not* randomization, but instead is the establishment of conditions beyond human control.²⁴³ Yet unfortunately, when she introduces her anthology in the terms of her field’s *habitus*, she writes that clients of Apollo’s dice oracles “were trying to domesticate the unpredictable (we would say ‘random’) forces that drove both their dice throws and their lives.”²⁴⁴

For these clients, the bulk of whom were merchants, their commerce and hence their lives were “fraught with unpredictable turns of fate.”²⁴⁵ My point is, fate cannot be random.

Such failure to maintain distinction between randomness and indeterminacy has prevented scholarship from advancing very far in understanding divination’s cultural role. That is, when—in a cultural investigation of practices of divining fate’s traces—one conflates “indeterminacy” with “randomness,” one is crucially wrong: because by describing the forces at hand as patternless, one characterizes cultural practices as mistaken.

Generally, because “randomization” is a term from experimental science, in deploying it scholars have tended to misapprehend divination in terms of modern science’s experimental methodologies, such as random sampling or the double-blind study. This tendency begins in 1957 with Omar Kayham Moore, who among anthropologists of divination was the first to publish a major argument on indeterminacy.

²⁴² Johnston 2005b, 15.

²⁴³ Johnston 2005b, 15.

²⁴⁴ Johnston 2005b, 16.

²⁴⁵ Johnston 2005b, 16.

In his article, “Divination—A New Perspective,”²⁴⁶ Moore’s paradigmatic diviners are members of the Naskapi tribe of Labrador, who, in preparation for a caribou-hunting expedition, burn a caribou’s bone in order to make legible some traces of the unknown. The emergent pattern of spots and cracks, they interpret systematically— as their map.

In advancing scholarship on divination, Moore made some major leaps. He claimed that the Naskapi rely on divination for guidance when they are uncertain.²⁴⁷ Moreover, he concluded that divination was neither mistaken nor false, but indeed was effective—which for a modern scientist at that time were bold claims. Furthermore, he argued that divination functioned as a form of control; and suggested that the key to its method was its unpredictability.

However, Moore characterized divination’s function as equivalent to the function of a modern experimenter’s table of random numbers. Moore crafted a creatively instrumentalist, Darwinian hypothesis: divination functions to randomize human behavior, which is advantageous to hunters because it prevents overhunting in any one area; plus it prevents the caribou from predicting and thereby avoiding the hunt.

But Moore had ignored the performative aspect of divination. His hypothesis assumed that resource-maximization (in this case, finding food) accounts for divination, but social factors (such as enacting the determination of where the food went) do not.

Following Moore, George Park’s 1963 article again advanced the study of divination’s dependence on indeterminacy. Regarding Moore’s hypothesis that the Naskapi hunters often would wander off randomly in wrong directions indicated by their osteomantic divination, Park suggested this hypothesis itself was boneheaded. Moreover regarding other categories of divination, for example in the identification of guilt, Park argued that he saw no conceivable advantage to randomization.

After concluding that the key to divination is not randomization, however, Park settled instead on the converse: de-randomization. He found that “*divination appears to have a derandomizing function.*”²⁴⁸ In this formulation, “more predictable”

²⁴⁶ Moore 1979[1957].

²⁴⁷ Moore 1979[1957], 377.

²⁴⁸ Park 1963, 200.

seems to equal “un-random.” But again, if people are following oracles, this behavior suggests they are not treating actions as patternless, from the start.

Nevertheless, Park helpfully introduced not only divination’s role in social governance—in consensus—but moreover this role’s dependence on the opposite of control. He found that “the employment of chance or chance-like mechanisms in the rendering of decisions” seems to insulate divination from merely expressing a user’s wish.²⁴⁹

Here, not unlike Moore’s model of randomization, Park’s model draws on a methodology of experimental science—in this case, the double-blind study. (In a double-blind study, while conducting the experiment the scientist must remain ignorant of which group is the “control” group, so his own hypothesis cannot shape the outcome.) Even so, Park’s account of divination is nonetheless quite useful.

The next step is to account expressly for the *performative* aspect of divination, in terms of determination, indeterminacy, and what Park calls “consensus.”

CHAPTER CONCLUSION

For its users, divination systematically traces underlying patterns of the universe—primarily the social universe. Like in the Naskapi tribesman’s osteomancy, traces of an occulted pattern surface to the collective’s view.

Much like the location of the herd is known by *the herd*, the collective knows itself, and locates itself. Via its hidden pattern—which heretofore has been indeterminate especially to the individual—the vector of action (e.g., for the hunt) gets warranted socially.

Moreover the Naskapi hunters’ reading of a burned bone, I take as a deployment of “exposure to ritually pure indeterminacy.” The tribesmen, who previously knew where the caribou were,²⁵⁰ face a pattern—the animals’ pattern of movement—beyond their ken. Though the caribou suffer no uncertainty, the hunters have become *dislocated from the domain of certainty*. As the hunters focus their

²⁴⁹ Park 1963, 198.

²⁵⁰ It hardly seems likely that the Naskapi, caribou hunters, had never seen a caribou herd.

collective attention on this intractable challenge of survival, they make sense of it by making a formal determination.

Generally it seems to matter that people behave as if they could determine their own situation.²⁵¹ If people manage to divine a path to self-determination, then they may try to follow this path. At that point, people tend to behave “with determination,” which can be enabling.

The sociopolitical formations most congruent with rites of divination are hegemony and counter-hegemony. Hegemony co-opts *determination*. That is, hegemony depends on people acting *as if* they determine their own situations—rather than acting as if the overall power-arrangements determine their individual situations.

By *containing* exposure to indeterminacy, mantic rites procure warrants for their determinations. This is how a hegemony deploys divinations: because power is always held contingently, a hegemonic bloc’s grip is always exposed to indeterminacy, but *by demarking limited exposures to ritually pure indeterminacy, it can seem that the rest of the time, everything is relatively well-determined.*

Alternately, divination can function counter-hege-mantically. For example, within some “traditional” cultures where elites restrict the most potent mantic practices to fellow elites, if and when counterhegemons are able to deploy this restricted form, their usage is “counter-hege-mantic” by virtue of their very access. In terms of cinema, when African-American subalterns gained substantial access to the practice of Hollywood’s mantic cinema,²⁵² regardless of the contents, *the procurement of warrants by counter-hegemons* itself was counter-hege-mantic.

Most potently, because divination by definition procures *warranted answers*, as an epistemic technology for its users it tends to “meta-warrant” itself: users depend on practices of divination as their way of knowing.²⁵³ That is, if a practice of divination is enabling its users to act effectively, then for its users, this practice of divination *works*. For its users, because it works, divination validates not only the contents of the divined warrant, but overall, the process of procurement.

²⁵¹ It matters because if instead people behave as if they lack all self-determination, they tend to lack effectiveness as actors. They tend to become mere drones, unmotivated and immobile, good for almost nothing. See Anidjar 2003 on “the Musselman.”

²⁵² See Cripps 1993. See also Heimlich 2005.

²⁵³ See Peek 1991.

In this way, a “new” practice of divination, as a “new” episteme, can enable a counter-hegemonic bloc to supplant a hegemony. If users associate their own *action-enabling practice of inquiry* with the ways of a certain counter-hegemony—say, “counter-hegemony X”—then after X itself becomes a hegemony, it is powerful indeed, rooted in its people’s practices of “to know” and “to do.” Examples of such supersession recur throughout this dissertation’s genealogies.

Questions of divination’s *effectiveness*—e.g., “Can a diviner do what he claims?”, or “Does this rite produce any noticeable effects?”—must be kept separate from the question of any given practice’s *validity*. Cultural practices are valid in the sense of being unmistakable. That is, for their users, on some level, rites work.

Finally, though I emphasize divination’s effectiveness at enabling action, unlike some scholars of divination I aim not to valorize its use. Divination intrinsically is neither a force for good nor for ill.²⁵⁴ A given practice’s set of enabled actions themselves may be malign like those of Torquemada or Mussolini, or benign like the actions of most bibliomancers or readers of fortune cookies.

Neither does divination *necessarily* work within, from, or towards a certain political vector. Though elites tend to associate divination with the unenlightened masses, this hardly means divination deserves to be so characterized. Moreover if leftist intellectuals associate divination particularly with fascism’s anti-modernity, this is largely because “secular” modernity characterizes itself in opposition to “superstition.” Yet meanwhile “secular” modernity itself hardly eschews mantic practices.

In all forms of divination, perceived cheating—or any form of perceived controlling by humans—pollutes the divination-system by removing or reducing the exposure to ritually pure indeterminacy. In order to achieve such exposure, a divination-system is supposed to transcend any mundane level at which any one human can purport to account for all the factors bearing in a decision.

²⁵⁴ Levy [2007 and forthcoming].

PART III: GENEALOGIES OF FORM

CHAPTER EIGHT: ROLLING BONES, MANTIC RHETORICS

OVERVIEW

How is it that *The Ten Commandments* came to be a rite of divination? That is, what practices does its genealogy include?

To get started towards answering these questions, the present chapter mainly refers to ancient Israel's religion, and to Greco-Roman antiquity including especially early Christianity.

Scholars in relevant fields have developed remarkable accounts of divination entering practices of hermeneutics—that is, the practices of interpreting poetry and scripture, prose and self. For Gerald Bruns—a scholar of literary hermeneutics—the canonization of the Hebrew Bible tamed and co-opted the wild, anarchic function of prophecy. Yet Michael Fishbane—a scholar of the Hebrew Bible—emphasizes that the Hebrew Bible features “inner-biblical mantology.”²⁵⁵ Though their two perspectives are somewhat incompatible, nevertheless each is highly relevant to the mantology of *The Ten Commandments*.

DIRECT CO-OPTATION OF DIVINATION

Hebrew Bible scholars Burke Long, Michael Fishbane, and Frederick Cryer have developed the claim that ancient Israel's “exegetical praxis has functionally co-opted older mantic techniques of divine inquiry.”²⁵⁶ Long suggests that in the ancient, Israelite religion, priestly “instructional activity” not only developed from priestly practices of divination, but moreover took the functions of cleromancy, or divination

²⁵⁵ Fishbane 2005, 459.

²⁵⁶ Fishbane 1985, 66, referring to 1 Kg. 22:8 and Ezra 7:10; quoted by Preus 1991, 442. As an example, Preus notes that “the very idiom used to describe Ezra's activity . . . is a precise reworking of an ancient formula used to indicate oracular activity Since Ezra's textual task is to seek from the Torah new divine teachings (or explanations of older ones) for the present,” this is an exegetical divination.

by casting of objects.²⁵⁷ Preus suggests that this co-optation proceeded from the canonization of the Torah. Specifically, scholarship after Vico has noted “the development in the religion of ancient Israel from pre-literate to textual techniques of divination, an advance that can be sketched by following the use of the verb *derash*—to inquire—from inquiry of the Lord through non-literary divination to inquiry of Torah, and on to Midrash.”²⁵⁸

According to Long—a Bible scholar who has studied divination in Mesopotamia and ancient Israel—by the era of Ezekiel and Jeremiah, circa 550 BCE, certain forms of mantic inquiry functioned to secure religious reassurance and political input.²⁵⁹ Long, addressing the ancient Israelite practice of divination by the Urim and Tummim, (priestly objects which may have been stones), characterizes it as an established cultic rite which the Torah does not differentiate, terminologically, from the practice of “a Babylonian king consulting omens (Ezek 21:26) or the like (Hos 4:12).”²⁶⁰

In his chapter on “Canon and Power in the Hebrew Bible,” Bruns concludes that through canonization of scripture, the practice of scriptural interpretation supersedes not only divination by the Urim and Tummim: it also supersedes the free reign of prophecy. “Canonization is the priestly appropriation of prophetic authority by means of the superior forces of writing and textuality; in other words, writing, in this case, was a way of getting rid of prophecy.”²⁶¹

Bruns argues (following Julius Wellhausen, a nineteenth-century scholar of the Bible) that early Israelite prophecy was able to reign anarchically *only until the Hebrew Scriptures were canonized*. Prior to canonization in the form of “the Masoretic texts, which give us the modern Hebrew Bible,”²⁶² while the Hebrew Scriptures lack a fixed, overarchingly authoritative version,²⁶³ the early prophets “do not preach on set texts,” nor “rest on any other foundation than their own

²⁵⁷ Long 1973, 496. Long further speculates that the word *torah* itself may have been derived from the verb *yhr*, “to cast [lots].”

²⁵⁸ Preus 1991, 441.

²⁵⁹ Long 1973, 496. I’m stretching Long here: he mainly discusses the prophetic, and differentiates between prophetic and sacred-lot divination.

²⁶⁰ Long 1973, 490.

²⁶¹ Bruns 1992, 77.

²⁶² Bruns 1992, 65.

²⁶³ Bruns 1992, 65.

certainty.”²⁶⁴ Prophecy during this period features radical indeterminacy, in that God “speaks . . . in ways that are entirely unpredictable and which no one can control, neither king nor priest nor, indeed, the prophet himself, who characteristically finds himself (as in Jer. 20:9) speaking the prophetic word against his own will and his own best interests.”²⁶⁵

In Bruns’s articulation—which is closely aligned with Jonathan Z. Smith’s view of the mantic canon—canonization is mediation.²⁶⁶ “What we call ‘canon’ is intelligible only in the context of conflicting claims to control the redemptive media and, in particular, to mediate and interpret authoritatively the common tradition.”²⁶⁷ In this understanding of canon, “a text, after all, is canonical not in virtue of being final and correct and part of an official library but because it becomes *binding* on a group of people.”²⁶⁸

According to Bruns, canonization came through the rabbis’ promulgation of Torah usage as “an official countertext to [classic] prophecy,”²⁶⁹ ushering in a new, hegemonic form of Temple-centered, Torah-centered, official, cultic prophecy.²⁷⁰ Bruns locates this historic moment “in the first and second centuries of the common era, as part of the development of rabbinic Judaism, and in the context of conflicting religious and cultural traditions.”²⁷¹ While Bruns as well as Cryer attribute this role specifically to rabbinical promulgation of Deuteronomy, Fishbane specifies the Book of Chronicles as the one that “through pseudepigraphic prophetic speeches and aggadic revisions, donned the mantle of prophecy and instructed a new generation.”²⁷²

²⁶⁴ Julius Wellhausen 1885, quoted in Bruns 1992, 72-73.

²⁶⁵ Bruns 1992, 72. See also the Book of Jonah.

²⁶⁶ The correspondence between Bruns and J. Z. Smith perhaps stems from Gadamer’s influence on both.

²⁶⁷ Blenkinsopp 1977, 96.

²⁶⁸ Bruns 1992, 65.

²⁶⁹ Bruns 1992, 79. Fishbane however attributes this function not to Deuteronomy so much as to the Book of Chronicles: “In an age . . . which begins to show the abatement of the forms and concerns of pre-exilic classical prophecy, the historiography of the Book of Chronicles, through pseudepigraphic prophetic speeches and aggadic revisions, donned the mantle of prophecy and instructed a new generation” (Fishbane 2005, 439).

²⁷⁰ Bruns 1992, 69 quotes Weinfeld 1992.

²⁷¹ Bruns 1992, 65.

²⁷² Fishbane 1985, 439.

TOWARDS CRITIQUING INNER-FILMIC TYPOLOGY

After Fishbane's account of "inner-Biblical exegesis," I refer to *The Ten Commandments*' "inner-filmic exegesis"—which, I argue, is a major component of this film's own strategies of interpretation. In order to consider how the film deploys strategies of interpretation, one must bracket any notion that written texts are rhetorically static.

Scripture interprets its own role in the user's world, particularly by interpreting parts of itself. As Fishbane says, it rhetorically co-opts the addressee.

By virtue of its canonical binding on its users—and through its particular rhetorical techniques—and through the practice of using it as a *basis* of interpretation—the Hebrew Bible constitutes users' understanding. This is to say, it constitutes people as subjects. It hails its subjects and sutures them into the text.

In a circular process, the more firmly users become sutured to scripture, the more users tend to treat it as bedrock. The more users treat it as bedrock, the more scripture becomes useful as the basis for interpreting everything else, which is in flux. And feeding back into the loop, the more it is used, the firmer the suture.

Of course this dynamic affects Biblical criticism. One effect is that one not uncommonly encounters a critique positing the Bible as a transcendental signified: as if, when anyone engages *it*, the interpreting must be a one-way street.

Of course such a critique commonly is applied to *The Ten Commandments*: "the film interprets the Bible." Indeed, in one of the most common approaches, critics inventory the film's divergences from the Biblical tale, and highlights where Hollywood misuses the Bible for its own self-aggrandizement. The critic, by documenting where DeMille did a poor job of interpretation, positions himself as the better interpreter of the Bible, and furthermore as un-duped by Hollywood's effort.

Actually, such a critique is quite ancient. As the following chapters discuss, for millennia, critics have blamed Deuteronomists, Hellenizers, or Christians as if those users had co-opted and polluted the pure usage of Scripture.

In a major advance on such a critique, Ostriker classifies *The Ten Commandments* as midrash—rabbinical commentary on the Hebrew Bible. This classification is a major upgrade for DeMille, from hack to sage. Moreover by

positing the film as midrash, Ostriker recognizes that this film, in itself, has achieved a significant degree of canonicity.

Hers is a good critique, largely because midrash is powerful and so is *The Ten Commandments*, and one can understand the two forms' power in relation. Regarding the film as midrash is an initial step.

In discussing the role of midrash, Ostriker depends on the hermeneutics of Gerald Bruns: however even as great a hermeneute as Bruns is prone to framing Scripture as bedrock. In elevating the liberatory role of midrash as *open-ended interpretation*, Bruns posits Scripture as fixed. That is, he posits that midrashic rhetoric brought a newly mantic practice, which superseded the dead-letter use of Scripture. This model is essentialist, reductive, and supersessionist in its model of prophecy's decline; in its model of midrash's ascent; and in its model of pre-midrashic scripture as inactive.

So one needs to go further. If one cannot say how Exodus-Deuteronomy works as Scripture, one can hardly say how it works as film. Fortunately, Michael Fishbane's critique goes much further. It is indeed quite useful for understanding *The Ten Commandments*.

Fishbane's arguments suggest that even after the Hebrew Scriptures are canonized (and perhaps even apart from the enlivenment of midrash) they nevertheless feature a great deal of supple divination themselves at several levels, in various practices—and this manticness does not necessarily feed into rabbinical dominance. Moreover Fishbane's account implies that Bruns has romanticized the indeterminacy of early prophecy: rabbinical Judaism co-opted prophecy precisely *because* prophecy *already* was a powerful vehicle for hegemony—only not yet rabbinical hegemony.²⁷³

Fishbane highlights, as a “mantic practice,” what he calls “inner-biblical exegesis.” This refers primarily to “intratextuality,” or internal cross-referencing, within the Hebrew Scriptures themselves. It features typology—“the hermeneutical

²⁷³ See Fishbane 2005, 409: “On occasions of religious rebellion or simply passive disaffection, when the demands of the covenant are disavowed in practice, the aggadic rhetors of ancient Israel frequently reused specific pieces of the *tradtum* in order to realign the community with its entire heritage. The prophet Jeremiah was particularly skilful in this regard.” Moreover, there is ample historic precedent for “prophetic predictions used for propagandistic purposes”: from Egypt, for example, circa 1991 BCE, it was used in support of rulers; also in ancient Mesopotamia (Fishbane 2005, 474-475).

aspect . . . which sees in persons, events, or places the prototype, pattern, or figure of historical persons, events, or places that follow it in time.”²⁷⁴

Radically, Fishbane rejects old arguments, made especially by Jewish scholars, that typology—and the supersessionism it brings—is *essentially* a Christian hermeneutics, based on the “New Testament” superseding the “Old.”²⁷⁵ Though it undeniably has been a prime mode of Christian interpretation, I note that by attributing typology to Christianity, critics had themselves posited a form of supersession, in the very effort of resisting it. That is, the very rhetoric that Christianity used to posit itself as superseding Judaism was not an all-powerful *new* rhetoric—it was “always already” a practice of use of the Hebrew Bible, and furthermore a practice of other ancient Near Eastern uses of scriptures.

In the form of “inner-biblical typologies,”²⁷⁶ the Hebrew Bible itself casts Adam as the type for Noah; it casts Joshua, Elijah, and Ezekiel each as a new Moses.²⁷⁷ Furthermore as Fishbane reads the Book of Exodus in the Hebrew Bible, Moses’s parting of the sea and YHWH’s destruction of the Egyptians, among many other such examples, manifest a typological parallelism in which primordial acts—in this case, primordial combat—stand as the type for future hope.²⁷⁸

Fishbane concludes that typology is a powerfully compelling form of interpretation because mantologically “what is ultimately put at stake is the very rational order which *gives cognitive coherence to time and its terrors.*”²⁷⁹ It is the process of making sense.

In his articulation of “inner-biblical *mantology*,”²⁸⁰ typology makes the *traditum* (content of tradition) into “*the screen* upon which national hope and renewal is contextualized, even imagined,”²⁸¹ and moreover, divinatorily “warranted.”²⁸² That is, “typologies serve . . . as the means whereby the deeper dimensions perceived to be

²⁷⁴ Fishbane 2005, 350.

²⁷⁵ On the hermeneutics of supersessionism see D. Boyarin 1993.

²⁷⁶ Fishbane 2005, pp. 350, 351.

²⁷⁷ Fishbane 2005, 372, 373.

²⁷⁸ Fishbane 2005, 356.

²⁷⁹ Fishbane 2005, 511, emphasis added.

²⁸⁰ Fishbane 2005, 459, emphasis added.

²⁸¹ Fishbane 2005, 413, emphasis added. *Traditum* is opposed to the *traditio*, or process of transmission (Fishbane 2005, 6).

²⁸² Fishbane 2005, 362, 375.

latent in historical events are rendered manifest and explicit to the cultural imagination,”²⁸³ and officially constituted as such.

This is exactly what *The Ten Commandments* does with inner-filmic typology, and most concretely with cross-fades. That is, it seems to allow what is latent—e.g., Jesus from Moses; Moses from the flame (and from the people’s cry); the flame from the American flag on the head of the overseer—to become legible. (See figure 8.1.) In a deep sense, when Hollywood made effective, mantic use of typology, its practice was congruent with the Bible.

RECHANNELING

Fishbane argues that through certain strategies of the Hebrew Bible’s mantic rhetoric, “the addressee is rhetorically co-opted and his attitudes are disengaged and rechanneled.”²⁸⁴ One of these prime strategies is “the *nationalization of content*”: Fishbane identifies its subtypes as “(i) the use of one instance of legal-covenantal transgression as a synecdoche for covenant violations generally,” and “(ii) the rhetorical identification of the activities of the nation with the individual deeds of one person.”²⁸⁵ This too corresponds with *The Ten Commandments*, which not only makes the orgy at the golden calf synecdoche for transgression. Moreover it identifies the deeds of America with the deeds of Moses (Charlton Heston), who censures the orgy. This kind of co-optation is ancient. It is part and parcel of using such a storytelling practice to nurture a sense of national destiny.²⁸⁶

²⁸³ Fishbane 2005, 360.

²⁸⁴ Fishbane 2005, 427. He calls such strategies “aggadic exegesis”: “the received canon of scripture is quintessentially an aggadic trope” (Fishbane 2005, 440).

²⁸⁵ Fishbane 2005, 426, italics in original.

²⁸⁶ “When old mythic theomachies are subsequently reused to underpin purely historical narratives or hopes . . . or when foreign *legenda* are subsequently reused to illustrate national fate . . . the remarkable capacity of tradition radically to build up a sense of *national history and destiny* is fully attested” (Fishbane 2005, 7, emphasis added.)



Figure 8.1. Typological inner-filmic scrying.

Even some tropes that seem like striking anachronisms, in *The Ten Commandments*, turn out to correspond with some of the Hebrew Bible's own prophecies. For example, many critics have found, at the core of DeMille's deracination (or "de-Jewishing") of the story, the film's failure to mention the covenant at Sinai. Instead of a future with the God who led his people out of Egypt, the film frames the Hebrews' future with the God who ended race-based slavery. Yet

this typology corresponds with Jeremiah 16:14-15, where Jeremiah predicts that in the future, a new oath (by God’s restoration of the Israelites from “all the lands to which they had been banished”)²⁸⁷—would replace the current swearing by the exodus as the manifestation of good power.

Moreover, correspondence regards *The Ten Commandments*’ uncanny inversions of identity between Hebrew/Egyptian and Black/White—for example, iconography of the American Flag appearing first on White Egyptians, later on emancipated, Hebrew slaves (see Chapters Three, Four, and Five, plus figure 8.2)



Figure 8.2. The exodus.

Through such inversion, *The Ten Commandments* seems to suggest the redemption of America, historically the Egypt of a captive nation of slaves. One might suppose this purpose, at least, was a new use of divination—unless somehow the Hebrew Bible itself divined the redemption of Egypt.

Indeed it does. In this regard *The Ten Commandments* parallels Isaiah, the Biblical prophet who quotes God’s redemption of “Egypt, my people” (Isaiah 19:25). In the eschatological oracle of Isaiah 19: 19-25, “what is most astonishing is its audacious inversion and transfer of a national tradition of redemption to the very

²⁸⁷ Fishbane 2005, 362.

people—the Egyptians—who were its original enslaver.”²⁸⁸ *The Ten Commandments*’ moves are audacious, yet in some key ways ancient.

CHAPTER CONCLUSION

Notwithstanding previous critiques of this film, it aims neither to make Biblical commentary nor to make a mere adaptation of the Bible. Rather, it aims to do what the Bible does. Through its divinations and its divinability, *The Ten Commandments* comports itself as the redemptive medium extraordinaire—as rightful claimant of the mantle of prophecy.

As *The Ten Commandments* frames *the common tradition*—to encompass the free world as America, and America as the people of moviegoers—pointedly it weaves a matrix of divinatory warrants²⁸⁹ for America as a nation of apocalypse (in the sense of the Greek *apokalypsis*, meaning “revelation” or “unveiling”²⁹⁰). The film gains canonicity by mediating a sense of *the common tradition*, which in America, notably during the Cold War, indeed favors eschatology.²⁹¹

As “a public document disclosed to the apocalyptic community—giving them the secret gnosis through which they may take heart,”²⁹² the film specifically follows the Book of Daniel (10:1 to 12:10). Daniel’s message of a great war comes to him in a vision, much like this film’s opening message of a great war comes in a vision scried from a shifting cloudscape.

Furthermore, much like Daniel’s message features a great prince and a despicable person, so does this film’s. Daniel’s great prince is Michael. “At that time Michael, the great prince who protects your people, will arise. There will be a time of distress such as has not happened from the beginning of nations until then. But at that time your people . . . will be delivered” (12:1-3). Daniel here echoes Exodus 9:24, about something that “had not been [seen] in all the land of Egypt since it became a

²⁸⁸ Fishbane 2005, 367. In Isaiah 19:25, where “Isaiah projects a time when Egypt, like Israel, will also be called ‘my people’ by YHWH,” it seems that “that redemptive event which constituted Israel’s particular destiny has become the prototype by which a more universal, messianic reconciliation is envisaged” (367-368).

²⁸⁹ See Fishbane 2005, 466.

²⁹⁰ Wojcik 1997, 4.

²⁹¹ See Boyer 1992 and Wojcik 1997. See also Lhamon 1990, Nadel 1995, and Chapter Eleven herein. Regarding Pardes’s reference to this film’s capacity of embodying “the biblical vox populi,” I read it in such a sense of eschatology, and divination more broadly, as folk tradition.

²⁹² Fishbane 2005, 516.

nation.” But the film—by applying the line not to the plague of hail, but instead to the rise of Prince Moses (see Chapter Three herein)—follows not Exodus but instead the Book of Daniel.

According to Daniel’s vision, in the estate of a king “a despicable person will arise, on whom the honor of kingship has not been conferred, but he will come in a time of tranquility and seize the kingdom by intrigue” (11:21-22). In *The Ten Commandments*’ narrative, the Hebrew overseer, despicable Dathan, intrigues his way to the governorship of Goshen. Edward G. Robinson—a blacklisted star widely vilified as a Communist traitor—plays Dathan.²⁹³ DeMille, who himself had helped blacklist Robinson as a despicable person, violated the blacklist in order to cast this “despicable person” in the line-blurring, Cold-War drama he was directing.²⁹⁴

At the end of Daniel’s vision-report, after an angel tells him to occult his vision’s meaning when he publishes it, Daniel’s obedience yields “a coded message whose secret meaning is revealed to a special adept—who engaged in strict ascetic procedures prior to his semi-mystical visions.”²⁹⁵ DeMille himself extrafilmically posed as such an adept.

In April 1953, while developing *The Ten Commandments*, as warm-up DeMille addressed a Bible class at a Texas church. As the leader of Biblical cinema he compared himself to “the old religious painters [who] spent hours in prayer before touching brush to canvas.” Though he did not claim his crew was ascetic, he did say its members endeavored “to make our minds and our work channels for the expression of the Mind of God.”²⁹⁶ That is, he said *The Ten Commandments* would be channeling.

He framed his impending exploitation of secretly revealed, Biblical meaning, by comparing it to America’s recent harnessing of the power of the atom.

The word of God does not change. But our
understanding of it grows and deepens as we learn
more. It is like the atom. It is as old as the word. But we

²⁹³ Nadel 1995[1993].

²⁹⁴ See Ceplaire and Englund 1980. See also the DeMille Archives’ letters vilifying DeMille for his decision to employ the villainous Robinson.

²⁹⁵ Fishbane 2005, 517.

²⁹⁶ DeMille 1953a, 6.

have just now learned how to use it, and I hope we are going to use it for production rather than destruction. So it is with the Divine message of the Bible. It is there for us to find if we look for it the right way.²⁹⁷

His stated goal was to bring his auditors to share the role as finder of hidden meanings.

Fishbane concludes that for the ancient users of the Book of Daniel, inner-biblical mantology works because “the group can transcend the threats of destruction confronting them via the human powers of the mundane world by focusing on the truths revealed by angelic powers and the realities of their supramundane world.”²⁹⁸ DeMille’s production aimed similarly to transcend the threats of destruction confronting his auditors. To reach that transcendence, he said one had to know where to look.

He suggested America’s successful *production* should warrant America’s worthiness. So in *The Ten Commandments*, as I have recounted, Pharaoh Sethi, unable to build his own treasure-city, holds a trial-by-ordeal for Moses, who succeeds (though his victory is later nullified): Sethi awards Moses with the throne—the mantle of empire—on the basis of Moses’s completion of the city. Egypt’s massive construction under Sethi represents America’s massive construction of the 1950s, which in turn not only bespeaks an “edifice complex” but moreover warrants America as inheritor of the mantle of global empire.²⁹⁹

This kind of mantic reading—of an ordeal’s completion as the sign of the completer’s deservedness—is of course Calvinist, but also older. In this mantic episode, the film closely parallels 1 Chronicles 28, in which King David, unable to build his own shrine, holds a trial-by-ordeal for Solomon, awarding him the throne on the basis of Solomon’s construction of a shrine for his ruler.

Generally, the salience of divination to a tale becomes especially apparent as the tale procures supplementary warrantings. In the case of Chronicles, after selecting Solomon, King David cites an old oracle that Solomon would build YHWH’s

²⁹⁷ DeMille 1953b.

²⁹⁸ Fishbane 2005, 517.

²⁹⁹ On the construction boom, see Nadel 1995.

Temple. In the case of *The Ten Commandments*, a plethora of mantic practices adds to already-nested layers of mantology.

Fishbane's conclusions suggest that mantological exegesis is not delimited by the political conditions of its production: furthermore it tends to open new situations to view. Particularly typology divines "a counter-reality of promise or anticipation that is already lived proleptically in the present."³⁰⁰ It seems that not even canonization nor the suppression of classical prophecy has foreclosed on this transformative potential of Scripture.

Though potential is not foreclosed, of course invocations of counter-reality very rarely get too far, while a powerful hegemony holds sway. The point is potential. Hegemony, which can never eliminate potential, instead co-opts it. Positively, divination—even in its most highly co-opted forms—can open new paths transformatively, by tracking different historical rhythms. The conclusion of this dissertation discusses such tracings of "counter-reality."

Meanwhile, as with the vision-report of the Book of Daniel, people often occult things *in order that they should be divined*. Major examples include puzzles and games, allegorical writing, as well as racy discourses skirting taboos. (A minor example is DeMille burying the sets of the first *The Ten Commandments* in 1923, which in 1983 were unearthed by an archeologist.³⁰¹)

Of course there is plenty of genealogy stretching between the Hebrew Bible and *The Ten Commandments*. Towards navigating it, as this dissertation opens a discussion of Christian mantology, I conclude here with Fishbane's implication that, closely based on the Hebrew Scripture's mantology, Christianity developed an intense "scrutinizing consciousness—fateful and faithful at once."³⁰²

³⁰⁰ Fishbane 2005, 518.

³⁰¹ Higashi 1994, 182; and 247, note 8.

³⁰² Fishbane 2005, 523. Of course Greek practices also shaped Christian ones.

CHAPTER NINE: MANTOLOGY FROM ANCIENT GREECE TO INQUISITIONS

OVERVIEW

Regarding *The Ten Commandments*' mantic rhetorics, the present chapter sketches genealogies from Greece to Rome, and from early through medieval Christianity. What are the ancestral practices of interpretation, in "the Western tradition"? In place of the far-flung communities of users of the ancient Hebrew Bible, Western Classical scholars cite the schools circa 200 BCE at the leading libraries of the Hellenistic world—Alexandria and Pergamum.³⁰³

The present chapter focuses on two levels: enigmas of allegory, and enigmas of self. Preliminarily I emphasize that only in the Middle Ages did *allegory* come to refer largely to a practice of *writing* allegories.³⁰⁴ Notwithstanding the work of Virgil and others who apparently built allegorical associations into their poems,³⁰⁵ in its more ancient sense *allegory* refers to a mode of reading.³⁰⁶ Especially because any writer must first interpret the allegory one writes, this dissertation uses *allegory* in the ancient sense, to refer to a mode of reading.

³⁰³ A great many Alexandrians were Jewish, so it is not entirely a substitution, to cite Alexandrians instead of users of the Hebrew Bible. However the point is that Classicists tend not to give credit to the Jews. Returning the favor, Fishbane suggests the Jews developed their traditions independently of the Greeks.

³⁰⁴ Murrin 1980, 3-25, cited by Struck 2005, 152.

³⁰⁵ Murrin 1980, 3-25, cited by Struck 2005, 152.

³⁰⁶ See Struck 2005, 148.

In his seminal account of “The Rise of Hermeneutics” (1900; translated in 1972 by Fredric Jameson), Wilhelm Dilthey—a giant of modern hermeneutics—holds that for the ancients, the main game was to handle indeterminacies, in order to resolve them with determinations. Alexandrians’ unease with unverified, agglomerated texts prompted them to develop and deploy a method for textual verification, Dilthey suggests.³⁰⁷ The verification warranted a properly coherent, canonical text. In other words, across the indeterminacy of incoherence, by deploying the Alexandrian rules of excision, one reached each determination.

“PRE-CHRISTIAN” (NON-ISRAELITE, NON-CHRISTIAN)
MANTOLOGY

The ancient Pergaminians adapted such a formalized method of interpretation, but for a rather different level of resolving unruliness. It seems they valued the highest spiritual expression not only as channeling order, but further, as transcending the human body. Meanwhile they regarded Homer as the pinnacle of spiritual expression: but Homer features crude imagery of the body. One imagines that whenever they regarded the glaring impurities in the great Homer’s work, this contradiction troubled the Pergaminians, so they developed their method. They read Homer’s sensually crude images as *allegories* for spiritual meanings Homer had hidden.

According to Dilthey the Pergaminians’ systemology of allegory came from “a profound insight into literary and religious productivity”: “Homer was a seer”—a diviner. It seemed Homer had divined some secret, spiritual meaning of life, which he hid in his verses for interpreters to re-divine.

Allegorism’s congruence with divination, Peter T. Struck concludes, is based on a homology: “allegorism developed by . . . transposing conceptual categories” from divination into allegorism, so that ancient use of Greek poetry actually involved

³⁰⁷ Dilthey 1972, 234-235. Dilthey says that the Alexandrians’ method was to identify the purely canonical core of each of their canonical epics; use this core as a baseline against which to compare every other part of the received text of that particular epic; and excise the unwarranted additions, yielding a fully warranted text. My discussion of the Greeks here is indebted to Dilthey.

“divinatory thinking.”³⁰⁸ In his essay, “Divination and Literary Criticism?”, Struck—a professor of classics with an unusual collection of degrees in anthropology, religion, and comparative literature—argues that allegorical reading “introduce[d] to Western criticism the distinction between a surface level of the text and an under-level where secret meanings lurk,” to be divined.³⁰⁹ In the Classical period, allegorists and other omen-mongers “see their texts specifically as ‘enigmas’ which carry hidden meanings to the skilled interpreter.”³¹⁰

As in other practices of divination, humans tend to access these meanings in order to locate themselves.³¹¹ They cannot be too accessible: that is, the enigmas cannot be too straightforward without joining the surface-meaning. In accordance with “the notion that truly meaningful language is precisely that which is unclear,”³¹² typically allegorical truth appears ambiguously, with slippage.

This feature of allegorism can satisfyingly explain why *The Ten Commandments* shuffles its slippery iconography: it is in order to reach determinations through indeterminacy. Moreover, this is why this film is perennially compelling. It makes satisfying meanings available.

MANTOLOGY OF THE EARLY CHRISTIAN CHURCH

The allegorical method later became an epochal mainstay, Dilthey suggests, after it enabled the early Christian church to resolve its own key, scriptural contradiction. The early Church faced indeterminacy in differentiating its flock from other users of the Hebrew Bible. How should early Christians use the Hebrew-Bible-within-the-Christian-Bible? As the early Christian church deployed the allegorical method, in keeping with a thrust of the Gospels themselves, for Christians the Hebrew Bible tended to resolve into merely an *allegorical* Old Testament

³⁰⁸ Struck 2005, 147. See also 151: “If people were in the habit of seeing their poets as *manteis*, even in only a vestigial way, it seems entirely plausible that at least some might be inclined to approach the poets’ words with a batch of assumptions that was congruent to the batch that guided their approach to oracles.”

³⁰⁹ Struck 2005, 148.

³¹⁰ Struck 2005, 164.

³¹¹ Struck 2005, 150.

³¹² Struck 2005, 156.

representing the New Testament.³¹³ From a Jewish perspective it can seem that supersessionist allegorizing tends to claim, “Your scripture represents ours; ours is real.”

The allegorizing stops with the New Testament, the early Church claimed, as it tried to frame its scripture as non-allegorical. This dichotomy helped the Church differentiate itself from rabbinical Judaism. Furthermore, opposition to allegorizing the New Testament was aimed specifically at another competing creed, Gnosticism.

DIVINATION OF THE SELF

Though “divination has been thoroughly studied by anthropologists in pre-literate societies,” relatively, “hardly an account has been taken of the fact that divination has also been a part of Western Christianity” and its hermeneutics all along.³¹⁴ Such oversight, as if presuming modern civilization no longer needed such practices, is symptomatic of a supersessionist view of cultural development which regards monotheism as if it neatly superseded polytheism; Christianity as if it superseded Judaism; and the rites of secular modernity as if they had superseded all previous rites.

However Preus claims that Western practices of Christian divination obey “the same rules as those found in other cultures, including those that do not use written texts.”³¹⁵ Preus suggests that performers of Christian divination generally remain unaware of their own performance as such: “Like a language it has a socially-constituted grammar that participants seem to know intuitively.”³¹⁶

By arguing that many deniers indeed are practicing divination, I may seem to be attributing false consciousness to them. However, I follow Preus and Foucault—not to mention my childhood neighbors, Brian and Ducko—when I characterize divination as a socially-constituted grammar.

³¹³ Dilthey 1972, 236.

³¹⁴ Preus 1991, 441.

³¹⁵ Preus 1991, 441.

³¹⁶ Preus 1991, 441. “”

Questions about people “knowing what they are doing” are not necessarily relevant to analyzing practices.³¹⁷ If one can say what people have been doing, and can surmise what people know they are *supposed* to be doing, this much can suffice.

Since its beginnings, Christianity of the Church has spurred each person “to try to know what is happening inside him, . . . to recognize temptations, to locate desires”³¹⁸ —“to decipher himself in regard to what was forbidden.”³¹⁹ The main rite employed by penitents was exomologesis, which “rubs out the sin and yet reveals the sinner.” Foucault suggests, in his lecture on such “Technologies of the Self,” that penitents’ main models for exomologesis were medical diagnosis, the tribunal of judgment, and trial by ordeal.

Analyzing the chastity of Cassian, Foucault finds this self-divination had developed into “an entire technique for analysing and diagnosing thought, . . . its dangers, its powers of seduction, and all the obscure forces which may be hidden under the aspect which it presents.”³²⁰ In this mantic inquiry, “the questioning should be posed always in such a way that it flushes out all secret ‘fornication’ which may be hidden in the deepest folds of the soul.”

Meanwhile as Christianity purported to supersede older practices of divination, actually it co-opted divination for itself. By the fourth century C.E. most soothsaying had been banned in the Roman Empire: “public divination was forbidden Therefore, one had to interpret one’s own dreams; one had to be a self-interpreter.”

MEDIEVAL CHRISTIAN DIVINING

Christian divination, featuring “the same attitude of mind which allows divination by auguries,” in the early Middle Ages “leads to the practice and the diffusion of the criminal examination by ordeals and the judicial combat.”³²¹ Ordeals

³¹⁷ See also Chapter Fifteen herein, footnote 7 (on “mantic efficacy”).

³¹⁸ Foucault 1988a. All references to Foucault in this section, unless otherwise noted, are to this text.

³¹⁹ Foucault 1988a.

³²⁰ Foucault 1982, 23. Foucault refers specifically to the combat of chastity in Cassian.

³²¹ Esmein 1914, 6-7.

and duels are trials: that is, they are divinations that “provide rules for producing an unequivocal outcome” on which “a clear decision about social relations” will depend.³²²

By the central Middle Ages, authorities had instituted and consolidated control of trial by ordeal, as an inquisitorial system which spread across Europe.³²³ Increasingly this system read physical pain in order to divine unfaithful desires.³²⁴ Literally the body was “a medium by which the truth about the self’s essential potentiality for transgression could be brought into the light.”³²⁵ In this era the human body was the nearest thing to a mass media.

Moreover the human body is also the social body: “an entire network of functions through which . . . testing . . . can take place.”³²⁶ Thus, from early Christianity’s practices of self-divination, there came a highly social form: in it “the form of a quest for the truth about oneself is brought about [mainly] across complex relations with others.”³²⁷ Mantic practice commonly became much less self-contained than it had been.

CHAPTER CONCLUSION

These rites of divination are writ large in the genealogy of *The Ten Commandments*. When Bithiah interrupts Moses’s racy tryst with Nefretiri, she announces that he is in grave danger from the woman. She represents the scrutinizing self (Freud would say “the superego”) divining hidden forces. The seductive danger lies in lust, which the film’s erotic display meanwhile might well arouse in a viewer.

Regarding exomologesis, it joins the genealogy of the film’s trials by ordeal, and particularly of Moses’s facing Pharaoh Sethi’s tribunal of judgment.

³²² Asad 1993, 90.

³²³ Asad 1993, 122.

³²⁴ Asad 1993, 110.

³²⁵ Asad 1993, 110.

³²⁶ Asad 1993, 113. Though Asad here refers here to the “monastic body as a whole,” he argues for its relevance to the encompassing, social body. .

³²⁷ Foucault 1982.

Between characters of *The Ten Commandments*, the webs of triangulations themselves serve in a social form of self-locating. Specifically, the combat over a lover (over Nefretiri, over Lilia, over Moses, over Joshua) functions as a duel.

The grueling duration of this film also functions as an ordeal. So does Moses's building of the treasure-city, his descent into the mud pits, and his ongoing chastity with lustful Nefretiri.

Meanwhile the whippings relate to somatomancy, or divination by the body.³²⁸ Joshua, when whipped, evinces his steadfastness by refusing to show sign of pain or submission. Moses's *lack* of whip-scars gets read—first by a male slave in the brick pits, then by Moses's own mother—as a key sign of his identity.

The film positions the viewer as diviner as if this were the Christian way, the Protestant way, and the American way: everyone must interpret one's own inner self. However actually in Christianity before the Reformation, priests as confessors read each sinner and divined the penance to fit the sin. It was the Reformation that foregrounded, universalized, and amplified *self*-mantology.

³²⁸ See Lessa 1952.

CHAPTER TEN: PROTESTANT TO AMERICAN MANTOLOGY

OVERVIEW

In further tracing a genealogy of *The Ten Commandments*-as-divination, the present chapter extends from the Reformation through early-nineteenth-century America.

The Church already had moved to dissociate itself from dueling and the grosser practices of trial by ordeal. After Reformation, Protestantism maintained Christianity's old imperative of self-decipherment (in regard to what was forbidden), while continuing to emphasize the scrutinizing of fate.

Protestantism's prime practices of divination interpret *evidence*. One's consciousness presides at an *internal* tribunal: "the self is on trial."³²⁹

In developing its practice of self-trial, Protestantism absorbed, as if from the inquisitorial system, the practice of trial by tribunal. Not only a monk such as Cassian would cultivate his inner hunter-judge now. Not only the inquisitor, not only the Catholic priest hearing confession, but moreover now each individual had to function as such a diviner.³³⁰ That is, in bypassing the practice of confession to priests, in

³²⁹ Preus 1991, 447. Preus refers here to Puritanism, but I am referring more generally to early Protestantism.

³³⁰ I say "each person" instead of "each Christian" because I am discussing Christian perspective, which aims at universality; and also because I am emphasizing that Christian practices exceed the bounds of "Christians. Inquisitions and other persecutions spurred adoption of Christian practices even by non-converts. Largely, though far from a one-way process, even much of non-Christian culture acculturated to it.

Protestantism the individual plays the role not only of a detective hunting one's own sins, and not only of self-prosecutor, but finally the role of judge.

While rites of exomologesis had aimed at revealing the sinner, Protestantism emphasized the *evidence* itself. Preus, who characterizes Protestant Christianity as an information system, suggests one consider "that divination in the broad sense of obtaining the divine knowledge necessary for salvation became *the* quintessential religious act of Protestant Christianity."³³¹

With Protestantism, mantic practice of Christianity expands. Divining gains importance as a more generalized act, for everyone's constant use. Now a rite of self-divination at *no point* requires a shaman nor a prophet nor a priest, but is the express duty of every self all the time.³³²

Protestantism generalizes mantic practice largely by capitalizing on print—the first industrial, mass medium. Under Protestantism, the spread of access to printed Bibles officially helps to "qualify" all individuals—potentially at least, pending literacy—as Christian self-diviners. This qualification-potential was new—in the middle ages, while inquisitors consulted the living, human body-as-medium, only a very select few qualified as inquisitor.

Furthermore, from an older sense of ritual as marking the passage of days and seasons, Protestantism developed mantic practices for use any time, and moreover practices meant for use all the time. It situated Christian, mantic practice not only as universally accessible, but also in tune with an industrial sense of time.

However meanwhile, the older, more occasion-specific practices of divination have overlapped with newer practices. For example, in early industrial folklore, the circulation of printed Bibles enabled the spread of bibliomancy.³³³

³³¹ Preus 1991, 442.

³³² Of course, some readers may object that Jewish and/or Christian practices should not be called divination at all. However, to understand the genealogy of "movie magic" in terms of divination, one must come to terms with mantic inquiry in Jewish and Christian rites, call it what one will.

³³³ This was "divinatory use of the Bible in a new key—a use recognized and viewed with alarm by some seventeenth-century contemporaries, e.g., Thomas Hobbes" (Preus 1991, 442).

PURITAN SELF-TYPOLOGY

According to Preus, Protestant emphasis on self-divination intensified in England particularly through Puritanism and especially its theology of election. Puritanism posited that God had already awarded salvation to certain individuals—“the elect”—whose names he kept in a list. “Above all, these sorts of Christians are concerned with one question: who are the elect and who are the reprobate?”³³⁴

Because this is a question beyond the range of ordinary human understanding, the method used to answer it is a form of divination. As such, I note, it is an extrapolation from classical prophecy, which already had declared certain city-states as reprobate, and the nation of Israel as, overall, elect. Puritanism extrapolated the basic form, to self-divination.

Moreover and more directly, Puritan self-divination adapts the ancient, mantological form of typology. Already, Biblical typology interpreted Biblical characters as the figure of subsequent *historical* persons.³³⁵ the Puritans expanded typology, I note, to apply to themselves as every-day persons. The stories of their own lives, they read typologically in relation to Biblical tales.³³⁶ Their question was “which of those Biblical characters *applies to me* here and now?”³³⁷ As the *here and now* shifted from moment to moment, this divination always involved indeterminacy.

Users aligned the Biblical tales with their own life stories. In Puritanism, where “God’s eternal ‘canon’ is a list of names,” meanwhile the Christian Bible functions as humans’ canonical cast of characters—as “*exempla* of the elect and reprobate.”³³⁸ In this sense of a canon as *binding* on a collective, Puritan discourse features Biblical tales. That is, “Scripture, the medium of access to divine knowledge, offers an earthly catalogue of exemplars,”³³⁹ which function as portents.

This is a complex, nested mode of divination. The Bible already featured inner-Biblical typology, and a deep history of use in prophecy. Puritans are seeing the

³³⁴ Preus 1991, 449.

³³⁵ Fishbane 1985, 350.

³³⁶ Preus 1991, 447.

³³⁷ Preus 1991, 449.

³³⁸ Preus 1991, 449.

³³⁹ Preus 1991, 449.

ancient Hebrews collectively as proto-Christians. The Bible stories offer portents for divining their own status.³⁴⁰ (See figure 10.1 below.)

Historically, of course, Protestantism's development of the role of self-judge arises counter-hegemonically, towards transcending Church authority. However in the service *of* a hegemony, this role of self-judge—an internalization of authority—territorializes a subjects' will.

Puritanism—yet another attempt to divine the true, pure core of Christianity—redoubled this dynamic as it diverged from the Church of England. At first a counter-hegemony, as it developed into a hegemony of its own it increased the ability of hegemony to co-opt resistance.

³⁴⁰ Preus 1991, 449.

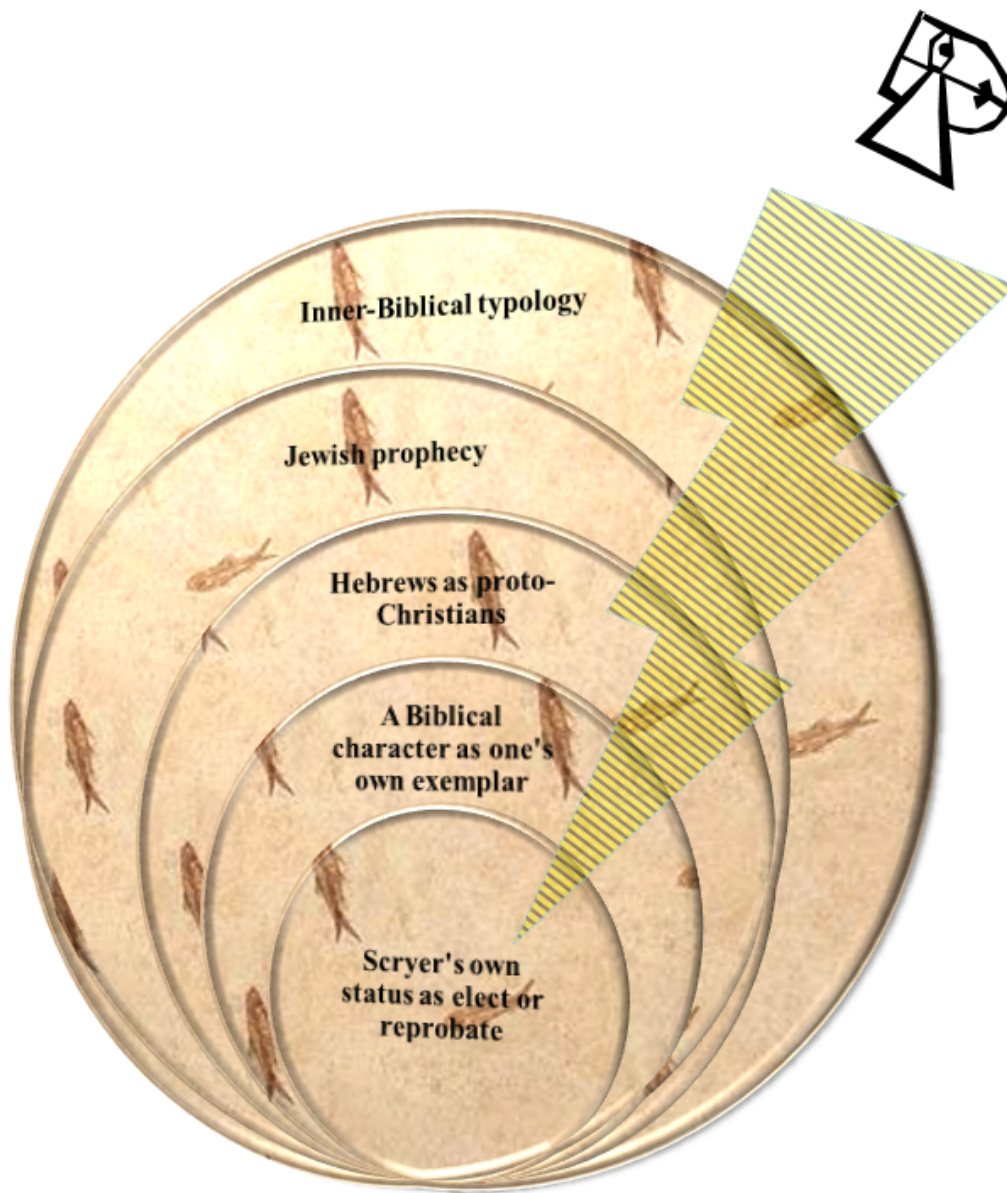


Figure 10.1. Puritan typological scrying.

AMERICAN JEREMIADIC *HEGEMANCY* AND ITS GENEALOGIES

In early America, Exodus typology flourished, functioning to divine American identity. In its civil religion, America's typology "has served as a rationale for the whole country," as well as meanwhile for many of its ethnic groups and regions.³⁴¹ In this sense "this country is, as everybody knows, a creation of the Bible, particularly the Old Testament."³⁴² In Colonial-era sermons, even during the seventeenth century routinely New England Puritan ministers substituted their land for Israel, finding that "AMERICA is legible in these promises"³⁴³ for those deploying the proper method of interpreting the signs.

New England Puritan practices included not only typology, but meanwhile older practices of divination, too. For example, they interpreted the meaning of earthquakes,³⁴⁴ which is a classic form of divination-by-natural-phenomenon. Furthermore the influence of the *Zohar*—which can be characterized as a divination-text—imbricates the New England Puritan's seventeenth-century writings.³⁴⁵

What the Puritans mainly introduced as new, I argue, was a mantology that integrated older and modern senses of time—that is, a sense of "typological time" with the modern sense of "current events." Modern time is linear; but typological time is like a spiral whose arms are bridged by correspondences, jumping epochs.

This dissertation's next chapter discusses modern time further, arguing that divination-by-print, especially in the form of daily newspapers, engendered industrial time in Europe from 1609. In early modernity, basic patterns of mediation—procuring new warrants of Church, and tracking time and other information—inextricably interweave. Nevertheless the present chapter, for ease of analysis, focuses on certain strands of Protestantism, Puritanism, and American rhetoric.

³⁴¹ Sollors 1986, pp. 39, 193. Sollors says America has not been Canaan in the divine sense, and moreover suggests that a premise of America as exceptionally divinely inspired would not fit with his scholarly method (Sollors 1986, 261). I am similarly bracketing the question, though I might say I oppose exceptionalism.

³⁴² Schechter 1903, quoted by Sollors 1986, 40.

³⁴³ Bercovitch 1978, 80.

³⁴⁴ Bercovitch 1978, 101, n.

³⁴⁵ Bercovitch 1978, 74, n. Bercovitch cites also more generally "exchange of millennial speculations among Jewish and Christian scholars" which fed into Protestant apocalypticism" (74).

Perry Miller suggests that the Puritans' basic, mantic practice of interpreting current events had jelled by 1679 when a synod of leading clerics, in "something of a ritual incantation," would "set up the doctrine that God avenges the iniquities of a chosen people . . . bringing the list up to date by inserting the new and still more depraved practices an ingenious people kept devising."³⁴⁶ Jonathan Edwards emphasized this practice with his "obsessive speculation about current events."³⁴⁷

I refer to this practice as *spin doctoring* because, although it is incongruous to use such a late-twentieth-century term to discuss a seventeenth-century practice, I find it fitting for several reasons. First, "spin" refers to the political recontextualizations of news items, in the practice of hegemony. Second, "spin" evokes Victor Turner, not only in name but moreover in his articulation of cultural performance as public relations: according to Turner all forms of cultural performance "have to circle, as it were, around the earth of the social drama, and some, like satellites, may exert tidal effects on its inner structure" as the social drama itself spins.³⁴⁸ Finally, I argue that the term *spin doctor* derives etymologically from *witch doctor*, a vernacular term for an African diviner.³⁴⁹ Within the framework of *breaking news*—which involves indeterminacy—as pieces of news break towards volatile territory, the *spin doctor* performs public interpretations.

By the 1730s for Jonathan Edwards—a spin doctor of current events in relation to history—America opened "the way for the future, glorious times."³⁵⁰ Then in 1776, Samuel Sherwood delivered a pivotal sermon paying close attention to current events. This Revolutionary sermon came in a then-popular mode of tracing a Catholic conspiracy to "the corrupt system of . . . Great Britain, which appears so favourable to popery."³⁵¹

The mantic mode of conspiracy-tracing had become key as the Reformation championed a new civil society to supersede an older social order—whose deep operations, alas, posed a danger that required tracing. Following the Reformation,

³⁴⁶ Miller 1952, 8, 15. See Bercovitch 1978, 5.

³⁴⁷ Bercovitch 1978, 99, n. See also 115, 117.

³⁴⁸ Turner 1980, 159.

³⁴⁹ See Franklin 1998.

³⁵⁰ Edwards 1842[1987], 469. See Bercovitch 1978, 99.

³⁵¹ Sherwood 1776, 14-15. See Bercovitch 1978, 125 and n. Arthur Southon, for the title of his novel, *On Eagles' Wings*—on which *The Ten Commandments* is based—perhaps borrowed his titular phrase from Sherwood, who spoke of how God "brought his church in to this wilderness on eagles' wings" (22-23).

American rhetors furthermore portended that the New World's ways would supersede the Old World's "Egypt."

The divination of conspiracy—itsself a trope older than the Book of Daniel (see Chapter Eight)—here dovetails with other forms of divination, including divination-by-current-events, divination-by-the-slave-as-trope, and typology.

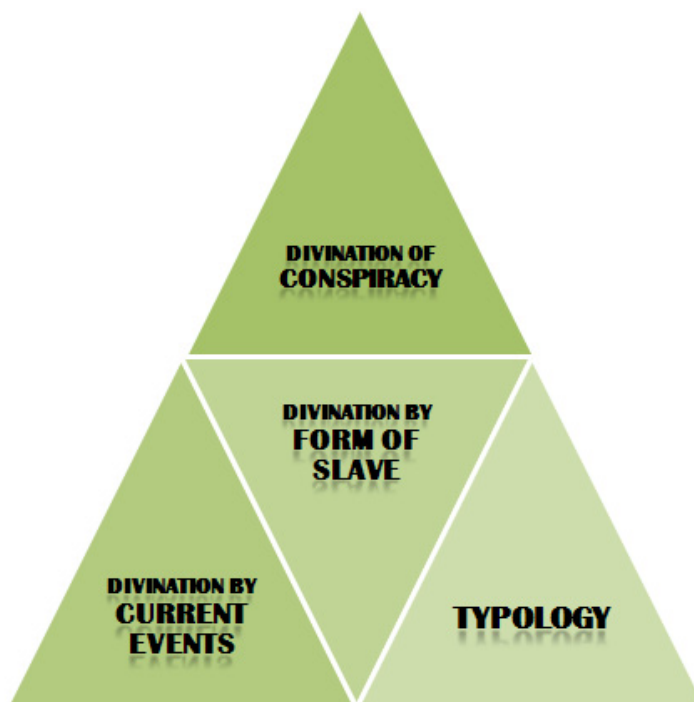


Figure 10.2. A powerfully compounded mantic formation.

Rhetorically at least, the mantic rite compounding these forms was the trial, which made the "legal eagle" America's avatar as it prepared to supersede the Old

World and become the world's lawgiver like Moses.³⁵² The trials facing the nation were a Protestant self-tribunal plus an ancient trial by ordeal.

A trial not only could trace a volatile, internal conspiracy: moreover a trial compounded the current events of war with the typology of national identity. For Jonathan Edwards, “if the ‘state of the nation . . . never looked so threatening’—then there was cause to rejoice, because it was precisely through such a ‘time of testing’ that Christ’s American soldiers could prove their sainthood.”³⁵³

The rhetoric resounded with mantology. Before, during, and after the War for Independence, American rhetors found “every fact that touched upon the war was pregnant” with portents.³⁵⁴ By the end of the 1770s, in Massachusetts, Maine, South Carolina, and Virginia, July Fourth orators motivated their countrymen by systematically divining “the correspondence between local progress and “the vast designs of providence.”³⁵⁵

Again, after counterhegemony won the day, it become a new, more sophisticated hegemony, as rather than engendering the next rebellion, instead Americans invested in keeping revolutionary impulses under wraps.³⁵⁶

Americans made a nation based on the function of exomologesis, which “rubs out the sin and yet reveals the sinner.”³⁵⁷ Except, in the American version, the rite of rubbing sin would reveal the identity of virtue—national election.

As the newer mantic practices enthusiastically scourged the national body’s depravity, Abram Maury in 1847 warned that “if we should become corrupt and unprincipled . . . no horoscope shall be needed to forecast our destinies.”³⁵⁸ No horoscope was needed for this forecasting because fortunately America featured

³⁵² See Bercovitch 1978, 114. The term *compounding*, I am borrowing from the discussion, in J. Boyarin 1992 (535-536) of a *technique of compounding*. In summarizing Nicholas Howe’s 1989 account of the Old English *Exodus*, J. Boyarin refers to a technique of using compound words: “The technique of compounding, particularly rich in Old English, serves as the means by which multiple semantic valences are bound in the same text.” Extrapolating from this linguistic articulation, I am arguing that certain practices, by deploying several mantic rhetorics and media—e.g., jeremiadic, melodramatic, Orientalist, blackface cinema—draw power by compounding multiple mantic valences.

³⁵³ Bercovitch 1978, 102.

³⁵⁴ Bercovitch 1978, 116.

³⁵⁵ Bercovitch 1978, 141.

³⁵⁶ Thus the U.S. “has always restricted the ritual of consensus to a certain group within the culture” (Bercovitch 1978, 134).

³⁵⁷ The quotation is Foucault 1988a.

³⁵⁸ Bercovitch 1978, 150.

“persons endowed with the . . . gift of detecting . . . the most appalling portents”³⁵⁹—diviners.

Meanwhile it had become traditional to declare every July Fourth that the American Revolution revealed “the pattern of things to come.”³⁶⁰ But what was this pattern?

While interpreting “continuing revolution as appeal for national consensus,”³⁶¹ actually such appeal has functioned historically towards forestalling too much inclusiveness.³⁶² American discourse—which is to say, American understanding—tends to read American revolution as portending the mandate for a certain categorical elite to rule.

Because national identity and consensus are based on “revolution,” radical alternatives come to seem un-American, and so tend to remain nothing more than minor threats.³⁶³ In the rites of America’s persistently “astonishing cultural hegemony,”³⁶⁴ American rhetoric of trials channels revolution into the service of the social order.³⁶⁵ The hegemony is particularly effective because by always declaring itself as dissenting, the polity has already co-opted the “outside” role for dissenting voices. So American rhetoric of trials has tended to come notably from hegemons.

Because it was Jeremiah who most fiercely proclaimed the signs that a national trial-by-God was underway, American insiders’ paradigmatic rhetorical rite, the jeremiad, bears his name—even though the Biblical prophet, Jeremiah, scourged the sins of the body politic as angry *outsider*, and although he himself in turn was judicially tried by his auditors-within-the-narrative. Sacvan Bercovitch’s study of *The American Jeremiad*—to which I am indebted for much of foregoing discussion—documents America’s jeremiadic mantology of its own role—its society, its history, and its upgrading of the English doctrine of *national* election into a doctrine of manifest destiny in the earthly world. He defines the American jeremiad as “the

³⁵⁹ William Evans Arthur, on July Fourth, 1850, in Covington, Kentucky; quoted by Bercovitch 1978, 146.

³⁶⁰ Bercovitch 1978, 143-144.

³⁶¹ Bercovitch 1978, 152.

³⁶² Bercovitch 1978, 160, 154. The performance of “continuing revolution” fosters “an American consensus that has broadened . . . to include all denominations of *our* (Anglo-Saxon Protestant) *race*” (Bercovitch 1978, 165). This rubric includes, I would argue, model minorities as “honorary Whites.”

³⁶³ See Bercovitch 1978, 160.

³⁶⁴ Bercovitch 1978, 28.

³⁶⁵ Bercovitch 1978, pp. 28, 150, 141, and 134, n. He further writes, “in virtually every area of life, the jeremiad became the official ritual form of continuing revolution” (Bercovitch 1978, 141).

political sermon . . . the state-of-the-covenant address . . . which has been designated as the jeremiad,” and delivered usually in the U.S.’s civil ceremonies, such as “artillery-company ceremonies,” the Fourth of July, etc.”³⁶⁶

Bercovitch’s account of civil millennialism suggests eschatological speechmaking constitutes a rite of national divination.³⁶⁷ However, he does not actually say so, nor name divination. Instead when Bercovitch demonstrates that “the American Puritan jeremiad was the ritual of a culture . . . based on a faith in process,” he names not a process of divination but the “rite of passage.”³⁶⁸

I do not claim that the rite of passage is irrelevant, when I say that more saliently the jeremiad is a rite of divination. Though the two kinds of performances tend to overlap³⁶⁹—and though America performs supersession of its former status—nevertheless the outcome of the American jeremiad is not a passage but an oracle, the answer of a rite of divination. I find Bercovitch gestures in this direction when he suggests individualism’s *volatility* as a risky exposure, across which American jeremiads reach a hegemonic determination.³⁷⁰

PURITANISM AND “CINEMANCY”

As Protestantism has contributed to how American culture has hailed diviners-at-large, and interpellated “the public” as a collective diviner, certain visual practices gave precedent to *The Ten Commandments*’ visual enigmas. For instance, as part of

³⁶⁶ Bercovitch 1978, 4. See also 6, 7. He notes that America’s was an exceptional use of the jeremiad because previously in Europe “the jeremiad pertained exclusively to mundane, social matters, to the city of man rather than the city of God.” Bercovitch also claims that the colonial Puritans introduced and standardized jeremiadic *optimism*, which “inverts the doctrine of vengeance into a promise of ultimate success.” However Fishbane would disagree that this use or its optimism was new to the Jeremiad. Fishbane suggests that some ancient communities did not distinguish, in their use jeremiads, between “the city of man rather than the city of God.” Moreover Fishbane finds this inversion-to-optimism part of inner-Biblical mantology: “the prophecy which had been formulated originally to forecast doom on the native land and the subjugation of its inhabitants for a period of seventy years”—Jeremiah 25:9-12—was subsequently reinterpreted in Jeremiah 29:10 “as a prophecy of hope for the diasporic community” (Fishbane 1985, 480).

³⁶⁷ See also Smolinski 1990, Hatch 1974, Block 1988, Lamy 1992.

³⁶⁸ Bercovitch 1978, 23.

³⁶⁹ “The unveiling of the mysteries of an unknown space becomes a *rite de passage* allegorizing the Western achievement of virile heroic stature” (Shohat 1997, 27; she refers to the nineteenth century).

³⁷⁰ See Bercovitch 1978, 24. That is, “given the Calvinist tenet that salvation is a lifelong enterprise, it is an errand fraught with all the religious and economic dangers of unfettered individualism: the excesses both of antinomianism and of self-interest. The American Puritan jeremiads seek (in effect) to prevent these excesses” (Bercovitch 1978, 25).

America's mid-nineteenth century Sunday-school movement, presenters solicited their viewers' attention with "chalk talk" on blackboards, often featuring a series of drawings in which one figure morphed into the next,³⁷¹ not unlike cinematic cross-fades came to do. Meanwhile since the eighteenth century, primers and "hieroglyphic Bibles," as "a popular form of Protestant visual culture," engaged children in tracing hidden, coded meanings in rebus puzzles.³⁷² Generally with mass cultural texts,

it is in the shift of the viewer's attention to the "how" by which the trivial resolution is achieved, "the rebus-like detail," that the "hieroglyphic meaning flashes up in him or her." In other words, Horkheimer and Adorno ascribe the effectivity of mass-cultural scripts of identity not simply to the viewers' manipulation as passive consumers, but rather to their very solicitation as experts—³⁷³

—that is, as diviners.

Puritanism specifically set the stage for the manticness of cinema because under Puritanism "the self's consciousness has to be *split*, so that the Bible-informed conscience can function as the diviner."³⁷⁴ In place of being Bible-informed, the twentieth-century's *cinemantis* absorbed Hollywood's rubrics of sexual titillation, across whose volatility one reaches a safe determination.

Moreover, mantic cinema comes to feature the star system, which Hollywood invented, enabling each user to divine which star is her idol. Much as Calvinists had developed mantic use of Bible characters by keying their stories to one's own life, Hollywood pioneered *the cult of the star*.³⁷⁵ These cults canonized stars by making their stories available, notably through newspapers, for users' divinations of where they themselves stood.

³⁷¹ Morgan 2002, 48-49.

³⁷² Morgan 2002, 48. The rebus (e.g., "I [heart] N.Y.", was called a hieroglyphic. I note it was not confined to religious books. See, e.g., Anonymous [c1849], *Mother [Goose] in Hieroglyphics*.

³⁷³ Hansen 1992, 51, here discusses mass culture in general, paraphrasing and quoting her translation of Horkheimer and Adorno 1970, vol. 3—whose published English version is Adorno 1991.

³⁷⁴ Preus 1991, 449.

³⁷⁵ See Gledhill 1991, 216-218. See also Williams 2001, 41; and Hansen 1992, 73.

As the star system meets typology in Westerns and Bible melodramas, mass culture compounds mantology.

Regardless of the explicit messages touted via dialogue and plot, the viewer is ceaselessly asked to translate image into script, to read the individual appearance of a star as an imperative of identity —“to be like her” —and to articulate the most subtle nuances in terms of the binary logic of “do and don’t.”³⁷⁶

This dynamic is quite patent in *The Ten Commandments*.

CHAPTER CONCLUSION

From Bercovitch’s (1978) claim of *ambiguity* as central to the success of the form of the jeremiad, follows Bhabha’s wider argument, in *The Location of Culture* (1994), that in general, nationalist hegemony depends on rhetorical ambiguity. Actually I find these two authors’ otherwise magisterial cogency lapses on the matter of ambiguity. My reading of such ambiguity—in terms of a mantic practice’s requirement of exposure to ritually pure indeterminacy—might help bridge that lapse.

Meanwhile this chapter has outlined mantological practices that can account for much of *The Ten Commandments*’ genealogy—particularly, its rhetorics of trial by ordeal (such as Moses slogging in the mud to make bricks), of trial by tribunal (such as Moses’s trial for a treasonous conspiracy against Pharaoh Sethi) and ultimately the film’s positioning its viewer to divine whether America is reprobate, or by “the light of God’s law,” elect.

It is the Protestant way, to cast each individual as a freestanding diviner of a legal inquiry. America nationalized this way. Furthermore in the twentieth century, access to the cinematic medium positions everyone, at least potentially, as a diviner.

³⁷⁶ Hansen 1992, 50, here discusses mass culture in general, paraphrasing Horkheimer and Adorno 1970, 3: 333—whose English version is Adorno 1991, 81. Hansen furthermore notes that “in the anthropological-philosophical context of *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, the concept of mimesis is derived from magic and shamanistic practices as well as zoological forms of mimicry. It involves making oneself similar to the environment; a relation of adaptation, affinity and reciprocity, a non-objectifying interchange with the Other; and a fluid, pre-individual form of subjectivity” (52).

Industrialism as a production demands recognition as a global event, by everyone. To enable such self-locating, Hollywood studios spread an accessible cine-literacy, and dub films.

Unlike print, Hollywood's studio-era cinema is the mass medium primarily of Americans, exported to the world. Indeed since the seventeenth century, American jeremiads have divined "that at some approaching 'destined moment . . . America is to give law to the rest of the world,'"³⁷⁷ and in *The Ten Commandments* of DeMille, Hollywood is giving God's law to the world. This rhetoric comes not only through jeremiad, but also through metonymic iconography of a viewfinder, screens, and of palm trees. Moreover through the heft of the film's self-framing introduction, the film positions and coaches the viewer to divine the role of studio Hollywood. Paramount Studios becomes the paramount medium for lawgiving.

Overall, this Puritan-American genealogy can help in articulating the hegemonic process by which *The Ten Commandments* features revolutionary rhetoric. Such rhetoric is the very basis of American hegemony.³⁷⁸

This and the previous two chapters have argued that from antiquity through the Middle Ages and the Reformation, Judaic and Christian attempts to supersede divination were actually co-opting it. Furthermore, mantic supersessionism—and the genealogy of *The Ten Commandments* as divination—involves empire and commerce.

That is, American rhetors divined that America's imperial and commercial successes evinced its new, exceptional, typological identity. By the colonial mid-eighteenth century, Americans said that only in the U.S. could a systemology interpret "*Industry and Valor*," "*Wealth and Conquest*," as national, typological fulfillment.³⁷⁹

Finally and mainly, *The Ten Commandments* depends on what I call *divination by current events*, or spin doctoring. This must be why one well-placed

³⁷⁷ Bercovitch 1978, 114, quotes an unnamed eighteenth-century writer.

³⁷⁸ See Bercovitch 1978. However the main flaw of Bercovitch's account of American hegemony is that, as if it were an exceptional endpoint, his model hardly allows for how counterhegemony ever can gain any traction. My own position attempts to mediate between two poles—Bercovitch's exaggeration of the "control" exerted by hegemonic rites, and Turner's exaggeration of ritual's counterhegemonically transformative potential. Meanwhile of course, in terms of mass culture, Turner is to Benjamin what Bercovitch is to Adorno.

³⁷⁹ Bercovitch 1978, 114.

critic calls *The Ten Commandments* “very likely the most *eventful* 219 minutes ever recorded to film.”³⁸⁰ The film spins events of ancient history, events of American history (such as the War for Independence) plus media history (newspapers and cinema) and current events circa 1956.

As politics increasingly came into play, Hollywood was following not only the Puritans but also Copernicus’s astronomy. New in the mid-sixteenth century, it related the solar system’s revolutions to *political revolutions of fortune’s wheel*.³⁸¹

Towards rounding out the genealogy of *The Ten Commandments*’ cinemancy, remaining chapters treat the trope of the trial; the figure of the Black; slave-divination; and the rhetoric of the Black Atlantic. However first, the next chapter treats mass mediums.

³⁸⁰ Erickson 2007, emphasis added.

³⁸¹ Shapin 1996, 3.

CHAPTER ELEVEN: MASS MEDIUMS

OVERVIEW

From their very canonicity of practices—shalt and shalt not—religions from Judaism through Protestantism have always featured mantic practices. As the previous three chapters have traced, in the very act of performing supersessions of divination, these religions categorically have co-opted the function of divination.

By the mid-twentieth century in America, it seemed to many observers that Protestantism, Catholicism, and Judaism were meeting in a “new tripartite pattern” of “diffuse convergence.”³⁸² According to Will Herberg, after “a religious ‘pool’ began rapidly to emerge as the primary context of self-identification and social location,” it became “the over-all *medium* in terms of which remaining ethnic concerns are preserved, redefined, and given appropriate expression.”³⁸³ In this new context for self-divination, DeMille’s team performed cinematic mass-mediation of racial concerns. They had every word of the script of *The Ten Commandments* vetted by a minister, a priest, and a rabbi, not only in order to avoid censure, but furthermore to tap into this contemporary, cosmopolitan sense of mediation.

The present chapter argues that the genealogy of *The Ten Commandments*-as-divination features—as relevant practices—America’s industrious deployment of melodrama, of the telegraph, of proto-cinema and of early cinema, each as a medium.

³⁸² Herberg 1955, 82.

³⁸³ Herberg 1955, 34, emphasis added.

Not unlike Peter Brooks's account of melodrama, Antonia Lant's account of the proto-cinema suggests that from France's late eighteenth century, a new kind of show developed a new form of mantic vision. This show with a projector called "magic lantern"—whose images sometimes resolved on smoke—resembled melodrama's tracing of an occulted domain.

By the mid-nineteenth century, America had developed its own technology to serve as its new medium. By telegraph—the first electronic network—the famous first message ever sent was a mantic inquiry, "What hath God wrought?"

THE TRACK OF TIME

Proto-modern mantology advanced with proto-modern technologies of *tracking time*, as Europeans increasingly turned not only to the calendar, but moreover to the clock and the daily newspaper. The ancients had relied on watching the heavens and seasons to track time, to get a grip on the indeterminacies of life; and had read changes of the stars and of the weather as signs of an all-encompassing coherency, which enabled people to know what to do. Then came the rise of mechanization.

Increasingly the effect of "knowing what to do" came to depend on machines. At first amongst Western European elites, verdicts from machines were the most *real* verdicts. Especially, the clock and the universe became understood through each other.³⁸⁴

Meanwhile modern cultural hegemony keyed its frame to "real time." Any ancient emperor—including Julius Caesar, who posted announcements throughout Rome—had tried to authorize the signs of his times, including not only oracles but also calendars. But in place of a top-down sense of news, the seventeenth-century brought Europe *the news* at large—mechanistic, canonical delivery of "current events." I mark Europe's first moderns as the users, from 1609, of Germany's *Avisa Relation oder Zeitung*, Europe's first regularly published newspaper.

³⁸⁴ Shapin 1996, 32, 33.

Where once it was primarily the role of a prophet (including Jesus in Matthew 16:4) to read “the signs of the times,” now the role became more open to any reader—indeed, it was *the* way of understanding. In 1833, print-capitalists brought divination-by-newspaper to the masses with the launch in New York City of the penny press. A novelist, Stendhal, marked the salience of such a development: his protagonist performed divination by a scrap of newspaper blowing in the street, in *La Chartreuse de Parme*, a novel of the same year.

MANTIC EGYPTOLOGY AND THE PROTO-CINEMA

Chapters Eight through Eleven have shown that Biblically sutured connections—sited in exodus from Egypt—have exerted sociocultural power. The association of Egypt with mantic practice increased in the wake of the Renaissance’s boom of “Hermetic wisdom,” which located ancient Egypt as the lost domain of everything most deeply occulted in human knowledge.³⁸⁵

Mantic Egyptology intensified again with the Enlightenment, as Europe largely came to regard some of its own mantic traditions as Oriental, specifically Egyptian.³⁸⁶ Orientalism posed the Orient as the Occident’s opposite in all respects. So—by finding that divination was characteristically Oriental—Orientalists helped to warrant Occidentals’ practices as divination-free.

Subsequently, iconography and rhetoric of ancient Egypt fed directly into Western regard for divination, to a great degree.³⁸⁷ So in Europe and America, Egyptological troping came to mark the manticness of certain modern practices of public display.³⁸⁸

Around the era of the French Revolution, Western Europe’s upheaval fed a strong emphasis on Egyptology in identity-divining shows. These shows drew on “contemporary politics and economics of Egypt, . . . [which] pertained to imperial ambition and questions of national and racial identity.”³⁸⁹

³⁸⁵ See Tambiah 1990.

³⁸⁶ For example, Tarot, and decks of cards generically, according to legend, come from Egypt.

³⁸⁷ Trafton 2004, 29.

³⁸⁸ See Said 1979; Lant 1997, 72; see also Higashi 1994.

³⁸⁹ Lant 1997, 79.

Specifically, in France immediately after the revolution, in a performance enclosure Egyptianized by “hieroglyphically embellished gates,” “in pitch blackness in a disused chapel (replete with crumbling tombs) in the vicinity of an old Parisian Capuchin monastery,”³⁹⁰ Etienne Gaspard Robertson staged his *Phantasmagoria*, a popular entertainment using the “magic-lantern,” a concealed projector of painted slides. Then in 1801, Paul de Philipsthal brought an anglicized *Phantasmagoria* to London, where the Lyceum staged it downstairs from a travelogue of “the AEGYPTIANA.”³⁹¹

For a long time, Egypt had figured large in typology—which is a form of network through *time*. Moreover increasingly by the 1840s the manticness of Egypt linked the network of imperial space. Panoramas, dioramas, as well as shows featuring the “magic lantern” all came to feature “the concatenation of Egypt with these forms” of performance, when Britain’s overland trade route to India opened, across Egyptian soil.³⁹²

As popular interest in Egypt rose, exhibitors drew audiences through Egyptology. Egyptology was the attraction; and moreover Egyptology was the model for the “experience” offered to viewers—exhibits positioned their viewers as if accessing the lost domain of ancient Egypt. In demarking the ascendance of “revolutionarily new” practices of mediation, exhibitors centered something recognized as superseded—Egypt.

Meanwhile the mantic rites of *mass*-media had begun with the mass-circulation newspaper in 1833 New York. Fourteen years later, the telegraph network also came out of New York City. Although the telegraph, as point-to-point communication, is hardly part of the direct genealogy of mantic cinema as a practice, nevertheless it is wired into the genealogy of mantic cinema. The telegraph network was the first medium that seemed to *charge* an invisible, yet manifestly public force-field.

³⁹⁰ Lant 1997, 72.

³⁹¹ Lant 1997, 74.

³⁹² Lant 1997, pp. 74, 71. Lant documents this concatenation’s persistence throughout the nineteenth century “across lantern shows, panoramas, dioramas, photographs and photographic criticism, and on into the emerging sphere of cinema itself.”

MATRIX MADE MANIFEST

For ages, diviners had practiced as if an invisible field was connecting and powering things. So the channeling of electricity for a communication network has “electrified” many culture-workers, as if the wiring of human communication bespoke a deep-seated interconnectedness. Anthropologist Mary Douglas addressed such connectedness in commenting on the neuro-ecology of shamanism: “If we are created as social beings, there must surely be some regular hard-wiring in our brains that alerts us to the reactions that the other human/social beings are having to the same event.”³⁹³ From the mid-nineteenth century that hard-wiring became manifest outside the human body in the form of the telegraph.

It seems this was especially the case for Americans, whose Manifest Destiny deploys a “sense of America as God's own chosen medium.”³⁹⁴ In the U.S. as the telegraph network expanded from 2,311 miles to 27,000 miles between 1847, and 1853, “the most intensive years of telegraph expansion thus coincided with the years of the rise and rapid proliferation of its spiritual counterpart”³⁹⁵: “a modern occult movement (one always called “modern” by its own adherents) which was created, in full view of the newspaper public, in mid-nineteenth-century America.”³⁹⁶ The 1983 findings of Werner Sollors in “Dr. Benjamin Franklin's Celestial Telegraph, or Indian Blessings to Gas-Lit American Drawing Rooms” show that contemporary reportage in newspapers and magazines cast Morse’s telegraph as a medium.

In nineteenth-century America, where they constituted one of the largest religious groupings, Spiritualists deployed mantic rhetoric and rites which had broad currency.³⁹⁷ As their rhetoric and rites appealed to an expressly divinatory sense of time and identity,³⁹⁸ necromancy became known as “The Spiritual Telegraph.”³⁹⁹ In *The Philosophy of Spiritual Intercourse* in 1866, Andrew Jackson Davis argued that “the conditions and principles upon which spirits answer to the inquiries of man, are simple and physical, philosophical and rational . . . no more complicated or wonderful

³⁹³ Douglas 2004, 21.

³⁹⁴ Sollors 1983, 479.

³⁹⁵ Sollors 1983, 471.

³⁹⁶ Sollors 1983, 460.

³⁹⁷ Sollors 1983, 469.

³⁹⁸ See Sollors 1983, 469.

³⁹⁹ Sollors 1983, 473.

than the principles upon which the magnetic telegraph is daily operating along our great commercial avenues.”⁴⁰⁰ The expanding matrix of *commercial* intercourse, too, connected everyone via invisible forces.

This connectivity was of a different order than community-based economies: the new connectivity, like the urban thoroughfares, seemed relatively depersonalized. This depersonalization, or community-disaffiliation, was widely celebrated, not only by Spiritualists. Indeed for some, it has long seemed that the path to human unity lies through divestment from one’s own particular affiliation—a divestment which is sometimes taken to define cosmopolitanism. A poem, in which Morse’s telegraph itself speaks to the 1852 readers of the *American Telegraph Magazine*, expresses this longed-for bondedness in messianic rhetoric:

Lo, the golden age is come!
 Light has broken o’er the world.
 Let the cannon-mouth be dumb,
 Let the battle-flag be furled.
 God hath sent me to the nations
 To unite them, that each man
 Of all future generations
 May be cosmopolitan.⁴⁰¹

Such communitarian nationalism in the U.S. also helped engender particular figurations of American Indians. As if “the static, fixed points in a world of great changes,”⁴⁰² Indian figures very frequently appeared to Spiritualist necromancers. Meanwhile counter-hegemonic visitations featured “Founding Father spirits who often endorsed the abolitionist . . . leanings of their mediums.”⁴⁰³ As the nineteenth century advanced, the figure of the Negro was used by American minstrels similarly as Indians to the Spiritualists: that is, as if a fixed matrix through which one divined identity-shifts.

⁴⁰⁰ Davis 1868, 26; quoted in Sollors 1983, 474-475.

⁴⁰¹ Anonymous, from *American Telegraph Magazine*, 1852, quoted in Harlow, *Old Wires*, 77 (quoted in Sollors 1983, 472). The complete poem appeared anonymously in the journal *The Telegrapher* in 1865 as “The Song of the Telegraph.”

⁴⁰² Sollors 1983, 479.

⁴⁰³ Sollors 1983, 479.

PORTENTS OF UNVEILINGS

Meanwhile, the nineteenth century rise of the mass-circulation newspaper was capitalizing on what I call “divination by current events.” (See Chapter twelve.) It came to feature what some writers have called “the romance of the real.”⁴⁰⁴ As if industrialism had dislocated people from the realm of their feelings, sensationalism in the press divined the path of return to the realm of strong emotions such as horror and pity, with reportage revealing lurid details of crimes.⁴⁰⁵

After the turn of the century, the manticness of the mass media—now including not only print, but also radio and film— exploded with reportage and propaganda of portents of war. The media, which first pronounced that fighting seemed imminent (or not), came to report stories portending either defeat or, typically, victory.

By mid-century, as mass-media continued to expand exponentially, the Cold War brought great emphasis on the mass media’s function in divination.⁴⁰⁶ Since ancient times, prophecies had predicted a great apocalypse. Now, the threat of nuclear destruction loomed—as if The Holy Bible and “God’s other Book,” nature, would reach their conclusions together, revealing the shape of their conjoined plot. The mass media, including film, read the signs.

If almost everyone knew the danger, then almost everyone shared the same inquiry. As William Faulkner stated it in his Nobel Prize acceptance speech in 1954, “There is only the question: When will I be blown up?”⁴⁰⁷

Cinema enabled its audiences to process such a mantic inquiry in public, as a public. Moreover while linking humanity through mass-mediation, cinema compounded all the mantic practices heretofore discussed—especially oneiromancy, Biblical mantology, the mantology of modern science, and Egyptology. In its publicness cinema has differed from print or radio, telegraph or television.

⁴⁰⁴ See Tibbets 1921. See also Dixon 1913 and 1914; Thompson 1847 and Looby 1993.

⁴⁰⁵ See Williams 2001, 20, which cites Halttunen 1998, pp. 47, 73. To document a rise in sensationalism, Halttunen analyzed crime reportage in America’s nineteenth-century popular press, and argues that crime reports became increasingly lurid, to incite readers’ intense excitement and horror.

⁴⁰⁶ See Wojcik 1997.

⁴⁰⁷ Faulkner quoted by Wojcik 1997, 97.

THE MANTIC CINEMA

Cinema invited its public, as if a mass, to locate itself via the first global vernacular.⁴⁰⁸ Via crowd-scenes onscreen, for its crowds of viewers cinema modeled their role as “masses” in history and in modernity, thereby enabling divination of what was otherwise inaccessible. In this way, from the early twentieth century, Hollywood cinema—serving as a model of sociable publicness—has “provided an aesthetic horizon for the experience of industrial mass society.”⁴⁰⁹ In the nineteenth century, in order to see the current, public function of a modern medium, one perhaps had to regard the telegraph wires strung on the commercial thoroughfares; however in the twentieth century, one went to the cinema.

I discuss the mantic cinema’s development further in Chapter Fifteen. However here I extend the present chapter’s development from proto-cinema into early cinema.

Not unlike the mid-nineteenth-century promotions of the telegraph, many of cinema’s promoters spoke of cinema as a practice of necromancy. They posed cinema as specifically *Egyptian* necromancy, bearing portents of mummies and other long-dead, ancient Egyptians.⁴¹⁰ Cinema supposedly recalled hieroglyphics—whose reading was still a lost art. As such, cinema seemed to channel the collective unconscious. Vachel Lindsay in 1915 called the cinema auditorium “an Egyptian

⁴⁰⁸ See Hansen 1999, 68 and *passim*, on Hollywood cinema as vernacular modernism.

⁴⁰⁹ See Hansen 1999, 70, and *passim*, on Kracauer 1960 as well as Negt and Kluge 1993[1972].

⁴¹⁰ Lant 1997, 72: Exhibitors and other culture-workers explicitly made “an association between the blackened enclosure of silent cinema and that of the Egyptian tomb,” and fostered “a perception of cinema as a necropolis, its projection mysterious and cursed, issuing a warning to spectators.”

tomb” in which “we realize our unconscious memories when we see the new hieroglyphs.”⁴¹¹

Into such contexts, producers released a slew of mummy films, Egyptian travelogues, and costume melodramas set in Egypt—especially Bible films. Early filmed Bible stories with Egyptian settings included *La Vie de Moïse* (Pathé, 1906), *Moses et l'Exode de l'Égypte* (1907); *The Life of Moses* (Vitagraph, 1909-1910); and French productions of *Israel in Egypt* (1910) and *The Infancy of Moses* (1911). Amidst these also came *The Prodigal Son* (Pathé, 1909), and *I Maccabei* (Italy, 1911); as well as *La Vie et la Passion du Christ* (Pathé, 1902-1905), *From the Manger to the Cross* (Kalem, 1912), D. W. Griffith's *Judith of Bethulia* (Biograph, 1914), and *Intolerance* (Triangle, 1916)—which deployed the contemporary sense of hieroglyphics⁴¹²—plus *La Vie et la Passion de Notre Seigneur Jésus-Christ* (Pathé, 1919).⁴¹³ Meanwhile by 1919 filmmakers had made five versions of *Cleopatra*.⁴¹⁴

In 1922 as the world's mass media capitalized on a major archeological discovery of an actual mummy, Tut-ankh-Amen, “at the same time Egyptian architecture sometimes came to encase the entire experience of film spectatorship in the building of new Egyptianate cinemas, of which the Grauman's Egyptian, Los Angeles, built in 1922, is only the most famous.”⁴¹⁵ The following year DeMille, taking up Griffith's mantle, made his first version of *The Ten Commandments*.

CHAPTER CONCLUSION

The present chapter helps situate several key aspects of *The Ten Commandments*. For example, its manifestation of the Colonial figures in tri-cornered hats—attending what turns out to be Moses's “liberation” of the Ethiopians and later of slaves—makes sense not only in terms of America's jeremiadic rhetoric, but

⁴¹¹ Vachel Lindsey quoted by Lant 1997, 89. Lant continues that generally “it became almost a commonplace for cinema's early historians to explain the newest art in terms of the oldest, to attribute to it a hieroglyphic structure and thus to describe it not only as a universal language but as an originating language that had been derived from a dead language renewed by the Victorians.” Hansen 1992 notes that this trope extends “fascination with the Egyptian hieroglyph in the writings of Whitman, Emerson, Poe, and Thoreau” (58).

⁴¹² Hansen 1992, 58.

⁴¹³ Lant 1997, 82.

⁴¹⁴ Lant 1997, 82.

⁴¹⁵ Lant 1997, 89.

furthermore in light of visitations associated with abolition, amidst telegraphic mediation circa 1856.

Moreover, to help frame several major levels of *The Ten Commandments* as divination—mainly, the film’s role as an industrial commodity—one can consult the mantological rhetoric of boosters of Morse’s telegraph. *Contra* Marx, who decried alienation of workers from the means of production, boosters of new media welcomed “our great commercial avenues” as enabling pedestrian access to hidden domains.

The business of fortune-making always has included fortune-telling—so of course commodities indeed were featuring in rites. By the mid-nineteenth-century with industrialization, eventually the new role for “masses” could be divined where scraps of newspaper blew: among the telegraph poles of the great, commercial avenues. Such commodified rites scandalized Marx, who derided them as vacuous “fetishism.” But the most salient aspect of such rites was hardly the fetishism, nor the spectacle, but divination.

At the level of sellers—including producers, distributors, and exhibitors—the goal of their market-divinations has been to get a grip on the indeterminacies of commerce. This goal is at least as ancient as the Greek god Hermes, who oversaw dice-oracles: Hermes was appropriate not only because he was the god of happenstance, but also because “he was the patron saint of merchants, who were the oracles’ primary clients.”⁴¹⁶

But modernity—with its depersonalized, even anti-personal marketing—engendered corresponding kinds of divining. This is because modernity’s preferred practices of channeling are ones modernity itself developed.⁴¹⁷

To make its *fortune* Hollywood relied on the *star system* so that the mass could locate itself as a consuming public. By hailing its consumers as the public, Hollywood stabilized its own market. The Hebrew Bible’s mantic rhetoric, with its *nationalization of content*, was well suited for this purpose of rechanneling and co-optation.

In sum, studio-era cinema offers a clear view of hegemony-in-operation—perhaps clearer than any prior medium. This is because cinema is a central-dispersion

⁴¹⁶ Johnston 2005b, 16.

⁴¹⁷ Baum 1989.

industry requiring enormous capital. There was no folk cinema.⁴¹⁸ As Hollywood was configuring publicness, members of the public took the roles offered—“constellators” of stars. (See Chapter Fifteen.)

Finally, the present chapter’s findings contextualize the significance of the general recognition of DeMille as a master-director of crowd-scenes—which even his critics, faulting his otherwise complete lack of artistry, tend to acknowledge.⁴¹⁹ At the cinema auditorium, crowd scenes function as a mirror through which an audience, as such, can scry. Critical attention to this function demands emphasis on DeMille, who perhaps more than any other individual positioned “the masses” to divine their role as consumers of mass-culture.

Next, this dissertation, having established the importance of crowd scenes in *The Ten Commandments*, tackles this film’s genealogy in terms of the mantic uses of relevant tropes and practices within performance. Chapter Twelve develops a genealogy of modern uses of the folk, in order to contextualize DeMille’s work with crowds, “the masses” and the public.

⁴¹⁸ Hollywood studios defined their form of cinema such that, at least circa 1955, nobody else could do it. The required budgets were so large that not even other countries’ studios could come close, much less independent operators. People made “home movies,” but even with popcorn these lacked authenticity *as cinema*.

⁴¹⁹ See DeMille 1959, 52.



Figure 11.1. The film's establishing shot, discussed in Ch. 2.



Figure 11.2. "The sound of song and revelry" at the orgy.

PART IV: GENEALOGIES OF CONTENT

CHAPTER TWELVE: THE SLAVE AND THE FOLK
IN AMERICAN MELODRAMATIC CARTOMANCY

OVERVIEW

The purpose of this chapter is to outline another branch of a genealogy of divination by *The Ten Commandments*: tropes of the slave, and of the Black, particularly as relevant to American melodrama.

Generally, even before and beyond Exodus, the slave-as-trope has served for self-locating divination. This is primarily because “the slave, by definition, [has] possessed at most a liminal status within the human community.”⁴²⁰ According to the non-slave’s definition of “slave,” the slave is outside the non-slaves’ community. Therefore, it seems the slave can access what is outside. So communities long have tended to privilege the forms of divination characteristic of the liminal Other. (For example, in the Biblical tale of Joseph, as a slave he becomes the oneiromancer to the Pharaoh.)

It seems rhetorics of Exodus especially have drawn power from slave-trope, through which non-slaves can divine their access to a lost domain of their own, needed *bondedness*. Anglo-Saxons in their medieval migration across the Channel embraced this peoplehood-function of the Exodus tale;⁴²¹ later American colonists further relied on figuring Exodus-to-a-New-World as a “theologizing experience.”⁴²²

⁴²⁰ On slaves as liminars, Gates 1988, 128 cites Robert Pelton 1980 and Baker 1985. Baker depends, Gates notes, on Victor Turner’s work. Gates is discussing New World slaves here, not Old World slaves.

⁴²¹ Howe 1989.

⁴²² See Sollors 1986, and J. Boyarin 1992.

English-speaking Protestants particularly have tended to divine the signs of “their continued new exodus from Egyptian-old-world bondage to the shores of the American promised land.”⁴²³ Through troping on Hebrew slavery and emancipation, collectives divined bondedness of peoplehood.

From the seventeenth century, the predominance of certain forms of labor—indentured servitude and race-based slavery—shaped and strengthened America’s rhetorics of Exodus and slavery. This was particularly the case for bonded laborers from Britain who migrated to America, and for West Africans forced into American slavery. Notably, African-American spirituals developed perhaps the richest rhetoric of Exodus typology, which became deeply influential.

An old association between slaves and divination⁴²⁴ in early modernity intensified. Europeans, now Enlightened, tended to displace “the irrational” and “the primitive” onto the Oriental and the Black—and to repress the primitive as if superseded. All this repression made for a feedback loop in which Europeans forcefully marginalized the Other, who ineluctably returned to center stage.

Much as the Hebrew Bible hearkens to enslaved ancestors, non-slaves tended to frame enslaved Blacks as if they represented an older order of human community. In such a dynamic of supersession, a civil society—representing itself as supplanting an older order of community association—expresses envy and resentment for the older order which it characterizes by “unity of will.”⁴²⁵ As Fiedler, Jameson, and especially Lott emphasize, this dynamic brings stigmatizing and repressing, yet also brings desiring and poaching of what the older order seems to represent.⁴²⁶

As industrialization was alienating the body from the Western self, resultantly the practice of re-accessing the domain of the body’s “language” has seemed to require some other folk’s vernacular tongue to express it, as if in translation-divination.⁴²⁷ Generally, urban leaders and culture workers portrayed the folk as low,

⁴²³ Sollors 1986, 43. My discussion here is indebted to the first chapter of Werner Sollors’s *Beyond Ethnicity: Consent and Descent in American Culture*.

⁴²⁴ See Reden 1993.

⁴²⁵ Jameson 1981, 146. I have adapted Tonnies’s axiom to make it more applicable here. Tonnies and Jameson say that the civil society actually supplants the community, but I am interested here in the performative dimension of the supplanting, regardless of its degree of actual success.

⁴²⁶ Jameson 1981, 146.

⁴²⁷ See Bakhtin 1984, 1986.

rural, authentic, orally-performing, common everymen—as an Other to their own elite, inauthentic, urban, inscribed, individual selves.⁴²⁸

SUITS OF A CARTOMANTIC DECK: FREE, SLAVE, MODERN, FOLK

America's divination-by-Blackness manifests a broader pattern of nationalism itself: divination by the folk. The culture industry has nurtured such nostalgic impulses to divine lost, folksy worlds.⁴²⁹

The rise of modern nationalism, to reconfigure loyalties as national unity, depended on urbanites' valorization of the rural folk as a rallying figure, a mascot to accompany the flag.⁴³⁰ While denigrating cosmopolitans, early-modern nationalists identified rural folk as keepers of the authentic attitudes, beliefs, customs and language essential as a nation's inspirational roots.⁴³¹ This tendency accompanied Western print-capitalism, in which a work of fiction aiming for a comprehensive portrayal of a nation tended to include some portrayal of its folk.

Folkism divined an imagined identity.⁴³² Part of the manticness of folk practices is that they putatively lack authors—thus folk songs for example are taken to manifest a people's shared, premodern, even primordial bond.⁴³³ The paradigmatic figuration of the *volk*, meanwhile, was German—and occultic.⁴³⁴

However America's framing of Black folk involved a supersessionist level of self-locating: America's need to distinguish its national culture—hence, its folk—from that of what it would reframe as “the Old World.” By 1886 a few writers

⁴²⁸ Anderson 1991.

⁴²⁹ Rogin 1996, 47.

⁴³⁰ See Bhabha 1990b, 53.

⁴³¹ See Bhabha 1990b, 53.

⁴³² See Rogin 1996, 47; see also the work of Benedict Anderson, Anthony D. Smith, George Lipsitz, Eric Hobsbawm, and Susan Stewart.

⁴³³ Rogin 1996, 45-46.

⁴³⁴ Gillman glosses “the modern German occult revival”—which “links to the occult roots of Nazism”—as a highly influential “synthesis of pseudo-Hinduism and Oriental mysticism with a mongrel politics of *Volk*-like nationalism and vague reformism” (Gillman 2003, 9).

articulated a sense of Black orality as channeling America's national "acts of the imagination."⁴³⁵

No other country's nationalism had bequeathed a template for incorporating of Black ex-slaves as America's folk.⁴³⁶ That is, the folk, to serve as a figure especially in nationalism, must be eternally the folk as low, rural, authentic, common people: but in priding itself on social mobility the United States tended to maintain that it lacked peasants as a socioeconomic class. (American Indians have hardly seemed nationally available as America's common folk, not least of all because Indians have been widely presumed to be *uncommon*—vanishing if not extinct.) While social mobility for Whites was one side of a coin, on the flip side, under White hegemony the mark of Blackness designated a legible and permanent lack of social mobility.⁴³⁷ Because the figure of the Black was cast as primordial, it could eternally serve as the nation's figure of the folk.

Already the slave was a prime, mantic trope: now so was Blackness. Then following their British counterparts, American abolitionists in the nineteenth century compounded the slave-trope with the jeremiad and other mantological rhetorics. Amidst currents of Industrial Age racism, their abolitionist rhetoric of slaves—as sufferers of cruel bondage—helped mark Blackness as a trace of Whites' lost realm of deep, earthy feelings.

As Americans have located their own social identities by "acting black," racially cross-coded performance conjured and exploited blackness.⁴³⁸ Especially African-American orality took a mantic role, as a highly adaptive form of translation

⁴³⁵ Gates reports that "A Lady from Philadelphia" wrote in *Lippincott's Monthly Magazine* in 1886 that the African "'has given us the only national music we have ever had,' a corpus of art 'distinctive in musical history.' He is, moreover, 'a natural storyteller,' uniquely able to fabricate what she calls 'acts of the imagination'" (Gates 1988, 174).

⁴³⁶ A relevant European template for nationalism was to frame modern self-locating as a Jewish practice. This was an imaginative performance of cosmopolitan negotiation, which modern Europeans in general, and especially with nationalism, learned to do by patterning identification on the Jew as a figure whose identity was, in a sense, universally available. As European anti-Semitism racialized Jews, these valences of the Jew became integral to the West's cross-racial codings, and to notions of modern-cosmopolitan identity. (See Veblen 1919, 475, 474. See also Sollors 1986, 243-244; J. Boyarin 1992, 28; and Rogin 1996, pp. 12, 46, 47, 56. (On "the modern art of always "being in between," in relation to the "Black aesthetic," see Iain Chambers 1994, 36, who cites Michel de Certeau 1984.) But Jews were seen as outsiders, not as a folk in the sense of European nationalism. Another relevant European template was "acting Gypsy," particularly for musicians at festivals, but also in fashion and in fortune-telling. But again, nationalisms have tended to regard Gypsies as outsiders, not as a national folk. (See Trumpener 1995; see also Heimlich 2006.)

⁴³⁷ See Lott 1993, Roediger 1991.

⁴³⁸ See Lott 1993, Roediger 1991.

of experience.⁴³⁹ Notably, Zora Neale Hurston claimed she used Black vernacular tongues as if her written voice were an “oral hieroglyphic”⁴⁴⁰ representing the expression of the Negro, who “thinks in hieroglyphics.”⁴⁴¹

MANTIC MELODRAMA

As a rite of divination, *The Ten Commandments* from its Manichean prologue most saliently is melodramatic. In melodrama “the anxiety of man’s prodigious revolutionary freedom, his infraction of the law, is dealt with . . . through the promise of a morally legible universe to those willing to read and interpret properly its signs.”⁴⁴² Notwithstanding Linda Williams’s reference to melodrama as “alchemy,”⁴⁴³ it is much more saliently divination.

According to Peter Brooks, after the Church’s established authority waned, in the eighteenth-century the French invented melodrama in order to relocate the lost domain of transcendent law. From France to England to America, from popular theater to literature to cinema, melodrama posits “intense ethical forces [which] have a real existence somewhere behind or beyond the façade of reality,”⁴⁴⁴ in a domain Brooks calls “the moral occult.” This “domain of operative spiritual values . . . is both indicated within and masked by the surface of reality.”⁴⁴⁵

In terms of technique, melodrama deploys a mantic canon of tableaux featuring immediately recognizable, stock characters. For example the swarthy villain oppresses the virtuous maiden, . . . until our sturdy heroes arrives in the nick of time. This canon of stock tableaux functions like melodrama’s deck of cards: its “deal” find *unsuspected* relevance to and appeal in new situations as they arise.⁴⁴⁶ So it is cartomantic.

⁴³⁹ Baker 1985.

⁴⁴⁰ Gates 1988, 224.

⁴⁴¹ Gates 1988, 199.

⁴⁴² Brooks 1985, 201.

⁴⁴³ Williams 2001, 44.

⁴⁴⁴ Brooks 1985, 202.

⁴⁴⁵ Brooks 1985, 5.

⁴⁴⁶ Williams actually refers here not to melodramatic tableaux in general, but to the race card—it “finds *unsuspected* relevance and appeal with each new configuration of racial victims and villains, with each new stage of American racial politics” (Williams 2001, 5, emphasis added).

When the abolitionist jeremiad met melodrama in America, the result was a powerfully compound. As *Uncle Tom's Cabin* exploded—first as a novel, then as a ubiquitous stage-play, then as a set of electrifyingly popular tableaux—through its currency America divined itself as a national-popular culture.

TOM CARTOMANCY

The making of *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, it seems, begins in 1851 in Brunswick, Maine, at the First Parish Church. There, according to her son, Charles, Harriet Beecher Stowe divined a vision when

during the Eucharistic celebration of the body and blood of the suffering Christ, a vivid picture of a whipped and bleeding male slave appeared before her eyes. “It seemed as if the crucified, but now risen and glorified Christ was speaking to her through the poor black man, cut and bleeding through the blows of the slave whip.”⁴⁴⁷

Once that story's tableaux were canonized, they constituted national culture's first deck of “race cards.” Fiedler posits that to give transcendent reach to its key tableaux, *Uncle Tom's Cabin* wielded melodrama like “magic.”⁴⁴⁸ As Linda Williams suggests, America was off to the races—playing the race card. In his book on prophecy, Paul Boyer frames the use of *Uncle Tom's Cabin* as if it provided a revelation of American history's sacred, transcendent meaning.⁴⁴⁹

Ever since its unprecedented national success, in America there has been no way around such melodrama, because “the Great Audience” requires relevant visions.⁴⁵⁰ Williams concurs with Fiedler that “melodramatic” is “still the best, and

⁴⁴⁷ Charles Stowe 1911, 145, quoted by Williams 2001, 49. I note that the Eucharist, known as the Lord's Supper, often is linked typologically to the Last Supper, which was a Passover seder, the Jewish commemoration of the Hebrews' exodus.

⁴⁴⁸ Fiedler 1979, 25, 45.

⁴⁴⁹ Boyer 1992, 228-229. Boyer groups *Uncle Tom's Cabin* with Abraham Lincoln's Second Inaugural Address and Julia Ward Howe's “Battle Hymn of the Republic,” “a work saturated in biblical apocalyptic.”

⁴⁵⁰ Fiedler 1979, 45, 13.

most accurate, description of the serious narrative and iconic work performed by popular American mass culture,” particularly the twentieth century’s racially “melodramatized media.”⁴⁵¹

From stage melodrama arose the melodramatic feature film, which came to typify Hollywood cinema.⁴⁵² Based on the studio-era’s mantic melodrama—which characteristically features “unmotivated events, rhythmic montage, highlighted parallelism, and overlong spectacles”⁴⁵³ as techniques—the United States became the world’s first capitalist mass society,⁴⁵⁴ and moreover rose to economic and cultural hegemony. To no small degree, then, practices of melodrama have empowered mass capitalism.

CHAPTER CONCLUSION

As reactions to modernity have spurred nostalgia for a domain of integral connectedness, such nostalgia has given traction to certain mantic practices. Melodrama fit well with America’s mantic rhetoric of jeremiad.

As Hollywood Biblical Melodrama, *The Ten Commandments* compounds typology, racial cartomancy, jeremiad, and the lost domain of transcendent morality, with the Decalogue anchoring the mantic practice in transcendentally canonical law. As American Puritan melodrama—*self-judging* melodrama—*The Ten Commandments* aims to stimulate and engage each viewer’s “inner diviner.” Thus the opening narration announces that humanity was given “the power to choose, between good and evil” but evilly “each sought to do his own will.”

The rhetoric positions its auditor to ask, “Who here evilly seeks to do his own will?” This is the crux of American cultural hegemony: the channeling of individualism’s volatility into the collective will, for “the good of the continuing revolution.”⁴⁵⁵ The primordial, primitive man knew what to do, but lost that domain

⁴⁵¹ Williams 2001, 13.

⁴⁵² Williams 2001, 21 cites Altman 1998.

⁴⁵³ Williams 2001, 22 cites Rick Altman 1998, 347.

⁴⁵⁴ See de Grazia 1996, quoted by Hansen 1999, 67-68.

⁴⁵⁵ See Bercovitch 1978,

of certainty “because he knew not the light of God’s law.” Facing the choice between good and evil, in the battle that continues today, surely one needs to choose properly!

Inasmuch as one needs a properly *warranted* choice, one needs a rite of divination. So the film prods at its viewer’s moral conscience melodramatically in order to make the traces of “transcendent virtue” legible. The film’s cross-fades make this movement literal.

In terms of cinematic technique, furthermore *The Ten Commandments* mantically deploys three main characteristics of studio-era melodrama: “unmotivated events, rhythmic montage, [and] highlighted parallelism.”⁴⁵⁶ Rhythmic montage becomes prominent from the first sequence of mantic cross-fades, which is keyed not only to the narration’s rhythm but also to movements of the score on the soundtrack. Chapter Fourteen herein discusses such montage as the mantic rhetoric of “the cut.”

The highlighted parallelism between subplot and plot in *The Ten Commandments* compounds the mantic form of “inner-filmic typology” with Puritan “personal typology” and melodrama. (See Chapters Eight and Ten. An example of this parallelism is the test of Joshua-versus-Baka-for-Lilia, corresponding to the duel of Moses-versus-Rameses-for-Nefretiri.) By establishing inner-filmic typologies, this parallelism coaches the viewer to perform the personalized task of relating the Biblical characters to herself.

⁴⁵⁶ Altman 1998, 347.

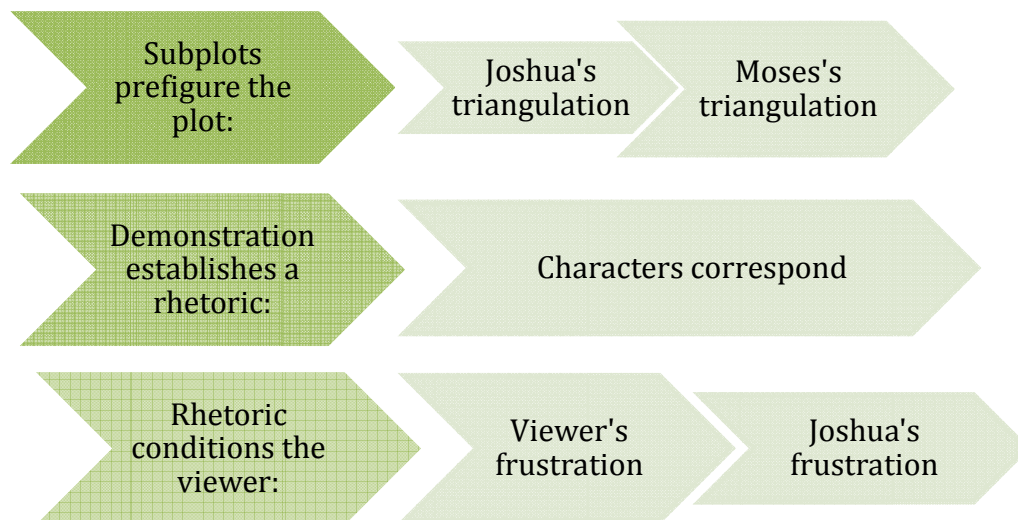


Figure 12.1. Example of how the film invites the viewer to perform personal typology.

Finally in *The Ten Commandments*' mantic melodrama, Bithiah's warning that "There is grave danger here"—a propos of nothing—exemplifies a key "unmotivated event." Here in the scene following Moses's sexually charged encounter with the Queen of Ethiopia, suddenly Bithiah, Moses's mother, inexplicably materializes, interrupting a second racy tryst, now between the throne princess and her son.

Overall, the function of melodrama is as Victor Turner articulated divination: it is to restate norms "in a striking and memorable fashion" when it "operates in emotionally charged situations."⁴⁵⁷ Especially under DeMille, the volatility is stimulated and channeled through sexual taboo. It is to this aspect of mantic practice that our intercourse now turns.

⁴⁵⁷ Turner 1979[1968], 375. Victor Turner refers to divination practiced by the Ndembu people of Zambia.

CHAPTER THIRTEEN: OEDIPAL, RACY, CONSPIRACY TRIALS

OVERVIEW

Divination by *The Ten Commandments* proceeds mainly through its treatment of various kinds of trials. Overarchingly, the film-as-trial evinces the moral virtue of Moses/America. Climactically, trials divine Moses's parentage, then his new identity, and finally the guilt of Moses and of his mother.

In analyzing the film's trials as mantic rites, the present chapter frames these rites in terms of conspiracy, particularly familial and racial conspiracy; in terms of practices of hunting, for biopolitical clues; and most specifically in terms of *The Leopard's Spots*, a novel of miscegenistic inquiry which led from *Uncle Tom's Cabin* to *Birth of a Nation*, and to *The Ten Commandments* (1956).

However first the opening of the chapter frames the film's trials in terms of Oedipal enigma; and then in terms of colonizers' accessing a realm of spiritual intercourse. It seems that sociopolitical structure itself is always dancing with mantic, cultural practices, as people make sense of how they relate to one another.

FAMILY ROMANCE DIVINATION

The self-divination by Moses (Charlton Heston)—inquiring “Whose child am I?”—as a fantasy-scenario is called “family romance” (*familienroman*). According to Sigmund Freud, universally this very question scripts the imaginary scenario played out by children in relation to their paternity.⁴⁵⁸ In relation to Moses, Freud scandalously called him “Moses the Egyptian,” emphasizing questions of parentage and identity.⁴⁵⁹ More recently several critics have articulated this Oedipal “Family

⁴⁵⁸ Freud 1953[1909].

⁴⁵⁹ Freud 1939.

Romance” as the general key to melodrama. Regardless of the “real” relevance of Freudian psychoanalysis to humanity or to cinema, it seems clear that DeMille, among other practitioners of melodrama, made Oedipus relevant to his work. (See herein Chapters Four, Twelve, Fourteen, and below.)

Melodrama, in divining via the moral occult, is homologous with scenarios revealing a protagonist’s parentage as a sign of his noble virtue made legible. Particularly “melodrama enacts, often with uncanny literalness, the “family romance” described by Freud—that is to say, the asking and answering” of the inquiry—“Whose child am I (or would I like to be)?”⁴⁶⁰ Psychoanalysis can seem to be the *fulfillment of melodrama*,⁴⁶¹ because both are homologous with oneiromancy.

In “A note on ‘Family Romance,’” Geoffrey Nowell-Smith and Stephen Heath explain Freud’s major statement of the concept, in which

the child’s family romance is seen as part of a movement of estrangement from the parents and as having two stages, one (prepubertal and asexual) in which the existing parents are replaced by superior ones, and a second one (developing from increased sexual knowledge) in which only paternity is challenged and the mother is pictured as engaging in secret infidelities. The motives in this stage can include sexual curiosity about the mother, a revenge against the parents for punishing sexual naughtiness in childhood and even a revenge against brothers and sisters who are bastardised in the romance while (in a curious variant) the author sees himself/herself as legitimate.⁴⁶²

Though “Freud seems to have coined this phrase to describe specific childhood fantasies,” more recent usages inflect it with new meanings.⁴⁶³ Freud’s term,

⁴⁶⁰ Geoffrey Nowell-Smith 1991[1977].

⁴⁶¹ Brooks 1985, 202.

⁴⁶² Nowell-Smith [and Stephen Heath] 1991[1977], 273.

⁴⁶³ Pollock 1991[1977], 277.

familienroman—*family romance*—critics alternately call *oedipal drama*, or *family novel*.

In this cinematic process, the path to be divined is the reconciliation of irreconcilables: “pleasure and reality principles.”⁴⁶⁴ By deploying realism (e.g., divination by *the news*) in the service of fantastic pleasure, *The Ten Commandments*’ “family melodrama fantasising” sutures subjectivities with cinema.⁴⁶⁵

As a family romance, DeMille’s narrative not only follows the Book of Exodus, replacing Moses’s parents with superior ones. The film not only foregrounds Moses’s challenge to paternity—for example when Moses commands “the push-pole men” to penetrate the Pharaoh’s granary. Moreover it portrays Moses’s only known mother, Bithiah, as the committer of secret infidelities. She has concealed his parentage from everyone including Pharaoh Sethi, who treats Moses as his son. Moses was her unwitting co-conspirator.

Meanwhile the allegorizing made available to viewers—now the Hebrews are “us,” now the Egyptians are “us,” then shuttling back and forth—sutures viewers to the film. In addition to this *process*, family romance sutures here also via certain *content*.

CHANNELING IMPERIAL EROS

Mainly because the potential of hybrid offspring tends to destabilize the categorical social relation between “the colonized” and “the agents of empire,” colonial relations depend on resolutions of sexual desire, via performances of displacement. As Gauri Viswanathan writes of the British Raj,

the otherworldliness of the occult offered alternative possibilities for imagining colonial relations outside a hierarchical framework, without succumbing entirely to the next logical step of miscegenation that closer ties

⁴⁶⁴ Nowell-Smith and Stephen Heath 1991[1977], 274, cite Freud 1953[1908]. Freud’s articulation of the process of creative writing, here, applies moreover to the process of reading melodrama.

⁴⁶⁵ See Nowell-Smith 1991[1977], 274.

might entail. In reimagining colonial relationships, occultism performs a function similar to what Robert Young describes as culture's role in imperializing Britain, which allowed for a cross-fertilization of language, history, and literature without the racial "degeneration" caused by sexual contact.⁴⁶⁶

Though colonization engenders some degree of social reconfiguration, hegemony tends to stay on top of it by performing as if the enforcement of "racial purity" could contain the dangers of cultural cross-fertilization.

Congruently, Hollywood's studio-era filmmaking—itsself a colonization of audiences both domestic and global—*displaces* its portrayals of miscegenation. As film scholar Susan Courtney documents, a certain Hollywood taboo—first codified, I note, by the censor-as-lawgiver nicknamed "Moses of the Movies"—long banned reference to the history of sexual relations between male owners and their female slaves. The trope of the White man raping Black female slaves was displaced, mainly onto two specific tropes: "the Black rapist," as well "the Oriental despot with his harem."⁴⁶⁷

From the late nineteenth century through the Jazz Age and the 1950s when American colonization of Black orality/aurality was in full swing, meanwhile the potent specter of miscegenation was fiercely hunted, judged, and contained. Blackness *itself* was widely seen by Whites as posing a hidden threat which they needed to contain—first by divining its location.

ANTI-NEGRO, ANTI-CONSPIRACY, CONSPIRATORIAL MANTOLOGY

As literary critic Susan Gillman suggests, parallel to melodrama's "moral occult," racism has posited a "racial occult." The elusiveness of racial essence—pointedly in the case of bodies whose color-classification seemed indeterminate—

⁴⁶⁶ Viswanathan 2000, 2, cites Young 1995, 95. See also Richman 1976b. Jonathan Richman and the Modern Lovers sing, "If you won't sleep with me, I'll still be with you, I'm going to meet you on the astral plane. . . . Or I'll go insane."

⁴⁶⁷ See Klein 2003 and Courtney 2005.

spurred scientific warranting of taxonomic verdicts. As such taxonomies fitted into a contemporary boom in phrenology and other somatomantic practices of reading the body, racial phenotypes became canonized for divining a body's race.⁴⁶⁸

Taxonomy of legible markings mattered firstly towards containing the potential subversion that someone "really" Negro might "pass" as White and commit miscegenation. Moreover, as if in a displacement of the actual conspiracy of Whites to repress Blacks, Whites tracked a hidden threat of Negroes conspiring insurrection.

Genealogically, conspiracy-hunting is a major branch of modern mantology: much as "conspiracy-eradicators" are actually conspirators, the divination-supplanters are themselves actually diviners. For example, following medieval inquisitions of heretics, the persecution of witches during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries was another practice of divination by traces.

In order to locate and identify witches, Europeans employed rites of hunting and guilt divinations, both involving the reading of omens. Although occasionally a coven materialized, usually such witch-hunts proceeded one-by-one: conspiracy-hunting came to the fore after Protestants stopped hunting individual Catholics and instead focused on Catholic plots of subversion.

Once such reformers wore the badge of authority they brought "the severe inquisition of truth."⁴⁶⁹ This Enlightened cohort traced "badges of suspected and falsified science" along with "old wives' fables, impostures of the clergy, illusions of spirits, and badges of Antichrist," in hunting and judging what Francis Bacon called improperly "warranted" truths.⁴⁷⁰

That is, Bacon, a founder of modern science, associated—with the divination of anti-Christ—hunting of the following: the conspiracy against sincere and validated science; against un-gendered, fresh truth; against true priests ("priests of nature"); and particularly the conspiracy against the true priests' debunking of superstition. Of course, conspirators would not wear badges as such: my point is that Bacon could hardly say that the superseders—"priests of nature"—would hunt "portents" or "omens," even though that is what he meant.

⁴⁶⁸ See Gillman 2003. I note that the present-day legacy of somatancy includes reliance on one's body-mass index or on blood type to divine one's health, life expectancy, or personality.

⁴⁶⁹ Bacon 2007[1605].

⁴⁷⁰ Bacon 2007[1605], emphasis added.

Bacon rhetoric, emblematic of modernity's mantic conspiracy-hunters, suitably frames Fiedler's characterization of "the Black rapist"-figure as the *anti-Tom*, as in *Antichrist: the hunt for racial conspiracy* hunts, one might say, "the badges of Anti-Tom."

The badges of Anti-Tom might be camouflaged, but the great, White hunter knows where to look and how to trace them. This is exactly the form of divination Thomas Dixon promulgated with his first novel, *The Leopard's Spots: a Romance of the White Man's Burden 1865-1900*.

Uncle Tom's Cabin meanwhile had gained and held powerful hegemony in U.S. (especially Northern) discourse of the abusive South, so Dixon, a proud Southerner, was attempting a counter-hegemonic, supersessionist divination. Because he aimed for his articulation to supplant *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, he had to draw from the same wellsprings. Dixon's goal, then, was to make what Fiedler called a "somasochistic masterpiece," channeling a "national eroticism."

Dixon's novel states its mantic inquiry repeatedly in italics: "*Can you hold in a Democracy, a nation inside a nation of two hostile races?*"⁴⁷¹ Dixon positioned readers to divine with him the answer—"We must do this or become mulatto, and that is death."⁴⁷²

Based on *The Leopard's Spots* and Dixon's second novel, *The Clansman*, Griffith made *Birth of a Nation* (1915), the infamous "masterpiece" of a Negro whose attempt to rape a virtuous, White maiden, the Ku Klux Klan foils in the nick of time. In his silent performance as Gus, husky Walter Long, in blackface, postures his body itself as a big, stiff "badge of Anti-Tom."

"WOULD YOU MINGLE THE BLOOD OF SLAVES WITH
YOUR OWN?"

In some key ways, like Griffith's *Intolerance* (1916), *Birth of a Nation* shaped *The Ten Commandments*. DeMille noticed that *Birth of a Nation* (1915) had overshadowed his own work. In his own release that year, *The Cheat* (scenario by

⁴⁷¹ Dixon 1903, 244, quoted by Williams 2001, 103.

⁴⁷² Dixon 1903, 244, quoted by Williams 2001, 103.

Hector Turnbull and Jeanie Macpherson) DeMille similarly featured anti-miscegenation somatomancy, a hunt, and a judgment culminating in a lynching. In 1917 DeMille cast husky Walter Long (who had played the rapist in *Birth of a Nation*) as the Sheriff in *A Romance of the Redwoods*; moreover Long played the Executioner in *Joan the Woman*, DeMille's first religio-historical melodrama.

The Ten Commandments (1956) refers to *Birth of a Nation* on several levels, most basically via one character's remark about the birth of the Egyptian nation, and more significantly by announcing its own miscegenation-scourging, mantic inquiry: "Would you mingle the blood of slaves with your own?" *Birth of a Nation* took its cue from *The Leopard's Spots*, in which the verdict was that miscegenation "means death." Indeed in *The Ten Commandments* it means death, too—of the diviner who dares pose the question, at the hand of Nefretiri, mad to mingle blood.

That diviner is Bithiah's servant, Memnet: her death comes in a climactic scene of badge-reading stolisomancy (divination by clothing) and necromancy. Memnet secretly has saved from Moses's infant basket his swaddling cloth, "torn from a Levite's robe." Now, thirty years later, as Nefretiri is shopping—choosing cloths for the upcoming dedication ceremony for the treasure-city, and simultaneously selecting diaphanous cloths for her wedding night with Moses—Memnet forebodingly offers her "a cloth that is more revealing." Before she asks, "Would you mingle the blood of slaves with your own?", dark Memnet divines that she hears "all the kings of Egypt cry out to [her] from their tombs: 'Let no Hebrew sit upon our throne!'"

DeMille patently was aiming to allegorize the American raciness of slavery-era miscegenation. He told Woody Strode (who played the King of Ethiopia and Bithiah's lead bearer) he wanted to 'hint at' as much as he felt a 1955 audience could accept.⁴⁷³ Moreover, during development of *The Ten Commandments* in 1953, in a memo to his staff DeMille insisted that the film should be an allegory of history of masters raping slaves.⁴⁷⁴ He framed his insistence in melodramatic terms of pity for the plight of the historical victims, as if the film's portrayal of villainous slave-owners was his staff's moral duty.

⁴⁷³ Orrison 1999, 135.

⁴⁷⁴ See Wilcoxon 1953.

DeMille strongly stimulated the potent specter of miscegenation, in order to spur its containment by hunting and judging. (See Chapter Fifteen.) As enigma, the allegory cannot be too accessible, so its solution perforce appears ambiguously, with slippage. Still, in the film's tableaux of Joshua or Dathan pursuing pale Lilia, and of mud-caked Moses soiling pale Nefretiri's bed—each momentarily is marked as the Black rapist whom, the film makes clear, must be contained.

Furthermore DeMille resolves the erotics of slavery-and-miscegenation onto portrayals of Oriental despots with their harems, as masters enjoy harem-like displays in several scenes. For instance in presenting the Ethiopians, when Moses says he brings twenty barges "full of such wealth as you see here," the shot lingers on a dusky Ethiopian maiden kneeling, looking at him. Later, after Prince Rameses, in paying Dathan for revealing the secret of Moses's parentage, tells Dathan, "You will have your price": the price, it later turns out, is Lilia, but the shot cuts meanwhile to a troupe of scantily clad, dancing women at Pharaoh's court. Meanwhile Prince Rameses in pursuit of Nefretiri as his "footstool," and pale Baka in pursuit of dark Lilia, each represents the White master as Oriental despot. Finally, the attentions of Jethro's lusty daughters, surrounding Moses at the well in Midian, devolves to a harem-dance in their father's tent, at which one of the spectators remarks that Moses is lucky to be able to mate with whichever dancer he chooses.

Repeatedly the film presents a divination concerned with mate-selection, then reframes it as a test of moral virtue. Indeed the opening of the film fits this pattern when astrologers proclaim that "the enemy to fear is in the heart of Egypt: the Hebrew slaves in the land of Goshen." As the dialogue hints, the danger here—the conspiracy of uprising—is from the slaves' ploughshares. The Egyptians' reactions to that danger, from the slaughter of the firstborn through whippings, evince them as morally reprobate.

In contrast, trials within trials all evince Moses's moral virtue. In the competition between the Queen of Ethiopia and Nefretiri over Moses, the remark that "there is grave danger here" serves to transition Moses into his trial of overseeing the slaves, which demonstrates his moral virtue. In the competition between Joshua and Baka over Lilia, Moses intervenes righteously. Finally, gentlemanly Moses, though he enjoys the Midianite women's competition over him, instead chooses chaste Sephora.

REACHING THE CLIMACTIC VERDICTS

Climactically meanwhile the film solicits the viewer's participation in several major trials: these divine Moses's parentage, then his new identity, and finally his guilt. These are major keys to *The Ten Commandments* as a rite of divination.

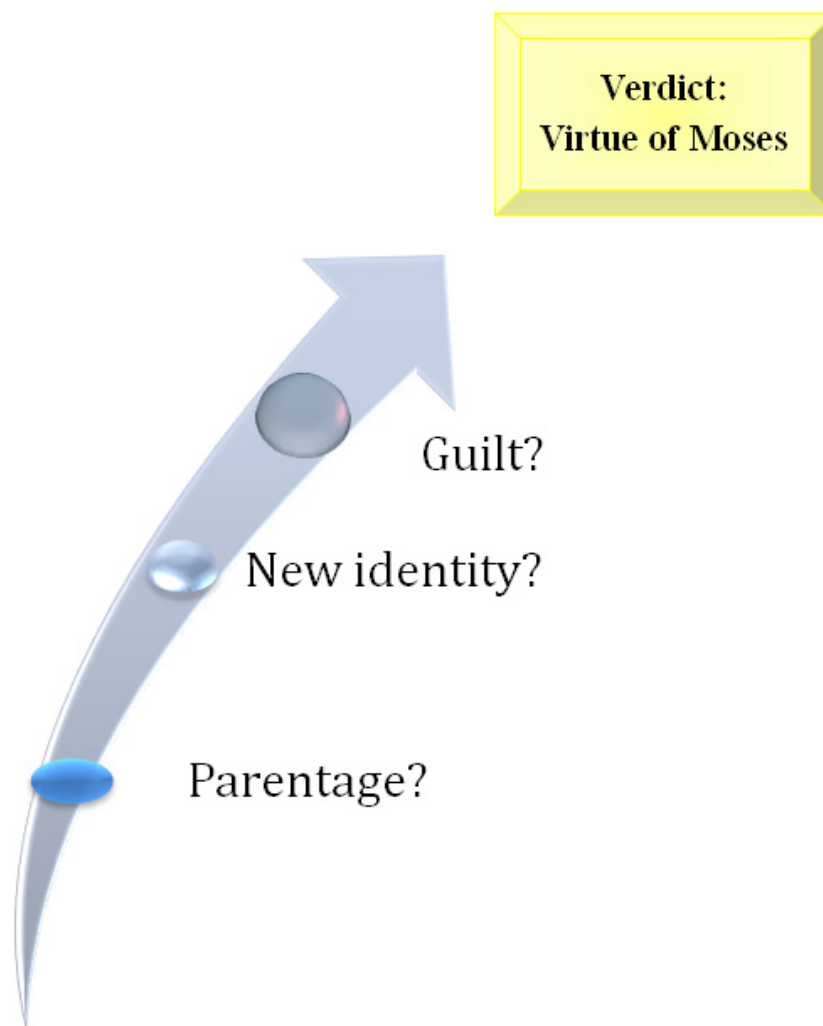


Figure 13.1. The climactic trials of Moses.

Whose child am I? This parentage inquiry is an America's key. For Werner Sollors, the social drama of American culture pits already-determined ancestry versus liberatory self-making. However according to Ralph Ellison, being American means selecting one's own ancestors. The choice proceeds by self-locating through divination, whether one accepts the canonicity of one's received genealogy, or traces another to supplant it.

Moses conducts his first climactic divination in the form of a trial by tribunal, pitting his Hebrew mother against his Gentile mother. This trial itself contains several forms of rite-within-mantic-rite. In the family-court trial, first the signs of Moses's body—his lack of scars—somatomantically seems to reveal him as the son of Egyptians. However, the application of a moral litmus test—the question of whether he believes slavery is justifiable—reveals him as a true son of Hebrews. Yochabel (Moses's Hebrew mother) poses the question.

Does Moses believe “men and women are *cattle*, to be driven under the lash”? The question, of course, is whether he believes men and women are *chattel*. This question anachronistically echoes not only American abolitionism, but moreover the Cold War inquiry the film's narrator (DeMille) poses initially: “Are men the *property of the state* or are they free souls under God? This same battle continues throughout the world today!”

Within the narrative's nested trials, on the surface the portentous implication here is as follows. Egyptians believe in slavery, but Hebrews do not: Moses does *not* believe in slavery, therefore Moses is not Egyptian but Hebrew. An allegorical implication is that Communists believe “men are property of the state,” but Americans do not. The film positions the viewer with Moses, to categorize oneself as believing men are *not* property of the state: if so, therefore the viewer is not Communist but American. Circa 1956 especially to DeMille this verdict must have seemed one that both domestic and global audiences should divine.

All the film's figurations of slavery and blackness bear on this inquiry, towards resolving the enigmatic slippage by which America is not only Hebrew but also—as a powerful empire with a legacy of slavery—Egyptian. Through this inquiry,

America supersedes Old World despots as well as “Godless Communists.” It ultimately comes down to *belief*.

As long as Americans do not *believe*, morally, that men and women are chattel to be whipped, then, the determination says, nothing else matters—not the nation’s legacy of slavery, nor the government’s gross abuses of workers, which were rampant in Cold War America and championed in Hollywood by DeMille—because American *moral belief* qualifies and redeems America like it does Moses here as a Hebrew.

In its genealogy this kind of inquiry is melodramatic, in its making moral virtue legible; and moreover it is Christian, not only in the Protestant sense of judging “faith, not acts,” but also in the older sense of judging heresy, which status disqualifies one for membership in the community. Medieval inquisitions tested for heresy. Even as early as 100 CE, long before any Christian nation arose, Ignatius labeled those who “confess not the Eucharist to be the flesh of our Saviour Jesus Christ” as heretics to be shunned by the community of Christians (Smyrnaeans 8).

The Ten Commandments, after determining the identity of Moses/America, launches its second climactic inquiry. As Moses (Charlton Heston) ritualistically declares, this inquiry is “to find the meaning of what I am.” Indeed generally after one’s new genealogy supersedes one’s received genealogy, one must find the alignment of meaning-in-new-identity.

If the change is more than superficial, then this is the key question in the wake of any supersession: what does the new identity mean? Such inquiry calls for mantic self-locating. In Zora Neale Hurston’s novelization of Exodus, this episode’s practice takes the form first of stolisomancy/somatomancy: “The short sword at his thigh had a jeweled hilt but he had crossed over and so it was no longer the sign of birth and power.”⁴⁷⁵ In *The Ten Commandments* DeMille’s Moses (Charlton Heston) too asks, “What change is there in me? Egyptian or Hebrew, I am still Moses. These are the same hands, the same arms, . . . the same hair, the same face, that were mine a moment ago.”

Of course, according to American jeremiad, the new identity indicates that America/Moses is elect. Moses/America does not simply arrogate to himself the

⁴⁷⁵ Hurston 1939[1984], 103-104. Hurston’s Moses’s “short sword at his thigh had a jeweled hilt” seems to be a chiasmus of the identifying mark of *Jewish* identity, found at the “handle” of something else at a man’s thigh, which would make her mantology closely akin to somatomancy.

mantle of leadership, but instead on several levels and in several ways, divines the mandate. The mandate makes Moses/America the world's leader, and the deliver of men from bondage into the rule of God's law which Moses/America gives.

After the film determines what the newfound identity of Moses/America means, *The Ten Commandments*, launches its penultimate inquiry, the trial by tribunal to determine Moses's guilt in Egypt. Moses, plus Bithiah, receives the verdict of treason. Moses is found guilty for *both* "passing" as Egyptian *and* insurrection of slaves against the nation. Sethi declares Moses illegitimate.

The film racializes this trial by portraying Moses here as an iconically Black Jeremiah denouncing enslavement of a people "only because they are of another race." As Linda Williams concludes in *Playing the Race Card*, "the primary way in which mainstream American culture has dealt with the moral dilemma of having first enslaved and then withheld equal rights to generations of African Americans" is through melodrama, which functions to warrant Whites' guilt as virtue.⁴⁷⁶

CHAPTER CONCLUSION

Melodramatic rites *work* by enabling action, by allowing, like any divination, for circumvention of the appearance of self-interest. Melodrama of Black and White works by warranting "racially constituted groups to carry out actions that they could not carry out in the name of self-interest."⁴⁷⁷

Actually in *The Ten Commandments* when Moses faces the question of belief, he does not directly answer . . . until his abolitionist jeremiad at his own trial. This is the moment the tables turn. Because he condemns Egypt's slavery, therefore Moses/America becomes no longer Egyptian.

⁴⁷⁶ Williams 2001, 44.

⁴⁷⁷ Williams 2001, 44.



Figure 13.2. Stars and bars.
From inquiry resolves determination.

The new identity here supersedes the old. It is necessary for “us” to condemn slavery because *the very act of condemnation makes it no longer our legacy*. Via the continuing revolution, jeremiadic rhetoric demarks the new “we” which always supersedes the old. Indeed, the new alignment makes slavery the legacy of Moses’s *enemy*—now cast as Egypt/Old-World/Communism.

The realignment comes through the mantic rites of trials. Generally a trial exposes its parties to the indeterminacy of whether or not its verdict will access the domain of transcendent morality—the domain of justice.

Ultimately when DeMille puts America on trial, the verdict warrants the legacy of slavery as the salvation of the land of liberty. In reaching this verdict, *The Ten Commandments* features a trial at which Moses confronts Yochabel, his biological mother. This scene compounds racial conspiracy and racial “passing” with the trial melodrama plus the motherly sacrifice of women’s melodrama. DeMille electrifies the compound with Hollywood typology, making “history written with lightning.”⁴⁷⁸

Indeed as DeMille in 1956 filmed the Decalogue, God inscribes each commandment literally with a bolt of lightning. Because the film functions to read the signs of the times, the practice here invokes ceraunomancy (divination by lightning).

For *The Ten Commandments* there remains one final inquiry. By this point, divinations have determined verdicts of ancestry, of legacy, and of guilt which warrants virtue. With Moses, “we” know where we are from, and what that means: we have progressed from the side of evil to the side of good. We know our enemies must be on the side of evil, so the only question now regards everyone else: which ones are with us?

After this dissertation’s final section, its Conclusion considers this inquiry. Moses inquires, “Who is on the Lord’s side?”

⁴⁷⁸ President Woodrow Wilson reportedly called *Birth of a Nation* “history written with lightning.”

PART V: SCREENING AND SCRYING

CHAPTER FOURTEEN: MANTIC RHETORICS OF
THE BLACK ATLANTIC AND OF CINEMA

OVERVIEW

If I have demonstrated that *The Ten Commandments* is a rite of divination, pivoting on its mantic inquiries; and if I have traced some major branches of its genealogy; now I can ask a next question. *How is it significant that mantic inquiry should proceed through a film?* Because the scope of this dissertation disallows a full review of literature on this question—and moreover because very few other critiques have discussed this question expressly, in depth—I limit this chapter to re-framing and adapting articulations from James Snead’s 1984 essay, “Repetition as a Figure of Black Culture,” published in *Black Literature and Literary Theory*, edited by Henry Louis Gates.⁴⁷⁹

According to the late James Snead—a remarkable critic of German and American literature, film, and culture—the prime practice of divination deployed by modern European and Euro-American culture is cinema. In this argument Snead follows Ishmael Reed’s characterization of the soul of American popular culture as “Neo Hoodoo”—a compelling, highly adaptive derivative of a New World branch of Ifa, the religion of the Yoruban people of Benin and Nigeria. So this chapter quotes articulations of Ifa divination—largely Gates’s, which is particularly suitable, and Ruth Finnegan’s, on which I have modeled my own articulation of mantic *self-locating*.

⁴⁷⁹ Though Gates himself discussed Black rhetoric relevantly in terms of divination in his 1988 book, *The Signifying Monkey*, he posed Yoruban divination as merely a *metaphor* for African-American rhetoric, while Snead says cinema actually *divines* things.

SNEAD ON MANTIC RHETORICS

Snead suggests that in West-African-derived cultural modes, a technology of *cutting* works mantically. Through indeterminate circulation and flow, players eventually divine a path of return to the domain of an earlier pattern. Though Snead does not use the term “divination,” nevertheless when he discusses “systematology,” he is undoubtedly referring to practices of divination.⁴⁸⁰ He cites China’s *I Ching* and early Europe’s *sortes Virgilianae* (bibliomancy by a copy of *The Aeneid*) as examples of “systematization of accident.”⁴⁸¹

In Black *circulation and flow*, “every previous pattern that had first been “cut” away from still exists in suspended form until it is “cut” back to.”⁴⁸² That is, the enduring accessibility of a beat itself—as if a once-visited beat pulsed in an eternal domain—generates the conditions for players’ indeterminate *cutting*. In Black music-making as an epistemology, no domain is ever quite lost, because the potential to re-access it inheres in the circularity of flow itself.

Snead emphasizes this beat’s schema as fluid, open to indeterminacy: he describes Black music-making’s *beat* as “amenable to restarting, interruption or entry by a second or third player or to response by an additional musician” or voice.⁴⁸³ When he glosses these qualities as “social,” his account matches Victor Turner’s description of “social reality” itself as “fluid and indeterminate.”⁴⁸⁴ That is, in Snead’s paradigm of the Black Atlantic’s rhetorical ecology, players’ flow with the musical beat corresponds with their social flow.

I note that this openness of the Black Atlantic’s rhetorical ecology has seemed quite attractive to Whites. Moreover, this openness to new rhetors enables them to adapt versions of Black Atlantic rhetoric for their own purposes.

From music Snead develops a broader model of the “characteristic ‘call and response’ element in black culture . . . eliciting the general participation of the group

⁴⁸⁰ Snead 1984, note 77.

⁴⁸¹ Snead 1984, note 77.

⁴⁸² Snead 1984, 78, n. 31.

⁴⁸³ Snead 1984, 68.

⁴⁸⁴ Turner 1980, 157. Turner refers primarily to the Ndembu, but poses his conclusions as universal. However Reed and Snead emphasize Black-nationalistic claims that Black culture is worthy, *independent* of whatever European and Euro-American cultures have accomplished. Those claims, which were appropriate, I now take as axiomatic.

at random, spontaneous ‘cuts.’”⁴⁸⁵ However, I note that these cuts—multi-centered, multi-brained, layered in flowing processes of circulation—are not *random*, not patternless. If no individual can determine precisely when each cut will come, this means the cuts come *indeterminately*.

Congruently a divination system (such as Ifa, the I Ching, or European bibliomancy, to take Snead’s examples) does not regard portents as accidents. Neither do users of a divination-system regard its efficacy as “magic.” In its use of those terms, Snead’s critique parallels Lott’s, for much the same reasons. It too benefits from re-articulation in *emic* terms of divination.

If I may take the liberty of substituting “indeterminacy” and “divination” in place of Snead’s use of “accident” and “magic,” the result advances my own critique.

Black culture, in the “cut,” builds [indeterminacies] into its *coverage*, almost as if to control their unpredictability. Itself a kind of cultural *coverage*, this [divination by] the “cut” attempts to confront [indeterminacy] and rupture not by covering them over but by making room for them inside the system itself.⁴⁸⁶

As well as Snead’s terms of “insurance coverage” of accidents, and his terms of territorialization—I find a third sense of systemic coverage of rupture.

That is, as I have suggested (in Chapters One through Four and Thirteen) in Lacanian terms, mantic inquiry is effective via *suture*. Indeed, “based on a principle of social indeterminacy,” according to pioneering anthropologist Ruth Finnegan, Ifa divination is “a system of self-recognitions and *self-placements*.”⁴⁸⁷ Users undergo a series of placements-displacements-placements. An experiential thread through such a series brings suture.

⁴⁸⁵ Snead 1984, 68.

⁴⁸⁶ Snead 1984, 67.

⁴⁸⁷ Finnegan 1983[1970], 154, emphasis added.

WHAT IS IFA DIVINATION?

In Ifa a diviner draws lots to select a fixed text, which he then presents and interprets to the end user, who deciphers and applies the meaning. As Gates details the “extensive rituals of disclosure that the Yoruba depend on,”⁴⁸⁸ he finds that the system of Ifa

consists of the sacred texts of the Yoruba people, as does the Bible for Christians, but it also contains the commentaries on these fixed texts, as does the Midrash. Its system of interpretation turns upon a marvelous combination of geomancy and textual exegesis, in which sixteen palm nuts are ‘dialed’ sixteen times, and their configurations or signs then read and translated into the appropriate, fixed literary verse that the numerical signs signify. These visual signs are known in the Yoruba as ‘signatures of an *Odu*,’ and each signature the *babalowo*, or priest, translates by reading or reciting the fixed verse text that the signature signifies. These verse texts . . . the propitiate must decipher and apply as is appropriate to his or her own quandary.⁴⁸⁹

Not only the technology of selection, but moreover the meaning of the texts themselves, and the relevance of the selected text for the end user, all are understood as coming through indeterminacy.⁴⁹⁰ The Ifa supplicant’s role as ‘listener’ requires him to notice what strikes a chord with his own dilemma.

⁴⁸⁸ Gates 1988, 35.

⁴⁸⁹ Gates 1988, 10.

⁴⁹⁰ Gates 1988, 20-21: “Human beings consult this text in attempts to decipher their destiny, or fate. What the supplicant hears read [or recited] to him, in “the signature of *Odu*,’ is neither a literal revelation of his fate nor a set of commands that can be put into practice to appease, or redress, the human being’s curse of the indeterminacy or uncertainty of fate. Rather, the supplicant hears read by the *babalowo* a series of lyrical poems that are so metaphorical and so ambiguous that they may be classified as enigmas, or riddles, which must be read or interpreted, but which, nevertheless, have no single determinate meaning. The supplicant, the reader as it were, must produce meaning by stopping the *babalowo* as he chants an *ese*, which in some way strikes the supplicant as being relevant to his dilemma. Then, the *babalowo* interprets the poem for his client and prescribes the appropriate sacrifices.”

Ifa divination aims to channel a verdict from beyond the human domain—specifically, prior to it. Yoruban tradition holds that

a person about to be born, about to leave the realm of the unborn for that of the living by way of the birth canal, kneels before Oludumare to hear whispered his or her fate, the truth of his or her existence. This fate, however, the unborn is doomed to forget upon entering the realm of the living. Ifa divination affords the apparent opportunity to retract from the lost world of the forgotten those spoken words that figure the contours of one's life.⁴⁹¹

Meanwhile the Yoruban figure of divination, Esu, is also a figure of sexuality, with associations between “the penetration of thresholds, the exchange between discursive universes.”⁴⁹² But “above all else, Esu, . . . is the Yoruba figure of indeterminacy itself, *ayese ayewi*, or *aillemo*, literally ‘that which we cannot know.’”⁴⁹³ Esu voices the gods in order “to disclose a deeper grammar to [Yorubans], and then to restore them to a conversation that speaks more accurately of Yoruba life.”⁴⁹⁴

After the Middle Passage, in the New World the need for self-locating increased. Thus Kimberly Benston ascribes a mantic function to all of African-American literature: it traces “one vast genealogical poem . . . to restore continuity to the ruptures or discontinuities imposed by the history of the black presence in America.”⁴⁹⁵ Yet the flow of Black Atlantic culture is cyclical and contingent.

According to Paul Gilroy the Black Atlantic's aesthetic ecology traces trajectories through “contingent loops.”⁴⁹⁶ Michael Titlestad, a South African critic after Gilroy, articulates “a Black Atlantic *rhetoric of relation* to create an *aura of loss*,

⁴⁹¹ Gates 1988, 41.

⁴⁹² Gates 1988, 27. Actually this quote refers not to Eshu but to Legba, who corresponds to Eshu in the religion of the Fon, a neighboring people of the Yoruba.

⁴⁹³ Gates 1988, 11.

⁴⁹⁴ Gates 1988, 41.

⁴⁹⁵ Benston 1984, quoted by Gates 1988, 123.

⁴⁹⁶ Gilroy 1993, 75.

a resonating silence *across disjunctive acoustic and symbolic regimes*.”⁴⁹⁷ He posits such a rhetoric itself as culturally translatable.

Indeed, it seems this rhetoric was widely translated and compounded across regimes of performance, notably by Whites in Europe and the United States. On this much cultural history many critics agree, even disagreements persist concerning how the process has gone, and how to characterize the results.

That is, these translations—have they merely resounded with minstrelsy, nostalgia, and Otherness? If the translations and compounds are effective, how so?

Finally does it make worthwhile sense to ask how the process—deployment of versions of a mantic, Black Atlantic *rhetoric of relation*—is mantic in its very adoption itself? Towards addressing these questions, I continue critiquing Snead’s essay.

ENCOUNTERS AND RELATIONS

Snead argues that the figure of the African has been sharply “radical in his effect upon the European”⁴⁹⁸ because the European previously had lacked access to the mantic technique of the Black Atlantic’s rhetoric: but I argue instead that this effect came through the European’s performance *as if* Blackness were mantic. When repertoires of performance proceeded to canonize Black figures, they became a mantic canon, used in ritually accessing a lost domain. As Michael Rogin argues, blackface minstrelsy as the “transitional object” of soundtracked cinema became part of its canonical repertoire.⁴⁹⁹

In accounting for how West Africa’s mantic culture shaped European culture (and *Euro-American*),⁵⁰⁰ Snead posits a starting point: he claims that prior to the twentieth century, African culture hardly influenced Euroculture. Then he argues that West Africa offered an outstandingly rich and sophisticated *systemology*—an integrated mantic practice of religion, spoken rhetoric, and especially music-

⁴⁹⁷ Titlestad 2002 (emphasis added) refers to a saxophonist nicknamed, “The South African Charlie Parker.” I note a relation here to John Cage’s “4’33”: for Titlestad, in Black Atlantic usage a silence can resonate in a rhetoric as if divining presences, absences, and differences.

⁴⁹⁸ Snead 1984, 63.

⁴⁹⁹ Rogin 1996.

⁵⁰⁰ I adapt, as “Euroculture,” Snead’s usage of European to refer to non-Black culture of Europe and America

making—to Europe at a time when the state of European divination had drastically declined. When Ruth Finnegan previously surveyed the world’s cultures she had concluded much as Snead, that “it’s in the widespread African practices that we find a still actively creative, large, and complex body of oral poetry accompanying a system of self-recognitions and self-placements based on an elaborate cosmology and an underlying principle of random meetings.”⁵⁰¹ So it can be tempting to agree with Snead that cinema has poached mantic rhetoric from Black culture.

However, though cultural cross-fertilization was indeed significant, Snead misstates the success of modern Europe’s repression of divination. As he sharply contrasts European technology of progress and control, versus [West] African technology of circulatory flow and channeling, he maintains that from the seventeenth century, European and Euro-American cultures almost completely had repressed their own mantic traditions. This makes some sense, as the Enlightenment supposedly has supplanted divination with reason and science— as Snead suggests, it brought increasing valorization of *progress* and *control*. But as I have established, divination arose strongly in the eighteenth century in practices such as melodrama, jeremiad, and nationalism. Modern Europe’s mantic practice was hardly in decline.

Europe’s repression of divination, which was thorough only in terms of denial, was anything but a repression of mantic practices. It may be true that early modern European culture featured nothing on the order of the *sortes Virgilianae* (divination by a copy of the Aeneid), and undoubtedly Europe stigmatized and attacked divination: but one need hardly take such repression at face value.

Instead, this dissertation argues that the repression co-opted what it ostensibly eradicated and superseded. Because the efforts to repress practices of divination were themselves mantic as could be, Europe’s early modern era arguably was *more* mantic, on the whole, than the supposedly Dark Ages.⁵⁰²

Modern Euroculture’s handicap was not the success of its suppression: its handicap was its *repression*, its own insistent tendency to stigmatize as “irrational” any practice that people acknowledged as mantic. For example the physician Sir Thomas Browne in 1646 had disparaged the appeal—to England’s masses—of

⁵⁰¹ Finnegan 1970[1983], 154.

⁵⁰² As Stanley Jeyaraja Tambiah notes in one of his anthropological lectures on religion, the “witchcraft craze that raged for two centuries” came *after* Europe’s supposed Dark Ages. The “wholesale purges that took a toll of thousands of lives” became progressively more widespread and terrible during the same era that “many scholars have regarded as ushering in the dawn of modern rationality and civilization” (Tambiah 1990, 47).

traditional practices of divination. Unlike the elite—who used their brains, knowledge, and reason—according to Browne the non-elite were fools trapped in the false, old ways due to the inevitable “erroneous disposition of the people.”⁵⁰³ Meanwhile perhaps Dr. Browne’s own colleagues, even while agreeing with his point, diagnosed his signs of a “choleric humor.”

Eventually Whites embraced mantic practice via putatively Black practices, as if the elephant in the room were a recently arrived African elephant, rather than Europe’s own tradition of divination. That is: because European moderns have denied that their own rites perform divinations, the Black Atlantic seemed to offer a holistic, expressive culture based unconflictedly on divination. In Snead’s account of the cultural encounter, Euroculture hardly drew on African-derived culture at all, until “modern developments in European [and European-American] music and literature . . . signify the foregrounding of repetition and of the ‘cut,’ revealing that Europeans are imitating a mode of repetition which is traditionally black.”⁵⁰⁴

Moreover, Snead concludes that *cinema is the form that finally, fully enabled Euroculture to incorporate Black divination by “the cut.”* Indeed cinema does depend on rhetoric of the cut—which melodramatic cinema particularly features in rhythmic montages.

CHAPTER CONCLUSION

Moreover the beat, as a seam, is the place of suture. Because processes of identification make suture, it makes sense to frame suture in terms of call-and-response, or better, as call-and-recall.⁵⁰⁵ To recall is the function of divination—to recall the lost domain of security-in-identity.

Snead concludes that through its incorporations of Black rhetoric, Euroculture has been reconciling with its own, long-lost, mantic tradition. Although I do not accept that this mantic tradition ever was long-lost, I find Euroculture identifies with versions of the Black Atlantic’s mantic rhetoric. This identification largely proceeds

⁵⁰³ Shapin 1996, 94.

⁵⁰⁴ Gates 1984, 15.

⁵⁰⁵ The phrase “call and recall” is attributed to Romaine Beardon. See O’Meally 1988 and O’Meally 1998.

through cinema. Euroculture relies on such rites to reconcile with its own alienated traditions of divination.

Parallel to Snead, Leroi Jones (Amiri Baraka) has characterized the disjuncture between American Puritan culture and West African culture as an almost unbreachable gulf:⁵⁰⁶ but actually these two cultures' mantic aspects made for a key overlap. Indeed much of Black political rhetoric—including much rhetoric of Amiri Baraka—is a version of American Puritan Jeremiad,⁵⁰⁷ in all its mantic glory. Towards examining the relations between Black and White mantic rhetorics, Biblical rhetoric provides a rich nexus.

Actually Snead himself does not absolutely claim Africa as the source of systemologies: he even suggests a relevant counterflow in which Black *cutting* has derived partly from Black rhetoric's reliance on language of the King James Version of the Hebrew Testament.⁵⁰⁸

If so, then transversely Snead suggests that the very form of mantic cinema is based partly on the Hebrew Testament, *through Black Atlantic rhetoric*. This is what my genealogical investigation, too, suggests of *The Ten Commandments*.

As the medium of cinema pivoted on “acting Black”—through blackface and melodrama, music and allegory, reveling in the “natural” revelations whose access Black practice supposedly enabled—meanwhile *mass media's rhetorical ecology* became more congruent with the Black Atlantic's circulation and flow.⁵⁰⁹ The process has engendered a circulation system—from a global vernacular into a global, cultural hegemony—through self-locating divination.

As studios avoided financial loss, they deployed their mantic powers to recall the lost domain of security-in-identity for characters and viewers, in order to divine the route to profitability for each film as a commodity. *This* rhetoric of relation informed every cut of every big-budget film especially.

⁵⁰⁶ Jones 1963, 8-10.

⁵⁰⁷ See Howard-Pitney 2005.

⁵⁰⁸ Snead 1984, 70. He cites as an example Psalm 29, lines 10-11: “The Lord remaineth a King forever. The Lord shall give strength unto his people. The Lord shall give his people the blessing of peace,” noting its “form of *anaphora*, where the repetition comes at the beginning of the clause.” (Snead must be referring here to the King James Bible.) On the efficacy of this rhetoric of repetition in the Psalms, see Buber 1988, 5.

⁵⁰⁹ See Zizek 1990.

That is, in order to find its audience and succeed as a commodity, a film must channel some current of the public. So with its films—and by establishing its systems of stars and of genres, via fan mail and focus groups, and by tracking the box-office receipts of each film—Hollywood studios generated a process of call-and-recall with Hollywood's public.

CHAPTER FIFTEEN: THE MANTIC CINEMA OF
DEMILLE, LASKY, *ET AL.*

OVERVIEW

This chapter extends this film's genealogy to encompass some relevant background of DeMille himself and of a few others responsible for the mantic practice of cinema, particularly of *The Ten Commandments*. Though *The Ten Commandments* is DeMille's film—he produced and directed it—and though studio Hollywood itself was largely his—he was hardly the creator. Other sources factored.

This dissertation has shown that mantic practices have featured in key counter-hegemonies, and moreover in a cultural dominant. However, it was hardly inevitable that cinema would develop mantically as it has. Jesse L. Lasky, Sr. and Cecil B. DeMille led the way.

Their leadership helped establish certain trends. Especially because early cinema was in no small degree Biblical cinema, it adapted mantic uses of Biblical narrative, typology, and modes of address. The cinematic trends followed not only from the genealogies so far described: moreover they depended directly on developments in fiction.

MANTIC CREDITS

Joseph Holt Ingraham (1809-1860), an author of historical melodramas, achieves his first popular success in 1840 with *The Quadroone; or, St. Michael's Day*, “a pioneering attempt to deal with miscegenation in fiction.”⁵¹⁰ In its resolution, the protagonists, tainted as Black, become White.

In his career as a novelist Ingraham authors many novels of “mystery” and of “hunting,” including *The Hunted Slaver* and the nephelomantic *The Steel Mask : Or, Mystery of the Flying Cloud*. Self-locating practices feature in the rhetoric and narratives of his novels such as *Sons of Liberty*.

In 1843 he authors a novel of a news-vendor, then after authoring many romances, in 1852 Ingraham takes ordination as a priest. In 1855 Ingraham authors *The Prince of the House of David*, concerning a Jewish girl during the lifetime of Jesus: it becomes a best seller.

This success “helps win wider approval for novels and opens the door for subsequent adaptations of biblical stories.”⁵¹¹ In 1859, near the end of his life, Ingraham authors *The Pillar of Fire; or, Israel in Bondage*, as if pyromantically from the fire he reads the tableaux of miscegenation melodrama into the story of Moses. Ninety-seven years later, *The Ten Commandments* (1956) would base some of its mantic practice on *The Pillar of Fire*.⁵¹²

Soon after the start of the twentieth century, a cornet player, Jesse L. Lasky, completes a forty-week tour opening for stage-magician Herman the Great, then becomes his manager. Lasky then becomes a talent scout and discovers Al Jolson.⁵¹³

Meanwhile, largely in the wake of Ingraham’s pioneering melodramatizations of Biblical tales in novels, similarly the popular theater and other public performances are versioning Biblical tales, too. As cinema gets started, its promoters desperately seek respectability—“cultural capital”—for their dubious new medium. Largely for this reason, early cinema depends on versions of Biblical tales, including Exodus.

Through Beatrice DeMille, a play broker in New York City, Lasky meets her son, Cecil Blount DeMille, born in 1881. When Lasky decides to make a film of a

⁵¹⁰ Burt 2004.

⁵¹¹ Burt 2004.

⁵¹² See particularly Ingraham 1859, 60-65.

⁵¹³ Eames 2002[1985], 17.

play, *The Squaw Man*, he forms a corporation with his own brother-in-law, Samuel Goldfish, plus the actor hired for the film (Dustin Farnum, who immediately sells his share), and Cecil B. DeMille as Director General. Especially because Henry Churchill DeMille, Cecil's father, is a respected playwright and lay minister, the name of DeMille brings cultural capital to the marquee of these scrappy, Jewish businessmen—Lasky and Goldfish (later Goldwyn), who in 1916 merge with the company of Adolph Zukor and Albert Kaufman. The company later becomes Paramount Pictures.

Jesse Lasky himself—whose son, Jesse Lasky, Jr. will co-author *The Ten Commandments* (1956)—is the executive producer and presenter of *The Squaw Man* (1914) and of DeMille's early success, *The Cheat* (1915). Furthermore Lasky Sr. is credited as the presenter of many of DeMille's early, significant films, including *The Girl of the Golden West*, *The Warrens of Virginia*, *The Captive*, and *The Arab* (see below).

Perhaps from Lasky's start in show business as a jazz musician and as manager of Herman the Great, he has learned the value of performing divinations for audiences. During the twentieth century's second and third decades, Lasky capitalizes on such lessons by presenting a slew of films whose scenarios come to characterize the manticness of Hollywood—including *God Gave Me Twenty Cents* (1926), in which the selection of a mate is determined by the toss of a coin, and many more love-divination scenarios such as *The Ace of Cads*, *We're All Gamblers*, and *The Lucky Lady*. While some Lasky scenarios associate fortune with money, some also associate fortune or fortune-telling with ethnicity, such as *Irish Luck* and *The Gypsy Trail*.

In some Lasky scenarios, spies, detectives, or judges divine certain determinations from what lies behind portents. These include *The Secret Orchard*, *The Secret Garden*, and *The Secret Hour*, as well as *Behind the Front*, *The Clue*, and *Code of the West*. Trial-melodramas presented by Lasky include *The Woman on Trial* and *The Blind Goddess*.

Linkage between law and religion runs strongly through Lasky-presented scenarios such as *Ten Modern Commandments*, *The Thirteenth Commandment*, *The Popular Sin*: they frame and resolve moral contradictions, as do *Sinners in Heaven* and *The Moral Sinner*. Moreover *The Heritage of the Desert* follows a film also known as *The Unforgivable Sin*, titled *The White Man's Law*.

Lasky's production of *Tom Sawyer* (1917), plus his presentation of *Huck and Tom* (1918) and *Huckleberry Finn* (1920), adapt for cinema Twain's practice of racial, self-locating divination. Twain's use of realism proves especially crucial for the development of the mantic cinema. Because in Twain, the realism of *Huck Finn* especially "is disclosed alternately by the thread of Huck's consciousness . . . and by the palpable events that seem randomly strung upon it," cinema's mantic use of realism benefits from adapting Twain's sophisticated technique of character-identification and narrative.⁵¹⁴

This technique—which derives a sense of reality by framing an event-sequence's indeterminacy—furthermore depends on the mantic practice of Blackface. The Twain films lead to Lasky's presentation of *Children of Jazz*, a silent scenario of ancestor-locating divination.

Lasky presents *Children of Jazz*—a silent which by four years precedes Warner's *The Jazz Singer* (1927, in Vitaphone sound)—the same year as DeMille produces and directs *The Ten Commandments* (1923). Meanwhile Lasky's presentation of *The Sheik* and *The Lady of the Harem* helps develop the pattern of displacements by which portrayals of harems titillatingly resolve a relevant American taboo.

All these displacements—especially the choosing of new ancestors—fosters a supersessionist approach, which two Lasky-presented scenarios of 1925 particularly evince. One is *New Lives for Old*. The second is a film concerning American Indians: released in Australia as *The Vanishing Race*, in the U.S. it is *The Vanishing American*. (This title, Leslie Fiedler later uses for his 1968 critique of White America's racial self-locating divinations.)

Meanwhile, from 1915 DeMille's own development of mantic cinema comes to depend directly on Jeanie MacPherson's writing of scenarios and screenplays for his films.⁵¹⁵ MacPherson authors or co-authors many of DeMille's key films (see below), including *The Cheat*, *Joan the Woman*, *The Ten Commandments*, *The King of Kings*, and *The Crusades*.

⁵¹⁴ Quirk 1995. See also Robinson 1995: in addition to Tom Quirk's chapter on "The Realism of *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*," see especially the chapters "Mr. Clemens and Jim Crow: Twain, Race, and Blackface," by Eric Lott; and "Mark Twain's Travels in the Racial Occult: Following the Equator and the Dream Tales," by Susan Gillman.

⁵¹⁵ MacPherson may well be the most important figure in Hollywood history to suffer critical neglect.

In 1939 Jesse Lasky, Jr. joins MacPherson in co-writing *Land of Liberty*, which DeMille edits. The film tells the story of U.S. history using footage from prior films such as *The Story of Alexander Graham Bell*, *Billy the Kid*, *Jezebel*, *Abraham Lincoln*, and in *Show Boat* singing “Ol’ Man River,” the star gospel singer, Paul Robeson.

That same year, Arthur Eustace Southon authors the ornithomantically titled *On Eagles’ Wings*, a novelization of the story of Moses in contemporary terms of “race relations.” Southon’s other mantically themed novels include *Jackson’s Ju-Ju*, *The Children Inherit*, and *Who Is Their Father*, as well as *The Laughing Ghosts*, *The Whispering Bush*, and *The Drums of Fate*.

Also that same year, Zora Neale Hurston—a student of Franz Boas and a leading expert on Hoodoo divination practices of Haiti and the United States—authors *Moses, Man of the Mountain*. Hurston’s Moses is a master of Hoodoo. In 1956, when none of her books are in print, Paramount credits, as bases for *The Ten Commandments*, the Moses novels by Ingraham and by Southon, but not the one by Hurston.

In 1948, Dorothy Clarke Wilson authors *Prince of Egypt*, the third and final novel that *The Ten Commandments* credits as its basis. Wilson poaches from Hurston’s theme of hoodoo.⁵¹⁶ Herself an active New England Methodist, Wilson brings to her Moses novel her own milieu’s concerns about social justice. Nevertheless, the next year’s Pocket Books edition packages Wilson’s novel emphasizing “a lustful people.” The cover features a tableaux of Moses tangling with a topless, buxom lass. Meanwhile the cover’s tag line is “The magnificent story of Moses, who forfeited a throne to found a faith”—emphasizing the magnificent story of Americans who forfeited the Old World to found a faith.

In DeMille’s postwar oeuvre, Fredric M. Frank co-writes all four of DeMille’s films. *Cecil B. DeMille’s The Greatest Show on Earth* is a circus story, and *Unconquered* is a Western. Co-writers of *Samson and Delilah* include Jesse Lasky, Jr. Finally Æneas MacKenzie and Jack Garriss join Frank and Lasky to make a foursome as the screenwriters of *The Ten Commandments* (1956).

⁵¹⁶ See Wilson 1949, 59-61.

Among the cast of *The Ten Commandments*, Yul Brynner and John Derek deserve special mention here. Brynner since 1951 has played the King of Siam in Rodgers and Hammerstein's hit musical, "The King and I." Brynner's stage performance is a huge sensation.⁵¹⁷ Moreover the play—adapted to film and released also in 1956—is itself a key text of American politics of Orientalism, foreign relations, Whiteness, and Blackness.⁵¹⁸ Regarding John Derek, he has starred in a film of some relevance to DeMille: a trial melodrama, *The Family Secret*.⁵¹⁹

THE DEMILLE FAMILY SECRET

In his 1959 autobiography (published the year he died), DeMille recalls that as a child in Pompton, New Jersey, he had a melodramatic imagination, formed by his role-playing as a fantastic hero: he had named himself "The Champion Driver." Young Cecil at play as The Champion Driver rode to save the day "just in the nick of time," "where evil was massed against good."⁵²⁰

Then DeMille tells his "secret story." He claims he kept it to himself until he was 71 years old. It concerns plants in his mother's garden: "Mother was extremely fond of Jerusalem artichokes." Alone at play one afternoon, young Cecil imagined "Those were not Jerusalem artichokes. They were the enemy. They were the Saracens at Accre . . ." Cecil, as if Richard the Lionhearted, "chopped, hacked, and twisted, [until] every last proud stalk lay over the earth in confusion . . . the victims of [his] ferocious assault." DeMille recalls that his mother "saw, without the help of an expensive child psychologist, that something was boiling, too deep for further questions. Something was. The tortures of the Gestapo could not have dragged it out of me."⁵²¹

⁵¹⁷ Brynner's performance as an Oriental despot is impressive. In 1977 when a revival of the musical returned Brynner to the role as the King, I saw him perform it on Broadway. I have seen my share of performers, and find the only one in Brynner's league is Bruce "The Boss" Springsteen.

⁵¹⁸ See Klein 2003.

⁵¹⁹ Levin 1951.

⁵²⁰ DeMille 1959, 39.

⁵²¹ DeMille 1959, 39.

Born in 1881, he had learned melodrama from popular literature, which as Susan Gillman shows, often portrayed the revelation of family relations which had been occulted: indeed DeMille's association of Gestapo, Jerusalem, and his mother hints at his family's occulted yet semi-public secret of his mother's Jewish origin, which DeMille never mentions in his autobiography nor anywhere publicly at all. Into the DeMille family, which identified itself thoroughly in terms of U.S. Protestantism and its church, Cecil B. DeMille's father had intermarried with Matilda Samuel, a daughter of a patrician, Sephardic, Jewish, English family. Cecil's father reportedly converted her to Protestantism at marriage. Lingering traces include her dark complexion, very infrequent contact with her estranged parents, and extremity in devotion to Jerusalem artichokes.

As DeMille reveals, many of his films have "told the world the Champion Driver's *secret story*."⁵²² DeMille's casting of himself—in the role of a scything Crusader—displaces his enmity onto his homestead's internal enemy, the Jerusalem artichokes, cast in a fantasy-displacement as Saracens—the Christian West's "external enemy," Muslims. It seems young DeMille destroyed his mother's Jerusalem artichokes as if to efface a badge of her Jewishness.

DEMILLE'S MANTIC, EARLY OUEVRE

DeMille who has scarcely been recognized as a maker of interracial films, actually made almost no other kind, as interspersed between the title cards of his silent films, DeMille practices racial cartomancy. Critics notice DeMille's penchant for "cardboard" characters and techniques: he usually presents the front of subjects, straight on, minimalizing diagonals and tracking. From his very first films, DeMille's cinematography meanwhile uses high-contrast lighting effects to code his miscegenation melodrama.

In this regard DeMille's cartomantic work depends not only on American stage melodrama, not only on the pageantry of England, but also on the striking, Christian-themed art of Gustave Doré.⁵²³ Doré, a Frenchman who illustrated Lord

⁵²² DeMille 1959, 40.

⁵²³ Doré himself—an expert in visual theater—for the court of Napoleon III staged tableaux vivants, during the same period that he illustrated the Bible (Higashi 1994, pp. 192-193 and 249 n. 24, cites Rose 1974, vii-viii).

Byron's works and Poe's *The Raven*, gained lasting fame as a romanticizer of the Bible. Doré's illustrated English Bible (1865), a major landmark, directly and deeply influenced DeMille's cinematography overall.⁵²⁴

In DeMille's debut film, *The Squaw Man* (1913), Wild-West miscegenation dislocates and relocates identities in terms of race, gender, and inheritance.⁵²⁵ In this melodrama Captain James Wynnegate rescues the Indian damsel-in-distress, Nat-U-Rich, who then bears his mixed-race son. After she kills the villain, Nat-U-Rich kills herself. Meanwhile Wynnegate wins entry to a new identity by inheriting an Earldom.

Displacing Indians, in 1914 DeMille features Mexican-American characters with Whites in *The Virginian* and *Rose of the Rancho*, and moreover *The Girl of the Golden West*, a cartomantic melodrama of miscegenation in which The Girl (Mabel Van Buren) wins Ramerrez (House Peters, in brownface) on a deal of the cards. One intimate tableaux shows their horses standing just behind the couple, his dark horse appearing in perspective as if mounting her white horse. That same year, in *The Man From Home* greedy Russians stand for greedy Jews, in a then-common displacement.⁵²⁶

From the fantasy-world of "pure melodrama," cinema moves further towards performing divination-by-reality. After five Westerns out of his first seven films, DeMille directs *The Warrens of Virginia* (1915), a Southern: one of the reviewers finds the on-screen armies make the film "educational" because "true to life."⁵²⁷ (Meanwhile one character's name, Blanche Sweet, connotes "white sugar" much like half a century later in *The Ten Commandments* the name Lilia connotes the lily).

This achievement emboldens DeMille to write his own screenplay, so rather than adapting a published play or novel, DeMille with Jeanie Macpherson writes his next film. It evinces family-romance fantasizing about uncovering a substitute genealogy.

Following DeMille's first Southern, *The Captive* (1915) raises the ante of mantic cinema's raciness by titillating America's secret of miscegenation between slaves and masters. This melodrama portrays romance on a Turkish farm, between a

⁵²⁴ Higashi 1994 finds that DeMille, throughout his career, brought Doré's type of Biblical theater from the elites to the masses, and paid tribute directly by copying Doré's typical setting of "the barren, craggy landscape with sheer embankments." Higashi 1994, 185.

⁵²⁵ My analysis of DeMille's oeuvre is indebted to Ringgold 1969.

⁵²⁶ See Rogin 1996, 288 n. 32.

⁵²⁷ Jessen 1915.

dusky slave and his pale mistress. Their coupling results in new identities first as the heroine loses her farm. The hero, it turns out, all along has had title to ancestral lands and nobility. He loses them, but finds a new life with her.

Miscegenation melodrama continues with *The Arab* (1915)—setting precedents for DeMille's later portrayals of Egyptians. The Arab romances a pale Christian missionary . . . until he becomes the next Sheik. That same year DeMille directs *Carmen*, adapting the classic story of the Spanish soldier and the Gypsy woman.

Chimmie Fadden Out West (1915) uses sooty makeup to darken the face of a street-urchin character, a Twainian precedent for the mud that would darken the slaves of *The Ten Commandments* (1956). Since the late nineteenth century, Chimmie Fadden has been a Bowery stage character, an Irish character who became associated with blackface.

DeMille's breakthrough success—which surely shaped *The Ten Commandments* (1956)—comes with a trial melodrama of interracial rape, interracial cattle-branding, and somatomantic reading of a scarred body. A hit with critics and at the box-office, *The Cheat* (1915) elevates him to the front rank of early directors.⁵²⁸ The climax of this Orientalist film reveals the guilt of the villain, Tori (Sessue Hayakawa) by the hidden sign of a Japanese cattle-brand he has put on the shoulder of the White heroine, Edith Hardy (Fannie Ward). As in *Birth of a Nation* (1915), this film's conflict resolves with the mob lynching the villain.

DeMille's first historical melodrama, *Joan the Woman* (1917), establishes his practices of inner-filmic typology and messianic history. He not only stages the martyrdom of Joan of Arc as a crucifixion, but moreover incorporates a latter-day, typological storyline, in which the same character, Eric Trent, is both the fifteenth-century French soldier who loves and betrays Joan of Arc *and* a twentieth-century English officer in the trenches of the Great War. Compounding things further, Joan also represents the figure of the lynched Black: when Joan's persecutor, a Catholic bishop named Cauchon, threatens to torture her, he is joined by three hooded inquisitors costumed like Klansmen.⁵²⁹

⁵²⁸ Higashi 1994, 29, 111-112, cites recollections of William deMille and Samuel Goldwyn.

⁵²⁹ See Higashi 1994, 137, 131.

CHAPTER CONCLUSION

While the critically acclaimed D. W. Griffith did not achieve financial success as a filmmaker; the artless DeMille was the most successful filmmaker of all time. This well-known financial success strongly suggests that DeMille's films have influenced filmmaking far more than critics have allowed. As an artifacts for cultural study, *The Ten Commandments*, while not "The Greatest Event in Motion Picture History" as advertised, nevertheless matters.

Perhaps more broadly than any previous medium, early cinema mediated an exchange of old lives for new. As a modern medium, mantic cinema benefitted from the genealogies charted in this dissertation, featuring sacred-text systemologies, science and nationalism, resonating with the Black Atlantic's rhetorical ecology.

The currency of the phrase "movie magic"⁵³⁰ testifies to widespread recognition that cinema hooks its auditors: however, it tends to hook auditors not through magic so much as through *mantic* practice. Because cinematic literacy is so accessible, cinema was able to become the world's first global, vernacular medium—a self-locating technology for scrying one's role in industrial modernity.

⁵³⁰ The present-day dominance of the electronic mass media is underscored by the following statistic of Google searches, undertaken on May 10, 2007: "movie magic": "about 660,000" hits; "Bible magic": about 885; "Biblical magic": about 422.

CONCLUSION

CONCLUSION OVERVIEW

The main conclusion of this investigation, which was exploratory, is that it has yielded fresh, worthwhile articulations. The articulations here of *The Ten Commandments* indicate the salience of mantic practices which prior critics have not associated with this film.

Because the study of divination is only now emerging as a distinct field,⁵³¹ in articulating my own model of divination perforce I have relied on models from diverse scholarly fields: religion, anthropology, and folklore, as well as the criticism of rhetoric, music, and literature, and of culture and media. In order to bring some thoroughness to an account of the mantic practice of *The Ten Commandments*, necessarily I have deployed a broad, working definition of what constitutes divination.

As a result however, I have exposed this investigation to two major objections, which I characterize as follows: “What you discuss does not count as divination”; or “Your definition is too broad to be useful.”

Regarding the former objection, in a sense I concur: indeed a clearly delimited rite of divination—such as a round of spin-the-bottle, or a determination, by flower-plucking, of whether “he loves me; [or] he loves me not”—is of a different order than exomologesis, which in turn is of a different order than a film’s positioning its viewers to perform as if divining identity. By lumping together incongruous things under the rubric of “divination” I do not mean to deny differences. I would not

⁵³¹ See Cornelius 2007.

categorically counter-object if someone characterizes much of what I have described as “mantish” or “divinationesque.”

My counter-objection would concern where to draw the line of authenticity. I am wary of supposing that anything *supplants* the ancient role of divination practice. These relatively diffuse practices, then, *supplement* more clearly delineated practices.

In the broadest sense, one might say that any studio-era, Hollywood film—by positioning the public to make sense of it—performs a kind of divination. The film presents its signs and narrative, typically including unforeseen events, so that its audience should read a pattern, constellating relations of and with the characters. Largely this is why, if people do not catch a line of dialogue, they tend to ask their companion “What did he say?”—auditors are compelled by a sense that each sign is potentially a key to making sense of the film, as if of an enigma.

A reader may object, next, that categorically, diviners must *recognize* their actions as divination, for it to count as such. However if the investigator focuses on practices, rather than on practitioners’ internal conditions such as believing or knowing, then the question of recognition becomes moot.

The other objection, again, is that I have defined “divination” too broadly. “If everything counts as ‘divination,’ then nothing does.” As Gerald Bruns notes, it is rare today to find an account of communication as if it were straightforward: so what interpretation is not mantic? The litmus test is whether or not anyone regards, for example, “pass the salt” as a riddle. If nobody does, then “pass the salt” is not a mantic speech-act.

My arguments do not rely on the broadest sense in which interpretation is divination. The defining question is the degree to which a speech-act marks its exposure to ritually indeterminacy. (Here I am using “marks” in the anthropological sense of “marked behavior.” I would characterize markedness as bearing an indexically self-referential component—here, as in “the finger pointing at the finger that points at indeterminacy.”) Certainly all examples of language and culture involve indeterminacy, but some Hollywood films—notably *The Ten Commandments*—especially announce their exposure to indeterminacy.

If my inquiry on *The Ten Commandments* indeed has saliency, then larger questions may follow. That is, if divination is an elephant in the room of everyday life for moderns—particularly in our uses of technologies of “new” mediation—then this

could help explain not only *The Ten Commandments*, not only cinema and other narratives, but also more. For example it could help explain why on Amazon.com, the search interface for “Search inside this book” features a bibliomantic button for “Surprise Me,” and why similarly the main page for a Google search of the internet features a button for “I’m Feeling Lucky.”

Furthermore the role of divination could help explain modern culture’s obsession with standardized test results. When standardized tests are used far beyond their statistical validity, often the usage functions like divinations, to warrant determinations.

Moreover, the role of divination can explain aspects of law and politics. For example, one form of divination—cleromancy—explains the basis of selection in the United States for jury duty. Moreover, contemporary political theorists and scholars of Classical divination tend to agree that the concept of “equal opportunity” itself is very closely tied to cleromancy. Furthermore, what about the notion that the result of a democratic election not only selects the leader but moreover can provide a mandate? Is such emphasis on a mandate not an emphasis on mantic warrantedness?

More broadly does this same line of inquiry not apply also to many forms of competition? On the sporting field does divination not explain why, after the ceremonial coin toss to select the one who will go first, competitors commonly utter the ritual invocation, “May the best man win?” As if the competition should select and warrant the winner? Does understanding social divination, in terms of the selection of individuals for a privileged role, not help explain much of the appeal of Darwinism—as if “survivors” were warranted as “the fittest”?⁵³²

Because this dissertation concerns hegemony, rhetoric, and divination, I have modeled “playing the race card” as cartomancy. However, it is important to understand the functions of the phrase—in a typical usage—more deeply and carefully in terms of hegemonic speech-acts. Stowe’s portrayal in narrative of Simon Legree as Uncle Tom’s abuser has something in common with Johnny Cochran’s portrayal at trial of detective Mark Fuhrman as O. J. Simpson’s abuser. Linda Williams adeptly situates both within “an extended cycle of racial melodrama seeking

⁵³² See Wendell 1893. Wendell remarks that “what [Calvinism] regarded as evidence for the doctrine of election is very like what people have in mind nowadays when they talk about the survival of the fittest” (119).

to give ‘moral legibility’ to race.”⁵³³ However Williams insists that the race card “needs to be seen . . . as an integral process of the gaining of rights through the recognition of injury.”⁵³⁴ I agree.

Yet whenever one characterizes rights-struggles as a mantic performance—making traces legible for a verdict—to be fair, and to avoid any risk that readers might suppose the strugglers for rights are exceptional in this regard, in the same breath one should similarly categorize Anglo-Saxon law itself, and American jeremiad particularly, as mantic performances.

Although “playing the race card” is indeed a useful trope for articulating practices of mediation after Stowe, on the other hand one can hardly strip from the phrase its connotation of disparagement for the advocacy of civil rights. More basically, though there is indeed a salient sense in which Stowe and others have played a race card, on the other hand the phrase does not etymologically derive from Whites’ rhetoric of Black pathos as in *Uncle Tom’s Cabin*.⁵³⁵ It is a recent coinage.

What is this competition in which the race card appears? Williams discusses the race card in terms of “trump,” as if Whites and Blacks were engaged in a rhetorical game of bridge.⁵³⁶ Yet, though competitive, such a rhetorical competition does not take place within the confines of a card game. It concerns the basic *warranting of verdicts*: it is a competition between hege-mantic and counter-hege-mantic divinations. To analyze how this is so, next I consider generic debates.

White hegemony claims that Blacks, on the whole, have remained subaltern because of their chronic failure in open competition. When Whites tend to select Blacks neither for college nor for employment but for imprisonment, in hegemonic rhetoric all such selections are open competitions of equal opportunity.

The competitive processes of college admissions, hiring, or of a legal trial, *warrant* the verdicts as if they had been insulated from self-interested manipulation. These processes, for their validity in procuring warrants, depend on rules that prevent or appear to prevent manipulation.

⁵³³ L. Williams 2001, 5.

⁵³⁴ L. Williams 2001, 4.

⁵³⁵ See L. Williams 2001, 300.

⁵³⁶ L. Williams 2001, 4.

By decrying the actual manipulation, the charge of racism challenges the divined warrants' validity. The charge characterizes the warrants as fraudulent.

Instead, in order to advance counter-hegemonically, the decriers practice *moral* divination, emphasizing the rules of moral validity. Hegemons counter-charge: "You are playing the race-card." With this response, the hegemon defends his divinatory warrant by rejecting *a competition whose very premise would supersede his own warrant with another*.

By labeling the racism card as "the race card," the rejection frames race itself as the sudden problem—arising from the applicant's unruliness. This rejection has power because overall, the systems of socioeconomic and legal competition depend on exposing each *individual* to ritually pure indeterminacy. Such rites serve towards keeping at bay the appearance of *racial* manipulation. Against any charge of racism, then, the hegemon implies that the charge of racism itself constitutes racial manipulation, by Blacks. Finally the hegemon suggests that the charge of racism ridiculously puts the entire socioeconomic and legal system on trial facing a prosecution based on "mere melodrama"—meaning an empty, illusory, fake rite of the benighted masses.

This dissertation's analysis of *The Ten Commandments'* racial divinations enhances the models of Eric Lott and Linda Williams. The enhancements come via tight focus on certain key terms, and broad sketching of branches of the genealogies of blackface and melodrama. This investigation has demonstrated that in some key ways, "divinatorily resolve and warrant" is a more cogent articulation of mediation than Eric Lott's "magically' resolve," or Linda Williams's tropes of alchemy or trump.

Meanwhile, as an American who presents his work in the U.S., my findings might help to recontextualize relevant, American models afresh. My provocative model might help towards improving American cultural studies' present, international reputation for stagnation. It seems that too many scholars outside the United States characterize its state-of-the-art of "cultural studies" as a derivative, Birmingham-School practice.⁵³⁷

⁵³⁷ Henry Krips, in private conversation with the author, at the annual meeting of the Cultural Studies Association in Portland, Oregon, April 19, 2007; in response to my question of why only a handful of scholars had come from abroad to the

Again however my main conclusion is much simpler, regarding the mantological analysis of rhetorics and their genealogies: it has enough cogency to be worthwhile for critiquing this one film's cultural work. As a tentative exploration, this investigation has succeeded in providing provocative conclusions to each chapter, regarding *The Ten Commandments*.

Yet, if I have established relevance of the results, I still must situate my working model of cinema-as-divination, so this is the purpose of the first section of this dissertation's three-part Conclusion. After the present Overview, I begin by returning to the work of Victor Turner, towards articulating the larger context of modern performance's relation to ancient rites of divination; and certain implications for scholarship. The first section is called "The Social Drama, the Matrix of Rites, and the Pitfalls of Indeterminacy."

This Conclusion's second section—"Who is on the Lord's Side of the Mantic Moses Matrix?"—begins with Jewish legend and proceeds into considering Exodus 32:26 ("Who is on the Lord's side?") as relevant to *The Ten Commandments* in terms of divination-by-trial.

The final section—featuring articulations by Fredric Jameson and by Walter Benjamin—addresses romance, the real, and historiography, as relevant to mantic practice.

SECTION A:
THE SOCIAL DRAMA, THE MATRIX OF RITES,
AND THE PITFALLS OF INDETERMINACY

SECTION OVERVIEW

How can it be, that “divinatory practice has had direct influence in shaping, even creating, . . . striking literary patterns,”⁵³⁸ and even the dynamics of modern hegemony? I return here to Victor Turner’s articulations, in order to explain hegemony’s role in terms of “the social drama” and the matrix of rites. Though Turner does not use the terms *hegemony* or *counterhegemony*, he discusses their basic processes astutely in terms of indeterminacy.

SUBSECTION A1:
MANTOLOGY OF THE SOCIAL DRAMA

Better than in his writings on divination per se, Turner in 1980 contextualizes how ancient rituals relate to modern hegemony. “Where historical life itself fails to make cultural sense in terms that formerly held good,” Turner finds, “narrative and cultural drama may have the task of *poiesis*, that is, of remaking cultural sense.”⁵³⁹ Most basically, because “ritual is a declaration of form *against* indeterminacy, therefore indeterminacy is always present in the background of any analysis of ritual.”⁵⁴⁰ This indeterminacy is part of social life, where encounters and balances may shift from moment to moment.

Towards stability humans nurse basic “aspirations to transform social reality into organized or systematic forms.”⁵⁴¹ Hegemony, capitalizing on such aspirations, however misleadingly and unfairly *delivers* a version of social order through

⁵³⁸ Preus 1991, 449.

⁵³⁹ Turner 1980, 168.

⁵⁴⁰ Moore 1977, 17, quoted by Turner 1980, 158.

⁵⁴¹ Turner 1980, 157.

“regularizing processes” and “processes of situational adjustment.”⁵⁴² Yet “even when ordering rules and customs are strongly sanctioned,” even within a “universe of relatively determinate elements,” still at sites of ambiguities, “indeterminacy may be produced.”⁵⁴³

Indeterminacy is “all that may be, might be, could be, perhaps even should be. It is that which terrifies in the breach and crisis phases of a social drama”:⁵⁴⁴ yet *contra* Turner’s gist, I emphasize that *hegemonic texts actually depend on indeterminate processes*, in order to gain involvement in stimulating fresh developments—in order to co-opt them.⁵⁴⁵

As Turner explains cultural performance via “the social drama”—roughly, the performative subtext of a social tension—his model can explain a lot. Turner frames the social drama’s unfolding “as a process of converting particular values and ends, distributed over a range of actors, in a system (which is always temporary and provisional) of shared or consensual meaning.”⁵⁴⁶ Herein I have catalogued—through certain categories of practices and motifs—one film’s work with particular values and ends.

Though particular viewers’ constellations of meanings are contingent, rather than fixed, even so—and even in the case of viewers who do not take the film seriously—in each case the cultural performance works by bringing participants towards “enjoying that we know that we know ourselves.”⁵⁴⁷ Such enjoyment constitutes the appeal of *The Ten Commandments*’ offering of resolutions. This film positions viewers to participate in divination rites mainly in order to encourage viewers to feel they come collectively to know themselves.

Resolution comes contingently because the rules, codes, and formations of meaning-making, though canonical, do not—cannot—foreclose on the meanings of a given performance. In Turner’s terms, “the rules may frame the performance, but the flow of action and interaction within that frame may conduce to hitherto

⁵⁴² Turner 1980, 158.

⁵⁴³ Turner 1980, 158.

⁵⁴⁴ Turner 1980, 157, emphasis added.

⁵⁴⁵ Turner argues that a procedure’s indeterminacy “is potentiality, the possibility of becoming” (Moore 1977, 17, quoted by Turner 1980, 158).

⁵⁴⁶ Turner 1980, 156.

⁵⁴⁷ Turner 1980, 156.

unprecedented meanings, which may be incorporated into subsequent performances,⁵⁴⁸ as if transcending the frame. Co-optation is never the last word. Finally, cultural practices of *resolving* actually can shape the political *revolving* of social realities.

In Foucault's terms, hege-mancy is one of the "linguistic and institutional forms through which human beings define their relationships."⁵⁴⁹ For Homi Bhabha after Frantz Fanon, "cultural and political change as a 'fluctuating movement' of occult instability"⁵⁵⁰—which fluctuating relates closely to what Stephen Heath and Eric Lott each calls "flickering," and what I am calling *hege-mantic exposure to ritually pure indeterminacy*—performs "the power of tradition to be reinscribed through the conditions of contingency and contradictoriness that attend upon the lives of those who are 'in the minority.'"⁵⁵¹

Across flickering visions of what subaltern life seems to conceal about status, traditions deploy enigmas. Specifically, this articulation helps explain why Egyptians in the opening dialogue of *The Ten Commandments* try to puzzle out the meaning of a divination by slaves.

SUBSECTION A2: THE MATRIX OF RITES

Turner concludes that a hermeneutics of modern textual practice in terms of ancient ritual practice makes sense because the practices are homologous. "Ritual in its performative plenitude in tribal and many post-tribal cultures is a matrix from which several other genres of cultural performance, including most of those we tend to think of 'aesthetic,' have been derived."⁵⁵² Specifically in Western modernity, "It would seem that with industrialization, urbanization, spreading literacy, labor migration, specialization, professionalization, bureaucracy, the division of the leisure

⁵⁴⁸ Turner 1980, 160.

⁵⁴⁹ Hutton 1988, 127 paraphrases Foucault 1980a, pp. 88-92 and 158-165.

⁵⁵⁰ Bhabha 1994, 37.

⁵⁵¹ Bhabha 1994, pp. 2, 152; Bhabha discusses Frantz Fanon's essay "On national culture," in Fanon 1967. Bhabha also cites Foucault 1988b and Lyotard 1984, 22.

⁵⁵² Turner 1980, 160.

sphere from the work sphere,” ritual itself carried over into diverse practices of “industrial leisure,” so that

the former integrity of the orchestrated religious gestalt that once constituted ritual has burst open and many specialized performative [arts] have been born from death of that mighty *opus deorum hominumque*, including the novel and cinema.⁵⁵³

Prominent among human rites, in no small degree divination has given rise to forms such as the novel and cinema.

A context for Turner’s manifesto is that among critics after Marx, mass-cultural texts *contrast* with premodern practices. In most Marxist hermeneutics, patterns evoking ancient or folk rites are merely residual, hollow shells—signs of alienation. However Turner rebelled against a Marxist orthodoxy in Britain—particularly of his advisor, Max Gluckman—which held that because sociopolitical organization determines meanings thoroughly, therefore any other hermeneutics is invalid.

In bringing focus on cultural performance as a locus of meanings, Turner struggled with a major, Leftist hindrance: a focus on counter-hegemonic potential might distract attention from the suffering of wage slaves. That is, in the scope of academia, Leftists have faced difficulty enough merely in promoting and maintaining focus on the sociopolitical organization of capitalist exploitation. How bad can exploitation be, readers might ask, if subalterns have recourse to these marvelously transformative rituals? A focus on counter-hegemonic potential might threaten the Left’s righteous project.

This hindrance has stunted scholarly articulation of modern rites of mass-mediation, because one cannot adequately interpret texts with reference only to the material conditions of production: the cultural processes of counter-hegemony and co-optation are also salient. Anyway circa 2007, Leftist scholars’ righteous dream—of transforming society by exposing exploitation—hardly seems to be bearing fruit.

⁵⁵³ Turner 1980, 166. I am adapting Turner’s discourse somewhat. He talks of “cultural forms” themselves as “genres,” which I think is confusing in a filmic context because of course “Western” is considered a genre, but cinema itself is not considered a genre. Moreover, Turner does not mention “modes” as forms. “Performative arts” is his phrase.

This is no reason to stop trying, but it may call for an expansion of focus and strategy. To start, much like anthropologically-oriented scholars study “pre-modern” civilizations in terms of their “orchestrated religious gestalt,” so should scholars of modernity attend much more thoroughly to industrial rites.⁵⁵⁴

Some advance is needed because no paradigmatic models nor terms have emerged handily to enable researchers of rites to analyze mass mediums with suitable cogency. Meanwhile, though many researchers after Durkheim have held that a set of rites constitute a religion, still it seems all too easy for scholars to fall back on models in which religion constitutes rites. So for this reason—even though Turner already has been overused in American cultural studies—still there is much to learn from Turner’s framing of industrial rites.

Yet unfortunately even Turner posits modernity in reductive terms of supersession. Modern practices, he claims, grew only from the ashes of “the integrity of the orchestrated religious gestalt that once constituted ritual.” It seems Turner, coming in the duly proud tradition of English freethinkers unfettered by orthodoxy, did not resist the temptation to reify both the “integrity” of religious fetters, and the radicality of his predecessors’ break with a top-down gestalt. Actual practices have always been constituted by diverse determinants, never purely orchestrated from the top down.

Though on one hand it is undeniable that the Church as an institution “lost control” of European society, on the other hand, the Church’s orchestration of practices always has proceeded in concert with other, overlapping determinants, including folklore. Next, industrialism has indeed introduced some new rites, but largely *within* an older matrix.

Secularizing and ritualizing processes ebb and flow, not especially as cross-currents. Overall, the salient division is not between religious and secular gestalts, so much as it is between various historical blocks which territorialize such discourses and their associated rites.

So in terms of divination, its practices tend to get co-opted, yet as a category it remains accessible for counter-hegemony. Ultimately a divination-centered model

⁵⁵⁴ On the importance of what I am calling industrial rites, see Kaye and McClelland 1990.

can account particularly well for flows and counterflows of hegemony because divination has always been, among other things, a popular practice.

SUBSECTION A3:

NAVIGATING “THE PITFALLS OF INDETERMINACY”

Especially for scholars impatient with previous accounts of cultures’ contingency, my approach might help navigate a “pitfall of indeterminacy.”⁵⁵⁵ In this regard, though I am hardly writing sociology per se, perhaps my investigation satisfies the main imperatives outlined by Jeffrey C. Alexander and Philip Smith in their influential essay of 2001, “The Strong Program in Cultural Sociology.” They call for “hermeneutically reconstructing social texts in a rich and persuasive way”: at least my textual reconstruction foregrounds hermeneutic richness.

Their essay challenges a neo-Marxist paradigm in which the sociohistorical conditions of production and reception, as determinants, tend to override any other cultural patterns. As Alexander and Smith characterize this paradigm, it poses meanings as “infinitely malleable in response to social settings.”

Alexander and Smith, finding this paradigm reductive, call for “a sharp analytical uncoupling of culture from social structure” in order to make new advances. Indeed my analysis largely has uncoupled culture from social structure, towards articulating certain common threads of mantic practices through the ages. A next phase of my investigation could recouple my findings much more specifically to certain social settings.

Though not for all the same reasons, I take up the call by Alexander and Smith for work that avoids “the pitfalls of indeterminacy.” Like them, I address “the intractable dilemmas of freedom and determination.” Like them, I have been dissatisfied, in the end, with neo-Gramscian and other models of “contingency in the play of culture.” These models seem unduly instrumentalist in ascribing agency: that is, such a model of contingency “is often reduced to instrumental reason (in the case of elites ‘articulating’ a discourse for hegemonic purposes) or to some kind of

⁵⁵⁵ “The Strong Program in Cultural Sociology” has appeared in *The Handbook of Sociological Theory*, edited by Jonathan Turner (New York: Kluwer, 2001), and in Alexander’s *The Meanings of Social Life* (New York: Oxford, 2003). Also it is archived at <http://research.yale.edu/ccs/about/strong-program/>.

ambiguous systemic or structural causation (in the case of discourses being ‘anchored’ in relations of power).” Finally, accounts of such models “tend to develop elaborate and abstract terminological (de)fences that provide the [mere] illusion of specifying concrete mechanisms.”

However while they find these shortcomings fatal flaws, my aim has not been to start from scratch, so much as to *extend the reach* of a model of hegemony in terms of contingency. In order to understand determinations, one must account convincingly for *indeterminacy*—and how it gets channeled. In order to get there, one must bracket the impulse to distinguish between “illusion” and “what really happens.”

Though I find their critique in parts useful in validating my model, meanwhile I reject the claim of Alexander and Smith that one should aim to show “how culture interferes with and directs what really happens”—because I understand any sense of “what really happens” as culturally constituted. So they might dismiss my model—as they more or less dismiss nearly all other cultural scholarship—as not satisfying their “skeptical demands for causal clarity.” Aiming for a “hard-headed” hard science, Alexander and Smith characterize all other projects as soft and weak, at best mere stepping stones on the path to a strong model of clear causality.

Alexander and Smith, who imply culture itself as a machine, demand a model of culture on which they can deploy as an answer-machine for questions of locating determinants. According to the experimental method, a good theory will predict “what actually happens.”

My model might satisfy them: mine is neither especially elaborate nor abstract, as such models go; moreover it specifies concrete mechanisms. My model predicts that other films also would deploy mantic practices similarly, and indeed it is easy to find many films (and television shows) that, like *The Ten Commandments*, open nephelomantically.⁵⁵⁶

⁵⁵⁶ The best known example is the opening sequence of *The Simpsons*, in which the cloudscape yields the Simpsons; and the opening sequence of M*A*S*H (both the film and television series) which resolves into a shot of helicopters. See also *Sky King*, of the 1940s and 1950s. A good cinematic example is *Superman* (“Look! up in the sky! It’s a bird! It’s a plane!” It resolves into Superman.) Moreover see *Lonely Are the Brave* (1962), which opens with a telling shot of vapor-trails in a sky-scape. (See Tompkins 1992; see also Engel 1994. This film also features some anti-cartomantic self-locating: asked by a policeman for identification, the protagonist replies “I don’t need cards to figure out who I am.”) *Lonely Are the Brave* was written by the leader of the Hollywood Ten, Dalton Trumbo, a master of the flows and counterflows of hegemony. (See Heimlich 2005). See also *Picnic at Hanging Rock*, *Close Encounters of the Third Kind*, *Aguirre, the Wrath of God*, *Barry Lyndon*, *The Crying Game*, *Beware of a Holy Whore*, *The Big Animal*, *Repo Man*, *Nights of Cabiria*, *Scarecrow*, *CE3K*, and *Raiders of the Lost Ark*—each of which resolves its initial icon nephelomantically.

However actually I do not offer my model as an answer-machine, so much as merely a story. This is largely because I am wary of the imperative for a machine that produces *warranted* answers.

To anyone craving an answer-machine, perhaps the best substitute is a convincing analysis of how certain dominant forms of rhetoric function as answer-machines. I suppose this is why Alexander and Smith prize the formal models of literary genre articulated by theorists such as Fredric Jameson and Peter Brooks—which though magisterially clear, hardly prove any causality.

It is not coincidental that Jameson and Brooks, who have articulated some their key models in terms of divination, are favorites of these advocates of the Strong Program in Cultural Sociology. Indeed, the Strong Program itself arose largely through analysis of nineteenth-century debates over phrenology⁵⁵⁷—a form of somatomancy. Where science meets narrative, it seems advances in understanding divination await.

CONCLUDING SECTION B:
WHO IS ON THE LORD'S SIDE OF THE MANTIC MOSES MATRIX?

SECTION OVERVIEW

In the body of this dissertation I argued that the Reformation and the American revolution both relied heavily on Exodus as a tale of slavery and supersession. I paraphrased Ferdinand Tönnies's identification of a large-scale pattern as *Gemeinschaft und Gesellschaft* (Community and Civil Society). A civil society, representing itself as supplanting an older order of community association, expresses

⁵⁵⁷ See Brown 1984.

both envy and resentment for that older order, *Gemeinschaft*, which it characterizes by “unity of will.”⁵⁵⁸

Rhetoric about *the new*—like in modern and American tendencies to focus on the next new medium—always manifests concern about the repression of the old unity of will. Followers of the older order get stigmatized, but not forgotten—indeed the forgetting would be dangerous, because the older order retains a subversive power.

Thus this dissertation—towards tracing, in the form a rite, some tidal effects of a society’s drama—highlights various *returns of the superseded*. Specifically I have suggested that new mediums’ signature rhetoric often features the mode of tracing slave-conspiracy.

Perhaps this basic pattern tends to figure not only in the rise of civil society, but moreover whenever one order of community is posed as superseding another. Perhaps this pattern is as old as the enslavement of one people by another. A master-culture—refitting its subalterns with a slave-identity to supplant their older, own identity—traces a feared uprising.

Nevertheless, and regardless of where and when this pattern has developed, it has figured as foundational in Jewish, Christian, modern, and American mantic rhetorics. That is, after God (or the forefathers) gave the scripture, the new mediation-by-scripture superseded the old ways—this is what rhetors tend to say.

The modern slave-trade, and its abolition, greatly compounded the mantic functioning of such patterns in rhetoric. This rhetorical heritage, as it focuses on slavery, drew on the figure we might call *Moses the superseder*.

SUBSECTION B1:

THE MANTIC MOSES MATRIX

As the Bible itself—with Exodus and Deuteronomy framing a narrative of slavery and emancipation as the sign of God-chosen peoplehood—tends to serve a mantic function for its users, it particularly deploys the liminality of Moses, who starts by escaping determination, then passes back and forth indeterminately. Was

⁵⁵⁸ Jameson 1981, 146. Tonnies and Jameson say that the civil society actually supplants the community, but I am primarily interested here in the performative dimension of the supplanting.

Moses a Hebrew slave or an Egyptian Prince? A born slave, he unknowingly becomes Egyptian, then re-adopts slave status, then leads the slaves' liberation.

Meanwhile the figure of Moses has always been channeled through dense matrices of intertextuality linking the status of slave and nobility—as if users, by their very usage of the story, themselves undergo exposure to indeterminacy in identity, emerging repeatedly with a determination to locate themselves collectively.

Older mantic tales predate the Book of Exodus; subsequent oral traditions of Moses tend to feature divination. Particularly the beginning of *The Ten Commandments*' narrative—the divining of Moses's birth—evokes ancient tales.

Recording such tales in the eleventh century, Rashi, the premier sage of midrash, emphasizes that Moses's advent and his parentage were, for the leaders of Egypt, matters of mantic inquiry.

The day that Moses was born, (Pharaoh's astrologers) said to him, "Today there was born their deliverer, but we do not know whether (he is) of the Egyptians or of Israel."⁵⁵⁹

Is Moses of the Egyptians or of Israel? Inquiring minds want to know. This is the story's point, to frame his status in terms of mantic inquiry. Diviners determined that the liberator had been born, but the question of his group-identity was up for grabs. The story instructs its auditor to take up the inquiry.

Exodus—that is, the narrative in received versions of the Hebrew Bible—includes, between Moses's private revelation of his parentage and publicity of the revelation, a liminal stage of Moses-as-Egyptian-in-Midian, meeting his Midianite mate at the well.⁵⁶⁰ In the tales from some rabbis, Moses married his Ethiopian wife in Ethiopia also during this liminal stage of Midian transition.⁵⁶¹

⁵⁵⁹ Rashi 1949, p. 14, col. 1, Sh. R. 1. Rashi continues, "and we see that his end (is) to be smitten by water. Therefore (Pharaoh) decreed that day also upon the Egyptians, for it is stated, "Every son that is born," but it is not stated, "that is born to the Hebrews" (parentheses in original).

⁵⁶⁰ See Keller 1981, 137, cited by Kirsch 1998, 99. This liminal episode is key. Significantly, after Moses accepts his Hebrew parentage, he does not immediately don a slave's garb, but instead continues to allow Egyptians to view him as an Egyptian rather than as a Hebrew. At this point Moses is merely allowing Egyptians to continue their regard for him. But then he flees to Midian, where he is unknown. Arriving at a desert well, he rescues the daughters of the priest of Midian. His reception in

Do the midrash imply that Pharaoh aimed to eliminate the potential of male Hebrew-Egyptian hybrids? Such implication might explain why Rashi finishes the tale of the astrologers as follows. Because the astrologers cannot determine whether the Hebrews' liberator is a son of Israel or of Egypt, "Therefore (Pharaoh) decreed that day also upon the Egyptians," death to the firstborn sons, because in the Torah "it is stated 'Every son that is born, but it is not stated, 'that is born to the Hebrews.'"

Regardless of what the tale's taxonomic concern may suggest, it is clear at least that midrash long have figured movement across the thresholds of sexual intercourse—notably in a master's rape of a slave woman—to foster mantic raciness, as in the midrash *Shemot Rabbah*, whose tale Rashi colorfully tells as "Smiting a Hebrew man."⁵⁶² The tale supplies motivation to the abusive Egyptian overseer whom in Exodus, Moses kills.

It begins with the covetous overseer flogging the husband of Shlomith, a Hebrew woman who in her bed fails to determine which man is which.

He smote and flogged him. And the husband of Shlomith, the daughter of Dibri was he (the Hebrew), and he (the Egyptian) cast his eyes upon her. And at night he awoke him (the Hebrew) and took him forth from his house, while he (the Egyptian) returned and he entered the house and lay with his wife, she thinking that he was her husband.

And the husband returned to his house and understood the matter. Now when that Egyptian saw that he

Midian marks a liminal stage between Moses the Egyptian and Moses the Hebrew. In most extra-Biblical versions of the story, the Midianite sisters identify Moses, who has indeed come from Egypt, as an Egyptian. Some rabbinical tales, moreover, say that on arriving in Midian, Moses was trying to appear Egyptian.

⁵⁶¹ Kirsch 1998 adds that in these rabbinic tales Moses also became a conquering mercenary, then ruler of Ethiopia (25).

⁵⁶² de Lauretis 1987, 43-44, cites Lotman 1979, 167-168. According to Lotman, who has analyzed the gendered crossings found in typical plots of myths, the myths'

initial situation is that a certain plot-space is divided by a *single* boundary into an internal and external sphere, and a *single* character has the opportunity to cross that boundary. . . . In the mythical text, then, the hero must be male regardless of the gender of the character, because the obstacle, whatever its personification (sphinx or dragon, sorceress or villain), is morphologically female—and indeed, simply, the womb, the earth, the space of this movement. As he crosses the boundary and "penetrates" the other space, the mythical subject is constructed as human being and as male; he is the active principle of culture, the establisher of distinction, the creator of differences. Female is what is not susceptible to transformation, to life or death; she (it) is an element of plot-space, a topos, a resistance, matrix and matter.

realized the affair, he smote and punished him all day.⁵⁶³

The tropes of American melodrama, and even the motifs of inter-ethnic flagellation and inter-ethnic rape, seem to manifest ancient social drama. Specifically from *Shemot Rabbah* comes *The Ten Commandments*' triangle of Baka versus Joshua over Lilia—in which Moses (Charlton Heston) becomes the rescuer of Joshua (John Derek), who is cuckolded and whipped by Baka the Master Builder (Vincent Price).

Moreover from the relation between Exodus and *Shemot Rabbah* comes the inner-filmic typology between plot and subplot. In simple terms, this typology is as I have described in the body of the dissertation: the triangulations of desirers over the desired.

More deeply, the configuration in *Shemot Rabbah* stands the rapist and Moses in typological (and chiasmatic) relation to each other: as if the finding of identity by Moses—and moreover, by the auditors of the tale—ultimately supersedes the rapist's potency. That is, first, in the Nile, infant Moses gets his identity switched. Later in Shlomith's bed the overseer gets *his* identity switched.⁵⁶⁴ The overseer next switches back to his original Egyptian identity, prefiguring Moses's switch back to *his* original Hebrew identity.

In the tales this congruence is a matter of causation, because by killing this same Egyptian overseer, Moses kills his own “inner Egyptian” and his own “inner overseer,” thus liberating his own “inner slave” and his emerging, Hebrew identity. Such identity-finding is the use-value of mantic raciness.

Meanwhile Shlomith can stand in typological (and chiasmatic) relation to the women of Midian. Paralleling Shlomith, who misrecognizes an Egyptian (her husband's overseer) as if a Hebrew, the Midianite women misrecognize a Hebrew (Moses) as an Egyptian. Then, paralleling the overseer tricking Shlomith, Moses (other midrash specify) on arriving in Midian wrongly was trying to “pass” himself as Egyptian even though he already knew himself as a Hebrew.

Of course, an implication of *Shemot Rabbah* is that Shlomith in her bed did not care to distinguish her husband from her husband's overseer. It is this implication

⁵⁶³ Midrash *Shemot Rabbah*; see Shin'an, Avigdor; see Rashi 1949, p. 8, col. 2. On versions of this episode see also Kirsch 1998, 81, who also cites Rappoport 1995, vol. 2, p. 240, 238; and Ginzberg 1956, vol. 2, pp. 279, 280.

⁵⁶⁴ This typological relationship is chiasmatic in that the two characters switch in opposite directions.

The Ten Commandments manifests by having one of the Midianite women ask, “Who cares? He’s a man!”

Retellings of the story of Moses have long been updating it. As Christianity reinscribes the Moses matrix, the Gospels mention Moses more than eighty times⁵⁶⁵ Early Christians particularly emphasized the role of Moses as a suffering apostle of God⁵⁶⁶—as if his were a trial by ordeal. Subsequently, miracle plays consistently put “Christian language into the mouths of their Old Testament characters,”⁵⁶⁷ including Moses. By the medieval era of European art, visually Moses resembled Jesus.⁵⁶⁸ Romanticism further enriched the matrix of Moses by highlighting the heroism of Moses’s loneliness⁵⁶⁹—another trial by ordeal—as well as his tyranny,⁵⁷⁰ and moreover by situating Romantic Moses against the Age of Reason.

Finally Exodus and *The Ten Commandments* each positions its auditors to identify with Moses and configure, from across the indeterminacies, a determination that makes sense, to perform collective-self-locating. Like any hegemony, to be effective this self-identifying process must continually be repeated.

SUBSECTION B2: DIVINING WHO IS ON THE LORD’S SIDE

In the Book of Exodus Moses inquires, “Who is on the Lord’s side?” (Exodus 32:26). Many of Moses’s auditors-within-the-narrative apparently do not answer satisfactorily, so Moses orders the Levite men to execute 3,000 of them.

Since Augustine, Christian commentary on Exodus 32:26 has focused on the slaughter of the three thousand men, which comes *after* the determination.⁵⁷¹ but the

⁵⁶⁵ Silver 1982, 136 says this is more than any other figure of the Hebrew Scriptures. Presumably he means, not counting God.

⁵⁶⁶ Silver 1982, 136.

⁵⁶⁷ Daiches 1975, 247.

⁵⁶⁸ Kirsch 1998.

⁵⁶⁹ See Daiches 1975, 248.

⁵⁷⁰ Craciun 1996.

⁵⁷¹ On Christian applications of “Who is on the Lord’s side,” see Walzer 1968.

midrash of “Who is on the Lord’s side?” are replete with rites of divination, each of which procures a warrant for a determination. In the midrash, the larger inquiry at hand—“Is Israel guilty for betraying God with the Golden Calf?”—calls for trials by ordeal, a trial by tribunal, and trials by contest. In the crux of one contest—a debate between Moses and God—Moses refers to another contest, which pits followers’ faith in God against faith in soothsayers.⁵⁷²

The Ten Commandments poses its mantic inquiry as a contest, too. However it does not pose itself as a trial of the hypothetical or the legendary, but a trial for “the world today.”

In *The Ten Commandments*, among those rushing to get onto the Lord’s side, the only recognizable character who appears is Bithiah’s lead guardsman (played by Woody Strode—who, wearing a beard, also played the King of Ethiopia.) Faced with Moses’s inquisition, if the viewer’s inclination is to rush onto the Lord’s side, then here the film positions the viewer to identify with the figure of the Black man.

Moreover as Cold War propaganda the film mainly poses Moses as America, on whose side is the figure of the Black man. The figure of the Black man works

⁵⁷² While the ordeal consists mainly of Moses’s struggle with the five Angels of Destruction, moreover the contest is a debate between Moses and God, as if the best debater should carry the day. Because Israel has sinned with the golden calf, God has abandoned Israel, but Moses debates with God to win his support for Israel.

Moses brings up soothsaying as if playing to God’s competitiveness towards the Egyptians’ faith in their fortune-tellers. As Louis Ginzburg retells the ancient tale, Moses reminds God that Egypt’s fortune-tellers “predicted to their king that the star ‘Ra’ah’ would move as a harbinger of blood and death before the Israelites.” If God abandons Israel, he will be fulfilling that prediction! That would strengthen faith in Egyptian fortune-telling, at the expense of faith in God.

God then blames Moses for bringing with Israel the mixed multitude: because Moses failed to practice segregation strictly enough, the mixed multitude corrupted Israel by seducing it to idolatry, God claims.

Moses puts onto the proverbial scales of justice all the major ordeals of the three patriarchs, which they all passed. These include the fire of the lime-kiln, and the other ten tests of Abraham; the sacrifice of Isaac; and the exile of Jacob.

Moses, turning the tables, then puts God through a hypothetical guilt divination. If God does not change course, Moses shows, God will be guilty of breaking his promise to the patriarchs to safeguard their descendants. God tells Moses that even though he has quit protecting Israel’s life, he still someday will fulfill his guarantee of resurrection. Moses asks God, “if the dead are to be restored to life hereafter, what wilt Thou then say to the fathers of this nation, if they ask Thee what has become of the promise Thou hast made to them?” If God violates his promise, the tribunal will find him guilty.

To rest his case, Moses clinches it by making an absent presence into a present absence: the outside constitutes the inside. Moses repeats Abraham’s argument at Sodom, but with a twist. God should spare Israel for the sake of only ten just men, Moses argues: then he names seven. God asks, what about the other three? Moses replies to God, “Thou hast said that the dead will hereafter be restored to life, so count with these the three Patriarchs to make the number ten complete.”

These tales divine that mantic practices deliver the warrant for action. A more down-to-earth tale of tribunal involves regulations of Jewish jurisprudence, which require judgment and punishment within one day. In this tale Moses appoint these Levites as judges: to divine the guilt of each of those accused of idolotry, their criteria is the testimony of eyewitnesses.

matically in American culture because it is fixed: with reference to its fixity, non-Blacks can locate their own national identity. In Exodus, Miriam and the Midianite women are marked with fixed identities over which Moses switches his own group-identities.

Just like the inquiry “Who is on the Lord’s side?” implies that some auditors are *not* on the Lord’s side, more generally the constituting of *our side* depends on the figure who is categorically excluded. In terms of Lacanian critique, this excluded figure is the *structuring absence*.

Relevantly in terms of political theory, Giorgio Agamben suggests that as the foundational process of social identity, any collective tends to determine its own sense of boundedness by designating its structuring outsider. For Agamben the emblem for the structuring outsider is *the categorically taboo human*, or *homo sacer*—literally, *sacred man*.⁵⁷³ This theory can account for Othering, segregation, and slavery, as well as for witch hunts. Agambenian theory helps in articulating Cold War rhetoric of the U.S., and its figuration of the Black. The aim to close ranks prompts designation of Communists as those who are not on the Lord’s side.

In *The Ten Commandments* the figure of the Black man serves as a pawn in the Cold propaganda War, and at the same time also appears in order to serve deeper mantic functions, including conditioning of the viewer’s response. That is, in response to hostility of Nefretiri, the King of Ethiopia reacts with displeasure; at Joshua’s rebellion, the headbanded slave cringes then clenches his fists; at Moses’s arrival as the emancipator, the Black overseer hails Moses’s new persona joyfully; and when the time comes to rush to the Lord’s side, Bithiah’s guardsman is doing what a viewer might well want to do.

Towards recoupling the film’s cultural work more closely with its conditions of production and release, one can begin by noting that in the mid-1950s’ broader constituting of White America, the Black figure is always a trace, “present in its absence.” Congruently in the film the Black figure, always primarily a trace of something, appears absent in its presence, in the sense that each Black figure seems invisible to the film’s other characters. This is a mantic function, in the sense that a

⁵⁷³ Agamben 1998. The term, which comes from ancient Roman law, designates he who can be killed without being sacrificed. Arguable it applies to those killed by the Levites in Exodus 32.

rite of divination channels traces from the sub-visible pattern—which is always actively guiding events as an absent presence.

In protest not only against lynching, but also against such usages of the figure of the Black by Hollywood's White hegemony, Paul Robeson—the Black, Hollywood star famous for singing “Go Down Moses,” whom DeMille had prominently featured in *Land of Liberty* (1939)—subsequently had become known as a pro-Soviet advocate of Communism. This development presumably spurred DeMille—who declared himself a mass mediator of Washington's policies⁵⁷⁴—to foreground a Black figure on America's side, Moses's side.

The film, which was in pre-production from 1951, had its preview in Salt Lake City, Utah, on August 3, 1956. In his remarks, live, before the preview that Friday night a half century ago, DeMille (if he followed his own script) began by claiming the film, through its dependence on Philo, “brings Moses into history.” “You will see why he is not in Egyptian history,” DeMille added, “but these documents have brought him into actual history.”⁵⁷⁵

Moreover, true to form, DeMille made the preview into a judicial trial. His opening remarks ended with two inquiries. The first was from the film's prologue. Are men free souls under God, or property of the state? In the second inquiry, DeMille put himself on trial, before his preview audience, from whom he requested written feedback.

It is important that we know how this picture impresses you. How maybe it goes into your hearts and minds or whether we have failed in our mission, and failed to properly show and illustrate the Word of God.⁵⁷⁶

His public inquiry, in its syntax, shows that his mission was for the film to go into the hearts and minds of viewers.

⁵⁷⁴ See DeMille 1959.

⁵⁷⁵ DeMille 1956b.

⁵⁷⁶ DeMille 1956b.

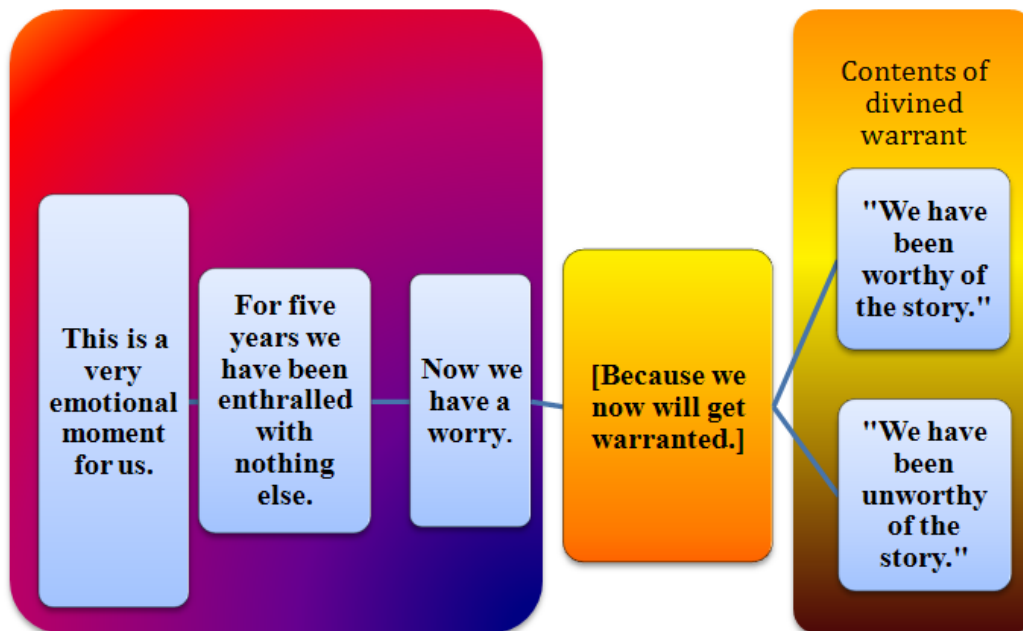


Figure Concl.i. DeMille frames the screening as a divination rite—at *The Ten Commandments*' preview on the night of Friday, August 3, 1956, in Salt Lake City, Utah. Below is the text of the opening of his speech, at the end of which he put an inquiry to the audience. (See next figure.) The audience included David McKay, ninth President of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints.

President McKay, ladies and gentlemen:

I am not going to make a speech. But this is a very emotional moment for those of us who, for five years, have been enthralled with nothing but this great subject. Our only worry is—have we been worthy of the subject. The subject is the story of the birth of freedom. It is the story of Moses.

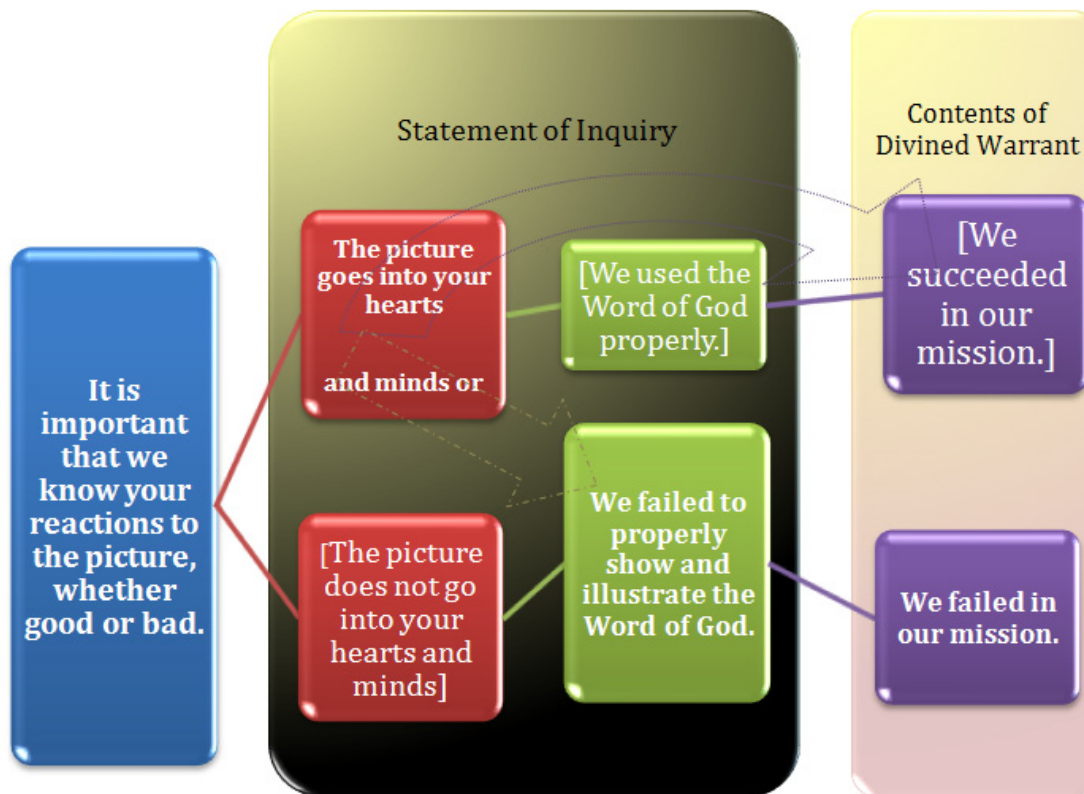


Figure Concl.ii. DeMille's inquiry, as submitted to the audience at *The Ten Commandments*' preview on the night of Friday, August 3, 1956, in Salt Lake City, Utah. In un-bracketed, boldface type are words he said. The text of his script's conclusion is quoted below.

The theme of the picture is whether men shall be ruled by law as free souls under God, or whether they are the property of the state. That same battle continues today through the world.

There will be – the picture runs for 3 hours and 43 minutes. There will be an intermission part way through the picture, of 10 minutes. Cards will be issued in the lobby on which I hope you will express your reactions to the picture, whether good or bad. It is important that we know how this picture impresses you. How maybe it goes into your hearts and [sic] and minds or whether we have failed in our mission, and failed to properly show and illustrate the Word of God. For it cannot be the fault of our script, for that was written 3200 years ago. I thank you.

Otherwise, his remarks mean, “It succeeds OR else it does not go into your hearts and minds; and if not, that would prove we have failed to properly show and illustrate the Word of God—because if we did it properly, it would go into your hearts and minds. Because of course the Word of God itself—the Bible—would go into your hearts and minds.” But actually, if DeMille believed the Bible were sufficient, plus he truly prioritized propriety with the Word of God, then he would not have made *The Ten Commandments* (1923), nor *The King of Kings*, nor *Samson and Delilah*, etc.

Of course, as a filmmaker DeMille truly aimed for his crowning achievement to reach its audiences’ hearts. Moreover, this was a preview—a real test for the film, on the grounds of propriety. How would religious Americans react? DeMille faced a huge risk, in his impending release of the film. If the Salt Lake Preview responses were not favorable, he faced serious trouble, and a major challenge to re-edit the film accordingly.

His inquiry meanwhile is tricky. It leaves no room for the option that “the film goes into our hearts and minds” BUT “you have failed to properly show and illustrate the Word of God.” If it went into viewers’ hearts, then they would find it acceptably proper.

As it turns out, the response at the opening preview was excellent. At least one respondent expressly said, “It touches our hearts.”⁵⁷⁷ Of 140 response cards, sixty-nine called *The Ten Commandments* the best picture ever made, and thirty-two more named it “wonderful” or “magnificent.”⁵⁷⁸ Only eight gave any criticism at all, and even of those “5 rave about the picture.” Only three were unenthusiastic. Moreover, the thick description notated by Paramount’s observers at the previews—recording the audiences’ responses minutely to each moment of the film—enabled Paramount’s final edits.

After Paramount released it in November, 1956, the film became a towering success. Damaging opposition to the film failed to materialize. In its day, the only film to have done better at the box office was *Gone with the Wind*. (Circa 2007, *The*

⁵⁷⁷ Anonymous, 1956, “140 Cards Received at the Theatre:”.

⁵⁷⁸ Anonymous, 1956, “140 Cards Received at the Theatre:”.

Ten Commandments is the fifth top-grossing film ever, adjusted for inflation.)
Moreover,

However something infelicitous happened the day of the preview. The actor Woody Strode—who played not only the King of Ethiopia but moreover Bithiah’s lead guardsman, who appeared as “God’s promise” and then most visibly “on the Lord’s side” in response to Moses’s final inquiry—was denied entry to the film’s sold-out preview. According an unpublished telephone message taken for DeMille, the “theater . . . was unable to accommodate [Strode]” with a ticket that day. Strode was visiting Salt Lake City from California.⁵⁷⁹

Racial tensions were running high in public accommodation in August 1956, only two years after the U.S. Supreme Court verdict of *Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka* ordered public schools to desegregate. Though DeMille as a director treated Strode well, he must have known that entertainments in Salt Lake City were segregated. DeMille’s priority must have been to avoid exposing his preview audience to discomfort or distraction—and Strode, DeMille well knew, was not only exceptionally big, strong, and proud; moreover Strode assuredly did *not* blend into a crowd.

That is, the very qualities that qualified Strode to appear in the film, made him especially disqualified from the preview. When DeMille chose an actor for the role of Ethiopian King, he subjected each candidate to a particular test. Because DeMille wanted someone regal, he wanted someone unafraid to look him boldly in the eye.⁵⁸⁰ No African-American men in Hollywood handled DeMille boldly enough, until Strode.

In Strode’s career as a star athlete, meanwhile, he had lived through some things that make his rejection from *The Ten Commandments*’ preview especially ironic. In 1936 as an Olympic decathlete, Strode competed at Hitler’s Olympics. Reportedly he posed for a portrait for Hitler. By the end of the decade, at UCLA, Strode was a football teammate of Jackie Robinson’s. Professionally, Strode was one of the cohort of the first four Black players to integrate the National Football League.

⁵⁷⁹ F., 1956.

⁵⁸⁰ Orrison 1999, 134.

One can hardly resist noting the parallel use of Strode by DeMille and Hitler. I do not posit an equivalence, however both masters read Strode's kingly figure as iconic.

1956 meanwhile was the year a different King rose to national prominence—Martin Luther King, Jr. About three months before *The Ten Commandments* previewed in Salt Lake City, Dr. King, in New York City on May 17, 1956—delivered a breathtaking sermon referring nine times to Egypt. “The Red Sea has opened,” thundered King, “and today most of these exploited masses have won their freedom from the Egypt of colonialism and are now free to move toward the promised land of economic security and cultural development.”⁵⁸¹

They were free souls under God. They had left Egypt behind. Now they could enter . . . actual history?

King, resisting segregation, was tracing a different historical rhythm with his vocal cadences. Hitler, of course, had approached from an opposite extreme, but still as a typological orator, had made history too. Strode, after helping to break color barriers in sports, had turned to making films. What about DeMille and his work? In a deep sense, finally, what is the relationship between the *social* dramas of Blackness and Whiteness, and *The Ten Commandments*?

According to several theorists of sociopolitical organization, bindings in the symbolic realm—such as systems of narrative and iconography, of accents and beats—are constitutive of real social-legal bindings; and vice versa. Notably Julia Kristeva says that to serve “the principle of One Law—the One, Sublimating, Transcendent Guarantor of the ideal interests of the community”—social policies police “radical separation” of social groups.⁵⁸²

Less essentialistically, in Victor Turner's model, “cultural performances may be viewed as ‘dialectical dancing partners’ . . . of the perennial social drama to which they give meaning appropriate to the specificities of time, place, and culture.”⁵⁸³ They

⁵⁸¹ King 1967.

⁵⁸² Kristeva 1986, 141. Kristeva's concern here is with the causes of a fundamental sociopolitical distinction between the sexes. Agamben's model is somewhat the converse of hers. That is, for Agamben a group's need for a boundary generates the law of exclusion; while for Kristeva, the ascent of the monotheistic law itself requires Othering and exclusion of the female. While I am inclined to agree with Kristeva's characterization of the imperatives of engendering the principle of the One Law, it seems she attributes too much to monotheism, and indeed to the role of the law. Her theory's implicit blame of monotheistic Law for sexism hardly seems able to account for the fact that separation of the sexes seems hardly less radical in societies that are polytheistic and that lack a transcendent principle of One Law. (I am indebted to Jonathan Boyarin for this point.)

⁵⁸³ Turner 1980, 159, quotes Ronald Grime's phrase.

dance in orbits around each other, exerting tidal effects. Around Woody Strode's exclusion from the premier of *The Ten Commandments*, and around the Montgomery bus boycott, dance the film's screenings, and King's subsequent speeches.

Blockbuster Video and Amazon.com refer to *The Ten Commandments* as “very likely the most eventful 219 minutes ever recorded to film”⁵⁸⁴ because the film is palpably brimming with events. These are events of narrative, but also on some significant level events of ancient history, events of American history, and current events—offered for constellating in viewers' “real” lives.

But finally, how do these mantic practices relate to *the real*? They may perform as magic—like the stage-magician whose card tricks mimic divinations, and like “movie magic” framed as mere entertainment, or even as “Industrial Light and Magic”⁵⁸⁵—or they may well channel “the real.”

CONCLUDING SECTION C: ROMANCING THE REAL TO OTHER HISTORICAL RHYTHMS

OVERVIEW

The final third of this Conclusion addresses how mantic practices can concern *the real*—largely through consideration of Walter Benjamin's “Theses on the Philosophy of History” —however, first the present section tackles Fredric Jameson's account of literary romance. On Jameson here I analyze, from monograph titled *The Political Unconscious: Narrative as a Socially Symbolic Act* (Cornell UP, 1981), the chapter, “Magical Narratives: On the Dialectical Use of Genre Criticism.”

⁵⁸⁴ Erickson 2007.

⁵⁸⁵ Industrial Light & Magic (ILM), a Lucasfilm Ltd. company producing digital effects, has won fourteen Academy Awards for Best Visual Effects and sixteen for Scientific and Technical Achievement.

SUBSECTION C1:
MANTIC NARRATIVES

Jameson casts early moderns as seekers of traces of the hand of providence. I read Jameson as accounting for post-medieval continuations of divination-by-narrative, when he characterizes early modernity as featuring “a post-Jansenist preoccupation with states of sin and grace, [and] a post-Calvinist fascination with the workings of Providence.”⁵⁸⁶

In Chapter Six and throughout this dissertation I have argued that *The Ten Commandments* performs divination by *the news* and by “this [actual] world today”; even while performing divination by melodrama. Though I eschew Jameson’s characterization of melodrama as “a degraded form of romance,”⁵⁸⁷ still surely Jameson’s account—of how romance and “that *reality principle*” interrelate—can frame my question of how *The Ten Commandments* can deploy practices which might well seem contradictory.

As I see it, in Jameson’s account romance functions as a mantic practice—it tries to channel valorized traces of the lost world. It aims to recall a lost domain: to recall “the conditions of some lost Eden, or to anticipate a future realm.”⁵⁸⁸ Jameson takes pains to dispel any misconception that he may be talking here about mysticism. Unlike mysticism, romance actually “does *not* involve the substitution of some more ideal realm for ordinary reality.”⁵⁸⁹

Romance does not involve a substitution of realms, I note, because romance is concerned with channeling between realms. Jameson, in my view, gets misled by magical terminology of *restore* —“restore the conditions”—which I have adapted above as “*recall* the conditions.” It is not an instrumental rite of magic, but an epistemic rite of divination, when into this world of the known—that is, into “ordinary reality”—romance channels something extraordinary.

In any case, Jameson effectively argues that modern hegemony of *the real* has provoked the use of romance as a counter-tactic. That is, in reaction to realism,

⁵⁸⁶ Jameson 1981, 131.

⁵⁸⁷ Jameson 1981, 116.

⁵⁸⁸ Jameson 1981, 110 paraphrases Frye 1957, 193. Jameson, who actually wrote that Romance aims to *restore* those conditions, conflates magical *restoring* with mantic *anticipating*.

⁵⁸⁹ Jameson 1981, 110; emphasis added.

romantic practices perform the locating of counterhegemonic, historical rhythms. Jameson finds that

it is in the context of the gradual reification of realism in late capitalism that romance once again comes to be felt as the place of narrative heterogeneity and of freedom from that reality principle to which a now oppressive realistic representation is the hostage. Romance now again seems to offer *the possibility of sensing other historical rhythms*, and of demonic or Utopian transformations of a real now unshakably set in place; and Frye is surely not wrong to assimilate the salvational perspective of romance to a reexpression of Utopian longings, a renewed meditation on the Utopian community, a reconquest (but at what price?) of some feeling for a salvational future.⁵⁹⁰

Like Snead's account of the Black Atlantic's rhetorical flow through beats, Jameson's account of romance highlights a certain cultural form as an embodiment of sensitivity for locating counterhegemonic, historical rhythms.

Like Black rhetoric, romantic practices channel the flow of *now*. If cultural forms—such as Dr. King's African-American jeremiad, or DeMille's European-American jeremiad—are dialectical dancing partners of the social drama, then indeed *the possibility of sensing other historical rhythms* must matter.

When the alternative rhythm-sensor is a cultural practice diffused by religious-popular-industrial productions, in a process which territorializes the very structure of feeling for a salvational future, what is the price? Clearly the price is industrial-strength co-optation. How high is that price?

Jameson finds that romance offers hope that the “real now unshakably set in place” might, as it were, get “all shook up” by romance.⁵⁹¹ But what about dismissals

⁵⁹⁰ Jameson 1981, 105, emphasis added.

⁵⁹¹ Otis Blackwell, an African-American, officially is listed as co-author with Elvis Presley of “All Shook Up,” a Presley hit. As it was ranked #1 for 9 weeks in 1957, this is considered the #1 song of 1957. The B-side of the single is “That’s When Your Heartaches Begin.” Blackwell also co-wrote “Fever,” a hit for Little Willie John in 1956, and wrote “Great Balls of Fire” in 1956—it became a hit for Jerry Lee Lewis in 1957—as well as “Don’t Be Cruel,” a Presley hit of 1956.

of such a hope as “unrealistic”? Jameson himself invites such dismissal by referring to this genre of narratives as “magical.”

The most salient characteristic Jameson finds in romance is its offer of *the possibility of sensing* traces: such offer is not magical, but mantic. Indeed as he casts about as if for the essential difference between realism and romance, Jameson finds an “enigma” which he tries to divine. (See Chapter Nine herein.) He does not seem to consider here that the difference between the two forms might not be especially salient, when texts deploy the mode of realism in service of romance.⁵⁹²

Stuck on the difference between realism and romance, Jameson finds “the key to this enigma” in recourse to Heidegger’s “cumbersome formula,” which he restates in mantic terms: “romance is precisely that form in which the *worldness of world* reveals or manifests itself, in which, in other words, *world* in the technical sense of the transcendental horizon of our experience becomes visible in an inner-worldly sense.”⁵⁹³ The Heideggerian *transcendental horizon*, which concerns what I call *the track of time*, helps explain what happened when romance met cinema at the aesthetic horizon of the industrial world. The result was a powerfully compounded, mantic technology of horizons.

Because he draws from a book by Northrop Frye—*The Secular Scripture : A Study of the Structure of Romance* (Harvard UP, 1976) for much of the ideas of “Magical Narratives,” Jameson critiques Frye’s approach after using it: he finds it deploys “a ‘positive’ hermeneutic, which tends to filter out historical difference and the radical discontinuity of modes of production and of their cultural expressions.” Surely Frye’s hermeneutic call for counterbalancing.

As a corrective, Jameson of course attempts to employ a negative hermeneutic to “sharpen our sense of historical difference,”⁵⁹⁴ but when Jameson brings his historical materialism to bear on examining modernity’s “secularization of romance as a form,” his historicizing is only as good as the frames on which it depends. Primarily his model of secularization seems reductive.

The biggest flaw of Jameson’s critique is its assumption of a radical disjuncture at the start of modernity, almost as if reality and unity appeared at the end

⁵⁹² See L. Williams 2001. Williams asserts that realism serves melodrama.

⁵⁹³ Jameson 1981, 112.

⁵⁹⁴ Jameson 1981, 130.

of the Dark Ages when the Enlightenment was switched on. Of secularization Jameson asks, “what . . . can have been found to replace the raw materials of magic and Otherness which medieval romance found ready to hand in its socioeconomic environment?”⁵⁹⁵

Jameson claims that when the tropes of [European, elite, canonical] novels switched from magic to Christianity, this switch marked the advent of secularism. However another flawed premise here arises. It is not so much the paradox of religious tropes marking secularism. The flaw is that the distinction between Christianity and magic has perhaps tended to be of scant concern to non-elites.⁵⁹⁶ So the shift in troping is hardly salient as Jameson argues.

In any case, Jameson undertakes some literary, modern mantology. Notably, as an exemplar he cites Alain-Fournier’s novel *Le Grand Meaulnes*, translated in one version as *The Lost Domain*. Moreover from Stendhal’s 1833 novel, *La Chartreuse de Parme*, Jameson cites the protagonist’s “discovery of a scrap of newsprint that prefigures his future death on the scaffold.”⁵⁹⁷ Jameson remarks the trope as manifesting something “curious” . . . but then dismisses it along with that novel’s astrological predictions and omens.

He interprets such mantology in supersessionist terms of “magical survivals of the older form which have found themselves, in secular society, degraded to the status of private superstitions.”⁵⁹⁸ But such schema of “survivals” is not good anthropological practice anymore—not in general nor in this particular case.

In Stendhal’s trope of divination-by-newsprint-in-the-street, I find realism serving romance through mantic practice. This practice’s genealogy extends forward to the cinematic device of showing a newspaper spinning as a fortune-wheel, before it resolves to reveal the newsflash that advances the narrative. This genealogy also includes the trope of newspapers in *The Ten Commandments*, and the sense that this film contains the most *eventful* 219 minutes in cinema.

The genealogy of divination-by-current-events is as old as *the news*. It has inherited in the sense that print-capitalism, which enabled nationalist hegemony,

⁵⁹⁵ Jameson 1981, 131.

⁵⁹⁶ Tambiah 1990, 23 cites Thompson, 1971/72, 41-55.

⁵⁹⁷ Jameson 1981, 132.

⁵⁹⁸ Jameson 1981, 132.

attracted power also by enabling owners to *make a fortune*. As the spread of printed books—Bibles—brought also the spread of Bibliomancy, that older mantic technology fed into the New England Puritan preachers' reliance on divination-by-current-events.

The much later practice, then, of newspapers to publish daily horoscopes—which burgeoned in the wake of each World War—capitalized on compounding mantic technologies. When the practice became canonical, all users knew newspapers tell fortunes on every page.

Opposing such practices came Karl Marx's counter-hege-mancy. After Hegel, Marx “envisioned nothing less than the dissolution of that ‘society’ in which the contradiction between consciousness and being had to be entertained as a *fatality*”—that is, as a destiny—“for all men in all times.”⁵⁹⁹

Jameson concludes by asserting that not only Frye's and Hegel's, but moreover Marx's analysis too has joined the romantic canon. This helps explain why DeMille, a breaker of labor unions, nevertheless deploys (especially in his mini-newsreel documentary about the straw industry) some Marxist rhetoric. It is all grist for the mill of mantic romance in collective self-locating.

As Jameson concludes with canonicity, his paradigm is cartomancy. He proceeds from Lévi-Strauss's conclusion that Freud's theory of Oedipus itself joined the canon of the Oedipus legend.⁶⁰⁰ The legend's functions, Jameson says, get “reshuffled like a deck of cards and laid out.”⁶⁰¹

The shuffling is the ritual exposure to mantic indeterminacy, enabling a cartomantic reading of traces. Jameson here posits the set of functions of the Oedipus tale as a deck of function-cards.

Jameson then in turn uses this simile itself as an analogy: romance itself is like the Oedipus myth. This is because, just as Freud's psychoanalytic models of Oedipus join the Oedipal canon, Frye's model of romance in *The Secular Scripture*—and by implication Jameson's own use Frye (which Jameson's own conclusions try to supersede)—all join the romantic canon.⁶⁰²

⁵⁹⁹ White 1973, 281-282, quoted by Jameson 1981, 103, n., emphasis added. It would not, then, be unjust,” White adds, “to characterize the final vision of history which inspired Marx in his historical and social theorizing as a Romantic one.” On Marx as a diviner, see Rothbard 1990.

⁶⁰⁰ Jameson 1981, 130 cites Lévi-Strauss, “Structural Analysis of Myth,” 213-216.

⁶⁰¹ Jameson 1981, 121 cites Lévi-Strauss, “Structural Analysis of Myth,” 213-216.

⁶⁰² Jameson 1981, 130.

When we reshuffle the deck and lay out the cards, we see the added functions. Into a canon of mantic practices, much else folds.

SUBSECTION C2:

In his “Theses on the Philosophy of History” Walter Benjamin grounds his argument in soothsaying because he respects the importance of mantic practice. As he once told Gershom Scholem, “a philosophy that does not include the possibility of soothsaying from coffee grounds and cannot explicate it cannot be a true philosophy.”⁶⁰³

Moreover Benjamin’s model historian is a diviner. As opposed to a mere chronicler “telling the sequence of events like the beads of a rosary,” a good historian “grasps the constellation his era has formed with a definite early one.”⁶⁰⁴ So “to articulate the past historically does *not* mean to recognize it “the way it really was.”⁶⁰⁵

As he argues against a historian’s warranting of *the real*, Benjamin famously rejects any notion of time as homogenously empty like an unbeaded string, and any notion of *the real* as a sequence of events that fill such time. He proclaims that rather than accepting a prevailing approach, instead the historical-materialist-*cum*-action-hero must be “man enough to blast open the continuum of history” with a sense of Messianic time.⁶⁰⁶

That is, he not only casts the historicists as unmanly, he also calls clients of soothsayers weak. The Jewish prohibition against soothsaying makes him “man enough” to *strip* the future before blasting open its continuum. Yet real men are those who do not succumb—or no longer succumb—to soothsaying’s draw.

As Benjamin explains his anti-historicism in terms of soothsaying and Judaism, like in the midrash—of the trial of “Who is on the Lord’s side?”—Benjamin poses Judaism and soothsaying as if rivals. Affiliating himself with Judaism he writes,

⁶⁰³ Benjamin quoted in Scholem 1981, 59.

⁶⁰⁴ Benjamin 1986, 263.

⁶⁰⁵ Benjamin 1986, 255 quotes Ranke, without citation.

⁶⁰⁶ Benjamin 1986, 262-264.

We know that the Jews were prohibited from investigating the future. The Torah and the prayers instruct them in remembrance, however. This stripped the future of its magic, to which all those succumb who turn to the soothsayers for enlightenment.⁶⁰⁷

Once again, the prime flaw of this articulation is its characterization of soothsaying in terms of magic-mongers' preying on false consciousness.

In order to characterize his own oppositional stance against the historicist episteme, Benjamin implies that his stance is like soothsaying, except that it is Jewish. Specifically, and confusingly, he implies that that his messianic stance is Jewish, particularly in its opposition to soothsaying. In his schema, Jewish messianism supplants soothsaying, by substituting *remembrance* for foretelling, and makes the future into nothing more or less than the gate for the messiah.⁶⁰⁸

However I read the concluding paragraph of his "Theses" as implying just the opposite: that Judaism, which *poses* itself as superseding soothsaying, "however" shares a salient function. Benjamin argues that from soothsaying into Judaism a function persisted: from the perspective of moderns considering historicism, this function can be called "the experiencing of time as neither empty nor homogenous."

Because Benjamin expressly aims to blast open the *continuum* of (modern, realist) historical time, I call this function *discretion*—primarily in the sense that *discrete* is an antonym of *continuous*. After he takes for granted that the discretion-function (of experiencing time as neither empty nor homogenous) "certainly" applies to the experience of the clients of soothsayers, he concludes that this function comes also through Judaism.

That is, Benjamin suggests that for Jews a radical focus on remembrance—and on the Messianic possibility of the present moment—should, while supplanting the practice of soothsaying, deploy soothsaying's sense of time. Long, Cryer, and Fishbane make a parallel argument more concretely by describing Judaism's own

⁶⁰⁷ Benjamin 1986, 264. Benjamin uses *historicism* in a historiographical sense: that is, historicists try to exclude anachronistically "presentist" *etic* perspectives such as Benjamin champions.

⁶⁰⁸ It seems the prohibition on divination forbids only *unofficial* forms—that is, forms unauthorized by rabbis. Consider for example that for his legendary attack on Jews, Haman determined its date (that it would be the 13th of Adar) by using divination—cleromancy, also known as *allotment*: yet a common, Jewish commemoration of Purim is with a lottery. It is as if to supersede the murderous lottery with a joyous one.

mantic practices in *historical* transition from priestly divination to Torah-reading. (See Chapter Eight herein.)

So much has proceeded from the development of exegesis as a mantic practice—especially in practices for reconstituting a sense of peoplehood. European groups (and others) have adapted and compounded mantic rhetorics in order to re-territorialize the Hebrew Testament’s “idea of a chosen people, the emphasis on a common stock of memory of the past and of hopes for the future, and finally national messianism.”⁶⁰⁹

Judaism seems a prime contributor to the West’s mantic practices—not only through now-ubiquitous rhetorics, but also through the influence of esoteric practices. Specifically, versions of Kabala have been quite influential, notably among the seventeenth-century Puritans. (See Chapter Ten.)

While so far I have framed exegesis and Kabala as two branches of mantology arising through Biblical mantology, I find Messianic mantology, such as Benjamin champions, as the middle branch. While exegesis became a near-universal, everyday practice, on the other hand Kabala as esotericism by definition could not. Messianism bridges between the universalizable and the esoteric practices.

Messianism itself, as I understand it, posits the Messiah as the ultimate diviner. Because the Messiah, like a super-Bodhisattva, is coming to relocate for the whole world the realm of certainty, therefore the only event messianists should foretell is the Messiah’s arrival—and perhaps the Messiah’s D.T.A., or Divined Time of Arrival.⁶¹⁰

Indeed as Benjamin iconoclastically frames the task of the “historical materialist,” it is akin to divining signs of the Messiah’s immanence. Like in all rites of divination, the crux is exposure to indeterminacy: one must divine “unexpected,” *indeterminately surfacing* remembrances. Benjamin posits Judaic Messianism as channeling the potentiality of the present through remembrance—*discrete* remembrance, as a trace from outside the known, which must be read epiphanically “as it flashes up at a moment of danger” and “appears to man singled out.”⁶¹¹

⁶⁰⁹ Hans Kohn 1965, quoted by Bhabha 1990b, 59.

⁶¹⁰ See Boyer 1992 and Wojcik 1997. In January 2007, a Chabad Lubavich Hasadic Rabbi of Tokyo, Rabbi Benjamin (no relation to Walter Benjamin, as far as I know), while visiting Kobe Japan’s Synagogue Ohel Shelomoh, stood at the dinner table and, with polished technique, read the signs of our gathering that night as showing the Messiah’s return as immanent.

⁶¹¹ Benjamin 1986, 255.

In sum, Benjamin's history-as-constellating should be "discrete" in several senses. One should treat time as a dis-continuum, therefore its events are decoupled; and meanwhile socially so is the constellator, in privacy. That is, even as he blasts any notion that historical events should be *universally* recognizable as such, finally Benjamin prescribes *private* consideration of certain thoughts—much as "themes where monastic discipline assigned to [Christian] friars for meditation were designed to turn them away from the world and its affairs"⁶¹²—as if only monastic rules might insulate mantic practice from the corruptions of manipulation.

In its usage, historical reality serves mantic practice. This is because paradoxically—though divination may seem in a sense *unrealistic*—in a deeper sense *the real* itself depends on divinations. As Theresa De Lauretis argues, *the real* "is not only the effect of representation but also its excess, what remains outside discourse as a potential trauma which can rupture or destabilize, if not contained, any representation."⁶¹³

Notwithstanding what may be *realistic*, indeed *the real* is figured as that of which representations channel traces. "Reality" meanwhile is what hits one unexpectedly, from outside the realm of one's knowledge.⁶¹⁴

Repeatedly the die gets recast, but this is not necessarily the good thing Benjamin claims. As Bercovitch shows, mantic imperatives make hegemony all too robust, by enabling it to *contain* the seeds of hope it nurtures. To apprehend hope counter-hegemonically enough, perhaps one must be in position to heed Benjamin's call for monkish constellating.

Or perhaps not: Thomas Elsaesser explains that cinematic melodrama can cast history's spectators in the role of appropriating memory, and thereby enable responsible action.⁶¹⁵ Paradoxically, via dependence on what seems to be a notion of indeterminism, divination enables practitioners actively to determine their own situation or behave as if they could do so, and to assume responsibility for their own destinies.

⁶¹² Benjamin 1986, 258.

⁶¹³ de Lauretis 1987, 3.

⁶¹⁴ On June 4, 2007 "Reality hit me" gets "about 19,900" Google hits; "reality bit me in the ass," which emphasizes the unexpectedness, gets thirty hits.

⁶¹⁵ Elsaesser 1996, in reference to *Schindler's List*.

Thus *The Ten Commandments* ambitiously contains seeds of counter-hegemonic hope. As a hegemonic text it aims for its viewers to act as if they could determine their situation.

Though DeMille aims to contain counter-hegemony, his film cannot guarantee outcomes. For example, some viewers decline to take the film seriously. But even these viewers tend to be implicated by the film's rhetorics.

Through strong focus on the law and on judicial procedures, *The Ten Commandments* models the reaching of determinations—and in general, all too frequently people do seem to need to make some determinations. The five decades since 1956 have hardly been lacking in breaches or crises: it is in such phases of social drama, Turner says, that “ritual and legal procedures mediate between the formed and the indeterminate.”⁶¹⁶

Overall, this film's practice of ritualized exposure to indeterminacy—its shuffling of layers of allegory—makes it akin not only to cartomancy but also to *sors biblica* (bibliomancy using the Bible). Like bibliomancy, *The Ten Commandments* cannot be understood solely in terms of religious nor popular nor industrial practice, because it is all three.

The need for divination persists because people all too frequently become dislocated from a domain of certainty—whether from the certainty of parental sustenance, or from the certainty that a clear sky threatens no danger. It seems people often favor familiar rites to put themselves back on the proper path.

At various levels, certain practices and approaches capitalize on such tendencies, because it seems the proper ritual at the proper time and place, performed appropriately, may succeed publicly. It can enable its auditors to locate their ancestry and themselves, and enable action via a casting of what they can constellate next.

⁶¹⁶ Turner 1980, 157.

Finally the studio-era film is a commodity. While divination is relatively well understood in terms of religious practice and folk practice, it has hardly been studied as a mass practice. How does it work? What practices might it fruitfully explain?

Critics might well deploy commodity manticism in explaining how American consumers relocate identities via commodities. Particularly in postwar prosperity, by 1977, American culture has seemed geared to keep returning consumers to the path of liberation from any constraints on their right to consume commodities such as orange juice, oil, or Hollywood films.

Cinema: It's not just for entertainment anymore.⁶¹⁷ It is for mass-mediating the world—serious business indeed, notably in 1956. Cinema is for industrial territorialization of our hopes for a salvational future. The price is that it hardly even matters much who chooses to practice commodity manticism, because one way or another, people buy into its game. It has reached hearts and minds.

⁶¹⁷ My understanding of commodity manticism is shaped by my childhood exposure to television advertising in the 1970s. A particularly significant advertisement or two came in the Florida Orange Juice Growers' campaign, "Orange Juice. It's not just for breakfast anymore!" The advertisements' clear implication, I find, is that orange juice moreover is not just for consumption, but for identity. The commercials portrayed orange-juice drinkers *as such* and moreover hailed the viewer as an establisher of collective identity via revolutionary consumption of this commodity. The age of revolutionary consumption superseding the age in which the drinking of orange juice was restricted to breakfast.

By capitalizing on commodity manticism, this campaign not only achieved its marketing goals, it also achieved great and lasting popular currency for the catchphrase "it's not just for breakfast anymore." I cite the story of Sandeep "Sneep" Wadwah of Cleveland, whose shtick, during his freshman year at Wesleyan University, featured his impression of his father sending him off to college with the following advice, delivered forcefully with an Indian accent: "Sneep: remember! You are an orange juice man!" Largely through this shtick Sneep became quite popular, and indeed became the president of the Class of 1989. This shtick, especially with the ethnic accent, deploys a sense of commodity manticism germane to *The Ten Commandments* as a mantic practice of mass-mediated self-locating. The ritual exposure to indeterminacy comes through the sense that we television-viewers learned commodity manticism because we "just happened" to hear the television commercials seeded throughout our family viewing rituals.

The currency of the phrase (44,200 hits on Google, as of June 4, 2007) comes from its popular deployment as *ironicization* of participation in commodity manticism: as if to say, "This is the price of the industrial territorialization of our hopes for salvational future. Collective self-locating of ourselves as consumers enables our actions towards liberating ourselves from the constraints on our consumption."

APPENDIX: *THE TEN COMMANDMENTS*'
PRODUCTION DETAILS

THE TOP-GROSSING FILMS OF ALL TIME⁶¹⁸

1. Gone with the Wind (1939)
2. Star Wars (1977)
3. The Sound of Music (1965)
4. ET (1982)
5. The Ten Commandments (1956)
6. Titanic (1997)

THE TEN COMMANDMENTS' BALANCE SHEET

Cost: \$13.3 million⁶¹⁹

Gross (to 1979): \$90 million⁶²⁰

COMPARE TO *THE PASSION OF THE CHRIST* (Mel Gibson, 2004)

The Passion's cost: \$30 million (estimated)⁶²¹

The Passion's gross (to 2005): \$604.4 million⁶²²

The Ten Commandments gross (to 1979) expressed in 2004 dollars: \$612.8 million

⁶¹⁸ StudioBriefing 2005, 6 Sept. Rankings are adjusted for inflation.

⁶¹⁹ Birchard 2004, 351.

⁶²⁰ Birchard 2004, 351.

⁶²¹ IMDbPro.com 2005.

⁶²² IMDbPro.com 2005.

THE TEN COMMANDMENTS' PRODUCTION DATES

Picture starts (Egyptian unit): October 14, 1954⁶²³

Picture finishes (Egyptian unit): December 3, 1954⁶²⁴

Hollywood unit starts: March 28, 1955⁶²⁵

Hollywood unit finishes: August 13, 1955⁶²⁶

Preview (Salt Lake City): August 3, 1956⁶²⁷

Release (New York premier): November 8, 1956⁶²⁸

FOREIGN RELEASES⁶²⁹

UK: 3 December 1956

Italy: 29 June 1957

France: 17 January 1958

West Germany: 17 February 1958

Japan: 5 March 1958

Hong Kong: 10 April 1958

Finland: 22 August 1958

Austria: 26 September 1958

Denmark: 6 October 1959

Sweden: 26 November 1960

Denmark: 26 December 1961 (re-release)

USA: 2 April 1966 (re-release)

Denmark: 5 February 1968 (re-release)

Finland: 14 April 1972 (re-release)

⁶²³ Birchard 2004, 351.

⁶²⁴ Birchard 2004, 351.

⁶²⁵ Birchard 2004, 351.

⁶²⁶ Birchard 2004, 351.

⁶²⁷ DeMille 1956b.

⁶²⁸ Birchard 2004, 351.

⁶²⁹ IMDbPro.com 2007.

*THE TEN COMMANDMENTS, ALSO KNOWN AS . . .*⁶³⁰

Dez Mandamentos, Os (Portugal, Brazil)
 Diez Mandamientos, Los (Spain, Argentina)
 Deu Manaments, Els (Spain—Catalan title)
 Dix Commandements, Les (France, Canada)
 Zehn Gebote, Die (West Germany, Austria)
 Deset Bozijih Zapovesti (Yugoslavia—Serbian title)
 Dieci Comandamenti, I (Italy)
 Dziesięcioro Przykazan (Poland)
 Kymmenen Käskyä (Finland)
 Tízparancsolat (Hungary)
 Ti Bud, De (Denmark)
 Tio Budorden, De (Sweden)

TECHNICAL SPECIFICATIONS⁶³¹

Camera:

Mitchell VistaVision Cameras

Process:

VistaVision

Super VistaVision (1989 re-release)

Color:

Technicolor

Laboratory:

Technicolor

⁶³⁰ IMDbPro.com 2007.

⁶³¹ Adapted from IMDbPro.com 2007.

Negative format:

35 mm (horizontal)

Printed format:

35 mm

70 mm (1989 re-release)

Aspect ratio:

1.85 : 1

2.20 : 1 (1989 re-release)

Sound mix:

Mono (35 mm prints)

70 mm 6-Track, Westrex Recording System (70 mm prints)

Audio compression:

Dolby (1989 re-release)

Dolby Digital (1998 re-release)

PROMOTIONAL TAGLINES

The Greatest Event in Motion Picture History

Paramount Pictures is proud to announce the return of the greatest motion picture of all time! (1966 re-release)

AWARDS (See also Chapter One)⁶³²

Academy Awards, USA, 1957

- Won, Oscar, Best Effects, Special Effects, John P. Fulton
- Nominated, Oscar, Best Film Editing, Anne Bauchens
- Nominated, Oscar, Best Picture, Cecil B. DeMille
- Nominated, Oscar, Best Cinematography, Color, Loyal Griggs
- Nominated, Oscar, Best Costume Design, Color,
Edith Head, Ralph Jester, John Jensen, Dorothy Jeakins, Arnold Friberg
- Nominated, Oscar
Best Art Direction / Set Decoration, Color
Hal Pereira, Walter H. Tyler, Albert Nozaki, Sam Comer, Ray Moyer
- Nominated, Oscar, Best Sound, Recording, Loren L. Ryder (Paramount SSD)

Fotogramas de Plata, 1960

- Won, Fotogramas de Plata, Best Foreign Performer
Charlton Heston (also for *Ben Hur*)

Golden Globes, USA, 1957

- Nominated, Golden Globe, Best Motion Picture Actor, Drama, Charlton Heston

National Board of Review, USA, 1956

- Won, NBR Award, Best Actor,
Yul Brynner (also for *Anastasia* and *The King and I*)

National Film Preservation Board, USA, 1999

- National Film Registry

⁶³² IMDbPro.com 2007.

CREDITS

Production Companies:

Motion Picture Associates

Paramount Pictures

Distributor:

Paramount Pictures (1956)

Producers:

Cecil B. DeMille ... producer

Henry Wilcoxon ... associate producer

Director:

Cecil B. DeMille

Original Literary Sources:⁶³³*The Holy Bible.*Midrash *Shemot Rabbah*.Josephus, Flavius. *The Jewish Antiquities*.Judaeus, Philo. *The Life of Moses. The Decalogue*.Pamphili, Eusebius. *Preparation for the Gospel*.

⁶³³ Adapted from IMDbPro.com 2007.

Writers:

J. H. Ingraham, novel, "Pillar of Fire"

A. E. Southon, novel "On Eagle's Wings"

Dorothy Clarke Wilson, novel, "Prince of Egypt"

Æneas MacKenzie

Jesse L. Lasky, Jr.

Jack Gariss

Fredric M. Frank

Edmund Penney (uncredited; for additional dialogue overdubbed in postproduction)⁶³⁴

Cast (as credited):⁶³⁵

Charlton Heston ... Moses

Yul Brynner ... Rameses

Anne Baxter ... Nefretiri

Edward G. Robinson ... Dathan

Yvonne De Carlo ... Sephora

Debra Paget ... Lilia

John Derek ... Joshua

Sir⁶³⁶ Cedric Hardwicke ... Sethi

Nina Foch ... Bithiah

Martha Scott ... Yochabel

Judith Anderson ... Memnet

Vincent Price ... Baka

John Carradine ... Aaron

Olive Deering ... Miriam

Douglass Dumbrille ... Jannes

Frank DeKova ... Abiram

Henry Wilcoxon ... Pentaur

Eduard Franz ... Jethro

⁶³⁴ Birchard 2004, 351, 361.

⁶³⁵ Adapted from IMDbPro.com 2007.

⁶³⁶ Actually Hardwicke was not knighted.

Donald Curtis ... Mered
 Lawrence Dobkin ... Hur Ben Caleb
 H.B. Warner ... Amminadab
 Julia Faye ... Elisheba
 Lisa Mitchell ... Jethro's daughter
 Noelle Williams ... Jethro's daughter
 Joanna Merlin ... Jethro's daughter
 Pat Richard ... Jethro's daughter
 Joyce Vanderveen ... Jethro's daughter
 Diane Hall ... Jethro's daughter
 Abbas El Boughdadly ... Rameses' charioteer
 Fraser Heston ... Infant Moses
 John Miljan ... The Blind One
 Francis J. McDonald ... Simon
 Ian Keith ... Rameses I
 Paul De Rolf ... Eleazar
 Woodrow Strode ... King of Ethiopia/Litter carrier-slave (described onscreen as a
 bearer)
 Tommy Duran ... Gershom
 Eugene Mazzola ... Rameses's son
 Ramsay Hill ... Korah
 Joan Woodbury ... Korah's wife
 Esther Brown ... Princess Tharbis (announced onscreen as the Queen of Ethiopia)
 Dorothy Adams ... Slave woman/Hebrew at Golden Calif/Hebrew at Rameses' Gate
 Eric Alden ... High Ranking Officer/Taskmaster/Slave/Officer
 E.J. Andre ... Sheik of Hazerath
 Babette Bain ... Little Miriam
 Baynes Barron ... Taskmaster
 Kay Bell ... Taskmaster/Red Bearded Slave
 Mary Benoit ... Guardian of the Prince/Court Woman/Hebrew at Dathan's
 Tent/Hebrew at Crag and Corridor/Mother
 Henry Brandon ... Commander of the Hosts
 Robert Carson ... Aleazar as an Adult
 Robert Clark ... Little Boy in Exodus
 Rus Conklin ... Whip Scarred Brick Carrier/Hebrew at Dathan's Tent
 Touch Connors ... Amalekite herder
 Henry Corden ... Sheik of Sinai

Edna Mae Cooper ... Woman of the Court
 Kem Dibbs ... Corporal
 Maude Fealy ... Slave Woman/Hebrew at Crag and Corridor
 Mimi Gibson ... Little Egyptian Girl
 Diane Gump ... Slave
 Nancy Hale ... Court Lady in Pool
 June Jocelyn ... Court Lady/Hebrew at Crag and Corridor/Hebrew at Dathan's
 Tent/Wife of Overseer
 Richard Kean ... Old Hebrew at Moses House/Hebrew Toward Corridor
 Gail Kobe ... Pretty Slave Girl
 Fred Kohler Jr. ... Foreman
 Kenneth MacDonald ... Hebrew at Crag and Corridor/Slave
 Peter Mamakos ... Chief Driver
 Irene Martin ... Tuya
 George Melford ... Hebrew at Golden Calf/Nobleman
 John Merton ... Architect's Assistant
 Amena Mohamed ... Architect's Assistant
 Paula Morgan ... Hebrew Woman/Slave Woman
 Dorothy Neumann ... Hebrew at Crag and Corridor/Slave/Hebrew at Dathan's Tent
 John Parrish ... Sheik of Rephidim
 Rodd Redwing ... Taskmaster/Hebrew at Golden Calf
 Addison Richards ... Fan Bearer
 Keith Richards ... Hebrew at Golden Calf/Courtier/Slave/Hebrew at Dathan's Tent
 /Hebrew at Crag and Corridor/Overseer
 Marcoretta Starr ... Slave/Hebrew at Golden Calf
 Onslow Stevens ... Lugal
 Clint Walker ... Sardinian Captain
 Amanda Webb ... Hebrew at Golden Calf/Young Woman/Hebrew in Exodus
 Frank Wilcox ... Wazir
 Jeane Wood ... Slave/Hebrew at Crag and Corridor/Hebrew at Golden Calf

Cast (uncredited):⁶³⁷

Abdullah Abbas ... Taskmaster
 Gorgen Raymond Aghayan ... Hebrew at Golden Calf
 Ahmed Salah Sayed Ahmed ... Slave
 Luis Alberni ... Old Hebrew
 Lillian Albertson ... Slave
 Ted Allan ... Hebrew at Rameses' Gate
 Herb Alpert ... Drummer on Mt. Sinai
 Claire Andre ... Slave
 Dorothy Andre ... Slave
 Michael Ansara ... Taskmaster
 Bart Antinora ... Slave
 Alan Aric ... Hebrew at Golden Calf
 Joel Ashley ... Taskmaster
 Maria Elena Aza ... Dancing Girl
 William Bagdad ... Slave
 Vicki Bakken ... Egyptian courtesan
 Peter Baldwin ... Courtier
 Peter Baldwin ... Courtier
 Patti Ballon ... Hebrew girl at Rameses' Gate
 Judith Barrett ... Hebrew at Golden Calf
 Norman Bartold ... Signalman
 Betty Bassett ... Court Woman
 Jack Baston ... Fan Bearer
 Arthur Batanides ... Hebrew at Rameses' Gate/Hebrew at Golden Calf
 George Baxter ... 2nd Wazir
 Prudence Beers ... Hebrew at Crag and Corridor/Hebrew at Golden Calf
 Don Bender ... Young boy
 Marc Bender ... Child slave
 Richard Bender ... Grainary Child/Child Slave
 Rita Bennett ... Slave
 Steven Benson ... Kid in massive march
 Butch Bernard ... Grainary Child
 Dehl Berti ... Pharaoh's Manservant/Architect's Assistant

⁶³⁷ Adapted from IMDbPro.com 2007.

Robert Bice ... Sergeant
Jan Bradley ... Court Lady/Slave/Hebrew at Crag and Corridor
Harriett Brest ... Hebrew in Exodus
Cindy Brown ... Slave
Linda Sue Brown ... Girl with doll
Naaman Brown ... Ethiopian
Wanda Brown ... Slave
Zeev Bufman ... Slave/Hebrew in Exodus/Hebrew at Golden Calf
Rexford Burnett ... Slave
Polly Burson ... Slave
Herbert Butterfield ... Royal Physician
Lillian Buyeff ... Mother
Tim Cagney ... Moses's son, age 6
Florine Carlan ... Hebrew Woman
Cliff Carnell ... Edomite Ambassador
Larry Chance ... Taskmaster at Brick Pits
Anna Cheselka ... Extra
Babs Christie ... Jethro's Daughter
Ken Christy ... Slave
Shari Clark ... Slave/Hebrew toward corridor
Elizabeth Cloud-Miller ... Old Hebrew Woman at Moses' House
Fred Coby ... Taskmaster/Hebrew at Golden Calf
Peter Coe ... Egyptian soldier
Lesley-Marie Colburn ... Slave child
Edward Colebrook ... Slave
John Compton ... Slave
Roger Creed ... Taskmaster/Slave/Baka's Guard
John F. Cretan ... Courtier/slave/Hebrew toward corridor
Dorothy Crider ... Hebrew in Exodus
Dean Cromer ... Court Man
Kio Cuddy ... Priestess
Fairy Cunningham ... Court Lady/Slave
Jack Cunningham ... Spearman
Tony Dante ... Libyan Captain
Jann Darlyn ... Swimmer
Steve Darrell ... Man with bedding
Frankie Darro ... Slave

Madelyn Darrow ... Court Lady in Pool
James Davies ... Hebrew at Golden Calf
Terence de Marney ... Hebrew at Rameses's Gate
Cecil B. DeMille ... Himself/Narrator
Vera Denham ... Slave/Hebrew in Dathan's Tent/Hebrew at Crag and Corridor
Adeline De Walt Reynolds ... Frail Old Lady
John Diggs ... Babylonian Ambassador
Sophie Dimitry ... Slave
Allan Douglas ... Hebrew in Exodus/Hebrew at Golden Calf
John Drexel ... Court man
Robert Dumas ... Palace Guard
Margie Duncan ... Slave
Marjie Duncan ... Slave
Edward Earle ... Slave
Mohamed El Deeb ... Elder
Mah Salah Eldin ... Treasury guard
Henry A. Escalante ... Taskmaster/Palace Guard
Hanaf Abou Esma ... Treasury Guard
Anthony Eustrel ... First High Priest
Charles Evans ... Councillor
Matty Fain ... Slave
Gamel Faris ... Sergeant
Richard Farnsworth ... Chariot driver
Franklyn Farnum ... High official
Frank Fayad ... Hebrew at Rameses's Gate
Tido Fedderson ... Court lady
Lila Finn ... Slave
Jack Fleming ... Servant
Mary Elizabeth Forbes ... Hebrew woman/Hebrew at Rameses's Gate
Robert Forrest ... Court Man
Eddie Foster ... Slave
Mona Fouad ... Slave
Vera Francis ... Nubian Slave
John Frederick ... Officer/Egyptian Captain
Kathy Garver ... Rachel (young slave)
Paul Gary ... Slave
Anthony George ... Slave

Leonard George ... Slave
 Hal Gerard ... Slave/Hebrew at Crag and Corridor/Hebrew at Golden Calf
 Jeanne Gerson ... Slave Woman with Donkey/Hebrew in Exodus
 Emily Getchell ... Old Hebrew Woman/Woman at Moses House
 Jo Gilbert ... Slave
 Richard Gilden ... Hebrew in Dathan's Tent
 Andy Glick ... Hebrew boy at Rameses's Gate
 Joe Gold ... Egyptian guard
 Gavin Gordon ... Trojan Ambassador
 Judy Goren ... Girl with donkey
 Cliff Gould ... Nobleman
 Bernie Gozier ... Extra
 Jaclynne Greene ... Mother
 Maia Gregory ... Slave
 Robert Griffin ... High Priest
 Mary Ann Griggs ... Hebrew at Golden Calf
 Jerry Groves ... Slave
 Lyn Guild ... Slave
 Frank Hagney ... Hebrew at Golden Calf
 Chuck Hamilton ... Slave/Hebrew at Crag and Corridor
 Kay Hammond ... Grease Woman
 Peter Hansen ... Young Aide
 Charmienne Harker ... Court Lady/Lady from Crete
 Michael Harris ... Court Man
 John Hart ... Ambassador from Crete
 Maurice Hart ... Slave
 Jean Harvey ... Slave
 Paul Harvey ... Royal Physician
 Edmund Hashim ... Captain of the Guards/Officer/Captain of Trumpeters
 Mary Ann Hawkins ... Slave
 Donald Hayne ... God (Pillar of Fire)
 Helene Heigh ... Court Lady
 Len Hendry ... Hebrew in Dathan's Tent
 Bob Herron ... Courier
 Herbert Heyes ... Old Councillor
 Salah Higazy ... Sergeant
 Hallene Hill ... Old Woman

Ed Hinton ... Taskmaster/Flagman
Patricia Hitchcock ... Court Lady
Madeleine Holmes ... Slave
Robert Hunter ... Courier
Patricia Iannone ... Grainary Child
Adele Cook Johnson ... Court Lady
Lorna Jordon ... Hebrew at Golden Calf
Eddie Kane ... Hebrew at Crag and Corridor
Mary Ellen Kay ... Court Lady in Pool
Max Keith ... Nobleman
Robert Kendall ... Slave Boy with Pigeons/Architect's Assistant
Don Kent ... Captain of Tintyru
George Khoury ... Hebrew at Golden Calf
George Kilburn ... Slave
Glen Kilburn ... Hebrew at Dathan's tent
Walter Woolf King ... Herald
Charlotte Knight ... Slave
Mel Koontz ... Ethiopian Witch Doctor
Walter Kray ... Court Man
Frank Lackteen ... Old slave praying
Ethan Laidlaw ... Elder of Joseph
Harry Landers ... Architect's Assistant/Hebrew at Rameses's Gate
Bob LaVarre ... Taskmaster
Mitchell Lawrence ... Slave
Norman Leavitt ... Slave
Michael Legend ... Court Man/Spearman
David Leonard ... Elderly Treader
Carol LeVeque ... Hebrew at Golden Calf
Harry Lewis ... Slave
Frank Leyva ... Hebrew at Rameses's Gate
Ronald Lisa ... Slave
Tony Louis ... Hebrew at Golden Calf
Jerry Lucas ... Hebrew at Rameses's Gate/Jailer
Don Lynch ... Officer/Hebrew at Golden Calf
Emmett Lynn ... Old Slave/Hebrew at Golden Calf
Herbert Lytton ... Sethi's Attendant/Hebrew at Crag and Corridor
Casey MacGregor ... Slave

Barry Macollum ... Slave/Hebrew at Golden Calif
 Terry MacRae ... Courtier/slave
 Ralph Major ... Spearman
 Larue Malouf ... Hebrew girl at Sphinx
 Sharon Manns ... Girl with water bag/Hebrew girl at Crag and Corridor
 Tony Marcos ... Treasury guard
 Michael Mark ... Hebrew at Dathan's Tent/Old Man who Blesses Moses
 Anthony Marsh ... Slave/Hebrew at Golden Calf
 Saul Martell ... Slave
 Jack Mather ... High Priest
 Ricky McGough ... Boy
 Frank McMahan ... Slave
 Albert P. Meissner ... Hebrew at Dathan's tent
 Madge Meredith ... Slave
 John Merrick ... Officer/Egyptian captain
 John Milford ... Attendant to Trojan Ambassador/Young Father
 Joyce Miller ... Court Lady
 Miliza Milo ... Slave
 Nico Minardos ... Court Man
 Gordon Mitchell ... Egyptian guard
 Steve Mitchell ... Slave
 Julie Mitchum ... Slave
 John Mixon ... Slave
 Michael Moore ... Father
 Pat Moran ... Slave
 Neyle Morrow ... Slave/Hebrew at Dathan's Tent/Standard Bearer/Hebrew at Golden Calf
 Robin Morse ... Pit Slave
 Lorraine Moscati ... Court lady
 Alix Nagy ... Water Carrier/Hebrew at Golden Calf
 Frank Nechero ... Slave
 Ron Nyman ... Egyptian guard
 Inez Palange ... Slave
 Jacqueline Park ... Hebrew at Golden Calf
 Eugenia Paul ... Hebrew Girl at Sphinx
 Yvonne Peattie ... Slave/Hebrew at Crag and Corridor
 Edmund Penney ... Voice of High Priest, etc.

Jon Peters ... Extra (boy on donkey crossing Red Sea)
 Preston Peterson ... Slave
 Greigh Phillips ... Spearman/Hebrew at Golden Calf
 Mary Ellen Popel ... Hebrew at Golden Calf
 Stanley Price ... Slave Carrying Load
 Elizabeth Prudhomme ... Hebrew at Golden Calf
 Vernon Rabar ... Extra
 Stuart Randall ... Elder of Joseph
 Harry Rand ... Court Man/Slave
 Ida Ratliff ... Hebrew in Exodus
 Marlee Sue Regen ... Child Slave
 Gloria Rhoads ... Slave
 Dawn Richard ... Pharaoh's Daughter/Court Lady in Pool
 Kent Lewis Richland ... Slave boy/Hebrew Boy at Rameses's Gate
 Carlos Rivero ... Slave
 Mel Roberts ... Little Boy in Exodus
 Stephen Roberts ... Councillor
 George Robotham ... Attendant
 Ric Roman ... Hebrew at Rameses's Gate
 Victor Romito ... Officer/Hebrew in Exodus/Hebrew at Golden Calf
 Mickey Roth ... Officer
 Linda Sue Rowen ... Little Girl at Crag and Corridor
 Paul Salata ... Amalekite
 Joan Samuels ... Pharaoh's Court Dancer
 Serena Sande ... Hebrew Girl at Sphinx
 Archie Savage ... Ethiopian
 Carl Saxe ... Amalekite/High Priest
 Jefferson Dudley Searles ... Hebrew Toward Corridor/Slave
 Ister Shatta ... Slave
 Naomi Shaw ... Slave
 Kathryn Sheldon ... Old Hebrew Woman Kneading Bread at Moses' House/Hebrew
 in Exodus
 Hal Sherman ... Slave
 Mike Sill ... One of the Bearers of the Golden Calf
 Mickey Simpson ... Overseer Watching from Door
 Marc Snegoff ... Extra
 Marc Snow ... Slave

Robert St. Claire ... Hebrew at Dathan's tent
Charles Stevens ... Slave
Emilie Stevens ... Hebrew in Dathan's Tent
Bob Stratton ... Nobleman
Carl "Alfalfa" Switzer ... Slave
Irene Tedrow ... Extra
Hy Terman ... Slave
Ken Terrell ... Amalekite
Arthur Tookoian ... Fan Bearer
Pat Tribble ... Woman
Patricia Turner ... Hebrew at Rameses's Gate
Julian Upton ... Spearman
Connie Van ... Slave
Robert Vaughn ... Spearman/Hebrew at Golden Calf
Louise Volding ... Slave
Bunny Warner ... Little Girl
Joan Warner ... Hebrew at Golden Calf
Paul Weber ... Architect/Hebrew at Dathan's Tent/Hebrew at Crag and Corridor
Alan Wells ... Hebrew at Crag and Corridor
Paul Wexler ... Hebrew at Crag and Corridor/Hebrew at Golden Calf
Dan White ... Slave
Loray White ... Nubian Slave
Marilyn Winston ... Grainary Child
Harry Woods ... Officer
Norman Wright ... Assyrian Ambassador
Than Wyenn ... Slave
Stephen Wyman ... Nobleman
Guy Zanette ... Slave
Fred Zendar ... Slave/Taskmaster

Casting Director:

Bert McKay (uncredited)

Original Music:

Elmer Bernstein

Cinematographer:

Loyal Griggs

Editor:

Anne Bauchens

Art Directors:

Albert Nozaki

Hal Pereira

Walter Tyler

Set Decorators:

Sam Comer

Ray Moyer

Costume Designers:

Arnold Friberg

Edith Head

Dorothy Jeakins

John Jensen

Ralph Jester

Make Up Department (credited):

Nellie Manley ... hair stylist

Frank McCoy ... makeup artist

Frank Westmore ... makeup artist

Wally Westmore ... makeup supervisor

Make Up Department (uncredited):⁶³⁸
 Hamdi Al Abdel ... assistant makeup artist
 Peggy Adams ... hair stylist
 Hamdy Ahmed ... makeup artist
 Shousha Ahmed ... assistant hair stylist
 Zakeria Ahmed ... assistant hair stylist
 John A. Anderson ... makeup artist
 Sayed Awad ... makeup artist
 Bud Bashaw Jr. ... makeup artist
 Larry Butterworth ... makeup artist
 Willard Colee ... makeup artist
 Olga Collings ... hair stylist
 Robert Dawn ... makeup artist
 Armand Delmar ... makeup artist
 Frank Delmar ... makeup supervisor
 Doris Dunkus ... hair stylist
 Mahmoud El Sayed ... assistant makeup artist
 Max Factor ... makeup supervisor: Egyptian makeup
 Ibrahim Abdel Fattel ... assistant makeup artist
 Mohamed Fouad ... assistant makeup artist
 Bertha French ... hair stylist
 Charles Gemora ... makeup artist
 Jane Gorton ... hair stylist
 Florence Guernsey ... hair stylist
 Faye Hanlin ... hair stylist
 Doris Harris ... hair stylist: Egypt
 Ahmed Higazy ... assistant makeup artist
 John G. Holden ... makeup artist
 Hussein Hussein al Sayed ... makeup artist
 Aly Iman ... makeup artist
 Issa Ahmed Issa ... makeup artist
 Alma Johnson ... hair stylist
 Dick Johnson ... makeup artist
 Anthony Karnagel ... makeup artist
 Sam Kaufman ... makeup artist
 Eugene Klum ... makeup artist
 Beth Langston ... hair stylist
 Lillian Lashin ... hair stylist
 Helen Lierly ... hair stylist
 Raymond Lopez ... makeup artist
 Mohamed Magdy ... makeup artist
 Youssef Mahmed ... makeup artist
 Paul Malcolm ... makeup artist
 Mohamed Mamdough ... assistant makeup artist
 Wanda McGee ... hair stylist
 Mahmoud Metwally ... makeup artist

⁶³⁸ Adapted from IMDbPro.com 2007.

Terry Miles ... makeup artist
 Sayed Mohamad ... makeup artist
 Fouad Ramadan Mohamed ... makeup artist
 Abdel Moneim Moussa ... makeup artist
 Sayed Ahmed Moustafa ... assistant makeup artist
 Dick Narr ... makeup artist
 Helene Parrish ... hair stylist
 Sidney Perell ... makeup artist
 Louis Phillipi ... makeup artist
 Norman Pringle ... makeup artist
 Hamdi Rafaat ... makeup artist
 Sobhy Rasta ... makeup artist
 Leonora Sabine ... hair stylist
 Eric Seelig ... makeup artist: extras
 Fae M. Smith ... hair stylist
 Abdel Hameed Soliman ... makeup artist
 Lavaughn Speer ... hair stylist
 Jack Stone ... makeup artist
 Hassan Taha ... assistant makeup artist
 Harry Thomas ... makeup artist
 Hazel R. Thompson ... hair stylist
 Vera Tomei ... hair stylist
 Lenore Weaver ... hair stylist

Production Managers:⁶³⁹

Frank Caffey ... production manager
 Kenneth DeLand ... production manager
 Donald Robb ... production manager
 Hugh Brown ... assistant production manager: Egypt (uncredited)
 William Davidson ... assistant production manager (uncredited)
 Andrew J. Durkus ... unit production manager (uncredited)

Second Unit (credited):

Arthur Rosson ... director
 Fouad Aref ... assistant director: Egypt
 Francisco Day ... assistant director
 Daniel McCauley ... assistant director
 Michael Moore ... assistant director
 Edward Salven ... assistant director

⁶³⁹ Adapted from IMDbPro.com 2007.

Second Unit (uncredited):⁶⁴⁰

Fawzy Aly ... second second assistant director: Egypt
 Henry E. Brill ... second second assistant director
 Richard Caffey ... assistant director
 Fouad Salah El Dine ... second second assistant director: Egypt
 Loutfy Nour El Din ... second assistant director: Egypt
 Ibrahim El Gamal ... second second assistant director: Egypt
 Farid El Guindi ... second assistant director: Egypt
 Raouf El Sabaa ... second assistant director: Egypt
 Raouf El Shafic ... second assistant director: Egypt
 Ahmed El Touki ... second assistant director: Egypt
 Gamel Faris ... second assistant director: Egypt
 Saleh Fawzy ... second second assistant director: Egypt
 Sherif Mustafa Hammouda ... second assistant director: Egypt
 Amena Mohamed ... second second assistant director: Egypt
 Abdel Salam Moussa ... second assistant director: Egypt
 Houssam El-Din Mustafa ... second assistant director: Egypt
 Fikry Ramzy ... second assistant director: Egypt
 Simon Saleh ... second second assistant director: Egypt
 L. Jeffrey Selznick ... second assistant director
 Mahmoud Serry ... second assistant director: Egypt

Art Department (credited):

A.J. Ciraolo ... scenic artist
 Gordon Cole ... property master
 Jerry Cook ... set constructor
 Robert Goodstein ... property master

Art Department (uncredited):⁶⁴¹

Moustafa Abdallah ... propmaker
 Abdel Badie Ahmed ... propmaker
 Abdel Hameed Ahmed ... propmaker
 Mohamed Mahmoud Ahmed ... propmaker
 Mahmoud Aly ... painter
 Mahmoud Aly ... propmaker
 Hosny Hamza Aman ... propmaker
 Harry Arnold ... stand-by painter: Egypt
 Said Ahmed Atta ... propmaker
 Abdel Aty Atwa ... prop shop
 Abdallah Awad ... welder

⁶⁴⁰ IMDbPro.com 2007.

⁶⁴¹ Adapted from IMDbPro.com 2007.

Sobhi Awad ... prop mechanics
Wayne Buttress ... stand-by painter
Nicholas Damaskos ... propmaker
Eddie Dengyan ... assistant set dresser
Sayed Abdel El Adl ... propmaker
Ibrahim Aly El Gamal ... assistant property master: Egypt
Ahmed El Guinengy ... carpenter
Abdou El Haron ... painter
Salama Gouda El Shaerb ... propmaker
Abass El Sheikh ... sketch artist: Egypt
Hamid El Sissy ... propmaker
Arnold Friberg ... assistant art director
Ahmed Gad ... props electrician
George Georgakis ... propmaker
Abdel Azim Ghareem ... propmaker: chariots
Les Hallett ... propmaker
Abd el Moheim Hassan ... prop mechanics
Mohamed Hassan ... gang boss
Saad Helbawy ... storyboard artist
Reggie Hockman ... propmaker
John Hohl ... assistant property master: Egypt
Dorothea Holt ... illustrator
Hassan Hussein ... props electrician
Ramadan Hussein ... painter
Julio Ielo ... art department coordinator: chariots
Mohamed Ismail ... props electrician
John Jensen ... sketch artist
Hussein Khalil ... laborer
Abdel Ghaia Khattab ... propmaker
Aly Nour Khattab ... prop shop
Hameen Raslan Khattab ... propmaker
Hassan Mabruk Khattab ... propmaker
Imam Egab Khattab ... propmaker
Mahmoud Hassan Khattab ... propmaker
Berdj Khoubesserian ... greensman
Nejib Khoury ... propmaker
Mohamed Zakaria Korseim ... sketch artist: Egypt
Ashour Lamloum ... propmaker foreman: chariots
Kamel Lamloum ... propmaker: chariots
Gene Lauritzen ... construction coordinator
Abd el Mabrouk ... prop mechanics
Sayed Mabrouk ... propmaker
Abdel Hamid Aly Mahfaz ... propmaker
Moustafa Mahmoud ... prop mechanics
William B. Major ... production illustrator
Naguib Malak ... propmaker
Ramadan Mamoud ... propmaker
Abdo Mohamed Abdel Mawgoud ... prop shop

James F. McGuire ... assistant art director
 Abd el Maguid Metwally ... prop mechanics
 Harold Michelson ... storyboard artist
 Tousson Moetamad ... propmaker
 Abdel aal Mohamed ... props electrician
 Abdel Hameed Mohamed ... propmaker
 Esmat Mohamed ... sketch artist: Egypt
 Khalifa Mohamed ... sketch artist: Egypt
 Sayed Younes Moursy ... propmaker
 Said Mohamed Moustafa ... welder
 Abdel Hakeem Hassan Nasr ... welder
 Sayed Mohamed Nassar ... welder
 Ahmed Fouad Nesseim ... sketch artist: Egypt
 Hassan Nour ... prop mechanics
 Osman Nour ... welder
 Earl Olin ... propmaker
 Metaweh Oweas ... propmaker
 Richard Parker ... propmaker
 Martin Pendleton ... set decorator: Egypt
 Constanteau Pitsis ... propmaker
 Ahmed Abdou Radwan ... painter
 Ramadan Abdel Radwan ... painter
 Abdel Moneim Abdel Rahman ... propmaker
 Dorothea Redmond ... storyboard artist
 Roy Rulin ... storyboard artist
 Henri Salvi ... propmaker
 William Sapp ... property master
 William Sapp ... propmaker foreman
 Jack Senter ... assistant art director
 Bob Sheldon ... laborer
 Moustafa Ali Sherif ... propmaker
 Nassif Solimon ... prop mechanics
 Mohamed Hamed Abou Steat ... propmaker
 George Swartz ... propmaker
 Dwight Thompson ... propmaker
 Fadlallah Toulba ... propmaker
 Dwight Turner ... painter
 Abdel Gawad Yehia ... propmaker
 Moise Yenni ... propmaker

Sound Department (credited):

Gene Garvin ... sound recordist
 Harry Lindgren ... sound recordist
 Louis Mesenkop ... sound recording supervisor

Sound Department (uncredited):⁶⁴²

Galal Amin ... sound assistant: Egypt
 Howard Beals ... sound editor
 Howard Beals ... supervising sound editor
 George Dutton ... sound effects designer
 Cecil Gardiner ... boom grip
 Charles Grenzbach ... sound re-recording mixer
 Hugo Grenzbach ... sound re-recording mixer
 Don Johnson ... sound re-recording mixer
 Al Meinschmid ... boom operator: Egypt
 Gene Merritt ... sound re-recording mixer
 Thomas B. Middleton ... sound editor
 Tommy Middleton ... sound editor
 Harry D. Mills ... sound re-recording mixer
 Pat Moore ... sound editor
 Rocky Nelson ... cable person
 Lovell Norman ... sound editor
 Loren L. Ryder ... re-recording and mixing
 Clarence Self ... boom operator
 George Swarthout ... cable person
 Ossama Wally ... production sound mixer: Egypt
 Bill Wistrom ... sound editor

Special Effects Department:

Farciot Edouart ... process photographer
 John P. Fulton ... special photographic effects
 William Sapp ... special effects property master (uncredited)
 Barney Wolff ... special effects (uncredited)

Visual Effects Department (credited):

Jan Domela ... matte artist
 Paul Lerpae¹ ... optical photography

Visual Effects Department (uncredited):⁶⁴³

Carol Beers ... traveling mattes
 Ray Binger ... visual effects camera operator

⁶⁴² IMDbPro.com 2007.

⁶⁴³ IMDbPro.com 2007.

Edward Faigin ... assistant visual effects animator
 Marion Green ... assistant visual effects animator
 Gladys Hallberg ... visual effects animation supervisor
 T. Hardy ... matte artist
 David S. Horsley ... additional visual effects
 Angel Jimenez ... assistant visual effects animator
 Roberta Johnson ... visual effects animator
 Marlene Kempffer ... visual effects animator
 Helen Lampson ... traveling mattes
 Ann Lord ... visual effects animation supervisor
 Bill Mahood ... assistant visual effects animator
 Ed Parks ... visual effects animator
 Pauline Rosenthal ... visual effects animator
 George Rowley ... visual effects animator
 Albert Simpson ... matte artist

Stunts (uncredited):⁶⁴⁴

Haguib Asfar ... stunt double
 Rahwia Badawi ... stunt double: Ms. Deering
 Kay Bell ... stunts
 Polly Burson ... stunts
 Joyce Cochtie ... stunt double
 J. Collins ... stunt double: Mr. Hill
 Claude Colvin ... stunt double: Mr. Robinson
 Ken Cooper ... stunts
 Frank Cordell ... stunts
 Rita Coudisi ... stunt double: Ms. Paget
 Roger Creed ... stunts
 Monica Dameanie ... stunt double
 Sayed El Badawi ... stunt double: Mr. Brynner
 Henry A. Escalante ... stunts
 Adele Essa ... stunt double
 Richard Farnsworth ... stunts
 Lila Finn ... stunts
 Robert Garvey ... stunts
 Bernie Gozier ... stunts
 Chuck Hamilton ... stunts
 Tom Hennesy ... stunts
 Bob Herron ... stunts
 Abdel Kadar Hussein ... stunt double
 Loren Janes ... stunts
 Hubie Kerns ... stunts
 Catherine Mikhail ... stunt double: Ms. Foch

⁶⁴⁴ IMDbPro.com 2007.

Bob Morgan ... stunts
 Boyd 'Red' Morgan ... stunts
 Hanafy Mohamed Moustafa ... stunt double
 Claude Moyal ... stunt double: Mr. Derek
 Peter Peterson ... stunts
 George Robotham ... stunts
 Victor Romito ... stunts
 Moh Sabe ... stunt double: Mr. DeKova
 Carl Saxe ... stunts
 Roudy Soufran ... stunt double: Mr. Heston
 Ken Terrell ... stunts
 Fred Zendar ... stunts

Camera and Electrical Department (credited):

Wallace Kelley ... additional photographer
 J. Peverell Marley ... additional photographer
 Rich Richardson ... still photographer
 John Warren ... additional photographer

Camera and Electrical Department (uncredited):⁶⁴⁵

Sayed Ahmed ... best boy electric: Egypt
 Sayed Ahmed ... rigging best boy electric
 Alfred Alexander ... camera loader: Egypt
 Ara O. Avedissian ... still photographer
 Alfred Baalas ... assistant camera: Egypt
 Erik Balzer ... camera loader: Egypt
 M.A. Boyce ... dolly grip
 Adolph Bricker ... grip: Egypt
 Fritz Brosch ... camera mechanic: Egypt
 Mal Bulloch ... still photographer
 Alfred Cline ... assistant camera
 Phil Eastman ... assistant camera: Egypt
 Mohamed Ezz El Arab ... assistant camera: Egypt
 Kamel El Araby ... generator operator
 Gamel El Ashry ... generator operator
 Ismail Ismail El Kholy ... electrician
 Awad Mohamed Abou El Naza ... head electrician
 Mahmoud Eracky ... electrician
 Manoli Eskender ... generator operator
 Rudolph Frank ... camera mechanic
 George Gall ... assistant camera
 Sayed Mahmoud Gindy ... grip: Egypt

⁶⁴⁵ IMDbPro.com 2007.

Soldier Graham ... gaffer: Egypt
 Norbert Haring ... grip
 Jack Harris ... still photographer
 Cliff Hartley ... grip
 Paul Hill ... assistant camera
 Sayed Hindawy ... grip
 Bernard P. Keever ... key rigging grip
 Abou Abdel Khalek ... electrician
 Abdel Fattah Khattab ... grip
 Farag Tewfik Khattab ... grip
 Mohamed Nagy Khattab ... grip
 Mohamed Sayed Khattab ... grip
 James V. King ... camera operator
 John Leeds ... assistant camera
 Thomas Morris ... camera operator
 Gordon Palmer ... rigging best boy grip
 Otto Pierce ... camera operator
 Awad Abdel Rahman ... grip
 Khomis Abdel Rahman ... grip
 Sayed Abd El Rahman ... generator operator
 Mohamed Abdel Razek ... battery man
 Glen E. Richardson ... still photographer
 Bob Rogers ... rigging gaffer
 Robert H. Rogers ... best boy electric
 Farag Riad Sayed ... grip
 Albert Scheving ... assistant camera: Egypt
 Dominic Seminerio ... key grip
 Kamel Shaker ... grip
 Ali Mahmoud Soliman ... electrician
 Mohamed Soliman ... electrician
 Bill Thomas ... still photographer
 Robert Tobey ... camera operator
 Fares Ahmed Abdel Wahad ... generator operator
 Edward Wahrman ... assistant camera: Egypt
 Paul Weddell ... assistant camera
 Ken Whitmore ... location still photographer: Egypt
 Max Wolk ... assistant camera
 Abdel Salem Yehia ... grip
 Murray Young ... key grip

Casting Department (uncredited):⁶⁴⁶

Sayed Aly ... casting assistant
 Johan Cope ... adr voice casting
 Mohamed Hassan ... casting assistant
 Olive Long ... casting secretary

⁶⁴⁶ IMDbPro.com 2007.

Ibrahim Mostafa ... casting assistant
 Hassan Taher ... casting assistant
 Mohamed Zayed ... casting assistant

Costume and Wardrobe Department (uncredited):⁶⁴⁷

Mohamed Abdel Aziz ... wardrobe: men
 John Mohamed Ahmed ... wardrobe: men
 Abdel Wahab Aly ... wardrobe supervisor: men
 Kamel Mohamed Aly ... wardrobe: men
 John A. Anderson ... wardrobe
 O. Arassky ... wardrobe
 Abdel Malik Attalah ... wardrobe stock clerk
 Mary Avierino ... wardrobe supervisor: women
 Moustafa Abdel Aziz ... wardrobe supervisor: men
 Gomad Omran Badowy ... wardrobe shop guard
 Adele Balkan ... wardrobe
 Sayed Abdel Bashaudy ... wardrobe: men
 Beba Benvenista ... wardrobe: women
 Marcella Bertini ... wardrobe supervisor: women
 Steve Brandt ... wardrobe: men
 Frank R. Budz ... wardrobe designer
 Billie Cheatwood ... costumer: Mr. Heston
 Ismail Chinnawy ... wardrobe: men
 Staveo Christofidas ... wardrobe: men
 Frank Delmar ... wardrobe
 Imam Abdel Wahed El Sharaby ... costume dyer
 Mahmoud Ezzat ... wardrobe assistant: men
 Mohamed Ezzat ... wardrobe assistant: men
 Makram Fahmy ... wardrobe assistant: men
 Lee Forman ... assistant wardrobe: women
 Abdu Mabrak Garby ... wardrobe shop guard
 Gigi Gargiulio ... wardrobe: men
 Abdel Moheim Gilbrill ... wardrobe: men
 Vou Lee Giokaris ... wardrobe assistant: women
 Youssef Hassan ... costume cutter
 Ahmed Helmi ... wardrobe cutter
 Walter Hoffman ... wardrobe intern
 Fred Kroiter ... wardrobe assistant: men
 Yvonne Madi ... wardrobe manufacturer
 Kitty Manassi ... wardrobe: women
 Winifred Martin ... wardrobe shopper

⁶⁴⁷ IMDbPro.com 2007.

Fouad Michael ... wardrobe: men
 Albert Mizrahi ... wardrobe shop
 Hussein Mohamed ... wardrobe: men
 Michel Moran ... wardrobe supervisor: men
 Michael F. Moussa ... wardrobe: men
 Ezzat Sayed Moustafa ... wardrobe: men
 Dario Piazza ... wardrobe designer
 Mounir Salama ... wardrobe: men
 Mohamed Mohamed Sayed Jr. ... wardrobe: men
 Eric Seelig ... wardrobe: Egypt
 Abdel Wahhab Shalaby ... wardrobe: men
 Ethel Shaw ... wardrobe: women
 R. Shepherd ... wardrobe
 Bondak Hassan Shetatu ... wardrobe: men
 Kalifa Soliman ... wardrobe
 Marilyn Sotto ... wardrobe
 Stella Spiro ... wardrobe supervisor: women
 Ruth Stella ... wardrobe: women
 Eleanor Szabo ... wardrobe
 John Thomas ... wardrobe: men
 George Tsontzos ... wardrobe: men
 Patrick Williams ... wardrobe supervisor
 Yanni Zafiro ... wardrobe: men
 Lopy Zakika ... wardrobe supervisor: women
 Labiba Zaki ... wardrobe: women

Editorial Department:

Richard Mueller ... color consultant: Technicolor
 Michael Caffey ... assistant editor (uncredited)

Transportation Department (uncredited):⁶⁴⁸

Abdel Salem Aly ... driver
 George Attallah ... transportation department
 Mohamed Moussa Chazly ... driver
 Tahan El Haggan ... mechanic
 Osman El Kashef ... driver
 Mohamed El Khatib ... driver
 Youssef A. Elramby ... mechanic
 Hamid Abdul Fayed ... driver
 Ahmed Fouad ... driver dispatcher
 Joe Herron ... transportation coordinator

⁶⁴⁸ IMDbPro.com 2007.

Aganeau Hassan Hussein ... mechanic
 Ahmed Aly Mabred ... driver
 M.J. McGee ... driver dispatcher
 Abdel Aziz Metwally ... driver
 Ezzat Hashem Mohamed ... mechanic
 Abdul el Hamid Morgan ... driver
 Zaghloul Mouwad ... driver
 Aly Naggy ... car washer
 Stelio Nicolaidis ... driver dispatcher
 George Pangalos ... driver
 Mohamed Saawan ... driver
 Mahmoud Hassan Saleh ... driver
 Saleh Hassan Saleh ... driver
 Sayed Ahmed Saleh ... assistant transportation coordinator
 Georges Sideratos ... transportation captain
 George Strouthos ... driver dispatcher
 Ibrahim Mohamed Zatoney ... assistant transportation coordinator

Miscellaneous Crew (credited):

Frances Dawson ... dialogue supervisor
 Ruth Godfrey ... choreographer
 Dr. Labib Habachi ... historical advisor
 Dr. William C. Hayes¹ ... historical advisor
 Dr. George R. Hughes¹ ... historical advisor
 Josephus¹ ... ancient text
 Philo¹ ... ancient text
 Rabbi Rudolph Lupo¹ ... historical advisor
 Donald MacLean ... dialogue supervisor
 Dr. Ralph Marcus¹ ... historical advisor
 Henry Noerdlinger ... researcher
 Gladys Percey ... researcher
 LeRoy Prinz ... choreographer
 Dr. Keith C. Seele ... historical advisor

Miscellaneous Crew (uncredited):⁶⁴⁹

Mounir Aly Abdel Hamid ... blacksmith
 Moh. Abe El Salem ... double: Mr. Carradine
 Abdel M.M. Ahmed ... liaison: Egypt
 Captain Ahmed Salah Ahmed ... interpreter
 Kamel Ahmed El Ahmed El Sayed ... blacksmith
 Mohamed Mahmoud Ahmed ... blacksmith

⁶⁴⁹ IMDbPro.com 2007.

Mohamed Abdel Alein ... interpreter
Ahmed Mahmoud Aly ... office production assistant
Ahmed Mawhid Aly ... production secretary
Art Arthur ... publicity chief
Claire Behnke ... script supervisor
Giselle Benaroyo ... production secretary
Rufus Blair ... publicist: Egypt
Joan Brooskin ... secretary: Mr. DeMille, Egypt
Marianna Buehrlen ... secretary: Mr. Wilcoxon
Lucien Cailliet ... orchestrator
Andre Castel ... location cashier
Rena Clark ... researcher
M. Jane Clifford ... assistant auditor
Claire Cochran ... secretary
Florence Cole ... secretary: Mr. DeMille
Beatrice Dashiell ... production secretary
James Davies ... trainer: Mr. Heston
Albert Deane ... publicist
Ann Del Valle ... publicist
Patricia DiLorenzo ... secretary: publicity department
Shater El Basset ... cook
Anis Serag El Dine ... contractor: Egypt
Yolande Fahmy ... production secretary
Rafik Shawky Farag ... interpreter
Souraya Farid ... assistant script supervisor: Egypt
Al Finestone ... publicist
George Fraser ... publicist: Europe
Arnold Friberg ... title designer
Frank Friedrichsen ... publicist
Leila Gilbertson ... assistant script supervisor
Jack Haddad ... stock clerk
Maxwell Hamilton ... publicity chief
Youssef Hassan ... assistant fabric cutter
Donald Hayne ... assistant: Mr. DeMille, Egypt
Dr. Tewfik Helmy ... company doctor
Barbar Hicks ... secretary: publicity department
Elizabeth Higgason ... researcher
Hassan Hilmy ... production department: Egypt
Dr. Samuel Hoffman ... musician: theremin
Bill Hurley ... livestock supervisor: Egypt
Genghis Khalil Ibrahim ... blacksmith
Nahed Kholousy ... telephone operator
Charles Kisco ... music advisor
Dr. Koussa Tadros Koussa ... company doctor
Margaret B. Kunde ... production secretary
William Lasky ... technical advisor
Edith W. Lynn ... secretary
Donald MacLean ... assistant: Mr. DeMille

Raafat Mahmoud ... timekeeper
Faiza Abdel Maksoud ... receptionist
Michael Marinos ... night operations
Ted Masters ... location auditor
Elaine Matta ... company nurse
M.J. McGee ... dispatcher
Mary Moon ... secretary: publicity department
Bernice Mosk ... field secretary: Mr. DeMille
Mahmoud Mohamed Moustafa ... blacksmith
Nicola D. Papadapaulo ... interpreter
Kamel Said Said ... service boy
John Samuels ... specialty dancer
Leo Shuken ... orchestrator
Paul Simqu ... publicist
Doris Turner ... secretary: Mr. DeMille
Geri Zerbonne ... production secretary

Filming Locations:⁶⁵⁰

Abu Rudeis, Egypt
Abu Ruwash, Egypt
Beni Youssef, Egypt
Luxor, Egypt
Guadalupe, California, USA
Los Angeles, California, USA
Paramount Studios, 5555 Melrose Ave., Hollywood, Los Angeles, California, USA
Red Rock Canyon State Park, Cantil, California, USA

⁶⁵⁰ IMDbPro.com 2007.

TELEVISION BROADCASTS

The ABC television network broadcasts *The Ten Commandments* on Easter Sunday, 1977, and then yearly until 1999.

In 1999 ABC substitutes a made-for-television animated film, *The Miracle Maker* (1999), starring Ralph Fiennes as the voice of Jesus. According to comments in the *Washington Post* by ABC's programming chief, Jeff Bader, the absence of *The Ten Commandments* draws "more irate phone calls than anything else that the network did" this season.⁶⁵¹

In April 2000 on Palm Sunday, *The Ten Commandments* dominates the ratings. It peaks at 9:00 p.m. with a 13.7 rating and a 20 share.⁶⁵² According to Nielsen Media Research, relative to other shows in its week, its rating is top among films broadcast, and the eighth-highest of all shows.⁶⁵³ After this success, ABC returns *The Ten Commandments* to its traditional slot on Easter Sunday.

On Easter Sunday of April 2002, the rating for *The Ten Commandments* is 9.3 with a 15 share, which is comparable to the 12.0/20 rating of CBS's Saturday coverage of the NCAA Basketball Tournament.⁶⁵⁴

In 2003, for the fourth consecutive year since its hiatus, *The Ten Commandments* tops the ratings among films broadcast during Easter week. According to figures from Nielsen Media Research, its ratings this year have fallen, yet the broadcast attracts 10.8 million viewers, which is more than enough to defeat its Sunday-night competition.⁶⁵⁵

⁶⁵¹ StudioBriefing 1999, 3 September, "Thou Shalt Carry *The Ten Commandments*."

⁶⁵² StudioBriefing 2000, 17 April, "Thou Shalt Watch Heston."

⁶⁵³ StudioBriefing 2000, 19 Apr., "Sweet 16 For ABC." The higher-rated shows that week were *Who Wants to Be a Millionaire* (Tuesday), *E.R.*, *Millionaire* (Thursday), *Friends*, *Dharma and Greg*, *60 Minutes*, and *Daddio*.

⁶⁵⁴ StudioBriefing. 2002, 1 Apr., "Viewers Go Mad over Basketball."

⁶⁵⁵ Scott Collins 2003, Moses frees ABC from Sun. Woes. The competition was mainly from CBS' *Ice Bound: A Woman's Survival at the South Pole*, starring Susan Sarandon; and from NBC's *100 Years of Hope and Humor*, a tribute to Bob Hope on his 100th birthday.

In 2004 *The Ten Commandments* is exceeded in its night's ratings by a CBS drama, *Cold Case*.⁶⁵⁶

In 2007 ABC, keeping *Desperate Housewives* in its Sunday-night slot, broadcast *The Ten Commandments* instead on Saturday. It attracts 7.87 million viewers, which is less than in previous years, but still a larger audience than for any other program this night.⁶⁵⁷

SCORE (RECORDING)

The Ten Commandments (2001, Soundtrack Library CD-72, "Complete Score"), two compact disks, 69:35 and 71:38

Disc One: 1. Overture (01:36) 2. Main Title - Prologue (05:40) 3. Slaying Of The First Born - In The Bulrushes (04:24) 4. Nefertiti (00:54) 5. Throne Room (01:55) 6. Love And Ambition (03:55) 7. The Bitter Life (03:24) 8. Temple Grainery (01:11) 9. Treasure City (04:32) 10. Death Of Memnit (02:09) 11. The Hard Bondage (02:10) 12. The Mud Pits (03:58) 13. Nefertiti's Barge - Death Of Baka (07:53) 14. Egyptian Dance (02:22) 15. Farewell To Moses (03:18) 16. Dathan And Lilia (01:09) 17. Exile - The Crucible Of God (04:08) 18. Jethro's Daughters (02:17) 19. The Holy Mountain (03:24) 20. Bedouin Dance (01:30) 21. Moses And Sephora (06:10)

Disc Two. 1. Burning Bush - End Of Act One (06:16) 2. Intermission Music (02:42) 3. Thus Sayeth The Lord (04:06) 4. Bricks Without Straw (00:42) 5. Lily At The Well (01:28) 6. Blessing Of The Waters (00:26) 7. The Water Turns To Blood (01:28) 8. Days Of Darkness (01:49) 9. The Plagues (04:25) 10. Freedom! (02:20) 11. Exodus Part One (07:08) 12. Exodus Part Two (02:55) 13. The Wrath Of The Pharaoh (03:28) 14. The Red Sea (08:21) 15. Orgy Complete (09:59) 16. Destruction And Finale (03:52) 17. Exit Music (05:22) 18. Exodus Fast (Alternate Fast Version Pt:1 - 2:12) 19. Pharaoh's Wrath (01:49) 20. The Pillar Appears - Giving Of The Commandments (Alternate Beginning - 00:44)

⁶⁵⁶ Littleton 2004.

⁶⁵⁷ StudioBriefing 2007, 9 Apr., "Let My People Go? ABC Says, No Way!"

SOUNDTRACK (RECORDING)

More Music from The Ten Commandments
(1994, Falcon 6994), compact disk, 1:09:52

1. Overture (01:37) 2. Main Title (05:30) 3. Murder of the Firstborn / Moses the Conqueror / Moses enters Pharaoh's Court (02:36) 4. Foods from the Gods (01:10)
5. The Treasure City / Erecting the Monolith (01:14) 6. A City of Sethi's Glory (02:30; with dialogue by Charlton Heston, Sir Cedric Hardwicke, Yul Brynner, Vincent Price) 7. The Hard Bondage (02:04) 8. Nefretiri's Barge (01:41)
9. You are the Redeemer / Lilia begs Dathan for Mercy (01:44) 10. Into the Blistering Wilderness of Shur (03:19) 11. The Well of Midian / The Stranger is Wise—and Strong (02:17) 12. Moses Questions Sephora about the Mountain of God (03:27) 13. Moses asks Sephora to be his Wife (03:16) 14. The Royal Falcon is Flown to the Sun / Lilia at the Water Well (01:52) 15. Plague of Blood (01:27)
16. The Green Cloud Descends / The Angel of Death (02:12) 17. Death of Pharaoh's Son (02:51) 18. I Set You Free (02:19) 19. A New Day / The Exodus (06:03)
20. The Ride of the Chariots / Pillar of Fire / Egyptians Cross the Sea (03:08)
21. And the Sea Covered Him (00:57) 22. His God—is God / Mount Sinai (00:35)
23. The Commandments / The Golden Calf / The Commandments Continue / Written by the Finger of God / Return to the Camp (07:00) 24. The Wrath of God / The Law is restored / Go—Proclaim Liberty (03:43) 25. Exit Music (05:20)

THE TEN COMMANDMENTS

AS FILMIC AND TELEVISUAL INTERTEXT (See also Chapter One)⁶⁵⁸

The Pigeon That Took Rome (1962)

*Close Encounters of the Third Kind (1977; the children of Richard Dreyfuss's character watch and refer to *The Ten Commandments* on television.)*

⁶⁵⁸ Adapted from IMDbPro.com 2007.

- Grease* (1978; a billboard in the opening's animated credits advertises *The Ten Commandments*)
- Wholly Moses!* (1980)
- Caddyshack* (1980)
- History of the World: Part I* (1981)
- The Naked Gun 2½: The Smell of Fear* (1991)
- The Simpsons*, "Homer vs. Lisa and the Eighth Commandment" episode (1991, television; the opening scene shows Homer stealing graven images from an adulterer as Moses delivers the Decalogue.)
- Saturday Night Live*, Charlton Heston episode, "Behind Moses's back" skit (1993, television)
- The Making of " . . . And God Spoke "* (1993; the character of Moses is asked to do his part like Charlton Heston did it.)
- Il Giudice Ragazzino* (Italy, 1994)
- Mystery Science Theater 3000*, "The Skydivers" episode (1994, television; character remarks that "*The Ten Commandments* had a smaller cast than this.")
- Kanya Ya Ma Kan, Beyrouth* (Lebanon, 1995)
- A Personal Journey with Martin Scorsese Through American Movies* (1995, television)
- Ace Ventura: When Nature Calls* (1995)
- Mystery Science Theater 3000: Jack Frost* (1997 TV episode) (Heckle and Jeckle in *The Ten Commandments*)
- NewsRadio*, "Rose Bowl" episode (1997, television; in his memorabilia box, Jimmy has the stone tablets.)
- The Prince of Egypt* (1998)
- Saturday Night Live*: John Goodman episode, *Ten Commandments* skit (1998, television)
- The Mummy* (1999)
- Dogma* (1999)
- The Closer You Get* (2000; the congregation discusses *The Ten Commandments* at church).
- Family Guy*, "Love Thy Trophy" episode (2000, television; Charlton Heston says "Let my pigeons go.")
- Men in Black II* (2002)
- Bowling for Columbine* (2002 documentary) *The Gidge* (2003 short film; main character's fantasy sequence)
- Bruce Almighty* (2003)

The Pervert's Guide to Cinema (2006 documentary, presented by Slavoj Zizek)

The Ten Commandments (Robert Dornhelm, Director; Ron Hutchinson, Writer; New Hallmark Entertainment Production, made for television, 2006)

ADDITIONAL CAPTURED FRAMES FROM DIGITAL VIDEO DISK

Available at <http://outnow.ch/Media/Img/1956/TenCommandents/> and
<http://www.tvfilm.hu/tvfilm/index.php?f=leiras&fid=6930&resz=0&lap=4>.

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