The Politics of Cyborg Communications

Harold Innis, Marshall McLuhan, and *The English Patient*

A postcolonial reading of Michael Ondaatje's *The English Patient* would start from the colonized subject's resistance to a "tremor of Western wisdom" (284)—the ongoing threat of nuclear apocalypse—which brings the novel to a climax and the Second World War to a close. Trying to imagine "The death of a civilisation" (286), Kirpal Singh closes his eyes and "sees the streets of Asia full of fire. It rolls across cities like a burst map, the hurricane of heat withering bodies as it meets them, the shadow of humans suddenly in the air" (284). Bitterly, he concludes that Western (and not Asian) imperialism is solely to blame: "All those speeches of civilisation from kings and queens and presidents . . . such voices of abstract order. Smell it. Listen to the radio and smell the celebration" (285). "You stood for precise behaviour," he says to his former mentor, the burned English aviator who may not even be English. "Was it just ships that gave you such power? Was it, as my brother said, because you had *The Histories* and printing presses?" (283).

The sapper from India who has spent the war in Kent and Sussex disposing of German bombs comes to see the Bomb itself as another instrument of Western hegemony, like the ships, the printing presses, and written history, all tools of "a sovereign Western consciousness out of whose unchallenged centrality an Oriental world emerged" (Said 8). Ultimately, Kirpal Singh sees the Word itself, the Judaeo-Christian Bible, as a source of immanent imperialism and of imminent apocalypse; for, in a literal as well as a figurative sense, it has authorized his own erasure from history.

Repudiating "The voice of *The English Patient* [which] sang Isaiah into his ear as he had that afternoon when the boy had spoken of the face on the chapel ceiling in Rome" (294), he thus refuses the master narrative which has brought the West to dominance, and now to the verge of destruction: "*For the heavens shall vanish away like smoke and the earth shall wax old like a garment. And they that dwell therein shall die in like manner*" (295; Is. li.6). So Ondaatje, it would seem, "writes back" on Kirpal Singh's behalf to undo the hegemony of Western knowledge and language and power.

Yet there is more in this idea of Western hegemony than a Eurocentric will-to-power which subordinates non-white races. For the terms of the indictment—progressing historically from the West's possession of ships to printing presses to radio to the atomic bomb—suggest that the West has to a considerable degree been determined by its technologies of communication. As Marshall McLuhan wrote in 1964, "Since our new electric technology is not an extension of our bodies but of our central nervous systems, we now see all technology, including language, as a means of processing experience, a means of storing and speeding information. And in such a situation all technology can plausibly be regarded as weapons" (*Understanding* 299). McLuhan has even claimed that a novel like *A Passage to India* is "a parable of Western man in the electric age, and is only incidentally related to Europe or the Orient. The ultimate conflict between sight and sound, between written and oral kinds of perception and organization of existence is upon us" (30). With much more justification, *The English Patient* can be seen as a novel about the consequences of technological change, where the meeting of the West and Orient on the ruins of Europe at the end of the Second World War raises crucial questions about the shaping effects of media on the individual, on gender, on social institutions, and ultimately, upon the state and its exercise of power.

And yet the better gloss on the ships, the printing presses, the radio, and the bomb which Singh identifies as agents of Western domination is to be found not in McLuhan but in the work of Harold Innis, his predecessor at the University of Toronto. For Innis, who had fought in the Great War, began to see after the collapse of France in 1940 that such total war was part of a deeper struggle to correct a cultural and political imbalance brought on by changes in the forms of media. "The rise of Hitler to power," Innis argued, "was facilitated by the use of the loud speaker and the radio. By the spoken language he could appeal to minority groups and to minority

nations. Germans in Czechoslovakia could be reached by radio as could Germans in Austria. Political boundaries related to the demands of the printing industry disappeared with the new instrument of communication. The spoken language provided a new base for the exploitation of nationalism and a far more effective device for appealing to larger numbers" (*Bias* 80). By the end of *The English Patient*, it is Kirpal Singh who has adopted such pessimistic conclusions about the age of radio.

But where the fictional figure had begun in 1940 to help dismantle the material weapons of imperial aggression, Harold Innis began in that year to dismantle their theoretical matrix. "By 1945 he had completed a 1000-page manuscript on the history of communications from which he drew his startling and exploratory essays on the ways in which various technologies of communication *Bias*ed the cultures in which they were embedded" (Berger 187). His enabling assumption was "that the available media of communications strongly influenced the social organization, institutions, and cultural characteristics of society" (Berger 188). So, for example, rivers, one of the earliest systems of communication, helped to shape centralized civilizations. Even the difficulty of transporting clay and stone, which were the material media of cuneiform and hieroglyphics, supported centralized bureaucracies and hierarchical temple structures. Papyrus, on the other hand, together with the alphabet allowed for a diffusion of power, and for decentralized bureaucracies which greatly extended the range of political *Empire* in space. But "Innis was very conscious of the hidden and revolutionary effects of the supercession of one medium of communication by another; the loss to the Roman *Empire*, for example, of its source of supply of papyrus and the supercession of papyrus by parchment subjected that *Empire* to stress and structural change" (Patterson 33).

The reason why all such changes in the method of communication seemed revolutionary to Innis was because each medium *Bias*ed a culture towards time or space. "A concern with communication by the ear assumes reliance on time," whereas "the *Bias* of paper and printing has persisted in a concern with space" (*Bias* 106, 76). Thus, there is a "tendency of each medium of communication to create monopolies of knowledge" (*Empire* 141). For example, the durability of parchment, a "product of a widely scattered agricultural economy suited to the demands of a decentralized administration and to land transportation," could be effectively adapted in rural monasteries to the problem of time, contributing to "the development

of a powerful ecclesiastical organization in western Europe" (*Empire* 140, 149). And yet this same "monopoly over time stimulated competitive elements in the organization of space. The introduction of paper from China to Baghdad and to Cordova and to Italy and France contributed to the development of cursive writing and to the organization of space in relation to the vernaculars" (*Bias* 124). Subsequently, the printing press "emphasized vernaculars and divisions between states based on language without implying a concern with time" (*Bias* 76). In this century, the lasting "*Bias* of paper towards an emphasis on space and its monopolies of knowledge has been checked by the development of a new medium, the radio" (*Empire* 216).

And yet the great "disturbances which have characterized a shift from a culture dominated by one form of communication to another culture dominated by another form of communication whether in the campaigns of Alexander, the Thirty Years' War, or the wars of the present century point to the costs of cultural change" (*Bias* 141). In our era, the cost of electronic technology is most apparent in the rise of global warfare: "The Second World War became to an important extent the result of a clash between the newspaper and the radio" (*Empire* 209). Inevitably, each new medium of communication upsets a civilization's balance economically, politically, socially, and psychologically. So Innis finds it necessary to establish a new equilibrium between printed methods of communication based on the eye and electrical methods of communication based on the ear. As he concludes prophetically, "Stability which characterized certain periods in earlier civilizations is not the obvious objective of this civilization. Each civilization has its own methods of suicide" (*Bias* 141).

The news of Hiroshima in *The English Patient* offers a startling image of the explosive effect of communications in our century. As Innis put it, "The sudden extension of communication precipitated an outbreak of savagery paralleling that of printing and the religious wars of the seventeenth century, and again devastating the regions of Germany" (209). If in Kip's crystal set there is a reminder of Hitler's (and even of Pound's) use of the radio in the 1930s, it is the voice of Allied radio which explodes his faith in the values of Western civilization, justifying wars of racial conquest and of economic expansion: "Listen to the radio and smell the celebration" (285), he says of the events leading up to V-J Day. Ultimately, what "Britannia"—or Anglo-Saxon civilization—rules are the air-waves.

Similarly, the nurse who "listened as the Englishman turned the pages of

his commonplace book and read the information glued in from other books" imagines the conflict in terms of such monopolies of knowledge. The "great maps lost in the bonfires and the burning of Plato's statue, whose marble exfoliated in the heat, the cracks across wisdom like precise reports across the valley as Poliziano stood on the grass hills smelling the future" (*English* 58), are obvious tropes for a "new interest in space" in the age of print, newly "evident in the development of the mariner's compass and the lens. Columbus discovered the New World, Magellan proved the earth a sphere, and in astronomy the Ptolemaic system was undermined especially after the invention and improvement of the telescope" (*Bias* 128). For his part, Poliziano, the great translator of the Iliad into Latin, with ties to the Platonist school of Ficino and Pico and to Lorenzo's artistic circle in Florence, was one of those who resisted the monastic Savonarola and his anti-humanism. Poliziano, better known as Politian, "wrote a great [vernacular] poem on Simonetta Vespucci . . . He made her famous with *Le Stanze per la Giostra* and then Botticelli painted scenes from it" (*English* 57). And yet such dedication to the new medium of printed paper did not immediately replace an older monopoly of knowledge over time: "And then came Savonarola's cry out of the streets: '*Repentance! The deluge is coming!*' And everything was swept away—free will, the desire to be elegant, fame, the right to worship Plato as well as Christ" (57).

In the longer historical perspective of Innis, Savonarola would only be defending a monopoly of knowledge built up in rural monasteries where parchment had for centuries been the dominant medium. But in the end, the world of Poliziano and Lorenzo would carry the day, because "Paper 'permitted the old costly material by which thought was transmitted to be superseded by an economical substance, which was to facilitate the diffusion of the works of human intelligence'" (*Empire* 168). In 1485, "Pico and Lorenzo and Poliziano and the young Michelangelo . . . held in each hand the new world and the old world" (*English* 57), bringing together opposing epochs of manuscript and print.

Two great epochs are opposed once again in 1945, the nurse and her patient holding in each hand a fixed world of print and a world of more fluid boundaries. For the effects of electronic text now appear in the breakdown of boundaries in the commonplace book kept by *The English Patient*. And yet this expanding codex, which Almásy has "brought with him through the fire—a copy of *The Histories* by Herodotus that he has added

to, cutting and gluing in pages from other books or writing in his own observations—so they all are cradled within the text of Herodotus" (16)— also suggests a more hopeful critique of the technology of *Empire* than Singh's final pessimism can allow. For the formal challenge to print in *The English Patient*'s fluid text adumbrates his larger challenge to social and political boundaries, whether borders are defined in terms of nation or of social institutions: "We are communal histories, communal books," Almásy says in what are virtually his dying words. "We are not owned or monogamous in our taste or experience. All I desired was to walk upon such an earth that had no maps" (261).

Other boundary breakdowns show up as well in the novel, beginning with what is left of the ruined villa: "There seemed little demarcation between house and landscape, between damaged building and the burned and shelled remnants of the earth" (43). So, too, "In the desert," Almásy tells his nurse, "it is easy to lose a sense of demarcation" (18). In a desert geography of no particular place, amidst a text which contains "other fragments—maps, diary entries, writings in many languages, paragraphs cut out of other books" (96)—there occurs a textual annihilation of space equivalent to cyberspace. Even *The English Patient*'s revisions to *The Histories* work, as we shall see, to revise the codex form by making us question the fixity of print. But if it seems that the book has to change in a world of electronic text, so may the self: "For many people," as McLuhan notes, "their own ego image seems to have been typographically conditioned, so that the electric age with its return to inclusive experience threatens their idea of self" (*Understanding* 253).

For Innis, the more far-reaching disturbance in an era of rapid expansion of communications is likely to be political, leading to the overthrow of nations and even of *Empires*. And yet Ondaatje's novel differs from *Empire and Communications* (1950) by refusing to make *Empire* its centre of reference or even to prolong imperial hegemony by seeking a balance between competing monopolies. Although Singh gives up on Europe and goes home to India at the end, the novel does not envision any limit to technological change. Where Innis had complained that in our time, "The form of mind from Plato to Kant which hallowed existence beyond change is proclaimed decadent" (*Bias* 90), Almásy's fluid text suggests that some form of instability might be useful to stave off the threat of entropy and the collapse of civilisation. His experiment in this "new" medium would even

suggest an antidote to technological determinism. And yet how far can another medium take us in rejecting both the claims of *Empire* (stability) and of apocalypse (entropy)?

Judith Stamps reminds us that *Empire,* for Innis, was merely "an institution within civilization—one that threatened the latter's survival because it had no awareness of its own limitations" (71). And so there is some ambivalence between his epochal view of the material reasons for imperial collapse, and his quest for a "stable compromise" (*Bias* 96) which would preserve the hegemony of the larger civilisation: "A bureaucracy built up in relation to papyrus and the alphabet was supplemented by a hierarchy built up in relation to parchment. The consequent stability was evident in the continuity of the Byzantine *Empire* to 1453" (*Bias* 117). Graeme Patterson concludes with some justice that Innis's media theory "boiled down to a proposal for a sort of stasis in a world in which, as he himself pointed out, all things were subject to change" (Patterson 20).

This formal tendency to contain the apocalypse is evidently shared by other theorists of the era, most notably by literary modernists who make form a bulwark against apocalypse. In *The Sense of an Ending* (1967), Frank Kermode describes "the admittedly apocalyptic tenor of much radical thinking about the arts in our century" (93). But "if one wanted to understand the apocalypse of early modernism in its true complexity," he says, "it would be Eliot . . . who would demand one's closest attention. He was ready to rewrite the history of all that interested him in order to have past and present conform: he was a poet of apocalypse, of the last days and the renovation, the destruction of the earthly city as a chastisement of human presumption, but also of *Empire*. Tradition, a word we especially associate with this modernist, is for him the continuity of imperial deposits; hence the importance in his thought of Virgil and Dante. He saw his age as a long transition through which the elect must live, redeeming the time" (111-12). And yet, when Kermode tries to discriminate among early and later modernisms, seeking to define what we would now call postmodernism, he sees only "a nihilistic, schismatic quality" in the latter. "Each reacts to a 'painful transitional situation,'" he writes, "but one in terms of continuity and the other in terms of schism. The common topics are transition and eschatological anxiety; but one reconstructs, the other abolishes, one recreates and the other destroys the indispensable and relevant past" (122-23).

Evidently, the poet's desire "to have past and present conform" is shared

by the theorist himself. For Kermode's own faith in "fictive concords with origins and ends, such as give meaning to lives and to poems" (7), is at base a faith in tradition. In the end, the continuity of tradition and formal coherence are used to convert an ending which is imminent into something which is immanent, as if it the end itself were synonymous with the beginning and middle, or as if all three could be occurring simultaneously in space. Kermode none the less worries about the possibility of cultural mutation: "If what is happening" among the postmodernists "is not a continuation but a mutation, then everything I say is wholly wrong. All these talks may be so much waste paper devoted to the obsolete notion that there is a humanly needed order which we call form" (123).

In *The Gutenberg Galaxy* (1962), Marshall McLuhan does find evidence of such a cultural mutation, noting that "Harold Innis was the first person to hit upon the *process* of change as implicit in the *forms* of media technology," and so claiming "The present book" to be nothing more than "a footnote of explanation to his work" (50). Though Carl Berger has determined that "McLuhan's own works were less an extension of Innis's ideas than an inversion of them" (194), there are none the less several essays in *Understanding Media: The Extensions of Man* (1964), most notably "Roads and Paper Routes," which elaborate Innis's thesis precisely in terms of the social effects of communications technology on institutions and culture, though without any further reference to Harold Innis or his work. *Understanding Media* develops the idea that a conflict between sight and sound in various monopolies of communication has been disastrous, not only for Western societies but also for tribal cultures: "Even today the mere existence of a literate and industrial West appears quite naturally as dire aggression to nonliterate societies; just as the mere existence of the atom bomb appears as a state of universal aggression to industrial and mechanized societies" (*Understanding* 299). Such thinking would appear to underlie Almásy's fear, in the end, that what he and his fellow explorers have actually done in their work of explorations is to bring war to the desert. His whole life in the desert, he says, "has been governed by words. By rumours and legends. Charted things. Shards written down. The tact of words. In the desert to repeat something would be to fling more water into the earth. Here nuance took you a hundred miles" (231). What he has been pursuing through such nuance is the recovery of lost worlds, lost history: "All morning he and Bermann have worked in the archaeological museum

placing Arabic texts and European histories beside each other in an attempt to recognize echo, coincidence, name changes—back past Herodotus to the *Kitab al Kanuz*, where Zerzura is named after the bathing woman in a desert caravan" (*English* 153). As long as his version of *The Histories* is simply evocative of the poetry of such naming, his book is no threat to the desert; but, "When he discovered the truth to what had seemed a lie, he brought out his glue pot and pasted in a map or news clipping or used a blank space in the book to sketch men in skirts with faded unknown animals alongside them" (246). So, in the end, he has to wonder if this very quest for verification, for a cartography of history, has not brought Rommel and all the machinery of war into the desert after all: "This country—had I charted it and turned it into a place of war?" (260).

The disaster for McLuhan, as much as for Almásy, is that print has turned space into something uniform and continuous; the map does to space what the alphabet and the printed word have done to oral cultures: it "is an aggressive and imperial form that explodes outward" (*Understanding* 258). Print invariably works to explode all previous forms of social organization and modes of production, just as the phonetic alphabet first exploded the balance between the senses. But the kind of psychic dissociation of sensibility which results from the use of the phonetic alphabet has also been transformed in the age of print into a dissociation of individuals from clan and family. So Almásy, the conventional bookman in his earlier phase, compares himself to Katharine who has continued to inhabit an oral culture, reciting her "old memorized poems. She would have hated to die without a name. For her there was a line back to her ancestors that was tactile, whereas he had erased the path he had emerged from" (170). His commitment to print has evidently fostered what McLuhan calls psychic values of privacy, detachment, and objectivity. But there are still worse effects to technology than its merely psychological effects.

Print, in McLuhan's view, has proven to be as apocalyptic as Innis had claimed; for the ultimate effect "of paper in organizing new power structures [is] not to decentralize but to centralize. A speed-up in communications always enables a central authority to extend its operations to more distant margins" (*Understanding* 96). While all "[c]entralism of organization is based on the continuous, visual, lineal structuring that arises from phonetic literacy" (*Understanding* 267), any "[s]peed-up creates what some economists refer to as a center-margin structure" (92). And so the new

centre in an age of print is defined by a concentration of paper and presses, while the political margins are structured by the homogeneity of print. "Nationalism was unknown to the Western world until the Renaissance, when *Gutenberg* made it possible to see the mother tongue in uniform dress" (192). Henceforth, great wars between nations are an inevitability, given the need to recover the balance of power lost to technological change (*Understanding* 101). But far more optimistically than Innis, McLuhan also holds out the hope that the new electronic media can challenge the visual hegemony of print, enabling the recovery of vocal, auditory, and mimetic values that have long been repressed by print, in effect rejecting the *Bias* of visual culture with its fixed point of view and promoting "the acceptance of multiple facets and planes in a single experience" (*Understanding* 247). And so McLuhan concludes that electric technology reverses the movement from centre to margin, since "Electric speech creates centers everywhere. Margins cease to exist on this planet" (92).

The difference on this point between Innis and McLuhan is the difference between a man writing in the age of radio and one writing in an age of television. Even though radio has had the power "to retribalize mankind" in an "almost instant reversal of individualism into collectivism" (263, 265), the "vernacular walls" (248) of electric speech are instantly breached through television whose video image is low in data, because the incomplete form of the image requires active response. In contrast to a film image, "The TV image requires each instant that we "close" the spaces in the mesh by a convulsive sensuous participation that is profoundly kinetic and tactile, because tactility is the interplay of the senses, rather than the isolated contact of skin and object" (272). "The mosaic form of the TV image" thus "demands participation and involvement in depth of the whole being, as does the sense of touch" (291). In sum, McLuhan finds in television a recovery of the sensory and social balance so prized by Innis: "What began as a 'Romantic reaction' towards organic wholeness may or may not have hastened the discovery of electro-magnetic waves. But certainly the electro-magnetic discoveries have recreated the simultaneous 'field' in all human affairs so that the human family now exists under conditions of a 'global village'" (*Gutenberg* 31).

On one level, we find a ruined version of this global village in the Villa San Girolamo of *The English Patient*. Here, a despairing collection of casualties from Europe, North America, and Asia are still unable to realize the hope of organic wholeness held out by the "electro-magnetic" age. Hana, the nurse

from Toronto, has decided at the end of the war to "remain with the one burned man they called '*The English Patient*,' who, it was now clear to her, should never be moved because of the fragility of his limbs" (51). This "English patient," more likely a Hungarian, is "someone who looked like a burned animal, taut and dark, a pool for her" (41). And yet, "There was something about him she wanted to learn, grow into, and hide in, where she could turn away from being an adult" (52). For a nurse, it seems, could also break, "the way a man dismantling a mine broke the second his geography exploded. The way Hana broke in Santa Chiara Hospital when an official walked down the space between a hundred beds and gave her a letter that told her of the death of her father" (41). David Caravaggio, her father's friend, even accuses her of having "tied [her]self to a corpse for some reason" (47). A spy himself who has lost his thumbs to the Nazis, Caravaggio is "a large animal in their presence, in near ruins when he was brought in and given regular doses of morphine for the pain in his hands" (27). All three of these fragile beings are attended in their ruined villa by the Sikh sapper who, after the death of his mentor Lord Suffolk in a bomb blast in Britain, had joined a unit in the Italian campaign, and "hid there for the rest of the war" (196). None of these fragile characters is whole in either body or soul; each is a casualty of this desperate age, in this "strange time, the end of a war" (54).

And yet there is still hope in various figures of participatory media in the novel, most obviously through that "borderless" commonplace book which Almásy keeps in memory of his dead lover. Before his love affair with Katharine, the bookman had been especially preoccupied with the problem of space and the mapping of *Empire*. But after her fatal injury, he is drawn to media which are *Bias*ed more towards time. In the Cave of Swimmers, "He looked up to the one cave painting and stole the colours from it. The ochre went into her face, he daubed the blue around her eyes. He walked across the cave, his hands thick with red, and combed his fingers through her hair. Then all of her skin, so her knee that had poked out of the plane that first day was saffron. The pubis. Hoops of colour around her legs so she would be immune to the human. There were traditions he had discovered in Herodotus in which old warriors celebrated their loved ones by locating and holding them in whatever world made them eternal—a colourful fluid, a song, a rock drawing" (248). After her death, however, he values rock as a medium of eternity no more than he does paper as a medium

of *Empire*. By the time he reappears in the Villa San Girolamo, he has abandoned both forms of fixity and has embraced the flow of borderless text.

Essentially, what he does in converting the book from map to poem, from printed text to oral performance, is to atone for his earlier mistake in charting the desert, or erasing his past, or resisting Katherine's tribal link to her ancestors. So now he reads to an improbable gathering of "villagers" from around the globe: "Hana sits by his bed, and she travels like a squire beside him during these journeys" (135). Whether Hana's reading to him in return demands "participation and involvement in depth of the whole being," it certainly requires "public participation in creativity" (McLuhan, *Understanding* 291, 282). For many of her books are offered to him only in fragments, filled with as many gaps as the walls of the ruined villa, since Hana never refers to the chapters she has read between times in private: "So the books for the Englishman, as he listened intently or not, had gaps of plot like sections of a road washed out by storms, missing incidents as if locusts had consumed a section of tapestry, as if plaster loosened by the bombing had fallen away from a mural at night" (8). Now he must follow her as best he can, whether they are "travelling with the old wanderer in *Kim* or with Fabrizio in *The Charterhouse of Parma*" (93).

Just as significantly, many of these volumes invite a dialogic form of participation: "She pulls down the copy of *Kim* from the library shelf and, standing against the piano, begins to write into the flyleaf in its last pages.

He says the gun—the Zam-Zammah cannon—is still there outside the museum in Lahore. There were two guns, made up of metal cups and bowls taken from every Hindu household in the city—as jizya, or tax. These were melted down and made into the guns. They were used in many battles in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries against Sikhs. The other gun was lost during a battle crossing in the Chenab River—

She closes the book, climbs onto a chair and nestles the book into the high, invisible shelf" (118). Kip not only verifies for Hana the authenticity of her journey, via Kipling's pages, "through stilted doorways" where "Parma and Paris and India spread their carpets" (93); but he offers her an opportunity to write back, to update the novel since Independence, perhaps including himself in a "reversal of Kim," where "The young student was now Indian, the wise old teacher was English. . . . And in some way on those long nights of reading and listening, she supposed, they had prepared themselves for the young soldier, the boy grown up, who would join them.

But it was Hana who was the young boy in the story. And if Kip was any-one, he was the officer Creighton" (111).

Similarly, "She opens *The Last of the Mohicans* to the blank page at the back and begins to write in it. *There is a man named Caravaggio, a friend of my father's. I have always loved him. He is older than I am, about forty-five, I think. He is in a time of darkness, has no confidence. For some reason I am cared for by this friend of my father.* She closes the book and then walks down into the library and conceals it in one of the high shelves" (61). To her, Caravaggio seems more of a latter-day Leatherstocking, a New World hunter having to confront an ancient ruin in the trackless forest, and so to surrender his New World myths of original innocence. Now, not even Hana's singing of the "Marseillaise," which had once touched him so deeply in her childhood, can "bring all the hope of the song together." For "There was no certainty to the song anymore, the singer could only be one voice against all the mountains of power. That was the only sureness. The one voice was the single unspoiled thing" (269).

All these instances of creative participation in the novel point to more than an ethos of "organic wholeness," as McLuhan's typology would have it. For everyone in the ruined "global village" is granted access, in an era before the personal computer, to a version of hypertext in its non-linear pathways to related texts and in its projection of a third dimension behind the two-dimensional page. Now a book in *The English Patient* is no longer a book, that is to say, a bounded entity, an authored text, or even an autonomous voice; it is its own prefiguration of cybertext. Much like the book Roland Barthes envisions in "The Death of the Author," such antici-pations of hypertext in Ondaatje's novel become sites where multiple meanings are collected by internal and external readers alike, all of us made collaborative authors in an expanding text. Authority is radically decentered in a "communal history" which bears the traditional name of Herodotus, and yet hides the name of its compiler (*English* 96). For who could possibly be the author of hypertext where another text always looms behind every text? Or where there is another story behind every story, as in the tales *The English Patient* tells Hana which "slip from level to level like a hawk" (4), stories of himself as Icarus fallen from the sky, or as Gyges dri-ven by a queen to kill her husband Candaules (232)?

As *The English Patient* informs us concerning one of his quotations, "'This history of mine,' Herodotus says, 'has from the beginning sought

out the supplementary to the main argument.' What you find in him are cul-de-sacs within the sweep of history" (118-19). What in the novel seems to be "supplementary to the main argument" is the central *Bias* of elec-tronic communications: a reinscription of some of the values of scribal cul-ture where, as McLuhan argued, writing was still a form of rhetoric, just as all "reading was necessarily reading aloud" (*Gutenberg* 82). One could even say that McLuhan's "argument for electronic media reintroduced the rhetorician's conception of language, and of human self and society, after the three hundred years dominated by the philosophers' of Newtonian sci-ence" (Lanham 202).

For all his private pain, *The English Patient* is just as hopeful as McLuhan that a repudiation of the fixity of print and the return to more rhetorical structures of communication might create an organic society. There are nonetheless two questions which complicate such a reading of the benefits of this "total field" of electric technology. First, the reading practices of *The English Patient* remind us how different is the reception of print from the process of its production. The act of reading has always required the sort of "gestalt" formation which McLuhan took to be intrinsic to the TV image, especially when the reader has to bring to the page a whole range of sensory and imaginative codes, including the sound of words, the vast tribal encyclopedia of meanings and associations, and the transcultural panoply of literary conventions and expectations. Could a visual medium like print ever be deciphered without something like a third eye of imagi-native configuration? Or could a cultural cliché of the TV viewer as a "couch potato" not prove more than a prejudice of literate culture, espe-cially when the work of connecting electron dots seems to be the activity of a standardized culture, always more ready-made than McLuhan was pre-pared to see? Would the television viewer not already experience alien-ation, in the Marxist sense, from the flickering images produced by a cathode-ray tube?

Even a former Marxist like Jean Baudrillard would have to say yes: "With the television image—the television being the ultimate and perfect object for this new era—our own body and the whole surrounding universe become a control screen" (Baudrillard, "Ecstasy" 127). And so no distance, no detachment is possible any more. A "new form of schizophrenia" (132) results, as the television viewer feels "the absolute proximity, the total instaneity of things, the feeling of no defense, no retreat" (133). Where

McLuhan blamed the alphabet for having created "a split man, a schizo-phrenic" (*Gutenberg* 22), Baudrillard blames television for the viewer's schizophrenia: "He is now only a pure screen, a switching center for all the networks of influence" ("Ecstasy" 133). Of course, McLuhan had already anticipated the structure, if not the alienating effect, of such an interiorization of the medium: "[W]ith film you are the camera and the non-literate man cannot use his eyes like a camera. But with TV you are the screen. And TV is two-dimensional and sculptural in its tactile contours. TV is not a narrative medium, is not so much visual as audile-tactile" (*Gutenberg* 39).[1] But Baudrillard senses what McLuhan failed to see in this "organic" constellation: the loss of privacy, of distance, and even of space.

If there is anything like Innis's threat of apocalypse in Baudrillard's view of the media, it comes from their being "anti-mediatory and intransitive," speaking "in such a way as *to exclude any response anywhere*" (Baudrillard, "Requiem" 169-70). In the resulting implosion of both subject and object, we reach "the end of metaphysics. The era of hyperreality now begins" ("Ecstasy" 128). Hyperreality, Baudrillard's term for "the generation by models of a real without origin or reality" ("Simulacra" 166), is a function of cybernetic programmes where "The real is produced from miniaturized units, from matrices, memory banks and command models—and with these it can be reproduced an indefinite number of times. It no longer has to be rational, since it is no longer measured against some ideal or negative instance. It is nothing more than operational." And since the image "bears no relation to any reality whatever," "it is its own pure simulacrum" ("Simulacra" 167, 170). The simulacrum helps to explain the poststructural view of language, "where the central signified, the original or transcenden-tal signified, is never absolutely present outside a system of differences" (Derrida 232). For there is nothing beyond language to guarantee its mean-ing either, just as there is nothing beyond the simulacrum save the writing of the cybernetic code.

The hyperreal image can even be seen to generate Almásy's love affair with Katharine. As he says, "She had always wanted words, she loved them, grew up on them. Words gave her clarity, brought reason, shape. Whereas I thought words bent emotions like sticks in water" (238). Both definitions come true as the words which Katharine reads to her husband in front of Almásy begin to produce their own simulacrum: "This is a story," Almásy admits, "of how I fell in love with a woman, who read me a specific story

from Herodotus. I heard the words she spoke across the fire, never looking up, even when she teased her husband. Perhaps she was just reading it to him. Perhaps there was no ulterior motive in the selection except for them-selves. It was simply a story that had jarred her in its familiarity of situa-tion. But a path suddenly revealed itself in real life" (233). As he confesses, "I would often open Herodotus for a clue to geography. But Katharine had done that as a window to her life" (233). And yet the story itself is hardly a map of correspondences between Clifton and Candaules, or even between Gyges and Almásy. Rather, it is the verbal model which produces this love affair out of an initial absence of attraction, the words of the story bending "emotions like sticks in water." A speaking voice works to create reality out of illusion, where *The Histories* suddenly appear to write the future.

"Illusion," Baudrillard has claimed, "is no longer possible, because the real is no longer possible" ("Simulacra" 177). In a similar vein, *The English Patient* tells his nurse that "I have seen editions of *The Histories* with a sculpted portrait on the cover. Some statue found in a French museum. But I never imagine Herodotus this way. I see him more as one of those spare men of the desert who travel from oasis to oasis, trading legends as if it is the exchange of seeds, consuming everything without suspicion, piec-ing together a mirage" (118-19). If the desert and history are both informed by mirage, the mirage is none the less real. So the burned airman can imagine that reality fines itself down to a flicker of firelight, to a drug-induced dream: "If the figure turns around there will be paint on his back, where he slammed in grief against the mural of trees. When the candle dies out he will be able to see this. His hand reaches out slowly and touches his book and returns to his dark chest. Nothing else moves in the room" (298). In the grip of his mourning, there is very little left in the world for *The English Patient* outside his text.

But in the stubborn continuance of the world outside the text, there is another kind of mourning as well for the loss of the real, involving a strange nostalgia of consumption. According to Baudrillard, "What society seeks through production, and overproduction, is the restoration of the real which escapes it. That is why *contemporary 'material' production is itself hyperreal*" ("Simulacra" 180). So television sells an image of Coca-Cola as "the real thing," and consumers strive, by consuming the hyperreal image, to make themselves "real." But in Baudrillard's worldview, the whole system of objects now belongs to the cybernetic code of the hyperreal. Only for

McLuhan is their production still firmly grounded in the material and historical processes of print culture. "[J]ust as print was the first mass-produced thing," he writes, "so it was the first uniform and repeatable 'commodity'" (*Gutenberg* 125). Thus our contemporary overproduction, at which Baudrillard despairs, would only be a sign for McLuhan of the loss of the organic, rather than the real.

McLuhan, in fact, contends that we have yet to grasp the message of the new medium of cybernetic production: "Today with the arrival of automation, the ultimate extension of the electro-magnetic form to the organization of production, we are trying to cope with such new organic production as if it were mechanical mass-production" (*Gutenberg* 130). His most valuable insight about our "electro-magnetic" machines might then be that they are much like organisms, and so are capable of integration into our neural circuitry. Effectively, "In McLuhan's discourse, biology and technology merge: the impact of electronic technology is to introduce the era of *bionic beings*, part-technique/part flesh" (Kroker 112). And yet such an integration of "man" and machine also threatens the sort of "stability" which McLuhan hoped to see achieved in "the new electronic and organic age" (*Gutenberg* 275).

Conversely, the "cybernetic organism, a hybrid of machine and organism," could work to destabilize the whole social order by revolutionizing human consciousness. At least this is the view of Donna Haraway in "A Cyborg Manifesto" (149). "It is not clear," writes this biologist-turned-socialist-feminist, "who makes and who is made in the relation between human and machine. It is not clear what is mind and what body in machines that resolve into coding practices" (Haraway 177). And so the breakdown of boundaries between animal and human, organism and machine, and physical and non-physical states of being discredits "all claims for an organic or natural standpoint" (157). The cyborg thus offers potential liberation, since the Western alibi of power has always been identification with nature, that "plot of original unity out of which difference must be produced and enlisted in a drama of escalating domination of woman/nature" (151). "Perhaps, ironically," Haraway concludes, "we can learn from our fusions with animals and machines how not to be Man, the embodiment of Western logos" (173).

Of course, no scientist could ignore the codes of power written into technology itself: "From one perspective, a cyborg world is about the final imposition of a grid of control on the planet" (154). What Haraway calls "the informatics of domination" (161) in information technologies depends on "the reconceptions of machine and organism as coded texts" (152). Both the "communications sciences and modern biologies are constructed by a common move—*the translation of the world into a problem of coding*, a search for a common language in which all resistance to instrumental control disappears and all heterogeneity can be submitted to disassembly, reassembly, investment, and exchange" (164). Textualization into digital code both in cybernetics and biotechnology thus prepares the way for re-engineering, not merely of bodies and machines, but of the whole social order. "No objects, spaces, or bodies are sacred in themselves; any component can be interfaced with any other if the proper standard, the proper code, can be constructed for processing signals in a common language" (163).

By this point, it should be clear that McLuhan's celebration of electronic media for their organic character was premature. What he identified as the homogenizing, spatializing power of print can be multiplied to infinity in the cybernetic writing of the digital code. Since the *Bias* of digital communications is toward perfect translation and control, digital logic threatens to reduce life itself to a single code. The real task, then, of Haraway's "cyborg politics" is to recode "communication and intelligence to subvert command and control" (175): "Cyborg politics is the struggle for language and the struggle against perfect communication, against the one code that translates all meaning perfectly, the central dogma of phallogocentrism. That is why cyborg politics insist on noise and advocate pollution, rejoicing in the illegitimate fusions of animal and machine" (176). Only "[i]f we learn how to read these webs of power and social life, we might learn new couplings, new coalitions" (170).

Though Haraway and Baudrillard both take for granted McLuhan's assumption that we interiorize our media, neither sees an end to the hegemony of writing in the new forms of communication. But where Baudrillard frets at the prospect of the human mind turning into an electronic screen, Haraway finds new "possibilities inherent in the breakdown of clean distinctions between organism and machine and similar distinctions structuring the Western self" (174). Where Baudrillard despairs at the loss of the real, of dialogue, and of public and private space, Haraway celebrates "the profusion of spaces and identities and the permeability of

boundaries in the personal body and in the body politic" (Haraway 170). Such pessimism or optimism is evidently inflected by gender as much as it is by personality or culture. For the woman who can read and write a cyborg semiology has little historical investment in saving a masculine idea of autonomous selfhood. The old metaphysics of "a unitary self" is happily swept away in a cybernetic apocalypse. To the socialist-feminist, "The issue is dispersion. The task is to survive in the diaspora" (170). And so the female cryptologist seeks in the cyborg "a kind of disassembled and reassembled, postmodern collective and personal self. This is the self feminists must code" (163).

The apocalyptic function of hypertext in *The English Patient* is finally explicable in terms of such cyborg politics. For Kirpal Singh appears in the Villa San Girolamo as if he had "entered their lives . . . out of this fiction. As if the pages of Kipling had been rubbed in the night like a magic lamp" (94), producing Singh as his own simulacrum. By Kip's own logic, he is a cyborg figure, since Sikhs are "brilliant at technology. 'We have a mystical closeness . . . what is it?' "Affinity." "Yes, affinity, with machines'" (272). His dramatic function as a cyborg is to decode "that knot of wires and fuzes someone has left him like a terrible letter" (76). He even turns himself into a hybrid of man and crystal radio set because "The distraction of music helped him towards clear thought, to the possible forms of structure in the mine, to the personality that had laid the city of threads and then poured wet concrete over it" (99). The cyborg semiologist further notes the link between his own body and the machine: "There is always yellow chalk scribbled on the side of bombs. Have you noticed that? Just as there was yellow chalk scribbled onto our bodies when we lined up in the Lahore courtyard" (199). He sees himself as a ticking time bomb, a man "who has grown up an outsider and so can switch allegiances, can replace loss" (271-72), but whose cyborg politics commit him to the dispersion of old identities. In his relationships with Hana, Caravaggio, and with Almásy, he eventually is prepared to disassemble and reassemble himself as a sort of postmodern collective self.

The cyborg semiologist who has reduced bombs to harmless texts nevertheless meets a technology too powerful for him to decode. He hears a "terrible event emerging out of the shortwave" in August, 1945. "A new war. The death of a civilisation" (286).[2] Just as Harold Innis had claimed, "Each civilization has its own methods of suicide" (*Bias* 140-41). And Kip's

response to the threat of such suicide is vintage Innis: he seeks to hallow an existence beyond change. Specifically, he retreats into his birth name of Kirpal Singh, back inside the geographical borders of the Punjab, where he can serve his own culture as a medical doctor. In such fashion, cyborg politics regresses toward a version of postcolonial politics, back inside the borders of nationalism, what Kwame Appiah calls the "nationalist project of the postcolonial national bourgeoisie" (353).

Nevertheless, Ondaatje's novel does not renounce its own experiment with boundary breakdowns. For Almásy, whom Kip has loved much as Rudyard Kipling's Kim had loved his Eastern teacher as the avatar of wisdom, offers a revised version of cyborg politics and cyborg semiology. In his narrative of love and loss, Almásy admits that "He has been disassembled by her. And if she has brought him to this, what has he brought her to?" (155). No simple representative of the strain of love on identity, the true cyborg is a man who sees the need for a borderless state in love, in geography, and in politics: the desert "was a place of faith. We disappeared into landscape. Fire and sand . . . *Ain, Bir, Wadi, Foggara, Khottara, Shaduf.* I didn't want my name against such beautiful names. Erase the family name! Erase nations! I was taught such things by the desert" (139). In the Sahara, space itself disappears: "The desert could not be claimed or owned—it was a piece of cloth carried by winds, never held down by stones, and given a hundred shifting names" (138).

The desert as a sign of flow thus shifts with every new wind of information, giving the lie to the author of *The Histories* who has tried to write his truth in stone, in words that he would like to see forever fixed: "*I, Herodotus of Halicarnassus, set forth my history, that time may not draw the colour from what Man has brought into being, nor those great and wonderful deeds manifested by both Greeks and Barbarians . . . together with the reason they fought one another*" (240). But after his loss of Katharine, the student of Herodotus gives up on his hope of permanence. The desert becomes for him a sign of flow rather than of fixity, such as may be found in electronic text, or in the shifting winds of his commonplace book:

The *harmattan* blows across the Sahara filled with red dust, dust as fire, as flour, entering and coagulating in the locks of rifles. Mariners called this red wind the "sea of darkness." Red sand fogs out of the Sahara were deposited as far north as Cornwall and Devon, producing showers of mud so great this was also mistaken for blood. "Blood rains were widely reported in Portugal and Spain in 1901."

> There are always millions of tons of dust in the air, just as there are millions of cubes of air in the earth and more living flesh in the soil (worms, beetles, underground creatures) than there is grazing and existing on it. Herodotus records the death of various armies engulfed in the simoom who were never seen again. One nation was "so enraged by this evil wind that they declared war on it and marched out in full battle array, only to be rapidly and completely interred." (17)

Abandoning his quest to capture the history of the desert in his cartography, the bookman now becomes the equivalent of a netscape navigator: "I have always had information like a sea in me. I am a person who if left alone in someone's home walks to the bookcase, pulls down a volume and inhales it. So history enters us" (18).

Whereas the *Bias* of print is static, the *Bias* of computer text is volatile: print communicates a sense of stable interiority and privacy, hypertext a sense of dynamic oscillation between inside and outside, between private and public space. Characteristically, Hana has read "books as the only door out of her cell" (7), appearing "like Crusoe finding a drowned book that had washed up and dried itself on the shore" (12) to validate the book as the very type and origin of private space.[3] Conversely, the burned aviator oscillates between a private and public self, seeking to disappear "into landscape," to do away with property and the nation-state, to develop a "cartography . . . marked by nature, not just to label ourselves on a map like the names of rich men and women on buildings" (261).

Even Almásy's mental processes are instances of networked, rather than of linear, thinking, as his mind moves through catalogues of information, slipping beneath the surface of embedded texts where further texts are stored. "Some old Arab poet's woman, whose white-dove shoulders made him describe an oasis with her name. The skin bucket spreads water over her, she wraps herself in the cloth, and the old scribe turns from her to describe Zerzura. So a man in the desert can slip into a name as if within a discovered well, and in its shadowed coolness be tempted never to leave such containment. My great desire was to remain there, among those acacias. I was walking not in a place where no one had walked before but in a place where there were sudden, brief populations over the centuries—a fourteenth-century army, a Tebu caravan, the Senussi raiders of 1915. And in between these times—nothing was there" (140-41). The reader's hypertextual "path through such interreferentiality soon becomes totally nonlinear and, if not totally unpredictable, certainly 'chaotic'" (Lanham 94). Yet

the point of such nonlinear thinking is to oscillate between both sides of a "characteristically unstable Western self, by turns central and social, sincere and hypocritical, philosophical and rhetorical," which "is just what electronic literacy has been busy revitalizing" (Lanham 25).

The political problem of Almásy the "international bastard" (176), however, is the fixed identity of his English lover, Katherine Clifton: "He was amazed she had loved him in spite of such qualities of anonymity in himself" (170). In the end, Katherine's fidelity to the code of nation and society (particularly the code of monogamy) leaves her vulnerable to a suicidal husband; but she is destroyed as well by her lover's refusal to use her proper name. After her husband has tried to kill all three of them in the desert, Almásy goes to bring the British to the rescue; but they lock him up because they cannot identify her in the ravings of the madman: "I was yelling Katherine's name. Yelling the Gilf Kebir. Whereas the only name I should have yelled, dropped like a calling card into their hands, was Clifton's" (251). The anonymous man can only atone for such a fatal linguistic error in the tryst he later keeps with his dead lover. He tries to fly her body out of the desert in a rotten canvas plane, buried for more than a decade in the Sahara. But plane and corpse and pilot alike are consumed by fire in mid-air. Only the fallen Icarus emerges out of the fire as another hybrid of man and machine: "I was perhaps the first one to stand up alive out of a burning machine. A man whose head was on fire. They didn't know my name. I didn't know their tribe" (5). In the end, he is only recognized by another cyborg man, Kip, who seduces Hana by snipping through the burned man's hearing aid. "I'll rewire him in the morning" (115), Kip says to the delight of the woman, but not without genuine sympathy for another cyborg.

The ultimate price the cyborg has to pay for hybridization is the border of his own skin; in Almásy's pain, we feel the cost of achieving perfect "permeability of boundaries in the personal body and in the body politic" (Haraway 170). For, if Almásy bears witness to the identity of his dead lover, he also remains as vulnerable as a child, quite as bare as the plum his nurse "unskins. . . with her teeth, withdraw[ing] the stone and pass[ing] the flesh of the fruit into his mouth" (4). In the end, Almásy martyrs himself to a postmodern idea of a plural self, and to a post-national idea of collective identity: "We die containing a richness of lovers and tribes, tastes we have swallowed, bodies we have plunged into and swum up as if rivers of

wisdom, characters we have climbed into as if trees, fears we have hidden in as if caves.... We are communal histories, communal books. We are not owned or monogamous in our taste or experience. All I desired was to walk upon such an earth that had no maps" (261).

Cyborg semiology thus prepares us to decode his borderless "geomorphology. The place they had chosen to come to, to be their best selves, to be unconscious of ancestry. Here, apart from the sun compass and the odometer mileage and the book, he was alone, his own invention" (246). In such wise, the "borderless" text enables him to be his own simulacrum. In other words, a hypertext without borders authorizes the man without borders who finds it easy, in the desert, "to lose a sense of demarcation" (18). And so Almásy's cyborg politics of "communal books, communal histories" becomes his ultimate challenge to the fixity of print and to the metaphysics of Western identity.

Even Hana, who bears deep scars from the war in Europe, denies with her English patient the coherence of European identity. As she writes her stepmother back in Canada, *"I am sick of Europe, Clara. I want to come home. To your small cabin and pink rock in Georgian Bay"* (296). But Hana, who is finally deserted by her Indian lover, retreats as much as Kirpal Singh back into the traditions of her own place and culture. A woman who has "imagine[d] all of Asia through the gestures of this one man. The way he lazily moves, his quiet civilisation" (217), appears to give up on the possibility of cyborg politics. And so the new couplings and new coalitions, which had been the promise of her union with Kip, are not realized at the end of the novel. Only in the narrator's imagination do the lovers remain open to what Almásy calls "the desire of another life" (238). But, as the narrator says, "She is a woman I don't know well enough to hold in my wing, if writers have wings, to harbour for the rest of my life." And so, on opposite sides of the globe, "Hana moves, and her face turns and in a regret she lowers her hair. Her shoulder touches the edge of a cupboard and a glass dislodges. Kirpal's left hand swoops down and catches the dropped fork an inch from the floor and gently passes it into the fingers of his daughter, a wrinkle at the edge of his eyes behind his spectacles" (301-2). Though a door is left open at the end of the novel for a flow across borders and through time and space, no lasting "neural" networks have been created. The potential of "communal books, communal histories," or of "a kind of disassembled and reassembled, postmodern collective and personal self" (Haraway 163), is left to the future.

In the end, Kirpal Singh's cyborg semiology becomes postcolonial politics, rejecting the hegemony of Western thinking but failing to deal with its threat of apocalypse. For he gives up decoding the technology which could bring it about, and retreats toward an essential identity and identity politics: "American, French, I don't care. When you start bombing the brown races of the world, you're an Englishman" (286). He thus denies difference as much as any imperialist, only to reinscribe in reversed order the old binary oppositions. Hana, by contrast, tries to escape such stereotypes through an oppositional politics: as she writes to her stepmother, it is *"One day after we heard the bombs were dropped in Japan, so it feels like the end of the world. From now on I believe the personal will forever be at war with the public. If we can rationalize this we can rationalize anything"* (292). But Hana's polarization of the private and the public only stereotypes the public sphere as imperial, the private as subaltern, and so arrests the dynamic oscillation between the two. Ultimately, this gesture also reproduces the binaries of Western metaphysics without realizing the promise of "communal books, communal histories," the promise of partial and contradictory identities which died with *The English Patient.*

Though we should not forget Baudrillard's lesson about the collapse of private and public spaces in our technology, we need not be fatally determined by the *Bias* of communication, as Innis and Haraway would remind us in their differing ways. And yet it is *The English Patient* who best illuminates what McLuhan means when he writes that "The literate liberal is convinced that all real values are private, personal, individual. Such is the message of mere literacy. Yet the new electric technology pressures him towards the need for total human interdependence" (*Gutenberg* 157). Before we can negotiate the *Bias* of cyborg communications, we have to learn from the printed word both how to subvert the command and control of the engineers and how to escape the old politics of tribalism, in order to survive in a world of electronic flow. Our global future depends on it.

NOTES

1 The film version of *The English Patient* (Alliance, 1996) would seem to bear out McLuhan's contention that 'Film, both in its reel form and in its scenario or script form, is completely involved with book culture' (*Understanding Media* 250). For the
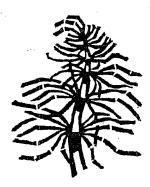
film, both in its cinematography and in its dialogue, is a faithful translation of the book into a related visual medium. Here, the love affair of Almásy and Katharine Clifton is developed with an intimacy and a simultaneity that print cannot rival, where new dialogue even adds depth to the characterizations. But most unforgettable are the panoramic views in the movie of desert landscape, particularly of those scenes shot from the air, which help to illustrate the graphic connection between typography, film, and continuous, uniform space. For the ripple of sand dunes seen from the Gypsy Moth at the outset of the movie emerge in a dissolve from the opening shot of a sheet of dark, grainy paper which could be sand dunes, until a calligrapher's pen appears to trace jet-black figures across the 'sandy' landscape. At least once more in the movie, such a juxtaposition establishes the connection between text and desert, and helps to explain the coincidence in film and typography alike of a monopoly of knowledge over space. In fact, the poetry of space in this particular movie makes it startlingly clear how deep the *Bias* of the film medium, like paper before it, is towards space.

2 The one really crucial omission in the film is the absence of Hiroshima and its effects on Kip. But then Kip never figures in the movie as anything like a cyborg. The absence of his crystal radio set only anticipates how the movie could not end in the shadow of a mushroom cloud, since it does not share the novel's concern with the shaping effects of media upon civilization, either in war or in peace. Almásy, whose commonplace book in the movie doesn't even outgrow its original binding, never comes to repent of his fatal cartography; nor does Kip repent of his service to Western imperialism, leaving Hana and *The English Patient* only because he has been posted by the British army to continue the post-war mop up farther north of Florence.

3 As McLuhan maintains, 'Typographic man took readily to film just because, like books, it offers an inward world of fantasy and dreams. The film viewer sits in psychological solitude like the silent book reader' (*Understanding Media* 255). So the viewer of the film version of *The English Patient* is returned to Hana's condition of 'typographic man,' inasmuch as the movie reproduces the experience of the 'inward dream,' rather than the 'networked thinking' of hypertext. The burned aviator lying in his bed becomes the quintessence of this private man, where his recollections turn into a cinematic equivalent of interior monologue. But then 'The stream of consciousness,' as McLuhan had also noted, 'is really managed by the transfer of film technique to the printed page' (*Understanding Media* 258). In this case, it is a cinematic device which now seems to have been returned to its origins. But what the film seems to lack—and what may be impossible for the medium to reproduce—is what Almásy describes as 'information like a sea in me' (18). The only real gesture which the film makes in this direction is to dramatize *The English Patient*'s extensive knowledge of popular music. The movie, in other words, seems unable to reproduce the effects of hypertext or even of Almásy's expanding commonplace book, and so recreates instead an established order of experience based on typography.

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