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Résumé de l'article

"The book" — meaning the written word, from the Bible to European literature to the colonisers' documented histories of the Native other — has been one of the principal sites of colonial aggression. The oral tradition of the North American Native has been a crucial signpost of their perceived inferiority; but in Thomas King's Green Grass, Running Water, it is also a method of resistance to the epistemic — as well as the material — violence of the colonial encounter. Yet this is not a simple binary opposition, as King strives to complement what he has termed a Native "interfusional literature," a hybrid of heretofore oppositional traditions. The effects of other forms of Western technology and media are similarly examined both in terms of their intrinsic "imperialist biases" and their innate propensities for resistance and hybridity.

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Plastic Shaman in the Global Village: Understanding Media in Thomas King's *Green Grass, Running Water*

BRIAN JOHNSON

T HOMAS KING'S *Green Grass, Running Water* (1993) is keenly attuned to the complex relationship between imperialism and communication. Historically, this relationship has been understood in terms of the meeting of oral and literate cultures and the ways in which literacy was employed as a tool by imperial powers in the destruction or subjugation of indigenous peoples and cultures. As Terry Goldie suggests, "the division between writing white and oral indigene is on the level of a different episteme …. Orality provides the white observer with both a manifestation of and a definition of Otherness" (110). In the encounter between European settlers and First Nations peoples the mode of communication thus provided a determining marker of difference which simultaneously constituted colonial "knowledge" about native inferiority and justified the practice of domination in the name of the civilizing mission. Moreover, the introduction of writing was an important colonial strategy because "writing does not merely introduce a communicative instrument, but also involves an entirely different and intrusive (invasive) orientation to knowledge and interpretation. In many post-colonial societies, it was not the English language which had the greatest effect, but writing itself" (Ashcroft 82).

Thomas King's novel diagnoses the symptoms of such media effects from a variety of perspectives. The parodic rewriting of Biblical narratives in the ongoing dialogue between the narrator and Coyote, for example, is not only a theological critique of the ways in which "the monotheist version of *creatio ex nihilo* — creation of the earth from nothing — achieves its singular and univocal status only by suppressing all other voices in this highly contested terrain" (Donaldson 32). It is also an assessment of the profound impact of the book on indigenous populations. As the narrator attempts yet another cyclical telling of the Creation — this time featuring

Old Woman — he is interrupted by Coyote's strategic double-tracking/ trouble-making which brings to light the clash between voice and letter:

> "Well," I says, "Old Woman falls into that water. So she is in that water. So she looks around and she sees — "
>
> "I know, I know," says Coyote. "She sees a golden calf!"
>
> "Wrong again," I says.
>
> "A pillar of salt!" says Coyote.
>
> "Nope," I says to Coyote.
>
> "A burning bush!" says Coyote.
>
> "Where do you get these things?" I says.
>
> "*I read a book*," says Coyote.
>
> "*Forget the book*," I says. "*We've got a story to tell*. And here's how it goes." (291; emphasis added)

It is precisely such an impossible forgetting of the book and a reclaiming of the voice that the characters in King's novel must hazard in their attempts to recover from the epistemic, as well as the material, violence of the colonial encounter. By shifting the focus from the message to the medium, Coyote and the narrator begin to suggest that colonial aggression and Native resistance are played out — at least in part — in the clash of systems of mediation.

Yet King's rendition of the encounter between "oral" and "literate" cultures is far more complex than the binary opposition between reading and telling in the narrator's retort to Coyote might suggest. As numerous critics have shown, King's novelistic critique of writing as a form of epistemic violence is of necessity hybrid and syncretic rather than simply oppositional. Echoing King's own theory of a Native "interfusional literature … that blends the oral and the written" ("Introduction" xii), for instance, Dee Horne argues that *Green Grass, Running Water* "combine[s] elements of the Aboriginal oral tradition with the settler novel genre to re-present it as a creative hybrid text" (260). Marlene Goldman concurs and aptly locates the literary progenitors of such "polyphonic" writing in the novel's many references to the Fort Marion ledger art, suggesting that, "in keeping with the warrior-artists who first appropriated ledger books King has likewise created a palimpsest — a work that both recognizes and draws 'over the space of foreign calculations'" (26). King's writing, in other words, like the works of the ledger artists, attests to a potentially productive and regenerative relationship between the technologies of colonization and the poetics and politics of indigenous resistance and cultural expression.

King's ability to "adopt and adapt" invasive colonial technologies into "repositories for Native wisdom and tradition" on the one hand, and "gesture[s] of defiance and self-assertion" on the other (Goldman 29, 25), has accurately been read by Horne, Goldman, and Herb Wyile, among others, as a riposte to the exponents of an unreconstructed politics of cultural authenticity who, like Clifford Sifton in *Green Grass, Running Water*, insist that "real Indians" do not "drive cars, watch television, [or] go to hockey games" (119). Yet King's endorsement of hybridized forms like the "interfusional" novel exists in tension with a clear desire to sustain, recuperate, and celebrate indigenous cultural forms as well. Indeed, one of King's principal objections to the term "postcolonial" is its implication that Native culture is defined *in toto* by an opposition to colonization.[1] As Wyile has convincingly argued, King's fiction "serves as an example of how we have to balance our appreciation of cultural difference and concerns about appropriation and misrepresentation with a respect for the individuality of the writer" (121), which, in the case of King, means recognizing that "both dominant and non-dominant cultures … are not only much more heterogeneous and much less self-contained than many expressions of multiculturalism suggest, but [that] they are also ultimately provisional, the result of rather than the source of social and cultural practice" (107-08). Thus King's literary and cultural project involves not simply a celebration of hybridity, but an informed and nuanced defence of cultural difference — though not "authenticity," in the regressive liberal sense. Such complex cultural politics require a delicate balancing act, which King carries off in *Green Grass, Running Water* by complementing images of hybrid representational forms, such as the ledger art, with a more direct critique of colonial media and a consequent valorization of indigenous cultural productions like the sun dance.

So far, King's critics have tended to confine their readings of how the novel both exposes the impact of settler media on Native peoples and reworks that violent legacy of colonial hybridization to a consideration of orality and writing. Goldman in particular has brilliantly deconstructed the colonial opposition between "oral" and "literate" societies with reference to an indigenous tradition of inscription — a form of polyphonic map-making that operates in concert with "oral storytelling, chanting, dancing" to "interrupt and contest the linear trajectory of the printed word" (29). Indeed, it is by now widely recognized that "King's fiction examines the reliance of western culture on a teleological narrative structure — epitomized and conveyed primarily by the Bible — and engages in modes of figuration other than those the linear narrative se-

quences seem to be driving forward" (Goldman 30). Such a focus on King's ambivalent critique of the technology of the book has yielded important insights, but King's equally nuanced examination of other forms of Western media has been less thoroughly explored. Critics generally agree that the novel opposes the technology of "genocidal annihilation" to ancestral "cultural heritage" (Donaldson 39) and that King thereby "critiques technology and the notion of progress" in general, and critiques the ways in which "settler society uses progress and technology to exclude and exploit others" in particular (Horne 266). But such observations require considerable elaboration given the novel's pervasive concern with the ongoing struggle over the means of communication and the sociopolitical effects of modern media as well as electric media's historical antecedents.

Canadian media theorist Marshall McLuhan provides a valuable perspective on such concerns, for in his "footnote" to Harold Innis he explored in depth "the psychic and social consequences of writing and then of printing" (McLuhan, "Introduction" ix). He was well aware of the cataclysmic impact that resulted from the encounter between oral and literate societies, and even argued that "submerging natives with floods of concepts for which nothing has prepared them is the normal action of all our technology" (*Understanding* 31). But McLuhan also drew attention to the psycho-social effects of electric media (television in particular) which are at the heart of *Green Grass, Running Water.* For instead of that scene — whose insistent repetition in the literature of colonialism both exasperated and fascinated Homi Bhabha — "of the sudden and fortuitous discovery of the English book" (102), *Green Grass, Running Water* stages a very different technological encounter between an unscrupulous television salesman and four Indian tricksters (who, although media-savvy, play "Indyun"):

> Bursum lined the old Indians up in front of The Map. He stood off to one side and waved the remote in a circle and then hit the button.
>
> "Ah," said the Lone Ranger as the screens came to life. "That's very beautiful."
>
> "Yes," said Ishmael. "Everything is so silver."
>
> "And bright," said Hawkeye. "Everything is nice and bright."
>
> "Boy," said Robinson Crusoe, "can you do that again?"
>
> "Sure," said Bursum, and he turned The Map off and then on again several times.
>
> "That's amazing," said the Lone Ranger. "What else does it do?" (250)

The wryness of the humour here should not detract from the force of the question — "what else does it do?" — which resonates ominously throughout the novel.

Although, as I will show, King's novel implicitly voices a critique of the violence of the letter, it is most explicitly engaged in questioning the effects of Western technology and electric media on Native subjectivity and culture.[2] Through an analysis of the interpenetrating roles of writing, cars, television, and hydro-electric power in *Green Grass, Running Water*, I will argue that the oppositional current in King's work — what Wyile calls its "counter-discourse to traditional white imaginings of the Indigene" (121) — is articulated in terms that expose the imperialist biases of non-indigenous media and technology, but that nonetheless escape the pitfalls of a romantic or culturally purist discourse of technophobia. Rather than simply satirizing media and the dual threats of assimilation and exoticism they represent for Native culture in the novel, King also explores the ambivalent effects of media and hints at their subversive potential. Moreover, although McLuhan's media theory informs my discussion of technology in King's novel, King's novel in turn suggests ways in which the cultural politics of McLuhan's writing require serious interrogation — particularly with regard to his romanticized appropriation of "tribal" culture to describe a "global" village.

In *The Gutenberg Galaxy* (1962) and *Understanding Media* (1964), McLuhan launched a series of probes exploring technology and media as extensions of the human body, and distinguished media in terms of the sensory biases they promote — a project immortalized in the catchphrase, "the medium is the message." According to McLuhan, "when a community develops some extension of itself, it tends to allow other functions to be altered to accommodate that form" (qtd. in Logan 94). In other words, social structures internalize, imitate, and are ultimately transformed by the very technologies they develop. Thus, McLuhan claimed, "rural Africans live largely in a world of sound — a world loaded with direct personal significance for the hearer — whereas the Western European lives much more in a visual world which is on the whole indifferent to him" (*Gutenberg* 19). Although such claims have often been misconstrued as an outright disavowal of "content," McLuhan's announcement that the medium, not the message, "shapes and controls the scale and form of human association and action" (*Understanding* 24) has been most usefully understood as a challenge to investigate such biases.

McLuhan's attitudes toward this principle of technological mimesis are notoriously ambivalent. McLuhan often represented himself as a

critic, or at least as a disinterested observer, of the often traumatic sub-
liminal effects of modern media, arguing that

> we are as numb in our new electric world as the native involved in our
> literate and mechanical culture. Electric speed mingles the cultures of
> prehistory with the dregs of industrial marketeers, the nonliterate with
> semiliterate and the postliterate. Mental breakdown of varying de-
> grees is the very common result of uprooting and inundation with
> new information and endless new patterns of information.
>
> (*Understanding* 31)

Despite such moments of sobriety, however, McLuhan's reputation as an
enthusiastic prophet of the new electric media is not entirely undeserved.
Neil Compton's essay, "The Paradox of Marshall McLuhan," provides a
valuable guide to the development of this ambivalence in McLuhan's
work, suggesting that although he "at one time gave the impression of
being a bitter man who scornfully contemplated the world around him,"
in later texts, such at *The Gutenberg Galaxy* and *Understanding Media*, he
embraced "a kind of millennial optimism," stemming from his convic-
tion that "we are entering an era which bears the promise of paradise in
the form of an undissociated electronic culture" (108).

Such "millennial optimism" is particularly evident in the narrative
thrust of McLuhan's suggestive — but problematic — historical model:
the three communication ages of man. The *oral tradition*, associated with
the ear, encompassed the period from humanity's first acquisition of
speech to the invention of writing and was marked by "thought patterns
and social forms [which] were coherent, cohesive, and integrated" (Lo-
gan 89). The *age of literacy,* associated with the eye, comprised three
stages: 1) the advent of writing, 2) the invention of the phonetic alpha-
bet, and 3) Gutenberg's invention of the printing press. The fragmentary,
abstract, and analytical characteristics of writing, amplified by the print-
ing press, served — perhaps unfortunately, McLuhan often imples — as
the paradigm for the "civilized" Western subject. As McLuhan laments,
"literacy creates very much simpler kinds of people than those that de-
velop in the complex web of ordinary tribal and oral societies. For the
fragmented man creates the homogenized Western world, while oral so-
cieties are made up of people differentiated not by their specialist skills
or visible marks, but by their unique emotional mixes" (*Understanding*
59). Finally, McLuhan coined the term "global village" to epitomize the
age of electric information in which we currently reside. He saw the flow
of electric information as a welcome revival and development of the oral

tradition which elicited "participation in depth," healing the fragmented individualism endemic to literate society which had, in its turn, broken down the communal patterns of oral, tribal culture.

Significantly, McLuhan did not see such "ages" as exclusively historical. Like the sociocultural evolutionists of the nineteenth century, he collapsed history into geography and associated past epochs with non-Western societies of the present. McLuhan could thus identify (albeit with more ambivalence than alarm) the present-day confrontation of oral and literate societies as a "great hybrid union" which would "breed furious release of energy and change":

> The giving to man of an eye for an ear by phonetic literacy is, socially and politically, the most radical explosion that can occur in any social structure. The explosion of the eye, frequently repeated in "backward areas," we call Westernization. With literacy now about to hybridize the cultures of the Chinese, the Indians, and the Africans, we are about to experience such a release of human power and aggressive violence as makes the previous history of the phonetic alphabet seem quite tame. (*Understanding* 58)

Although McLuhan does not name it as such, the encounter he describes as "Westernization" is the hallmark of colonialism in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. The visual bias of print culture, moreover, is not only discernible at the moment of "hybridization," but plays a crucial part in the determination of imperialism itself.

Tracing the complicity of media and political systems in *Empire and Communications,* McLuhan's intellectual mentor, Harold Innis, "explained the difference between the imperialistic military bureaucracy of Rome and the conservative priestly bureaucracy of Babylon in terms of the materials on which they wrote. The Babylonians used clay tablets which provided a permanent record of their culture and hence provided them with command over time. The Romans, on the other hand, wrote on an extremely portable medium, papyrus, which gave them command over space" (Logan 84). It was not only the physicality of the medium that affected imperialism, however, but the development of the phonetic alphabet itself. For McLuhan, the one-way violence by which "any society possessing the alphabet can translate any adjacent cultures into its alphabetic mode" was epitomized in the story of "The Greek King Cadmus, who introduced the phonetic alphabet to Greece, [and] who was said to have sown the dragon's teeth and that they sprang up as armed men. (The dragon's teeth may allude to old hieroglyphic forms)" (McLuhan, *Gutenberg* 50). Two elements

of media, the alphabet and paper, thus provided the necessary conditions for the development of Western imperialism.

The sociocultural landscape of *Green Grass, Running Water* is criss-crossed both by a historical consciousness of the "radical explosion" of ear and eye, which was the direct result of imperialism, as well as by a concern for current manifestations of the imposition of writing on a previously oral culture. Most immediately, the title itself reinscribes the historic media encounter since it was the phrase employed in settler treaties to mask the dispossession of Native land: "As long as the grass is green and the waters run. It was a nice phrase, all right. But it didn't mean anything. It was just a metaphor. Every Indian on the reserve knew that. Treaties were hardly sacred documents. They were contracts, and no one signed a contract for eternity. No one" (224). Metaphor, as McLuhan reminds us, "is from the Greek *meta* plus *pherein*, to carry across or transport … Each form of transport not only carries, but translates and transforms, the sender, the receiver, and the message" (*Understanding* 91). Eli's distrust of metaphor, in other words, reflects an awareness of the metaphor as media. Or, as Robert K. Logan puts it, that the metaphor is the message (99). For the settlers' duplicitous use of written documents to disarm indigenous inhabitants and to pave the way for the expropriation of Native land constitutes the paradigmatic symbol for the devastating effects the encounter with a new medium had on First Nations peoples.

King draws attention to the continuity of the effects of this encounter by translating the theme of writerly imperialism into a critique of the ways in which "literacy explodes the tribal or family unit" (McLuhan, *Understanding* 58) of Native peoples in the present day. As McLuhan suggests, writing encouraged the production of the individual through fragmentation — both "through direct influence, and through the printing press, which functioned as the forerunner and precursor of mass production" (Logan 89). In King's novel, certain forms of writing become metaphors for the danger of assimilation into the dominant culture. Charlie, as a lawyer for the company whose dam threatens the livelihood of the community, exemplifies the individualism, but also the communal fragmentation, associated with the letter of white law. Eli, who leaves the reserve to teach English literature at the University of Toronto, discovers that he cannot go home. For each man, the restoration of community requires the symbolic, if not the literal, renunciation of a job that privileges the written word over oral performance.

Although Alberta's interest in the Plains Indian ledger art constitutes a hybrid critique of Eli's and Charlie's relation to writing, she exemplifies

the individualism associated with Gutenberg technology in other ways. For her, it is not writing but her car that marks her social alienation in the form of her longing for a child and her fear of male companionship:

> Alberta liked to drive. She liked to drive her own car, and *she liked to drive alone.* She didn't like the idea of a trip, but once she was on her way, once the lights of the city were behind her and the road narrowed into the night, a feeling of calm always came over her, and *the world outside the car disappeared.* She rarely flew, hated planes, in fact. In a plane, she was helpless, reduced to carrying on an inane conversation with a total stranger or to reading a book while she listened for the telltale vibration of the engine's pitch or the first groan of the wing coming away from the fuselage. And all the time, that faceless, nameless man sat in the nose of the plane, smiling, drinking coffee, telling stories, completely oblivious to impending disasters. Marriage was like that. (70; emphasis added)

Alberta clearly chooses her transportation technology on the basis of her ability to control it — as well as for the isolation it ensures. Driving guarantees separateness from the world; flying implies an oppressive, makeshift community. The similarities between Alberta's technological preferences and McLuhan's assessment of their significance are striking. For McLuhan saw "the mechanical bride" as a technology that "exercised the typical mechanical pressure of explosion and separation of functions. It broke up family life … it separated work and domicile" (*Understanding* 200). Such separation has particular resonance for the Native community since the "continuing power of the car medium to transform the patterns of settlement" (200) recalls the fragmentation of Native families through patterns of assimilation that moved community members from reserves to cities. Moreover, Alberta's car — as the signifier of her own self-protection — exemplifies McLuhan's notion of car as carapace, "the protective and aggressive shell, of urban and suburban [wo]man" (200). And finally, her identification of the car with "freedom" and individualism is closely linked to the experiences of Charlie and Eli, whose alienation from the Native community is literally *inscribed* by the media of print. For, as McLuhan notes, "the car and the assembly line had become the ultimate expression of Gutenberg technology: that is, of uniform, and repeatable processes applied to all aspects of work and living …. The car is a superb piece of uniform, standardized mechanism that is of a piece with the Gutenberg technology and literacy which created the first classless society in the world" (197, 199).

A similar pattern of associations is apparent in Charlie's conspicuous consumption of automobiles, which symbolizes his social alienation, not only from the Native community, but from the dominant community with which he wishes to identify. His red Porsche is a status symbol to Lionel, but it is also a "non-status" symbol since "driv[ing] cars" (119) is precisely what denies Charlie's status as a "real Indian" according to the racist identity politics of white liberalism. Significantly, Charlie's flashy red Porsche is supplanted, narratively, by a rental Pinto: "the first thing that Charlie noticed about the car was that it was red, a color he hated. The second thing was that it was old; in fact, as he got up to the car itself, he realized that some of the red was, in reality, rust" (128). Although the cars are connected by their colour, together they constitute a narrative of technological decay. More broadly, rusting cars populate the landscape of the novel in the form of narrative conjunctions between water and automobiles. The excremental image of Alberta's father's pickup, "sitting in a small lake where the outhouse used to be, the water above the wheels and the doors" (74), for instance, conflates the disintegration of a Native family (Amos's alcoholism), human decay, and the disintegration of technology. Such decay is not simply negative so much as it is an ambivalent sign of simultaneous loss and healing, since the water from the outhouse also takes on mythic proportions: "Amos never came back. The pickup sat there in the water for years, slowly rusting and sinking into the depths. Her mother never said a word about the truck or the lake, never seemed to wonder where he had gone or where the water had come from" (74). The question that sounds endlessly in King's text — where did the water come from? — links the water here to the water that precedes creation, thus placing a story of Native hardship and familial disintegration within a broader, cyclic story of creation and renewal. But the repeated figure of the car in the puddle, which all the major characters witness just before their car's disappearance, is also a comment on technology. By focussing on the disintegration of cars, *Green Grass, Running Water* dismantles the product of Gutenberg assembly-line technology and subverts its biases.

More subtly, the four Indian tricksters' appropriation of the automobiles, "the Nissan, the Pinto, and the Karmann-Ghia" (346), in the final scenes of the novel furnishes a parodic critique of settler technology which links the car and the printing press back to the imperial policy of "typographic man" (as McLuhan named the subject of the age of literacy). By transforming the cars into parodies of the ships that brought disease and conquest to the "New World," the tricksters concentrate a genealogy

of Gutenberg technology — from the modern car, back to the print media which informed Western imperial exploration — in a single image. It is precisely the notion of media as "extensions of man" that the climactic meeting of the cars/ships with the dam critiques. For just as the ship as extension of the European body made imperialism possible, so too does the automotive medium provide a paradigm for the disintegration of Native communities in the twentieth century. Thus, at the end of the novel, when "the dam gave way, and the water and the cars tumbled over the edge of the world" (346), inaugurating a new Creation story, King suggestively links the renewal of Native community with a parodic technological apocalypse.

Whereas McLuhan understood such a meeting of oral and literate cultures to be a violent upheaval, he saw the meeting of oral and electric cultures as a sort of technological homecoming. In contrast to the "explosive" social and psychic fragmentation induced by print, McLuhan envisioned an "implosive" return to oral, tribal patterns with the advent of electric technologies. Consequently, he argued that non-industrial cultures are better suited than print cultures to coping with the invasion of electric media since they have "no specialist habits to overcome in their encounter with electromagnetism, but they have still much of their traditional oral culture that has the total, unified 'field' character of our new electromagnetism" (*Understanding* 40). The "global village" was the natural result of electric media, thought McLuhan, because instantaneous communication reversed the individualist and nationalist social patterns of Gutenberg technology, intertwining communities across the globe in "in depth" involvement with each other. At the heart of this formulation was the development of television, "the most recent and spectacular extension of our central nervous system" (276). Television, he argued, provided the greatest realization of cool, high-participation media because TV images are low-definition (furnish relatively little information) and therefore permit greater audience involvement.

Green Grass, Running Water, however, seems profoundly critical of such utopian idealism. Rather than representing television as a cool medium which "includes" its viewers (McLuhan, *Understanding* 37), King's novel foregrounds the alienating, deadening effects of electric technology on the Native community. At the centre of this critique — and defining its geography — is Buffalo Bill Bursum's Map, which exposes television as the dominant form of media in the twentieth century even as it connects media to cultural imperialism. In short, the arrangement of television sets into a map of Canada and the United States on the wall of

Bursum's store is the physical embodiment of McLuhan's dictum, "The medium is the message":

> All two hundred screens glowed silver, creating a sense of space and great emptiness at the end of the store … Bursum pushed a tape into the VCR at the corner of the display and waited while the machine whirled and clunked and buzzed. Suddenly the screens came alive with brilliant colors … Bursum doubted that even Lionel understood the unifying metaphor or the cultural impact The Map would have on customers … The Map. Bursum loved the sound of it. There was a majesty to the name. He stepped back from the screens and looked at his creation. It was stupendous. It was more powerful than he had thought. It was like having the universe there on the wall, being able to see everything, being in control. (108-09)

Couched in the language of Empire ("majesty," and the colonizer's fantasy of "empty space"), religion ("creation" of a "universe"), and panopticism ("being able to see everything, being in control"), Bursum's "Machiavellian" Map (109) is a shrine to the technologies of power. Not only does it identify the terms by which First Nations peoples were dispossessed of their land and culturally assaulted — empire and the "civilizing mission" — it also suggests the continuity of imperialist practices at the level of electric mediation itself.

Horne's analysis of the Hollywood Western in *Green Grass, Running Water* has already pointed out many of the ways in which images of Indigenous peoples "reconstruct history … to glorify settler expansion and exploration" (264). From this perspective, Portland's career as a Native actor in Hollywood, forced to reconstruct his own appearance by using a fake nose to look acceptably "Indian," dramatically demystifies the myth of "The Mystic Warrior" — what Daniel Francis has called "the imaginary Indian." His tragically hyperreal self-fashioning into a simulacrum of Indianness that is "more real than real" demonstrates the oppressiveness of media content for Native culture, but also hints at an anxiety about technology itself:

> Everyone loved the nose. C.B. and Isabella swore it made him look even more Indian. And the parts began to open up again. But the nose created new problems. Portland couldn't breathe with the nose on, had to breathe through his mouth, which changed the sound of his voice. Instead of the rich, deep, breathy baritone, his voice sounded pinched and full of tin. (130)

The transformation of Portland's voice from "breathy" to "tinny" suggests a threatening internalization of the prosthetic nose which closes off the breath and turns the Native actor into a technobody. The nose, which "seemed to grow and expand, to dominate Portland's face" (130), signals the erasure of Native identity at the hands of the white signmaker, but also represents the oppressiveness of technology itself since the nose is a medium as well as a message.

In other ways as well, the shift of the Western from large screen to small screen which takes place in the novel suggests a heightened concern for the specific effects of the television as a *medium,* in excess of the *message* first inscribed by Portland and others in the Hollywood Bs. Consider the four Indians' intervention into the discourse of the Western on Bursum's TV Map. At one level, the tricksters' magical manipulation of the novel's archetypal Western, *The Mysterious Warrior*, is in keeping with the novel's satire of non-Native culture. Reversing the outcome of the battle between John Wayne, his companion Richard Widmark, and the bands of howling savages subverts the genocidal ideology informing "the spectacle of men and horses and weapons" (183). At another level, the ease with which the four Blackfoot Indians pass in and out of the television screen to alter the images projected thereon suggests precisely the model McLuhan offered to characterize electric media. For the intense degree of interaction between the old Indians and the televised image recalls the oral bias of television as well as McLuhan's alignment of television with the social and psychic reorganization of human behavior whose paradigm was the global village. By presenting the television image as manipulable by the oral magic of the tricksters (they alter the film by counterposing the swelling music of the soundtrack with "a new sound, faint at first, but building until it lay against the cadence of the oncoming soldiers" [266]), the novel transforms McLuhan's assessment of the "inclusivity" of cool media into a magic realist intervention, even as it offers a compelling critique of the "red meat."[3]

King presents this reversal of "Western" ideology (in both senses) via Native interventions into mass media as a difficult ongoing struggle, rendered all the more difficult by the powerful effects of the TV medium itself. King foregrounds these politically inhibitory effects by making the fantastic scene of televisual subversion a repetition of earlier scenes in which the same movie is viewed by most of the novel's main characters. This section of the novel — which undermines stereotypical media images of Indians by cross-cutting scenes from the Western with personal memories of Native experience — attests not to the "inclusivity" of TV,

but to its alienating effects, and can thus be read as a parody of the global village. For although the simultaneity of the viewing experience unites the viewers in time, they are paradoxically "united" only by virtue of their isolation in space. In place of a global village, King's novel presents an image of melancholy, somnabulistic separation. Television is thus implicated both in the division of Native communal life and in the neutralization of political resistance — just as the images of massacre it projects gruesomely literalize the implications of the medium's effect.

Consequently, this first showing of the movie is characterized by the viewers' overwhelming impotence in the face of the TV and by forms of resistance that are both belated and inadequate. Latisha's son, Christian, for example, decides that the Western is hardly worth watching if the Indians always lose; nevertheless, the television stays on (161). Latisha's attempt to foreclose on the expected dénouement is limited to a touch of the remote control that turns off the television. The futility of this localized response is suggested by her answer to her son's question, "Is it over, Mom?" "Yes … it is," refers not only to the movie, or even to her desire to pre-empt it, but also to the pervasive sense of despair such representations produce and to the individual's inability to intervene meaningfully in the system of mediation itself.

Charlie's failure to switch out the TV signal reiterates this dilemma more clearly still. For even though he turns down the intrusive sound on his set, Charlie still "lay there with his eyes open" (177) and therefore catches sight of his father's large rubber nose (181). The meeting between father and son is thus staged as a hyperreal encounter in which image and referent seem permanently riven. Alberta herself experiences both such a sense of belatedness and such a confusion of reality and simulacra when she attempts to turn off her TV:

> Alberta hit the Off button. Enough. The last thing in the world she needed to do was watch some stupid Western. Teaching Western history was trial enough without having to watch what the movie makers had made out of it. *But it was too late.* As she closed her eyes, she could see Charlie mounted on a pinto, a briefcase in one hand, the horse's mane in the other, his silk tie floating behind him. And Lionel mounted on a bay, naked, except for the gold blazer that billowed and flapped as he lay against the neck of the galloping horse, and his shiny wing-tips glistened in the sun. (178; emphasis added)

Electric media thus come to represent an invasive influx of images that are extremely difficult to tune out — not only because they have been so

thoroughly internalized by the viewer, but because the media themselves are designed to neutralize meaningful response. As Alberta's entire experience of the medium suggests, the coerciveness of TV has to do with its seductive duplicity: "Alberta lay on the bed and touched the remote *control. An* old Western. Alberta changed to the next channel. Nothing. The next channel. Nothing. And the next. *Before she knew it*, she was back to the Western" (149; emphasis added). For although television manufactures the feeling of control ("remote" or otherwise), Alberta's instantaneous response to the medium (which takes place "before she knew it") exposes control as an illusion.

Such a theory is the very opposite of McLuhan's sense of television as a medium of intense "participation." The Native viewers in King's novel do not inhabit McLuhan's global village; they are lost in Jean Baudrillard's funhouse, the all-pervasive media environment of late capitalism which is the darker side of McLuhan's "delirious tribal optimism" (Baudrillard, "Requiem" 172).[4] As Baudrillard suggests, "mass media are anti-mediatory and intransitive. They fabricate non-communication … *they are what always prevents response*, making all processes of exchange impossible" ("Requiem" 169-70). This is not to say, simply, that "the media are monopolized by the dominant classes, which *divert* them to their own advantage" ("Requiem" 168). Rather, it is to suggest that "power belongs to the one who can give and *cannot be repaid*" and that such a unilateral structure is the very essence of television technology:

> "TV, by virtue of its mere presence, is a social control in itself. There is no need to imagine it as a state periscope spying on everyone's private life — the situation as it stands is more efficient than that: it is the *certainty that people are no longer speaking to each other*, that they are definitively isolated in the face of a speech without response." ("Requiem" 170, 172)

In the context of Alberta's, Latisha's, and Charlie's profoundly limited responses to the medium, the four Indians' lavish intervention has the paradoxical effect of highlighting the very principle of the medium it seems to subvert. The comical image of Bursum seated before his display of a virtual America, compulsively fast-forwarding the altered tape in the hope that the ending will change back to the narrative he remembers is an imaginative reversal which satirizes white society's Western-ization. But the four Indians' own discovery that they can only alter one tape at a time draws equal attention to the issue of media itself:

> "Oops," said the Lone Ranger. "I thought we fixed this one."

"Yes," said Ishmael, "I thought we did too."

"A lot of them look the same," said Hawkeye.

"Boy," said Robinson Crusoe, "this is sure a lot of work." (266)

The Indians' alteration of the Western is thus the exceptional response to television that proves the rule of non-response. Television takes its place beside — not opposed to — Gutenberg technology in the familiar narrative of assimilation, aggression, and cultural imperialism.

The effects of television on Native culture are further explored in the contrasting figures of Lionel and George Morningstar. As a television salesman who resists returning to the reserve, Lionel exemplifies the "false consciousness" of one who is complicit in his own oppression. The erasure of his name in Charlie's bitter diatribe about "Mr. Television. Mr. Stereo. Mr. Video Movie" (98) already points to the ways in which media infiltrates and annihilates the subject. King's novel expands this critique in a telling scene that begins to suggest the anesthetizing effects of television through the dialectic of inner and outer space:

> Inside, through the plate glass windows, past the video posters and the clearance sale banners, he could see Bill, all smiles in his gold jacket, talking to a young couple and patting the new Panasonic.
>
> Outside, the night air was cold, but standing there, looking back at the store, Lionel felt exhilarated, intoxicated. For a long time, he stood there in the dark, smiling and swaying until the edges of his ears began to burn and he started to shiver. And as he came back through the darkness and into the light, he caught a glimpse of his own reflection in the glass. (69)

Lionel's exhilaration comes just after Charlie has driven away in the red Porsche, leaving behind a pervasive sense of assimilationist optimism and renewing Lionel's hopes about using the TV sales job as a stepping stone to University. Inside the plate glass window, Lionel glimpses an ironized frieze of modern life: rather than patting a baby, Bill pats the new Panasonic he tries to sell to the young couple. The store window itself becomes a kind of TV at this moment, and the Panasonic, a TV within a TV. The *mise en abyme* created by this recession of images mirrors the Panasonic's displacement of the baby, heralding an entirely new system of re-production — that of simulation. For simulation "is no longer that of a territory, a referential being or a substance. It is the generation by models of a real without origin or reality: a hyperreal" (Baudrillard, "Simulacra" 166). Lionel himself, however, is not aware of such sinister implications, as his state of "intoxication" suggests. From his vantage

point outside the store, he is the archetypal television viewer, letting the seemingly idyllic scene unfolding on the plate glass screen play over him.

At this point, Lionel is still nursing his dream of saving money at the store to finance a university degree. But the novel seriously questions the extent to which ends and means can be separated, especially when they are concerned with subtle forms of neo-colonialism. Charlie's rationalization of working against Eli's stand, for example, dramatically parallels Lionel's own dubious argument:

> "Charlie, how can you work for Duplessis? You know that the tribe isn't going to make a cent off that dam. And what about all that waterfront property on the new lake — "
>
> "Parliament Lake."
>
> "Parliament Lake. What happened to all those lots the band was supposed to get?"
>
> "The government made some changes."
>
> "That's a new way to describe greed. You know that the tribe isn't going to make any money off the entire deal."
>
> "Then some of us should, don't you think?"
>
> "God, Charlie."
>
> "Look, where's the harm? The case will probably be in the courts long after we're dead. I mean, the dam is there. The lake is there. You can't just make them go away." (99)

Although Charlie's reputed "sleaziness" is related to his ethical failure, Lionel's situation is more complex. For the scene in which the store becomes a metaphor for television as a medium suggests a pervasive sensory deadening that anesthetizes the user.

Lionel's "intoxication" takes place both outside and "in the dark." His smile, which echoes Bill Bursum's, is thus heavily ironized. As the cold night air finally impels Lionel "back through the darkness and into the light," however, the tone of the scene shifts to accommodate a fleeting moment of misrecognition. Just moments before, Lionel looked in on the microcosm of modernity with a feeling of inclusion and possibility; now, however, as he attempts to re-enter the building — to step through the screen like the four old Blackfoot Indians could — he is momentarily arrested by his own reflection in the glass. Suddenly, his difference is confirmed by the reflection of his own image, which symbolically excludes him from the domestic gathering inside and which suggests his outsider position as "mimic man" (Horne 268). The image of Lionel glimpsing his own reflection in the window/screen is also a metaphor for

the "Narcissus-trance" which McLuhan argues is the inevitable effect of technological "auto-amputation" (*Understanding* 30, 52). Just as Narcissus "numbed his perceptions until he became the servomechanism of his own extended or repeated image," Lionel is "hypnotized by the amputation and extension of his own being in a new technical form" (51, 26). As McLuhan suggests, immersion in media which extend the body or the central nervous system (as television does) produces neurosis that is only guarded against by numbness and auto-amputation. Lionel's euphoria epitomizes such dangerous somnabulism for his reflected image in the glass is a self-amputation that "forbids self-recognition" (52). The scene does not end in an epiphany, but is simply left in suspension; the next time we see Lionel, he is still working for Bursum. Lionel is thus a mimic man who is "not quite/not white" (Bhabha 92), but also, more subtly, he instantiates "the Narcissus illusions of the entertainment world that beset mankind when he encounters himself extended in his own gimmicry" (McLuhan, *Understanding* 67). The Native mimic man is also technophilic gimmick man.

If Lionel's close relationship with media points to ways in which television anesthetizes the viewer and impedes resistance, George Morningstar embodies the medium's violent assault on Native culture and subjectivity. George, who initially adores Latisha because she is a "real Indian" (112), becomes a wife-beater and a would-be exploiter of Native culture when he tries to photograph the Sun Dance at the end of the novel. He represents the worst that white culture has to offer Native peoples. Significantly, his representation is intimately linked to forms of mediation, beyond his use of a camera to capture the Native ceremony. His third date with Latisha, for instance, suggests his close affinity with television: "And Latisha talked, poured her life out, a great flood of dreams and enthusiasms, and George had sat there and waited and listened, his mouth set in a pleasant smile, *his blue eyes never blinking*" (112; emphasis added). The unblinking blue eyes, which reflect Latisha's life back at her with only the illusion of interest and participation (as the "set" smile indicates), perfectly capture Baudrillard's sense of television as an eye that watches you.

In other ways as well, George instantiates the symbolic violence of the television medium in its assault on Native culture when his abusive relationship with Latisha becomes a technological allegory. For the television features prominently in the scene of domestic abuse which proceeds George's public humiliation. When Latisha will not acknowledge the "historical" value of his fringed leather jacket — itself a foreshadowing of George's photographic attempts to appropriate Native culture —

"George stood there in the middle of the restaurant as if someone had turned him off," like a television set:

> That night, when Latisha got home, George was sitting in front of the television with Christian curled up on his lap. He still had on the jacket. Latisha hadn't even seen it coming. *George turned the television off*, got out of the chair as if he was getting up to get a cup of coffee, grabbed Latisha by her dress, and slammed her against the wall. And *before she realized what was happening*, he was hitting her as hard as he could, beating her until she fell.
>
> "Don't you ever do that again," he kept shouting, timing the words to the blows. "Don't you ever do that again."
>
> He stood over Latisha for a long time, breathing, catching his breath, his feet wide apart, his knees locked. And then he sat down in the chair *and turned the television back on*." (160; emphasis added)

The beating occurs in the space between televised images. In other words, George's savagery is not only framed by his interaction with the TV set; it is a metonymy for the effects of television itself. Similarly, Latisha's belated realization that she is the object of violence — "before she realized what was happening" — syntactically recalls Alberta's profound lack of control over the decision to watch the Western on TV (149). King's harrowing depiction of the beating thus expands the scope of domestic violence to comment on insidious technological, as well as more obvious, forms of oppression. Finally, George is ironized as a McLuhanesque apologist for technological invasiveness when he appeals to the panoptical ethos of the global village: "It's almost the twenty-first century, Country. Look, they let you take pictures in church all the time. Hell, everything the pope does is on television. People are curious about these kinds of things. And the more people know, the more they understand" (316).

King's critique of white technology culminates in the image of the hydro-electric dam whose operation Eli attempts to forestall. In contrast to the running water of the multiple Creation stories that flow like rivers through King's narrative of modern Native life, the water behind the Grand Baleen Dam is stopped-up and stagnant. Eli's stance against the dam project is thus both a political and a spiritual form of opposition to the "common-sense" settler position Sifton articulates: "That's the beauty of dams. They don't have personalities, and they don't have politics. They store water and they create electricity. That's it" (95). In the context of media, the dam is both an example of invasive technological advance and the very source of electric power that underlies the oppressive system of

television broadcasting. The dam, in short, provides a direct link between electric technology, cultural imperialism, and the material dispossession of Native land. The connection between the dam(n) technology of Ah(dam)n's descendants and the televisions it powers is cunningly suggested by Eli and Sifton's metaphorical disagreement:

> "You know, if your cabin faced west, you'd have a great view of the dam from your front window."
> "View is fine as it is."
> "It's nice in the morning. Sort of white, like a shell."
> "Reminds me of a toilet," said Eli. (115)

Lionel's father makes a similar point when he calls Bursum's television store a "toilet store" (143).

Although I have emphasized the ways in which King's novel portrays the political and emotional challenges faced by Native communities and individuals in terms of a poetics of technological threat, it would be a misinterpretation to suggest that the novel itself is technophobic. As the ambivalent consequences of the destruction of the Grand Baleen Dam suggest, King resists a nostalgic resolution that projects the triumph of Native "authenticity" over imperialist technologies. The liberation of the water may provide a symbolic defeat of settler technology and inaugurate yet another creation story, but the consequent deluge, which results in Eli's drowning and in the partial destruction of his mother's house, also emphasizes the extent to which Native and settler histories are violently and inextricably intertwined. Consequently, even if King's highly critical presentation of settler media can be seen as an extension of the ways in which "European religious, cultural, literary and historical narratives are contained and subverted within an oral and circular framework, rather than a linear and teleological framework, emphasizing a Native perspective" (Wyile 117), King nonetheless remains cautiously optimistic that, like the book, electric mass media can be "adopted and adapted" to more accurately reflect divergent cultural perspectives.

King's novelistic world is not only one in which the camera — "Hard. Metallic … Clicking. Like an insect" (316) — is excluded from the Native Sun Dance. It is also a world in which potentially productive relations between Native culture and seemingly antithetical media forms are explored and encouraged. The Indian tricksters, for instance, make use of Lionel's car, even though they do not own it, transforming it in the process into a lively nomadic community (103-06). Likewise, the complex relationship between water and television established by King's patterns of

imagery suggests that TV can also be a site of creative and productive intervention. For just as Raymond Williams insisted that television is experienced primarily as *flow*, so King characterizes Lionel's unconscious experience of TV as the old Indians subvert the Western: "Lionel saw none of this. He lay in his chair, his head on his chest, the tumbling light pouring over him like water" (180). Moreover, the surprising ambivalence of the dam, in its ability to transform "running water" *into* electricity, implies a similarly intriguing continuity between electric media and the mythic water of the valley which, once the dam has burst, "rolled on as it had for eternity" (347).

Perhaps the most compelling evidence of King's interest in adapting electric media to Native use is his own Dead Dog Café Comedy Hour on CBC radio. McLuhan regarded radio as a retribalizing medium *par excellence* — a "tribal drum" that acts like "a subliminal echo chamber of magical power to touch remote and forgotten chords":

> Even more than telephone or telegraph, radio is that extension of the central nervous system that is matched only by human speech itself. Is it not worthy of our meditation that radio should be especially attuned to that primitive extension of our central nervous system, that aboriginal mass medium, the vernacular tongue? The crossing of these two most intimate and potent of human technologies could not possibly have failed to provide some extraordinary new shapes for human experience. (264)

Leaving aside for the moment McLuhan's primitivist rhetoric, his general point about radio as a medium which extends human speech provides a valuable perspective on the ways in which King's radio show constitutes more than simply another venue for King's witty satire of Canadian culture. For the Dead Dog Café not only affords King the opportunity to parody and contest stereotypical representations of Natives for a mass popular audience, it also enables him to do so orally, and thus to revitalize and reinvent oral traditions in a non-traditional medium.

Yet if King's adoption/adaptation of a non-indigenous medium like radio provides a paradigm for his own critical and creative practice in *Green Grass, Running Water*, it does so in ways that challenge many of McLuhan's most optimistic speculations about the positive effects of electric media. Foremost among these is McLuhan's confidence in the power of radio and television to subliminally retribalize cultures which have been structured by the mechanistic, individualistic, and homogenizing influences

of print. Such retribalization, McLuhan audaciously claimed, may ultimately pave the way for more pluralistic cultural politics and global harmony:

> Whereas highly literate Westerners have always idealized the condition of integration of races, it has been their literate culture that made impossible real uniformity among races. Literate man naturally dreams of visual solutions to the problems of human differences.… Race integration, undertaken on the basis of visual uniformity, is an extension of the … cultural strategy of literate man, for whom differences always seem to need eradication, both in sex and in race, and in space and in time. Electronic man, by becoming ever more deeply involved in the actualities of the human condition, cannot accept the literate cultural strategy.… The entire approach to these problems in terms of uniformity and social homogenization is a final pressure of the mechanical and industrial technology. Without moralizing, it can be said that the electric age, by involving all men deeply in one another, will come to reject such mechanical solutions. It is more difficult to provide uniqueness and diversity than it is to impose uniform patterns of mass education; but it is such uniqueness and diversity that can be fostered under electric conditions as never before. (275-76)

As King's satire of Hollywoood Indians in *Green Grass, Running Water* warns, however, the mass media's promotion of "uniqueness and diversity" may simply be another name for exoticism. Indeed, McLuhan's anticipation of a global village marked by a celebration of difference rather than assimilation and homogeneity continues to resonate in current debates about multiculturalism, which, as Wyile suggests, increasingly favour a view of cultural production "in which different cultural elements are neither absolutely discrete nor absolutely blended," over the more traditional view, apparent in McLuhan's discourse, of "an illusory unity within and discontinuity between cultural communities" (105). Moreover, King's subtle focus on ways in which medium and message interact, and on how difficult it is to escape the narcosis induced by mass communications to intervene in the medium and to transform both medium and message, provides a more workable model than McLuhan's technological determinism.

Thus, although McLuhan's emphasis on the medium furnishes a strategic vantage point from which to understand the role of media in colonial and neocolonial relations in *Green Grass, Running Water*, King's text in turn points to ways in which the direction of analysis needs to be

reversed. The need for such a reversal is particularly evident in McLuhan's use of the Indian as an image of authentic oral communication — an image that is basic to his theorizing and that underlies his assessment of the sociopolitical implications of electric media. As Glenn Willmott has argued, McLuhan's representation of the radio as a "tribal drum" or the wired world as a "global village" "draws upon what must be the most popular paradigm of modern anthropology, the 'mythic consciousness' of tribal peoples, in which he found a structural model of existential subjectivity applicable also to premodern and postmodern modes of Western civilization" (121). According to Willmott, the immediate source of McLuhan's ideas about "primitive peoples" was the anthropologist, Edmund Carpenter, who wished to avoid the ethnocentrism of "orthodox anthropology" in which "the non-Western expression of myths is reorganized according to Western logical and narrative structures — so that an alien *episteme*, and its abstract categorization of 'contents,' is imposed upon it" in favour of a more cautious brand of cultural relativism by which he sought "to reconstruct the reality of a primitive culture … according to its root expressions of knowing and being" (121). Yet as is confirmed by McLuhan's integration of a postmodern noble savage into his account of how electric media herald "a return to the Golden Age but on a higher level, as in the Hegelian synthesis of thesis and antithesis" (MacDonald 31), theoretical approaches that fetishize cultural difference may easily fall prey to the very ethnocentrism they seek to overcome. For McLuhan, in other words, oral-aural cultures are not simply different from the culture of typographic man, they are "anti-environments" (Willmott 120) that embody everything the Western world has lost with the advent of print technology, and may currently be in the process of regaining:

> the electric implosion now brings oral and tribal ear-culture to the literate West. Not only does the visual, specialist, and fragmented Westerner have now to live in closest daily association with all the ancient oral cultures of the earth, but his own electric technology now begins to translate the visual or eye man back into the tribal and oral pattern with its seamless web of kinship and interdependence.… The immediate prospect for literate, fragmented Western man encountering the electric implosion within his own culture is his steady and rapid transformation into a complex and depth-structured person emotionally aware of his total interdependence with the rest of human society. (*Understanding* 59)

To be sure, McLuhan often viewed this process of immanent translation from eye to ear with ambivalence, insisting that even though "the TV image has exerted a unifying synesthetic force on the sense-life of these intensely literate populations, such as they have lacked for centuries," it is nonetheless "wise to withhold all value judgements when studying these media matters" (274). The frequently noted "cheerfulness" and "tribal optimism" of *Understanding Media* suggest that McLuhan frequently ignored his own advice, but concerning the politics of his representation of tribal culture, his "optimism" or "pessimism" are beside the point. Ultimately, it is McLuhan's categorical opposition between traditional-oral and modern-literate cultures that poses the most significant problem, for it reduces tribal cultures to the role of others who exist only as an abstract alternative to the "instrumentality" of Western thought and as a potential solution to familiar Western feelings of alienation from human community, the natural world, and mythic consciousness. In other words, McLuhan's primitivism constitutes what Deborah Root calls a "commodification of authenticity" (79). As King's novel repeatedly demonstrates, through oppressive white characters like George and Karen who seek "real Indians," "an abstract notion of authenticity can be used as a political tool to legitimize or delegitimize actual people and communities" because "*authenticity* … [is] a definition imposed from the outside on a living culture so that the community will never be able to live up to the way it has been defined" (Root 79).

In light of such dangers, we might see what Dwight MacDonald has referred to as McLuhan's "topism toward the primitive" (31) as implicating the famous Canadian media theorist in a kind of plastic shamanism. Daniel Francis defines the plastic shaman as a non-Native who "appropriate[s] an Indian persona and claim[s] to have a special insight into the Indian way of life. These 'plastic shamans' speak with great authority and achieve wide recognition. They are accepted easily because they conform to the image of the Indian held by the white world. They are the Indian that Whites wish the Indian to be: the Imaginary Indian come to life" (109). Obviously, McLuhan did not "go Indian" in quite the same way as a celebrity like Grey Owl. But McLuhan's own pop celebrity as neo-primitivist prophet of the global village suggests that the media theorist embodies an academic version of the Plastic Shaman.

As new technologies continue to "implode" societies around the world, prompting a deluge of celebratory, though tendentious, images of global citizenship from advertisers and multinational exponents of "globalization," an awareness of the biases of McLuhan's original formulation

of the global village is particularly instructive. As King's novel attests, the global extension of electric information technologies is not inherently liberating, but neither is a purist cultural politics that refuses to explore the potential of technological syncretism. To read King against McLuhan, and McLuhan against King, is thus, finally, to trouble not only the mythic opposition between the voice and the letter, but also the opposition of indigenous oral traditions to invasive settler technologies, without rejecting outright the politics of resistance such deconstructions often seem to demand.[5]

NOTES

[1] King refuses any purely oppositional model of Native literature which would remain "a hostage to nationalism," arguing that "while post-colonialism purports to be a method by which we can begin to look at those literatures which are formed out of the struggle of the oppressed against the oppressor, the colonized and the colonizer, the term itself assumes … that the struggle between guardian and ward is the catalyst for contemporary Native literature. And, worst of all, the idea of post-colonial writing effectively cuts us off from our traditions, traditions that were in place before colonialism ever became a question, traditions that have come down to us through our cultures in spite of colonization, and it supposes that contemporary Native writing is largely a construct of oppression" ("Godzilla" 12).

[2] Robert K. Logan's analysis of McLuhan's thought points out that "the laws of media apply with equal validity to media and to tools, the distinction between technological inventions and media of communication is somewhat arbitrary." Consequently, "technology" is a term that comprises machinery, "but also all forms of communication and information processing including speech, writing, mathematics and science" (82). It is in this broad sense that I use the term in this paper.

[3] In *Understanding Media*, McLuhan argued that content often blinds us to the effects of the medium itself: "For the 'content' of a medium is like the juicy piece of meat carried by the burglar to distract the watchdog of the mind" (32).

[4] The relationship between McLuhan and Baudrillard is far to complex to chart here. Although Baudrillard critiques McLuhan's electric "optimism," there are far more similarities between these two pre-eminent theorists of media than differences; their work is closely intertwined and often parallel. See Galbo.

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