

## The Garden of Light: Images of the Desert in Film

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The desert is by definition deserted, an un-human space, a space in which no-one is, so that, as we look into it, we are more than ever aware that we can only exist outside, excluded from its imagery. The desert has become the purest signifier, in the secular West, of the mystic emptiness of the soul.

But perhaps just because it has been depicted as this contradictory space, empty of people but full of incidents, the desert has changed its nature again and again in our times, like a blank page that changes function according to what you write or draw upon it. (Sean Cubitt, *The Garden of Allah*, 1998.)<sup>1</sup>

Sean Cubitt's description of the desert as a tabula rasa for the Western imagination is most appropriate in discussing the particular relation of identity and memory in two desert epics; David Lean's *Lawrence of Arabia* (1962) and Anthony Minghella's *The English Patient* (1996). Both films present the desert as a place of inscription, a place where identity, memory and light are inextricably bound together. Light in these films constitutes the primary mode of signification be it a transition from a lit match to a glowing red sunrise in *Lawrence of Arabia* or in the form of a digital construction of light and shadow in *The English Patient*. What is most striking about these films is that each of them begins with a dead body, that of T.E. Lawrence (Peter O'Toole) in *Lawrence of Arabia* and Katherine (Kristen Scott-Thomas) in *The English Patient*. Lawrence is shown riding his motorcycle along a country road as the wind billows through his blonde hair while Katharine is in an airplane, the wind blowing through her equally beautiful blond hair and trailing white scarf. The difference between the two images is that Katharine is already dead. Yet, this difference is a minor one as *Lawrence of Arabia* reveals that Lawrence too is already dead and both are mere images animated by light.

Hence, the narratives of both *Lawrence of Arabia* and *The English Patient* are seemingly structured as "flashbacks." This is particularly important, not for the obvious and ultimately facile reason that cinema is writing with light but because the cinematic image is not simply frozen in time waiting to repeat itself as fact, as the authentic



moment, but as a trace of something or someone which can never come into existence: a mythological construction. Eduardo Cadava points out that this rather Benjaminian insight was anticipated by Siegfried Kracauer who wrote that:

The photograph becomes a ghost because the costume doll lived... This ghostlike reality is unredeemed... A shudder of recognition goes through the view of old photographs for they do not illustrate the recognition of the original but rather the spatial configuration of a moment; it is not the person who appears in his photograph, but the sum of what is to be deducted from him. It annihilates the person by portraying him, and were he to converge with it, he would not exist.<sup>2</sup>

This notion is particularly important for the desert epic as generic regime. The *mise-en-scène* of this genre, the desert, is all surface, light, heat, and barren, unlike its antithesis, the ocean, which is deep, dark, cold and brimming with life. Thus the desert is the ideal place for the process of myth-making. It is precisely this process that characterizes the desert epic's most pertinent and yet, perhaps also its most indefinable characteristics. In a review of *Lawrence of Arabia*, Roger Ebert commented that he had "noticed that when people remember 'Lawrence of Arabia,' they don't talk about the plot. They get a certain look in their eye, as if they are remembering the whole experience and have never quite been able to put it into words."<sup>3</sup> This ineffability is a result of the genre's form, a form which hinges upon its *mise-en-scène*. Both *Lawrence of Arabia* and *The English Patient* are literary adaptations which result in the elision of the complexity of the written work in favour of the amplification of its grand themes, heroic individualism in the former and romantic love in the latter. This is not, however, a question of vulgarization where the intellectual qualities of the literary work are watered down for mass consumption. Rather, the form of

the desert epic, the particular coupling of character with *mise-en-scène*, produces a work that is neither the sum of a particular work nor a particular author. Instead it is the end result of the inscription, the writing that is produced when the light of the desert is reproduced with cinematic light. It is this light that provides both the possibility of the artwork's transcendence, its aura of originality in Benjamin's terms, and its inevitable failure to achieve that since it is ultimately a mere emblem, a reproducible inscription that undermines its status as an authentic/original work of art. I will, however, assert that while both *Lawrence of Arabia* and *The English Patient* proffer the most grandiose imagery in the service of the evocation of emotion at the expense of analysis (political or otherwise), the former also questions the process of myth-making and the role of memory in that process.

### **Divine Light in the Service of Politics**

Philosophy has traditionally conceptualized memory as a storage system or, in Locke's idiom, a store-house of ideas, which hold previous experiences for retrieval. This conventional conception of memory parallels the structure of *Lawrence of Arabia* which begins at the end, with the aforementioned death of the central character, T.E. Lawrence. After a memorial service, a journalist asks several people to comment on the "real" T.E. Lawrence. The responses run from those who say that they did not know him well to a condescending and contradictory description of him by an American journalist as both "poet, scholar, and mighty warrior" as well as "the most shameless exhibitionist since Barnum and Bailey." The film puts Lawrence's identity into question and then proceeds to probe the obscurity and confusion of the past with the flashback structure. The source of this flashback is not the journalist or his interviewees à la *Citizen Kane* (1941) but rather it is the myth of Lawrence, a myth of his own making as the film is based on T. E. Lawrence's heroic, autobiographical account of his own Arabian adventure, published in *Seven Pillars of Wisdom* (originally published with the title *Revolt in the Desert*). This point of view is made clear by the close-up of his motorcycle goggles which dangle from a branch in the aftermath of the accident. In her book on flashbacks in film, Maureen Turim has written:

One of the ideological implications of this narration of history through a subjective focalization is to create history as an essentially individual and emotional experience...The flashback narratives that create history as a subjective experience are suspect as historical accounts...since...the power of the film to disguise its representation as "reality," can mask the discursive argument the film is presenting.<sup>4</sup>

Turim's description of the flashback as a subjective and emotional experience which elides historical accuracy parallels Walter Benjamin's assertion that knowledge comes "only in flashes" which simultaneously illuminate and blind. Benjamin's conception of photography as being without authenticity by its very reproducibility would, however, seem to undermine Turim's idea that the subjective and emotional power of the image runs counter to historical accuracy. In fact, Benjamin's notion that it is the artwork's aura of originality and potential transcendence that constitutes its status as an inscription, be it subjective or emotional. This, in turn, permits both its rupture with the past reality that it grew out of and the possibility of a political act of reading the image. "The dialectic image flashes [aufblitzendes]. The past must be held like an image flashing in the now of recognizability."<sup>5</sup> The historical accuracy of Major Lawrence's role in enlisting the desert tribes on the British side in the 1914-17 campaign against the Turks is not then what is important in this film. Rather, it is the inscription, the flashes of light which illuminate the construction of, and correspondence with, a legend. Indeed, the opening sequence of the film where Lawrence dies is followed by the camera pulling back from a bronze bust of him located in St. Paul's Cathedral in London, where the memorial service is being held. Lawrence's bust, made from a cast, is infinitely reproducible and is already an image in service of his memorialization. As the aforementioned contradictory descriptions of him reveal, Lawrence himself is a construction: a reproduction. Benjamin describes this in terms of photography's relation with death: "The procedure itself caused the subject to focus his life in the moment rather than hurrying on past it; during the considerable period of exposure, the subject as it were grew into the picture, in the sharpest contrast with appearances in a snap-shot..."<sup>6</sup> This development into the image, the contrast between light and dark that belongs to the photographic negative, characterizes the process of memory whereby one is apparently frozen in time in the form of a specific image.

This development, the contrast between light and dark also works to reveal the nature of perceptual mediation inherent in the construction of the Western self in relation to the Middle-Eastern other. In *Lawrence of Arabia* such contrasts are made manifest when the figure of Sheik Sherif Ali Ibn el Kharish (Omar Sharif) transforms from a tiny dark speck in the shimmering heat of the desert horizon to a black-robed Bedouin who shoots Lawrence's guide. This image stands in opposition to Lawrence's Christ-like appearance later in the film. His transformation into the Christ/saviour image has been constructed throughout the film as follows: After Prince Faisal proclaims to Lawrence they "need a miracle!" the camera tracks Lawrence's footprints on the





ripples of the blowing desert dunes. He wanders through the night and then, as the morning light dawns, he announces his decision to capture the Turkish garrison at the port of Aqaba by crossing the Nefud desert the “Sun’s Anvil.” After successfully crossing the treacherous Nefud, he turns back into it to rescue Gasim and triumphantly returns to the oasis with him, only to later take Gasim’s life by executing him in order to keep the peace between the Arab clans. He gives life, he takes it away. After he has been wounded in a raid on a Turkish train, Lawrence climbs on top of it, arms outstretched and framed against the bright sun. His body throws a giant shadow on the ground that the Arabs follow as they chant his name in unison.

Lawrence works miracles, is both worshipped and reviled, speaks of walking on water and being invisible to the enemy, is both tortured and vengeful. The Christian iconography is clear. But, more interesting than this is the manner in which it is light, emanating from crystalline blue eyes, captured in flowing white robes, glinting off raised swords and daggers, and shining through layers of grime and enemy blood that elevates Lawrence to the status of deity. Lawrence is light from above. Like Christ, he is the supreme embodiment of Western humanity. As Roger Bastide describes this entity: “his hair...[was] given the colour of sunshine, the brightness of the light above, while

his eyes retained the colour of the sky from which he descended and to which he returned.”<sup>7</sup> As a construction of light, he is not original, he is a reproduction, a Christian/Western allegory.

Does this mean that Lawrence’s status as a deity in the film elides the true/real events of the Arab uprising in favour of the idea that a lone Westerner delivered them from obscurity to nationhood? Not if we consider Benjamin’s emphasis on the importance of the caption, the legend and/or inscription, as a key factor inherent in the photograph’s status as legitimate and authentic.<sup>8</sup> It is clear that Lawrence’s status as a transcendent entity is only an image that has been propped up by himself and those around him such as Prince Faisal and Dryden of the British Political Bureau. Lawrence’s desire to transcend himself can only take this path, can only follow this image. When speaking to Ali after his capture and torture by the Turks he pinches his flesh and says to him “What colour is it? That’s me, and there’s nothing I can do about it.” And, as long as he remains in the allegorical role of Christian/saviour he is useful to the press, the British military and the Arabs. It is only at the end of the film when the British medical officer (Howard Marion Crawford) calls Lawrence, still clad in an Arab robe, a “filthy little wog” do we see Lawrence’s real threat. As Faisal says at the end of the film: “Aurens [Lawrence] is a sword with two edges. We are equally glad to be rid of him, are we not?” The moment Lawrence’s identity is mistaken for an Arab, is the moment he becomes truly dangerous as he is then more than an image; he is uncategorizable, unreadable, and therefore, unpredictable and uncontrollable.

Lawrence’s body, with its eyes the colour of the sky, his skin the colour of virginal sand, his hair the colour of the sun, all of which are animated by light, inscribe his body with the codes of Christian allegory. But they are outward and as Richard Dyer has pointed out, for all of the emphasis on the depiction of the noble or suffering body in Christianity, what counts is what is inside: the soul.<sup>9</sup> In the secular West, the desert has become the purest signifier, of the mystic emptiness of the soul. As the bust of Lawrence reveals at the beginning of the film, this fully-inscribed body is a reproducible set of conventions which permits the fascination with the ineffable soul or spirit that ostensibly lurks beneath the surface of all of us.

### **Impossible Light in the Service of Emotion**

This ineffability also characterizes a more recent desert epic, *The English Patient*. While all cinematic adaptations operate to condense and distil their literary sources, *The English Patient* goes further in terms of distilling the very genre to which it belongs: the desert epic. Utilizing new technologies the film reproduces, indeed encap-

ulates, the tradition of the desert epic and its use of light into a compact sight and sound byte, the sole purpose of which is to establish its generic credentials through the evocation of emotion.

Consider the difference between the opening sequences of Michael Ondaatje's novel and the film. The novel opens at the Villa with the following:



She stands up in the garden where she has been working and looks into the distance. She has sensed a shift in the weather. There is another gust of wind, a buckle of noise in the air, and the tall cypresses sway. She turns and moves uphill towards the house, climbing over a low wall, feeling the first drops of rain on her bare arms. She crosses the loggia and quickly enters the house.<sup>10</sup>

With this elegant and sensual beginning we are introduced to the character of Hana, the Canadian nurse who is occupying the villa with the English patient. Despite its elegance, it is not suitable for the conventional introduction of the desert epic. This is why the film opens with a series of close-ups of a brush painting a swimming figure, which then in turn dissolves into an overhead shot

of artificial yet voluptuous flesh-coloured sand dunes which resemble the curves of the human body. The swimming figure continues from the previous shot as a silhouetted shadow gliding across the dunes. It is gradually replaced by the shadow of a plane which then comes into view with two figures, shot from overhead and enhanced with accurately cast shadows by Digital Film London. This sequence is described in a review by popular film critic Roger Ebert:

The film opens with a pre-war biplane flying above the desert, carrying two passengers in its open cockpits. The film will tell us who these passengers are, why they are in the plane, and what happens next. All of the rest of the story is prologue and epilogue to the reasons for this flight. It is told with the sweep and visual richness of



a film by David Lean, with an attention to fragments of memory that evoke feelings even before we understand what they mean.<sup>11</sup>

It is quite breathtaking and beautiful, as is the following long shot of the plane sweeping across a series of perfectly-formed sand dunes which, through cinematographer John Seale's camera, resemble in their scalloped symmetry either the middle of the desert or the flesh of a lover. In fact, it resembles both, as the English patient describes it approximately half-way through the novel: "In the desert the most loved waters, like a lover's name, are carried blue in your hands, enter your throat. One swallows absence."<sup>12</sup> The desert becomes the slate upon which the Western imagination writes its fantasies and no words can conjure up the immensity of these visions. What is most intriguing and problematic about this series of images from the film is that they are as empty as they are seemingly devoid of contextualization.

Indeed, in this opening sequence all of the visual cues, the matte lines and sizing flaws, that once alerted the spectator to the artificiality and constructedness of the manufactured image are absent. Nor are there the wipes, fades or wavy dissolves to cue us to a flashback. Through the digitized sequence of the desert body, the viewer is transported to a seamless reality that amplifies the conventions of the desert epic. In other words, the ideas of loving the desert and the relation between flesh and the desert that *Lawrence of Arabia* spends over two hours getting to are all conflated here in a single image.

This sequence functions not as a disguise of reality but rather in the manner of a trompe l'oeil: commonly and mistakenly referred to as the illusion of reality. The trompe l'oeil is referred to in the novel several times and the most interesting of these references is when the English patient says: "I have lived in the desert for years and I have come to believe in such things. It is a place of pockets. The trompe l'oeil of time and water."<sup>13</sup> In other words, the trompe l'oeil does not function as an illusion of a concrete external or internal reality but rather it contributes to the construction of depth, time and a quasi-materiality. It evokes a coherent fictional world.

E.H. Gombrich describes the trompe l'oeil painting as follows:

...[it] may cease to be consistent with the world around it, but it remains closely knit within its own system of references. In 1823, the... neoclassical critic, Quatremère de Quincy [said that] Our pleasure in illusion,... rests precisely in the mind's effort in bridging the difference between art and reality. This very pleasure is destroyed when the illusion is too complete. "When the painter packs a vast expanse into a narrow space, when he leads me across the depths of the infinite on a flat sur-

face, and makes the air circulate... I love to abandon myself to his illusions, but I want the frame to be there, I want to know that what I see is nothing but a canvas or a simple plane.”<sup>14</sup>

This is true for cinema as well where the ritual of a public screening involves not the hackneyed idea of suspension of disbelief, because we know that we are indeed at the cinema, but rather, an abandonment to the screened image. In other words, the *trompe l’oeil* nature of this sequence offers no cues nor does it automatically frame representation as reality; rather, it proffers, through its very hyper-reality, an opportunity for effectual engagement which will imbue the discourse surrounding the film with those adjectives associated with the epic film: “lush,” “gorgeous,” “picturesque,” “sweeping,” etc. It is entirely without context in terms of being grounded in any notion of time or space. It is, as a result of its digital treatment, mere appearance, that represents nothing. Because it relies on the mutual reinforcement of illusion and expectation, it does however, allow the spectator to create a representation based upon appearance alone.

Ludwig Wittgenstein explicates this problematic with the example of the difficulty inherent in describing a first or immediate experience, something present to the mind’s eye that could precede ordinary language. He introduced the old simile of the magic lantern:

I always think of it as like the cinema. You see before you the picture on the screen, but behind you is the operator, and he has a roll here on this side from which he is winding and another on that side into which he is winding. The present is the picture which is before the light, but the future is still on the roll to pass, and the past is on that roll. It’s gone through already. Now imagine that there is only the present. There is no future roll, and no past roll. And now further imagine what language there could be in such a situation. One could just gape. This!<sup>15</sup>

This sense of the immediate experience is evident in a popular review in *TIME* by Richard Corliss: “All year we’ve seen mirages of good films. Here is the real thing. To transport picture goes to a unique place in the glare of the earth, in the darkness of the heart-this, you realize with a gasp of joy, is what movies can do.”<sup>16</sup> The “gasp of joy” echoes Wittgenstein’s confrontation with the image on the screen where one can just gape and only later, as the Ebert review points out, do we understand the images that evoke these feelings. In other words, what Ebert is saying is that to see what these segments of *The English Patient* represent, is to first experience their very sensual nature, and that it is only when we have been given numerous insights that we can retrospectively understand their purpose.

In contrast to this I am suggesting that the atemporal nature of this sequence operates in a manner analogous to Siegfried Kracauer's description of certain flashbacks in film: "In many an otherwise insignificant story film the continuity is suddenly disrupted, and for a short time it is as if all clocks ceased to tick; summoned by a big close-up or a shot of heterogeneous fragments, strange shapes shine forth from the abyss of timelessness."<sup>17</sup> To be emotionally moved by this fragment of memory that evokes feelings, a memory that is as yet not even delineated as a bodily memory is not to be given knowledge. Knowledge is achieved through interpretation which is an action and involves the use of a picture in some way that seems justified. In other words, experience can only be assigned truth values when it is reflected upon and fashioned into a propositional form and made the basis of an assertion, when it is articulated.<sup>18</sup>

This trompe l'oeil of light and shadow, flesh and desert is spun out into an articulation of the world where the borders between states are washed away by the shifting sands, the mingling of bodies, and the impossible light which casts impossible shadows. "I came to hate nations," says the English patient in the novel. "We are deformed by nation-states."<sup>19</sup> The trompe l'oeil that constitutes the opening scene thus negates the idea of nations in its evocation of an endlessly sensual vista but it also works to homogenize difference. The supranational unity experienced by the Europeans drawn to the desert elides the problematic images of White European men in tuxedos being waited on by men in fezes. The reduction of Katherine to a part of her body, the eroticization of the body of the Indian sapper Kip, and his relation to the nurse Hana, which is the central relationship in the novel, are all smoothed over in the manner in which the opening sequence elicits and exploits an investment in a romantic world whose coherence is best defined by the English patient who says, "I believe in such cartography — to be marked by nature, not just to label ourselves on a map like the names of rich men and women on buildings. We are communal histories, communal books."<sup>20</sup> Indeed, the same digitized sequence reappears at the end of the film after the patient has died.

To return to Corliss' statement about the "mirages of good films" it is the fiction not the illusion, that is the substitute for, if not the equivalent of, knowledge. It is the articulation of what the text "knows" and, perhaps most importantly, how it knows. The "strange shapes of sensuality that shine forth" from this abyss of timelessness enable a complete investment in a romantic world of an epic scale — an investment which is exploited. Through this opening and closing sequence Minghella's adaptation foregrounds the grand themes of the novel but, ultimately, it dampens down its melancholic world of loss and desire. In the novel after receiving news of Hiroshima, Caravaggio finds himself agreeing with Kip that "they would never have dropped such a bomb on a white nation."<sup>21</sup> By remaining true to the novel's impressionism, the film elides the sub-

ject of race and imperialism. Its epic grandeur demands that the viewer bow to the emotional aura surrounding the film.

This does not mean that I am subscribing to a notion that literature is superior to cinema. Instead, I am subscribing to Andre Bazin's idea that cinematic adaptations are "digests" not in terms of the oversimplification that adaptation entails but rather because of the "mode of expression itself, as if the aesthetic fat, differently emulsified, were better tolerated by the consumer's mind."<sup>22</sup> Bazin goes on to say that "the difficulty of audience assimilation is not an a priori criterion for cultural value." Both films in question here are highly entertaining and emotionally evocative. The fact remains, however, that *The English Patient* is unlike *Lawrence of Arabia* where the sweeping imagery is consistently punctuated by the contrast between the body and the landscape. Lawrence's body, his white skin, his golden hair and sky blue eyes are animated by the light of the desert. His construction as the white messiah can only take place here: the blank slate for the Western imagination. It is clear, however, that the film, particularly in the scenes in which Lawrence's body fails him for being too white, too vulnerable or, in Prince Faisal's words, simply "another of these desert-loving English" acknowledges its status as myth-maker. The mingling of the flesh and landscape that comprises the opening sequence of *The English Patient* conflates the white body with the landscape completely. It is no longer a place of inscription and imagination, each of which allows for the possibility of a dialectical form of reflection, but of sensuality and emotion.

Wittgenstein's ideas on immediate experience demonstrate that it is not a question of distinguishing between the accuracy and inaccuracy of this image nor its place in the present and the past. Rather, this image, comprised of pixels, serves to permit us to rethink the common expression "a picture is worth a thousand words." The hyper-real digitized sequence, a sequence that is evocative of light but contains no light, works to generate an effective experience that is not contextualized, historically or otherwise. *Lawrence of Arabia* conjures up the West's romanticism of the East only to ultimately reveal its very impoverishment when subjected to the machinations of politics. As Lawrence says: "There may be honour among thieves, but there's none in politicians." The opening sequence of *The English Patient* suggests a transcendence of politics, a borderless landscape of communal sensuality. It ends on the epic and grand notion, that Katherine writes of in her farewell note, of bodies being more important than countries. In this respect it is in opposition to *Lawrence of Arabia* where Lawrence's body is but a pawn to be moved around between Prince Faisal and Dryden in the service of their nation's goals. The digital technology which collapses body and landscape transcends the flashback which is a technique in service of the cinematic art of time. The question remains then as to how we read such an emotionally evocative but seem-



the expansive space of the desert. Although recognizable, the politics of both films, the imperialism and sexism alike, are difficult to articulate. This is so in *Lawrence of Arabia* because one is blinded by the light that emanates from a glowing red sunrise, which illuminates the swirling sands, and animates sky-blue eyes. Reading the West's numerous but ideologically impoverished projections onto the desert become possible through such films as *Lawrence of Arabia* which point toward their artificial construction in the service of myth-making. As we can read this cinematic writing, so too can we read much of *The English Patient* in terms of the emblems and inscriptions that a tradition of film-making has deposited on its surface. My argument here, however, is that the opening sequence where the shadow glides over voluptuous dunes in a sea of pixels while accompanied by music that is vaguely Oriental in character, does not lend itself to such a reading. Instead, it requires a shift in approach to that gaze which brings everything to a standstill which, as Eduardo Cadava tells us, is parallel to the logic of the photographic image and Benjamin's "Medusan" philosophy.

ingly uncontextualized image?

Wittgenstein asserts that it is senseless to treat emotions as internal mental contents: "What does it mean to say 'What is happening now has significance' or 'has deep significance'? What is a deep feeling? Could someone have a feeling of ardent love or hope — no matter what preceded or followed this second? What is happening now has significance — in these surroundings. These surroundings give it its importance." The question is therefore an epistemological one: "In what sort of context does it occur?"<sup>23</sup> The context in which both of these films occur is in the realm of the Western mind and its imagined desert rendered in cinematic terms. This realm of light and shadow permits the juxtaposition of the small and insignificant human body with

Only when the Medusan glance of either the historical materialist or the camera has momentarily transfixed history can history as history appear in its disappearance. Within this condensation of past and present, time is no longer to be understood as continuous and linear, but rather as spatial, an imagistic space that Benjamin calls a “constellation” or a “monad.”<sup>24</sup>

The whole purpose of this Medusan moment is to arrest time, interrupting history in order to see that it is not a natural reproduction of the past. This is what the opening sequence of *The English Patient* achieves in that time is transformed into space, the past, present and future are collapsed, and calculated ones and zeros are transformed into light. I do not, however, believe that it necessarily works in a dialectical fashion like the still photograph or even the cinematic image to interrupt the flow of time/history and wrench it from its context for analysis. How can we decontextualize such an image that is without context? According to Cadava, Benjamin says that neither “the Medusa nor history can be viewed or comprehended directly”<sup>25</sup> which means that Wittgenstein is right when he says that when there is only the present (no past or future) we are like the deer caught in the headlights and can only just “gape.” Perhaps we can understand this image and its emotional power when read as exceeding both the context of tradition, a tradition of generic expectations for which *Lawrence of Arabia* is perhaps the most influential, and, as exceeding a context for the Western imagination which utilizes such images of the desert as a pristine slate for its inscriptions, or a blank screen for its projections, its representations of itself in history. When the journalist Bentley asks, “What is it Major Lawrence, that attracts you personally to the desert?” Lawrence replies: “It’s clean.” In turn Bentley comments: “Well now, that’s a very illuminating answer.”

## Endnotes

1. Sean Cubitt, *The Garden of Allah* ([http://www.livjm.ac.uk/Digital\\_Cultures/Garden.html](http://www.livjm.ac.uk/Digital_Cultures/Garden.html), June 26, 1998).
2. Sigfried Kracauer quoted in Eduardo Cadava, “Words of Light Theses on the Photography of History,” *Fugitive Images: From Photography to Video* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1995), 31-32.
3. Roger Ebert, *Lawrence of Arabia* (Chicago Sun-Times, March 17, 1989), 46.
4. Maureen Turim, *The Flashback in Film* (New York: Routledge, 1989), 105.
5. Walter Benjamin quoted in Cadava, 229.
6. Walter Benjamin, *One Way Street, and Other Writings*, trans. Edmund Jephcott and Kingsley Shorter (London: New Left, 1979), 255.
7. Roger Bastide, “Colour, Racism and Christianity,” *Daedalus* (96, 1967), 315.
8. Walter Benjamin, *One Way Street, and Other Writings*, 255.
9. Richard Dyer, *White* (London: Routledge, 1997), 16.

10. Michael Ondaatje, *The English Patient* (Toronto: Vintage Books, 1993), 3.
11. Roger Ebert, *The English Patient*, (Chicago Sun-Times, December 2, 1996), 38.
12. Michael Ondaatje, *The English Patient* , 125.
13. *ibid*, 259.
14. EH. Gombrich, *Art and Illusion* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1984), 277, 279.
15. Ludwig Wittgenstein 1929-1949 quoted in David G.Stern, *Wittgenstein on Mind and Language* (London: Oxford University Press, 1995), 140.
16. Richard Corliss, *TIME Magazine* (November 11, 1996 V. 148 N. 22), 34.
17. Sigfried Kracauer, *Theory of Film: The Redemption of Physical Reality*, 51.
18. Raymond Tallis, *In Defense of Realism* (London: Edward Arnold, 1988), 24.
19. Ondaatje, *The English Patient* , 138.
20. *ibid*, 261.
21. *ibid*, 286.
22. André Bazin, *Bazin at Work*, trans. Alain Piette and Bert Cardullo (New York and London: Routledge, 1997), 49.
23. Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, trans. G.E.M. Anscombe Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1991), 153e.
24. Cadava, 232.
25. *ibid*, 23.