

# If McLuhan is Serious, Anthropology Isn't: The Question of Unexamined Worldview by Albert Michael Weber

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The anthropologists of our time have been extremely guilty of importing uncritically literate assumptions into non-literate areas of study, fusing models of perception that have no relevance to their materials. These models are constructed of literacy - visual points of view. Ted Carpenter has written me about the Hymes critique of the galaxy:

Hymes is bluffing. He pretends that much is known about the shifting of sense ratios by the new extensions of man. The authorities he cites make no contribution to this subject, nor do anthropologists or linguists generally. They cannot even be trusted to recognize the significance of such an approach when they encounter it. Hymes is merely defeating his own unconscious, literate stake in a field he doesn't understand.

Anthropologists see themselves as daring explorers, way out in front. Most are actually 19th Century in outlook. They deal with data atomistically and feel free to abstract them and create regularities for them. Their visual models are highly ethnocentric, totally ill-suited to understanding non-literate patterns. Models offered by Joyce Klee and Pound are ignored. The alienation then, of man vs. environment - so dear to the 19th Century - survives among them like a watch ticking in the pocket of a dead man. Yet anthropologists hold a monopoly on a body of data of prime importance to the understanding of environments as natural expressions of man. Their models blind them to the significance of these data; professionalism prevents them from accepting ideas which threaten existing management.

It was Western man, not McLuhan, who carried the individualizing capacity of print, and the linear nature of thinking it posters, to "ludicrous extremes." McLuhan suggests that lineal thinking alone is not capable of grasping and understanding our world in a global manner. He offers no single-minded, oversimplified exegesis, but opens the way for multiple models simultaneously applied. One obstacle to such an all-at-once analysis is the

single-minded, oversimplified, obsolete approach which Hymes seems to be saying offers "an adequate view of human history."

*"The self-consciousness of learned people is the cosmic tragedy of civilization. There is not a sentence which adequately states its own meaning. There is always a background of presupposition which defies analysis by reason of its infinitude."* – Alfred North Whitehead

What follows here is not actually a direct defense or even explanation of McLuhan at all. Instead, I have tried to provide a number of new and reorganize a number of old perspectives on Anthropology and worldview that I think do come as close to "surrounding" the problem as it is possible in a presentation of this length. An annotated bibliography continues the work. My basic point is that the scope of Psychological Anthropology should be extended to include a functional meta-science, that is, a cultural anthropology of *cultural studies themselves*.

There is a very real sense in which the social sciences have a range of responsibility totally different from the physical sciences as till conventionally practiced. Specifically, for Anthropology it is "culture bound" itself in the very sense that it attempts to be "scientific" *within the Western tradition*. Anthropology has indeed much to learn from such often-suspect "secondary" electric generalist studies as World Philosophy of Culture and Mass Communications theory. Even such a seemingly playful theory as McLuhan's is a genuine attempt to deal explicitly with the history and context of *the observer* and his basic theoretical and methodological assumptions. (There is some awareness in the *Verstelian* approach to Sociology and the not-too-well practiced ideal of empirical placing of individual Anthropological studies, but we have more in mind than this.)

Approaches which are common in studies of the World Religion and the history of major cultures - such a study as Arend Van Leeuwen's on the religious origins of secularism or even Rudolf Otto's of mysticism - do not take the literate sequential view for granted. A model of the type of openness we have in mind is Joseph Needham's study of Chinese civilization, a study which suggests several major Chinese schools had powerful intuitive grasp of relativity theory long before, even before the advent of the absolutist Newtonian position in the West. I am not advocating a return to the general romanticization of Non-Western culture. I do say many generalist studies have "styles of approach" that are a considerable advance upon the naïve positions of most anthropological studies and, almost as a result, the problems they concern themselves with are much more significant.

While the whole trend of thought since the Industrial Revolution (actually since the Reformation) has been that the ground reality is a suspect order of confusion held together by external "legislation," the basic message of the "generation gap" is that *multi-positional* context has totally replaced that linear control – the direct repression of 19th Century Newtonian Science. Even such a dynamic thinker as LaBarre is wrong in that, *even with new material*, he is mirroring the old legislated dichotomy. As Colin Wilson carefully submits, Whitehead's real message was that the reality was neither tough nor tender-minded, that it was rather a living *organic* participatory order, so *powerful* as to easily overwhelm any single-minded attempt of materialist clarity. Whitehead observes in the Principle of *Relativity*:

Nature is . . . a totality including individual experiences, so that we must reject the distinction between nature as it really is and experiences of it which are purely psychological. Our experiences of the apparent world are nature itself. The state of nature is alive, the human body is more alive, the human mind is more alive still. The notion of life implies *a certain absoluteness of self-enjoyment*. This must mean a certain immediate individuality, which is a complex process of *appropriating into a unity of existence* the many data presented as relevant by the physical processes of nature. Life implies the absolute, individual self-enjoyment arising out of this process of appropriation. (And each such act was an "occasion of experience" Whitehead held were real things composing an "evolving universe ever plunging into creative advance.")

An open, general, playful, even at times audacious approach in participating terms may actually be more valid and less culturally bound than a conventional attempt to be "scientific." C. L. Stevenson talks of a "dialectic" approach - certain forms of playful, multi-dimensional absurdities shatter the covert single-minded cultural ones. We will now outline a number of valuable, if a little more conventional, approaches and then return to this subject toward the end of the paper with a consideration of Maslow's Being-cognition.

Within formal social science definitions, the area with which we are basically concerned is well-labeled as *Meta-anthropology* - and among European traditions that do not make our divisions, *Dynamic Sociology*. Spencer is a seminal figure just as in Culture and Personality. Toynbee and Sorokin can be considered two somewhat later exponents. Alfred Weber's sociology, Cultural History as Cultural Sociology is an excellent example. Weber integrates his position with that of his more famous brother. Max Weber, for all the various critiques of "ideal type," did provide a number of orientations which, as extended in Mannheim's Sociology of Knowledge, would still be the start of a cultivated awareness of the place of

Anthropology in *Western culture*. As Alfred Weber defines the project of Dynamic Sociology, it is to ask our place in the stream of history and to grasp the historical processes in its totality.

Both Weber and MacIver make the same basic distinctions between "culture" and "civilization" that are found in the work of the Russian existentialist Nicholas Berdyaev. *Culture* is the creative synthesis of world and individual personality. *Civilization* is practically irreversible - essentially more deterministic - technological process. Civilization and "social process" (the various levels of social organization in their continuing developmental patterns) increasingly provide the very "environment" to which culture most creatively responds. A demand for a Meta-anthropological organization of McLuhan could well be met by such a framework. As pointed out recently by Albert Rabil in a very perceptive article in *Soundings*, there are at least *two* McLuhans. There is the prophet of freeing cultural creativity - at least a crisis point in social process - as well as the apparent technological determinist.

In a sense, Compté's old functional priesthood of social science may not have been so far wrong. But if those who study freer ("cultural") aspects of human personality do not assume their proper place, it will be taken by those intent on preserving the present level of social organization allied with the disciplines of pure technology. The paradox in a complex changing society is that a cultural science is more than "a science," at least according to the popular physical science model. This, because it has an essential human future-directed function to deal with its very material. Fulfillment of such a function would demand a totally more holistic view of science than most present conventional approaches follow. Though thus accused of being determinist, the World Culture theorists come much closer to developing integrated theories of the place of human personality in cultural change than any conventional anthropologists.

After careful considerations I think Lancelot Low Whyte is, especially for our purposes, the best example of such a World Theorist. The areas of Whyte's concern are essentially those of the much more widely-known philosopher of "East-West" reconciliation, F. S. C. Northrop. The degree of Northrop's acceptance opens the way for what I think is Whyte's much more significant contribution to the philosophy of science. Northrop, while pioneering the field, often seems to be simply elaborating conventional stereotypes. He maintains the rather paradoxical position of subsuming all human knowledge under one essentially conventional "tough-minded" view of Science while yet praising the undifferentiated

aesthetic continuo of the East. To this I would certainly prefer Sovokm's view - in which science is only one possible perspective - or Merleau-Ponty's creative, moral science of human subjectivity.

For Whyte, the whole man, the whole human personality is a dynamic biological fact, but his biology totally transcends all compulsive Western dualisms and is non-reductionist. Whyte's central theme is a study of the dualistic character of the Western personality and the need for a new "unitary process man" – the Hericlitian merger of materialism and idealism overcoming the limitations of each. As with Whitehead, an organic vitality replaces both tough and tender-minded ends of the Western dichotomy:

Viewed historically, unitary man is the universal type which begins to appear about the middle of the 20th Century as a result of a reorganization of the tradition based on the unitary conviction. The coming period in history, the fifth in our analysis, is this characterized by man's awareness of the formative process which unites them with nature. Subjective religion and neutral objective science represent components of the process of social development in the past which stand in contrast to the comprehensive unitary conviction which grows out of them. *The unitary form of life cannot be described in the partial terms of a dissociated civilization.* It is not religion, for it is based on the socially-recognized facts of science and it neither seeks nor promises eternity. It is not objective science unconcerned with its influence on life, for it is one with feeling and action. This criterion is not an objective neutrality, but the development of life by truth. The unitary form transcends the modes both of dissociated and of less-differentiated societies. The human need for unity first created subjective religion, then objective analytical science. Now it corrects the partiality of these attitudes by substituting one complete doctrine.

As we have indicated, Whyte is a serious bio-social McLuhan. I will outline later at least briefly a way in which the general type of insight he represents might be integrated into Anthropology.

Some formative attempts that have been made - von Bertalanffy's General Systems Analysis and Wallace's "mazeway" approach - can be seen as similar. Wallace seems to suffer from a certain ahistoric behaviorism. Systems theory must be constantly protected from one-sided development by mathematicians. The basic correction is sufficient imagination which replaces rejection with correct contextualization. My basic point for Anthropology: It is possible to turn "refusal of a priori categorization" constantly back upon Western scientific methods themselves.

A suggestion: Systematic collection of worldviews and theories of personality-reality classification *with the purpose of eventual "systematic" confrontation of Western analysis systems themselves*. As Ludwig von Bertalanffy has observed,

I believe that the basic question in the mind-body problem is whether we should take the world outlook of the Western adult for granted, and dismiss all others as primitive superstition, or whether we should probe the bases of both everyday experience *and the universe of science*. I believe we have good reasons for pursuing the latter course.

What von Bertalanffy means is that in *total personal context*, even mystical theories may tell us as much or more about scientific problems – both biological and anthropological. Florence Kluckhohn and Fred Strodtbeck in *Variations in Value Orientations* did in a sense initiate a number of relevant studies. These studies could be of considerable aid in a further concretization of the positions of the World theorists. Yet again there is the universal problem of *not using materials in any organized way to reflect back on one's own categories*.

The most ambitious attempt to date of what I would call a scientific biocultural study seems to be the recent work of psychotherapists Esther and William Menaker (*Ego in Evolution*). They do in effect take up L. L. Whyte's challenge to correct the static and overly rigid dualistic aspects of Freud's thought. In so doing they do seem to correct the major faults of LaBarre, who for all his ingenuity takes Freud too literally. The result is something much closer to Montagu's view of human nature.

The Menakers have taken seriously the tentative insights of Hallowell, one of the few conventional anthropologists to maintain an evolutionary perspective:

Hallowell asks, "What is the emergence of a cultural mode of adoption a function of?" The achievement of a human status in the evolutionary process, when taken inclusively, is not to be conceived as a simple function of the possession of specific organic traits – brain size, foot structure, or some specific psychological traits such as intelligence – but as a total psychobiological adjustment that implies an overlaid psychological structure functionally integrated with organic structure.

What the Menakers see so carefully document in an almost behavioristic way is the increasing development of empathy as a real source of biocultural evolution. They have a positive process view of the superego like to Blumev's position on norms and roles being replaced by personal identification. As one of the several bases for their position, they develop what is probably the most careful elaboration of personality formation factors

involved in breast feeding yet attempted. We cannot detail their development here, but one of their major sources seems to be J. Bowlby's article "The Nature of the Child's Tie to his Mother" - though they summarize many other studies as well.

In terms of the predictions of Whitehead and von Bertalanffy, some of their approaches to the study of and conclusions on the process of ego formation are most interesting:

Within such a framework (Bowlby's), there is no straight-line causality, and therefore no "primary" and "secondary" in the cause sense. There are patterned processes and interacting totalities, which in the arena of the evolutionary process become selected out because of their greater adaptive efficacy. This is as time for the evolution of forms of social interaction and psychic structure as for the physical substratum that makes this possible. . . . It would seem to us that his study goes beyond his own conception of it and that in fact it is impossible to separate so-called instinctual roots of ego processes.

The Monakers' basic position on empathy actually provides a biological social evolution of parallel to one of the major aspects of the World Communications development theory. Father Walter J. Ong has more carefully elaborated out of some of McLuhan's insights - the increasing identification with the "Outsider." Such identification is then actually the potential biological base for comparative culture personality studies with an evolutionary perspective.

Ego in Evolution actually provides us with a number of leads toward such studies in Anthropology. One of the major ones actually involves Holmberg's study of the Siriono, but in a different aspect from that considered in this course. Holmberg later made an experiment involving the introduction of simple tools which more than doubled the productive capacity of the families receiving them. Here, there developed a considerable increase in in-group hostility. In a later experiment with the Vicas Indians in Peru, there was a very successful transformation. The Menakers' point is that there is evidence in the studies that technological change actually necessitates real ethical evolution, genuine ego development which can be viewed as having a certain biological base:

A change to a form of greater complexity and differentiation of social and economic organization necessitates a corresponding change in the complexity of ethical organization. Or, expressed more evolution only creates the niche, the opportunity, for further ethical evolution. What Holmberg was witnessing when he observed with regret the increase in in-group hostility was a transitional period during which an imbalance existed between the economy that had advanced from its former position and the existing available ethic. [In

the case of the Vicas] an entire group of individuals who had lived as serfs for generations were enabled to develop a democratic, cooperative, and relatively literate society within a few years. Such changes must have brought in their wake changes in ego processes, including greater feelings of competency, autonomy, and self-esteem, as well as new levels of relatedness to others and new cultural and ethical values.

Ego in Evolution illustrates quite clearly what a difference in personality must make in "scientific" perception itself. While being as carefully analytic as LaBarre, the Menakers seem by different emphasis to come to some qualitatively different conclusions.

After material experience, hunting is the most formative experience in terms of the development of the human personality. Hunting of large game requires intelligence and a new degree of empathy which either wins out over (or represents a more imaginative channeling of) the simple male sex drives. Further, Oedipal conflict is seen not in terms of suppression and defense mechanisms but of a natural continued extension of that empathy to the father – a creative, and not a rigid defense, process.

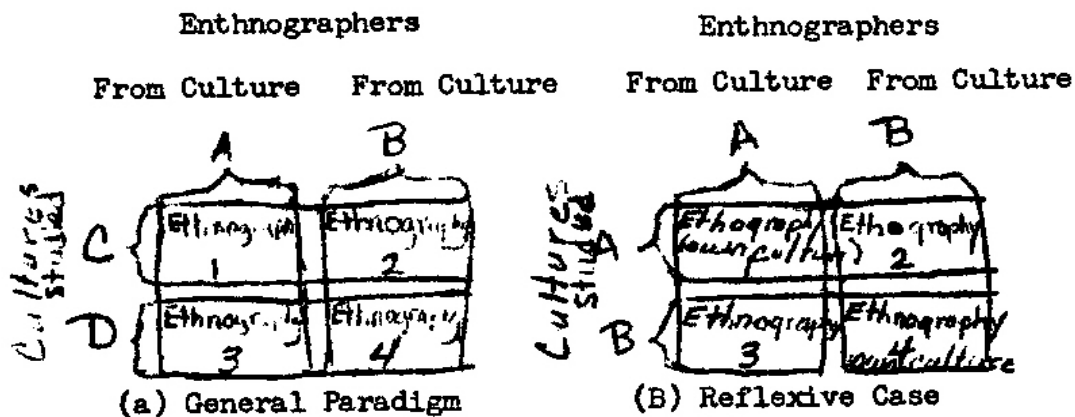
Mentioning creativity, we will now go on to several problems again more directly involving methodology. One characteristic of McLuhan that especially irritates the more "scientific" is his - at least apparent - playfulness. One of the major points of Von Bertalanffy is that all forms of cognition are valid in their own right. What we must eventually do ourselves, if we wish to develop the kind of contextualization that is necessary (in the need for the economy alone), is to develop that very kind of empathy on the level of our own theory integration. "The single view" is no longer a necessary or even adequate approach - as Maslow has observed, "dichotomizing is pathologizing."

Both Maslow and Joseph Royce - in a recent work largely in the World Culture tradition, *The Encapsulated Man*, on the danger of specialization - make an interesting point in observations flowing from the Jungian tradition. True, "individualization" demands as much awareness as possible of one's "inferior" functions. In an attempt to "scientifically" exclude them, even (and in fact, especially) the greatest specialist runs the risk of severe victimization at the hands of that very function at some crucial point in his analysis. The enormous polarity he creates will only result in a compensating response from what amounts to his disordered scientific unconscious. All perspectives perform a service for each other. There are probably many "insane" forms of cultural analysis which demand our attention! R. D. Laing has already pointed out directly that certain forms of schizophrenia



may be evolutionary. McLuhan is fighting against social and medical lobotomy at a crucial period in the development of Western culture.

Here is my personal: If Psychological Anthropology is to begin to answer McLuhan's challenge, we must considerably extend contextualizing models - models which take into account the culture and personality of the observers! A good example of what I have long had in mind in Donald Campbell's Ethnographic Triangulation, an approach which largely explains itself:



**"Multiple- ethnography schedules to extricate the ethnographer content from the culture-studied content."**

Campbell was concerned with the so-called "subjective vs. objective" content. We would make no such valuations, but would use such paradigms and more to get a fresh view of all aspects of culture-personality-worldview interaction. (It would be very interesting to see what such an approach would yield, combined with the Kluckhohn value study paradigm – with the approach itself subject to reexamination.)

One of the basic points in such constantly comparative approaches consistently applied would be that we could end the whole illusory "value free" approach - which because of the rigid philosophy of science that backs it up is so unsuited to represent the genuine, constantly interactive situation in personality and culture. With such an approach, "philosophy" could then be freely returned to cultural study with an actual gain in objectivity. Further, the organic place of cultural studies in the on-going formation of culture itself, the major concern of World theorists, could be recognized within Anthropology itself.

It is my firm conviction that, if humanity is to survive, there must very soon be a dynamic mobilization of all responsible students of culture and society. McLuhan, White, and others

are actually calling for aid. It may truly be, as most of the World theories see it, the crucial period when we all decide between destruction of all human potential and realization of a true personalist cultural pluralism approaching toward Teilard's Noosphere!

## BIBLIOGRAPHY

This Bibliography is meant more to provide samplings of works in all the major areas involved. The major criterion is their usefulness for more detailed reference to further materials in each area.

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Excellent work in an area not very well covered. See especially chapters on meta-anthropology (a long consideration of Northrup is included) and Culture History, extensive bibliography, and index.

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