

World as View and World as Event¹

WALTER J. ONG, S.J.

Dept. of English
St. Louis University

As a concept and term, "world view" is useful but can at times be misleading. It reflects the marked tendency of technologized man to think of actuality as something essentially picturable and to think of knowledge itself by analogy with visual activity to the exclusion, more or less, of the other senses. Oral or nonwriting cultures tend much more to cast up actuality in comprehensive auditory terms, such as voice and harmony. Their "world" is not so markedly something spread out before the eyes as a "view" but rather something dynamic and relatively unpredictable, an event-world rather than an object-world, highly personal, overtly polemic, fostering sound-oriented, traditionalist personality structures less interiorized and solipsistic than those of technologized man. The concept of world view may not only interfere with the empathy necessary for understanding such cultures but may even be outmoded for our own, since modern technological man has entered into a new electronic compact with sound.

I

THIS PAPER IS addressed to the question of whether there are differences in kind between the problem of discovering the world view of a technologized contemporary society and the problem of discovering the world view of other societies. It appears that there may well be such differences. Our very use of the concept "world view" advertises the likelihood. This concept is of recent formation, part of the equipment of the postromantic historicism that, somewhat surprisingly, grows up with technological culture. Its ready applicability to all cultures of the past or of the future can hardly be taken for granted.

Many cultures have never generated this particular concept. I suspect that no early culture has. In ancient Greek and Latin, for example, there appears to be no way to express "world view" short of circumlocutions so vast as to be surely misleading. It is a waste of time to look for an entry under "world view" in most English-Latin word lists, and if we try for something approximating it, such as "outlook," we find that the best Latin equivalent offered is *spes*, hope, which is refinable into *bona spes*, good hope, and *nulla spes*, no hope. This conjures up an atmosphere entirely different

from that of "world view." We can grope for other terms—*conspectus*, perhaps, or *contemplatio* or even *animus, opinio, sententia de mundo, consilium de orbe terrarum*, or *propositum*—but they all prove remote from our twentieth-century concept. The curious Latin word *saeculum*, which yields our English "secular," comes closest of all perhaps in its sense of "spirit of the age," but it lacks sufficient subjective reference: one can hardly refer to the *saeculum* of an individual. Ancient Greek offers *theōria*, but that too lacks adequate subjectivity: it suggests either abstract theorizing or a public spectacle.

"World view" is an elusive term, but when we speak of someone's world view in any of its senses, we do not mean simply the world impressing itself upon his passive receptors, sensory or intellectual. A person does not receive a world view, but rather takes or adopts one. A world view is not a datum, a *donné*, but something the individual himself or the culture he shares partly constructs; it is the person's way of organizing from within himself the data of actuality coming from without and from within. A world view is a world interpretation. This makes it evidently a romantic or postromantic formulation that suggests Coleridge's idea of the imagination as giving form to material otherwise disorganized.

M. H. Abrams (1953) has shown that, by

Accepted for publication 4 November 1968.

and large, preromantic concepts of man hold that the art he creates imitates or mirrors nature, whereas romantic and postromantic concepts hold that it throws light onto nature, interpreting the world. This romantic concept depends, as hinted above, on technology. The reason is that it implies a degree of control over nature unknown to early man, one achieved only by the growth of technological skills and physical sciences that accelerates so remarkably during the period running from the high Middle Ages through the Enlightenment. This growth in technological skills not only vastly enlarges technological control over the external world but also enables knowledge to expand at unprecedented rates through the development of writing (which needs technology for its materials) and of print, as well as through the increase of leisure time. For early man the world was something he could only participate in, not an object to be manipulated in his consciousness.

On the face of it, a concept so dated would appear probably more applicable to the cultures out of which it arose than to earlier cultures. Discovering a world view in cultures that talk of world views and in cultures that do not possess the framework for such a concept might well be undertakings differing in kind. I do not mean to suggest, however, that speaking of the world view of an early culture is illegitimate. It would be idiotic to rule that we may study a given culture only in terms the culture itself provides. That would freeze thought for good. Nevertheless, the limited distribution of the concept suggests that the term itself needs close study, especially when it is applied to cultures removed from those where it is current. Such study can become very complex, and I shall undertake it here in only a limited way, attending to some noetic implications of the term with relation to the conditions of knowledge storage and retrieval in contrasting cultures.

II

However we break it down or specify it, the term "world view" suggests some sort of

major unifying perception, and it presents the unification as taking place in a visual field. "View" implies sight, directly or analogously. The concept is of a piece with many other spatially grounded metaphors we commonly avail ourselves of in treating perception and understanding: "areas" of study, "field" of investigation, "levels" of abstraction, "fronts" of knowledge, "waves" of interest, "movements" of ideas, "trains" of thought, "grounds" for analysis, and so on indefinitely. We are used to these conceptualizations by now and have found them productive, so we often forget how thoroughly metaphorical they are and how remote from actual cognitive experience. Studying anthropology or anything else gives one no experience at all of moving one's mind over an "area." We become aware in various ways of changed interests, but we do not directly experience a change of interest as a wave, whether we take a wave as visually or as kinesthetically perceived. Nor does anyone ever directly experience ideas of his as taking part in a movement. Ideas are neither moving nor static; they simply are not that sort of thing, although we can consider them analogously as one or the other.

These metaphors and others like them are useful and beyond a doubt worth keeping. Many of them have roots deep in the past. There is nothing new in taking the physical universe as somehow a model for conscious intellectual activity. The macrocosm-microcosm notion is an old one and an inevitable one. But the metaphors just noted here, including that of "world view" itself, present both macrocosm and microcosm in a distinctive fashion. In a way characteristic of modern technologized man, they take the physical world to which they relate consciousness as something visually perceived. The senses other than sight do not count here or count very little, with the exception of touch insofar as it is allied to vision in presenting extension and insofar as visual perception itself perhaps never occurs without some admixture of the tactile imagination. (Touch, as both medieval scholastics and modern psychoanalysts remind us, is the

most basic sense, lying at the root of all the others.) But touch enters into these concepts of the physical world unobtrusively or even subconsciously, however really and inevitably. Essentially, when modern technological man thinks of the physical universe, he thinks of something he can visualize either in itself or in terms of visual measurements and charts. The universe for us is essentially something you can draw a picture of.

The history of this assertive and on the whole marvelously productive visualism is, in the main, fairly well known. Habitual resort to visual models or analogues is of a piece with the modern stress on "observation" (a concept referring essentially to sight; you cannot "observe" a sound or a smell but only listen to the one and sniff the other). Visualism grows to its present strength under the aegis of modern science, particularly with the application of mathematics to physics from the seventeenth century on. It has, of course, earlier roots too, which can be discerned in ancient Greece but grew much sturdier in the European Middle Ages. Elsewhere (1958) I have tried to show in some detail how medieval scholasticism, most particularly arts scholasticism rather than theological scholasticism, fostered quantification and visualization as nothing before ever had, and how scholasticism gave birth to the movement (there we are again!) known in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries as Ramism, after Peter Ramus (1515-1572). Ramism gratified the growing desire for quantified, diagrammatic treatment of actuality. But the Ramist kind of quantification is related to actuality only obliquely at best. Instead of applying measurements to carefully observed physical phenomena, Ramists set up diagrammatic arrangements of knowledge itself in dichotomized divisions and subdivisions ad infinitum.

Nevertheless, despite the aberrancy of Ramist efforts, history from Ramus's time on shows that thinking of the universe as essentially something seen (and to a degree touched) is highly rewarding in the physical

sciences. Whether it is equally rewarding in philosophy or anthropology is a question seldom, if ever, raised. Whatever the case with anthropologists, most philosophers from Locke through Kant and many down to the present day not only accept the physical universe in exclusively visualist terms but also treat understanding itself by analogy with visual knowledge to the virtual exclusion of analogies with any of the other senses (Ong 1967:66-74). The success of vision (observation) and quantification in the physical sciences has charmed the modern mind into considering its own activity as essentially like that of sight. Until the past decade or so, there was little awareness that there are any other options. Hence we are likely to take for granted that the presence of the world to man or of man to the world should be thought of in terms of a world "view."

Recent studies of oral or preliterate cultures, however, have brought out the fact that other options are indeed open. In particular, the work of psychologists and psychiatrists reported by J. C. Carothers (1959), Marvin Opler (1956), and others whom they cite, provides evidence of "auditory synthesis." There are cultures that encourage their members to think of the universe less than we do as something picturable and more than we do as a harmony, something held together as a sound or group of sounds, a symphony, is held together. Modern theological and biblical studies have made it a commonplace that the ancient Hebrew concept of knowing expressed by *yadha'* takes knowing as something like hearing—personal and communal—whereas the ancient Greek concept expressed in *gignōskō* takes knowing as something like seeing—impersonal, fractioning, and analytic. Leo Spitzer (1963) showed, however, that the ancient Greeks also quite commonly thought of the world as a harmony, something heard rather than something seen; the universe was something one responded to, as to a voice, not something merely to be inspected. So did many other early peoples. We are seldom aware of how strongly audile the sensi-

bility of early man could be or that of modern, nontechnologized man often still is. Of the many rural cosmological concepts well known in nontechnologized cultures, that of the harmony of the spheres is perhaps the only one generally familiar today to technologized man, even in learned circles.

Of course, the physical universe is both seen and heard and is touched, smelled, and tasted as well. But each of the various senses has an economy of its own, and each impinges on the human life world differently, particularly with regard to awareness of interiority and exteriority.

Sight presents surfaces (it is keyed to *reflected* light: light coming directly from its source, such as fire, an electric lamp, the sun, rather dazzles and blinds us); smell suggests presences or absences (its association with memory is a commonplace) and is connected with the attractiveness (especially sexual) or repulsiveness of bodies which one is near or which one is seeking ("I smelled him out"): smell is a come-or-go signal. Hence "It stinks" expresses maximum rejection or repulsion: do not even go near—the farther away the better—do not even think about it. Taste above all discriminates, distinguishing what is agreeable or disagreeable for intus-susception by one's own organism (food) or psyche (aesthetic taste). . . .

Sound, on the other hand, reveals the interior without the necessity of physical invasion. Thus we tap a wall to discover where it is hollow inside, or we ring a silver-colored coin to discover whether it is perhaps lead inside. To discover such things by sight, we should have to open what we examine, making the inside the outside, destroying its interiority as such. Sound reveals interiors because its nature is determined by interior relationships. The sound of a violin is determined by the interior structure of its strings, of its bridge, and of the wood in its sound-board, by the shape of the interior cavity in the body of the violin, and other interior conditions. Filled with concrete or water, the violin would sound different [Ong 1967:117–118].

Touch attests "objective reality" in the sense of something outside that is not myself.

Dr. Johnson made this clear when he undertook to refute Berkeley tactilely—once one felt contact with a stone one kicked with

one's foot, idealism, Johnson thought or pretended, was doomed. His state of mind persists and no doubt will always persist. "Real as this stone," we say, feeling ourselves clutching it with our fist, in actuality or in imagination. By touch we assure ourselves that the stone is there, is objective, for, more than other senses, touch indeed attests to existence which is objective in the sense of real-but-not-me.

And yet, by the very fact that it attests the not-me more than any other sense, touch involves my own subjectivity more than any other sense. When I feel this objective something "out there," beyond the bounds of my body, I also at the same instant experience my own self. I feel other and self simultaneously [Ong 1967:169–170].

III

These examples may remind us of "worlds" we often neglect in our scientific commitment to vision. What was the "world" like to a culture that took actuality in more auditory, less visual, terms than those to which we are accustomed? Relying for support on a much longer treatment of my own (1967) that in turn draws upon the work of many others, I shall attempt a summary listing and description of four salient features. (When I say "salient features," that is, features that "stand out" or, more accurately, "leap out," I betray my own visual or visual-tactile bias. A more aural expression might be "assertive qualities.")

Dynamism

The world of a dominantly oral or oral-aural culture is dynamic and relatively unpredictable, an event-world rather than an object-world. What we are getting at here can be understood in terms of the nature of sound as compared to other sensory perceptions. Sound is of itself necessarily an event in the way in which the object of no other sense is.

Sound signals the present use of power, since sound must be in active production in order to exist at all. Other things one senses may reveal actual present use of power, as when one watches the drive of a piston in an engine. But vision can reveal also mere quiescence, as in a still-life display. Sound can in-

duce repose, but it never reveals quiescence. It tells us that something is going on. In his *Sound and Symbol*, writing on the effect of music, Victor Zuckerkandl notes that, by contrast with vision and touch, hearing registers force, the dynamic. This can be perceived on other grounds, too. A primitive hunter can see, feel, smell, and taste an elephant when the animal is quite dead. If he hears an elephant trumpeting or merely shuffling his feet, he had better watch out. Something is going on. Force is operating [Ong 1967:112].

Moreover, voice is for man the paradigm of all sound, and to it all sound tends to be assimilated. We hear the voice of the sea, the voice of thunder, the voice of the wind, and an engine's cough. This means that the dynamism inherent in all sound tends to be assimilated to the dynamism of the human being, an unpredictable and potentially dangerous dynamism because a human being is a free, unpredictable agent.

Traditionalism

The world of a dominantly oral or oral-aural culture is traditional. Its traditionalism is closely related to the problems of acquiring, storing, and retrieving knowledge in a voice-and-ear or oral-aural economy of thought and communication, operating without the use of records.

Recent studies, many involving massive recordings of oral performances, have revealed the noetic processes of oral cultures as never before. We can only summarize here some relevant points in the new discoveries, points that will be found explicated in more detail in lengthier works (Lord 1960, Havelock 1963, Yates 1966, Ong 1958 and 1967, Chadwick and Chadwick 1932-1940).

An oral culture, we must remind ourselves, is one in which nothing can be "looked up." Words are sounds, and sounds exist only as they are going out of existence. I cannot stop a word as I can a moving picture in order to fix my attention on an immobilized part of it. There are no immobilized parts of sound. If I stop sound, I have only its opposite, silence. An oral culture is deeply aware of this evanescent quality of

words. Homer expresses this awareness when he sings of "winged words." At the same time, oral cultures consider words more powerful than we do, probably in the last analysis because whereas we interpret movement as instability, they are keenly aware of the moment of sound as signaling use of power. Words fly, which means that they not only move but do so energetically.

How to keep knowledge stable is thus a major problem in an oral culture. We know now the general lines along which the problem is solved. Basically, the solution is to standardize utterance, making it highly "traditional." By contrast with verbal expression, which is composed in writing, oral verbalization is thematic and formulary, filled with epithets (standard, expected qualifiers), prolific of heroic figures (fixed, "heavy," more or less symbolic individuals, predictable in performance, almost entirely free of any character development). When writing takes over from oral verbalization but before writing fully develops its own economy of noetics and expression, these heroic figures become quasiscientific abstract types (writing makes science possible). Such are the virtues and vices of medieval morality plays or the related figures of Ben Jonson's drama and eighteenth-century comedy. Stability of character helps anchor knowledge for retrieval in an oral world. If Nestor is always wise, around a story about Nestor can be clustered what Greeks knew and could later treat more scientifically as wisdom. So wily Odysseus serves to store and retrieve what was known about wiliness, Achilles what was known about bravery, and so on. In the interest of stabilizing knowledge, oral cultures make a great deal of commonplace statements enshrined in popular adages or proverbs and of apothegms attributed to famous persons. Oral folk want to and need to hear the treasured utterances of the past. "Tell us something from the tales of old." Highest marks are given to superlatively skilled performance of the expected, and there is little if any interest in "originality" or "creativity," such as grew up

with the late typographical phenomenon called the Romantic age.

Accustomed as we are to noetic conditions, where virtually everything that men have ever known can be "looked up" on a designated page in a locatable book on a specified shelf in a library, we forget how natural and inevitable the oral exploitation of commonplace material is. In a society in which articulate utterances or statements about a subject cannot be "looked up" (although visual aides-memoire such as wampum belts or winter-count pictures may be used), even the expected is not so expected as it is for us. It is on hand only when it is being recited. And one needs to be assured that it can be retrieved by recitation on demand. Under such conditions the role of a poet in, for example, preliterate Homeric Greece, as Eric Havelock (1963) has shown in beautiful detail, is not simply that of an entertainer. The poet is also a recaller and a repeater; if he and others like him were not around, what knowledge the society has would simply disappear. The orator participates in the role of the poet. He must likewise deal in the commonplace, the expected, the already known, as well as in the particular issues with which individual forensic or deliberative problems engage him.

We are now aware of just how conservative, just how fixed, just how essentially repetitive the poetry and the oratory of an oral society are. Homer, recent studies (Lord 1960 and others cited there) have shown, is made up almost completely of clichés. Everyone is familiar with his "wine-dark sea" and "rosy-fingered dawn." These are among the most heavily worked epithets. But close tabulatory study of the text shows that virtually every image in Homer, line after line, is of that sort. Epic poets sing of standard themes—the arrival of the messenger, the summoning of the council, the feast, the arming of the hero, the description of the hero's shield or sword or other armor, the journey, the challenge, the combat, the despoiling of the vanquished foe, and so on.

And they sing of those themes in formulas or formulaic elements that they have accumulated by the thousands. A horse, to fabricate an English example that makes the point clear, is a "coal-black steed," a "roan-red steed," a "snow-white steed," a "fast gray mare," a "dapple-gray mount" (one extra syllable), a "dapple-gray stallion" (two extra syllables), and so on. If a rider needs a horse, the singer has a number of options he can trot out of his memory, all metrically harnessed and ready to go. And so with everything else he deals in.

That is why, as Albert B. Lord (1960), carrying on Milman Parry's work, found with oral epic singers of modern Yugoslavia, a singer can repeat an epic of an hour's duration after hearing it only once. Essentially all the singers have the same thematic and formulaic equipment—although each will have his own peculiarities in his management of it—and it is simply a matter of putting the equipment to work on a new set of characters and situations. (Of course, even today all narration is always thematic, including the most sophisticated kind of present-day historiography, for the only way to cut verbally into the unbroken web of history is to lift out certain themes; but the themes of the oral epic are much more fixed and limited in number than those of today's writers.)

Memory in an oral noetic economy is never verbatim on any appreciable scale. Lord (1960) has shown this as an indisputable fact in the case of the prodigiously skilled memory of the Yugoslavian epic singers; recordings show that they never sing any epic exactly the same way twice, despite their protestations (also recorded) that they do. I have reviewed elsewhere (1967) the evidence—or, better, the utter lack of it—that leads us to believe that no oral culture in the world achieves verbatim memory for lengthy passages of anything. But oral memory is nevertheless tenacious and accurate; it is locked in the themes and formulas. And it is extensive. Innocent hearers from chirographic and typographic cultures, who them-

selves generally memorize verbatim from texts, are likely to think that a person capable of reciting *ex tempore* thousands of lines in a highly complex meter must have memorized the material word for word. The fact is that such persons have in their store of expressions thousands upon thousands of phrases that fit into the standard metrical pattern. They are "rhapsodizers" or "stitchers," as the Greeks called them (*rhaptein*, 'to sew together,' from which *rhapsödein* derives). It is significant that this kind of composition features complex meters but not rhyme, which would be much more unmanageable.

Even today the "feel" of an oral tradition for unchanging themes and formulas is still accessible to the post-typographic man who is familiar with the telling of fairy stories to children. Here there is no question of an original author or of originality or of telling the story each time in exactly the same words. But the story remains in its basic elements quite stable, and the audience expects the story as a whole and its formulary elements to be the same each time it is told. Anyone who in repeating the story of *The Three Little Pigs* to a youthful audience varies the number from three to four or seven will immediately meet with resistance from his hearers. And formulas, once uttered, are sacrosanct. I myself was pulled up by a five-year old some years ago for saying, "He huffed and he puffed, and he huffed and he puffed" instead of the expected, "He huffed and he puffed, and he puffed and he huffed."

Oratory, the other great oral art form, remained an oral improvisation or rhapsodizing ("stitching") long after the appearance of writing (Ong 1967). Cicero wrote his orations only after he had delivered them, that is, performed them. Oratory as an oral form proceeded in much the same fashion as epic, exploiting the set commonplaces or *loci communes* relentlessly, such as Cicero's "O tempora! O mores!" which was his "things-are-going-to-pot" bit, and other comparable prefabricated purple patches on dishonesty, valor, a dark night, a long time, and so on.

Traffic in the commonplaces persisted as oral residue through the age of Shakespeare (who is quotable because he is made up of quotations tooled and retooled and given their final resonance by his master voice) and pretty strongly into the nineteenth century. It endures in some political oratory even today, particularly in nontechnologized cultures, where "capitalist warmongers," "colonialism," and similar themes, whatever their validity, are repeated with a persistence nauseating to technologized man but completely in accord with the older oral noetic patterns.

The noetic procedures illustrated by epic and oratory extend through the entire economy of a completely oral culture, as Havlock (1963) has pointed out. Oral Homeric Greece contrasts here with Lord's modern Yugoslavia, where oral epic poets constitute only a subculture in a society administered by literates—and a dwindling subculture, as Lord notes (1960), since growing literacy is destroying it. An oral poet must be illiterate or he will take to matching written or printed texts, thereby destroying the entire oral economy of performance. In contrast to modern Yugoslavia, Homer's Greece not only included a population of illiterate, highly skilled epic singers but also was administered from top to bottom by illiterates. In such a society the stitching or weaving of thematic and formulary elements that the epic singers practiced was a skill needed by public officials too, although not to the same specialized degree. If an official wanted to get a substantial message from Ithaca to Argos, he would have to cast it up in some mnemonic form or an illiterate messenger would never be able to deliver it.

The fixed-formula economy of an oral culture of course governs not only what it can repeat but also what it can know. Man knows what he can recall—all else is so ephemeral as to be negligible. In an oral culture this means that he knows what is cast in fixed thematic and formulary patterns. Anything else will seem unreal, nonknowledge, reprehensible, and dangerous. This is the noetic foundation for the traditionalism

stemming from oral cultures. What is not traditional—cast in recognized themes and formulas—is dangerous because it is slippery and unmanageable. Oral-aural man does not like the nontraditional because, beyond his limited means of control, it advertizes the tenuousness of his hold on actuality. Only when recordkeeping, first by chirography and then much more effectively by print, anchored knowledge in space for facile visual retrieval could traditionalism yield to a more flexible relationship to the world and a more flexible understanding of what the world is.

Polemism

The world of a dominantly oral-aural culture is highly personal and polemic, at least in part because of its orality. Although this does not mean that polemic qualities in early cultures cannot also be related to other features besides orality, it is not entirely impossible that all the other features in some way or other relate significantly to orality, making it the major component in a complex of causes.

Without records, oral cultures have quite limited means of storing knowledge by categorization in what we may call scientific or highly abstract fashion. The development of bodies of knowledge of the sort we call arts and sciences has to wait on the advent of writing. Although it is fortunately out of date to say that primitive man has no idea of causality, it is true that complex chains of causality elude him. *A* is caused by *B*, *B* by *C*, and *C* by *D*, but *D* happens because Zeus was peeved at Athena. This means, in effect, "I pass." When divine causality is later analyzed in a sophisticated Christian tradition, it is no help at all in accounting physically for physical phenomena. It operates at another level.

The larger conceptual and verbal structures in which oral-aural man stores what he knows consist in great part of stories that turn on human action and on the interaction of man and man. Thus the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* function not merely as entertaining stories but also as encyclopedias to an ex-

tent we often fail to appreciate. The list of the ships in the *Iliad* (ii. 494–875) is probably the closest thing to a national directory that an oral culture could produce. Where else would such material be verbalized? Similarly, the description of shipbuilding in the *Odyssey* (v. 225–261), when Odysseus is getting away from Circe, is the closest thing to a shipbuilding manual that an oral culture would know. Where else in a culture without writing would the method of building a ship be articulated? Perhaps in an oration, but orations were constructed in much the same way that epic poems were. What we find in Homer or a shipbuilding manual today would hardly be recited by a shipwright who learned and taught his trade by an apprentice system.

Whether in an epic narrative or in an oration built around some expected personal response, factual material and even technical description thus was stored and retrieved by being built into the human life world. Objects and objective fact did not inhabit an isolated section of actuality purportedly altogether screened off from contact with human "subjectivity" or personal relevance, as they do for modern technologized man. Everything was part of human activity, more or less objective and subjective simultaneously.

By the same token, in one way or another everything was caught up in the polemic of the human life struggle. The action of the heroic figures generated in an oral economy of narration would naturally at root consist of a battle between forces of good and evil. When so much of the lore of a culture was retained through narrative tales or songs about great heroes, even what would otherwise be completely neutral material thus acquired a moral flavor by association with the polemic or *agonia* of the hero and his adversaries. The entire world thereby tended to be polarized in terms of "good guys" and "bad guys" and later in terms of abstract personifications of virtues and vices (at least in Western European cultures around the Middle Ages, when writing was encouraging abstraction but had not yet crushed domi-

nantly oral structures). In the highly moral climate of heroic song the *Iliad's* catalogue of ships is thus not merely a national directory, but, from the technically rhetorical point of view, it is also an encomium or "praise" of the Greeks: the Greek leaders and their followers are "good guys." Learning itself takes place in an agonistic setting under these oral-aural conditions. Puberty rites of early societies correspond in many ways to academic education in more developed cultures. Through puberty rites the young men are initiated into the lore of the tribe, its myths and intellectual heritage, as well as into its various skills. In this lore objective fact and man's subjective world interpenetrate. In the process of learning the youths are often subjected to excruciating physical torment, which gives their new knowledge its requisite agonistic tone.

By an extension of oral practices into literate society and even for a while into early typographical society, the agonistic element in learning is perpetuated through the arts of rhetoric and dialectic, which governed all academic practice from antiquity through the Renaissance. During that period no one was ever formally taught neutral objectivity, although many doubtless did achieve it in their own way. A scholar was taught to defend a stand he had taken or to attack the stand of another; rhetorical performance and dialectical debate governed all subjects. Truth was a human possession, to be defended as one's own life. This long persistence of agonistic frames of reference suggests how thoroughly polemic had been oral man's life world.

More could be said about the polemic frame of mind and its connection with an economy of scarcity, with the linguistic situation that fragmented most of mankind into small groups hostile to outsiders, with the common acceptance of war as the permanent state of human existence, with the incredibly harsh punishments, including execution even for minor offenses, found in early conquest states and some other early societies, including the residually oral societies

of medieval and Renaissance Europe. But enough has been retailed here from the more substantial studies to give some indication of the noetic roots of polemic in oral cultures.

It was against the personal world inherited from preliterate Greece that Plato's philosophy took form, as Havelock (1963) has circumstantially shown. Plato's expulsion of the poets from his Republic and his touting of the "ideas" are the two sides of the same coin. His expulsion of the poets was his rejection of the old *paideia*, in which learning was basically oral, only slightly modified by writing; the *Iliad* and *Odyssey* were learned from a written text. The pupil was made to identify with heroic figures in a life world in which all things, even objective fact, were caught up. Plato's ideas launched the new world, the opposite of the old, which his attack on the poets proscribed. The old world had made much of man's activities and of human struggle as the focus or axis of all reality. Where the old world had been warm and human, Plato's "ideas" or "forms" (Greek *idea*, 'outline': a concept based on visual perception) were cold and abstract; where the old world had been mobile, event-full, visualized as narrative is often visualized, but not visualized in explicatory, analytic fashion. The vision of narrative was a swirl of exciting activity. In contrast, Plato's new ideas were motionless, ahistorical; where the old view had held all knowledge in a concrete human setting, the new traced everything to the abstract, the other-worldly, the totally objective, the fixed, modeled on an immobile figure visualized on a motionless field.

Structuring of Personality

In oral cultures the external world sets up and impinges on personality structures quite different from our own. The clinical studies reported by Carothers (1959) and Opler (1956) correlate definite psychological or personality structures with differences between illiteracy (studied pretty well across the globe) and literacy (as represented only

by alphabetic writing, not character writing such as Chinese, which might produce a third, intermediate personality structure). The difference in psychological structures can be summarized by noting that in oral cultures schizophrenia virtually never manifests itself by delusional systematization, that is, by systematic day dreaming, by constructing a private, imaginary, unreal world in which one's problems are solved or non-existent. When subject to the kind of strain that produces schizoid behavior, the illiterate from an oral culture (illiterates from literate cultures are not quite total illiterates, for they experience the effects of literacy vicariously) reacts, too, by losing contact with actuality. But his typical pattern is an outbreak of intense anxiety and hostility and psychic disorganization that shows itself in extreme violence toward others and sometimes toward himself; Carothers attributes the pattern to a lack of ego defences due to tribal reliance on the group. The outbreak of anxiety and hostility is rioting, which is a regular phenomenon in many oral cultures and which is represented by the ancient Scandinavian warrior who goes berserk or the southeast Asian warrior who runs amok as well as by more recent Congolese rioters, whose behavior is interpreted by their own culture as regrettable but inevitable. The absence of schizophrenic delusional systematization appears to be the correlative of the individual's inability to isolate himself and his thought processes from the group, from the tribe, in the ways that become possible for the first time with reading. (The shift to reading, however, does not make withdrawal the only recourse of schizophrenics: in literates, too, violence can occur, perhaps as a more primitive response.) Just as physical personal privacy is at best a rare luxury in oral, tribal cultures, so psychological withdrawal is infrequent or even impossible in such cultures. Thought is not advanced by Aristotles or Einsteins or other individual discoverers but rather moves ahead with glacial slowness; everyone must advance together. We must remind ourselves that in an

oral culture there is no private study. Learning is communal, unless it is achieved at the hands of that most dangerous and worst of teachers, raw experience.

IV

Script and print, with all that they entail, have transformed the oral world into the one we know today—or at least into the one we have known up to the past few years. Script, and particularly the alphabet, converted the dynamic event-world in which oral-aural man stored his knowledge into a world of static visual record. Many, perhaps even all, primitive peoples make much of sight, but the alphabet warped sound itself into a visual mold. The alphabet triumphed only slowly and never entirely, but inexorably. Print, by locking words into the same place in thousands of copies of a book and thereby making indexing and retrieving information possible to a degree utterly unknown in pretypographic manuscript culture, consolidated the work of the alphabet in reducing evanescent sound to the repose of space.

The conversion from totally oral to largely visualized vocalization took a long time, though its success was inevitable. Three thousand years and more after the invention of the first script (around 3500 B.C.) and a thousand years after the invention of the alphabet (around 1500 B.C.), classical antiquity remained largely oral. Its modes of composition were still largely based on the commonplaces and the oration, even in genres such as historiography. Its stance was polemic, its educational goal the training of the *rhetor*, the *orator*, the public speaker, outfitting him for verbal combat. The Middle Ages were far more textually oriented than antiquity and yet by our standards still impossibly oral. Their universities applied themselves to texts as man never had before, and yet the testing of intellectual achievement was never by writing but always by oral *agonia* or dialectical debate. Even the Renaissance, which culminated the medieval drive toward the written word by

producing the printing press and modern textual scholarship, still felt itself committed in principle and to a surprising degree in actuality to the oratorical culture of classical antiquity. As I have undertaken to spell out in great detail (1967), all Western culture remained significantly oral until well into the Romantic age, only slowly relaxing its hold on the traditionalism and the polemicism marking oral society and personality structure.

V

In the light of the foregoing explanation, which is uncomfortably sketchy but cannot be enlarged on here, we can reflect on the applicability of the concept of world view to earlier cultures. Is an oral world unduly distorted by having applied to it the concept of "view"? Are the very differences that mark it off from our own thereby obscured? The visual synthesis the concept endorses certainly makes the concept congenial to the psyche developed in a context of writing and print and technological design. We take very readily to synthesizing "world" as some kind of picture. But does this very type of synthesis somehow vitiate what we make of earlier man's life world?

Perhaps we cannot do otherwise. Freudians have long made the point that for thought and civilization itself to advance, man must minimize the proximity senses of touch, taste, and smell and maximize the senses of hearing and sight. The latter are more abstract in that they report on objects that can be and to a degree must be at a greater distance from the perceiver. Touch requires contact, which the eyeball cannot tolerate. Thus hearing and sight keep the individual and the object of perception nicely distinct. (Touch includes a perception of self-as-touching far more than hearing includes a sense of the self-as-hearing or sight a sense of the self-as-seeing.) Of the two, sight is the more abstract and thus the more "objective." The latter-day history of civilization has entailed a marked movement from the aural to the visual world sense.

Specialization in visually based concepts thus appears to be a sign of progress because they afford preferred information of a sort otherwise unavailable. It does not make much sense to say that we should not examine an oral culture in terms of our concept of a world view because an oral culture tended to synthesize less in terms of view and more in aural terms than we do. For the same reason, oral culture was in fact quite incapable of analyzing itself or anything else in the ways that have become feasible and even mandatory for us.

Nevertheless, we can ask whether we are not too exclusively and unreflectively exploiting visual models today to the neglect of analogs from the other senses. Insofar as understanding of the life world of a given culture requires participation in it, or a kind of empathy for it, the hypervisualism of our sensorium may to a degree disqualify us for understanding whatever unity an earlier culture may have known in its relationship to actuality.

VI

Finally, our hypervisualism may already be outmoded. It may hinder our understanding of our own life world as it is reorganizing itself today and for the immediate future. If it is true, as I have suggested elsewhere (1967; see also others there cited), that we are moving into a new era of sound, we can ask ourselves whether the term "world view" alone is adequate to conceptualize the kind of unification man of coming generations will experience or undertake to realize. The new era into which we have already entered is marked by an unprecedented augmentation of sound-communication devices. We live each succeeding day in an increasingly oral world. Telephone supplements letter-writing, radio makes voice present all over the world simultaneously, television (much more an aural device than its name suggests) does the same, rapid transportation has multiplied personal confrontation in conventions, discussion groups, and assemblies of all sorts. Sonar is even used to catch

fish. As sound gains, in certain ways sight is downgraded. With radio telescopes and interplanetary television mediated through codes of binary numbers, the use of all kinds of complex nonvisual probes in physical and chemical analysis, and other similar developments, the direct use of sight is on the wane in science. Our oralism profoundly differs from that of preliterate man, for it is programmed by means that include writing and print. But at the same time we are often more effectively oral than early man, who could not make an individual's voice heard in every quarter of the globe simultaneously.

How far does our new oralism make our culture like that of early oral-aural man, man before the advent of writing? Marshall McLuhan's statement that we live in a "global village" has become a commonplace. But it is a gnomic and paradoxical commonplace. For what is global cannot be a village, with the village's feeling of an in-group affording shelter from the larger outside world. There is no longer an outside world.

When we examine the present situation for evidence of the four features of early oral-aural culture we noted above (there are other features, of course, in addition to these), we find some striking correspondences and some striking differences. First, our present world has become an event-world to a significant, self-conscious degree. Preliterate cultures were immersed in an event-world because of their inability to structure knowledge other than around human beings. We construct an event-world self-consciously and programmatically to strengthen the human in a world filled with objective structures of the mind. And we do so, as I have attempted to show elsewhere (1962:223-229, 1967:87-110), by massive exploitation of sound.

On the other hand, our world is certainly not traditional in the way in which the old oral-aural world was. We rely on too many records and too exhaustive historical knowledge to need this sort of support. But is there some kind of new traditionalism among us? Faddism, perhaps? Are beatniks

and hippies traditionalists of a new kind? Or of a reverse kind? Their drive to conformism is marked.

Further, the personal and polemic cast of preliterate oralism is represented only partially in the present situation. Personalism is indeed stressed. The protest against overmechanization is one of the many manifestations of attention to the person as such; other manifestations are the growth of counseling in all its forms, the proliferation of discussion groups of all sorts, the cult of the outsider, the study of group dynamics and group relations, and so on. Again, in contrast to earlier spontaneous or unreflective personalism, ours is reflective and programmatic. This makes it in one way less human and in another way more human. But the polemic associated with older, feudal, personalist structures is missing. Despite our much publicized strife, the irenic quest marks our age. We are still distressingly warlike, but being so troubles our collective consciences as it seldom if ever troubled the collective or even most individual consciences of earlier man. Strong in their feeling for in-groups, earlier cultures believed quite generally that war, though perhaps regrettable, was an inescapable part of life.

Finally, are we entering into the older pattern of schizoid behavior, with rioting replacing schizophrenic withdrawal? Perhaps to a degree. It is probably significant that much rioting centers in groups who are either largely illiterate in tradition or ill at ease in centers of literacy, such as universities. Elsewhere (1958, 1962) I have attempted to detail the connections the alphabet and alphabetic printing have with a sense of order. It would appear that these connections are being shaken up in our present stage of oralism.

The foregoing is no more than a sketch of the present state of oralism, but it shows that the world ahead of us, like the world of the distant past, may call for new tools of analysis. Man's experience of the "world" organizing itself today may to a significant degree elude us if we unthinkingly equate

"world" with some sort of canvas spread out before us, as something of which we have primarily a "view."

The concept of world view of course need not and should not be discarded. But how can it be supplemented? We can perhaps start from a more generic concept, thinking of not merely a world view but a world sense. In fact, such a generic concept would seem to be demanded by the terms we use, or are likely to use, in analyzing various world views. Although the concept of view is visually grounded, it is also quite metaphorically interpreted, and analyses of world views do not in fact commonly restrict themselves to the use of visually grounded terms. We can analyze a world view in terms of texture, which is based patently on the sense of touch, or in terms of tonality or concordance, which refer to hearing. We might, however, gain a good deal if we reflected more on the sensory field or fields in which the various concepts we use are grounded. Perhaps it would be productive to cultivate some aurally based concepts, such as those just mentioned as well as "harmony," "cacophony," and "melody," although doing so might seem to suggest a certain affectation.

But I believe that another productive way to supplement our concept of world view is to move from the concept of world sense to the concept of world-as-presence. By presence I mean the kind of relationship that exists between persons when we say that two persons are present to one another. Presence in the full sense of the term entails more than sensation. Insofar as it is grounded in the senses, it appears to be grounded in all of them simultaneously. We speak of a "sense" of presence, rather than a sight, sound, smell, taste, or touch of presence. There is some special relationship, of course, between presence and touch; probably because with touch is associated our sense of reality and presences are eminently real, we can say that we feel someone's presence. There is also some special relationship between presence and smell, presumably be-

cause of the relationship of smell to memory. A particular odor can conjure up a presence or presences very effectively, although it may leave the impression very vague. Still, the sense of presence appears not to be founded on any one sensory field in particular.

What happens if we think of world presence or the world-as-presence rather than of the world as something viewed, something toward which we have an outlook? We do suffer some disabilities. In terms of presence we cannot achieve the precision we achieve by resort to the visual imagination for models representing the structures in consciousness. But by thinking of world-as-presence we gain in immediacy and in a certain kind of relevance.

The conditions in which we find ourselves today call for consideration of the world as a kind of presence chiefly because of what Teilhard has called quite aptly the hominization of the globe. The ambiance in which man finds himself today is made up of human beings more than ever before. For the first time in man's history the globe is pretty well covered with men all of whom are in contact with one another, at least in the large. Nature is more and more subjected to man's management and is becoming a kind of extension of humanity. Our environment is more and more a peopled environment in which things themselves exist in a context of people. This is the kind of world the concept of presence expresses. Presence applies most directly to persons. If I am in a room with a chair, a plant, a cat, and a human being, it is the human being who normally will be felt as a presence, not the other things. In the strict sense only persons are real presences. A world conceived of in terms of presence is a hominized world.

Thinking of the world as a kind of presence is, of course, not entirely new. There is a good deal of evidence that in the past it was thought of this way after a fashion. First, as has been noted earlier, oral-aural cultures predispose man to personalize even

impersonal phenomena because he has to store knowledge in narrative rather than abstract scientific categories. Secondly, as phenomenologists like to remind us, intersubjectivity is a primary mode of human experience. When I walk alone through a dark wood at night and hear what I know is the branch of one tree rubbing against another in the breeze, I cannot keep my imagination from persistently suggesting that the noise is the voice of some living being, and indeed of some person who, being otherwise unknown and of uncertain intent, may well wish to harm me. My imagination wants persons around. Every infant is initiated into an awareness of himself from the beginning in a context of persons who mediate the exterior world to him, and he can never after release himself from that context. Where persons are missing, he projects them. Animism exists in primitive cultures for a variety of reasons, no doubt, but one reason would appear to be the relative emptiness of the primitive universe. Since there are very few persons around, personal presences are projected into the otherwise empty world. Animism can persist for a while in urban populations, but it is more typically a phenomenon of loosely dispersed groups.

We no longer need animism today. The wood nymphs vanished as the woods filled with trailer camps. Water sprites have been crowded out by submarines and scuba divers. We need no longer project presences into the world, for they are already there. Besides the persons just down the street or in the next room or at our elbow, there are all the others permanently available on television. For dealing with our superpeopled environment we seem to need some attention to the notion of presence if we are to think of the world in post-Cartesian terms. We must, of course, refine our various vi-

sual models of the universe as never before. But we also need some nonvisual concepts, including even some that have not yet been born. In the present situation, this paper can pretend to be no more than maieutic.

NOTE

¹ This paper was originally prepared for and presented at Wenner-Gren Foundation Burg Wartenstein symposium no. 41, "World Views: Their Nature and Their Role in Culture," August 2-11, 1968.

REFERENCES CITED

- ABRAMS, M. H.
1953 *The mirror and the lamp*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- CAROTHERS, J. C.
1959 Culture, psychiatry, and the written word. *Psychiatry* 22:307-320.
- CHADWICK, H. MUNRO, AND N. KERSHAW
CHADWICK
1932-1940 *The growth of literature* (3 vols.). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- HAVELOCK, ERIC A.
1963 *Preface to Plato*. Cambridge, Mass.: Belknap Press.
- LORD, ALBERT B.
1960 *The singer of tales*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.
- ONG, WALTER J.
1958 *Ramus, method, and the decay of dialogue*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.
1962 *The barbarian within*. New York: Macmillan.
1967 *The presence of the word*. New Haven: Yale University Press.
- OPLER, MARVIN K.
1956 *Culture, psychiatry, and human values*. Springfield, Ill.: Charles C Thomas.
- SPITZER, LEO
1963 *Classical and Christian ideas of world harmony: prolegomena to an interpretation of the word "Stimmung."*
- YATES, FRANCES A.
1966 *The art of memory*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.