# review articles

# macrothought

JAMES W. FERNANDEZ—*Princeton University*

*World View.* MICHAEL KEARNEY. Novato, CA: Chandler and Sharp Publications in Anthropology and Related Fields, 1984. 244 pp., bibliography, index. $8.95 (paper).

Anthropology struggles against the fundamental solipsism—the perceived loneliness—of individual lives, the accepted separation of individual cultures. We propose by our diverse methods to escape that. We propose to be able to see another world as others see it, to hear it as they hear it, to taste it, feel it, smell it as they do. It is that as much as anything that drives us to "be there," to participate and to observe. And we propose to come back from that foreign land to tell those more or less like ourselves about that "otherness." Sometimes that telling comes down to a set of propositions about otherness that demonstrate universals at work as it suggests particularities. Sometimes it takes the form of "descriptive integration," thick description rich in local color and corroborative detail. In either case or in both, what a task that is and what a necessary one in any world system seeking terms for order. For we can hardly have a satisfactory world order without a decent respect for the world views of mankind based on some sympathetic understanding of their perspective on things.

But can we do it? And is that all there is to it? First can we capture "otherness"? Any self-consistent old line relativism or any modern pragmatism would argue in the end that we cannot, that we cannot escape in any convincing way our own enculturation, our own discourse, our own projects and practical necessities and the world view in which they are embedded and that reflects them; we cannot escape our own enculturation to offer a world view of others that is really theirs—not ours in other's clothing. Moreover, once we have described otherness is our task done?

Here, to challenge that skepticism and to show us our larger task, is an intelligent and interesting—in some ways masterly—book on world view that offers us a theory—the first coherent theory of world view the author claims—by which all world views might be understood. In this review article I would like to briefly review the main points of Kearney's argument and then offer some few suggestions as to how world view might be more effectively studied than is achieved here.

Kearney's argument is mainly directed at a if not *the* core debate in American anthropology today, as it is the core debate in Western thought since Marx: the debate between cultural idealism and historical materialism. This is not only a debate between those—the culturologists—who give more credence to ideational superstructures than to the material infrastructures

of internal inconsistency, the illogic of ideas, and external inconsistency, that is, the lack of fit between the content of a specific world view and external realities. But there is a general strain toward consistency internally and compatibility externally. Indeed some world views are truer than others in this respect—more self-consistent and more compatible with reality. History, if not historical materialism, is our judge of this. For some world views have come to flourish and others have fallen away.

Having stated the universal categories of world view, Kearney then applies them to specific cultures in an illuminating way—if one accepts the categories. One is reminded of the illuminating way that Morris Opler (1945), once having formulated his basic themes in a particular culture, went on to show these "dynamic affirmations" at work in that culture. There is at the least an intellectual satisfaction in seeing a formulation brought to bear and deductively verified if not validated in specific cases. It gives the sense of deeper and yet more intelligible grasp of specific cultures than we might otherwise obtain.

It is important to distinguish between the universals everywhere present and the particular images and assumptions of given cultures that constitute the content of these universals. In every case the anthropologist must endeavor to show (and compare) the content of the universals at work in specific cultures. The universals have little value in and of themselves. Their role is to enable us to focus on particular contents of particular cultures. The universals do not obviate close study of particular cultures. Kearney makes that study, or at least as much of it as the size of this book allows. One hopes that the reader will carry away as much of the particular as he will of the universal. But universals, once stated, are hard to scrub from the mind.

The major comparison is between aboriginal California Indian world view and Mexican peasant world view. The former, as recreated by the anthropologist, has a much greater consistency to it and a much greater amplitude. Because of the poor class position of the latter and the political economic domination and cultural hegemony established over them, the peasants' world view is both truncated and inconsistent. Impoverished and dependent are two words, economic and political in locus, that well describe this class-constricted world view. It seems incontrovertible, as Kearney argues, that when it comes to the modern world no world view can be described without reference to the class position of those who hold it.

## the fleshing out of skeletal propositions

While, as I have said, I recommend this book as original, learned, and fertile of argument, I am not convinced by it. I want to make clear that this is not, as far as I can see, because of my devotion to cultural idealism or my class position. Given the manifest impoverishments and dependencies in this present world system which we Euro-Americans are administering, one can only value Kearney's inclusion of political economic factors as part of the dynamic of world view both in the theorists themselves and in specific cultures. I value Kearney's attempt to ground world view in history and social dynamics; but I am not convinced by this theory because, in final judgment, it seems still too mentalistic, too much a part of a certain kind of self-preoccupied Western world view, Platonic-cum-Evangelical, that in the end short circuits our very considerable challenge to empirically understand the "other." Kearney may speak of "praxis" but his intellectual apparatus comes to loom so large, so masterful and determining, that the pragmatic affairs of the "other" become indentured to the high intellectual adventure of seeing universal categories filled with local content.

So what would I recommend as, if not a more plausible and authentic theory of world view, at least an enriched theory? To answer that let me return to Kearney's argument and try to show where I think it goes wrong in respect to three aspects: his comparison of world-view theory and theory in cognitive anthropology, his treatment of the place of images in world view, and his passing over the role of the "aesthetic" in obtaining coherence in world views.

With reference to the relationship between ethnosemantics and world-view theory Kearney argues that, whereas ethnosemantics provides a theory of the organization of domains, world-view theory provides the greater conceptual theory within which these domain studies are situated. But there is a considerable jump in this thinking here from the level of domain study to the much higher level of world-view study. No indication is given as to how that gap might be theoretically filled in. And yet there has been considerable work in anthropology and elsewhere on associative processes by which interdomain relations are established and larger cultural integrities brought into being by perceived similarities and contiguities (Sapir and Crocker 1977) or by implication (Lakoff and Johnson 1980).

This thinking, which goes by the name of "metaphor theory" and which is, after all, an ancient theory arising in the Sophists and Aristotle, is virtually ignored by Kearney. Although not quite fully ignored, because periodically and quite unannounced (there is no index reference to metaphor), we are told that "absolute presuppositions" (Collingwood's term roughly equivalent to Kearney's propositions) are highly metaphoric statements (pp. 58–59). Or we are told that most of the evidence for the content of the universals of specific cultures is contained in metaphor images (p. 100). So the tropes hum out there on the peripheries of Kearney's awareness throughout his argument, although he does not come to terms with them. One does not have to buy Pepper's argument (1941) that the hypotheses out of which worlds are built are contained in metaphor—and that different cultures choose different metaphors to build their worlds—to still recognize how crucial metaphor theory is to the study of world view and to our understanding of the integration of worlds.

This area of neglect in the argument is seen in another way in Kearney's reiterated definition of world view as consisting of the "images and assumptions" that provide a way of thinking about the world. Here we are given a series of wavering definitions of these two key terms:

> Images are more or less synonymous with world view assumptions. However in some contexts it is more important to refer to one or the other so I shall, therefore, use both terms interchangeably. It is important, however, to distinguish images and assumptions from propositions. Assumptions are images of reality that the anthropologist hypothesizes as existing in the world view of a particular individual or group. He states these hypothetical statements as propositions which he infers from any and all social behavior and expressive productions he is studying. This means that the location of an image or assumption is in the mind of the people whose world view is being analyzed while the proposition is in the model that the anthropologist constructs to replicate world view [pp. 47–48].

In this migratory definition images collapse (though not completely) into assumptions, which collapse into propositions (from which they must yet be distinguished). This "migration" is probably due to the fact that Kearney, as an intellectual, is primarily a verbalizer rather than a visualizer; hence the visual or ocular component of images is more comfortably and quickly transformed into verbal form. The images themselves get scant treatment. In any event we are told that the term "image" is used in two ways: (1) as a visual or other sense-modality representation in the mind and (2) as a more abstract scheme, plan, or organizing principle. It is this latter meaning of image that gains the upper hand, and perhaps this explains how readily in this book images are intellectually transmogrified into propositions. I can only say that in my field experience, worlds are most often imaged in the first sense and that, for a visualizer alert to the complex sensory quality of images, the transformation of an image into a proposition is not an easy matter at all. The fact is that it is not only metaphor but also an uncertain treatment of images—which must be central to any discussion of world view—that haunts this argument.

Also, and part of this general critique, there is the matter of aesthetics, that is, the way that thought worlds are bound together not just by processes of rational logic but by another logic: by the artful manipulation (by reiteration, replication, transformation) of various themes embedded in sensual images. The importance of the aesthetic factor has long been recognized by students of world view. It is the co-principle term in Laura Thompson's study of the Hopi world view that she addresses as a problem in "Logico-Aesthetic Integration in Hopi Culture"

(1945). The title of Witherspoon's study of the Navajo, *Language and Art in the Navajo Universe* (1977), contains the same recognition that the creation of that universe is a matter of both logic (language) and aesthetics (art).

These are just two among many recent studies (none mentioned by Kearney) on New World world view and cosmology in which these matters of the association of things into a universe by the "resonance" they have with each other is addressed. Reichel-Dolmatoff's term, translated from the Tukano, is "echo" (1971:94), a term that alerts us, by an auditory rather than an ocular metaphor (although he also translates the term as "image"), to the reverberances among diverse things that remind the Amazonian Indians of the integrity of their universe. These aesthetic matters are perhaps best captured, surely for the auditory-cum-ocular mode, in the title, taken from Zuckerkandel, of Ellen Basso's recent study of Kalapo Cosmology: "A Musical View of the Universe" (1981). She addresses the organization of the Kalapo universe, a sense of wholeness in it, that cannot be captured by "explicit propositional statements" (1981:291). That does not mean, however, that there is not a science of the concrete, to recall that phrase of Lévi-Strauss (as Basso says, one of the most musical of anthropologists). Metaphor theory is central to that science.

There are those, of course, whose definition of science would exclude, probably because of some hard/soft continuum implicit in their judgment, metaphor theory and a science of the concrete from logic, if not from science itself. But there surely is a logic to the associative processes of things visual or otherwise sensory, and it would be a mistake to exclude these from our science. Perhaps the distinction, made in depth psychology, between primary-process logic and secondary-process logic would be more convincing. The first kind of logic, preverbal or nonverbal, is the logic associated with visualization processes and is captured in the study of metaphor, metonym, and the other tropes. Secondary-process logic associated with language acquisition is captured in the study of grammar and syntax (Spiro 1982). The world and particularly world views are not put together by secondary processes alone!

Kearney is aware enough of the tendency to "overrationalize" human behavior and he intends his word "structural" to cover such things as "the similarity between the images of physiological and social process" (p. 62). In other words he intends the term to cover the "structural replication" in different idioms and in different modalities of the common images of world view. But, in fact, he gives short shrift to these matters of image resonance and image replication in different domains and modalities. The term "structural" may limit his options, for it seems somehow too constructed a term to convey the intricate associative processes of aesthetic integration. Indeed, Kearney gives some sign of, at least, aesthetic dissatisfaction with his central concept "logico-structural integration," calling it at various points a "barbarism," a "catchall term," and a "hyphenated monstrosity" (p. 209).

The author does mention, in regard to these matters, the work of Kroeber and others on "stylistic integration," an offshoot of the Boasian interest in cultural configurations, and a concept aesthetic in spirit. But after mentioning the understanding this concept afforded him in his own research, he drops the topic from consideration. "We must impose some admittedly arbitrary limits in deciding when we have come to the limits of structurally integrated phenomena, and not trespass into problems of style" (p. 64).

But, of course, it is in just such matters that particular world views really take shape, become embodied with their own particularity. Kearney quotes approvingly Wallace's observation that "a worldview is not merely a philosophical by-product of each culture like a shadow, but the very skeleton of concrete cognitive assumptions on which the flesh of customary behavior is hung" (p. 53). By giving short shrift or no shrift at all to such matters as interdomain association, metaphor, image resonance, and stylistic integration, Kearney risks a very skeletal account indeed of the world views he would have us apprehend. It is, also, to risk a disservice to another

of the base and those who reverse that priority. It is a debate between two world views. Reflexivity is built into the argument. Kearney clearly recognizes that he writes about other world views from a world view of his own. And so his theory is one that, as it proceeds, attempts to examine itself and its presuppositions. Still, the object of the argument is to construct a progressive, truly liberating model of world view. The task will be to "self-consciously develop a model of worldview that is not encumbered by the tacit assumptions of liberal anthropology" (p. x).

## a dialogue with the cultural idealism in American anthropology

There are readers who, finding such phrases, will anticipate a doctrinaire exercise; but Kearney proposes and achieves much more than that. He intends a corrective dialogue with the cultural idealism of American cultural anthropology as well as a theory that will avail itself of the insights into the workings of culture as provided by American students of culture. His concern is not to defend materialism against idealism but to show how, in respect to world view, reality and thought shape each other. Kearney wishes "in other words, to bypass the entire tedious debate by giving ideas *nearly* equal importance as material and social conditions" (p. 4; emphasis in original).

The hedge "nearly" becomes significant as the book unfolds. In this context it is meant to indicate that the material factors will still be given greater importance. But it also indicates an uncertainty in the argument. At some points in the book, especially when particular cultures are being discussed, ideas seem to loom larger than material factors. To clarify this the author makes a distinction between tactics and strategy. In the short run people's actions are best explained by the ideas they have in their heads. In the long run these ideas must be mainly traced to social and material conditions. "We can say that this world view theory is tactically mentalistic but that strategically it is founded on historical materialism" (p. 4). This is a subtle distinction, indeed. And it occurs so frequently in this book that a mentalistic tactic of analysis, the pursuit of "macrothought," comes to appear the grand strategy.

Let us first examine Kearney's dialogue with cultural anthropology and the idealism and liberalism he finds embedded in it. The dialogue is largely engaged with the Boasian tradition, with ethnosemantics, and with Redfield's work. Kearney locates Boas and the culture concept that he and his students articulated in the tradition of German Idealist scholarship that produced Burckhardt and Spengler (he does not mention Dilthey in this connection). Though this was a progressive scholarship when directed against the racism implicit in the evolutionism of the period, it had and continues to have a conservative function typical of idealist beliefs in general. That is, its analyses are removed from and have little relevance to the life problems of the peoples of the cultures so dissected.

The fruits of Boasian idealism are seen in the configurationalism of Kroeber and Benedict at the cultural level and of Sapir and Mead at the level of personality. It is also seen in Opler's work on themes and Hoebel's and Kluckhohn's work on basic postulates. But this latter work has the advantage, over the earlier configurationalism, of getting closer to the human realities of contradiction and ambiguity in these underlying ideas, the constant necessity of negotiation between incompatible ideas and the consequent challenge of integration, or what Kearney calls logico-structural integration, in culture. This latter concept is the central one in the book. And it is, as he says, his "bias" to affirm that world views are integrated. The basic building blocks of this integration are "propositions" that surely owe something to this earlier work in the Boasian tradition on the "elementary forms" (derived from Bastian) out of which configurations are built.

It should be noted for subsequent comment that Kearney passes over Boasian-influenced

culture and personality theory—which in its interest in group or national character has much in common with world-view theory—because of its concern with the expression of affect. He affirms that the study of world view is more concerned with the rational functions of the mind. It seeks not to understand needs and emotions but "cross cultural variations in the logic, structuring and content of systems of thought having to do with the general nature of reality" (p. 30). But, as I will argue below, there is an affective logic as well that must be taken into account in the integration of world views.

Redfield's work, largely independent of the Boasian tradition, is also, as it must be, influential on Kearney, and he regards it as groundbreaking mainly because Redfield aimed at understanding world-view universals—the way that all people divide up and categorize the phenomena that they perceive. Indeed, for Redfield, an interest in universals is both necessary for world-view study and these universals are produced by such study. Such is argued in *The Primitive World and Its Transformation*.

> We advance our understanding of differences by seeking what is universal; and the attempt to find generalizing language in terms of which to compare things as to their resemblances as well as their differences leads us back again to a recognition of universals or with part universals. So with world view. As we begin to think about any two or three or four world views against a background of even off-hand characterizations of universal world view we begin to find words to describe what is true of some world-views but not of others [1953:96].

Redfield's categories of "self-other," "human-nonhuman," "space and time" all find their resonance in Kearney's theory, although, in the end, Redfield is faulted for being only interested in two world views, the Primitive and the Urban; for having mainly descriptive and not theoretical interests; and for having little concern for why certain cultures had certain world views or how they changed. It is a little hard to understand Kearney's critique in this last instance, with *The Primitive World and Its Transformation* in mind, particularly Chapter 5 of that book, "Man Makes Himself." It is true that Redfield's explanation of change in world view looks to individual initiative rather than social structure—an explanation that would be attributable, in Kearney's view, to Redfield's liberal bias and his affluent position in America's upper classes with their ideology of entrepreneurship and individual initiative.

As far as this dialogue with American anthropology is concerned it also ought to be mentioned that, in contrast to his review of the Boasians, Kearney gives short shrift to the Redfieldians. The Redfield-influenced works of Guiteras-Holmes (1961), Leslie (1960), Tax (1941), and others are not mentioned. And the Wenner-Gren Burg Wartenstein Conference of 1968 (Jones 1973), which like Kearney's work was concerned with developing a universal model of world view, is ignored.

## macrothought: a theory of the logico-structural integration of world view

Kearney gives more attention to the ethnosemanticists than he does to the Redfield school because both world-view theorists and cognitive anthropologists seek to discover a people's underlying assumptions about the nature of reality that can be stated as formal propositions. While earlier ethnosemanticists were, in Kearney's view, working fully in the tradition of cultural idealism—little concerned with the relation of semantic structures to behavior—later cognitivists have been, on the contrary, concerned with such behavioral matters as decision making. Their work is, thus, much more congenial to world-view theory, which posits the dialectical relation of these semantic structures with ongoing social action and environment—or, in Piagetian terms, in the dialectical interaction between subject and object. The consequences of the decisions we take in the object world influence subjective structures as these structures influence the object world.

But the two approaches operate at much different levels of abstraction. Ethnoscientists have

paid great attention to "microthought," that is, to the organization of thinking within domains. World-view theory seeks to discover the underlying assumptions at a much higher level of abstraction—at the level of "macrothought". What ethnoscience gains in rigor it loses in relevance and explanatory power. These are qualities that world-view theory possesses. One main object of Kearney's book, then, is to obtain greater rigor while yet retaining relevance and power, that is to say, comprehensiveness of explanation.

Kearney gives a number of definitions of world view as his argument advances but his basic definition is "a culture's way of looking at reality consisting of basic assumptions and images that provide a more or less coherent though not necessarily accurate way of thinking about the world" (p. 41). I will provide a critique of the author's notions of images and assumptions below, but I wish here to point up an important distinction made (1) between these images and assumptions and the propositions formulated about them and (2) between first-order and second-order knowledge. The presumption is that the images and assumptions exist in the world view of the people themselves even in the absence, which is frequently the case, of native commentary upon or even awareness of them. The propositions are the model the anthropologist constructs to replicate that world view. Propositions are "as if" statements in the sense that much of social behavior and cultural phenomena can be explained "as if" predicated upon such statements. It will be noted that this is a more mentalistic even idealist statement than Kearney's generally dialectical argument would lead us to expect.

The formulation of these "as if" statements enables the theorist to articulate that "first-order" tacit knowledge of which a people are not aware but in which will be found the working out, or the filling in, in local terms, of the universal, but empty, categories for which all specific world views must provide their particular content. These universal categories are "self-other," "classification," "relationship," "causality," and "time-space." That is, all world views must define the self and distinguish it from the other, must classify the things of the world, must address the significant relationships of things, must give an account of their cause, and must place them in time and space.

What is the source of these universal categories? In part they arise out of the requirements of social order and of effective adaptation to environment. But, as was true for Redfield, in part they would seem to emerge out of the fact of comparison on the one hand and the necessity of comparison on the other. These categories, like the propositions, are inferences that, apparently, satisfactorily account for all world views known to Kearney. That is, all known world views can be satisfactorily studied "as if" predicated upon them. So we, indeed, see that, compared with the domain-specific analyses of ethnosemantics, there is a considerably greater degree of abstraction and inference involved in macrothought.

Second-order knowledge contains the images and assumptions of which a people are aware, that is, folk knowledge. But this level of knowledge can be seen to be a series of permutations of the underlying culturally specific forms, or contents, of the universals. So second-order knowledge—local knowledge known to locals—is not empowered to bring the inferences of this world-view theory into question in any significant way. This also would seem to be a rather idealist strategy of theory building or at least one that is at risk of not being dialectically interactive with the subjects to which it is applied.

I will make Kearney's much longer argument short, because I wish to move on and offer a critique particularly on the above point. Once we have been given, in an instructive discussion, the five categories of world view, Kearney goes on and argues for their logico-structural integration as they are manifested (given their content) in any specific culture. This integration or systematic interrelation of elements, the mind's search for consistency, is axiomatic in the argument, or at least it is described as a "theoretical bias" of the author's argument. Compartmentalization in any thoroughgoing way, such as we know of from the long tradition of acculturation study, is not contemplated. At the same time the author does not ignore the dynamic

world view if, perchance and in all humility, we should "find" in it a skeleton largely of our own fabrication.

## conclusion: radical ethnography and the risks of macrothought

Michael Kearney's new book on world view is an interesting and important contribution not only because his argument is something of a "tour de force"—whatever its wavering on certain central definitions and its neglect of the primary-process logic bound up in images and in the tropes—but because world view is an important central concept in anthropology. It is a concept that insistently forces us to a central responsibility in our task: to grasp as we can and to communicate as we may the way that the "other" looks out upon the world.

This task provokes skepticism and resistance in some quarters. This skepticism is of two kinds, epistemological and ethnocentric. Epistemologically, it is argued that we cannot escape our own discourse into another world view. Ethnocentrism, explicit or implicit, makes us uninterested in doing so. The two kinds of skepticism often reinforce each other. I do not share either of these skepticisms. It is true, however, that such radical macrothought as Kearney's provokes some skepticism in me. This skepticism is not provoked because Kearney's argument is radical in the sense that he wants us to be more conscious of the presence of political and economic factors in theorizing and in the formation of world views. This is a positive part of his argument. Indeed, it is an important part of our task to understand those things. The skepticism is provoked because of the risks and biases in macrothought of any kind insofar as apprehension of the other is concerned. There is the risk that these grand universal theories are mainly lodged in our own world view and our own significant discourse and are imposed upon the other. One consequence of the consciousness raising that Kearney is about should be the awareness of the tremendous capacity that contemporary politics and economics has given to us Euro-Americans to impose our thinking upon others. Macrothought possesses that potentiality to a high degree.

Is there any guarantee against that? If there is, it lies in what we might like to call radical ethnography. I have the etymological sense of the term "radical" in mind: "rootedness." The best guarantee against the imperial imposition of our own discourse and our own preoccupations upon others—the best guarantee of coming close to their life problems—is to root our inquiry as much as possible in local images, in local metaphors, in local "primary process" if one wishes. Out of such microthought should such macrothought as Kearney offers be sure to grow. What I miss in him is a radical argument in that sense.

## references cited

Basso, Ellen
    1981   A Musical View of the Universe: Kalapalo Myth and Ritual as Religious Performance. Journal of American Folklore 94:273–291.
Guiteras-Holmes, Calixta
    1961   Perils of the Soul: The World View of the Tzotzil Indians. New York: Free Press.
Jones, W. T.
    1973   World Views: Their Nature and Their Function. Current Anthropology 13:79–109.
Lakoff, G., and Mark Johnson
    1980   Metaphors We Live By. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
Leslie, Charles M.
    1960   Now We Are Civilized: A Study of the World View of the Zapotec Indians of Mitla, Oaxaca. Detroit: Wayne University Press.
Opler, Morris
    1945   Themes as Dynamic Forces in Culture. American Journal of Sociology 15:198–206.
Pepper, Steven C.
    1941   World Hypotheses. Berkeley: University of California Press.

Redfield, Robert
   1953   The Primitive World and Its Transformation. Ithaca: Cornell University Press.
Reichel-Dolmatoff, G.
   1971   Amazonian Cosmos: The Sexual and Religious Symbolism of the Tukano Indians. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
Sapir, David, and C. Crocker
   1977   The Social Use of Metaphor. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press.
Spiro, Melford
   1982   Collective Representations and Mental Representations in Religious Symbol Systems. *In* Symbols in Anthropology. Jacques Maquet, ed. pp. 45–72. Malibu: Udena Publishers.
Tax, Sol
   1941   World View and Social Relations in Guatemala. American Anthropologist 43:27–42.
Thompson, Laura
   1945   Logico-Aesthetic Integration in Hopi Culture. American Anthropologist 47:540–553.
Witherspoon, Gary
   1977   Language and Art in the Navajo Universe. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press.