

# Eric McLuhan, Marshall McLuhan, Walter Ong, and Connection Consciousness

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## Article abstract

In this article, I highlight the lives and works of three distinguished media ecology theorists: (1) Eric McLuhan (1942-2018; Ph.D. in English, University of Dallas, 1982); (2) Marshall McLuhan (1911-1980; Ph.D. in English, Cambridge University, 1943); and (3) Walter J. Ong, S.J. (1912-2003; Ph.D. in English, Harvard University, 1955). Throughout this article, I use Eric McLuhan's 2015 book *The Sensus Communis, Synesthesia, and the Soul: An Odyssey* as a touchstone for my discussion of connection consciousness. I round off this article by listing a wide range of other books and articles that are also related to connection consciousness.

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## Eric McLuhan, Marshall McLuhan, Walter Ong, and Connection Consciousness

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**Abstract:** In this article, I highlight the lives and works of three distinguished media ecology theorists: (1) Eric McLuhan (1942-2018; Ph.D. in English, University of Dallas, 1982); (2) Marshall McLuhan (1911-1980; Ph.D. in English, Cambridge University, 1943); and (3) Walter J. Ong, S.J. (1912-2003; Ph.D. in English, Harvard University, 1955). Throughout this article, I use Eric McLuhan's 2015 book *The Sensus Communis, Synesthesia, and the Soul: An Odyssey* as a touchstone for my discussion of connection consciousness. I round off this article by listing a wide range of other books and articles that are also related to connection consciousness.

In my admittedly belated review of Eric McLuhan's short 2015 book *The Sensus, Communis, Synesthesia, and the Soul: An Odyssey*, I highlight the lives and works of three distinguished media ecology theorists:

- (1) Eric McLuhan (1942-2018; Ph.D. in English, University of Dallas, 1982);
- (2) Marshall McLuhan (1911-1980; Ph.D. in English, Cambridge University, 1943); and
- (3) Walter J. Ong, S.J. (1912-2003; Ph.D. in English, Harvard University, 1955).

Because the three of them were Catholics, I tend to think of them as representatives of and cheerleaders for Team Catholic – in the sense that each of them tended to celebrate aspects of the Roman Catholic tradition of thought – at times more explicitly than at other times. To be sure, you do not have to be a Catholic to read and understand their works – but you may need to be a theist, or at least not antagonistic toward theists and theistic orientations. In the wildly

associative present essay, I refer to connection consciousness as an important dimension of the Judeo-Christian tradition of thought, and in Eric McLuhan's 2015 book *The Sensus Communis, Synesthesia, and the Soul: An Odyssey*, he celebrates connection consciousness. I round off the present essay by listing certain other books and articles related to connection consciousness. (To understand why I describe the present essay as wildly associative, I urge you to look over the alphabetized list of "References" at the end of the present essay.)

Now, the late Eric McLuhan was the oldest child of Marshall and Corinne McLuhan. In 2015, Eric McLuhan published the short book *The Sensus Communis, Synesthesia, and the Soul: An Odyssey*. It is now out of print. However, Amazon and Barnes & Noble online still sell an e-book version of his 2015 book.

Dennis D. Cali has published a wide-ranging appreciation of Eric McLuhan's 2015 book *The Sensus Communis, Synesthesia, and the Soul: An Odyssey*, titled "The Inner Sensorium in Media Ecology: Justification for Study of Media Ecology" in the online journal *New Explorations: Studies in Culture and Communications* (Autumn 2020). In it, Cali "explores the pertinence of this inner sensorium to media ecology and its role in shaping human identity in a technological age." In Cali's first paragraph, he calls attention to how the American Jesuit pioneering media ecology theorist Walter J. Ong operationally defines and explains the sensorium in his seminal 1967 book *The Presence of the Word: Some Prolegomena for Cultural and Religious History* (p. 6; for further specific page references to sensorium, see the "Index" [p. 356]). In Cali's article, he notes, Ong says, "by sensorium we mean . . . the entire sensory apparatus as an operational complex" (Cali's ellipsis).

Now, the American Jesuit Renaissance specialist and cultural historian Ong first explored

sensory orientations in the cognitive processing of sensory information in his massively researched 1958 book *Ramus, Method, and the Decay of Dialogue: From the Art of Discourse to the Art of Reason [in Ramus and Subsequently in the Age of Reason]* (for specific page references, see the “Index” entry for aural-to-visual shift [p. 396]).

For further discussion of Ong’s account of the aural-to-visual shift in cognitive processing in our Western cultural history, see my somewhat lengthy *OEN* article “Walter J. Ong’s Philosophical Thought” (dated September 20, 2020).

I have also discussed Ong’s work in my *OEN* article “Thomas J. Farrell on Thomas J. Farrell” (dated November 17, 2023).

I have written more extensively about Ong’s life and eleven of his books and selected articles in my book *Walter Ong’s Contributions to Cultural Studies: The Phenomenology of the Word and I-Thou Communication* (2000) – which received the Marshall McLuhan Award for Outstanding Book in Media Ecology in 2001, conferred by the Media Ecology Association. In 2015, Hampton Press published the revised and expanded second edition of my book.

For a briefly annotated bibliography of Ong’s 400 or so distinct publications (not counting translations and reprintings as distinct publications), see Thomas M. Walsh’s “Walter J. Ong, S.J.: A Bibliography 1929-2006” in the book *Language, Culture, and Identity: The Legacy of Walter J. Ong, S.J.*, edited by Sara van der Berg and Thomas M. Walsh (2011, pp. 185-245).

In any event, Ong’s various publications about Ramus and Ramist logic prompted Marshall McLuhan to write his 1962 book *The Gutenberg Galaxy: The Making of Typographic Man* (for specific pages references to Ong’s publications about Ramus and Ramist logic, see the

“Bibliographic Index” [pp. 286-287]).

Two noteworthy biographies of Marshall McLuhan have been published: (1) Philip Marchand’s *Marshall McLuhan: The Medium and the Messenger* (1989); and (2) W. Terrence Gordon’s *Marshall McLuhan: Escape into Understanding: A Biography* (1997).

Also see *Letters of Marshall McLuhan*, selected and annotated by Matie Molinaro, Corinne McLuhan, and William Toye (1987).

Now, in the present wide-ranging review essay, I supplement and complement Cali’s wide-ranging article by further contextualizing Eric McLuhan’s 2015 book *The Sensus Communis, Synesthesia, and the Soul: An Odyssey*.

Now, Eric McLuhan has published a scholarly book about the Jesuit-educated Irish writer James Joyce’s novel *Finnegans Wake*, titled *The Role of Thunder in Finnegans Wake* (1997) – about Menippean satire. In 2015, Eric McLuhan published a shorter book about Menippean satire titled *Cynic Satire*.

I have written about Eric McLuhan’s 1997 book and his 2015 book in my 5,150-word 2022 review essay “Eric McLuhan’s 1997 and 2015 Books on Menippean Satire” that is available online through the University of Minnesota’s digital conservancy.

In addition, I have written about Eric McLuhan and Marshall McLuhan in my 5,000-word review essay “The McLuhans’ 2011 Book of Theories of Communication, and Walter J. Ong’s Thought” that is also available online through the University of Minnesota’s digital conservancy.

Now, in the 1940s, Marshall McLuhan regularly reviewed books about Joyce in the journal *Renascence*, published out of the English department at Marquette University, the Jesuit university in Milwaukee, Wisconsin (USA).

Father Ong reviewed the Jesuit scholar William T. Noon's book *Joyce and Aquinas* (1957) in the journal *New Scholasticism* (October 1957).

Now, the Canadian Catholic convert Marshall McLuhan was formally received into the Roman Catholic Church in the spring of 1937. When Marshall McLuhan was in studies in English at Cambridge University, somebody there put the French Thomistic philosopher Jacques Maritain's then recently published book on the reading list. Marshall McLuhan read it and was impressed by it. In some measure, it contributed to his decision to convert to Roman Catholicism, a decision that guaranteed that he would never become a professor at Harvard University because of the stigma at the time of being a Catholic.

When Senator John F. Kennedy, a graduate of Harvard College, ran for president of the United States in 1960, his religion was a stigma for national office. Up to 1960, white Anglo-Saxon Protestants (WASPs), and former Protestants, tended to dominate the prestige culture in American culture. For further discussion of WASP culture in the United States, see Robert C. Christopher's book *Crashing the Gates: The De-WASPing of America's Power Elite* (1989).

In any event, young Marshall McLuhan published an article about the British Catholic convert G. K. Chesterton, a prolific author: "G. K. Chesterton: A Practical Mystic" in the *Dalhousie Review* (1936). To this day, I think that Chesterton's biographies of St. Francis of Assisi and

St. Thomas Aquinas are still worth reading. In addition, Yale's literary critic Harold Bloom thinks that Chesterton's literary criticism is still worth reading.

Marshall McLuhan's 1936 article about Chesterton is reprinted in the 1999 book *The Medium and the Light: [Marshall McLuhan's] Reflections on Religion*, edited by Eric McLuhan and Jacek Szklarek (pp. 3-13).

Now, from 1937 to 1944, the recently converted Marshall McLuhan taught English at Saint Louis University (SLU), the Jesuit university in the City of St. Louis, Missouri (USA), where he continued to work on his doctoral dissertation on the history of the verbal arts of grammar, rhetoric, and dialectic (or logic). But he took a leave of absence one year and returned to Cambridge University to work further on his dissertation. His dissertation was completed and approved in 1943. It was published posthumously, unrevised but with an editorial apparatus, as *The Classical Trivium: The Place of Thomas Nashe in the Learning of His Time*, edited by W. Terrence Gordon (2006).

During Marshall McLuhan's years at SLU, he became friends with the young philosophy professor Bernard Muller-Thym, who had completed his doctoral dissertation in medieval philosophy under the French Thomistic philosopher Etienne Gilson at St. Mike's at the University of Toronto (where McLuhan at a later time taught English).

Muller-Thym's doctoral dissertation was published as the book *The Establishment of the University of Being in the Doctrine of Meister Eckhart of Hochheim* (1939). The Swiss psychiatrist and psychological theorist C. G. Jung was fascinated with Meister Eckhart's work. The contemporary American spirituality writer Matthew Fox has published three books about Meister Eckhart's thought – featuring his own translations of Eckhart's writings. In addition, Fox creatively constructed an interview with Thomas Aquinas about creation spirituality, by

selecting and arraying certain passages from Aquinas' writings in Latin – and translating the passages into English in his creative 1992 book *Sheer Joy: Conversations with Thomas Aquinas on Creation Spirituality*.

Regarding the main title of Fox's creative 1992 book, check out the German Thomist Josef Pieper's short 1990 book *Only the Lover Sings: Art and Contemplation*.

By definition, one's spirituality contributes in manifold ways to one's felt sense that one's life is meaningful, because one's spirituality activates what Jung and his followers refer to as the feeling/valuing function, which involves one's sense of suffering and experiencing reality (explained below).

Digression, I should point out here that what is referred to in the United States today as spirituality involves, to one degree or another, the dimension of the human psyche that Jung and his followers refer to as the Self, which they at times capitalize to differentiate it from the lower-case self that is also known as ego-consciousness. Now, one of Jung's closest disciples was Marie-Louise von Franz. Jung published his magnum opus about alchemy as *Mysterium Coniunctionis* (German orig. in two parts, 1955 and 1956; English translation, 1963, but revised edition, 1970). As a companion volume, Marie-Louise von Franz published a volume that is published in English translation as *Aurora Consurgens: A document Attributed to Thomas Aquinas on the Problem of Opposites in Alchemy* (orig. German/Latin bilingual ed., 1957; orig. English/Latin bilingual ed., 1966). The attribution of that document to Thomas Aquinas has not been widely endorsed by specialists in the thought of Thomas Aquinas.

Nevertheless, in connection with that attribution to Thomas Aquinas, I would call attention to Ong's 1947 *Speculum* article "Wit and Mystery: A Revaluation in Medieval Latin Hymnody,"



which he reprinted in his book *The Barbarian Within: And Other Fugitive Essays and Studies* (1962, pp. 88-130). In his essay Ong examines the liturgical poetry of Adam of St. Victor (died by 1192) and Thomas Aquinas (1224/1225 – 1274). The Canadian literary critic Hugh Kenner, who studied English at St. Mike's at the University of Toronto under Marshall McLuhan, praised Ong's 1947 article rather generously in his 1955 book *Dublin's Joyce*, saying, "Father Ong's essay is required reading for students of *Finnegans Wake*" (p. 144).

Wit is employed in two of the most famous works in Renaissance humanism (in Latin), Erasmus' *Praise of Folly* and Thomas More's *Utopia*, and, as Ong mentions, in metaphysical poetry in English. The point of this digression is that Aquinas' liturgical poetry shows his poetic side in Latin and the Latin work *Aurora Consurgens* involves deeply poetic expression.

Also in connection with the attribution of *Aurora Consurgens* to Thomas Aquinas, I would call attention to Matthew Fox's 550-page creative book *Sheer Joy: Conversations with Thomas Aquinas on Creation Spirituality* (1992), mentioned above. Fox creatively constructs his conversations with Aquinas by posing various questions to him. For Aquinas' responses, Fox draws on a range of Aquinas' publications. The Aquinas who emerges in Fox's book could have been the author of *Aurora Consurgens*. End of digression.

No doubt Muller-Thym served as a resource person for McLuhan in identifying relevant scholarly works to consult for his doctoral dissertation on the history of the verbal arts in Western culture, which he then used to situate the English vernacular writer Thomas Nashe, one of six of Shakespeare's contemporary writers known collectively in literary studies as the university wits, because they were university-educated. In his dissertation McLuhan refers to a

number of works by Gilson and Maritain in his 1943 doctoral dissertation – published posthumously, unrevised but with an editorial apparatus, as the 2009 book *The Classical Trivium: The Place of Thomas Nashe in the Learning of His Time*, edited by W. Terrence Gordon, mentioned above.

Muller-Thym left his position at SLU to serve in the U.S. Navy in World War II. After the war, he went into the consultant business. In the book *Master Minds: Portraits of Contemporary American Artists and Intellectuals* (1969), Richard Kostelanetz devotes a chapter to Muller-Thym and another to McLuhan (even though McLuhan was Canadian).

Now, in 1944, on the occasion of the 100th anniversary of the birth of the Victorian Jesuit poet Gerard Manley Hopkins (1844-1889), who was a convert to Catholicism, McLuhan published the article “The Analogical Mirrors,” which is reprinted in *The Interior Landscape: The Literary Criticism of Marshall McLuhan 1943-1962*, edited by Eugene McNamara (1969, pp. 63-73).

Now, at a later time, the American Jesuit philosophy professor at Saint Louis University George P. Klubertanz published the book *St. Thomas Aquinas on Analogy: A Textual Analysis and Systematic Synthesis* (1960), which Father Ong reviewed in the Jesuit-sponsored magazine *America* (January 28, 1961).

Now, in the book *Varieties of Transcendental Experience: A Study of Constructive Postmodernism* (2000), the American Jesuit philosopher and theologian Donald L. Gelpi works with the contrast between the American Protestant dialectical imagination and the Roman Catholic analogical imagination. No doubt Marshall McLuhan had an analogical imagination.

At a later time in McLuhan's life, as mentioned above, he taught English at St. Mike's at the University of Toronto. In the later 1950s, he and a graduate student in English named Donald Theall (now deceased) slow read and discussed the Canadian Jesuit philosopher and theologian Bernard Lonergan's recently published book *Insight: A Study of Human Understanding* (1957) chapter by chapter. After Lonergan had finished writing it, he was sent by the Jesuits to teach theology at the Jesuit-sponsored Gregorian University in Rome. Thus far, the University of Toronto Press has published twenty-one of the planned twenty-five volumes in the *Collected Works of Bernard Lonergan*. *Insight* is volume three (1992).

Now, the former Catholic seminarian in Rome Michael Novak, who at a later time received the Templeton Prize, published an early book about Lonergan's *Insight*, titled *Belief and Unbelief: A Philosophy of Self-Knowledge* (1965), which was reissued in an expanded second paperback edition by Transaction Publishers in 1994. In the new introduction to the 1994 paperback edition, Novak, who was also familiar with Father Ong's books, sets forth a perceptive critique of the American pragmatist philosopher Richard Rorty:

Rorty thinks that in showing that the mind is not 'the mirror of nature' he has disproved the correspondence theory of truth. What he has really shown is that the activities of the human mind cannot be fully expressed by metaphors based upon the operations of the eye [see Ong on visualist tendencies]. We do not know simply through 'looking at' reality as though our minds were simply mirrors of reality. One needs to be very careful not to confuse the activities of the mind with the operations of any (or all) bodily senses [see Ong's critique of the corpuscular sense of life]. In describing how our minds work, one needs to beware of being bewitched by the metaphors that spring

from the operations of our senses. Our minds are not like our eyes, or, rather, their activities [i.e., the activities of our minds] are far richer, more complex, and more subtle than those of our eyes. It is true that we often say, on getting the point, 'Oh, I see!' But putting things together and getting the point normally involve a lot more than 'seeing,' and all that we need to do to get to that point can scarcely be met by following the imperative, 'Look!' Even when the point, once grasped, may seem to have been (as it were) right in front of us all along, the reasons why it did not dawn upon us immediately may be many, including the fact that our imaginations were ill-arranged, so that we were expecting and 'looking for' the wrong thing. To get to the point at which the evidence finally hits us, we may have to undergo quite a lot of dialectical argument and self-correction (p. xv).

Ong's critique of the corpuscular sense of life can be found in his massively researched 1958 book *Ramus, Method, and the Decay of Dialogue: From the Art of Discourse to the Art of Reason [in Ramus and Subsequently in the Age of Reason]* (pp. 65-66, 72, 146, 171, 196, 203, 210, and possibly 286), mentioned above.

Now, with the publication of the books *The Gutenberg Galaxy: The Making of Typographic Man* (1962), mentioned above, and *Understanding Media: The Extensions of Man* (1964), Marshall McLuhan somehow skyrocketed to extraordinary fame -- even in the WASP-dominated prestige culture in American culture at the time. In short, he had his proverbial 15 minutes of fame.

In two notable publications, Father Ong expressed strong praise for *The Gutenberg Galaxy*.

However, in the “Bibliographic Note” to his 1967 encyclopedia article on the written transmission of literature, Ong qualifies his previous sweeping praise for it by saying that “McLuhan gives a racy survey, indifferent to some scholarly detail, but uniquely valuable in suggesting the sweep and depth of the cultural and psychological changes entailed in the passage from illiteracy to print and beyond” (Ong, 2002, p. 343). That strikes me as a fair assessment of *The Gutenberg Galaxy*.

But Marshall McLuhan was also subjected to an intensely hostile backlash by certain highly articulate academics, some of whom may have been motivated by envy of his proverbial 15 minutes of fame – or perhaps they felt deeply threatened by something he said, or by their understanding of something he said. In part, perhaps some of the hostility directed toward McLuhan was a reaction to his analogical imagination. (In part, some of the hostility was due to his at times inconsistent understanding of formal causality. When he refers to the “effects” of the media, most people understandably think in terms of “cause and effect” as we usually understand efficient causality, but he claims that he is studying formal causality and means by “effects” the effects of formal causality, not efficient causality. Even so, I would note here that he at times refers to the classicist Eric A. Havelock’s book *Preface to Plato* [Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1963] as though it supports his [McLuhan’s] own claims about the supposed “effects” formal causality. But Havelock works with efficient causality, not formal causality.)

To this day, the academic guardians of the prestige culture in American culture who serve as critical gatekeepers can be described as intellectual snobs (to paraphrase Spiro Agnew). Nevertheless, the intensely hostile backlash against Marshall McLuhan was extraordinary.

Because the American Jesuit cultural historian and theorist Walter J. Ong is my favorite scholar, I want to say here that he represents a Roman Catholic who had a somewhat different view from Marshall McLuhan's. For example, Ong published the foreword in the book *Pius XII and Technology* (1962, pp. vii-x). Incidentally, the main library at Saint Louis University, built in the early 1960s, is named the Pius XII Memorial Library, because Pope Pius XII gave permission to film the Vatican library's manuscript holdings – over 11,000,000 manuscript pages.

In Ong's 1969 article "Communications Media and the State of Theology," he critiques the Marxist theorist Herbert Marcuse's widely read book *One-Dimensional Man* (1964). In the main text, Ong says, "Marxist theory is a response to the same [agonistic] pattern, for the Marxist view of life is not merely temporarily or provisionally contentious, but essentially and permanently contentious, as is evident from Mao Tse-tung to Herbert Marcuse, who complains in *One-Dimensional Man* (1964, pp. 31-34) that something is awry when the laboring class has its needs satisfied and can no longer express itself in full negativity" (Ong, 1969, pp. 472-473).

Then in footnote 10, Ong says that following: "Professor Marcuse's position, like that of many Marxists and many European scholars, Marxists and others, appears to be that of a widely read and thoughtful spectator rather than that of a participant in the industrial activity about which he writes. This gives perhaps a certain 'objectivity,' but to those who have participated it also gives the impression that the human dimensions of industrial actuality elude the analysis and severely limit its applicability if not its relevance" (p. 480n.10).

Ong, "Communications Media and the State of Theology" in the Special Issue of the journal

*Cross Currents* (Fall 1969), titled *Theology in the City of Man*, edited by John W. Padberg, S.J. Ong's 1969 article "Communications Media and the State of Theology" is reprinted in volume one of Ong's *Faith and Contexts*, edited by Thomas J. Farrell and Paul A. Soukup (1992a, pp. 154-174). It is also reprinted in *Media, Culture, and Catholicism*, edited by Paul A. Soukup (1996, pp. 3-20).

Of course, Marxist theorists also tended to be atheists who are also anti-religion. By contrast, Father Ong tends to be a cheerleader for Team Catholic, which included cheering for McLuhan's 1951 book *The Mechanical Bride: Folklore of Industrial Man* in his (Ong's) 1952 review essay about it: "The Mechanical Bride: Christen the Folklore of Industrial Man" in the now-defunct journal *Social Order* (Saint Louis University) (February 1952). Ong's 1952 review essay was later reprinted with a different title in the book *McLuhan Hot and Cool: A Critical Symposium with a Rebuttal by McLuhan*, edited by Gerald Emanuel Stearn (1967, pp. 82-92).

Now, in the first part of Eric McLuhan's 2015 book *The Sensus Communis, Synesthesia, and the Soul: An Odyssey*, he ably explains a number of key ideas that appear in his father's publications. In the spirit of giving credit where credit is due, I want to praise Eric McLuhan for tracking down various pre-Christian ancient sources of what eventually emerged historically in the Christian tradition of thought. In addition, he demonstrates that he can enlist various papal statements in support of points he is making. In this respect, he far surpasses Father Ong as a cheerleader for Team Catholic.

Of course, it remains to be seen if Team Catholic will be interested in his 2015 book. But I wouldn't bet on it, because Team Catholic at least in the United States did not significantly

differentiate itself from Team Non-Catholic in the United States in responding to Marshall McLuhan. Oftentimes, he compounded the situation by speaking and/or writing as though a word to the wise were sufficient – a tendency that some of his critics noted and described as “oracular.”

But oftentimes Marshall McLuhan was expressing what Lonergan refers to as insights. When I grasp somebody else’s insight, I have an “ah-ha” experience – I get it. But when I do not yet quite grasp somebody else’s insight, there is not a lot that can be done for me – I just don’t get it.

However, to point out the obvious, even if you grasp Marshall McLuhan’s various points, you do not necessarily have to agree with him about those points – Ong, for example, did not always agree with McLuhan’s points. Moreover, McLuhan himself actually encouraged people to consider what he is saying as “probes” (his term) – in effect, as brainstorming.

But it remains for me to try to spell out exactly what both Ong and McLuhan claim that differentiates both of them from Lonergan and from virtually everybody else on Team Catholic and Team Non-Catholic.

In the terminology of Aristotelian-Thomistic philosophy, both Ong and McLuhan suggest that external material technologies of the word may work, in effect, as instrumental efficient causes – or in plain English, as contributing factors – in our inner noetic economy. Naturally, this suggestion is debatable.

Please note that I say “in effect” here to signal that I am the one saying this, not Ong nor



McLuhan. Of course, both of them were familiar with Aristotelian-Thomistic philosophy. No doubt each of them had heard of an instrumental efficient cause.

Perhaps an analogy is in order here. When I turn the light switch to the “on” position, the light switch thereby functions as the instrumental efficient cause of the light going on. But, of course, the electric current is the real efficient cause of the light going on. No electric current, no light – regardless of the position of the switch.

Now, Ong’s thought about this is extremely tricky. For Ong, phonetic alphabetic writing systems may work as instrumental efficient causes contributing to possible noetic developments. However, he leaves himself enough wiggle room to avoid claiming that they necessarily work in such-and-such ways. For if they necessarily worked in such-and-such ways, then he would be claiming that they work as efficient causes. But if he were to say that they always and everywhere work as efficient causes, then just one example of where they do not work in that hypothetical way would suffice to refute such an erroneous claim. No doubt Ong’s work is tricky to understand in this respect. Thus, when phonetic alphabetic writing systems work in certain ways that Ong undertakes to describe to the best of his ability, then they work in the ways he describes to the best of his abilities. But when evidence is brought forward of examples of when phonetic alphabetic writing systems do not work in the ways Ong describes to the best of his ability, then he attributes the counter-evidence to oral residue. In this admittedly trick way, Ong avoids constructing a one-size-fits-all-examples explanation – a Procrustean bed, as it were.

Gelpi regularly refers to the American Protestant dialectical imagination as involving either-or

thinking and to the Roman Catholic analogical imagination as involving both-and thinking. Both Ong and McLuhan often work with bipolar contrasts, which by definition involve either-or contrasts. But both Ong and McLuhan set up mutually exclusive contrasts (either this or that) so that they can accommodate the spirit of what Gelpi refers to as both-and, but not necessarily the spirit of what he means by either-or.

For example, McLuhan works with the contrast figure/ground. This is one example of an either-or contrast, because something is either figure or ground. But the same something cannot be both figure and ground in the same way at the same time. Therefore, whatever is figure is not ground, and whatever is ground is not figure. This is a dialectical contrast.

I suppose that yin and yang is one of the most widely known dialectical contrasts.

Incidentally, what Gelpi refers to as the American Protestant dialectical imagination involves what Ong describes as the spirit of Ramist dialectic. Evidently, Gelpi was not familiar with Ong's work.

Thus far, I have used terminology from Aristotelian-Thomistic philosophy to discuss the distinction between an instrumental efficient cause and an efficient cause. Next, I want to discuss act and potency. Act actuate potency. But potency is not known unless and until it is actuated. In other words, human potential is not known unless and until it is actuated in act. Most of my professional publications are about actuating human potential. The human potential movement in psychology associated with Jean Houston is devoted to calling attention to human potential and inasmuch as it may be possible promoting the actualization of human potential.

For all practical purposes, Martha C. Nussbaum develops this idea in her own terminology in

her book *Women and Human Development: The Capabilities Approach* (2000). Basically, she is an Aristotelian. See, for example, her article “Human Functioning and Social Justice: In Defense of Aristotelian Essentialism” in the journal *Political Theory* (May 1992).

Yes, in the broad Aristotelian-Thomistic tradition in philosophy, human nature is described as the essence of each human person. See, for example, the Canadian Jesuit Lonergan scholar Frederick E. Crowe’s 1965 article “Neither Jew nor Greek, but One Human Nature and Operation in All,” which is reprinted, slightly revised in the anthology titled *Communication and Lonergan: Common Ground for Forging the New Age*, edited by Thomas J. Farrell and Paul A. Soukup (1993, pp. 89-107).

Now, as noted above, Havelock in his 1963 *Preface to Plato* and elsewhere works with straightforward efficient causality, suggesting the vowelized alphabetic phonetic writing system developed in ancient Greek culture somehow served as the efficient cause that actuated the human potential for the kind of abstract thinking as exemplified in Plato and Aristotle.

But it has been said that all of Western philosophy is a series of footnotes to Plato, including presumably the American Enlightenment and the Declaration of Independence and our experiment in representative democracy. Figuratively speaking, we Americans are living footnotes to Plato.

But I have intimated that I prefer Ong’s wiggle room. In other words, I prefer to say that the vowelized alphabetic phonetic writing system developed in ancient Greek culture was an instrumental efficient cause – in plain English, a contributing factor -- in the actuation of the

kind of abstract philosophical thinking as exemplified in Plato and Aristotle. Another significant contributing factor involves the matrix of pre-Socratic thought in ancient Greek culture. In short, I stand with Nussbaum in defense of Aristotelian essentialism.

Now, somebody like the learned Rabbi Lord Jonathan Sacks, the recent recipient of the Templeton Prize, and a cheerleader of Team Jewish, may want to argue that the phonetic alphabetic writing system used in the Hebrew Bible also helped actuated certain human potential for the kind of rich thinking expressed in the Hebrew Bible that he excels in interpreting creatively and admirably. I have no problem with also saying that the phonetic alphabetic writing system used in the Hebrew Bible was an instrumental efficient cause – in plain English, a significant contributing factor – in the actuation of the kind of monotheistic thinking exemplified in the Hebrew Bible.

Next, I should also discuss the actuation of human potential in what Ong refers to as primary oral cultures (i.e., pre-literate and pre-historic cultures). According to the Lonergan scholar Crowe, all people in primary oral cultures shared in our human nature and used the cognitive activities of their human nature. Ah, but what human potential did they actuate, if any?

I am only going to take a broad view here. The German scholar Max Weber (1864-1920) helped popularize the expression the disenchantment of the world. But a supposed disenchantment of the world presupposes an earlier enchantment of the world. Now, people in primary oral cultures actuated the human potential for the enchantment of the world.

The German Thomist Josef Pieper has called attention to Thomas Aquinas' distinction between two kinds of knowledge: (1) properly theoretical, conceptual knowledge (i.e., philosophical knowledge in the Western tradition of philosophy), knowledge *per cognitionem*,

and (2) knowledge based upon existential affinity (knowledge through “suffering” and experiencing reality), knowledge *per connaturalitatem*. But knowledge through suffering and experiencing reality is reminiscent of Aeschylus’ famous expression about learning through suffering. However, the Lonergan scholar Crowe claims that all human persons have the same human nature. Therefore, all human persons have the potential to acquire knowledge through suffering and experiencing reality.

Of course, all human persons may also have the potential to acquire properly theoretical, conceptual knowledge in the Western tradition of philosophical knowledge.

But the human potential to acquire knowledge through suffering and experiencing reality is basically involved actuating the human potential for the enchantment of the world.

Basically, the enchantment of the world involves what is known today in the United States as spirituality. For short, I will refer now to the activization of the sense of the enchantment of the world as the activization of the sense of connection consciousness, as distinct from the de-activization of the sense of connection consciousness in the disenchantment of the world (also known as secularism). But I should also note here that the enchantment of the world is a creative human construct, just as is the disenchantment of the world. In theory at least, humans today could construct new ways in which they engage actively in the enchantment of the world. Actually, the human spirit for constructing ways in which to actively engage in the enchantment of the world has never really died, but it has not fared well in the prestige culture in American culture because certain secularist tastemakers and gatekeepers prefer to denigrate whatever they consider to be at odds with their preferred disenchantment of the world. But don’t secularists also engage in secularist spirituality?

Digression: After I had written the bulk of the present essay about connection consciousness in connection with Eric McLuhan's 2015 book *The Sensus Communis, Synesthesia, and the Soul: An Odyssey*, I read the lay American Catholic columnist Michael Sean Winters' impassioned and multi-directional column titled "How to vault Catholic social teaching from 'best kept secret category'" (dated February 21, 2024) at the *National Catholic Reporter* website.

Now, what I refer to in the present essay as connection consciousness in the historical larger Roman Catholic tradition of thought is part of the intellectual background out of which explicit Catholic social teaching emerged in the late nineteenth century. Concerning Catholic social teaching, see the lay English Catholic theologian Anna Rowlands' book *Towards a Politics of Communion: Catholic Social Teaching in Dark Times* (2021) and the lay American Catholic economist Anthony M. Annett's book *Cathonomics: How Catholic Tradition Can Create a More Just Economy* (2022). End of digression.

Now, years after Marshall McLuhan died in 1980, the University of Toronto Press published the book *Laws of Media: The New Science* co-authored by Marshall McLuhan and Eric McLuhan (1988). In the preface (pp. vi-xi), Eric McLuhan says, "The key to the whole business [of the book] is sensibility, as the serious poets and artists (and grammarians) have always maintained. [Giambattista] Vico in particular targeted 'the modification of our human minds' as the crucial area, while he cast about for a way to read and write the mental dictionary.' Then the relation between [Francis] Bacon's idols and Vico's axioms surfaced – bias of perception – and the job was done. Bacon called his book the *Novum Organum* (or *Novum Organon*, as a swat at Aristotle's followers), the *New Science*; Vico called his the *Science Nuova*, the *New Science*; I have subtitled ours *The New Science*" (pp. x-xi).

Basically, Eric McLuhan's 2015 book *The Sensus Communis, Synesthesia, and the Soul: An Odyssey* is about connection consciousness in the Roman Catholic tradition of thought. But his short book is not massively researched, to say the least. Here are some relevant scholarly references that he does not happen to advert to explicitly.

(1) Lonergan's book *Verbum: Word and Idea in Aquinas* (1967; reprinted as volume 2 of the *Collected Works of Bernard Lonergan* [1997]). The five chapters in this book were originally published as a series of articles in the 1940s in the Jesuit-sponsored journal *Theological Studies*. In Ong's 1962 book *The Barbarian Within: And Other Fugitive Essays and Studies*, Ong refers to one of Lonergan's articles in *Theological Studies* in 1946 (p. 127n.50 and p. 128n.59).

(2) In the Roman Catholic tradition of thought, the doctrine of the divine trinity includes referring to the supposed God-man Jesus the Christ (also known as the Messiah) as the Word (in English; capitalized; Greek, *Logos*; Latin, *Verbum*) and the Son (also capitalized) and the Second Person of the Divine Trinity. The tradition regarding the capitalized Greek term *Logos* is based on the prologue in the Gospel According to John, which in turn traces back to a usage by Philo the Jew of Alexandria.

(3) Concerning the historical debate out of which decisive features of thought in the Roman Catholic tradition emerged, see my article "Early Christian Creeds and Controversies in the Light of the Orality-Literacy Hypothesis" in the journal *Oral Tradition* (1987).

(4) Ong's book *The Presence of the Word: Some Prolegomena for Cultural and Religious History* (Yale University Press, 1967), mentioned above, the expanded version of Ong's 1964

Terry Lectures at Yale's Divinity School.

(5) Ong's important article "World as View and World as Event" in the journal the *American Anthropologist* (August 1969). What Ong describes as the world-as-event sense of life is manifested in connection consciousness. Ong's important 1969 article "World as View and World as Event" is reprinted in volume three of Ong's *Faith and Contexts*, edited by Thomas J. Farrell and Paul A. Soukup (Scholars Press, 1995, pp. 69-90). I discuss Ong's important 1969 article "World as View and World as Event" at length in my article "Walter Ong and Harold Bloom can help us understand the Hebrew Bible" in *Explorations in Media Ecology* (2012). For a related discussion of the Hebrew Bible, see James L. Kugel's book *The Great Shift: Encountering God in Biblical Times* (2017).

For a perceptive account of connection consciousness in one indigenous Canadian group, see the anthropologist David M. Smith's 1997 essay "World as Event: Aspects of Chipewyan Ontology" that is reprinted in the ambitious anthology *Of Ong and Media Ecology: Essays in Communication, Composition, and Literary Studies*, edited by Thomas J. Farrell and Paul A. Soukup (2012).

Also see T. C. McLuhan's book *Touch the Earth: A Self-Portrait of [American] Indian Existence* (1971), and Edward S. Curtis, A. D. Coleman, and T. C. McLuhan's book *Portraits from North American Indian Life* (1972). T. C. McLuhan is one of Eric McLuhan's sisters.

(6) Hans Urs von Balthasar's book *Presence and Thought: An Essay on the Religious Philosophy of Gregory of Nyssa* (1995).

(7) Robert Sokolowski's book *Eucharistic Presence: A Study in the Theology of Disclosure* (1994).

(8) Hans Belting's book *Likeness and Presence: A History of the Image before the Era of Art* (1994).

(9) The Dutch Jesuit theologian Frans Jozef van Beeck's book that is in effect about



connection consciousness, *Christ Proclaimed: Christology as Rhetoric* (1979).

(10) Frans Jozef van Beeck's article "Divine Revelation: Intervention or Self-Communication?" in the Jesuit-sponsored journal *Theological Studies* (1991).

(11) The Lutheran biblical scholar Werner H. Kelber's article "Walter Ong's Three Incarnations of the Word: Orality – Literacy – Technology" in the journal *Philosophy Today* (1979). For a major collection of Kelber's essays over the years, see the book *Imprints, Voiceprints, and Footprints of Memory: Collected Essays of Werner H. Kelber* (2013).

(12) William Craig Forrest's 335-page doctoral dissertation *Literary Kinesthesia* (Saint Louis University, 1960). Ong served as the director of Forrest's dissertation.

Ong refers to it in his book *Interfaces of the Word: Studies in the Evolution of Culture and Consciousness* (1977, p. 131).

(13) John D. Schaeffer's book *Sensus Communis: Vico, Rhetoric, and the Limits of Relativism* (1990).

Ong also served as the director of Schaeffer's doctoral dissertation on a certain aspect of Thomas More's thought.

(14) Schaeffer also published the article "From Natural Religion to Natural Law in Vico: Rhetoric, Poetic, and Vico's Imaginative Universals" in *Rhetorica: A Journal of the History of Rhetoric* (Winter 1997).

(15) More recently, Schaeffer published the two-volume work titled *A Translation from Latin into English of Giambattista Vico's Il Diritto/ Universal Law* (2011).

(16) A. N. Williams' book *The Divine Sense: The Intellect in Patristic Theology* (2007).

(17) Norman Russell's book *The Doctrine of Deification in the Greek Patristic Tradition* (2004).

(18) A. N. Williams' book *The Ground of Union: Deification in Aquinas and Palamas* (1999).

(19) Bernhard Blankenhorn's book *The Mystery of Union with God: Dionysian Mysticism in*

*Albert the Great and Thomas Aquinas* (2015). Dionysian mysticism refers to the work of the author known as Denys the Areopagite.

(20) Daria Spezzano's book *The Glory of God's Grace: Deification According to St. Thomas Aquinas* (2015).

(21) Johannes Hoff's book *The Analogical Turn: Rethinking Modernity with Nicholas of Cusa* (2013).

(22) Robert A. Orsi's book *History and Presence* (2016).

(23) Marcia Pally's book *Commonwealth and Covenant: Economics, Politics, and Theologies of Relationality* (2016).

(24) Ong's book *Hopkins, the Self, and God* (1986), the published version of Ong's 1981 Alexander Lectures at the University of Toronto.

(25) The French Jesuit paleontologist and spirituality writer Pierre Teilhard de Chardin's book that is in effect about connection consciousness, *The Divine Milieu* (2004).

(26) Pierre Teilhard de Chardin's ambitious book about evolutionary theory, *The Human Phenomenon* (1999). But also see Edward O. Dodson's book *The Phenomenon of Man Revisited: A Biological Viewpoint on Teilhard de Chardin* (1984).

(27) The American Catholic philosophy professor and spirituality writer Beatrice Bruteau's book *The Psychic Grid: How We Create the World We Know* (1979).

(28) The English lay Catholic theologian Anna Rowlands' book *Towards a Politics of Communion: Catholic Social Teaching in Dark Times* (T&T Clark, 2021), mentioned above – the main title of which reminds us of the connection consciousness I have been detailing in the present essay.

Now, in the book *The Duality of Human Existence: An Essay on Psychology and Religion* (1966), David Bakan, a Jewish faculty member in psychology at the University of Chicago,

describes the duality of human existence (remember Aquinas' and Pieper's existential affinity) in terms of (1) agency and (2) communion. Connection consciousness involves the sense of communion, and so does Aquinas' knowledge *per connaturalitatem*. As you can see, I have not listed any relevant scholarly studies about non-Christian traditions regarding knowledge *per connaturalitatem*.

Now, in what Ong refers to as primary oral cultures (such as the pre-historic cultures of our small-group hunter-gatherer ancestors), and in residual forms of primary oral cultures (such as medieval Europe), what Bakan refers to as communion was alive and well. In addition, in the Roman Catholic tradition of thought to this day, the spirit of communion and connection consciousness is still expressed in residual forms of thought from medieval Catholicism. In Eric McLuhan's under-researched 2015 book *The Sensus Communis, Synesthesia, and the Soul: An Odyssey*, he in effect reminds us of the spirit of communion and connection consciousness in the Roman Catholic tradition of thought.

Now, thanks to extraordinary media coverage, Pope Francis has emerged as a media celebrity – but not to the extraordinary extent to which Marshall McLuhan emerged as a media celebrity in the 1960s and 1970s. Pope Francis' 2015 eco-encyclical *Laudato Si'* is undoubtedly the most widely read encyclical letter ever issued by a pope. Even though a case can be made for relating the pope's 2015 eco-encyclical to connection consciousness, an even stronger case can be made for relating Pope Francis' 2020 encyclical *Fratelli Tutti* (Siblings All) to connection consciousness.

For further discussion of Pope Francis 2020 encyclical *Fratelli Tutti*, see Cardinal Michael Czerny and Father Christian Barone's 2022 book *Siblings All, Sign of the Times: The Social*

*Teaching of Pope Francis*, translated by Julian Paparella (orig. Italian ed., 2021).

In any event, Pope Francis' widely publicized strafing of capitalism grows out of his understanding of the Roman Catholic tradition of thought about the spirit of communion and connection consciousness. Even Senator Bernie Sanders of Vermont, who is Jewish, commended Pope Francis for strafing of capitalism.

I have incisively profiled the doctrinally conservative Pope Francis in my *OEN* article "Pope Francis on Evil and Satan" (dated March 24, 2019): [https://www.opednews.com/articles/Pope-Francis-on-Evil-and-S-by-Thomas-Farrell-Abortion\\_Catholic\\_God\\_Homosexuality-190324-51.html](https://www.opednews.com/articles/Pope-Francis-on-Evil-and-S-by-Thomas-Farrell-Abortion_Catholic_God_Homosexuality-190324-51.html)

However, apart from the media coverage that the pope's strafing of capitalism has garnered for him, the deeper underlying issue informing his criticisms of capitalism involves the spirit of communion and connection consciousness. Even so, certain conservative American Catholics have been vociferous in their anti-Francis rhetoric.

See the Italian Catholic philosopher and papal biographer Massimo Borghesi's book *Catholic Discordance: Neoconservatism vs. the Field Hospital Church of Pope Francis*, translated by Barry Hudock (2021; orig. Italian ed., 2021). For further reading about neoconservatism, see (1) Peter Steinfels' book *The Neoconservatives: The Men Who Are Changing America's Politics* (1979); and (2) Gary Dorrien's book *The Neoconservative Mind: Politics, Culture, and the War of Ideology* (1993).

Finally, I should point out that certain academics feel under the gun to publish or perish. But if somebody holds a gun to your head and says, "Your money or your life," you will feel that your

life is threatened. Perhaps certain academics feel that they will indeed perish, at least figuratively speaking, if they don't publish.

But Eric McLuhan was not under the gun to publish his 2015 book *The Sensus Communis, Synesthesia, and the Soul: An Odyssey*. Nor am I under the gun to publish the present essay. (I retired from the University of Minnesota Duluth at the end of May 2009.)

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