ALFRED KORZYBSKI MEMORIAL LECTURE 1990

No Dinosaurs on the Ark
Science, Language and Art in Evolving Human Culture

by

Warren Robbins
Founder of the National Museum of African Art and of the Center for Cross-Cultural Communication

[At the Yale Club of New York City, November 30, 1990]

Editor’s Note:

Mr. Robbins’ lecture was actually two separate lectures which he related with a title encompassing his life-long interest in both communication and art. The first part was a presentation of his own pedagogical approach to the problems of education and communication addressed by General Semantics. Part II was a separate, but not unrelated, slide presentation of African art in juxtaposition with works by Picasso, Klee, and other 20th century artists who were heavily influenced by African art.

The text of Part I has been cast in a “Cubist Poetry” format devised by Robbins to connote emphasis and subordination of ideas by placement and spacing on the page, suggesting intonation and pace characteristic of aural presentations. If this format had been converted by the editors of the Bulletin to conventional rectangular page-filling form, it would have failed ignominiously to reproduce for readers the tempo and flavor of its original presentation. “The whole idea of the format,” Robbins says, “is to have the reader ‘hear’ what is being silently read.”

Robbins’ informal, less than rigorous use of terms such as is (of identity), mind, reality, idea, spiritual, essence, psyche, concept, etc. caused the editors some consternation for neuro-linguistic or general epistemological reasons. But we decided that, since we could never have either put together such a lecture-picture-show, or rewritten his text in non-Aristotelian “correctness”, the best course was to say simply: here it is, get some of the ‘feel’ of it. And for the rest, you would have had to have been there!

Just as Marshall McLuhan’s “Medium is the Message”

one might well observe
that the title of this presentation alone
— all by itself —
is broad enough
to constitute my message

suggesting as it does
treatment of the full gamut of human experience

— and all within 30 minutes.
Indeed, the title was chosen to reflect
the inter-connectedness and interplay
of its several components:

Science, Language, Art, and Culture

(we'll get to Noah and the Dinosaurs later).

But mainly, the title is intended
as a frame of reference
for observations I would make
concerning cross cultural communication

with Africa in relation to European civilization
as the case in point.

My presentation will be in two parts
separate but related:

Part I:

an informal and somewhat personal
recounting of ideas that address
what I believe is the single most crucial
educational problem of our time:

How to reorient public thinking;

how to turn people's minds around
so that they become disposed
to evaluating the roots of their beliefs
according to 20th century criteria of understanding

instead of rejecting or resisting modern (scientific) understanding
on the basis of historically more limited
and perforce more naive perspectives of the past
that people hold fast to.

In searching for an effective approach
to this pedagogical dilemma,
in several facets of my own work in public education
during the past 40 years

I have integrated the ideas
of three important 20th century social scientists,
all now deceased,
who have influenced me:

The first: those of Alfred Korzybski
on language in relation to science
and what he defines as sanity for our century.
The second: the work of Leslie A. White who was for many years Chairman of the Department of Anthropology at the University of Michigan and pre-eminent today in the American school of Cultural Anthropology.

White founded his own discipline: culturology which focuses not so much on the human being as the maker of culture, the emphasis of cultural anthropology, as on culture itself, operating according to its own rules of evolutionary development (thus: culturology).

The third: the ideas of Social Psychologist Hadley Cantril whose Perception Centers at Dartmouth and Princeton universities have demonstrated in the most conclusive way that assumption determines perception, not the other way around ("Believing is seeing," not "Seeing is believing").

Together the writings of these three scientists comprise, I believe, a comprehensive approach to understanding the human being in relation to modern life and a prototype orientation for modern education (Education for What is Real, as Earl Kelley titled his important little book of some years ago).

Part II of my presentation concerns art as a manifestation of human creativity in whatever culture it finds expression, in this case traditional African culture. Mostly visual, this part of my presentation will deal specifically with how the sculpture of Africa, never made as "art" per se
and originally functioning
within its indigenous culture
as a socio-religious — and therefore political —
tool of communication
has taken on an entirely new communicative function
as historical circumstances
have projected it across cultural boundaries
to influence profoundly and in the most direct way
the modern art of the Western world.

I myself am the youngest of eleven children
and, as you can well imagine,
I grew up with a compelling need to communicate
to be heard
to have my very existence acknowledged

(not very easy
when you’re the youngest of eleven children).

My earliest interest in personal communication (or lack of it)
led to a concern for problems of communication barrier in general
between parents and children;
teachers and pupils;
and among siblings, groups, cultures, nations.
This in turn led me
to the investigation of language:

semantics in general as distinguished from
the more specific “General Semantics”.

I was introduced to General Semantics
during graduate study
at the University of Michigan
where, although a history major,
I was doing ancillary work
in Cultural Anthropology
under Leslie White’s tutelage

Specifically, I encountered the subject in 1947
in reading Stuart Chase’s The Tyranny of Words
then, S.I. Hayakawa’s Language in Action.

* [more accurately] linguistic semantics as distinguished from the more far-reaching “General Semantics”. [Ed.]
Ultimately I became acquainted with Korzybski's own writings at the 1950 GS Seminar at Great Barrington

(Korzybski himself was no longer alive then but I did meet the artist/educator Harry Holtzman).

My introduction to General Semantics marked a turning point in my education for it gave me the pedagogical vocabulary I had long been seeking for ideas dormant within me.

For this very personal reason, it is a special privilege to have been included in this illustrious lecture series memorializing Korzybski's contribution to modern understanding.

I do not presume to include myself among such milestone 20th century minds as F.S.C. Northrup, Lancelot Whyte, J. Bronowski or Ashley Montagu among others noted in the announcement as previous lecturers in the series or Buckminster Fuller and Henry Lee Smith who, like Hayakawa and Holtzman, were personal mentors of mine.

Though I haven't been "in the classroom" for forty years I regard myself as a teacher still, considering my function in the 20th century educative process to be that of an interpreter of the fundamental ideas of the great teachers of scientific understanding who have influenced me, helping to bridge the gap — that cultural lag of 50-75 years — between the point where a key concept is introduced in culture by some genius (here defined as a person of exceptional capacity who is on the scene when culture in its own evolution is ready for important ideas of the past to be synthesized and built upon) and the time when that idea comes to pervade public understanding.
Consider, for example, the concept of Cultural Relativism the handmaiden of Democracy now widely put into practice as “doing your own thing.”

We have now bridged that gap in our society but what we seem to have ended up with is cultural relativism run amuck —

in which there has been a capitulation of standards by which to govern our thoughts and behavior and a gross misinterpretation by the public of both the requisites and the rewards of a democratic society.

Even Einstein was not an unqualified relativist.

He recognized well the need for standards and even he had to get an absolute fix on the universe to attach his theory to.

Or think of Korzybski’s educationally vital differentiation between assumption and conclusion best translated into present-day parlance as “I see where you’re coming from.”

(The mere use of that phrase by the public can be seen as representing real progress in overcoming cultural lag).

And to report on the very up-to-date, consider what is now called “Reality Erosion” as in the case of the Milli Vanilli tapes in which the public has soundly denounced these rock musicians for the creation of a false reality when they lip-synched their own vocals.

Such public denunciation can also be looked upon as progress.
Could we have here the beginnings
of popular recognition
of the dangers inherent
in the use of the “is” of identity?

Up till now, anyone could become
a “Wizard of Is”
and create his own reality.

This is all very different of course
from negative reality:

“Ain’t nobody here but us chickens,”
said the fox.

But that’s simply lying.

And now, I read that
they’re even digging up
an archeologist is actually excavating
in a desert in California
the mammoth set of Cecil B. De Mille’s
1923 silent film “The Ten Commandments”.

Must this not be seen
as a highly responsible thing to do
when one considers
the havoc that could be wrought
in future academic speculation
if archaeologists of 3000 or 4000 AD
were to discover huge statues of Ramses II
and his Queen —
in California
10,000 miles away from Egypt.

Which ones would be the originals?

Does all this portend well for the future?
Will the public become
linguistically more sophisticated?

(Sometimes understanding is enhanced
through negative example.)
The late Nobel prize-winning German physicist Werner Heisenberg warns us in his *Principles of Quantum Theory*:

One should particularly remember that human language permits the construction of sentences which do not involve any consequences and which therefore have no content at all—in spite of the fact that these sentences produce some kind of picture in our imaginations...one should be especially careful in using the words “reality,” “actuality,” etc....

There is a story of a little boy, a deaf mute who never spoke a single word all the seven years of his young life. Nevertheless, his mother cared for him with undiminished love and tenderness. One morning as she brought him his breakfast at the dining room table, he suddenly said:

“Take this damn lousy oatmeal back to the kitchen.”

“Sweetheart,” she exclaimed,

“You can speak! I’m thrilled; I’m overjoyed!”

“But tell me,” she said,

“why didn’t you ever say anything before now?”

“Well,” he replied, “up till now, everything has been okay.”

Well, we know that in our 20th century world, everything is far from okay.

Gyorgy Kepes, in his essay “Scale, Structure and Rhythm” put it this way:

There is an increasing hopelessness among many of the most sensitive and best equipped minds today. Resultless efforts have led them to conclude that whatever their honesty and knowledge, they cannot tame the fury of approaching social disasters. They live in a tense barrenness as their best feelings, their cleanest purposes and most passionate efforts become only a mockery.

And an old Arab proverb reflects such despair more concisely:

If your surroundings have gone mad
Your reason will be of no use to you.

Yet the times we are living in for all their faults and failures are possibly the most exciting that have yet been experienced...
during the still very brief period
that the human being has been on hand in the universe.

For we are participating
in a tremendous acceleration of knowledge.

Force-fed by science,
it is a phenomenon which, it should be stressed,
is not a thing apart from nature
but is itself an aspect of nature.

Contrary to the belief of many people,
man is not the enemy of nature.

Nor does science represent simply
man's attempt to do battle with nature,
to control and exploit it.

What others do with what science learns
is not to the detriment of science.

You can't blame an apple tree
because mean little boys
throw at each other,
the fruit it bears.

Science too
represents nature in operation.

Working through the collective, cumulative human mind,
nature changes itself.

Through science,
nature is creating
a qualitatively different
kind of human being.

"Time-binding"
is Korzybski's term for this process of
language enabled, language ennobled,
evolution of human culture.

An invaluable concept, Korzybski's
but so disarmingly simple
as to be often simply not comprehended.

Fostering understanding of what science "is"
in the evolution of human culture
reflects the life's work of the late Leslie White.
In White’s phrase, “science is sciencing,”
a particular way that the human being
can gather, organize, evaluate, utilize, and build upon information.

In the ideal,
science represents the human being functioning
in the most efficient, reasonable, logical, intelligent,
predictable, and honest way.

Yes, honest — for science demands above all
the honesty and integrity of its findings.

Science does not go the way of superstition, hallucination,
belief in witches, exhortation of guardian angels,
exorcism of evil spirits

nor of the irrational confusion
of the “reality” of fantasy (only inside the head)
with “reality” in the verifiable external world.

There is nothing more “real” than an hallucination

or the existence of witches
to those who believe in them.

The question is: WHERE IS THE REALITY?

Just in the world of words
(that Heisenberg warns us of)?

Inside our heads
where we can create reality
with the “is” of identity
but with no necessary reference
to material phenomena?

Or outside of the individual mind
where symbolization
must be put to the test
of observation and reason?

Korzybski equates science with sanity
in the title and in the contents of
his master work Science and Sanity.

For him, science is sanity

if I may violate his own
non-Aristotelian principle
by substituting “is” for “and”
since the system of science
represents the human being functioning
in the most sane way.

Science does not pit "materialist" man
against the "spirituality" that has traditionally been regarded as
an inherent part of the "human psyche."

There is no essential battle between science and religion,
mythologist Joseph Campbell insists.

Religion would represent the recognition
of that deeper dimension in man
that science cannot reveal to us.

But religion holds no monopoly on spirituality
and the rationality of science
is not incompatible with spirituality.

One could cite no better affirmation of this
than in the words of Albert Einstein:

The cosmic religious experience is the strongest, noblest mainspring of scientific research. The most beautiful and profound emotion we can experience is the sensation of the mystical. It is the power of all true science. He to whom this emotion is a stranger, who can no longer wonder and stand rapt in awe, is as good as dead. To know that what is impenetrable to us really exists, manifesting itself as the highest wisdom and the most radiant beauty which our dull faculties can comprehend only in their most primitive forms --- this knowledge, this feeling is at the center of true religiousness.

The real conflict of our time,
Joseph Campbell holds,
is not between religion and science,
but between the science of 2000 years ago
and the science of today.

To elaborate, if I may, upon Campbell's observation:

The spiritual life of the human being
must today follow the lead of science
if, in this age, it is to continue to influence significantly
the evolution of the human mind.

The guiding principles of the spiritually motivated life
may constitute "eternal verities" for us
but the *worldview* as expressed in the conventional vocabulary of spirituality must keep pace with the frontiers of human comprehension, must be consistent with the findings of science as they are continually unfolding in the process of knowledge accumulation and synthesis that is the essence of human culture.

This worldview must *not lag* behind; not 75 years, not 2000 years, not 5000 years.

For it runs counter to what it *means* to be a *human* being and to the process of human culture, if religious values are held to be incompatible with scientific understanding.

It is a false dichotomy that separates the spiritual from the rational.

Human culture results from the interaction of the universal human mind with the accumulated inheritance of the past.

The individual human being, born into history at any given point, assimilates what culture proffers, contributes to the accumulation and changes it with his or her own contribution or even modest presence, the role of the perceiver in the thing perceived being a fundamental tenet of modern physics.

This process of knowledge accumulation, synthesis, and preservation that Korzybski calls “time-binding” is a biological function of our species.

Just as a cow eats grass with her system producing milk, the brain of the human being “chews ideas,” as it were, digests them and produces *new* ideas.

In other words,
in the symbolic language of ideas, 
1 + 1 does not equal 2.

One idea plus a second idea 
does not result in just two ideas 
but in a new, third idea.

Compounded with each new generation, 
“1 + 1 = 3” 
is the basic mathematical formula 
the basic building block 
of cultural evolution.

But some ideas cause us indigestion 
and most people prefer to believe 
that 1 + 1 = only 2.

For such people, the first necessity 
is to recognize 
both within themselves as individuals 
and within human culture as a whole 
the process of cumulative growth.

Into whatever era 
human beings are born, 
they must live in accordance 
with the cumulative understanding of that era.

“Reality” for the human being 
must therefore be seen 
as directly related to culture 
in its own evolutionary process.

“Reality” cannot be established or interpreted 
in terms of the static understanding 
of an earlier place and time in history.

This is one of the most difficult notions 
for people to grasp.

“What is reality anyway?” 
asks Lily Tomlin in the words of Jane Wagner, writer of 
The Search for Signs of Intelligent Life in the Universe.
Possibly as good a social scientist as Tomlin is a social satirist, Wagner’s answer to the question as delivered by Tomlin, is
“Nothing but a collective hunch”.

But “reality” that vast and vague abstraction that human beings project upon their environment must be recognized as an ever-expanding hunch.

“Reality” is determined for each of us as individuals or groups not only by our separate experiences in our lives, our culture, or our histories but also by the characteristic way that different languages structure and determine what human beings perceive.

It is the uniquely human symbolic capacity — the language capability — that enables the human being to both feed into and benefit from the evolution of culture.

No other animal has the ability to conceptualize, to convey concepts to others, and, with audible, written or painted symbols, to pass them on (for better or for worse) from generation to generation.

No other species can do this. (Each generation of cats, for example, must start from scratch.)

To be sure animals can communicate. They can signal, they can use and respond directly to signs.

Dogs, for example, can themselves signal: danger, stay back, I want or they can respond to signals.
A dog can respond to the command “come here.”

But a dog simply cannot comprehend:

“come here on Tuesday...
at 3 o’clock...
and bring your lawyer.”

(He might just show up on Monday
at 11:00 am
and without legal representation.)

In this symbolic capacity
lies not only the origin and the essence
of individual human behavior

but the basis for cultural evolution,
the building block for our evolving “universal reality”
which the human being “is” (or can be) plugged into.

Accordingly, the oldest human being
is not the one among us
who has been alive the longest biologically

but the one who comes the latest (in potential)
in the total span of human existence.

With this idea in mind,
I once addressed to a high school graduating class,
the question:

Are you seventeen
or are you 17,000 years old?

Have you grown up to reach
only your biological age

or are you prepared to be as old as
the recorded history that is available to you?

And if the latter,
are you, in your evolved mind,
only 15,000 years old,
or 12,000 years old?
(let alone, seventeen)

Human beings who are biologically older
but whose beliefs are arrested
at an earlier century’s stage
of cumulative intellectual growth
and "conventional wisdom"
are culturally younger by hundreds or by thousands of years
than those whose understanding rides the rim
of our ever-expanding reality.

On Noah's ark, there were no dinosaurs,
because dinosaurs were not part of
the "reality" of Noah's time.

One cannot deny their existence in the reality of today, however.

That they roamed the earth in earlier eras
is affirmed by their skeletal remains
that have been unearthed
and placed in museums of natural history
the world over.

But for Noah, they simply did not exist.

Should we therefore
continue to root our spirituality
on the mentality and scope of understanding of a Noah
or should we make it compatible
with the understanding of science?

The "reality" of today's world is radically different
from what it was 17,000 years ago
when the first great accelerations of knowledge
began to take place.

It is radically different
from what it was in Noah's time,
or what it was 2,000 years ago
when shepherding societies
were led by wise men

ahead of their own time in their wisdom, to be sure,
but certainly way behind ours
in their understanding of the phenomenon
of being human.

The reality of today is radically different
from what it was in the world of even 300-400 years ago
just before Galileo and Newton
introduced the empirical principles
of modern science

thus changing unalterably
the way the human being evaluated the circumstances
of life and environment.

If those high school students I addressed
were pre-Galileo and pre-Newton
in their thinking
then they were 350 years younger, culturally,
than what they have the potential of being today.

(Actually now, 390 years younger,
since it was 40 years ago
that I spoke to them,
and consider how “reality” has changed
even in only those 40 years!)

Like the individual human being
who grows from infancy to adolescence to adulthood,

humanity itself has been growing from its infancy
to some future adulthood

being today still in its adolescence
and being “dragged kicking and screaming,” as they say,
into what we arbitrarily call the 20th century.

Today we are riding the crest of an almost
incomprehensible exponential curve of knowledge expansion.

This curve is to be seen
in every aspect of modern culture;

in the harnessing and utilization of energy

in population growth

in speed of travel

in explosive power

and most significantly of all
in the increase in learning
by the human being.

It has been the advent of empirical science
that has set in motion
this radical expansion in knowledge

- further accelerated exponentially
- through the automatic printing press;
- the media of radio, film, and television;
- and above all, the computer

  which can gather, assimilate and correlate
  in an hour or a day
  what it formerly took individuals
  lifetimes or more to do.

We are told that there are
more scientists at work today
than in all ages of man combined
prior to our own generation;

- that an estimated 90%
of all the scientists who ever lived
  are living and working today;

- and that knowledge is doubling every six or seven years
  with the rate of increase,
  increasing all the time.

Knowledge expansion has been further enhanced
by the fantastic development of instruments of perception:

- **telescopes** and **space cameras**
to view the outer-reaches of space
  (photography of Saturn 800,000,000 miles away!);

- **atomic microscopes**
enabling us to see not only
  organisms not visible to the naked eye,

    - with their fantastic micro-creatures
      as horrendous as the most frightening
      mythological animals of childhood fantasies

  (any old microscope can do that),

- **sonic scanners** which enable us to "see"
  with sound transformed into visual images.

This exponential development
of man's ability to perceive
and therefore to better understand nature
which has given us such great insights
not only into the "realities" of nature
but into the nature of "reality" itself
is also part of nature;
technology is also nature.

Through such instrumentation
nature is unlocking itself
with the human symbolic capacity
providing the key to secrets
which are being defined, observed,
asimilated, utilized and adjusted to.

Sensory enhancing instruments give us a reality
in the face of which
the naive oversimplifications of knowledge of the past
can no longer suffice or compete.

Yet these oversimplifications
from the infancy and the adolescence
of the human being
do compete.

They compete for the attention of the public
in our education systems,
in our political institutions,
in our churches,
in our press and media,
in our publishing houses,

and they compete on a 50-50 basis
in which it becomes a matter of
"your reality" versus "my reality".

For example,
blandly ignoring irrefutable historical evidence,
the fundamentalist (of whatever group)
says to the scientist:

"In this world of relative knowledge
you have your opinion and I have mine."

"You have your scientific theory of evolution
and I have mine — of creationism,"
All the while, the fundamentalist is usurping scientific terminology to rationalize theories which are completely inconsistent with the cumulative intelligence before us from which the fundamentalist, ironically, in medicine, material convenience, and countless other ways, is quite ready to benefit.

Thus, the “12th century man” or the “1st century man,” living in the 20th century, is oblivious to the process of knowledge accumulation and of cultural evolution,

and through his ignorance of the cultural and historical forces that have shaped the human being, would block the flowering of the human mind in its own process of evolutionary growth.

Without recognition of the cumulative process of human culture the fundamentalist not only hoodwinks himself, but deludes the bewildered multitudes, who are vainly seeking spiritual refuge from what the poet W. H. Auden has characterized as the “Age of Anxiety.”

As a result, the multitudes remain bogged down in lesser, earlier stages of human comprehension.

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The education problem I have sketchily outlined herein is vital to resolve if ever we are to bring into alignment with the 20th — now 21st — century mind these vast numbers of people who are stuck within the confines of the far more restricted collective human mind of earlier centuries.

Today, in all parts of the world — no less so in America —
there are virtually millions and millions of people —
fundamentalists, by whatever name —

who confine their thinking
to the time-stopping (as opposed to time-binding)
mentality of shepherder societies and the like,
no matter whether they be

highly orthodox adherents of rigid religions
believers of secular-superstitions,
practitioners of astrology,
purveyors of the warmed-up old ideas of New Age-ism,
or dupes of the fraudulence of televangelism
and political demagoguery.

Such people reject their human, natural
— shall we say “God-given” — capacity

to expand their awareness of history and culture
to observe the laws of nature
to recognize its process
to build on past knowledge
to grow — and to change — as nature changes.

And of gravest danger, geo-politically,
are whole nations of such minds

arrested in the world views of past ages
yet armed with the technology of 20th century weaponry
and reinforced by 20th century communications media

who are ready to die — in waves —

not only for the preservation
of the mentality of thousands of years ago

but more alarmingly,
for the proselytization
of that mentality today.

An incongruous, volatile situation
(reason enough to justify
a restrained military force in the Middle East
to protects not simply oil reserves,
but far more important,
the stability of the present
against a resurging onslaught of the past).

Are we swimming against the tide
with our new knowledge
(our little pockets of reason)
while millions of people proliferate
to solidify and perpetuate
the perspectives of the old?

Jonas Salk
who has turned some of his attention
in recent years to the subject of human evolution
would say no.
Keep swimming, would be his advice to the educator,
and point the direction.

In a recent conversation
I was privileged to have with him, he suggested
that those who cannot keep pace
with the progression of culture
will disappear in a generation or two.

They will die out
to be ultimately replaced by new generations
of those prepared to live in accordance with
the reason and wisdom
accumulated in us all.

Mr. Robbins concluded the first part of his presentation with a demonstration of the rotating
(trapezoid) window, one of the Perception devices utilized by Hadley Cantril at the Princeton
University Perception Center, demonstrating the effect of assumption on perception.

Part II of Mr. Robbins' lecture was a slide presentation demonstrating the role played by traditional
African sculpture in the revolutionary 20th century Western art movement, which will be illustrated
in General Semantics Bulletin #61.

Was the relationship between the two art forms a matter of aesthetic coincidence, he asked; or of
the affinity that certain artists felt for the tribal sculpture of Africa and the Pacific? Did a universal
"collective unconscious" account for the remarkable similarities to be seen in the two art traditions,
as the Swiss psychologist Carl Jung suggests?

With some 80 juxtapositions of African art images with works by Picasso, Braque, Matisse, Klee,
Brancusi, and others he demonstrated conclusively that there is much greater evidence of direct
derivation from African forms than most Western art historians and critics have been prepared to
recognize and acknowledge.
BIOGRAPHY

Warren Robbins is the Founder (1964) and since 1982 Director Emeritus of the National Museum of African Art, which became a Bureau of the Smithsonian in 1979. He was also the Founder (1963) of the Center for Cross Cultural Communication, an inter-disciplinary educational institute that was the progenitor of the Museum.

A former secondary school teacher and editor-writer, Mr. Robbins served with the United States Information Agency in the American diplomatic service as an Education Advisor, Cultural Attaché, and Public Affairs Officer stationed during the years 1950 to 1960 at various posts in Germany and Austria. In Austria he published the educational journal Erziehung (Education), in which he included articles featuring Korzybski, Irving Lee, Hayakawa, and Stuart Chase. He attended various Institute-sponsored programs, including the 1950 Seminar on General Semantics.

The recipient of many awards and honors for his creation, almost single-handedly, of the National Museum of African Art, Mr. Robbins is the author of the two volume African Art in American Collections (1966, 1989); with 1,950 illustrations of some 240 different styles of traditional African sculpture, it is the most comprehensive photo survey of African Art ever produced.

The Museum of African Art, established as a private institution in 1964, was through Congressional legislation merged with the Smithsonian in 1979. Over the years, at the Museum and in extension programs, Mr. Robbins organized some 100 exhibitions of African Art, African-American Art, and African-American history, producing in addition to the afore-mentioned book, 20 catalogues, an award-winning film, and an audio-visual educational aid distributed by Encyclopedia Britannica. He has lectured at hundreds of universities, museums, and other institutions throughout the United States and in Europe and Africa. Dealing with a wide variety of cultural and educational themes, all of his publications, lectures and exhibitions reflect a strong general-semantics orientation.

Currently in preparation by Mr. Robbins are two additional publications, one on the history and the pedagogical approach of the Museum of African Art as an instrument of cross cultural education, and the other on the impact of African sculpture on modern art.

Mr. Robbins received an MA degree in History from the University of Michigan (where he also studied cultural anthropology with Leslie A. White) and a BA degree from the University of New Hampshire, which awarded him an Honorary Degree as a distinguished alumnus in 1976. Mr. Robbins is the recipient of the de Menil Rothko Chapel Medal for “Dedication to Truth and Freedom”; the Smithsonian’s prestigious Joseph Henry Medal, awarded to only 13 other persons throughout its history; and the Aggrey Medal of the Phelps-Stokes Educational Fund. In 1994 he received an Outstanding Achievement Award from the University of Michigan. The library of the National Museum of African Art has been designated as the Warren M. Robbins Library.