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Review of *Contexts of Behavior: Anthropological Dimensions*, by Robert J. Maxwell

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BOOK REVIEWS

Robert J. Maxwell, *Contexts of Behavior: Anthropological Dimensions*, Nelson-Hall Publishers, 1983. 306 pp. \$27.95 (cloth).

This book is a massive disappointment. The well-designed dust jacket indicates that Maxwell, "Describes the interaction between humans and their environments, drawing upon a wide range of ethological and anthropological research to form a comprehensive, integrated picture of human cultural ecology." This is only partially true. Maxwell describes a substantial amount of research, but his review is neither comprehensive nor well-integrated.

Maxwell throws out a bibliographic fishing net and cleans his variegated catch in slipshod fashion. Unfortunately, his net also has gaping, unexplained holes. The best that one can say about this book is that the bibliography would have been mildly useful ten years ago to students of human-environment relations. It is now sadly out-of-date.

The book is a compendium of eclectic materials disguised as scholarly explication. This work would be more appropriately subtitled: *The Dilettante's Vademecum*. Little-known facts pepper the pages: "For example, the crystals on the edge of a blunted razor blade may reproduce themselves in a pyramid and thus restore the original sharp edge of the razor" (p. 101). Less exciting bits of information include: "Tornadoes are small rotary storms with extremely high winds" (p. 167) and "Areas with a Mediterranean climate experience warm or hot summers, cool rainy winters, and a great deal of sunshine all year round" (p. 87). Other gems deal with body odors, genital mutilation, mating practices, and Maxwell's trips to Samoa and Indiana. Those boorish, pontifical fellows who inevitably wind up drinking too much at department cocktail parties will find this book a goldmine of conversational gambits for years to come.

Maxwell demonstrates a tendency to include, sometimes at incredible length, materials which support a thesis of environmental determinism. For the geographers in the crowd, Ellsworth Huntington's *Mainsprings of Civilization* (1945) is exhumed and dusted off. Those geographers who know their disciplinary history, however, will be surprised to learn that: "If most of the environmental determinists were geographers, most of the so-called possibilists were anthropologists" (p. 56). The French possibilist school of geography (and its descendants) vanishes into thin air! Nor does Maxwell attend to the landmark works of William L. Thomas *International Symposium on Man's Role in Changing the Face of the Earth* (1955), or Carl Sauer

Land and Life (1963). These and other works by a host of distinguished and thoughtful scholars are central to any balanced and representative review of geographers' contributions to the study of human-environment interactions.

Attending to landmarks and other major sources is not Maxwell's style. While misunderstanding Amos Rapoport's *House Form and Culture* (1969), he completely omits (both from text and bibliography) any account of Rapoport's *Australia as a Human Setting* (1972), *The Mutual Interaction of People and their Built Environment: A Cross-Cultural Perspective* (1976), or *Human Aspects of Urban Form: Towards a Man-Environment Approach to Urban Form and Design* (1977). Since Rapoport is an anthropologist as well as an architect and is one of the leading theorists in human-environment relations—he is a recipient of the Environmental Design Research Association (EDRA) Award for his theoretical contributions—these are not small omissions.

Anthropologists and communication scientists alike will also wonder how it is possible to include what purports to be a full-blown exposition of proxemic behavior and non-verbal communication without even citing (either in text or bibliography) the works of Ray Birdwhistle, *Introduction to Kinesics: An Annotation System for Analysis of Body Motion and Gesture* (1952) and *Kinesics and Context: Essays on Body Motion Communication* (1970). Readers ready for an up-to-date consideration of these and related issues may want to look at Amos Rapoport's *The Meaning of the Built Environment: A Nonverbal Communication Approach* (1982).

Maxwell also overlooks the annual yearbooks of the Environmental Design Research Association as well as almost all the work reported in the pages of *Environment and Behavior*, *Environment and Planning*, and *Man-Environment Systems* (just to name a few of the central journals in human-environment relations research).

In addition to the above cited journals, however, there is now a solid review series of human-environment research to which the interested reader (if not Maxwell) is directed. The title of the useful series is: *Human Behavior and Environment: Advances in Theory and Research* and is under the general editorship of Irwin Altman and Joachim F. Wohlwill. The first volume was published by Plenum in 1976 and one thus wonders why Maxwell missed these significant and intellectually engaging volumes. Fortunately, they provide us with a much more current and responsible introduction to the complexities of the contexts of human behavior.