

Alfred Korzybski Memorial Lecture

By Robert P. Pula

The Impact of Korzybski at the Planetary Level: The View From 2000

At the Yale Club of New York City, Friday, November 3, 2000

Introduction by George J. Barenholtz

OK, so I've gotta introduce the guy who needs no introduction, right? What do I have to say here? Let me think. Well, when Jeff first talked to me about doing this, I didn't realize that I said I'll give him 75 seconds, and I didn't realize that I was only given 20 seconds, but he said, "Great, 20–75 seconds, sold", so here I am—and start counting.

Bob and I met in 1985. I went to the seminar in San Diego and I didn't know a damn thing about general semantics. Of course, we don't wanna carry that further. So the first day I asked him what turned out to be a really dumb question, and luckily I've forgotten the question, but he was really kind to me, and answered it in a way that didn't throw me away, which is very easy to do with little tender blossoms, which I was at the time.

We cemented our relationship later in the evening when I bought him a couple of beers, and since then we've been in love. And I've really enjoyed that; I've enjoyed Milton a lot. But most of you know about him—did I say "Milton"?! [laughter]. [Bob Pula in background: "I understand."] Sorry, Bob, but I was thinking of Milton and the beers at the same time.

You've all read the brochure, but I'm

gonna take you through this a little bit, just to give you some more background on what's happening with him.

Of course, uh, this year's speaker is Bob Pula, blah blah blah, he's spent many weekends giving seminars; he's a former editor of the *General Semantics Bulletin*; he has a lot of writings in ... musicology—now what's all this? He also composes, plays music for the piano, and is an exhibitionist [laughter]. Now what in the hell? Naw, OK, of *paintings*. And we know he's Polish; he went to Poland, and uh, everybody knows he's Polish; in fact I think that's why [to Bob] you're involved in it, because you were excited about Korzybski—and you like me because I have Korzybski's head. Bob carried on a lot of research in Poland [for a biography of Korzybski].

But this doesn't really give the flavor of the guy, I mean, this is really a very, very, very prolific man. I mean, just look—OK, I want all of Pula's extended family to stand up, just to get an idea of what are we talking about. Look at what this guy has done! [Two tables of 'Pulas' stand. Bob says, "I only made six of them—helped to make—six of them!"] And they're all fun, and they're all bright, and I think that's terrific, I mean, this is no joke now,

this is serious stuff.

But I'm getting close to the end because my time is almost up, but you never know what to expect from Bob. I mean, you know that he has the general-semantics side, and seriously I view him, and I think he does now, as the preacher of general semantics. He's the one that, when we get into a space of talking about GS, he always wants to go back, back to the original, back to the basics, and not to get away from it; I tried to get him involved in teaching Pink Floyd, and he just wouldn't move, he kept going back to the basics.

But he does a lot of things. He's a painter, and a terrific painter. He composes music and does a lot of other things. I don't know what he's gonna do tonight; I mean, he's always a surprise. He might come out and draw a picture for us, he might come out and play the violin, he may take off the monkey suit and have a tutu underneath it and do a ballet for us, I don't know.

So let me introduce you to Bob Pula [prolonged applause].

Address by Bob Pula

Charlotte told me that I have to deliver this sitting, so that's why I didn't stand to acknowledge your kind applause. I've also done something that I don't usually do, given the fact that I had a slight interruption in my schedule recently, which I'll tell you about. I've actually written out some stuff, which I'll read.

But I'll try to read it in such a way that you won't immediately pass out or doze, whichever comes first.

A funny thing happened to me on the way to the Yale Club. On October 5, I had quintuple by-pass surgery. That's OK, though, because it reminded me that, though Korzybski formulated the first non-Aristotelian multi-valued system, he also emphasized that there are, in life, lower-order situations which demand either/or choices. Either life: high probability; or death: very high probability.

An angioplasty procedure indicated that all major heart arteries were so occluded that heart surgery was required posthaste. The surgeon who interviewed me (I was supine at the time) said that he and his colleagues have achieved a 95 percent success rate in performing open-heart surgery. The alternative for me was almost immediate death—or coagulation, as Korzybski would say. I said, "Give me the paper," and signed the authorization form. After all, I had to get to the Yale Club. And, the surgery having been performed the next day, here I am. But I only did it for y'all.

Our theme today is the planetary impact of Korzybski and general semantics, as seen from the vantage point of 79 years since the publication of *Manhood of Humanity* (which has been translated into Italian as *The Adulthood of Humanity*—I mention that for my feminist daughters and nieces), 67 years since the publication of *Science and Sanity*, 62 years since the founding of the Institute, 50 years since Korzybski's death, and, an indication of my personal involvement, 40 years since I began my study and teaching of this discipline.

When Korzybski founded and incorporated the Institute of General Semantics in Chicago in 1938, these brief statements appeared in the Articles of Incorporation, setting out the mission of the Institute, which means us—most people here who are not simply guests. Most people here are members of the Institute. Indeed, this is billed as the annual meeting of the Institute. But I have here a French expression, which I think is correct: "L'Institut, c'est nous." Nothing but.

Now, I am going to read some of these statements from the bylaws to give you an indication of what Korzybski was up to, why he exerted himself to do what he did, and why we people who are members of the Institute, teachers and so forth, do what we do:

"The name of said corporation shall be 'Institute of General Semantics, Incorporated'. The purpose for which said

corporation is formed is the following, to whit: In general, to promote and conduct linguistic and epistemologic scientific research and education. Two, to undertake and conduct education and training courses in the methodology of General Semantics. Three, to write, edit, publish and sell books, pamphlets, periodicals, bulletins, reports, yearbooks and news releases. Four, to provide teaching and other materials and editorial consultative research, teaching and lecture services on General Semantics and aligned subjects. Five, to provide encouragement to and supervision of individuals, groups, organizations and institutions affiliated with the Institute of General Semantics, Incorporated.”

OK, so that’s basically the mission statement, and it’s the kind of stuff that we still are trying to do as participants in the Institute of General Semantics. Now, I note that and emphasize that, as I’ve often reminded members of the Board of Trustees, that the Institute is neither in the salvation business nor the entertainment business. Our mission is much more modest: the amelioration of human woe by way of improved evaluating.

I have a note here to make a reference to my dear friend, Harry Maynard. Oftentimes at board meetings he will claim, “Well, we didn’t have enough people” at a conference, or a seminar, that we should really have larger crowds for what we do. And I’ve said to him, “Harry, suppose you had 50,000 general semanticists in a stadium. What in hell would you do with them?” And of course, the answer, short of having a revival meeting or something: nothing. Our work is more subtle, much more quiet than the kind of stuff that could happen in a stadium filled with 50,000 flag-waving, stomping, jumping up and down, let’s call them ‘affiliates’.

From the first issue of the *General Semantics Bulletin* in 1950, its masthead has

read, “For information and inter-communication in the non-aristotelian discipline, formulated by Alfred Korzybski. News, news comments, group activities, work in progress reports, research and applications, etc.” The *Bulletin* remains the main engine which drives the ongoing printed dissemination and influence of Korzybski’s work in the year 2000.

Now, saying that, I do not want to downplay the importance of *ETC.*, the other major journal that deals explicitly with general semantics, published by the International Society for General Semantics in Concord, California, in which I have indeed published many things; some of you have, Allen Walker Read has; but the *Bulletin* tends to be more rigorous, generally, and more specifically Korzybskian, so that’s why I make that statement. [Pula: *ETC.*, published since 1943, has a current quarterly issue run of just over 3,000 copies, some 2,200 which go to subscribers, members of the ISGS, professionals in education, management, libraries, the sciences, consultants in ‘every’ field, including business and industry. Given that it is engaged in telling (teaching, publishing) people about general semantics (which too many refer to as ‘semantics’), *ETC.* must be seen as a major purveyor of the Korzybskian impact.]

Both of these Institute missions, following Korzybski’s heroic solo efforts from 1921 to 1933, have been carried forward and continue to this day. What difference has all this effort made?

In his Alfred Korzybski Memorial Lecture on November 11, 1988, right here at the Yale Club, famed psychologist and student of ‘thinking’ as time-binding, Jerome Bruner, began with this extended statement—this is Bruner speaking:

I am very moved to be here. I should introduce this lecture by greeting you all, members of the Institute of General Semantics, and also greeting former colleagues, former students, because there

are some of you in that category in this audience. It's very moving!

Korzybski is an astonishing figure. He has had an impact very, very difficult fully to grasp, but to put it in some sort of intellectual tradition, I've tried to think through where he fits in Western thought. The best I can do is this: There was for a long time, and indeed it still exists today, in Russian and Eastern European linguistics, a strong trend that went under the name of "Poetics". Its objective was to find out what it is that language can do, to save people from responding automatically to language. [Pula: I'm going to repeat that, because I think that it is as good a characterization of what we presume to be up to as I have read. "What is it that language can do" (that is to say, *we* using language) "to save people from responding automatically to language"?]

That is to say, if I may take a very striking example of Shklovsky and the Russian formalists, they posed a conception that they spoke of as *ostranenyi*. *Ostranenyi* refers to how you make the obvious and the familiar strange, so that you look at it afresh. And they saw one of the uses that they spoke of as the poetic function of language, of the *literaturnost* of poetry, and the novel, and indeed any kind of writing, as an invitation to the speaker to awake to what he was saying or hearing. [Pula: Again, I will presume to repeat Bruner's words: *an invitation to the speaker to awake to what he was saying or hearing*. Now Bruner's an old dude by now, so he says "he", but he means humanity in general. My daughters will understand that—I've explained it to them.]

Now this tradition [this is Bruner again] goes back a long and interesting way, to one of the really legendary figures of the turn of the century in linguistics, a

Pole, about whom Korzybski knew, whom everybody knew in linguistics at that point, with the astonishingly French name which some Poles had at that time; he was called [Jan Ignacy Nieczyslaw] Baudoin de Courtenay. Baudoin de Courtenay came from Warsaw and Czestochowa to the University of Leningrad to lecture, and was one of the first to recognize the importance of the way in which language, as we say today, is *constitutive* as well as communicative; that is to say, it not only communicates a picture of reality but actually constitutes it or constructs it. [Pula: And, of course, this is central to Korzybski's approach.]

Now Baudoin de Courtenay, coming from Warsaw, the Poland that Korzybski had been exposed to, had a very long reach. He influenced the poets of the next generation, he influenced people like Roman Jakobson, one of the great giants of the field; even unto today the professor of linguistics in the University of Moscow, Professor Ivanov, still represents that tradition.

So that as I look out at this group this evening and see what the Institute of General Semantics has done, in a sense it has carried, so to say, the plea for consciousness and against automaticity, machinelikeness, robotry, and seized the instrument of language as doing it. So it is indeed for me a great honor to be the thirty-seventh, I believe it is, lecturer in this series.

—Jerome Bruner, "Life and Language in Autobiography", The Alfred Korzybski Memorial Lecture, 1988. *General Semantics Bulletin*, No.57, 1993, p. 15)

Do I need to say that it is a great honor for me to be the forty-ninth lecturer in this series? I hereby do so.

Another internationally known scholar who is today considered a 'classic' of semiotics,

Charles Morris, characterized Korzybski's focus in this way:

The work of A. Korzybski and his followers is psycho-biological in its orientation, aiming to protect the individual against exploitation by others and [Pula: I emphasize] *by himself* [himself/herself]. (Charles Morris, *Signs, Language and Behavior*, Prentice Hall, 1946, p. 283)

Again, I will presume to repeat: "aiming to protect the individual against exploitation by others and by himself" through language, both at the exploitation level and at the protection level.

It's important to recognize as a corollary to this that we need to remember that we talk first to ourselves, and how we do that makes a big difference in our lives and in the lives of others. How we talk to others is very directly a function of how we first talk to ourselves. So getting some consciousness, some awareness, of what in hell are we doing in here [points to head] constantly—you know, we're supposed to do X, but we forget to do it because we're so busy rolling around a-b-c-d-e-f-g-h-i-j-k, etc., in our heads, that we can very readily lose contact with what we call, in general semantics, the "extensional world", and never get to X—the world in which we, if we're lucky, wake up and smell the coffee.

Those statements by Bruner and Morris well characterize Korzybski's program, and give a strong indication of his impact in the just-ended 20th century. From the very beginning of his career in America, Korzybski had impact, if only because he was one of those fascinating characters, quite like the great conductor Leopold Stokowski, who attract attention from the daily press, both mainstream and tabloid, and journals across the spectrum, from *The New Republic*, various professional periodicals (scientific, medical, educational, psychiatric), to Masonic magazines, like *The Builder*, popular magazines like *Liberty*, *Time*, *Life*, and *Quick*, and a host of others. Now some of you,

I know, are young enough that you may not recall that there was a magazine called *Liberty*, which my father refused to let me sell, by the way. I wanted to work. I needed some pennies. And I wanted to sell *Liberty* magazine, carrying it around in a bag, with "Liberty" on the canvas bag, and going through the neighborhood trying to peddle this magazine. Well, my father considered that undignified behavior, and refused to let me do it. And that's very important, because that's why I grew up to be so dignified. But *Time* and *Life*, I suppose, everybody will recall, whatever your age.

Korzybski's first book, *Manhood of Humanity: The Science and Art of Human Engineering*, 1921, created a great stir, by 1923 going into its fourth printing. Scholars, scientists and philosophers from every continent (save Antarctica) wrote to him wanting to discuss his theories, his definition of humans as time-binders, his views on language, labor relations, the role of capital in economic systems, the biological basis of human evaluating, etc., etc.

Korzybski was not shy about covering a lot of ground. I want to say something, though, about this Antarctica business. In my preface to the fifth edition of *Science and Sanity*, I wrote that Korzybski is being read and studied in every continent save, perhaps, Antarctica. Now, there might be a couple of researchers there in Antarctica who have a copy of *Science and Sanity* with them, but I wasn't sure about that, so I mentioned probably not in Antarctica, because I know, for example, that penguins do not read. Well, on the Internet, somebody objected to that, claiming that I was some kind of elitist. Apparently, he felt offended for the Antarciticans. So, you know, you've gotta be careful what you put in print.

For several years I've been examining the correspondence and news clippings, office memos, etc., in the Korzybski archive at the Butler Library, in the Rare Books and Manuscripts Room, at Columbia University.

The archive contains an estimated 20,000 items. Korzybski was a very busy fellow. I can affirm that he corresponded with the majority of important scientist-scholars of the first half of the 20th century. I mention a few here: Bertrand Russell in mathematics, logic, and philosophy; Bronislaw Malinowski in anthropology and comparative linguistics; Eric T. Bell in mathematics; C. K. Ogden, linguistics and semantics; C. Judson Herrick in neurology; Percy W. Bridgman, Nobel Prize physicist; and a host of others. Some Korzybski knew personally, consulting face-to-face, engaging in reciprocal influence. I want to emphasize that, reciprocal influence. Korzybski was a remarkably open person, even until his old age, which he didn't really achieve. I mean, he was younger than I am when he died, and God knows I'm not old, but until he suddenly stopped, he was very open to information from others, and learning from them. He was very taken, for example, in 1948, by Norbert Wiener's term "feedback", which he realized he had been talking about for years (neuro-linguistic feedback), but didn't have that term, so he was just delighted with learning about feedback from Norbert Wiener, and this was when he was about 68 years old. So, this influence was "mootchul" (mutual), as that lovely lady (Terri Garr) says in *Young Frankenstein*.

Of special importance was the coterie of pioneers at Johns Hopkins University [early 1920s], with whom he consulted in Baltimore, had informal gatherings at a farm near Arnold, Maryland, which was owned by a friend of Korzybski's named Jesse Bennett. Although he was not a terribly creative formulator himself, Bennett made a specialty of attracting pioneers to himself, genuine originators; and there were a whole bunch at Hopkins at this time, and they would come down from Baltimore to Arnold, Maryland (which is now where the Anne Arundel Community College is located—at which I taught some general semantics, by the way), and they would just spend a weekend,

three or four days, talking to each other, and Korzybski was part of that group. So he learned a lot, but he also taught a lot in that process. Some of the people involved were H. S. Jennings in biology; Raymond Pearl, biologist, founder of biometry; W. Horsley Gantt, who was an associate of Pavlov and introduced Pavlovian methods into the United States; Adolf Meyer, head of the internationally known Phipps Psychiatric Clinic, after whom the current Adolf Meyer Psychiatric Institution (the psychiatric wing) of the Johns Hopkins Hospital is named; and William H. Wilmer of the famous eye clinic. Actually, the famed eye clinic didn't exist then. It was created and named after Wilmer some years later. [Of particular importance was Korzybski's intimate association in the 1920s with Dr. William Alanson White at Saint Elizabeths (no apostrophe) Hospital in Washington, D.C. White may be considered the Nestor of public (government-funded) psychiatry in the United States and, indeed, the world. Korzybski and White very much 'studied' with each other.] Many others, at Hopkins and elsewhere in the United States and abroad, could be listed; they can be found copiously catalogued and generously acknowledged in *Science and Sanity* and Korzybski's other writings.

One notable person on whom Korzybski drew, and who knew something of Korzybski's work, and didn't think much of it, was Albert Einstein, according to Blanche Weinberg, wife of Harry Weinberg, a student of Korzybski's, who wrote the excellent *Levels of Knowing and Existence: Studies in General Semantics*. She and Harry were boating on Lake Saranac when they spotted Einstein and his sister in a small sailboat. I have a photograph that Weinberg took of that; and I often tell people, "You can tell which one is Einstein's sister, because she has the larger mustache." They look remarkably alike. Harry asked permission to take the photograph which I just mentioned. He identified himself as a student of Korzybski, and asked Einstein

what he thought of *Science and Sanity*, at which Einstein said, “Dot’s ah krrrazy boook!” But I remind you of Einstein’s rejection of statistical methods in quantum mechanics, and what he called “that Bohr-Heisenberg tranquilizing philosophy”. So, despite his reputation, Einstein wasn’t always right. Sometimes he was scared on the formulational level.

Earlier this year I spent time examining the newly founded Korzybski archive at the University of Warsaw, a much more modest collection than Columbia’s, which nevertheless contains many treasures for the biographer and cultural historian, and I’ll say more about that later.

Now, I hope I’ve given some indication that when Korzybski was alive, he was very much in the news. Many programs were set up in colleges, universities, and in independent institutions teaching his stuff. [He lectured to university faculty and learned and ‘intelligent laymen’ societies all over America. These were consistently and prominently covered in the local and regional press.] Within his lifetime there were three big conferences on general semantics, based primarily on the stir that *Science and Sanity* had initiated, and these were attended by all kinds of scholars and professionals in the sciences and the arts from all over the United States and from abroad.

As I was about to say before I interrupted myself, current examples of the impact of Korzybski related to some people here today are Dr. Rachel Lauer who has already been introduced; she’s the head of the Straus Learning and Thinking Center at Pace University; her program seeks to integrate general semantics and related compatible approaches; Dr. Martin Levinson, who I believe is in the back there—Hello, Marty [“Hello, Bob”]—who heads a program in drug counseling in which he uses general-semantics methodology; Gerard Nierenberg, internationally known expert in negotiating, whose foundations are Korzybskian; Dr. Alan Meyrowitz,

not able to be with us tonight, who is the head of the Navy Center for Applied Research in Artificial Intelligence program at the Naval Research Lab in Washington, D.C., teaching his researchers general semantics as a tool by means of which to conduct their research, and as an informing paradigm, as we would say today; and there are many others. Dr. Sanford Berman has recently established three university professorships [chairs] in general semantics, two in California and one in Nevada. So the impact is there.

Most important has been Korzybski’s impact in education. Probably the best source for getting to know about that is a work published in 1958, originally by Catholic University Press, by a Catholic nun named Margaret Gorman, called *The Educational Implications of the Theory of Meaning and Symbolism of General Semantics*, and that has been published separately in the University of Nebraska Press “Bison Book” series; it’s called *General Semantics and Contemporary Thomism*. Now of course, Margaret Gorman, being a Catholic nun, and raised in the philosophy of Thomas Aquinas, was very interested in comparing the very Aristotelian approach of Thomas Aquinas with that of Korzybski’s [non-Aristotelian] general semantics. And of course, you can guess who won in her book. But she recognizes, and (of course) she bases much of her discussion on Hayakawa [while not ignoring Korzybski], but she makes the statement that since most English teachers in the United States at this time (we’re talking about 1958–1960) are basing their instruction largely on Hayakawa’s book, which has sold well over a million copies since its original publication, then it’s very important to examine this stuff, to see what’s being taught to the children, the effect on the children of bringing them from being raised to be certaintists to being uncertaintists, etc., etc. So, that’s probably the best source that you can look at to get an indication of the impact of Korzybski and *Science and*

Sanity in the United States, and ultimately in the world.

Now from this point on, I'm going to get personal, since I've been kinda like Malinowski the anthropologist, who called himself a "participant-observer" in his field work in the Trobriand Islands and Papua New Guinea, and places like that. He was very gifted in languages, as many of his colleagues were in the part of the world that he came from [namely, Korzybski's], and when he went into the field to study so-called 'primitive' cultures, he didn't just have a house somewhere and then occasionally go and look at people, he lived among them, and every place he went he learned the language and was able to understand the culture from within, but he was not of that culture; so that's why he called himself a "participant-observer". He was participating, but he was still the observer from outside who was eventually going to publish books in England about what he found out.

So I'm going to suggest that when I started studying general semantics, I sort of functioned that way also. I was interested in two things: learning what the hell is this guy talking about, but also observing how it was being done.

I'll mention my early reaction to Korzybski. I'd just finished a Jesuit college, in which I did very well in Thomistic, that is to say, Aristotelian, philosophy. I got A's, if you can believe it. So when I was reading Korzybski, my first, my 'only' reaction was "Oh, pooh, pooh, pooh, pooh." And I admitted to myself that if this guy, and George [Barenholtz] has mentioned that, if this guy didn't have the name "Korzybski", I'd probably throw the book into the fire, but I felt obliged because I'm also a student of Polish stuff, culture, etc., so I insisted that I keep reading. And finally I got the neuro-linguistic point, in the Introduction to the Second Edition, where Korzybski says that philosophers, mathematicians, etc., seem unable to recognize that if a phonograph

record has to have its structure changed before it can store information, music, whatever it may be—why is it so hard to understand that the human nervous system works in the same way? That's what I call "the neuro-linguistic point". And when I saw that, and pondered it, I said, "Ummmmm, there's something here." And as I read further, I said to myself, "If this guy is right, then almost everybody else that I've read up to this point is wrong."

Now I don't claim any kind of great epiphany; this was just a very clear, unexcited recognition. I didn't pass out, or anything like that. So from this point on, I'm going to talk about Korzybski's impact through my own experience as someone who decided that I would become a teacher in this field.

Before that, though, in fact before I had even read Korzybski, I'd heard about him. In 1960, a Monsignor at a shore party where we drank beer and talked a lot, a fellow named Dziwulski, was putting out a parish newspaper in which he had articles about notable Poles (it was a Polish parish), and the person who had been doing that had run out of gas, and Dziwulski asked me, "Would you take this over?" So I said, "Sure." So I wrote a few obvious ones on Malinowski and Marie Curie, people like that. But then I had heard about Korzybski, first of all at a party where a young engineering student named Ferd Leimkuhler from Purdue University, when somebody said something, said "Oh, yeah, Korzybski." That's how I heard about that. That's all I knew. So I decided that, since I needed to do another article in this series, I'd look into Korzybski. And I did. And here I am today. As Weinberg said, uh, what did he say?, "I fell for the book, something and thinker"? [voices from audience—"book, line and thinker"] He read it and he fell for the book, line, and thinker. Good ol' Harry. [Weinberg: "I swallowed it whole—the book, the line, the thinker." —*Levels of Knowing and Existence, Studies in General Semantics*, p. xii.]

I also have consistently run into people ...

uh, I'll be in a restaurant with a party and somebody from another table knows somebody from the party I'm in, and might come over, and they'll say, "Well, whatta you do?" So I tell 'em and they have trouble believing it, but they often say [things like] "Oh, yeah, yeah, there's this guy teaching courses in general semantics at Towson State University", which is north of Baltimore. So it's around and it's part of the impact. I became aware of the impact initially through very informal encounters such as that.

Well, I studied and studied. I was intending to write a biography of Korzybski, which I'm still working on. This was in the early 1960s. So I wrote to the Institute and told them what my interest was. I wrote to Kendig, but she sent me to Charlotte, and here we are, about 40 years later, almost? And still working together. I took some seminars and eventually became lecturer at Institute seminars. In the process of doing that, I made a count today, I've taught in 25 states in the contiguous U.S.—and that's a minimum count—I can't remember where I've been all the time. In Canada: Ottawa, Montreal, and Toronto. In Poland: Warsaw, Opole, Lublin, Poznań, and Kraków. I've had students from Canada, the United States, Mexico, Puerto Rico, Venezuela, Argentina, England, France, Italy, Germany, Switzerland, Holland, Sweden, Poland, Algeria, Ghana, South Africa, India, China, Japan, Malaysia, Australia, New Zealand, etc. Now, all of these people, whom I ran into at seminars, were from these countries, and they paid their way to the seminars. So this is an indication of what my theme is tonight, the impact of Korzybski/general semantics on a planetary level. Again, I don't know of any continent from which orders do not come for general-semantics books, particularly *Science and Sanity*, and from where I have not met people, again with the exclusion of Antarctica. I've had some people at seminars who seemed penguin-like, but I would not go so far as to characterize them as penguins.

The time is running short, so just let me report to you about my recent experiences in Poland.

In 1997 I spent a month in Poland, by invitation, and I lectured at two universities, Warsaw and Poznań, at that time. I learned of Professor Jerzy Pelc who is called by a fellow in Poznań whose name is Tadeusz Zgółka—can you say "Tadeusz Zgółka"?—you don't have to—he calls Pelc "The Pope of Semiotics", at least in Poland. So I had an interview with Pelc in his office in Warsaw in 1997. He heard that I was there and, through channels, he set up an appointment. During that appointment, maybe about halfway through, he said, "Pan Puła!"—"Pan" used to mean "Lord" and "Sir" but now it means mainly "Mister", but still with a little suggestion of the lord business, especially if it's addressed to me. "Pan Puła! It will be very important for you to introduce Korzybski to Poland!" And I said, "Sir, that is my mission!" So we had a nice time.

Well, last year, and this year, too—it's still 2000—I spent the academic year, 1999–2000 (I returned from Poland on July 2)—and I did two main things there, well, three main things. I lectured at five universities about Korzybski and general semantics, and I did research on the Polish half of Korzybski's life for the biography that I'm writing—and I drank wódka. But in *that* order, in that order. My daughters are smiling wryly because they think that's why I had the bypass operation. They read a lot of pop stuff, you know. (My research in the Warsaw University Philosophy and Sociology Library was greatly facilitated by the aforementioned archive, gathered by Janusz Krajewski, biographer of Władysław Tatarkiewicz, philosopher and aesthetician, author of a standard *Historia Filozofii* [History of Philosophy]. Among its many treasures, the archive features a photo and picture album gathered by Krajewski which, going back to the beginnings of photography in Europe, displays many representations of Korzybski's family: parents,

uncles, cousins, etc.)

I was very interested to find that, although Professor Pelc told me that I should come and introduce Korzybski to Poland, even though we both knew that there had been some stuff written about him during the sixties and seventies, early eighties perhaps, but we both felt that he really wasn't well enough known in the country from which he came. Well, in my going around in Poland, I found that there was a lot more knowledge of Korzybski than I was led to expect. I'll give two examples. In the University of Lublin my hostess was Professor doktor habilitacja [habilitatsia] Anna Żuk—they love titles there in Poland—I used to call her "der hab", *d r h a b*, for abbreviation. She gave me a book in which she had—it was a book about struggle, sometimes warfare, but just about struggle in life, competing. Very interesting. And in there she had a list of people, and there was usually about a page or two for each person, about what they had to say about struggle in human living. And between Tolstoy and J. M. Bocheński was Alfred Korzybski. And, of course, referenced in the bibliography, and so forth.

Another woman professor, Jolanta Antas, in Kraków, Copernicus's alma mater, who was my hostess there, had written a book on the neuro-linguistic abuse of children, which was very much informed by Korzybskian notions, including bibliographical references to *Science and Sanity*, and so forth.

So what I found was that the planetary impact, given all of what I've said before, was not only very strong but seems to be on the uprise. Martha [Santer] just told me that we got an order from a bookstore in Poznań, which is apparently the biggest bookstore and distributor in Poland, as far as we know, ordering a bunch of *Science and Sanitys* and inquiring about other stuff. Now, of course, I'm tempted to attribute that to my recent visit there, but I won't do that. I'll just assume that it's part of the rising interest in the work of this person

who was concerned about ameliorating human woe, since, short of being thrown into a concentration camp, or zapped with an atomic bomb, most of our problems in life are a function of how we talk to ourselves. Most of our problems don't come from outside; most of them are *sui generis*, self-generated. So to learn how we do that, so that we can be, perhaps, kinder to ourselves, seems to be a very worthwhile project.

Well, what of the future?

Tomorrow's colloquium, which I invite you all to attend, will be dealing with that. And the people who will be on the panels are all leaders in teaching and management, and so forth, using general semantics for analysis and for amelioration in their communication systems.

I remind you of the mission statement that I read before from the bylaws: to teach, to promulgate, to publish, to assist people who want to learn how to use general semantics in business and education, and so forth. We have done that. I say "we"—I mean we of the Institute. And I want to encourage y'all to recognize that. That, indeed, what the mission statement is in the bylaws, originating from 1938, since Korzybski's death, the Institute and others have been, indeed, accomplishing that. We are doing that today. And, as positive time-binders, we can persist in doing it for an indefinitely extended series of tomorrows.

Thank you [extended applause].

Thank you. I would stand and acknowledge your applause, but Charlotte's sitting right there, and she just won't let me. But thank you very much.

Jeff Mordkowitz: I want to thank you, Bob, for an excellent speech. I personally wouldn't say you lost anything by sitting down; I think it went rather well. It gave you a little more studious aspect than might've been the case otherwise.

Bob (laughing): You've been there before, have

you?

Jeff: I think Bob knows most of you by name, and if not, it shouldn't matter, so, if there are any questions . . . Somebody from the Pula tables.

Bob: Oh, Ramona [Bob's daughter].

Ramona Pula: Just in terms of the planetary impact of general semantics, with stuff that's going on, um, just for example, what's going on in the Middle East, how do you think general semantics would help with diplomatic relations, with what's going on between the two sides, and, y'know, how in the future would it alleviate a situation like that?

Bob: OK. I had to have her come up here with me. No, that's a very good question, and of course it's among the most serious places where, if it would be allowed, general semantics could be helpful. Most conflicts of that kind I see as clashes of symbol systems. People kill each other for words. It's not, y'know, you may say it's about, well, territoriality, etc., etc. Oh, no—it's about ideology. The fight over the holy city of Jerusalem is not a matter of real estate. It's a matter of ideology and symbols. Insofar as general semantics is concerned with alerting us to how we use our symbols, instead of having our symbols rule us, which is what's happening in the Middle East, if people were willing to listen, they could benefit very greatly.

I am of the opinion that it's impossible to be a fanatic if you are an internalized general semanticist. Just not possible. One of the problems with relation, say, to the so-called peace process, the negotiations there, is that negotiations are not going to go anywhere unless, from the beginning, negotiators—Gerry Nierenberg I think would support me in this—are there in order to solve a problem to each other's benefit. The negotiators need to have their people in mind as opposed to winning the argument.

Now, if you engage in negotiations, and you have this secret core of stuff that you will not be willing to give up, or you will not be

willing to ameliorate in some way, then the negotiations are almost pointless. And indeed . . . what, the so-called peace process? It's been going on for nine years now? And it demonstrates what I just said. As long as there's a point central to your baseline position, when you say, oh, I'll be willing to trade off this and that and the other thing, but this is not negotiable, and it involves such a hot issue as what to do about Jerusalem, and whose capital's gonna be there, and we certainly can't have a shared capital, etc., etc.; once you get to that point the whole thing explodes, implodes, and then you have people back on the street. Now, there are other, y'know, complications.

So, what general semantics would . . . if people were trained in general semantics, and they were involved in these negotiations, they would not be absolutists, they would not be certaintists, they would not be ideologues, and then the chances are they might be able to work something out. But as long as you have two competing ideologies, which are held to with certainty, even fanaticism, then all the negotiations in the world are not gonna do much.

Tom Hogan: Hi, Bob.

Bob: Hello, Tom.

Tom: You may use this, Bob, if you want to, anytime you want to, you can use this statement. I was in Springfield, Massachusetts some 25 years or so ago, maybe 125, you know how time gets; screw time.

Bob: I know, especially for you, Tom, I've noticed that [general laughter].

Tom: Oh, that's choice, that's very clever there [laughter]. Well, anyhow, the speaker was a man who it seemed to me every now and then, he would draw on general semantics. So when it was over, I went up to him and I said to him "Did you ever read *Science and Sanity* by Alfred Korzybski?" "No," he said, "That's a terrible book." He said, "That's a god-awful book." I said, "Well, you know, when you have nothing to do, some night why don't you read *People in*

Quandaries?” “Oh, Jesus,” he said, “that’s a great book; that’s a great man who wrote that book!” [laughter]. You see what I mean?

Andy Hilgartner: As I read Alfred Korzybski’s general theory of time-binding in the *Time-Binding Papers*, ’27, ’28, I see no clue that he rejected the ontological construct of identity, yet in *Science and Sanity*, he does. Somewhere between 1927 [1924–1926] and ’33, he hit on that verbal formulation of rejecting identity, the first that I’ve detected. Do you know, or does anybody here know, when and how and why Korzybski arrived at that?

Bob: Well, it seems to me that there are foreshadowings of it in the two time-binding papers, particularly the 1925 one, where he starts off—but first I think we should say that by ‘identity’ Korzybski intended confusion of orders of abstracting, mistaking one level of abstracting for another; and I think the first sentence of the ’25 paper is something like, “The conditions of human living are determined by the properties of light and human symbolism.” [Pula: Actually, the quote is from the 1924 paper and reads as follows: “All human knowledge is conditioned and limited, at present, by the properties of light and human symbolism.”] To me, I see that as a kind of opening laser that leads ultimately to the non-identity formulation.

Andy: I concur, but it leaves me with my puzzle, when and where and how did he come up with the . . . he would reject the idea of identity, he would reject the ‘is’ of identity, how . . . did he phrase it?

Bob: You mean when was the first printed statement to that effect? I cannot give you that off the top of my head.

Irene Mayper: [barely audible, but suggesting that Korzybski at least partly derived ‘non-identity’ from his Polish background.]

Bob: Oh, yes, well I really found that before, because he himself refers to a lot of aspects of the mainstream of Polish culture back to the medieval and Renaissance periods, to what he

called the practical Polish idealism, that he was committed to. And there are lots of, particularly in the twentieth century, the mathematical logicians, particularly of the Lwów-Warsaw School, had a great influence on his formulating. **Unidentified voice:** I’ve heard very little about the “spiral theory”.

Bob: Well, of course, the first statement of that is in *Manhood of Humanity*, yet there are also many references in *Science and Sanity* and in his later works. The last paper of Korzybski, “The Role of Language in the Perceptual Processes”, is kind of his summation of his work in 1950, just before he died, and that’s a good place to check. I would also, modestly, recommend my *General Semantics Glossary*, which is available from the Institute and the International Society, just published in May of this year, in which I address that issue, especially in the last segment where I do variations on the Structural Differential and very much emphasize the spiral character of abstracting, which, of course, brings in the whole space-time dimensions.

Rachel Lauer: To what extent did Korzybski credit systems, particularly education systems, as prompting a lot of the linguistic programming of an either-or fragmentation? Is there anything at the system level, or is it primarily at the individual level?

Bob: Definitely at the system level. In fact . . . well, I won’t say that that’s where he started, but it certainly has equal weight with his concern for individual abstracting. That, indeed, the systems in which we are embedded produce our particular style of abstracting. He has a lot to say in *Science and Sanity* about education and the 2,000 year-old Aristotelian traditions which permeate, still, most of our educational endeavors.

Jeff: George, then we can have one more question.

George Barenholtz: Bob, you’re writing a biography of Korzybski . . .

Bob: Yes.

George: Korzybski was obviously very worthy and intelligent, but what have you found out about Korzybski's drinking and living, you know everything we hear is about formulating and . . .

Bob: Well, all of the above. I'll just say a few things to give you—in other words, you want to know about balls, I take it.

George: About who?

Bob: Well, Korzybski was convinced that the gonads, and I guess ovaries in women, are great nutrients for the brain—ha, ha—and, indeed, that was current science and I don't think that's been dismissed, either, in present-day neuroscience. He was a very energetic, funny, daunting character, and I'll just say one sentence from my bio-methodological sketch that I wrote. He said, "Women have been very kind to me in my life" [laughter, audience and Pula, and applause].

Jeff: Another question?

Female voice: You mentioned, Mr. Pula, just now, you mentioned education . . . and you mentioned someone in Poland working on the effect of language [neuro-linguistic abuse] on children . . . What do you think Korzybski would say if he could come back today, what he would tell the people . . . what to do to time-bind your children?

Bob: Well, that's a pretty big, big order, but I would say that we can look on general semantics as a prescription for proper evaluating. And that if we address our children in accordance with this prescription, we will not be involved in neuro-linguistic abuse.

Voice: Thank you.

Edith Pula: Dad, can I have a comment.

Bob: Certainly . . .

Edith: . . . as one of your children? [audience laughter]

Bob: Ay, Boże [Oh, God], I'm going back to the Church!

Jeff: Is that the abused or the recovered?

Edith: This is on a serious note. Um, as one of Bob's six children, we were, it's hard to kind of

explain being raised on general semantics. Such a part and parcel of the way we grew up learning how to think critically, to evaluate very openly, to not jump to conclusions in any kind of sense, and feel it has made a tremendous impact on all of our abilities to open ourselves up to culture, to experience, to evaluating, to be probably very different people than we would have been without this, or if we would have come to it later in life, and I'm very thankful for it [prolonged, enthusiastic applause with whistles, and Bob's 'overvoice'].

Bob: Now, is that a daughter, or what?!



Editor's Note: For further information on Korzybski's impact on the world, see Bob's preface to the fifth edition of *Science and Sanity* (the preface can be ordered from the book-list section at the back of this issue), and his marvelous essay "Alfred Korzybski, 1879–1950: A Bio-Methodological Sketch", in *Polish American Studies*, Vol. LIII, No. 2, 1996 Autumn, pp. 57–105 (to be reprinted in a later *Bulletin* volume).

Note to George Barenholtz: Shine on, you crazy diamond. As just another brick in the wall, I *love* your suggestion to Bob about teaching Pink Floyd.



"Continuing downward [digging with shovels and other tools at an archaeological site], we found traces of the Paleolithic Age, which began about 600,000 years ago. It was here that we unearthed the skull of a human being. This skull had been battered in in the back by a stone ax that had obviously been made by and wielded by another human being. We were all elated by this significant discovery—the *first signs of civilization!*"

—Roger Price, *In One Head and Out the Other* (1951), p. 92.