

ALFRED KORZYBSKI MEMORIAL LECTURE 1995

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General Semantics: The Next Generation²

Alfred Korzybski Memorial Lecture

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Thank you, Jeff.⁴

It is a great honor to be asked to deliver this year's Alfred Korzybski Memorial Lecture – by my count the 44th in this series. It is also a great pleasure for me, and not just a little nostalgic, to have been able to visit with a number of you earlier at this Conference.

Acknowledgments

Many of you here have devoted years of your life to the study, application and teaching of the principles of general semantics which Korzybski developed and shared with us in his lecturing and writing, most especially the classic *Science and Sanity*.⁵

For that, I thank all of you. Especially are you to be congratulated for the cooperation that exists today between the Institute of General Semantics,⁶ the International Society for General Semantics,⁷ and all the other related organizations, study groups, and publications.

But for the arrangements for *this lecture* I specifically want to thank those with whom I have been in contact: Charlotte Read,⁸ who sent me the invitation last February, Marjorie Zelner,⁹ who has handled so many details with professional skill between then and now, and Alexej Ugrinsky,¹⁰ who extracted a title for this talk from me early enough for it to be included in your program.

I would also like to acknowledge the presence this evening of the remainder of the sum total of the Wendell and Edna Johnson offspring: my beloved sister Kate Johnson, who lives here in New York City.

It is a little humbling, to say the least, to join a list of lecturers that includes the likes of William Vogt, Ashley Montagu, F. S. C. Northrop, Buckminster Fuller, Clyde Kluckhohn, Abraham Maslow, J. Bronowski, Gregory Bateson and Steve Allen – to mention very few from a long and distinguished list.

Growing up in Wendell Johnson's Home

Those tapped for this honor since the series began in 1952 have included individuals with ties to cities *other* than my home town of Iowa City, of course.¹¹ But the list does include, in addition to my father, Wendell Johnson,¹² an appearance by the noted physicist James Van Allen,¹³ and at least three

occasions on which Russell Meyers appeared.¹⁴ Neil Postman, who was with you in 1974, although not living in Iowa City, at least came through town a week ago to promote his stimulating new book, *The End of Education*¹⁵ – at which time we were able to chat briefly about some ideas for this lecture.¹⁶

Of course, as a *very* young boy, when I couldn't even pronounce "general semantics," the academic significance of these people was often lost upon me. They encouraged me to call them by their first names, and to the extent I judged them at all it was by standards other than intellectual.

Wendell Johnson was just "Dad." His friends called him "Jack," a name I later learned had stuck with him since his early prowess as a boxer, when Jack Johnson was a well-known pugilist.¹⁷ All I knew was that he had wanted to be a major league pitcher, until he got his hand caught in a printing press.¹⁸ So he was a professor instead. And one who never did fully extract himself from printing presses it seemed to me as a kid. But he also never lost his skill as a pitcher, nor his willingness to spend time with me – whether what we were tossing around was a baseball or the latest idea to excite my curiosity.¹⁹

My earliest memory of any tangible application of the principles of general semantics was Dad's insistence that my sister, Kate, and I have no food dislikes. How could we not like something we had never tasted, he would ask. We were just reacting to the words. We must sample the food.²⁰ This lesson has been both a blessing and a curse. The blessing has been that, as I have traveled the world, I have had no difficulty eating from the tables of a great many cultures. The curse has been the consequence of taking "all-you-can-eat" restaurants literally.

Alfred Korzybski was just known to me as someone who gave lectures in Chicago that Mom and Dad would go to hear. They thought he was very wise and famous, and therefore, of course, so did I.

Jim Van Allen was the fellow who, with my father, when asked by United Airlines how it could improve the beverage service, wrote: "A little cookie would be nice." That was, of course, a suggestion with enormous appeal to a small boy who someday hoped to fly – but had no idea he was talking to someone who was, literally, a "rocket scientist."

Russ Meyers came over to the house occasionally for dinner or parties, and, if I was very lucky, would play the piano for me. He was the best I had ever heard, and helped create my lifetime liking for New Orleans jazz. It wasn't totally clear to me what neuro-surgeons did, but Russ explained to me the impact of motorcycle accidents on the human brain with sufficient graphic detail that I have never, to this day, wanted to own a motorcycle. So who knows, I may even owe my life to him.

Don Hayakawa²¹ was known to me as the ukelele player who accompanied Russ. He also talked with Dad for hours, but they would let me listen if I sat quietly on the floor beside them. Don also showed me how to use chop sticks. So I was always happy to hear he was coming to visit.

Kurt Lewin,²² the psychologist, car pooled with Dad, and would drop me off at nursery school²³ in the mornings.

Artie Shaw I did know to be a band leader, because I played his phonograph records. But he never played his clarinet for me in our home. He and Dad just talked, as Dad helped him edit what later became Artie Shaw's remarkably insightful book, *The Trouble with Cinderella*.²⁴

There are probably those who question Korzybski's assertion, in the introduction to the second edition of *Science and Sanity*, that his system is "so elementary that it can be applied by children . . ." ²⁵ But perhaps I can provide an anecdotal bit of support.

As a youngster I had no guns. But I soon discovered something much more powerful: the two questions, "What do you mean?" and "How do you know?" ²⁶ With them, I discovered at an early age, I had the capacity to interview, and often render quite uncomfortable, even the most learned Ph.D.s visiting in our home. It was a heady discovery.

The 1925 version of Korzybski's structural differential was labeled an "Anthropometer." ²⁷ Dad had a beautiful, polished wooden one hanging on the wall in his office. As a child I saw it as simply a rather unique collection of building blocks with strings on a board, but slowly its significance became clearer. Today it is in my office, for his great grandchildren to ask about.

By the time I was a teenager, of course, I came to have a greater appreciation for this remarkable environment into which I was blessed to have been born and raised. I wanted my own copy of *Science and Sanity* – which I noted the other day, on the back of the title page, is the 1950 printing of the 1948, third edition. I did a pretty good job of marking it up, though I suspect there were portions on which I would not have done very well on an essay exam.

I read Dad's *People in Quandaries*, ²⁸ and the ukelele player's *Language in Thought and Action* ²⁹ – a book from which I would later teach, with Dr. Hayakawa, at San Francisco State. My own copies of *ETC.* began coming regularly, as did the other major general semantics books of the 1950s and 1960s – either from the bookstore or from Dad. ³⁰

The nostalgia of those days remains with me as my wife, Mary Vasey, and I now live, once again, in the same house where I lived with my father, mother and Kate from 1941 to 1952. Mary and I eat breakfast every morning from the same table where *People in Quandaries* was written.

"General Semantics: The Next Generation" – The Title

When Marjorie Zelner and Alexej Ugrinsky wanted a title for this lecture I suggested, as you see, "General Semantics: The Next Generation." Aside from the nice "Star Trek" ring to it, I thought it would give me some flexibility.

When I was a law student at the University of Texas ³¹ we arranged for a lecture by a distinguished Texas Supreme Court Justice, W. St. John Garwood. He never did give us a title for his talk, so we had to make up one for the posters and promotional literature. We titled it, "Law Is Universal." Judge Garwood liked the flexibility of that title so much he said he was going to use it thereafter for every talk he gave.

That's how I feel about "General Semantics: The Next Generation." Although I hope that none of you will consider either the title, or what flows from it, to be what a general semanticist would call "non-sense," it does provide the speaker a great range of flexibility – as you have already observed. So not only do I intend, like Judge Garwood, to use the title from now on, but I also offer it for *your* use any time you need to title a lecture *before* you have written it.

The Next Generation

In one sense, as the son of Wendell Johnson, I am *genetically* of “the next generation.”

In another sense, as someone who grew up with general semantics, its impact upon my subsequent interests and career is illustrative in some ways, it seems to me, of what has happened to the field of general semantics – as a discipline, a body of literature, and a movement. We who advocate the use of “dates” and “indexes” should be among the first to recognize the constant change in general semantics itself. “General semantics¹⁹⁵⁵” is not “general semantics¹⁹⁹⁵”. And the influence and applications of general semantics today are to be found in a range of communications disciplines and activities that may not be thought of as general semantics as such.

My involvement with “communications,” in the broadest sense, has run the gamut. The relevance of that is *not* that it happens to involve me, but rather that it illustrates the *communications context* in which general semantics exists and can make its contribution to one’s life.

- I was early exposed to the *physiological* dimension of communications in adjusting to a hearing loss that very nearly put me in a school for the deaf, and growing up with a father whose stuttering was a personal challenge for him – albeit one that led to a professional accomplishment of enormous proportions.³²
- In high school I participated in the speech, debate and drama programs – developing an early appreciation for the social and political implications of *personal* communication.
- The *technical* side of communications intrigued me as a kid building kits, and today as an amateur radio operator³³ and computer hobbyist.
- I have seen the *media* from the perspective of a critic,³⁴ a regulator,³⁵ a print and television journalist,³⁶ a professor,³⁷ and a candidate using the media to political ends.³⁸
- When President Jimmy Carter appointed me a Presidential Advisor for the 1979 White House Conference on Libraries and Information Sciences, he turned my attention from the conventional broadcast media to what we today call *cyberspace* – the Internet, and World Wide Web.
- Finally, these are interests that continue today in writing and lecturing, the two courses at the University of Iowa College of Law – Mass Communications Law and Law of Electronic Media – and the occasional article for *ETC.*³⁹

Needless to say, life has not been exclusively communications. But this listing is illustrative of what has happened to the next generation of general *semantics* as well as the next generation of general *semanticists*. What was learned, literally at my father’s knee, and in early reading, has had an impact on a *lifetime* of communications-related activities and interests.⁴⁰ The “system,” of which Korzybski spoke, has given an integration, a common theme, to the life which followed.

In the same way, the fact that there are relatively few courses in general semantics today,⁴¹ or books on the best-seller lists, is a tribute, *not* to the *failure* of general semantics, but to its *success* – if one may be forgiven this brief public use of two words Dad warned might produce an epidemic of IFD disease.⁴²

What it was that Alfred Korzybski and his followers set out to do in the 1930s, '40s, and '50s they have in many ways accomplished.

A half-century ago, what they had to say was seen by some as extraordinarily wise, innovative, and helpful. Others saw it as radical and dangerous. But today those ideas, teachings and techniques have been absorbed and accepted as a matter of course by innumerable disciplines and professions.

That is not to say that the “sanity” of which Korzybski spoke is always to be found today in the rhetoric of Louis Farrakhan, the conflict in Bosnia, the medicare debate, or the O. J. Simpson aftermath. Frightened by the potential threats of atomic warfare, Dad wrote in the 1940s of what he called “the urgency of paradise.”⁴³ We have yet to arrive in either paradise or Camelot.

But we have made progress down that road in a number of respects:

- there are African-Americans in Congress, elected to represent districts in which they could not even have voted in the 1950s;
- we have avoided nuclear war for the past half-century, and continue to make strides toward further nuclear disarmament;
- there is an openness to diversity – artistically, culturally, politically, in lifestyles – well beyond that of 50 years ago.

One could provide dozens of other examples for which general semantics can be credited with a direct or indirect positive impact on our society.⁴⁴

When I was an undergraduate at the University of Texas in Austin I worked at the University Book Store in the trade book department. In that position I was able to proselytize a little on behalf of general semantics, both with those who knew what books they wanted and those to whom general semantics was a new idea.

Out of those encounters came not only the sale of books, but the creation of an unofficial general semantics study group. When we realized we were putting more time into this non-credit exercise than many of our for-credit courses we decided to approach our various deans to see if any would assign us a professor and provide academic credit for our efforts.

I say “deans,” in the plural, because – as will come as no surprise to this audience – we represented virtually every department on campus: geology and government, foreign language and physics, music and mathematics, and so forth.

It has been said that an educational administrator needs gray hair so as to look wise, and hemorrhoids so as to look concerned. All of our deans appeared both gray and concerned. For the most part they even listened politely to our appeal. But few could see beyond the distant horizons of their

own little departments, and so responded to our presentations with the near-identical question, “Ah, but what department does it *really* belong in?”⁴⁵

Frustrated, I went to see the University’s chancellor, Harry Ransom. He listened to my story, leaned back in his chair laughing, and offered not only to provide us academic credit, but a budget to bring in professors from other schools. He had his share of paper work and administrative hassles. But he also had sufficient wisdom to know that the encouragement of learning, however rare, is an even higher purpose for an educational institution than consistency in compartmentalization and the application of regulations. Since then I have looked, almost always in vain, for educational administrators with an equivalent perspective.

Those study group participants of the 1950s, and thousands like them, are now the leading lights in academic disciplines from anthropology to zoology. Many have probably long since forgotten where the ideas and techniques they daily rely upon originally came from: the book, the professor, the classmate, who first opened their mind to an idea.

The *Next*, Next Generation: Media Distortions of Perception

All of which brings us to the *next*, next generation. For, just as “general semantics¹⁹⁵⁵” is not “general semantics¹⁹⁹⁵”, so are both to be distinguished from “general semantics²⁰⁰⁵”.

Alfred Korzybski and his followers were concerned, among other things, with the difference between the “map” and the “territory,” the distortions that our *language* imposes upon our perception of “reality.”

They were quite aware of the mass media. Even though Dad was formulating his ideas in the late 1930s and early 1940s he was thoughtful about the potential of audio-visual media.⁴⁶

But the primary focus was on language, speech and print.

There is nothing wrong with that. It made sense then. It makes sense now. General semantics makes possible an analysis of the rhetoric of demagogues that has not changed that much over the years.⁴⁷

Robert Pula’s introduction to the fifth edition of *Science and Sanity*, Paul Dennithorne Johnston’s recent summary in *ETC*,⁴⁸ Gregory Sawin’s just-published book,⁴⁹ and the introductory material now available on our four World Wide Web sites (three in English and one in French)⁵⁰ – to mention but a few examples from dozens – are evidence enough that Korzybski’s principles continue to be restated, shared, and usefully applied today.

Korzybski’s observation that “the ignorant or pathological use [of language] becomes a public danger” even greater than that associated with unlicensed automobile drivers⁵¹ is, if anything, even truer today than when he wrote it. Were we to have adopted his suggestion that speakers and writers be similarly tested, and licensed, one wonders how many of today’s talk show hosts would be filling the air with their hateful venomous abstractions and unchallenged assertions of fact without empirical data.⁵²

But suppose we define our concern as not about *language*, per se, but about *any introduction of distortion into our perceptions of reality* – from whatever cause. Of course, language remains a major culprit. But as we look to the *next*, next generation, it may well be that future general semanticists will want to focus an even brighter light on the ability of the *media*, new and old, to cause distortion.

This is not to suggest the flattering self-delusion that I have come up with some new and unique insight never before considered in the literature of general semantics.⁵³ It's just that I think we should give it even more emphasis than we have. Let me explain by offering you Exhibit One.

What I am about to read to you is a brief passage from a speech. It was delivered by none other than a president of the United States, President Ronald Reagan. From the videotape of the event, as well as the structure of the text, he appears to be speaking from the heart, without script or teleprompter. And although I do not know the precise date, it was at least ten years before there were even rumors, let alone acknowledgment, of his having any medical problems whatsoever. He is speaking to a meeting of the Congressional Medal of Honor Society. In this excerpt he is telling – what else? – an incident of World War Two valor. And the videotape shows that he is bringing to this very solemn moment all the emotional content for which he was so famous – an ability I will not even try to imitate, lest I bring you, too, to tears.

A B-17, coming back across the Channel from a raid over Europe, badly shot up by anti-aircraft. The ball turret that hung underneath the belly of the plane had taken a hit. The young ball turret gunner was wounded, and they couldn't get him out of the turret there while flying. But over the Channel the plane began to lose altitude, and the Commander had to order, 'Bail Out.' And as the men started to leave the plane, the last one to leave – the boy, understandably, knowing he was left behind to go down with the plane, cried out in terror. The last man to leave the plane saw the Commander sit down on the floor. He took the boy's hand, and said, 'Never mind son, we'll ride it down together.' Congressional Medal of Honor, posthumously awarded.

After the President's speech, the White House and Pentagon were asked, attempted, and failed, to find any record of such a Congressional Medal of Honor having been awarded.

Where did this story come from? Why would the President tell it on such a solemn occasion if it were not true? This was neither the time nor place to make up such stories. He had absolutely nothing to gain by doing so – and risked some considerable loss of stature were it to be discovered and revealed.

No, I think we have to conclude that President Reagan actually *believed* the space-time events he described had taken place. He *thought* he was telling the truth.

So we're still left with the question: Where did this story come from?

As you may well have guessed by now, the story comes from a feature film. For those movie trivia buffs in the audience, it was a 1944 World War Two film, 97 minutes, black and white, with a three-star rating from Leonard Maltin; Henry Hathaway was the director; the cast included Dana Andrews, Sir Cedric Hardwicke, and Don Ameche – anyone got it yet? – that's right, "Wing and a Prayer."

Were this but a single slip up by President Reagan its occurrence would be mere inconsequential trivia. Unfortunately, it is not. There were a number of occasions in which the President seemed genuinely to confuse feature film fantasy with reality.⁵⁴

We are indebted for this analysis to the work of University of California, Berkeley, political scientist Michael Rogan. He presented a paper reporting his research (which goes well beyond this brief excerpt), the CBS program "60 Minutes" got wind of it, did a segment called "Ronald Reagan: The Movie" some ten years ago,⁵⁵ and the rest is history.

As I hope those of you who are Reagan fans will understand, the point of this example does not have to do with my feelings about the politics, substance and consequences of Ronald Reagan's presidency, or the partisan battles already being waged over who will occupy the White House in 1997.

There are hundreds, if not thousands, of examples of the ability of the mass media to distort the perception of reality of millions of humans all around the planet.⁵⁶

The potential impact of the mass media's portrayal of violence upon the real life violence in our society is once again a popular subject of discussion.⁵⁷ As you are probably well aware, there are literally thousands of academic studies documenting this impact.⁵⁸

Some make their living injecting scenes of violence into episodic television and feature films. Others are paid to wash the blood from our city streets and hospital operating rooms. It is not surprising that a debate swirls across the gulf between them.

But one aspect of the academic findings is often overlooked in that debate.

In addition to the impact of televised violence on real life violence, Dr. George Gerbner's research at the University of Pennsylvania Annenberg School of Communications has documented the impact of televised violence on the audience's *perceptions of reality*.⁵⁹

For example, those who watch little or no televised violence, and are generally well informed, are aware that those who live in urban suburbs, small towns, and rural America have little likelihood of being murdered by strangers. Their greatest risk of being shot comes from guns in their own homes – whether from deliberate suicide, homicide or accident – and the guns of present and former significant others, next door neighbors, friends and relatives.

What of those who watch high quantities of televised violence? We must remember that if the *average* American adult is watching three to four hours a day, and *you* are watching little or none yourself, there must be *somebody* out there doing little more than sleep, work and TV watching. And it turns out that those who watch *more* than the average – including necessarily large quantities of televised violence – have a much different view of reality. *They* believe their greatest risk of harm comes from *strangers* – often strangers from minority groups or foreign lands. They believe a gun in the house will help *protect* them. They refuse to believe the studies that show gun ownership simply increases by ten to fifteen times the owner's likelihood of firearm injury or death.⁶⁰

Of course, the primary impact of television has to do with its commercials rather than its programming. Indeed, the television business is *not* the business of selling programming to consumers.

It is the business of selling the *audience* (which is the product) to the *advertiser* (which is the consumer). Like cattle sold at a price per hundred-weight, we are sold to the advertisers at a cost per thousand. As TV entertainer Tom Smothers once put it,⁶¹ the programming serves much the same function as the styrofoam in the box your toaster came in. The programming is there to keep the commercials from rattling around and getting broken.

A good deal of advertising is quite factual; the full-page supermarket grocery ads are an example. Before making a purchase, computer hobbyists actually pay to obtain and browse the latest issue of *Computer Shopper* – a Manhattan phone-book-sized magazine consisting of little more than ads.

But the fact remains that many of the commercials we see on television are deliberately, and skillfully, *designed* to distort perceptions of reality. Nor is the effort limited to commercials as such. There is also the highly lucrative business called “product placement”: paying to have a product featured as part of a television show or feature film *without* identifying it as a commercial.

Commercials and product placement are often created after the deep psychological probing of research subjects, the better to manipulate potential consumers.

Why else would young girls in grade school and junior high start smoking cigarettes? Reports of recent research have confirmed the obvious once again: young girls are influenced by the tobacco companies’ advertising and skillful use of product placement. An industry that sells an addictive product that kills off its customer base at a rate of 400,000 to 500,000 a year obviously has to create what the industry calls “replacement smokers.” The younger they are the more easily and permanently they can be addicted, the more profitable will be their product loyalty, and the more product they will consume during the course of their shortened lifetimes.⁶²

Similarly, why would young heterosexual males – anxious to project a masculine image, insecure about their sexuality, and homophobic – suddenly create a billion-dollar-a-year male cosmetics industry? Where did this sophisticated sense of smell come from, this compulsion to contribute to the profits of those who sell fantasy with fragrance?

Could this possibly have something to do with a multi-billion-dollar advertising industry’s efforts to distort young persons’ perceptions of reality?

In the first chapter of *People in Quandaries* Dad describes what he calls the IFD disease.⁶³ The failure to achieve high goals or ideals (the “I”), leads to frustration (the “F”), and after sufficient repetition to demoralization and depression (the “D”) – the “I-F-D” disease. Ideals can be unattainably high, he said, for three reasons: (1) they are mathematically unlikely to be reached (the woman who wants to be the homecoming queen of a 35,000-student state university, or to make a million dollars a year by the time she is 30), (2) they are very highly valued, so that one is devastated when they are not achieved (say, failing to become a member of a fraternity or to make partner in a law firm), or (3) they involve words with no external referents, or means of measurement – they are vague. Examples would be the person who wants to be “successful,” “wealthy,” “beautiful,” “popular,” “famous,” or “powerful.”

There are few rules of war. But there are some. And one is that it is unacceptable deliberately to spread disease among one’s enemy. This is called biological warfare.⁶⁴

And yet consumer marketing firms are not only free deliberately to spread the IFD disease throughout our land, they are richly rewarded for doing so. They are in the business of stripping our sense of reality and self-esteem, and substituting for it their fantasy world of unattainable ideals. The remedy for our repeated resulting frustration, they subsequently urge upon us, is the purchase of yet another product – or perhaps the “new and improved” version of the old one. And should our condition reach the point where headaches, depression or other mental illness actually interfere with our shopping or consumption they will try to persuade us to buy a pharmaceutical crutch to boost our spirits sufficiently to get us to the store and back.⁶⁵

As the Hollywood writer and musician Mason Williams once put it, “We’re like a race horse shot full of speed to make us run harder than is good for us, to win for the owners and lose for ourselves, to win the race for only the price of the chance to run.”⁶⁶

The signs that this is affecting all of us do not end with anecdotes about former President Reagan.

- John Hinckley, who narrowly missed assassinating Reagan, was equally confused between the actor Jodi Foster and the character she played in a movie – assuming he could win the love of the former by carrying out the story line of the latter.
- Friends in the soap opera business in Hollywood tell me that when a character in a script gets married, or has a baby, wedding and baby gifts arrive at the studio.⁶⁷
- How much of what *you* know about Nixon’s involvement in Watergate comes from Senator Ervin’s hearings and how much from the movie, “All the President’s Men”?
- How much of what we know about the assassination of President Kennedy is from the Warren Commission report, and how much from the movie, “JFK”?

The Next, Next Generation: The Technology of Virtually No Reality

As we look to the *next*, next generation we see an onrushing tidal wave of technology that threatens to make it even more difficult for us to distinguish reality from fantasy, or what Warren Robbins has called “reality erosion.”⁶⁸

The Internet and World Wide Web are providing an illusion of interpersonal relationships for people who are seldom far from a computer screen. Sending bits and bytes around the planet at the speed of light is being substituted for face-to-face visits with a neighbor across the street whom one may never have met.⁶⁹ The free software, like Internet Phone and CU-SeeMe, that now make voice and desktop video conferencing possible over the Internet without the use of conventional telephones will only accelerate this trend.

With faster CD-ROM players and larger screens with better resolution (and the animated “Hot Java” programming coming to the Internet) children’s video games, computer games, and computer simulation take on more and more of the superficial quality of reality, while delivering a substance that is increasingly divorced from it.

The notion of reality becoming “virtual” has entered our vocabulary, our markets and our lives. Relatively cheap computers can provide the illusion that one is capable of walking around a building, or other location, and seeing it from all angles. Three dimensional illusion is possible.

With the proper headset, gloves and body suit, one can experience the illusion of being transported anywhere on planet earth – or out in space – totally emerged and surrounded on all sides by fantasy.⁷⁰ Virtual sex is coming to a computer store near you. Lawyers are awaiting the first divorce case to be filed on grounds of virtual adultery.

But this is not primarily about “values,” family or otherwise. It is about “evaluations.”⁷¹ And if general semanticists are concerned about distortions in the capacity of humans to evaluate their environment I think we have a relatively new and exciting agenda before us.

As a concession to the shortness of life, this is neither the time nor place to exhaust the subject – or even introduce it properly. But imagine how we might use the structural differential to try to explain what audio-visual images, not to mention virtual reality, are doing to us.

Once it is pointed out, the differences between the map and the territory are relatively clear and easily understood.⁷² Most individuals can grasp the idea that human sensory perception, and the vast array of space-time events from which our senses make their selection, are decidedly different from the language we use – of whatever level of abstraction – to *talk about* those perceptions.

Audio-visual imagery, and virtual reality, by contrast, so interweave perception and verbalization as to make them all but indistinguishable to any save the most sophisticated and perceptive students of the phenomenon.⁷³ A feature film is a high order abstraction, a generalization, a message, an association. And yet it is delivered to us, in largest measure, *as if it were sensory perception*.⁷⁴ This is most obvious with virtual reality. As such, it is implanted in our brain along with other sensory input, from where it can never be totally erased.

Ronald Reagan believes a Congressional Medal of Honor has been given to the character in a movie. And John Hinckley thinks he has to assassinate Reagan in order to win the love of yet another movie character.

Media Merger Mania

I cannot leave this topic, however, without one final concern and warning.

When Time announced it was going to merge with Warner, executives were asked their reasons for the merger. They replied, in effect, that someday there would be five firms controlling all the media on planet earth, and they intended to be one of them.⁷⁵

Even in the midst of today’s merger mania, it is not yet true that five firms control all of the media on planet earth. It *is* already true, however, that there are not five, but *six*, firms that control, not *all* the world’s music, but *over 90 percent* of it. And for those who only *dream* globally while acting locally, the FCC is relaxing the rules that limit how much media one owner can control in a single community – as well as the limits on numbers of stations owned nationally.

The Constitutional Right to Censor

This would be frightening enough but for a little-noticed development in First Amendment law.

We know that the First Amendment gives each of us, at a minimum, the right to speak and write free of government interference.⁷⁶ It also gives that right to the owners of our mass media. Two hundred years ago, when competing, special interest one-page newspapers were common, and broadsides could be printed and posted on trees and walls around the village green, that was adequate.

But as we all know, we have long since left that model behind us. The media industries have not yet merged themselves into but five firms, but they are well down that road. New York City's once-plentiful choice of newspapers continues to dwindle.

The only modern equivalent to the exchange of ideas around the village green, if one wishes to have meaningful participation in a modern urban dialogue, is some form of a legally enforceable right of public access (paid and free) into the monopolistic, and oligopolistic, channels of dominant mass media (such as newspapers and general circulation magazines, radio and television, cable television, and soon the former telephone companies' "interactive television" offerings).

Why? Because the Supreme Court continues to rule that the First Amendment protects not only a media owner's right to *speak*, but also his or her right to silence all others, to *censor*. Each medium in turn has received this grant of power from the Court: newspapers, radio, television, and cable television – even public utilities' billing envelopes!⁷⁷

Consider the *Tornillo* case⁷⁸ as but one example. Normally the Supreme Court gives great deference not only to the Constitution, but to the acts of state legislatures as well – often upholding laws with which one suspects the Justices vigorously disagree, laws they never would vote for as elected officials, but laws which, as judges, they believe themselves obliged to respect unless clearly violative of the Federal Constitution.

The Florida legislature passed a law that seemed on its face, by contrast, the epitome of reasonableness and wise public policy. It required of newspapers little more than what the FCC requires of broadcasters under the terms of the personal attack doctrine (which the Court *has* upheld⁷⁹). In short, a Florida newspaper could be as vicious and slashing as it wanted in opposing candidates for public office. But, having done so, it was then obliged to give the individual attacked an opportunity to respond.

Pat Tornillo, a candidate for public office, was attacked by the dominant newspaper in Miami, the Miami Herald. He asked for an opportunity to reply and was turned down. He went to court. The paper challenged the constitutionality of the law. The Florida court found it constitutional. The U.S. Supreme Court reversed. Not only did this near-monopoly paper have a First Amendment right to engage in vicious, one-sided political attacks, said the Court, it also had a First Amendment right to censor from its pages any effort to present another point of view to the voters of Miami.

The cases involving the other media arise in different factual settings, but involve a somewhat similar analysis. And, of course, there is no reason to believe that, as telephone companies enter the

entertainment and information business, they will not be found to have equivalent constitutional rights to censor what you and I can say, and otherwise distribute, through the networked conduits they control.

Bear in mind that this right to censor is not limited to snuffing out the voices of the likes of you and me. NBC exercised its right to refuse commercials Mobil Oil wanted to run. CNN very recently refused to air some AT&T commercials that CNN felt were contrary to CNN's best economic interests.⁸⁰

Conclusion

The bottom line is that we simultaneously have (1) more and more technological capacity for creating detachment and distortions in humans' perceptions of reality, (2) falling into fewer and fewer hands, with (3) ever greater ability to censor any contrary point of view.

I don't know about you, but it sounds to me like this is a job for "General Semantics: The *Next* Generation."

Endnotes

1. Permission is hereby granted to share electronic and hard copy versions of this text with individuals under circumstances in which no direct or indirect payment is made by those to whom the text is given for the text itself, the volume or other medium or online service in which it is included, tuition or other payment for the course or seminar, and so forth. Any other use is reserved to the author and requires prior permission. – Nicholas Johnson
2. A word of explanation may be in order regarding this text. It was prepared, not as a scholarly paper, but as a speech text. And so it remains. To those who prefer the impenetrable prose of obscure academic journals, I apologize.

As a concession to the shortness of the evening, if not of life itself, the talk, as given, did not use all of this text and endnotes. But virtually all of it was written by that time (November 3, 1995).

It is always a judgment call whether to include personal reminiscence and anecdote in a public presentation – especially in a lecture series with a distinguished academic lineage. On this occasion it seemed appropriate, and turned out to have been well received by the audience (although there may well have been some present, and now reading this, who think otherwise). For those readers who were not present when it was delivered, and who are unfamiliar with general semantics, the Institute of General Semantics, the personalities and history, here's a capsule of explanation.

My father, Wendell Johnson, was one of the early students and followers of Alfred Korzybski, for whom the lecture series is named. Dad's book, *People in Quandaries*, first published in 1946, remains one of the basic general semantics texts drawing on Korzybski's work. (Indeed, the Institute of General Semantics Booklist describes it as "A model of popularization, one of the finest and most accurate books yet written on the system of general-semantics. . . . Johnson . . . had a legendary reputation as a teacher. Must reading!") He was also one of those responsible for the creation of the International Society for General Semantics at about that same time.

Now, (a) a half-century later, (b) on this occasion, (c) given those who were gathered in the audience, it seemed acceptable to provide some insight from the perspective of a little boy growing up in Wendell Johnson's home, and more personal material, than might normally be the case.

The endnotes contain references that may be useful to the reader, especially scholars reviewing the history of general semantics.

Hopefully, the suggestion that “the next generation” should bring even more of Korzybski’s perspective, and tools, to the evaluation of mass media will be taken up by others.

3. Nicholas Johnson was the Joseph G. Astman Distinguished Conference Scholar and presenter of the Alfred Korzybski Memorial Lecture at The Eleventh International Interdisciplinary Conference on General Semantics, November 2-4, 1995. He is a member of the board of the International Society for General Semantics, the author of *How to Talk Back to Your Television Set*, and a former Commissioner of the Federal Communications Commission. He currently teaches at the University of Iowa College of Law in Iowa City, Iowa (Box 1876, Iowa City IA 52244). His e-mail address is 1035393@mcimail.com; his home page <http://www.sunnyside.com> [“Nicholas Johnson Archives”].
4. Jeffrey A. Mordkowitz, President, Institute of General Semantics, introduced the speaker.
5. Alfred Korzybski, *Science and Sanity: An Introduction to Non-Aristotelian Systems and General Semantics*, 3rd ed. (Lakeville: The International Non-Aristotelian Library Publishing Company, 1948).
6. For information about the Institute of General Semantics contact: Marjorie Zelner, Executive Director, Institute of General Semantics, 163 Engle Street, Englewood, NJ 07631 USA, voice 201-568-0551, fax 201-569-1793, email Institute@General-Semantics.org World Wide Web home page: <http://General-Semantics.org>
7. The postal address is: International Society for General Semantics, Box 728, Concord CA 94522 USA. Its World Wide Web home page is: <http://www.crl.com/~isgs/isgshome.html>
8. Charlotte Schuchardt Read is Secretary, Institute of General Semantics.
9. Marjorie Zelner is Executive Director, Institute of General Semantics.
10. Alexej Ugrinsky, Director, Documentation, Finance, and Planning, Hofstra Cultural Center, was Conference Coordinator for The Eleventh International Interdisciplinary Conference on General Semantics.
11. A list of those delivering the Alfred Korzybski Memorial Lectures from 1952 to 1994 is contained in the Conference Program for The Eleventh International Interdisciplinary Conference on General Semantics, November 2-4, 1995, or would otherwise be available from the Institute of General Semantics.
12. Wendell Johnson participated in the 1958 Alfred Korzybski Memorial Lecture Symposium panel discussion with Dr. Russell Meyers.
13. Dr. James A. Van Allen participated in the 1959 Alfred Korzybski Memorial Lecture Symposium.
14. Dr. Russell Meyers participated in 1958, 1959 and 1985.
15. Neil Postman, *The End of Education* (New York: Knopf, 1995).
16. During that brief visit Postman shared with me that he has saved a letter in which Dad explains that, having read a piece of Postman’s, he is able to conclude, “you are a sane person,” which Postman, properly, took as high compliment. It was he who suggested I explore, and emphasize in this lecture, my concerns about the media’s impact on the audience’s distorted perceptions of reality.

17. Jack Johnson, born in Galveston, Texas, in 1878, was the first African-American to hold the world heavyweight title (1908-1915).
18. For an autobiographical account of his early years see the book published when he was in his mid-twenties, Wendell Johnson, *Because I Stutter* (New York: D. Appleton, 1930).
19. For a reminiscence by others, see the tributes in *ETC: A Review of General Semantics*, vol. 49, pp. 423, 424, 433, 442 (Winter 1992-93): Jeremy Klein, "Wendell Johnson," Joseph L. Stewart, "Wendell Johnson: A Memoir," Dean Williams, "Remembering Wendell Johnson," and a reprint of Wendell Johnson, "You Can't Write Writing."
20. Kate recalls the story Mother liked to tell of an occasion when the family was eating out at a restaurant. I was apparently taking an undue amount of time perusing a rather fulsome menu. As my parents, and the waitress, patiently waited for me to make up my mind, the pressure finally took its toll, and I blurted out, "That's what you get, Dad, for teaching us to have no food dislikes!"
21. Although critical of then-U.S. Senator "Sam" Hayakawa's "U.S. English" movement opposing bilingual education, interesting biographical information about Hayakawa's early life can be found in John G. Condit's article, "Hooked on English: S. I. Hayakawa vs. the Bilingual Educationists," *General Semantics Bulletin* No. 59, p. 20 (1994).
22. Alfred Korzybski acknowledges the "valuable comments" of "Professor Kurt Lewin" in Acknowledgments, *Science and Sanity*, 3rd. ed., p. lv (along with "Professor S. I. Hayakawa" and "Professor Wendell Johnson").
23. The Iowa Child Welfare Research Station, at 9 East Market Street in Iowa City, for youngsters aged two to four, described itself as the first institution in the world devoted to the study of normal children – although the normalcy was undoubtedly questioned at times by parents, friends and neighbors. The University of Iowa Experimental Schools ("University Elementary School" and "University High School"), which I also attended, were then left to deal with these nursery school graduates. The project was finally abandoned by unimaginative educational administrators in 1972, on which occasion I was asked to give the last University High School commencement address.
24. Artie Shaw, *The Trouble with Cinderella* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Young, 1952). In his inscription to me Shaw modestly describes it as simply a "somewhat spotty road map through a very thick jungle we're all expected to find our way through." Dad was somewhat more effusive in his dust jacket blurb: "Shaw has stopped the music and is talking to the dancers with lively gestures. He is telling them how much he paid for the clarinet – how much they have paid, too. It is a staggering price – in the coin of personal and social distortion – paid to the ideal of mass taste. . . . He tells what just about everyone would call a success story – and he tells it so well simply because he turns it upside down and it makes a lot more sense that way. . . . The clash of jazzy language and a kind of thinking that is deep and full-bodied is pretty electric. . . . [T]he trouble with Cinderella . . . is bad trouble, and the more we know about it the more happily we'll live ever after."
25. *Science and Sanity*, 3rd. ed., p. xii.
26. "Of all the questions we can encourage the child – and ourselves and our neighbors – to ask, these three are the most important." (To the two mentioned was added the third, "What then?" – meaning, what are the implications, the differences that makes, the things we should do about it.) Wendell Johnson and Dorothy Moeller, *Living With Change: The Semantics of Coping*, pp. 37-38 (New York: Harper & Row, 1972) (in both hard cover and paperback). Described on the title page as "Observations by Wendell Johnson, Selected and Synthesized by Dorothy Moeller," Dorothy says in the Introduction that "this text comes from transcripts of tapes of hundreds of talks he gave during the decade before his death in 1965 . . ." It was an enormous undertaking on her part, and shows a careful adherence to the chatty way of delivering substantive insights that I recall from my conversations with him. Moreover, much of the material – up to and including the title – seems as timely as yesterday's seminar

topic or Internet posting, thirty years ahead of its time. Ms. Moeller died in the fall of 1995. Because it was published after Dad's death, my copy was inscribed in 1972 by my mother, who died in 1989: "May your father's words still bring you comfort, wisdom and pride." Indeed, they did, and they do. Another book of his, which he believed contains some of his best writing, although it has received much less attention than *People in Quandaries*, is *Your Most Enchanted Listener* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1956), in paperback as *Verbal Man: The Enchantment of Words* (New York: Collier Books, 1965, No. 04669).

27. By the time of the third edition of *Science and Sanity* the entry for "Anthropometer" was the simple cross-reference: "See Structural Differential." p. 783.

28. Wendell Johnson, *People in Quandaries* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1946) is still in print in a paperback edition published by the International Society for General Semantics, San Francisco, and available through the ISGS and the Institute of General Semantics. How does a father inscribe such a book to his son? "With my best warm wishes, undated, unindexed and without quotes. Dad."

29. S. I. Hayakawa, in consultation with Basil H. Pillard, *Language in Thought and Action* (New York: Harcourt, Brace, 1949). The inscription reads, "for Nickie," as I was affectionately called as a very young boy, "who, in his upbringing, was no doubt the victim of some of the principles enunciated in this book – Don Hayakawa." Somewhere along the way I seem to have also acquired hardback and paperback copies of the second edition, 1964.

30. The collection of those early books includes, for example, among many others: Stuart Chase (in collaboration with Marian Tyler Chase), *Power of Words* (New York: Harcourt, Brace, 1954), and *Guides to Straight Thinking* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1956); Harry L. Weinberg, *Levels of Knowing and Existence* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1959); a couple more books of Hayakawa's: *Language, Meaning and Maturity* (as editor of "Selections from ETC: A Review of General Semantics 1943-1953") (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1954), *Symbol, Status, and Personality* (New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, 1963), and uncorrected page proof of *Through the Communication Barrier: On Speaking, Listening, and Understanding* (edited by Arthur Chandler) (New York: Harper & Row, 1979); Irving J. Lee (as editor), *The Language of Wisdom and Folly: Background Readings in Semantics* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1949) (dedicated to Alfred Korzybski); and Anatol Rapoport, *Operational Philosophy: Integrating Knowledge and Action* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1954). Hayakawa inscribed *Language, Meaning and Maturity* with more than the usual brief good words:

"TRIOLET

(To an unwilling student of general semantics – which would not be a description, I trust, of Nick Johnson.)

'To a mouse, cheese is cheese; that's why mousetraps work.' W. Johnson, *People in Quandaries*.

To a rodent, cheese is cheese,
That's why mousetraps work.
No date or index if you please
To a rodent cheese *is* cheese
Without semantic subtleties
(Listen, you mouse-brained jerk!)
To a rodent, cheese is cheese;
That's why mousetraps. (WORK!)

Don Hayakawa
Oct. 25, 1954"

31. My Texas years included 1952-58 as an undergraduate and law student at the University of Texas in Austin (B.A., 1956, LL.B., 1958), and 1958-59 in Houston as law clerk to U.S. Court of Appeals, 5th Circuit, Judge (later Chief Judge) John R. Brown.
32. From hundreds of books, monographs, scholarly papers, research reports, and supervised masters and doctoral dissertations, and in addition to the reference to *Because I Stutter* in note 18, above, see, for example, Wendell Johnson (ed., assisted by Ralph R. Leutenegger), *Stuttering in Children and Adults: Thirty Years of Research at the University of Iowa* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1955), Wendell Johnson and Associates, *The Onset of Stuttering* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1959); Wendell Johnson, Spencer J. Brown, James J. Curtis, Clarence W. Edney, and Jacqueline Keaster, *Speech Handicapped School Children* (New York: Harper & Brothers, rev. ed. 1956); Wendell Johnson, *Stuttering and What You Can Do About It* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1961) (also as paperback, Garden City: Doubleday Dolphin Books, C-349, 1961).
33. The Extra Class license is for call sign N0EAJ.
34. See, for example, *How to Talk Back to Your Television Set* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1970); *Test Pattern for Living* (New York: Bantam Books, 1972).
35. Commissioner, Federal Communications Commission, Washington, D.C., 1966-1973; Commissioner, Broadband and Telecommunications Commission, Iowa City, Iowa, 1981-1987.
36. Host and contributing editor, PBS-distributed television series, *New Tech Times*, 1983-1984; author, nationally syndicated column, *Communications Watch*, 1982-1986.
37. In recent years: University of Iowa College of Law, 1981-present; departments of communication studies, California State University, Los Angeles, 1986, University of Iowa, 1982-1985, Syracuse University, 1980, University of Wisconsin, Madison, 1980.
38. Congressional candidate, Democratic primary, Iowa Third District, 1974; board member, Democratic National Committee Harriman Communications Center, Washington, D.C.
39. For example, "Freedom, Fun and Fundamentals: Defining Digital Progress in a Democratic Society," *ETC: A Review of General Semantics*, vol. 51, p. 189 (Summer 1994); "Frauds and Facts: Broadcasters as Public Trustees and Audience Network," *ETC: A Review of General Semantics*, vol. 48, p. 386 (Winter 1991-1992); "The Semantics of Computer Communications," *ETC: A Review of General Semantics*, vol. 45, p. 250 (Fall 1988); "Searching for the Right Word: The Semantics of Heterosexual Relationships," *ETC: A Review of General Semantics*, March 1979, p. 6; "Doing Well by Doing Good," *ETC: A Review of General Semantics*, vol. 33, p. 159 (June 1976); "Defending the Fairness Doctrine," *ETC: A Review of General Semantics*, vol. 32, p. 397 (December 1975); "I Dissent," *ETC: A Review of General Semantics*, vol. 32, p. 273 (September 1975).
40. Only after writing this did I come upon what Dorothy Moeller had written of Dad: "Perhaps he was neither speech pathologist nor semanticist. Surely he was not primarily a clinician. Or perhaps he was these combined plus something else. He used to search for a word to describe himself more accurately. On one occasion, at least, he chose to refer to himself as a communicologist, meaning an individual who had somehow drawn out of his training, learning, and experience a new approach to human problems that is based on heightened awareness of that most human of all of our characteristics, our ability to make and use language and other kinds of symbols." *Living With Change: The Semantics of Coping*, p. ix (see note 26, above).
41. For a relatively current and complete list, see Mary Morain, "Membership Page," *ETC: A Review of General Semantics*, vol. 52, p. 192, 195-196 (Summer 1995).

42. The IFD disease is described in *People in Quandaries*, chapter one, pp. 3-20, "Verbal Cocoons." For an explanation in this paper, see the text at note 63, below.

43. *People in Quandaries*, chapter 18, p. 467, "The Urgency of Paradise."

44. To offer but one of those examples: India, with a rich tradition of both spirituality and superstition, and home to some of the world's great scientists and computer programmers, is now undergoing a growing movement of "rationalists," colloquially referred to as the "guru busters," who are putting the psychics, astrologers and fakirs to the scientific test. National Public Radio, "Morning Edition," November 13, 1995.

45. Very early in the day of "New Age" notions of "wellness," and preventive medicine, Dad was writing about a conception/proposal for "towers of health." In the course of doing so he observed, "One of the basic principles is that you can't solve any human problem within the confines of a single academic department. Academic departments are institutionalized abstractions or verbal structures. They don't correspond at all precisely to anything outside of themselves." Wendell Johnson, "Rehabilitation As It Seems To Be And As It Might Be," *ETC: A Review of General Semantics*, vol. 20, pp. 203, 211-212 (July 1963).

46. "[Y]oung girls striving to look like reigning movie queens; . . . young brides frantically wondering whether to give up their husbands or their Hollywood-engendered definition of *husband* . . . live the high idealism that leads usually [to] 'unsanity.' . . . It is this urge to aim high, to out-snob the snobs, that is appealed to – and stimulated by – advertisers generally, and by Hollywood producers" *People in Quandaries*, pp. 10-11.

47. See, for example, Charles A. Fleming, "Understanding Propaganda from a General Semantics Perspective," *ETC: A Review of General Semantics*, vol. 52, p. 3 (Spring 1995).

48. "What is General Semantics? A Personal View," *ETC: A Review of General Semantics*, vol. 52, p. 299 (Fall 1995).

49. Gregory Sawin, editor, *Thinking & Living Skills* (Concord: International Society for General Semantics, 1995).

50. ftp://lumina.ucsd.edu/pub/.../gs_dir/000_gs.html <http://www.traveller.com/~fcp/ga.html>

<http://www.crl.com/~isgs/isgshome.html>

<http://www710.univ-lyon1.fr/%7Efouet/ga/ga>

and see

<http://www.newciv.org/GS4Kids/>

and Carmen Clark's <http://www.newciv.org/ssread/>

51. *Science and Sanity*, 3rd ed., p. 486.

52. See, for example, Christopher Boyd, "Speaking Rushian," *ETC: A Review of General Semantics*, vol. 51, p. 251 (Fall 1994) (an analysis of the argumentative techniques of Rush Limbaugh).

53. With apologies to the authors of any pieces unintentionally omitted, here are some recent articles from *ETC: A Review of General Semantics* that might be thought to touch on one aspect or another of "the new media." In some the reference may be no more than a phrase or sentence. Few discuss the media's capacity for distortion in the ways I describe; the best, from that perspective, is probably Jean-Luc Plat's article. But all demonstrate our awareness of the relevance of "media" to general semantics.

Michael J. Strauss, "97% Fat Free: On the Art of Misinforming," *ETC: A Review of General Semantics*, vol. 52, p. 284 (Fall 1995) (the manipulative misuse of language in advertising, including broadcast commercials); Raymond Gozzi, Jr., "The Generation X and Boomers Metaphors," *ETC: A Review of General Semantics*, vol. 52, p. 331 (Fall 1995) (the overuse of the "verbal tic" "like" is associated with setting a scene, as in television; and

see Jean-Luc Plat, below); John W. Murphy, "Communication in the Information Age: A Critique," *ETC: A Review of General Semantics*, vol. 52, p. 336 (Fall 1995) (suggesting that "communication," to the extent it exists at all over the Internet, is of a different order from face-to-face); Franklin B. Krohn and Frances L. Suazo, "Contemporary Urban Music: Controversial Messages in Hip-Hop and Rap Lyrics," *ETC: A Review of General Semantics*, vol. 52, p. 139 (Summer 1995) ("Unfortunately not everyone is conscious and knowledgeable about the distinction between fiction and reality," p. 153); Raymond Gozzi, Jr., "The Projection Metaphor in Psychology," *ETC: A Review of General Semantics*, vol. 52, p. 197 (Summer 1995) ("Our senses construct a sort of 'virtual reality' for us. We wander through the world with our sensory-virtual-reality 'helmets' on, blind to anything not picked up by the apparatus . . ." p. 199); Michael E. Holmes, "Naming Virtual Space in Computer-Mediated Conversation," *ETC: A Review of General Semantics*, vol. 52, p. 212 (Summer 1995) (the language of location" in physical space and cyberspace); Jean-Luc Plat, "Like," *ETC: A Review of General Semantics*, vol. 52, p. 66 (Spring 1995) ("The consequence is that TV not only defines what is reality, but much more importantly and disturbingly, TV obliterates the very distinction, the very line, between reality and unreality," quoting from Mitroff and Bennis, *The Unreality Industry*; "Our video culture creates the illusion that the viewer has actually reached wherever the narrative leads . . . past, present or future. . . . The viewer can be mesmerized into considering herself a witness to whatever takes place in videoland." p. 68); Christopher Boyd, "Speaking Rushian," *ETC: A Review of General Semantics*, vol. 51, p. 251 (Fall 1994) (an analysis of the argumentative techniques of Rush Limbaugh); Raymond Gozzi, Jr., "The Information Superhighway as Metaphor," *ETC: A Review of General Semantics*, vol. 51, p. 321 (Fall 1994) (the consequences of talking about whatever it is that is going on in cyberspace as if it were an electronic version of the interstate highway system); Ruth Rodak Goldfine and Gina Marie King, "Never at a Loss for Words: Why Do Cliches Live On?" *ETC: A Review of General Semantics*, vol. 51, p. 338 (Fall 1994) (provides some examples of how "spoken rhetoric, distributed by the twentieth century's many forms of electronic media, abounds with cliches." pp. 347-348).

The "Retrospect: Fifty Years Ago in ETC." section provides some evidence of early media commentary. For example, Clifton M. Utley, "Can a Radio Commentator Talk Sense?", reprinted *ETC: A Review of General Semantics*, vol. 52, pp. 361-362 (Fall 1995) (the relationship between stations' financial condition and their willingness to be concerned about integrity of content); Anonymous, "I'm Going to be Difficult to Live With," reprinted *ETC: A Review of General Semantics*, vol. 52, p. 363 (Fall 1995) ("[advertising approaches] members of all classes on their irrational, that is, their emotional, side, and in a manner well calculated not to arouse such critical intelligence as they may possess."); S. I. Hayakawa, "Poetry and Advertising," reprinted *ETC: A Review of General Semantics*, vol. 52, p. 246 (Summer 1995) ("both [poetry and advertising] attempt to make the objects of experience symbolic of something beyond themselves"). And see the classic: S. I. Hayakawa, "Popular Songs vs. the Facts of Life," *ETC: A Review of General Semantics*, vol. 12, p. 83 (Winter 1955) ("The words of true jazz songs . . . tend to be unsentimental and realistic in their statements about life. . . . The words of popular songs, on the other hand, . . . tend towards wishful thinking, dreamy and ineffectual nostalgia, unrealistic fantasy, self-pity, and sentimental cliches masquerading as emotion." p. 84).

And see, Warren Robbins, "No Dinosaurs on the Ark: Science Language and Art in Evolving Human Culture," *General Semantics Bulletin* No. 60, p. 11 (1994) (the 1990 Alfred Korzybski Memorial Lecture; "'Reality' for the human being/must therefore be seen/as directly related to culture/in its own evolutionary process." p. 23), in addition to the quotes from Robbins in note 68, below.

54. There were, of course, even more occasions on which he used movie lines he identified as such: "Go ahead, make my day" (from "Dirty Harry," in a speech threatening a veto), "The force is with us" (from "Star Wars," in speaking of the Strategic Defense Initiative, colloquially referred to as "Star Wars"), and "We're going to win this time" (from "Rambo") are but three examples also included in the "60 Minutes" report cited in note 55 below.

55. "Ronald Reagan: The Movie," CBS "60 Minutes," December 15, 1985.

56. Of course, to borrow the language of invocation of moments of silence, these distortions occur to us "each in his or her own words, each in his or her own way." As William J. Haney put it in the Alfred Korzybski Memorial Lecture of 1989, "[W]hen we encounter Cezanne and Grandma Moses, Ernest Hemingway and Barbara Cartland, Mozart and John Lennon, Enrico Caruso and Michael Jackson, we are unlikely to have had identical learning experiences, and where are the standardized measuring devices?" William J. Haney, "People-Managers Need Accurate Self-Maps," *General Semantics Bulletin* No. 59, pp. 13-18 (1994).

57. For an analysis of the language used to talk *about* mass media violence, see Arthur Asa Berger, "Violence," *ETC: A Review of General Semantics*, vol. 51, p. 453 (Winter 1994-95).

58. For an early collection, see the supporting volumes for The Surgeon General's Scientific Advisory Committee on Television and Social Behavior, *Television and Growing Up: The Impact of Televised Violence* (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1972).

59. The lifetime of research and writing by Dr. George Gerbner is extraordinary. For an early illustration of the thesis, and data, however, see George Gerbner and Larry Gross, "Living With Television: The Violence Profile," *Journal of Communication*, vol. 26, no. 2, p. 173 (Spring 1976). "[W]e asked a national sample of adults about people's chances of being involved in violence in any given week. [Their] patterns of overestimations [were] in line with television's view of the world. . . . [R]espondents' estimates of danger in their neighborhoods had little to do with crime statistics or even with their own personal experience. The pattern of our findings suggests that television and other media exposure may be as important as demographic and other experiential factors in explaining why people view the world as they do." p. 193.

60. See Nicholas Johnson, "A Public Health Response to Handgun Injuries: Prescription – Communication and Education," in Craig Zwerling and Daniel McMillan, eds., *Firearm Injuries: A Public Health Approach*, *American Journal of Preventive Medicine*, vol. 9, no. 3, supplement, p. 47 (May/June 1993).

61. From a personal comment to me.

62. "It takes time, yes, but if you expect to be in business for any length of time, think of what it can mean to your firm in profits if you can condition a million or ten million children who will grow up into adults trained to buy your product as soldiers are trained to advance when they hear the trigger words 'forward march.'" Clyde Miller, quoted in Vance Packard, *The Hidden Persuaders* (1957), pp. 158-159; quoted in Nicholas Johnson, *Test Pattern for Living* (New York: Bantam Books, 1972), p. 46. Of course, if they can be addicted as well as trained, so much the better. But compare the comment of Emerson Foote on leaving an advertising agency with cigarette accounts, "I guess I just don't think it's right to make a profit out of killing people." Statement before the World Congress on Smoking and Health; also quoted in *Test Pattern for Living* at p. 20, and in Robert Kennedy, *To Seek a Newer World* (1968), p. 6.

63.. See note 42, above.

64. See, for example, *Convention on the Prohibition of the Development, Production and Stockpiling of Bacteriological (Biological) and Toxin Weapons and on Their Destruction*, March 26, 1975, 1015 U.N.T.S. 163.

65. "Woman One: Here you are, dear.

Woman Two: Oh thanks, but I can't look at another dress. All this shopping has given me such a headache.

Woman One: I'll get you something.

Woman Two: Wait a minute, it better be something strong.

Woman One: I've got what you need, Laura.

Woman Two: What's that?

Woman One: Anacin."

The possibility that chemical-free remedies for Laura's problem might be to (1) suspend shopping for awhile, (2) lie down, (3) have a head, neck and upper back massage, or (4) take a walk in fresh air would be inconsistent with the consumption-oriented program and advertising environment in which this early 1970s television commercial was found. Quoted, Nicholas Johnson, *Test Pattern for Living* (New York: Bantam Books, 1972) p. 28.

66. Mason Williams, *Flavors* (1970); quoted in Nicholas Johnson, *Test Pattern for Living* (New York: Bantam Books, 1972), p. 28.

67. Dr. George Gerbner relates the *Philadelphia Bulletin's* report that "in the first five years of the program 'Dr. Welby' received over a quarter of a million letters from viewers, most containing requests for medical advice." George Gerbner and Larry Gross, "Living With Television: The Violence Profile," *Journal of Communication*, vol. 26, no. 2, pp. 173, 178 (Spring 1976).

68. "[A]s 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."

Warren Robbins, "No Dinosaurs on the Ark: Science, Language and Art in Evolving Human Culture," *General Semantics Bulletin* No. 60, pp. 11, 16 (1994) (the 1990 Alfred Korzybski Memorial Lecture).

Noting that an archeologist is excavating Cecil B. DeMille's desert set for "The Ten Commandments," Robbins comments on the confusion,
"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?"
Ibid. at 17.

"Science does not go the way 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 . . ."

Ibid. at 20.

69. See, John W. Murphy, "Communication in the Information Age: A Critique," *ETC: A Review of General Semantics*, vol. 52, p. 336 (Fall 1995) (suggesting that "communication," to the extent it exists at all over the Internet, is of a different order from face-to-face); Michael E. Holmes, "Naming Virtual Space in Computer-Mediated Conversation," *ETC: A Review of General Semantics*, vol. 52, p. 212 (Summer 1995) (the language of "location" in physical space and cyberspace).

70. Paul Dennithorne Johnston had a bit of fun playing with this idea in his description of baseball in the year 2250: "Baseball²²⁵⁰," *ETC: A Review of General Semantics*, vol. 52, p. 134 (Summer 1995).

71. "General semantics is concerned with the study and *application* of basic principles of evaluation . . ." Wendell Johnson, "Editorial," reprinted in "Fifty Years Ago in ETC.," *ETC: A Review of General Semantics*, vol. 52, p. 249 (Summer 1995).

72. Stuart A. Mayper has summarized the principles nicely: "1. A map is *not* the territory. (Words *are not* the things they represent.) 2. A map covers *not all* the territory. (Words cannot cover all they represent.) 3. A map is self-reflexive. (In language we can speak *about* language.) (More fully, an ideal map would include a map of the map, a map of the map of the map, etc. – and also the map maker.)" Stuart A. Mayper, "Critical Thinking vis-a-vis General-Semantics," *General Semantics Bulletin* No. 59, pp. 30, 31 (1994).

73. "Believing is seeing," Warren Robbins reminds us (and my daughter, Julie, has selected, in abbreviated form (BLVNSCN), for her personalized car license plate). Warren Robbins, "No Dinosaurs on the Ark: Science, Language and Art in Evolving Human Culture," *General Semantics Bulletin* No. 60, pp. 11, 13 (1994) (the 1990 Alfred Korzybski Memorial Lecture). The map may not *be* the territory, but when the map takes audio-visual form it appears to have some capacity for reshaping that territory. See note 59, above, and associated text. That is, the referenced material illustrates how (1) individuals' misperceptions of the territory, brought on by film and video depictions of it (*e.g.*, that their health and safety are threatened by strangers with guns), can (2) influence their behavior (*i.e.*, the purchase and possession of their own guns) in ways that (3) change the territory (*i.e.*, into a community, and homes, in which there are more guns) so as to, in fact, increase the risk of injury to themselves (albeit a risk from, primarily, themselves, family, friends and neighbors).

74. "The dominant stylistic convention of Western narrative art – novels, plays, films, TV dramas – is that of representational realism. However contrived television plots are, viewers assume that they take place against a backdrop of the real world. Nothing impeaches the basic 'reality' of the world of television drama. It is also highly informative. That is, it offers to the unsuspecting viewer a continuous stream of 'facts' and impressions about the way of the world . . ." George Gerbner and Larry Gross, "Living With Television: The Violence Profile," *Journal of Communication*, vol. 26, no. 2, pp. 173, 178 (Spring 1976).

75. Although there are not yet five firms that control all of the media on planet earth, there are already "five companies [that] dominate the world's music business." Ronald Grover, David Lieberman, Mark Lewyn and Blanca Riemer, "Invasion of the Studio Snatchers," *Business Week*, October 16, 1989, p. 52. So one may fairly assume that the boast, or threat, regarding all media is not wholly fanciful.

As early as 1989 (the year of the Time-Warner merger), Ben Bagdikian was reporting that, "A handful of mammoth private organizations have begun to dominate the world's mass media. Most of them confidently announce that by the 1990s they – five to ten corporate giants – will control most of the world's important newspapers, magazines, books, broadcast stations, movies, recordings and videocassettes. Moreover, each of these planetary corporations plans to gather under its control every step in the information process, from creation of 'the product' to all the various means by which modern technology delivers media messages to the public." Ben H. Bagdikian, "Conquering Hearts and Minds: The Lords of the Global Village," *The Nation*, June 12, 1989, p. 805.

He quotes Robert Maxwell as having predicted in 1984 that "in ten years' time there will be only ten global corporations of communications . . . I would expect to be one of them." (What Maxwell failed to see was that in ten years' time the predictions would be halved, from ten global corporations to five.)

Bagdikian explains one of the attractions to the owners, and the risks to the rest of us, of these mergers: "A dream sequence tantalizes the lords of the global village: Giant Corporation Inc. owns subsidiaries in every medium. One of its magazines buys (or commissions) an article that can be expanded into a book, whose author is widely interviewed in the company magazines and on its broadcast stations. The book is turned into a screenplay for the

company movie studios, and the film is automatically booked into the company's chain of theaters. The movie has a sound track that is released on the company record label. The vocalist is turned into an instant celebrity by cover features in the company magazines and interviews on its television stations. The recording is played on the company's chain of Top 40 radio stations. The movie is eventually issued by the firm's videocassette division and shown on company television stations. After that, rerun rights to the movie are sold to other television stations around the world. And it all started with an article in the company magazine, whose editor selected it because it was recognized as having other uses within the company. The editor of the magazine is given a generous stock option. Every other editor and producer in the empire takes notice."

76. "Congress shall make no law . . . abridging the freedom of speech, or of the press; . . ." U.S. Constitution, Amendment 1 (1791).

77. See, for example, *Miami Herald Publ. Co. v. Tornillo*, 418 U.S. 241 (1974); *CBS v. Democratic Nat'l Comm.*, 412 U.S. 94 (1973); *FCC v. Midwest Video Corp.*, 440 U.S. 689 (1979); *Pacific Gas & Electric Co. v. Public Utilities Comm'n of Cal.*, 475 U.S. 1 (1986). For a brief summary of some of the requirements that *are* imposed on *broadcasters*, see note 79, below. Although the *CBS v. Democratic Nat'l Comm.*, case, above, supports broadcasters' right to "censor," the Court's rationale for sustaining those requirements that it *does* uphold with regard to broadcasters (see note 78, below) include (a) the "scarcity" of frequencies (notwithstanding the fact that there are roughly 10,000 stations sharing this scarce resource, compared with roughly 2,000 newspapers enjoying the "unlimited" opportunity to publish), see, *e.g.*, *NBC v. U.S.*, 319 U.S. 190 (1943), and (b) the pervasiveness, intrusiveness and impact on children of broadcast programming, see, *e.g.*, *FCC v. Pacifica Foundation*, 438 U.S. 726 (1978) ("the George Carlin case").

78. Cited in note 77, above.

79. See *Red Lion Broadcasting Co. v. FCC*, 395 U.S. 367 (1969). Although this is not the occasion, nor do we have the space, to explain the intricacies of former, and present, Congressional and FCC doctrines in this area, with full citations to authority, here is a brief summary. There is no "equal time" doctrine, as such, although there is widely believed to be. There is an "equal opportunity" doctrine, which normally would not require precisely "equal time," that is only applicable to candidates in political campaigns – and only after one candidate has been given time. (Candidates for federal office have a right to buy "reasonable" time.) The "fairness doctrine" (rejected by the current FCC), gives no rights to any given individual; it required that stations (a) must deal with "controversial issues of public importance," and (b), in doing so, must provide some range of views on the issue (*not* all views, any given spokesperson, format, or "equal time") – something other than an unrelieved, one-sided propagandistic barrage. The "personal attack doctrine," by contrast, while providing broadcast stations with license to engage in as vicious attacks as they may choose, *does* impose an obligation on such a station to (a) notify the person attacked, (b) provide them a tape or transcript of what was said, and (c) give that individual an "equal opportunity" to answer the attack. If the reader wishes to explore these issues further see, *e.g.*, Marc A. Franklin and David A. Anderson, *Cases and Materials on Mass Media Law*, 5th ed., Part IV. Broadcasting, pp. 629-796 (Westbury: The Foundation Press, 1995).

80. See "CNN Rejects an Ad," *New York Times*, October 24, 1995, p. 14 (nat'l ed.).