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WE OPEN this issue with a farewell to Bob Wanderer, long-time ETC contributor, followed by a reprint of his article, *General Semantics: a Compendium of Definitions*. Bob demonstrated the best time-binding with this article, drawing on many well-known general semantics writers and teachers, as well as some less familiar names, and adding a bit of his own substantial understanding. The result provides a hefty nutshell, worth studying on its own and handy for sharing with friends who ask the perennial question.


From the NY Society of General Semantics’ symposium on Wendell Johnson last October, we present Lance Strate’s talk on *Quandaries, Quarrels, Quagmires and Questions*. This paper provides insight into the philosophic path Johnson took to arrive at his foundational work, and explains “why, sixty years later, we still need to read *People in Quandaries*.”

John Schaeffer has taken his own philosophical journey, as a “boomer”, a musician and a writer. His study of general semantics has led him to conclude *ISes Don’t and Nouns Aren’t*. From a different perspective, Claire Villareal considers *Cultural Relativity: My World, Your World, Our World*, and contends that how we assign meaning depends on our underlying cultural beliefs. Understanding this, Villareal suggests, “we can use a culture map to figure out the internal worlds of others in order to communicate with them more effectively.”

The ongoing clash of cultures that we call “America” interests Christopher Bear Beam. In his *Conversation on the Semantic Pedagogy of “Whiteness,”* Beam examines the way our language has influenced our political and social structure and vice versa.
With this issue, we introduce our newest Berman Scholar, Marisa Sleeter. In this internship, Marisa will work with Steve Stockdale on projects to promote the study of general semantics. To show why we chose her, we offer her final paper in the general semantics class she just completed at TCU, taught by Steve. Due to her interest in history and anthropology, Marisa chose to write a book review *On the Muse of History and the Science of Culture*, by Robert Carneiro, the AKML speaker in 2005.

This issue brings Chapter 3 of David Linwood’s ongoing memoir, *That was by My Other Mother*, and *Saying the Word by Sensing the Person*, by Philip Vassallo, who teaches and writes about effective writing for business, school and home.

Finally, in this issue’s “Calling Out the Symbol Rulers” feature, IGS Executive Director Steve Stockdale looks at recent events involving the public use of “bad words” and wonders if we will ever come to grips as a society with *A Fence Sieve Language*.

Our cover art comes to us from IGS member, Lucile Redmore, a writer and artist from Central Texas. Redmore has taught English and art in New Mexico, Texas, Rhode Island and Pennsylvania, and homeschooled two of her three children. In 2006, she participated in the IGS Summer Seminar in Fort Worth, and her poem, “Airborne,” appeared in *ETC*, Volume 64, Issue 1, in January 2007.

“The Tree of Knowledge of No Absolutes” grew out of Redmore’s musings on the various metaphors, symbols and terms of general semantics.

This month, the Institute of General Semantics welcomes three new trustees. Vanessa Biard-Schaeffer, from Paris, France, received a degree in Human Resources from University Paris XIII, and currently works as a real estate agent. Vanessa also publishes *La Lettre Sémantique Générale* and organizes presentations and classes on general semantics around Paris. Sandra Pate, D.Phil, LCSW, Executive Director for The Center for Community Stabilization, lives in Rogers, AR, where she also has a private practice offering counseling to individuals, children and families, and marriage therapy. Frank Nason, from Las Vegas, NV, is president and founder of Residential Resources, Inc., a market research service for real estate developers, and owner of Efelen Marketing Services.

ROBERT WANDERER
(1924-2007)

General semanticist, writer, editor, teacher; Bob Wanderer sustained multiple injuries when hit by a car on January 8, 2007. Complications from multiple sclerosis interfered with Bob’s recovery efforts over the next three months. He died on April 11 at 83.

Bob was two when his family moved from their Wisconsin home to the Haight District in San Francisco. He graduated from Lowell High School at 16 and, after studies at the University of San Francisco, he began a news career at a small Chico, CA newspaper, becoming its editor. He later became editor of a Burlingame, CA paper. His change of career focus came in the late 1950’s, as a result of attending the highly-acclaimed lecture courses presented by Prof. S.I. Hayakawa at San Francisco State. Hayakawa, newly-arrived from Chicago, led the International Society For General Semantics and edited its quarterly journal, “ETC,” assisted by many of his students. Some of his students began the SF Chapter of ISGS, with the goal of introducing general semantics to the public through monthly lectures and seminars which demonstrated ways to resolve conflicts and solve other problems. In 1957 Bob produced the first chapter newsletter, The MAP, to promote the meetings and popularize general semantics principles (e.g., “The map is not the territory”). The meetings have continued for over 50 years now. Through the meetings, seminars and The Map, Bob chronicled the contributions of a long list of writers, lecturers, teachers and other figures who presented at the meetings. In this role and in his writing for the ETC journal, Bob became an important “time-binder” for the many who through their teaching and writing have helped spread the principles of general semantics into other disciplines and systems. In addition, Bob taught gs in adult-level classes for more than 25 years.

Bob’s struggle with multiple sclerosis paralleled but took second place to his love of writing and his long commitment to general semantics.

Jeremy Klein
GENERAL SEMANTICS:  
A COMPENDIUM OF DEFINITIONS  
ROBERT WANDERER

SOMEONE WHO has never heard the term “general semantics” is likely to pick up the “semantics” as the study of words and meanings, usually “tricky” meanings, and consider “general semantics” to be a kind of “general” study of words. We compound the confusion further by sometimes using the term “semantics” as an abbreviated form of “general semantics.” Suppose someone asks you, “What’s general semantics?” You might first consider what kind of answer would be most appropriate in the particular circumstances—an offhand, casual one, a somewhat longer answer, a more comprehensive, even scientific definition.

Short and Simple

Some short and clever definitions that pack a lot into just a few words:

A general semanticist is someone who, upon encountering a person with a beard, would say it was probably a man, but would hold open the possibility that it might be a bearded lady.  
RICHARD P. MARSH

General semantics is the science and art of understanding and being understood.  
WILLIAM PEMBERTON

General semantics, as seen in terms of its working principles, is designed to help you “get the words out of your eyes.”  
WENDELL JOHNSON

General semantics deals with how we use symbols, and how symbols use us. It stresses the dangers of letting the symbol be confused with the thing it symbolizes.  
ANON.

General semantics is the science of how not to be a damn fool.  
S. I. HAYAKAWA
General semantics involves talking about ourselves and about the world so that the talk will fit the world.  

Irving J. Lee

General semantics is a way to open one’s eyes and ears, and to be ready to take in new information.

S. I. Hayakawa

General semantics is a general theory of how you can act a little more sanely because you talk to yourself a little more sanely.

S. I. Hayakawa

General semantics is the study of relations between symbol systems and nervous systems as expressed in behavior.

Robert Pula

General semantics is part of the search for significance that we make in the world around us.

William Pemberton

General semantics helps people to gather information more accurately, evaluate it more clearly, judge it more soundly, and act upon it more successfully.

Stuart Larick

More Complex

Here are some more thorough definitions:

General semantics is not any “philosophy,” or “psychology,” or “logic,” in the ordinary sense. It is a new extensional discipline which explains and trains us how to use our nervous systems most efficiently.

Alfred Korzybski

General semantics can be viewed as a program of guided awareness, of educated consciousness of what is going on in the world and within ourselves.

J. Samuel Bois

General semantics may be regarded as a systematic attempt to formulate the general method of science in such a way that it might be applied not only in a few restricted areas of human experience, but generally in daily life. It is concerned with science as a general method, as a basic orientation, as a generalized way of solving problems.

Wendell Johnson

General semantics is concerned with constructing a science of man, based upon an empirical investigation of the way man’s perception of reality is distorted by the screen of language interposed between him and his world.

Anatol Rapoport
General semantics is the study of how we “size up” the world and then symbolically relate to it. It is concerned with the total reaction of the individual to the world.

Harry Maynard

General semantics is a linguistic self-control which teaches how symbols are related to experience so as to make it less likely that we take too seriously the absurd or dangerous nonsense that, within every culture, passes for philosophy, wisdom and political argument.

Aldous Huxley

General semantics is the study of what makes human beings human. In its inquiry into the disorders of symbolism, general semantics is also the study of what makes human beings sometimes less than human.

S. I. Hayakawa

General semantics points out how we “create reality” by selecting things to notice from Out There, selecting things to relate them to from In Here, and creating a Picture in Our Head from all that. One major problem is that we tend to think the picture we have created is a representation of what’s happening Out There, when so much of that picture comes from stuff already In Here.

Robert Wanderer

General semantics sets up systematically (1) the characteristics of life facts about which communicators must be aware, (2) the host of language habits which represent those life facts inadequately, (3) specific, usable and teachable devices by which to make language habits produce proper evaluation.

Irving Lee

General semantics is an up-to-date epistemology. It is the science of our mental activities, and it deals with how we observe with our senses and how we introspect, how we think, how we doubt, how we attain certainty, how we accept the views of others, how we communicate our own views, how we differentiate facts from opinions, how we remember and forget, how we solve problems, how we invent and create.

J. Samuel Bois

General semantics deals with how [one] perceives and conceives reality, and with the ways in which language, words, symbols, and linguistic habits influence people and human events. It is a way of analyzing language operations and improving communication.

Raymond Arlo
General semantics is like a little bag of tools. When different situations arise, you open the bag and take out the tool that will help you with that particular situation—indexing, dating, the abstraction ladder, the word-is-not-the-thing, or whatever.

A MEMBER OF THE GENERAL SEMANTICS GROUP
AT THE PRISON IN VACAVILLE, CALIFORNIA

General semantics is a general theory of evaluation based on modern scientific knowledge, the postulates of Einsteinian physics, etc. It represents a methodological synthesis of trends in the Western world that evolved during the 19th and 20th centuries, and are now increasingly becoming a part of our new world reorientation.

INSTITUTE OF GENERAL SEMANTICS

More Comprehensive

These definitions are still longer and more “complete”:

General semantics provides a method of studying the part language plays in human affairs. It emphasizes the effectiveness of human communication in (1) the awareness of the all-pervasive character of language in daily affairs, (2) the habit of looking to language as a possible clue to some of our misunderstandings and conflicts, and (3) an appreciation of the scientific method and a consideration of applying it to language.

CATHERINE MINTEER

General semantics insists that our sensory perceptions are gross approximations and may be a source of error. These errors multiply in a fantastic manner when we fail to pay attention to orders of abstraction and when we confuse interpretation with first-order experience.

J. SAMUEL BOIS

General semantics is a very broad methodology covering the whole range of human evaluation, including directions for seeking control of worry, hate, feelings of inferiority, etc., linked to both an ethical system which is not in contradiction to anything known to science, and a program for proper evaluation which is firmly rooted in the psychoneurological structure of man.

HARRY WEINBERG

General semantics is (1) the study or correction of human responses to symbols, symbol systems, sign systems and sign situations, (2) a study of how a human nervous system works and ought to work, (3) an educational theory whose aim is to study the evaluational processes of human beings, and (4) ultimately a nonverbal discipline of silence, of dissolving away the encrusted verbalizations and abstractions, dogmas and creeds which envelop most of us like layers of barnacles.

S. I. HAYAKAWA
General semantics is concerned with organizing the factual material and its derivative higher abstractions in such a way that the relation between the “in here” and the “out there” is continually maintained on a “current” basis. The “raw material” of knowledge is consciously organized, and the relevant portion of it can be focused on whatever particular problem concerns us.

John Magee

General semantics is the science and art of how we operate in the world around us. We take note of the kinds of assumptions we make, the way we see things, the way we use words and symbols, the role of our self-concept in our relationship with the rest of the world, and some of the kinds of bias and distortion that plague all of us in the way we listen, the way we think, and the way we operate.

Robert Wanderer

General semantics deals with our reactions to words, symbols, and to whatever happens to us; as distinguished from semantics, which deals with words and their meanings.

J. Samuel Bois

General semantics is the study of total meaning as it resides in and is a function of the symbol and the response, the person and the purpose, the time and place and culture. It urges us to broaden our awareness, and increases our tolerance for verbal behavior through understanding the way language is used to communicate meaning.

Weller Embler

General semantics is designed to introduce an over-arching system that welcomes the plurality of cultures and logics, and that brings together in a set of simple interlocking theorems the activities of the scientist, the poet, the artist, the philosopher, the statesman and the man in the street.

Viewpoints Institute

General semantics is concerned with an analysis of [humans] as abstracting, self-reflexive, self-determining organism[s], and [their] evaluative behavior[s]. It is not concerned with ideologies, except as specimens of human behavior, since ideologies represent a pathological, reversed order of evaluation leading eventually to an animalistic conflict.

J. Talbot Winchell

General semantics is the study of the relationship between words and people, between symbols and behavior, between what makes “sense” and what sometimes prevents us from achieving the degree of “sense” we’d like. We’re concerned with false assumptions, unseen blockages in perception, hidden confusions in evaluation,
and other ways in which we sometimes fail to act as efficient, as sensible, as human as we might.

ROBERT WANDERER

“Good” Answers

In the situation of someone asking for a definition of general semantics, sometimes you don’t want either one that’s short and clever or one that’s very long and more comprehensive. Here are some “middle-sized” answers:

General semantics is the study of the relations between language, thought, and behavior – how we talk, therefore how we think, and therefore how we act.

S. I. HAYAKAWA

General semantics deals with how people perceive the world and how the language we use has an influence on that perception, and how our language locks us into a particular way of seeing the world.

PAMELA BUTLER

General semantics is simply the name we give to all those inquiries which take as their starting point the pre-eminence of symbols and structure in human communication, and which are dominated by the paradigm of communication as environment.

NEIL POSTMAN

General semantics urges upon us the image of language as a self-correcting cybernetic system, with verbal-visual maps that are tentative and hypothetical and always open to revision and amalgamation. These can never represent more than a part of the territory and are best seen as informed relationships between mind and environment.

CHARLES HAMPDEN-TURNER

General semantics provides a coherent, tested, teachable approach: a system derived from the successful methodology of modern sciences, concerned with developing up-to-date maps of “reality.”

INSTITUTE OF GENERAL SEMANTICS

General semantics encourages the study of processes behind the curtain of language. It investigates the relations between words, what words refer to and the human beings involved, the effects of the language on evaluation and of evaluation on language.

MARY MORAIN

General semantics is a discipline drawing upon the best scientific methods for the deep restructuring of human beings to make optimal use of their potentialities.

ALLEN WALKER READ
General semanticists analyze the mixtures of descriptions, inferences, and judgments that compose differing versions of an event. They examine the originators of various versions, searching for a source who distinguishes between these various levels of abstraction, a source highly knowledgeable about related events, a source unencumbered by a vested interest in conclusions to be drawn from any particular version of what happened, a source whose version deserves confidence.

Robert Allardyce

About Language

To a great extent, general semantics is “about” language and its effects:

General semantics is an analysis of language, beginning with meanings rather than sounds. It can give the student an increased ability to listen, to form valid judgments, to make practical decisions, and to escape the domination of verbal spooks.

Stuart Chase

General semantics is a field of research, scholarship, and practical methodology concerned with the distinctively human function of creating and using symbols.

Wendell Johnson

General semantics is a tool for analyzing and understanding almost every area of human endeavor because it is a metaphor-linguistic system—a pattern for talking, thinking, and feeling about talking, thinking, and feeling.

Harry Weinberg

General semantics is less interested in word lore than in that miraculous harmony by which one goes through words to the world. Its emphasis is on the use of words—the best words in the best order—and on what language does, rather than on what language is.

Geoffrey Wagner

General semantics involves the study of the relationships between words and other words and symbols and other symbols, and the relationships between words and what they stand for, but it emphasizes relationships between language and human behavior. It makes use of [one’s] ability to transcend [oneself] and perceive [oneself] in the act of perception.

Kenneth Johnson

General semantics is concerned with revealing and understanding the linguistic unconscious—the role that language unwittingly plays in our behavior and way of life. It is thus part of the major advance in the behavioral sciences of this century—that of making the unconscious conscious.

Anon.
General semantics is a way to avoid getting hung up on words. By studying the relationship between words and the things they stand for, plus the way the speaker and listener are involved, the semanticist is able to see and think more realistically.

ROBERT WANDERER

About Communication

General semantics is also “about” the whole process of communication:

General semantics is concerned with communication and the reactions people have to the world of words and other symbols. It deals with the way in which our understanding of the world is influenced and shaped by how we talk about it. It is not simply a matter of studying language, but of studying yourself and your reactions.

S. I. HAYAKAWA

General semantics studies ways in which a better understanding of the communication process can improve an individual’s judgment, reasoning ability, and indeed his mental health.

STUART CHASE

General semantics assumes that communication is a good thing. Therefore, the more information you get, the more accurate that information is, and the more effectively you process that information, the better off you are.

ROBERT WANDERER

General semantics is a recent movement which has given knowledge and insight into human evaluating processes and particularly the relationship between meaning and the symbols of language. It is concerned with the study of communication.

LAURENCE PETER

General semantics deals with the process of how we get information and what risks, distortions, and errors take place as this process occurs. It is the study of communication in the broad sense: how people communicate with their physical environment, with themselves, and with other people. It includes how [they] perceive, how they behave, how they use symbols, and how they operate in social institutions.

BURLY PAYNE

General semantics is a new system of thinking and communicating, through which you learn to express yourself more effectively, to put your mental processes in order, and to develop dependable standards for making judgments, evaluations, and decisions.

GINA CERMINARA
General semantics teaches how we can communicate, work and negotiate with others who have maps in their heads that are different from those in our own.

**Emory Menefee**

**About Awareness**

General semantics is also “about” becoming more aware of this whole process and all aspects of it:

General semantics teaches us to expect and look for the unique differences in every object, event, or person, so that we shall be ready (for example, as applied to children) to understand not only the uniqueness of each child but, on the other hand, not to have a faint dislike for other people’s children because they are not like one’s own.

**S. I. Hayakawa**

General semantics is a discipline that offers tools, techniques, devices, and approaches that aim at helping us to progressively “see” greater areas of the realities of a given subject or set of circumstances.

**Samuel Whitman**

General semantics is the study of human evaluation. We study the human being as an organism which handles information, and we also study the nature of that information, particularly our symbolic system which we use to handle that information.

**William Pemberton**

General semantics is largely concerned with human adjustment; the effect of the environmental stimuli on the individual; the effect of the individual on the environment; the realm of life.

**Clarence Meader**

General semantics is about awareness and the personal linguistic unconscious that each of us has embedded within our systems, and taking a look at those unconscious assumptions and unconscious habits to see how they get us into trouble.

**Eugene Rebstock**

General semantics is a methodology concerned with recognizing in effective thinking, detecting hidden assumptions, and communicating with a maximum of understanding and a minimum of time and errors.

**Robert Wanderer**
As a Science

In other words, general semantics ties in the method of science with our everyday life:

General semantics is a never-ceasing attempt to organize, in a well-balanced system, the cumulative findings of the present sciences of man and to derive from this system rules and procedures for self-management and mutual understanding.

J. Samuel Bois

General semantics formulates the method of science in a way that makes reasonably clear the possibilities of its application to our personal and social problems.

Wendell Johnson

General semantics is interested in applying modern scientific methods and knowledge in human behavior in order to direct it toward sanity. It moves from science to sanity—from theory to therapy.

Walter Steurmann

General semantics consists of studying the natural processes of our world according to the best knowledge we have of modern science, and trying to correct our habits of evaluating and speaking to fit what we “know” and how we “know” it.

Rachel Lauer

General semantics is a way to bring to bear upon the management of our organism the findings of the human sciences of today.

J. Samuel Bois

General semantics is an application of the methods, habits, and viewpoints of science to the everyday problems of living. Hopefully, it will lead to an integrated science of man.

Stuart Larick

General semantics is a reeducational system whose purpose is to train people to use language as scientists do when they are being scientific. This is done through the application of various tactics intended to raise the effects of the languaging process to a conscious level and to keep such awareness relatively constant.

Neil Postman and Charles Weingartner

General semantics is a system in which the scientific method, the one clearly effective method of problem solving, has been put into a form which can be applied by the average person to “nonscientific” problems.

Allen Flagg
Long-range Effects

Getting general semantics “under your skin” and developing a “semantic orientation” presents certain difficulties but offers certain advantages:

In general semantics we do not “preach” “morality” or “ethics” as such, but we train students in consciousness of abstracting, consciousness of the multiordinal of mechanisms of evaluation, relational orientations, etc., which bring about cortico-thalamic integration, and then as a result “morality,” “ethics,” awareness of social responsibilities, etc., follow automatically.

General semantics has as its basic idea that no one can know it all, no one needs to know it all, and that human beings can enjoy life which is a never-ending quest, increasing knowledge and wisdom and predictability through experience, by keeping their minds open and flexible and hospitable to new information.

General semantics is a long-range undertaking that will demand, first, a radical self-examination, and then, a painful self-administered change in the values and purposes each of us cherishes.

General semantics aims not merely to make changes in the language we use, but to bring about a sweeping and profound reorientation that will avoid the faulty personality reactions that develop in the Aristotelian system.

General semantics views healthy human beings as complex but organized entities, whose pleasure and challenge is problem-solving, whose characteristics include an eagerness for living, as well as an interest and involvement in daily life.

Related Ideas

The following thoughts, some of them from people outside the field of general semantics, pertain to it:

Nature must cherish uniqueness, because it has gone to great lengths to provide it. We are all unique, since we select what we want to see and what we want to ignore, and this selection is necessarily different for each person.
Words enable us to behave like human beings, but also to behave more stupidly than dumb beasts. . . . Labels are devices for classifying experiences, for putting things in pigeon holes. But in the real world pigeon holes do not exist—even the pigeons spend most of their time flying around.

Laura Huxley

The empiricist...thinks he believes only what he sees, but he is much better at believing than at seeing.

George Santayana

Language is more than a tool for the objective description of the world; it is also a form of word-magic to be used in trying to control the world, or at any rate to control others’ perception of it.

Garrett Hardin

If the human race is to survive, it will have to change its ways of thinking more in the next 25 years than it has done in the last 25,000. In a rapidly changing system it is desperately easy to learn things which are no longer true.

Kenneth Boulding

(Because we as a nation do not make adjustments to current conditions) we are guided, in part, by ideas that are relevant to another world; and as a further result, we do many things that are unnecessary, some that are unwise, and a few that are insane.

John Kenneth Galbraith

To cease looking at things atomistically in visual experience and to see relatedness means, among other things, to lose in our social experience . . . the deluded self-importance of absolute “individualism” in favor of social relatedness and interdependence. When we structuralize the primary impacts of experience differently, we shall structuralize the world differently.

S. I. Hayakawa
What does it DO? What makes it GO? That’s all we’re ever apt to know. Show me an IS that doesn’t DO, I’ll show you how it isn’t, too.

‘Cause something IS as something DOES. It isn’t IS. It never was! It does a “do.” It goes a “go.” But what it IS we’ll never know.

To know a thing, find what it’s not. At least you’ll know what you ain’t got. And then some IS will not confuse its function with the label used.

Nouns are shortcuts, mere abstractions, substitutes for lots of actions. You’ll see, the more you think about the functions label-nouns leave out.

You call it this. I call it that. And thus are arguments begat. To abrogate this noun-compunction, focus on, and think of function.

And thus your mental maps will show reality ain’t IS, it’s flow. For thoughts to match the world “outside,” belief in IS must be denied.

To DO, or not to DO, ‘s the question. Think in verbs. That’s my suggestion. Then if you miss some labels’ meanings, you still’ve ‘groked’ their inbetweenings.

‘Tis where the action all takes place, ‘twixt Nature and the Human Race. Example: Last line’s ‘labels’ show, Man split from Nature. ‘T just ain’t so!

We’re part of IT. It’s all of us. So let’s not miss the cosmic bus. ‘Cause nouns like ‘cosmos’, ‘you’, and ‘me’ are more a DOES than IS! Y’see.....

Nouns aren’t the things you think they are. They’re just things’ names, and on a par with people names, like Joe or Lee. A noun just names a name, y’see.

And nouns, though useful, all leave out the functions of what’s talked about. Don’t get me wrong, I know we need ‘em! Just have a care how your brains read ‘em!

Don’t think they’re real just because, they name a thing that ‘is’ or ‘was’. And don’t assume you know a noun, until you’ve got its function found.

I must digress a line or three, to iterate disparity, ‘twixt nouns that BE and verbs which DO. I’d watch’em close, if I were you.

You’ve read above how IS is not. That goes for WAS, BE, and the lot! Those ‘being’ verbs too often marry concepts which, in real life, vary.

Between two nouns an IS or BE insinuates identity. It makes us think in terms of ‘same.’ and differences are lost. For shame!

Alas, this loss leaves us deceived. For similarities perceived are only due, you have my word, to differences becoming blurred.

You’ll not befooled if you but seek, the difference making each unique. Misleading use of IS can’t fool someone from Doc C Mantic’s school!

In point of fact, it’s often used to keep an audience confused, by joining nouns which shouldn’t’a been. To stretch a point. To lie, or spin.

“She is a nag.” “He is a nerd.” The psycho-baggage from the word is transferred to the subject, thus. Believing IS... we miss the bus!

Now, as to nouns, it takes some thought to comprehend how nouns are not. But once you see they don’t exist, feel free to use ‘em. I insist!

“A noun’s a person, place, or thing.” That phrase should make alarm bells ring.
‘Cause nouns can only represent, in language-form, some real event.

All real-life things don’t BE, they DO. And nouns all function that way too. They sound so plain as they are said, then ricochet inside your head.

I know, at first it sounds bizarre. A tree’s a tree! A car’s a car! But nouns are names. Don’t you confuse the real-stuff with the labels used!

We skip that step, and no one cares. “Okay,” you say, “you’re splitting hairs! The name is not the thing. We know!” Darn easy to forget it, though!

So Occam’s Razor notwithstanding, nouns subvert our understanding. Nouns are short-cuts, actually, to cut out lots of verbs, y’see.

Now we can see through logic’s knot, how ISes don’t, and NOUNS are not. With these two twins it takes some seeing t’watch nouns ‘act’ as verbs of being.

But there you have it, plain as day. So don’t think all mixed up and say, they “are” the same. ‘Cause now you’ve learned, the subtle differences concerned.

A thing is just a mass of functions, all nested so it clouds the junctions. What at first seems just one unit, ‘s really lots of functions doin’ it.

Believe in doing, not in being. That’s because believing’s seeing, ‘n not the other way around! ‘Cause what one looks for shapes what’s found.

Nouns make you believe in things, like purple cows, and pigs with wings. Belief can make y’see what ain’t! A UFO. A ghost. A Saint.

The quest for ‘fire’ was one of those. Men searched the flames and ember-glowes, for what it was that got released, when burning left a thing decreased.

Those scientists of yore discerned, “That stuff in everything that burns, must be the same!”’, and did insist on naming this hot stuff Phlogiston.

Mystery was they couldn’t find it. Now we know the NOUN’s behind it! Looking for the ‘thing’, they missed, the action function. They were pissed!
Imagine their exasperation, someone else found oxidation.
Lighting up my point precisely—Nouns mislead, where verbs serve nicely.

They looked for what and not for how. Their search seems somewhat silly now. They all believed their noun was real, but nouns are not. And that’s the deal!

You pin ‘em down—they wriggle out! They got no tail! They got no snout! You realize, on closer look, what they don’t say could fill a book!

See, nouns are not what they first seem. They’re like a ghost. They’re but a dream. They may seem solid, but they’re not. Those nouns’ll fool ya, slicker’n snot.
MY WIFE Pamela and I recently saw The Good Shepherd at the theatre. In one scene Joe Pesci (playing a great Italian guy probably a mobster) converses with the American spy Mr. Wilson (who happens to be European American). Pesci’s character says, “we Italians have the church, the Jews have tradition, and the n-----s have their music,” and then turning to Wilson asks, “What do your people have?” Mr. Wilson comes back quickly in a totally unfeeling way, “we have the country. The rest of you are just visitors.”

Pesci’s derogatory statement about African Americans shouts loudly about the racial hierarchy in our contemporary, white, “supremacist” culture (and even more so in the culture of the 1950s and 1960s when the story takes place); however, it also silently breathes out a noxious vein of something running much deeper in our acculturated white world that has been framed and crafted by our words, associations, and philosophies. For it is through these dogmas that we have designed our collective reality about difference. Our society has formulated our collective reality around race with a language all its own.

Something else seems “messaged” to me: there is a non-verbal norm of what appears to be a determined and stratified tier-system of racial dominance within his statement. On the surface it looks like Pesci is saying something positive about each group, but the bottom line is that he calls African Americans the “n” word and they inevitably wind up at the bottom. Historically this has been the case. Even in light of the Civil Rights Act, Brown vs. the Board of Education, desegregation and Affirmative Action, white America has to have someone it can place at the lowest point on the gradient of the hierarchy of oppression. Some possible reasons for this will follow in this article.
In order to get this we have to come to understand that a European, white-dominated system formulated who would be considered white, giving permission to some groups to move freely up and down the ladder of social hierarchy developed around race. The ethnic groups cited by Pesci—Italian, Jewish, and African ancestry—have all been stigmatized, made scapegoats, and oppressed in both our distant and recent past. The past has also influenced the present as it continues to exist today. Knowing this must inform how we will shape the future when it comes to understanding, appreciating, sharing resources and exchanging ideas with those who don’t fit within whatever the “white” mold is at the time. Currently this affects most powerfully immigrants coming from Mexico to better their lives in the U.S.

The language of racism has created a way of thinking; in brief, it has created a world that is false to the way the universe seems to operate. Another way to say this is that we have structured the world by our narratives and meta-narratives about WIGO, i.e., “what is going on out there.” But we seem to have gone beyond that. We too often believe that our words about our world are undeniable, unchallengeable facts. We have turned what Korzybski called ‘consciousness of abstracting,’ up side down; people have substituted what they think, feel and believe about the verbal and non-verbal universe that surrounds them, for the structure of scientific fact. Humans sense an event non-verbally, label it, then describe it, and finally create generalizations or attitudes about it. In our mis-education we believe our stereotypes are facts in far too many instances. This is how stereotypes begin and are perpetuated for groups of folks that we fear or whom we deem inferior.

A good example of this substituting may be found in a docudrama by film-maker Oren Jacoby. The short documentary called Sister Rose’s Passion follows the later life of Sister Rose Thering, a Dominican nun. In the film, she tells how her father mentioned that there was a new pharmacist in town, and that he thought the man was Jewish. When he said this, he lowered his voice to a whisper, as though he might be found out just mouthing the word “Jewish.” When she got home, Rose asked her mother what a Jew was. She had read in some of her religious education books that the Jews had killed Christ. Her mother didn’t answer at first, but when Rose prodded her again she said, “They killed Christ.”

After going into a convent, Rose eventually came to the point of researching and investigating Catholic teachings about the role of the Jews in the death of Christ. She found that in Catholic theology and scholarship, as well as at the grass roots level of Catholic lay people, many believed that indeed it was the Jews who killed Christ. For Christians, this meant the Jews had committed deicide or the killing of God.

Later while doing graduate work for her doctorate she looked at the facts of biblical and historical interpretations surrounding the crucifixion and found that it wasn’t the Jews who had killed Christ. Sister Rose’s research revealed that
the tyrannical Romans were well known to use crucifixion for punishment, but the Jews apparently never did. Additionally, many Christians feel that the Gospels are eyewitness accounts, while in fact they were written anywhere from fifty to one hundred years after Jesus’ death. The Gospel writers wrote in such a way as to distance themselves from the Jews. It also should be remembered that Jesus was a Jew who lived among Jews; the apostles were all Jews, and some of the most contentious issues took place at a time when Jews hated this sect that came to be called Christianity. Sister Rose concluded that it was no wonder that the early church fathers and other redactors would propagate the myth that the Jews killed Christ (for another interesting take on this, one contemporary film, *The Color of the Cross*, poses the idea that Christ was an African man who was hated by both Romans and Jews, and was thus removed from the scene by racism).

So for hundreds of years a myth was substituted for fact, a scapegoat was found for the death of God, and within a large, collective unconscious the words “the Jews killed Christ” were seen to be the truth. Sister Rose was one of the key players in the Catholic hierarchy who caused a change within the globe-circling system of Catholicism when Vatican II finally recognized very clearly that Jesus was not killed by the Jews. This led the Roman Catholic Church to renounce centuries of myth, lies, and ignorance. Along her journey she was resisted by many, companion Catholics, not only because she was a woman but because a system will resist and deny an objectionable truth until it can no longer wiggle out of it.

As an aside, I’d like to mention that I grew up in a suburb north of Chicago, in a neighborhood divided between Catholics and Protestants. There was an “uneasy truce” between the two sides. Somewhere, early on in my life, had been planted in my mind the idea that the Jews killed the Messiah, and this was subtly reinforced as I grew up in my Protestant home. Some of my family lived in the South, and the message was more pronounced in that region. This unconscious notion rattled around in the darker, unseen areas of my psyche for years until I came to discover the facts about it. The accompanying attitudes I had ingested about Catholics definitely gave me an subconscious bias and prejudice against them as a group as well.

Just catching a glimpse of the inside of a neighbor’s home, with its mysterious icons and symbols of sainthood, or peering inside the huge, dark, mysterious St. Joseph’s Catholic Church at the top of the street, added to the air of secrecy that stood between me and the Catholic friends I had in the neighborhood. The realities that I felt inside my head about the differences between us erected a wall of misunderstanding and mistrust. Anything that isn’t put on the table and talked about openly breeds mistrust, and dialogue won’t be forthcoming. The wall of separation is buttressed higher and higher by stereotypes and self-fulfilling prophecies about the “other.” The maps inside my head about the territory of Catholicism did not
accurately reflect the human beings who called themselves “Catholic.”

One teacher of general semantics, Irving J. Lee, gave a paper at the Second American Congress on General Semantics in 1941 (compiled and edited by M. Kendig in 1943), titled Mechanism of Conflict and Prejudice. In it, he refers to Aristotle’s philosophy, including many racial myths Aristotle taught his students: some groups were slaves and some free, some were rulers and some to be ruled. Aristotle’s reason? That this was the eternal order of nature and God; harmony could only be attained if the oppressed were ‘kept in their place.’ Aristotle and many other classical traditionalists have been the shapers, movers and shakers of our present day worldviews. In colonial times it was believed that the United States of America was bequeathed this legacy as well, especially in the light of its fundamentalist, patriotic battle cry of “Manifest Destiny.”

The philosophy of dualism is primarily a notion of Western European culture and academia. Dualism forms the hard, inner lining of much of our religious, educational, and social education. We thought it kept us warm against the cold chills of uncertainty and ambiguity. Today we still feel it provides security against the fear of the “other,” and the changing complexities of the world. European American society has fashioned a buffer zone based on dualism that we use to order our world. Dualism seems foundational to our American worldview. We crave certainty and control. Our anxiety appears to lead us to an onslaught of fearful, obsessive emotions, and these may be noted as the primary, psychological state of our society.

Aristotle’s notion of dualism leads to our present method of “either-or” thinking. He formulated a worldview that people, places, or things were either to be categorized as A or Non-A. In the natural system world, a tree is a tree, and what is a non-tree can’t be a tree no matter how hard it tries. Dualism structures a world that is characterized by rigidity, extremes, good or bad, lower or higher, etc. Dualism creates a thought structure positing reality as a series of events, actions, occurrences, outcomes, failures or successes at the two extremes of a linear axis. Dualism allows no “both ands” within a dynamic process of tractable non-opposites. But a living tree is in the process of both growing and dying. It exists in a process state of being with growing and decaying happening simultaneously.

In our contemporary world of quantum physics consciousness of life as process has emerged. Both life processes and actors in the events are integral parts of this dynamism. This new way of viewing the building blocks of life has created a radical shift in the understanding of reality. Life may be viewed now more as a fluid, non-static, ever-changing energy flow with every interdependent form of life in our universe, animate and inanimate, as part of the process. Seen in this way, the decay and rotting of the tree cited above, is a part of the life of the universe. Viewing the structure of life through these lenses
shows us that for the tree, rotting isn’t good or bad, worse or better, but just a part of the joie de vivre of the cosmos.

If we think of the attributes of civilized, intelligent, spiritual, concern for family, etc. on an “either-or,” linear continuum, we give ourselves the permission to assert value judgments on varied people groups different from ours. The value judgments depend on which group is doing the evaluating, which group is being targeted, and what kind of criteria used for the attributes mentioned above. A ‘white racial frame’ is a lens through which those of us who are European Americans (or who view themselves as “white”) perceive the world. From this white lens there is often an “either-or” assumption about others who don’t look like us as being “less than.”

This new view invites us to ask ourselves the question that dualism encourages: is it true to the structure of life to say that some ethnicities are by their very nature, less civilized, less intelligent, less spiritual, less concerned about the lives of their families? Is this logical? Is this a statement of fact or science? Science has found no biological basis for race, and anthropology has taught that race is more a social, political and economic construct of reality. DNA research and testing has confirmed that there is more diversity within one ethnicity than between different ethnicities.

The European American idea of white “supremacy” is indeed a “false-to-facts” ideology. This philosophy that the world of humanity is a dualistic and closed system results in circular reasoning that leads to an un-sane way of seeing reality. Contained in this paradigm is the notion of white superiority and non-white inferiority, an idea fleshed out in a closed, deterministic loop and the dogmatic assertion that “white is always right,” and that no other schemata is true or workable in life. In other words, it’s closed because the only reasonable answer to our human condition is that white “supremacy” is the only answer, period. It’s THE ABSOLUTE TRUTH.

Within its tenets (and its premise that “whiteness” is “normal”), life can never change, people can never change, cultures never change, genetics are forever set, etc. It is life within a boundary of expectations for one group (whites) and expectations for the “other” (non-whites). This rigid ideology is transformed into a system of white privilege, power and possession. To say that European American capitalism is good leaves out many facets of conditions extant in the world today such as environmental racism, racism, inaccurate values of beauty and sophistication, rabid consumerism and materialism at the expense of peace, joy and contentment, along with bloodshed on many continents in the name of democracy and freedom.

On the other hand, when we see that humanity is compounded from many cultures, religions, resources, ethnic assets and values, we can begin to see that all life is dying even in the process of being born, in the words of Bob Dylan. In this non-static manner, our dynamic world is always changing, with the old being replaced by the new; nothing is permanent, and space, matter and energy are in the flux of change. In one ordinary
cell we can see the workings of the entire universe, but when we really get it, it presents a global universe without fixed borders and worldviews. Viewing the “ordinariness” of life in this way may open up our thinking to encompass a superordinate universe without fixed borders and rigid worldviews.

As Dr. William H. Pemberton writes, if we are to solve international conflicts, there is no room for a singular, dogmatic worldview, common only to one, supreme group. With impermanence comes change, and with change comes an appreciation for the novelty of life and other human beings. A worldview propagated by white, European determinism is the cause of insanity, conflict, the push and pull of the ‘better and the worst,’ and much suffering for both the oppressors and the oppressed. A worldview of interdependency is admittedly the cause of unpredictability, but it spawns new creative movements and ideas, and a respect for other cultures who simply view life differently, not deficiently. Interdependency is indeed the ‘true to fact’ way of science.

Our task, then, as whites, and especially as European Americans, is to get used to seeing the world as a place of flowing with the *yin and yang* of both instability and certainty that is forever changing. Just think of planting an apple seed in your yard. Although growth is a possibility, it’s not a certain fact until it occurs. There are many variables that can affect the conditions of the seed in its growth stage: weather, insects, the type of soil it is growing in, fertilizer. Growth is always messy, as is healing. Growth is unpredictable and invisible at times. The apple seed is a part of an interdependent ‘organism-as-a-whole-in-an-environment’ embraced by change and instability. If the seed grows into a tree, it may produce a hybrid mutation or it might produce luscious fruit. It behooves white Americans to understand this about the growth of this nation and others on the globe.

Even in the production of a chocolate bar, there are many factors and compounds that go into creating the end result. Even then some people are allergic to chocolate. A life of diversity is one that implies commitment, understanding difference, knowing the mechanisms of prejudice and racism, accepting unpredictability, and resting in uncertainty. The advantages, however, include more available resources through more cultures working together in community and bringing unique talents and skills to the common goal of keeping our planet alive and well.

Nationalities, cultures and ethnic groups are also forever changing despite having some long-held traditions and practices. There are always exceptions to this rule. Indigenous, Native Americans were very sophisticated in their system of governance prior to the coming of Europeans to the Americas. They ruled their territories, lived and died, practiced their spirituality, had families and lived life for hundreds of years, yet now many of them find themselves living in conditions that can be likened to crowded chicken coops on what can best be described
as ‘developing world’ reservations. The European immigrants who settled in the Americas are now the ruling majority and have imposed a system of social, political and economic enrichment for their own hegemony. And what’s more, too many of us consider only people who look like us, talk like us, make money like us, believe like us, dress like us, to be the “real” Americans.

The language and thought processes of racism, particular to our American culture, are filled with what Joe Feagin calls “sincere fictions.” These “sincere fictions” are the stereotypical notions of how non-white groups are of lower intelligence, less civilized, less hard working and not as moral as whites. Feagin writes, “Today, as in the past, the distorted white framing of society is generated and supported by more than childhood socialization. It is supported by a lifetime of moment-to-moment reinforcements within a long series of interactions in recurring and supporting social networks.” (Feagin, p. 44)

Whites view non-whites through a “white racial frame” as all humans view life through the window of their own unique perceptions. In one of Feagin’s dialogue workshops, he emphasized the need to view this white racial frame from a psycho-historical vantage point. Our social conditioning and perceptual awareness of others doesn’t arrive out of thin air. It is formulated in the mix of our semantic environment, consisting of diverse layers of biological, social, intellectual, historical, psychological, economic and spiritual factors. If one draws a time line of our national history, one finds that ninety percent of our history has consisted of slavery and legalized segregation. Clearly, white Americans have held these conditioned worldviews for a long time.

The white racial frame includes racialized emotions tied to cognitive stereotypes and powerful, neuro-biological images. Breaking this down, Feagin writes:

Whites typically combine racial stereotypes (the cognitive aspect), metaphors and concepts (the deeper cognitive aspect), images (the visual aspect), emotions, (feelings like fear), and inclinations (to take discriminatory actions) within a racist frame that is oriented, in substantial part, to assessing African Americans and other Americans of color in everyday situations, as well as to assessing white Americans and white institutions (p. 27).

As long as white Americans continue to use language and thought processes which are counter to the structure of the real world, we will perpetuate our pathogenic system. But if even one piece of a system begins to change, despite the all too natural resistance, the entire system can shift. One small example of this is the use of the terms “minorities” when referring to non-whites. In point of fact, non-whites are not “minorities” (in the global context), and recently whites in America are becoming a smaller percentage of the demography. This means that we have to change our maps
of the territory we call America both in terms of demographics and how we wish to anglicize the systems within the communities where we live.

It appears to me that the proclivity for white domination may stem from the drive to keep ourselves on top, and not to become extinct. For us, it’s our survival mode. But this is the mode of the old, ‘hunter brain.’ Our anxieties relate to our fear of the “others” taking over, turning the tables, and our annihilation as an ethnic group. It used to be said that the sun never set on the British Empire, but we only have to look at a map of the world today to conclude this statement to be false. Realistically and rationally we can also conclude that the Brits gave the world some healthy contributions, but also some unhealthy ones, namely colonialization with its genocidal instincts.

I like the way that Stewart Holmes explains a way of thinking about difference as it applies to human beings. He describes how he formulates the word “reality” to the universe and our situation. The universe, what we may call the non-verbal composites of life, he names Reality 1. The verbal part of “reality,” that which we describe and talk about (but which is not the reality itself), he names Reality 2. “Reality 2” exists within our limited brains, our limited senses and our limited language. It is the reality we formulate within ourselves.

Including reality in this model means that we tend to separate ourselves from the rest of life or the whole, interdependent universe. This is one of those elemental landmines cropping up in our path suggesting feelings of separation and alienation. Because we see ourselves as separate, we project that anxious isolation onto other groups and initiate one of the mechanisms of conflict, prejudice and racism. This is a consequence of dualistic thinking, a closed system of reasoning; thus, we have placed ourselves within a circle and everyone else (who doesn’t look like us) outside the circle. We describe and assign what’s inside our circle as possessing “+s” and what’s outside “-s.”

Many schools of science, philosophy, and religion paint a canvas of an open universe; that in actuality the “world out there” is all within the circle and this is the “real” deal, what we can call the “circle of life.” At the same time all life is changing as we speak, shifting like the earth’s plates beneath our feet. All life is building up and disintegrating, and all energy is being transformed into other energy in ongoing cycles. Shouldn’t we then develop a new language and a new thinking that would accommodate this universal? Could this not help us to displace an older form of dualism and bring about a new “multivision” of humanity and life?

This new way of thought needs to be congruent with WIGO. My hunch is that it needs to be more congruent to an open-ended, fluid, changing, non-static, and diverse universe in which all forms of life are giving and taking to keep the fire of life alive and productive. A new conversation and language around the issues
of racism is one way of structuring a new model for the discussion of these vital topics in our age of diversity. I consider it crucial for European Americans to engage in this conversation and help to create it, to repudiate the history of European American dominance and oppression in our culture.

REFERENCES

Author’s Note: This article was presented as a paper at the World in Quandaries Symposium, held at Fordham University, New York City, on September 8, 2006. The symposium marked the 60th Anniversary of the publication of Wendell Johnson’s People in Quandaries, along with the 60th Anniversary of the New York Society for General Semantics, and the 8th Anniversary of the Media Ecology Association, and I would like to thank Allen Flagg, President of NYSGS for making the event possible. Neil Postman, who formally introduced the term “media ecology” in 1968, was known to remark that “media ecology is general semantics writ large.” People in Quandaries was required reading in the doctoral program in media ecology that Postman founded at New York University in 1970, no doubt because it provides an accessible and comprehensive introduction to general semantics (not to mention scientific method). I assume that he did not introduce his students to general semantics by assigning Korzybski’s Science and Sanity even though it is the original source because he thought that the book was too hard. I also assume that he did not introduce his students to general semantics by assigning Hayakawa’s Language in Thought and Action even though it is the most popular general semantics work ever written because he thought that the book was too soft. In other words, my Goldilockean conclusion, if you can bear it, is that Postman thought that People in Quandaries was just right.

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THE STORY of the Trojan Horse is a well known tale of deception and betrayal, but it is also a classic example of the disastrous consequences of mistaking a symbol for reality. Clever Odysseus, that great manipulator of symbols, knew that the war-weary Trojans would interpret the meaning of the wooden horse intensionally, that is, in accordance with their own needs and desires. They would therefore be eager to see the horse as a sign that the Greeks had abandoned their decade-old quest to sack their city, and had set sail for home. The horse was the sacred symbol of the sea-god Poseidon, and Odysseus knew that the Trojans would revere it as a holy icon, and not suspect that it was a false idol. Had the Trojans adopted an extensional orientation and engaged in reality-testing, they might have discovered that the Greeks had not sailed across the Mediterranean, but were merely hidden nearby. This in turn might have led them to investigate the horse itself, and determine its true nature as a false front. But after ten years of living with a siege mentality, the last thing the Trojans wanted to do was to look a gift horse in the mouth.

Of course, there were a few Trojans who questioned the symbol of the wooden horse, and the inferences that others had made about its meaning. One of the skeptics was the tragic seer Cassandra, who had the gift of true foresight, but had been cursed so that no one would take her seriously, and most thought her insane. Another was the priest Laocoön, who issued the warning to “beware of Greeks bearing gifts.” But Poseidon, who sided with the Greeks, sent serpents to kill him and his sons, and the Trojans took this as a sign that his suspicions concerning the totem were not only incorrect, but also downright blasphemous. And so it came to pass that those who questioned the Trojans’ reaction to the symbol, their definition of the situation, and their construction of reality were labeled as being either mad or bad. And so, for want of a general semanticist, or media ecologist, the kingdom of Troy was lost.

Over three millennia after the fall of Troy, another set of visionaries warned us to beware of Greeks bearing gifts. Their names were Alfred Korzybski, S. I. Hayakawa, and Wendell Johnson, among others, and the particular Greek that concerned them was not the cunning ruler of Ithaca, Odysseus, but the equally intelligent philosopher from Athens, Aristotle. Aristotle’s Trojan horse was symbolic logic, a mode of expression and cognition that misrepresents reality at the same time that it opened the door to most scholarly and scientific investigation. I should note that no one considered Aristotle to be either mad or bad, or an enemy. In fact, Wendell Johnson wrote that if Aristotle were alive today, he would not be an Aristotelian. Instead, he would acknowledge that the time had come to replace his old approach with one that Korzybski had named general semantics; Korzybski characterized general semantics as a non-Aristotelian system, following the example of mathematics, where non-Euclidean geometries had been introduced,
and the example of physics, where Einstein’s theory of relativity had ushered in a non-Newtonian view of the universe. These three developments are in fact related to one another, and stand in contrast to an older Aristotelian-Euclidean-Newtonian worldview, a worldview in which “things” are solid, discrete, and independent of one another; where reality is static and unchanging; perfect order reigns over chaos and entropy; where species of life are eternal, neither evolving nor becoming extinct; numbers never become irrational, geometries don’t go fractal, and mathematical systems do not have to be incomplete if they don’t want to be; it was a worldview in which rationality rules the mind rather than unconscious impulse; space, time and truth are absolute, not relative; and meaning and logic are never fuzzy. In contrast, a non-Aristotelian, non-Euclidean, non-Newtonian worldview is one that emphasizes change and growth, complexity and uncertainty, nonlinear processes and dynamic interactions, interrelationships and interdependence. In other words, it is an ecological worldview.

Korzybski, Hayakawa, and Johnson were engaged in ecological thinking when they explored the relationship between human beings and their symbols, and between symbols and the reality they are thought to represent. They therefore could be placed in the same class as the 19th century zoologist Ernst Haeckel, who was concerned with the relationships between organisms and their natural environments, and who coined the term ecology. Another member of this class would be Albert Einstein, whose theory of relativity replaced Newtonian absolutes with a focus on the relationships among physical phenomena. This class would also include the philosopher Martin Buber, who wrote about the relationship between human beings and God, the psychologist Carl Rogers, who emphasized the relationship between therapists and their clients, the educationist Paolo Friere, who argued for the importance of the relationship between teacher and student, and the communication theorist Paul Watzlawick who explained that interaction is more about establishing and maintaining relationships than it is about exchanging content. And this class includes media ecologists such as Marshall McLuhan, Walter Ong, and Neil Postman, as well as others such as Lewis Mumford, Susanne Langer, Harold Innis, and the late James Carey. I have provided an overview of this intellectual tradition in Echoes and Reflections: On Media Ecology as a Field of Study (Strate, 2006).

Formal systems of ecological thought, such as media ecology and general semantics, are a relatively recent phenomenon, but ecological thinking itself has been with us throughout our history. Odysseus was an ecological thinker, as was his countryman Heraclitus, a pre-Socratic philosopher who lived not far from where the Trojan War had been fought by his ancestors; his well known statement that you can never step into the same river twice, is quoted with approval by Wendell Johnson in People in Quandaries (1946), who writes that “Heraclitus was
over two thousand years ahead of his time. The notion which he so aptly expressed has about it a distinctly modern flavor. It is one which Einstein might heartily endorse. It is the basic notion of science, and science as we know it is not as old as Heraclitus — far from it” (p.23).

What Johnson (1946) meant by “science as we know it” was not so much the science of Copernicus, Galileo, and Newton, but the science of the twentieth century. Johnson describes the modern scientist as “a master of discrimination,” explaining that “differences are his stock in trade, and differentiation is the operation by which he performs his wonders” (p.38). “A similarity,” Johnson explains, “is comprised of differences that don’t make any difference” and “when a scientist says that two things are similar, he is saying … that certain differences between them do not serve to make them different one from the other, for certain purposes” (p.38). Similarities, according to Johnson, are never absolute. Consequently theories and generalizations, which are based on perceived similarities, must always be tentative and open to refutation and falsification. Along these lines, Johnson describes the method of science as consisting of:

(a) asking clear answerable questions in order to direct one’s (b) observations, which are made in a calm and unprejudiced manner, and which are then (c) reported as accurately as possible and in such a way as to answer the questions that were asked to begin with, after which (d) any pertinent beliefs or assumptions that were held before the observations were made are revised in the light of the observations made and the answers obtained. Then more questions are asked in accordance with the newly revised notions, further observations are made, new answers are arrived at, beliefs and assumptions are again revised, after which the whole process starts over again. In fact, it never stops. Science as method is continuous. All its conclusions are held subject to the further revision that new observations may require. It is a method of keeping one’s information, beliefs, and theories up to date. It is, above all, a method of “changing one’s mind” — sufficiently often. (pp. 49-50)

Johnson (1946) goes on to observe that much of what he has described as the method of science has to do with the way that language is used, from which he concludes that “the language of science is the better part of the method of science” (p.50). He then adds that “the language of sanity is the better part of sanity” (p.50), by which Johnson means that the goal of general semantics is to adapt the language of science for use in everyday life. To this we might add that the goal of general semantics is to encourage ecological thinking in everyday life.
We might further add that the goal is to encourage media ecological thinking, for as Johnson explains about the structure of language:

On the one hand, it plays a role in determining the structure of our culture, our society, our civilization. On the other hand, it serves as the chief medium or means whereby the individual acquires or interiorizes that culture structure. Thus, a study of language structure leads both to a deeper understanding of our civilization and its problems and to a keener insight into the basic designs of individual lives and personalities. It is as though mankind had spun an enormous web of words — and caught itself. (p.18)

Media ecologists tend to view language as a medium, and often understand media to be technologies and techniques. Consistent with this approach, Johnson (1946) views language as both medium and technique:

Before we can change our language, it is essential that we develop a certain kind of attitude toward it — the attitude that language is to be viewed as a form of behavior and that, like other behavior, it is to be evaluated as technique. … we evaluate a technique by asking what it is designed to do, how well it does it, and with what consequences. (p.269)

Media ecologists also understand media to constitute environments, in one sense webs that we create, inhabit, and find ourselves imprisoned by. Accordingly, Johnson (1946) introduces the term “semantic environment” (p.412; see also pp.417-426), which we can understand in relation to the larger media environment that includes all of our modes of communication, all of our codes and symbols systems, all of our techniques and technologies. Accordingly, we can could define general semantics as the study of semantic environments, and even refer to general semantics as a semantic ecology.

Johnson, like Korzybski before him, understood that the structure of language as a medium, technique, and environment, is not neutral, but has an inherent bias. Fundamentally, language is a means by which we impose a sense of order, stability, and predictability on an otherwise chaotic, volatile, and uncertain world. It is a method for reducing differences down to a manageable number by directing our attention to similarities. It is a way to gain a sense of control by giving us the power to impose names and labels on phenomena. Language allows us to step into the same river twice, at least symbolically. The bias of language is the bias of identity, and identity is a relationship that exists only in symbols systems. There are no identity relationships in physical, chemical, or biological systems, where no two
things or phenomena are ever exactly alike. But language allows us to make identity statements such as one plus one is two, the sky is blue, Pluto is not a planet, war is peace, freedom is not free, ignorance is bliss, and a rose is a rose is a rose.

The bias of identity allows language to function as a kind of informal science, a way of knowing the world, a form of theory-building. And there should be no doubt that the bias of identity has had enormous survival value for our species, serving as a shortcut for making evaluations and predictions about our environment, and helping us to alter our environment to enhance our own survival. The bias of identity is also vital for maintaining social cohesion, inducing cooperation among individuals, and facilitating collective action, without which human survival is impossible; this is why Kenneth Burke (1969) argues that the primary function of rhetoric is identification, not persuasion. The bias of identity is therefore not a problem in and of itself, and in fact constitutes an evolutionary advantage that has much to do with the success of our species. The problem with identity, I would suggest, is the problem of too much of a good thing. It is the ecological problem of losing a healthy balance. How does this happen? First, we need to recognize that while the bias of identity may be characteristic of language in general, different languages may differ in the degree to which they exhibit this bias. As Johnson (1946) contends, it is possible to reduce the level of this bias in English and other languages. By the same token, the level can be raised, perhaps deliberately by the propaganda techniques George Orwell described in 1984, but also accidentally, as the unintended effect of other types of changes. And the most significant change that has affected human language is the invention of writing (Goody 1977, 1986; McLuhan, 1962, 1964; Ong, 1967, 1982).

As a speech pathologist, Wendell Johnson would certainly agree that human language is essentially speech, and he would appreciate the distinction between the spoken word on the one hand, which has been with us for perhaps one hundred thousand years or more, and the written word on the other hand, whose first awkward appearance was only about five thousand years ago. He might even note that the fact that we say that a written word is a word, rather than saying that it stands for or represents a word, reflects how deep the bias of identity extends to writing. Writing is a secondary symbol system used to symbolize the primary symbol system of speech. And as a medium, technology, and environment, writing has its own biases, which in turn act on and alter speech and language. One of these effects has been the intensification of the bias of identity. The classicist, Eric Havelock (1978), has demonstrated this change by studying the effects of the alphabet on the ancient Greek language. In the Greek colonies on Asia Minor, the same region where the Trojan War was fought, the alphabet was used to transcribe the oral tradition concerning those events, which we know as the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*. The content of these poems is essentially preliterate, and as Havelock explains, the language is
one of dramatic action, of agents performing acts, rather than statements of static
description. The verb “to be” is not used to identify or equate in the language of
the oral epics, but begins to be used in this fashion as more and more literate works
are produced, that is, its use increases as we move from Homer to Hesiod, through
the pre-Socratics, to Plato and Aristotle. Aristotle’s logic, which says that, if A equals
B and B equals C then A equals C, is in fact a by-product of the ABCs.

The alphabet was first developed by the Semites, and the Greeks learned about
this technology from the Phoenicians, which is why they referred to it as Phoenician or
phonetic writing. From another group of Semites, the Israelites, came the God of the
alphabet, the eternal, all-powerful and unchanging God whose name is represented by
four Hebrew letters Yod Hay Vav Hay (YHWH), commonly rendered in English as
Jehovah. These four letters are translated as, “I am that I am,” a statement of absolute
identity that stands as the foundation of monotheism, of the Abrahamic religions of
Judaism, Christianity, and Islam. And it was paralleled by the sacred written texts that
when copied with care, could be duplicated with little or no variation. Along the same
lines, in the Greek colonies on Asia Minor, an oral tradition consisting of countless oral
performances over many generations, each one different and unique, was transformed
into a fixed text, encoded by means of alphabetic writing; the result was that the ex-
temporaneous and improvisational singing of tales was replaced by a new practice
of verbatim memorization and recitation. The variation that was taken for granted as
a characteristic of oral tradition has suddenly been thrown into sharp relief by the
alphabet, and had come to be seen as corruption, while identity became associated
with authenticity (Kirk, 1962).

In the kingdom of Lydia, bordering the Greek colonies on Asia Minor, the
alphabet effect led to the minting of the first coins, establishing the idea that all
goods can be reduced down to the same monetary units, just as all speech could be
reduced down to the same set of twenty-odd letters. Is it any accident that the Greek
colonies also gave rise to the first physicists, natural philosophers who introduced
the idea that all of the universe could be broken down into identical, indivisible
units they called atoms (Logan, 2004). Heraclitus is often counted among them,
although he was unique in his emphasis on change and therefore his resistance to
the bias of identity. The pre-Socratics laid the groundwork for Aristotle’s logic,
not to mention Euclid’s geometry, while further to the east, the Hindus, who also
adopted the alphabet from the Semites, used it to develop the numerical notation
that we are all familiar with, and with it higher mathematics (Logan, 2004). All of
this culminates in Newtonian physics, and the Aristotelian-Euclidean-Newtonian
worldview.

We should further acknowledge that the Semites also introduced the concept
of law, the earliest examples being associated with the Babylonian Hammurabi,
Quandaries, Quarrels, Quagmires, and Questions

and the Israelite Moses (Logan, 2004). And with formal, written law came the idea that we are all equal and identical before the law. The Greeks, in turn, introduced the concept of democracy, that citizens are the atoms of society, each having an equal say in making political decisions. From these seeds emerge the modern idea of individualism, and with it the declaration that “all men are created equal.” The ideal of equality associated with the founding of the American republic and the European Enlightenment presupposes identity relationships among citizens, at least in the symbolic realms of politics and the law, leading to further demands for equality in our social, educational, and economic systems. While modernity was associated with equality through uniformity, contemporary postmodern culture seems to instead favor equality through diversity, the idea that we are all identical in being equally different from one another.

Identity is not just a symbolic affair, as the technologies of mass production have given us a multitude of seemingly identical products. Mechanization begins to take command in the monasteries of medieval Europe, where the invention of the mechanical clock produced the first multiple, identical units, in this case hours, and later minutes and seconds (Mumford, 1934). It continues its march during the fifteenth century in a shop in Mainz, Germany, where Johann Gutenberg starts the printing revolution by producing multiple, seemingly identical copies of the Bible and other texts (Eisenstein, 1979). And it completes its takeover with the Industrial Revolution that begins in the late 18th century and culminates in the early 20th century technique of the assembly line. Mechanization and industrialization also give us the media of mass communication, newspapers and magazines, movies and recordings, and especially broadcasting. These powerful technologies made possible the creation of the mass society, a society in which a mass of individuals are identical in their anonymity and apathy, equal in their alienation and impotence, and all the same in their indifference (Ellul, 1965). This was the moment that Korzybski introduced his non-Aristotelian system, having witnessed the first use of weapons of mass destruction during the First World War. And Wendell Johnson gave us People in Quandaries following the even more massive and indiscriminate destruction of the Second World War, in which whole populations were identical in being subjected to concentration camps, gas chambers, aerial bombardments, V-2 rockets, and atomic bombs. It may well be true that every war dating back to the Greek assault on Troy is a war of (or for) identity (McLuhan, 1976), but the two World Wars were wars of mass identity, while the Cold War ended with a massive identity breakdown on the part of the Soviet bloc.

If terrorism and the war on terror represent a different kind of warfare, one fought with new weapons and with the aid of new technologies of communication, they remain conflicts over identity relationships. And our present-day identity
politics is just identity war by other means. Along the same lines, electronic technologies have reversed some of the characteristics of mass society, but we have gone from mechanical reproduction to an even more perfect form of digital reproduction, from printing to photocopying to computer-based copy and paste operations. Our new media continue to extend the bias of identity into new realms. And then there is the biotechnology of cloning, which opens up a new universe of identity relationships. The bias of identity has mutated since the time of Aristotle, but if anything, it has resulted in an identity crisis of unprecedented proportions. And that is why, sixty years later, we still need to read *People in Quandaries*.

In that book, Wendell Johnson wrote about the IFD disease, which stands for Idealization, Frustration, and Demoralization. The IFD disease is a disease of language, brought on by the bias of identity. It begins when we idealize a word, such as love or success, or freedom or democracy. As goals, these vague ideals are unobtainable, no matter how hard we strive for them. And because they are unreachable, we wind up frustrated, and ultimately demoralized. Johnson’s solution is to use the language of science, define our terms in a clear, precise, and concrete manner, specify the context in which these terms will be used, and specify the operations and procedures related to these terms. Johnson presented the IFD disease as a quandary, and general semantics as a solution. I want to add a footnote to the IFD disease with the 4 Qs that make up the title of my talk, Quandaries, Quarrels, Quagmires, and Questions (I believe that Johnson, as a specialist in speech, would appreciate the alliteration, as well as my particular emphasis on the peculiar quality of the letter Q). Beginning with Johnson’s key term of Quandaries, my intent is to emphasize not just the personal maladjustment that was Johnson’s focus, but the interpersonal and social maladjustment that can also occur. To use the example of the Trojan War, which begins when Helen, the wife of Menelaus, runs off with Paris to Troy, the quandary in this case had to do with the idealization of terms such as love, and marriage, both of which remain quandaries in need of operational definitions to this very day. But in this instance, the quandary led to a quarrel, specifically the Greek assault on Troy. The quarrel then resulted in a quagmire, as ten years go by with no resolution to the conflict.

Now, as I mentioned earlier, Odysseus was an ecological thinker. He therefore recognized that the Greek efforts to push through the walls of Troy, coupled with the Trojans resisting by pushing back at the Greeks, had resulted in a stalemate. In effect, the Greeks and Trojans together had created a homeostatic system (Postman, 1976; Watzlawick, Bavelas, & Jackson, 1967; Watzlawick, Weakland, & Fisch, 1974). The Greeks would try to change that system by fighting harder, but this would result in the Trojans fighting back with greater effort, so that the initial change within the
system would result in no real change to the system. As an ecological thinker, Odysseus was able to ask the right questions, questions being the fourth Q, and the way out of the quandary. He was able to ask questions about why the Greeks’ strategy had failed, and what new strategy might succeed. And he was able to ask questions about how changes within the system differ from changes to the system itself, and how changes within the system might fail, and changes to the system might succeed. And so, Odysseus was able to step outside of the system, instructing the Greek forces to appear to fall back instead of continuing to push forward. The result was that the entire system of Greeks and Trojans stuck in a quagmire experienced system-wide change of epic proportions.

Wendell Johnson stressed the importance of asking good questions, and that is why I have highlighted questions as the means by which we may escape our quandaries, quarrels, and quagmires. In other words, questions are the answer. As Johnson wrote in *People in Quandaries* (1946), “in the meaningful use of language it is a cardinal rule that the terminology of the question determines the terminology of the answer” (p.52). Media ecologists of course recognize that this is another way of saying that the medium is the message. Johnson goes on to explain.

One cannot get a clear answer to a vague question. The language of science is particularly distinguished by the fact that it centers around well-stated questions. If there is one part of a scientific experiment that is more important than any other part, it is the framing of the question that the experiment is to answer. If it is stated vaguely, no experiment can answer it precisely. If the question is stated precisely, the means of answering it are clearly indicated. The specific observations needed, and the conditions under which they are to be made, are implied in the question itself. As someone has very aptly put it, a fool is one who knows all the answers, but none of the questions. (pp.52-53)

General semantics and media ecology have many good questions, questions about differences, about what differences make a difference, and what differences may be safe to ignore. Questions about how symbols represent reality, how words stand for and point to things in reality, how maps depict territories, and how media extend us outward into our environments. Questions about what symbols fail to say about reality, what words cannot express about things, what details maps leave out, and how media insulate us from our environment. And questions about the nature of symbols themselves, about what a word is and is not, about how maps are made, about the meaning of meaning and the biases of technologies, about how the medium is the message, and how media, by separating us from our environment,
become our new environment. All of these questions are not only good questions, they are ecological questions. They are questions about our relationships with ourselves, with each other, with our symbols and tools, with our semantic environments and media environments. Ultimately, they are questions about achieving sanity on a personal and global level, they are questions about what it means to be human and especially what it means to be human in a technological age, and they are questions about our place in a universe that is 14 billion years old.

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IN VALHALLA, fallen heroes spend their days fighting and reliving their most glorious exploits, maiming and being maimed only to be restored each evening and feast together in the great hall. In a Buddhist hell realm, on the other hand, miserable hell beings spend countless eons hacking each other to bits by day only to be healed every night so they can endure the same torment endlessly. How can one culture’s heaven be another’s hell? Each culture has a distinct underlying set of core beliefs about the world. Just as a massive object will warp space/time around itself, drawing less massive objects toward it, so too these massive ideas warp the space around them in the mental worlds people build to navigate their day-to-day realities. After defining terms and exploring the general concepts underlying “cultural relativity,” this paper will propose a way of visualizing the map behind a given culture’s view of the world.

To begin with, in the current context “culture” is defined as a particular set of assumptions about reality made by an individual and/or shared by a group and passed on through time. Any given culture is an orderly frame that delineates the worlds of those who subscribe to it. For instance, in junior high culture young people share beliefs about which music is cool, which of their peers are the popular ones, which clothes are preppy, gansta, skater, etc. These ideas will differ from school to school, but each iteration of the junior high culture structures its world around similar institutions: the mall, the lunch room tables, current gossip, budding romantic interests, and other mainstays of young adolescent life. A culture, then, is a structured account of how the world works and one’s place in it.

Next, what about relativity? The relevant aspect of Einstein’s famous theory of relativity is that motion must be defined in terms of a given context, that there is no single underlying frame of reference with regard to which all movement

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in the universe can be measured. For instance, we can say that a car travels at sixty-five miles per hour, but what we really mean is that a given car travels along the earth’s surface at sixty-five miles per hour while the earth rotates on its axis and travels around the sun, which itself is rotating in one of the arms of the Milky Way. Because we’re moving along with the earth, it seems to us to be standing still (even though it’s moving much more quickly than the car!). An observer on the planet Mars would observe the car’s velocity very differently, and an observer in a distant galaxy would give an even more divergent velocity for our sample car.

In the same way, each culture’s point of reference is distinct, and the meaning of a given event will be very different depending on who the observer is. In India, the most polite way to get someone’s attention is by snapping at them. In America, snapping to get someone’s attention is considered impatient and condescending. What does a snap mean? It depends on who does the snapping. As long as everyone is a member of the same culture, the one snapping and the one hearing the snap will understand the meaning of the snap in its context. However, if an Indian snaps at an American who is unfamiliar with the custom, that American will translate the event as an insult. Relativity, then, means in this context that each event, statement, or transaction has meaning and value according to the cultural lens through which it’s viewed. There is no such thing as the absolute meaning of a snap.

Having established basic definitions for “culture” and “relativity,” we can now examine the phrase “cultural relativity.” For our purposes, cultural relativity means that any event or transaction must be explained in terms of a given cultural framework in order for meaning to be ascribed to it. To use our earlier example of a snap, cultural relativity means that the snap has one meaning to the Indian and another to the American. The snap itself is neither polite nor rude; it is simply a transaction between two individuals. It’s tempting to say that if the snap occurs in India, then it’s polite and the American shouldn’t be bothered by it, and if the snap occurs in America, then the Indian should know the culture here and refrain from snapping. But in reality, the only place where that snap has any meaning at all is inside the heads of the participants in the transaction.

Cultural relativity, then, denies any inherent meaning to any communication but predicts instead that when two people share a similar enough frame of reference, they will interpret a linguistic event similarly. When we communicate effectively with our friends (with whom we share very similar cultural frames of reference), it leads us to believe that our words and symbols have an inherent meaning, but in reality the beliefs inside the speaker’s head and those inside the listener’s are similar enough that the illusion of external meaning is created. When we try to communicate with people whose internal worlds are more divergent from our
own, we more often find that they just don’t see things clearly or can’t seem to understand simple concepts. (People with divergent internal worlds, incidentally, need not come from the other side of the world. They could be our parents — or children — or anyone else who doesn’t see things our way.)

The bad news here is that we may never get everyone else to see life entirely our way. The good news is that we can use a culture map to figure out their internal worlds in order to communicate with them more effectively.

A culture map is an abstract construct that shows the contours of a given culture’s version of reality. Figure 1 is an example of a culture map which we can visualize in three dimensions, with massive, foundational ideas (defining concepts) at the center and lesser supporting ideas falling into place around them. These defining concepts shape the center of the culture map, and lesser concepts then cluster around those central ones, providing an internally coherent map of the entire known conceptual world for that culture. An individual using that culture map to explain her world will then locate any experience somewhere within that conceptual space and determine its meaning based on where it fits into her pre-existing vision of the world.

One last important feature of a culture map is that its edges are porous, allowing individuals to pass in, examine the terrain, and pass through. One doesn’t have to be a member of a given culture in order to peek into its culture map and get an idea of what the world looks like to someone who subscribes to that map. However, when one looks into another’s culture map and only sees the peripheral beliefs or doesn’t appreciate the power and beauty of that map’s defining concepts, that observer will misunderstand the other culture.

If we were, for instance, to imagine a Protestant Christian woman from the American Midwest and a Theravadin Buddhist woman from Northeastern Thailand, we would find very different defining concepts at the centers of their respective culture maps. At the center of the Christian’s world is an all-powerful creator god who sustains life as she knows it and directs the course of events here on earth. The rest of the Christian’s world falls into place around that central concept. If the Christian is “good” (however that’s defined in her denomination), she will go to heaven when she dies, and there she’ll be reunited with all her good loved ones. From her belief in the creator god at the center of her world, she explains the entire history of the world — its creation to its destruction, as well as her own life, from her birth to her death.

The Buddhist’s culture map looks very different. At the center of her map is the dharma, the Buddha’s teachings about the nature of the world and how to achieve liberation from delusions about the world. There is no creator god at the center of her culture map, and as a result her mental world is very different. The world and all sentient beings in it have existed from beginningless time, cycling
from one lifetime to another because they continually cling to concepts of intrinsic existence. When the Buddhist dies, she will pass into another rebirth in any of six states of existence, there to suffer once again the slings and arrows of outrageous delusion, until in some lifetime she finally pierces the veil of delusion and realizes the true nature of existence, at which point she has attained nirvana and will never again be reborn as a helpless sentient being. The Buddhist’s life is also defined from birth to death and on into the next life.

Now let’s say that our Christian doesn’t know much about Buddhism and observes our Buddhist bowing to a statue of the Buddha. In that Christian’s mind, the act of bowing is an act of worship. The Buddhist must be worshipping the Buddha, and the Buddha must be the god of the Buddhist religion. The Christian observer has just translated the Buddhist worldview into the Christian culture map. She has placed the Buddha in the central position in her draft of the Buddhist map, with the worshipper assumed to perform the same actions toward the Buddha that the Christian would perform toward Christ. The Buddha must be divine, must offer salvation, must demand certain things of his followers, must offer a way into an eternal heaven. The Christian’s assumed map of the Buddhist’s worldview is in the ballpark, but it’s certainly not an accurate picture of Buddhism. (The Buddhist, given a similar level of knowledge about Christianity and observing the Christian practicing her religion, would probably make similarly inaccurate assumptions about the mental map underlying Christianity.)

In any situation, then, an observer translates an action through the lens of her own culture map, and it finds a place there according to the core assumptions about reality contained within that map.

Because the Christian’s culture map has at its center a creator god who is relatively anthropomorphized, the contours of her cultural worldview will naturally be very different from the Buddhist’s. When a creator god is at the center of the culture map, karma makes no sense, nor do the Buddhist’s claims to work toward perfection of her own mind. From the Christian’s point of view, if the Buddhist refuses to acknowledge her central creator god, she’s already denying the fundamental nature of reality. If the Buddhist proceeds from her own assumptions to try to see reality ever more clearly, to let go of ideas of static selfhood or indeed of anything being unchanging and eternal — if the Buddhist assumes these things, then according to the Christian culture map she will simply meander further from reality until she becomes completely delusional.

From the Buddhist’s point of view, if the Christian begins with the assumption that there is an unchanging, eternal being in control of the entire universe, she’s already fallen into a serious delusion about the nature of reality. If the Christian then attempts to worship that being, expecting punishment from it at times and rewards at others, the
Christian is departing further from a clear understanding of reality even as she deepens what she considers to be her spiritual practice. From the Buddhist’s point of view, then, the Christian is actively obscuring her understanding of reality as it is.

Which of the two is correct? The easy way to answer this question is to pick the one with the culture map most similar to our own and back her against the other. But instead we can counter this question with a physics question: A scientist is sitting in his lab on earth, watching a real-time video of an astronaut piloting his spacecraft near the speed of light as he approaches a massive star. To the scientist, the astronaut’s time passes slowly, the second hand of his watch ticking lazily every few seconds. To the astronaut, the scientist’s watch has sped up, ticking several times per second. Which of the two is experiencing “real” time? In this situation, it’s obvious that neither has the “correct” time because there’s no such thing as a universal standard of time measurement.

In the same way, there’s no such thing the one “real” culture map which every human being would share if we could all just see things clearly. Even a simple physical event like the weather on a given day can have one meaning in one person’s internal world and a different one for someone else. Many people see portents in a cloudy day, while a trained scientist might see nothing but prevailing winds and rainfall patterns. Even the simplest event is open to multiple interpretations.

Given, then, that each culture is structured according to central ideas about the world, and given that one could visualize a map of a given culture, with its massive defining concepts at the center orbited by secondary ordering principles of the nature of reality — given, in short, that one can use culture maps to visualize the organization of cultural space, what does it matter? It matters because it gives us a way to understand others not as strange people with a faulty understanding of the world, but as people living in their own unique cultural space. It gives us leave to explore respectfully into their defining concepts, to allow them their own internally consistent world without having to impose ours on them. It opens our eyes to the rich diversity of the world around and inside us, most of which we take for granted. And most importantly, it allows us to let go of the tyrannical idea that the rest of the world must join us in the one true culture map.
A culture cannot be discriminatingly accepted, much less be modified, except by persons who have seen through it—by persons who have cut holes in the confining stockade of verbalized symbols and so are able to look at the world and, by reflection, at themselves, in a new and relatively unprejudiced way.

Aldous Huxley, “Culture and the Individual” (1963)

During the first months of 2007, the American public, politicians, and media have banded together to up-armor our “confining stockade of verbalized symbols.” Instead of cutting holes through which to self-reflexively evaluate ourselves, our language, and our behaviors, we have reinforced our ancient, pathological attitudes toward words and the people who use them.

The Don Imus affair (Google: nappy-headed hos, jigaboos and wannabees, Rutgers women’s basketball, MSNBC, CBS radio, WFAN, the Rev. Al Sharpton) consumed the most print space and air time. But let’s not forget some of the other examples of language behaviors that have prompted outrage, lawsuits, indifference, or in some cases, applause.

- Isaiah Washington, an actor on the television series “Grey’s Anatomy,” checked into a rehab center and began counseling after using the word faggot in reference to another actor on the show. (1)
- Ann Coulter, the blonde darling of a certain segment of conservative Republicans, joked during a presentation to the Conservative Political Action Conference that, “I was going to have a few comments on the other Democratic presidential candidate John Edwards, but it turns out you have to go into rehab if you use the word ‘faggot,’ so I — so kind of an impasse, can’t really talk about Edwards.” (2)
- The family of a high school freshman filed a lawsuit against officials at Maria Carillo High School in California claiming the school denied the First Amendments rights of their daughter. The family is Mormon. The
utterance at issue concerns the daughter’s response to classmates who needled her with questions such as, “Do you have 10 moms?” She replied, “That’s so gay.” School officials gave her a warning on the grounds that it has an obligation to protect gay students from harassment. The parents’ suit claims the phrase that’s so gay “enjoys widespread currency in youth culture.” The girl says the phrase means, “That’s so stupid; that’s so silly; that’s so dumb.” (3)

- The day after he officially announced his candidacy for the Democratic party’s nomination for President, Senator Joe Biden (D-Delaware) said of fellow candidate Senator Barack Obama (D-Illinois), “I mean, you got the first mainstream African-American who is articulate and bright and clean and a nice-looking guy,” Biden said. “I mean, that’s a storybook, man.” He was immediately besieged with controversy over the words “clean” and “articulate.” (4)

- Four days later, Senator Obama illustrated how quickly “what goes around comes around” when he used the word “wasted” to refer to the lives of U.S. soldiers killed in Iraq. (5)

- A partner from one of the most prestigious law firms in the country, Fulbright & Jaworski, visited the law school at Duke University for recruiting purposes. During the course of an interview, the partner recounted a story about one of the firm’s founders (Leon Jaworski) and his commitment to justice in the 1920s. Jaworski represented a black man accused of murder in Waco, TX, and faced a district attorney who used “the n word” to refer to the accused. A student who heard the story objected and complained, the dean of the law school wrote a letter to the entire law school, and the chairman of the executive committee at Fulbright & Jaworski traveled to Duke to apologize. (6,7)

- New York City Councilman Leroy Comrie embarked on a campaign to ‘voluntarily’ ban “the n word.” His campaign was featured in an “investigative report” on “The Daily Show with Jon Stewart” by the “investigative team” of Larry Wilmore (an American black) and John Oliver (a British white). During the report, Oliver refers only to “the word” and leaves it to Wilmore to fill in the blanks with the word nigger. (8)


- City officials of the Bronx in New York City labeled a new German army training video as “racist” and demanded an apology from the German military. The video depicts an instructor describing a scenario to a trainee
this way: “You are in the Bronx. A black van is stopping in front of you. Three African-Americans are getting out they are insulting your mother in the worst ways. Act!” (10)

- Rush Limbaugh began referring to Senator Barack Obama and actress Halle Berry, each of mixed-race parentage, as “Halfrican Americans.” (11)

These examples come from just a four-month period. But they reveal just how confining our stockade of verbalized symbols has become.

In other words, it’s become almost impossible to talk sensibly about how we talk. Forget about cutting holes … we can’t even make a dent.

Not that some haven’t tried. Compare and contrast these attempts at explanation, elucidation, or explication:

If you’re 10 or 100, nappy-headed ho means the same thing.

Al Sharpton on “Real Time with Bill Maher” (12)

Did you want to name the book The N Word and they said, no, you’ve got to call it The N Word, or did you say, I want to name this book The N Word and they assumed you meant, you know, the ‘n word’ when in fact you meant the ‘n word’? The ‘n word’ has become so anonymous [sic] with the ‘n word’. Is saying the ‘n word’ pretty much like saying the ‘n word’? Because, I would never say the ‘n word,’ but I don’t want somebody to think I’m saying the ‘n word’ by saying the ‘n word.’

Stephen Colbert to Jabari Asim (9)

It’s really hard to address the language of racism without somehow directly engaging in that language.

Jabari Asim to Stephen Colbert (9)

[After letting loose with 47 “equal opportunity” racial and religious epithets …] There is absolutely nothing wrong with any of those words, in and of themselves. They’re only words. It’s the context that counts. It’s the user. It’s the intention behind the words that makes them good or bad. The words are completely neutral. The words are innocent. I get tired of people talking about ‘bad words’ and ‘bad language.’ Bullshit! It’s the context that makes them good or bad.

George Carlin (13)
It doesn’t matter, the origins of curse words. What matters is that civilization has decreed —arbitrarily, obviously—that certain words are inherently obscene.

Dennis Prager (14)

Words don’t ‘mean,’ only a person does. There is no meaning in a word. We sometimes talk about this as the ‘container myth.’ Now you can put something in a glass—water, dirt, sand, anything. A glass will hold something, and we can talk about this as a ‘container.’ A word, however, is not a container in the way a glass is. A container of ‘meaning’ is a man, a woman. It’s you. It’s you listening, it is I talking. It is I listening, it’s you talking. A word doesn’t ‘mean.’

Irving J. Lee (15)

Understandably, the use of the word offended the student.

Katharine T. Bartlett, Dean, Duke University School of Law (7)

There is no excuse for what happened on this campus. There is no context for which that is permissible conduct.

Steven Pfeiffer, Fulbright & Jaworski (6)

It seems that two conflicting views are at work here, leading to these questions:

1. Do words have “inherent” meanings that exist and apply irrespective of speaker, listener, or context?
2. Do words have variable meanings that depend on context?
3. Is it more appropriate to talk in terms of “offensive language,” in which specific ‘bad’ words (profanities, obscenities, epithets) cause offense, justify outrage, and demand apology?
4. Is it more appropriate to talk in terms of “language that some find offensive,” that recognizes that each individual may respond according to his or her own standards of what offends them?
5. Do actions like banning, censoring, and penalizing certain words and terms aid or hinder our individual and societal efforts to “cut holes” through our current culture, to progress beyond our prejudices and stereotypes?

From my general semantics perspective, it’s pretty easy to answer no, yes, no, yes, and hinder. What makes this so difficult for most people to understand? Or, what makes it so rewarding for people to perpetuate the “word=thing” identifications? I offer four inter-related possibilities.
Control

Language has always been used as a means for rulers to exercise their power over their dominion. Religious leaders, politicians, business bosses, military commanders, teachers, parents, lawyers … virtually everyone is subject to someone else’s controlling or directive language. We have been conditioned to respond to certain words in specific, somewhat predictable ways. Go to church and you can expect to hear language intended to provoke penitence, guilt, grace, thankfulness, humility, or charity. Go to a political rally and you’ll get bombarded with carefully crafted words to evoke patriotism, civic duty, fear, pride, outrage.

As Alfred Korzybski observed in *Science and Sanity*, “those who rule the symbols, rule us.” Rulers need predictable results and desired reactions. They need their constituents to identify the labels of choice with the rulers’ desired attitudes and behaviors. If the people chose to deliberately and extensionally evaluate the assertions expressed by their rulers, then the rulers might well be forced to rule on substance, rather than by symbol.

Cop-out: Denying Personal Responsibility

Alfred Fleishman, co-founder of public relations giant Fleishman-Hillard, Inc., advocated general semantics in his own unique, street-wise way. One of the simple observations he would share with delinquent and troubled teenagers in St. Louis was, “Just because you call me a son of a bitch, that doesn’t make me a son of a bitch.” He encountered hundreds of youngsters in detention schools and jails who automatically reacted to being called a name … just words … in ways that caused pain, suffering, and despair to their victims, their families, and ultimately themselves. They didn’t stop to think that they could react any differently to the name. The label *(boy, nigger, asshole, etc.)* made them do it. The devil must be in those words; remember comedian Flip Wilson’s character Geraldine’s universal excuse? “The devil made me do it.”

A different aspect of personal responsibility is described by Irving J. Lee, who used the term “bypassing” to describe another aspect of lazy, indiscriminant listening. He explained that a listener has two choices when encountering language that isn’t quite clear. The aware, responsible listener will ask the speaker, “What do you mean?” or pause to consider what the speaker might have intended. The lazy, unaware listener will immediately proceed to evaluate what the speaker says as if it were the listener talking; in other words, he will assume (or demand) that the speaker uses the same words in the same way as himself. He will maintain that it’s the speaker’s responsibility to use the ‘right’ words, rather than the listener’s responsibility to evaluate the speaker’s intent.
In the latter case, the listener/reactor denies his own responsibility for interpreting, evaluating, and appropriately responding to the words of the speaker. The words (symbols) ‘cause’ the response, just as Pavlov’s bell caused his dog to respond.

Misunderstanding ‘Reality’

As we learn more and more about our brains and nervous systems, Korzybski’s formulation of the abstracting process continues to be validated. The brain orders and constructs our experiences from our sensory interactions through the nervous system to our ultimate evaluations of pleasure, pain, fear, etc. Therefore, like everything else, ‘meaning’ is constructed by each of us, individually and uniquely. As Charles Sanders Pierce put it, “We don’t get meaning, we respond with meaning.”

However, a lot of people don’t quite understand this or don’t want to understand it. There are still many who believe that there is an “objective reality” out there that ought to be perceived “as it is.” They rail against “relativism” without acknowledging the inevitable relativism that results from the natural functioning of six billion different nervous systems. Which one of those six billion is the right one to say what ‘is’ the true meaning or the inherent purpose of a statement, an event, or a symbol?

Identifying the ‘Map’ as the ‘Territory’

Those who advocate eliminating or even banning certain words and phrases do not seem to grasp the symbolic nature of words. They misplace or misallocate their ire toward the word itself rather than on the underlying attitude, beliefs, and behaviors of the individuals who use the word.

Although Jabari Asim tries to straddle a difficult line in proposing that some people can use the word nigger but others shouldn’t, I support his statement quoted previously. From a historical context, you cannot teach Huckleberry Finn without using the language of the time and understanding the attitudes of the time. Neither can you arbitrarily dictate (or request, in the case of Councilman Comrie) that nigger be stricken and banned from music lyrics.

The hip-hop world took a lot of the collateral damage from the initial Imus bomb, to the extent that rap/hip-hop icon and impresario Russell Simmons co-authored a statement that read, “We recommend that the recording and broadcast industries voluntarily remove/bleep/delete the misogynistic words ‘bitch’ and ‘ho’” as well as “a common racial epithet.”

As if “bleeping” accomplishes anything other than calling attention to itself and, by extension, what got bleeped.
If one thinks through the logical consequences of “bleeping,” one comes full circle to the realization that it’s the context, not the word, that establishes the basis for offense. Even without benefit of visually observing the following phrases spoken, do you have any doubt as to what the “bleep” stands for?

“I said drop your bleeping gun!”
“Go bleep yourself.”
“Get the bleep out of here.”
“You dirty son of a bleep!”
“This tastes so bleeping good…”

Leave it to the comedians to shine illuminating light on this shadowy subject. In their “investigative” report on Councilman’s Comrie’s quest to ban a “word with no meaning,” Wilborne and Oliver point out the potential consequences:

OLIVER: Leroy, are you at all concerned that we are banning one of the most versatile words in the English language? It can be used as a noun …
WILBORNE: Yo, yo, whassup, my nigga?
OLIVER: A verb …
WILBORNE: Hey, man, don’t nigger those potato chips.
OLIVER: An adjective …
WILBORNE: Oh, so now you nigger rich?
OLIVER: And adverb …
WILBORNE: Man … that’s some niggerly [bleep].
OLIVER: Are we kissing goodbye to all of this?
COMRIE: I think that all of those usages are just vile and need to be stopped.
OLIVER: What do you say to rappers who need that word in terms of a rhyme scheme?
COMRIE: Need the word? I don’t think you need the word.
WILBORNE: I’m not sure about that Leroy. Finish this phrase … I’m not saying she’s a gold digger, but she ain’t messin’ with no broke …
COMRIE: Hmm. (to himself) I’m not saying she’s a gold digger, but she ain’t messing with no broke … fool.
WILBORNE: (pause) Do you understand how rap works, Councilman?

Wilborne and Oliver understand that context determines meaning, and, like George Carlin two generations before them, realize that the English language offers unlimited opportunities to poke comedic fun at our arbitrary and multiple usages. As Carlin pointed out thirty years ago, even order establishes context: “You can prick your finger. But don’t finger your prick!”

A more serious reason to object to any type of ban, particularly with epithets, is
that these words carry such strong social stigmas that their usage may serve a valuable purpose. Like the canary in the mine, or smoke that signals the possibility of burning embers, racial and religious epithets can alert us to the possibility of prejudice, bias, and hate within the speaker. If you ban the language, these people may comply with the ban and not say the word, but they may well continue to harbor the feelings and attitudes that may lead to discriminatory and prejudiced behaviors.

Huxley continued his “hole cutter” metaphor with this observation:

What the would-be hole cutter needs is knowledge; knowledge of the past and present history of cultures in all their fantastic variety, and knowledge about the nature and limitations, the uses and abuses, of language.

We can learn a lot from our daily news outlets and entertainment programs regarding our attitudes towards language. Unfortunately, we (English-speaking Americans) seem to be backsliding toward the 19th century in terms of our dependence on the cultural crutch of verbal taboos. Consider how prematurely quaint the words of anthropologist Margaret Mead seem, as reported in an unnamed local newspaper in 1969:

Anthropologist Margaret Mead says that the current binge of written and spoken four-letter words will also pass providing everyone doesn’t become uptight about it. It’s this uptightness in the current phraseology that is at the heart of the problem. We are in a temporary period when it is exciting to light up some-thing that was dark, saying words that were forbidden, exhibiting all sorts of things that weren’t allowed before, but this excitement is going to wear out. (16)

Until we exit this “temporary period” (going on 38 years now) in which we insist on righteously playing “got ‘cha!” with offensive language, our public discourse about racism, sexism, violence, drugs, and even taxes will never progress to the substantive from the superficial.

We must be vigilant, however, in clearly discerning and discriminating between the effective uses and the manipulative or ignorant abuses of language. The more we focus on the words, labels, and categories, the less we concern ourselves with the individuals who use those symbols, and the individuals upon whom those symbols are slapped. Because the words of Irving J. Lee will forever apply: We tend to discriminate against people to the degree we fail to distinguish between them.
NOTES

I LIVE ON Earth at present, and I don’t know what I am. I know that I am not a
category. I am not a thing a noun. I seem to be a verb, an evolutionary process an
integral function of the universe.”

R. Buckminster Fuller, Designer, Author,
Architect, Inventor (1895-1983)

Not being able to govern events, I govern myself.

Michel de Montaigne, Essayist (1533-1592)

Put it before them briefly so they will read it, clearly so they will appreciate it,
picturesquely so they will remember it, and above all, accurately so they will be
guided by its light.

Joseph Pulitzer, Editor and Publisher (1847-1911)

I was reading the dictionary. I thought it was a poem about everything.

Steven Wright, Comedian (1955-)

Real courage is risking one’s clichés.

Tom Robbins, Author (1936-)

The world is a looking glass, and gives back to every man the reflection of his
own face.

William Makepeace Thackeray, Novelist (1811-1863)

In nature there are neither rewards nor punishments; there are consequences.

Robert Green Ingersoll, Lawyer and Orator (1833-1899)
Finish every day and be done with it. You have done what you could. Some blunders and absurdities crept in; Forget them as soon as you can. Tomorrow is a new day. You shall begin it serenely and with too high a spirit to be encumbered with your old nonsense.

Ralph Waldo Emerson, Writer and Philosopher (1803-1882)

The firm determination to submit to experiment is not enough; there are still dangerous hypotheses; first, and above all, those which are tacit and unconscious. Since we make them without knowing it, we are powerless to abandon them.

Henri Poincaré, Mathematician (1854-1912)

The empiricist ... thinks he believes only what he sees, but he is much better at believing than at seeing.

George Santayana, Philosopher, Essayist, Poet, and Novelist (1863-1952)

No satisfactory justification has ever been given for connecting in anyway the consequences of mathematical reasoning with the physical world.

E. T. Bell, Mathematician and Science Fiction Author (1883-1960)

We make our tools, and then they shape us.


It is terrible to see how a single unclear idea, a single formula without meaning, lurking in a young man’s head, will sometimes act like an obstruction of inert matter in an artery, hindering the nutrition of the brain, and condemning its victim to pine away in the fullness of his intellectual vigor and in the midst of intellectual plenty.

Charles S. Peirce, Polymath, Physicist, and Philosopher (1839-1914)

There is much in the social habits of a people which is dispersed and distorted by the mere act of making inquiries about it.

Norbert Wiener, Mathematician, Writer (1894-1964)

Irrationally held truths may be more harmful than reasoned errors.

Aldous Huxley, Writer (1825-1895)

Part of the problem is that we think very poorly. But how could it be otherwise when few of us have given any instruction in that difficult task? Do schools teach us how to think? Very rarely. They teach us what to think.

Steve Allen, Musician, Comedian, Writer (1921-2000)
WHEN I FIRST BEGAN to learn about general semantics, the principle that most intrigued me was the idea that there could be way to apply a scientific method to human interactions and communications. The more I learned about this theory, the more practical and even obvious it became to me. If applying a scientific way of thinking can work for human interactions on a day-to-day basis, why not apply it to other fields of study, such as history, that deal with human interactions? I see no reason not to and neither does Robert L. Carneiro, author of *The Muse of History and the Science of Culture*.

In keeping with the objectives and methods of this class and of general semantics as a whole, I have chosen to write about this book through a series of thoughts, questions, comments and critiques inspired by the content of the book itself and by related book reviews.

I found this book to be one of the more thought-provoking pieces of writing I have read in my undergraduate career. It poses many compelling questions about our views of history. Carneiro discusses topics such as, does history have a pattern or is it just a series of unpredictable and unrelated events? He explains the various philosophies of history that can offer answers to these questions and more. In the concluding chapters of the book, Carneiro proposes his own set of “laws of culture” as a supplemental and personal answer to these questions. I appreciate the fact that even though Carneiro maintains strong opinions about many of these topics, he gave more than one side of each argument so that the reader could draw his or her own conclusions.

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Student Paper

* ON THE MUSE OF HISTORY AND THE SCIENCE OF CULTURE *

MARISA SLEETER *

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* Marisa Sleeter, our new Berman Scholar, is a senior in the Schieffer School of Journalism at Texas Christian University. She will graduate in May with a double major in International Communications/Anthropology and a minor in Spanish. She is a participant in the TCU Honors Program, a student worker in the TCU Study Abroad office, and has been active in the TCU band, Habitat for Humanity, the National Society of Collegiate Scholars and the TCU Leadership Council.
One of the reasons this book resonated with me is because Carneiro approaches the science of history from an anthropological perspective, which is one of my fields of study. Through most of the book, he seems more concerned with directional trends in social institutions throughout history rather than focusing on specific events as examples of overarching historical theories.

Before relating some of the book’s quotations and examples to general semantics are discussed, I would like to provide a brief overview of each section of the book.

The first chapter is about the debate on overarching philosophies of history. Most contemporary historians “remain hostile” to the idea of a philosophy of history. Earliest attempts were heavily influenced by religion, and most authors were philosophers and not historians. This type of theory was quickly rejected, and for some time historians did not even attempt to create philosophies because of their aversion to “broad generalizations inherent in any philosophy of history.” The idea of creating an overarching theory was once again embraced in the early 1900s and aimed at incorporating orders of historical events and determinants of the orders.

The second chapter describes the changing definitions of the subject of history. History has been used as a term to describe everything humans have ever done, the surviving record of everything humans have done, or the selection, arrangement and presentation of aspects of this surviving record. It has taken the form of a narrative practice, a recounting of objective facts, literature, universal history, cultural history, and “new” history that looks at a broad spectrum of cultures.

Carneiro states that “one of the hallmarks of physical science is that it formulates laws governing the phenomena it studies.”

The “thorny thickets” of history are dealt with in the third chapter, including free will (which Carneiro decidedly rejects) vs. determinism, moral judgments, and contingency in history and historical relativism.

The next two chapters focus on the driving factors of history, such as race, deities, and great men and ideas as prime movers of historical stories. Carneiro maintains that these approaches to history are outdated, and in the next chapters discusses the approaches he believes are full of merit — a combination of evolutionist and materialist views. This is where his anthropology background factors in the most. Carneiro asserts that “individual people and particular events must be transcended through conceptualization not as inherently unique entities but rather as recurrent phenomena.” (3)

In the chapter titled “Are There Laws of History?” Carneiro states that “one of the hallmarks of physical science is that it formulates laws governing the phenomena it studies.” He then explores the question, “Can history do the same?” Scientific laws
are principles that assert an unvarying relationship between two or more events under stipulated conditions. Carneiro asserts that these laws can be found in history.

In the final chapters, he proposes “laws of culture” rather than philosophies of history, and insists that an anthropological view can offer tentative laws that are similar to the laws of natural sciences — that is, laws that are neither vague, nor self-evident, which can be tracked and proven by a scientific method. Interestingly, he asserts that there is a direct mathematical relationship between the “size of a village and its tendency to fission” and that this relationship and the form it takes can be discerned through research about the society. He also claims that there is an order, or a hierarchy, by which societies have evolved certain traits, which can also be statistically proven.

Although for the most part it was not the overarching theories or propositions of laws that grabbed my attention, one of the main points that struck me throughout the first half of the book was the revelation of the subjective nature of history. We have

I never realized the extent to which this spin can be taken, and the power this has over readers and students like me.

been taught the topic of “history” throughout our lives and schooling as if it is a concrete subject with knowable facts that do not change. We have learned that history is not something that can be made up or an area of study that is still evolving. How many times have we heard “you can’t rewrite history” or “you can’t change history, but you can learn from it?” It is almost embarrassing that until reading this book I have thought of history as an objective topic. Sure, I know that certain cultural perspectives and historians themselves can put “spin” on a historical event, but I never realized the extent to which this spin can be taken, and the power this has over readers and students like me.

I cannot include here all of quotes and assertions in this book that I found particularly interesting. In fact, one of my only critiques would be that this book poses too many interesting questions. As one question was posed, I hardly had time to reflect on an answer of my own before being prompted to think about another question. For a historian or anthropologist who has researched subjects like historiology, this book may be a summation of arguments the researcher has already encountered. However, it was the first time I had been introduced to many of these debates, and I felt somewhat overwhelmed with what seemed like the enormous size and weight of these questions.

I found it easier to focus my attention on some of Carneiro’s more specific statements and to compare those to the ideas I have learned from general semantics. One review stated:
Carneiro deserves praise for dealing with one of the most important questions in both social science and history. This book will have the effect of helping social scientist and scholars more self-consciously examine their assumptions regarding the nature of history and the role the social sciences and the humanities in historical investigations.(1)

I think this is one of the many areas in which Carneiro, either knowingly or unknowingly, parallels the ideas of general semantics. I believe one of the major factors that general semantics stresses is the ability to critically evaluate the assumptions and inferences humans tend to make — to assess possible “filters,” other options, backgrounds and things overlooked. Here, Carneiro reinforces this idea and applies it to the specific field of history, urging social scientists not only to focus on the historical happening, but the complexities of the cultural setting to both explain and predict historical events.

When discussing the multiple explanations of history as it has been used … historically … Carneiro states that one view held that “if history forgets or neglects to tell a story, it will inevitably forfeit much of its appeal and much of its authority.” From a general semantics point of view, we can observe that: 1) it is impossible to recount all historical events; 2) historical events are inter-related in that they affect and influence people, events, etc.; and 3) one cannot claim to know all the facts about a particular historical event. I am not sure that this takes away from the authority of history, but it is a nice reminder to be cognizant of the fact that there are always other factors involved and that even the best recounting or theory will have assumptions and inferences automatically built in.

Near the end of the book, Carneiro proposes an explanation for historical change, reinforced by the theory that “in the development of Western civilization, not every great advance was made by the same peoples, but rather, the torch was handed on from one society to the next.” To the best of my knowledge, this theory is a perfect example of that which differentiates humans from the rest of the organisms on this Earth — the ability to time-bind.

However, Carneiro’s argument implies that there is a hierarchy of advances, with each advance built upon by the next society. I am not certain that I agree with this conclusion. To be sure, I have not studied anthropology or history in as much depth as the author, but I agree with Stephen Shennan in his review of the book when he states that “…this sort of view clearly sees ‘social evolution’ as a goal-directed process and leads us in the direction of characterizing different stages as opposed to describing and explaining real historical processes.”(4) I believe it is more likely that progressions of societies result not from linear or “goal-oriented” processes that can be directly traced from one generation and one society to the
next, but rather a tangled web of ideas and unique innovations that may or may not be transferred to other societies. I also believe that this kind of characterization puts a value judgment on “more” or “less” advanced societies.

...this theory is a perfect example of that which differentiates humans from the rest of the organisms on this Earth — the ability to time-bind.

When discussing the idea of a universal history, Carneiro cites Herbert Butterfield, who said, “Universal History has ceased to hold a prominent place in our interests, presumably because it spreads the mind over so wide an area that the knowledge can hardly avoid becoming too thin” and also that most professional historians lack the “global knowledge and comparative perspective needed” to undertake this task. This reminded me of the summary of formulations listed in Section 26 of Kenneth Johnson’s General Semantics: An Outline Survey. (5) One of these formulations states that “the more territory a map covers, the less it can say about that territory.” I think that this statement holds true not only for the idea of a “Universal History,” but also for many of the other “overarching” theories of history. As we generalize to a wider and wider range of facts and ideas, important details tend to get lost.

Perhaps the most interesting topic to me was the debate among historians about free choice vs. determinism. Carneiro states that in terms of developing a scientific method to explain history, “if there is a science [of man] there is no free choice.” He argues that most historians choose to believe in free choice (he states that it can even be determined that most will believe in free choice) because determinism takes the “joy” out of life and leaves people unable to “rejoice in the open vistas that free will seemed to afford them.” He follows this statement with the idea that however hard determinants may be to define, “lack of awareness of determinants is no guarantee they do not exist.” Although the idea of free will is a romantic one, I tend to agree with the author when he cites Einstein’s observation that humans act under “external compulsion… and internal necessity.”

Carneiro recounts an interesting anecdote that underscores the principle of cultural and historical relativism. In the 1700s, Sir Walter Raleigh wrote a book titled History of the World. Shortly afterward, while imprisoned in the Tower of London, he witnessed from his cell window an altercation involving other prisoners. Later, he discussed this event with others who had witnessed the ‘same’ event. Raleigh was dismayed to realize that each of the witnesses had interpreted the altercation differently. As Carneiro explains, Raleigh asked himself, “If four men seeing the very same event have four different versions of it, how could anyone possibly rely on the word of a historian writing about events that happened centuries before?” Then Raleigh threw his book into the fire.
This story is a good example of the “to-me” principle in general semantics. Almost everything is up to individual interpretation, and it is necessary to understand that factors from personal background and biases to physical sensing abilities differ greatly from person to person. I can’t help but sympathize with Sir Walter Raleigh’s hopelessness when he decided to destroy his book.

Another subject I found interesting is the principle of cultural history. Carneiro focuses on this subject, although from my understanding it sounds a little less scientific in principle. He cites Sir Francis Bacon as having a “truly noble plan” that “should tell the origins, progress, migrations...declines...chief controversies and school of thought, principal authors, best books...etc.” This sounds highly inferential and subjective to me, picking the “best books” and “chief controversies.” I believe this is an interesting premise — to include not only one small slice of historical events, but most of the actions and cultural components surrounding it — but I wonder how one can even start to attempt that kind of a recounting without exhibiting major biases.

Perhaps that is the best conclusion to draw from Carneiro — that all of history, all of the theories and accounts, all the stories and perspectives, leave some things out and are inevitably skewed because of the assumptions that historians (and social scientists and anthropologists alike) make in their formulations. Although some “concrete” theories have been proposed, it is important as educated citizens for us to realize that history as a whole cannot avoid subjectivity. As in the other sciences, and in general semantics, it is important that we continually and critically analyze the things we label as historical ‘facts.’

NOTES

Quotes to Ponder
From The Muse of History and the Science of Culture

History is not merely an account of external events, but an explanation of them.
Edward P. Cheyney

History:
1. Everything that human beings have ever done
2. The surviving record of everything that human beings have ever done
3. The selection, arrangement and presentation of certain aspects of this surviving record.

If history forgets or neglects to tell a story, it will inevitably forfeit much of its appeal and much of its authority.
Henry Steele Commager

After I have read three of four thousand descriptions of battles, and the terms of some hundreds of treaties, I have found that fundamentally I am scarcely better instructed than I was before. From these things I have learned only events.
Voltaire

If it is free to a man to choose what he will do or not do, there is no adequate science of him. If there is science of him, there is no free choice.
James Anthony Froude

Everybody acts not only under external compulsion but also in accordance with inner necessity.
Albert Einstein

Scientists did not assess the moral character of their subject matter ... did not say that gravitation was good or mitosis was bad ... and should not the historian emulate the scientist in this regard?
Robert L. Carnerio

We admit that by universal estimation, Hitler was a diabolical monster, yet he cannot be fully understood by labeling him as such. He was also the expression of certain tendencies...exemplified the inclination of militaristic states to create empires.
Robert L. Carnerio

There is a general path of social development along which, owing to special circumstances, some peoples have advanced a great way, some a less way, some but a very little way.
John Fiske
From various other sources

It should be known that history is a discipline that has a great number of approaches.

Ibn Khalduin of Tunis

All history becomes subjective; in other words there is properly no history, only biography.

Ralph Waldo Emerson

History is a science, no more and no less.

J. B. Bury

The past does not influence me; I influence it.

Willem de Kooning

History proves nothing because it contains everything.

Emil Cioran

No harm’s done to history by making it something someone would want to read.

David McCullough

History is not history unless it is the truth.

Abraham Lincoln

To look back upon history is inevitably to distort it.

Norman Pearson

Those who cannot learn from history are doomed to repeat it.

George Santayana

History is merely a list of surprises. It can only prepare us to be surprised yet again.

Kurt Vonnegut

History is the science of what never happens twice.

Paul Valery

The past is malleable and flexible, changing as our recollection interprets and re-explains what has happened.

Peter Berger

Clio, the muse of history, is as thoroughly infected with lies as a street whore with syphilis.

Schopenhauer

There is no history of mankind, there is only an indefinite number of histories of all kinds of aspects of human life.

Karl Popper
Writing intellectual history is like trying to nail jelly to the wall.

William Heseltine

People are trapped in history, and history is trapped in them.

James Baldwin

History never repeats itself; at best it sometimes rhymes.

Mark Twain

History isn’t really about the past - settling old scores. It’s about defining the present and who we are.

Ken Burns

A historian has many duties. Allow me to remind you of two which are important. The first is not to slander; the second is not to bore.

Voltaire
GENERAL SEMANTICS
AND MEDIA ETHICS
MARTIN H. LEVINSON, PH.D. *

This talk is based on a chapter in *Journalism Ethics: Philosophical Foundations for News Media* (1997), John C. Merrill’s comprehensive and well-written book on journalism morality. The title of the chapter is “Korzybski to the Rescue.”

In the early part of the twentieth century, Alfred Korzybski, a Polish polymath with a keen interest in the relationship of words to facts, proposed a general system of evaluation to help people make more accurate assessments of themselves and the world. He labeled his system “general semantics” (GS).

Since language provides the means and the environment by which we evaluate, much of general semantics involves studying the effects of language (and other symbol systems) on our behavior. Merrill notes that such study should have particular relevance for journalists, as words are the fundamental tools of their craft. He specifically states, “An orientation to general semantics will raise the linguistic consciousness of journalists, bring them to a higher level of sophistication, instill in them a recognition of the weaknesses and the power of words, and generally help them overcome the enslaving tendencies of language.” (1) In this talk, I will examine eleven basic ideas of general semantics and four GS observations that led Merrill to his aforementioned conclusions.

I. Eleven Basic GS Ideas and their Relevance to Journalism and Media Ethics

*The word is not the thing:* General semanticists say, “The map is not the territory.” The symbol is not the object or event that is symbolized. For example, when we describe a “flower” we should be aware that the “real” flower is an ever-changing process that entails air, light, water, and soil. When using words, we should not fool ourselves into thinking we are fully describing an actual flower. The word is not the thing. This principle is even more important when we are discussing abstract terms like *freedom, justice, patriotism, democracy,* and *responsibility.*

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My article titled “Democracy Here is not Necessarily Democracy There,” which appears in the April 2006 issue of ETC, illustrates this point. The concluding paragraph reads “President Bush believes that ‘democracy,’ in the way we use that term, can move the Iraqi people to have happier and more productive lives. Maybe it can. But maybe people who have been conditioned to accept orders from authorities such as clerics have a different conception of democracy. Maybe they believe, like America’s founding fathers and the citizens of ancient Athens, that it is within proper democratic bounds to restrict the rights of women and other groups. Only time will tell which definition of democracy will prevail.” (2)

Stay low on the abstraction ladder: In communicating with others, don’t use abstract terms when you can use more meaningful — more specific — ones. For example, when expressions like pornography, good Christians, arrogant government officials, fundamentalists, or concerned voters are used in a story, it is helpful for the journalist to explain them. If possible, the journalist should give specific examples of what the subjects do or what they believe, in order to clarify a story’s meaning.

Make clear distinctions: reports, inferences, and judgments: Reports are based on observable data and verifiable. Bill Smith, age twenty-five, was sentenced last week to fifteen years in prison. Inferences are assumptions made from known data. Bill Smith will soon be in prison. Judgments are conclusions made from inferences. A judgment: Bill Smith is an evil and dangerous individual. Journalists frequently confuse or mix reports, inferences, and judgments, which is unfortunate, as flawed inferences or flawed judgments can have a negative impact on “objective reporting.”

Recognition of non-allness: One can never completely describe anything. Certain characteristics are always left out. For example, a report may say, “He is a New York attorney.” But he is a great deal more (a husband, a Baptist, an alcoholic, an ex-military man, etc.). Journalists, when using language, must leave out much significant information. Ethical reporters (ethical in the sense of dedicated to “truthful, accurate, and objective reporting”) must avoid intentionally biasing their story by what is omitted, and they should be aware of the omissions.

Delay your reaction: A hunter lived with an infant in a cabin, guarded by his dog. One day the hunter returned from the fields and saw the cradle overturned and the baby nowhere in sight. The room was a mess. The dog had blood all over his muzzle. The hunter, enraged, shot the dog. He then found the baby, unharmed under the bed, and a dead wolf in the corner.

Uncritical assumptions can result in negative consequences. Ethical journalists understand this and so, following the general semantics recommendation to delay one’s reaction to more accurately assess what is going on, they do not precipitously rush when gathering facts for a story. Unlike many of us, such reporters do not take for granted the human ability to delay one’s reaction. They know the capacity to delay
reacting, and bring our higher brain functions into play, is a key characteristic that distinguishes our species from the rest of the animal kingdom.

**Reality is dynamic:** The Greek philosopher Heraclitus famously said that one can not step in the same river twice. What he meant by this is that life is perpetually in flux, people and situations are constantly shifting. While language may impose, as Nietzsche suggested, a “stabilizing fiction” on events that transpire in our restless universe, the fact is change is ever present. Because reality is dynamic, ethical reporters will not use an old quotation, as if it were currently valid, to give someone’s views on a subject nor will they automatically assume that the views individuals hold today are the same they espoused thirty years ago.

**Person₁ is not Person₂:** The eminent general semanticist Irving J. Lee asserted that we tend to discriminate against people to the degree that we fail to distinguish among them. **Indexing,** a GS tool that involves using mathematical subscripts to break down larger categories into their component parts, is an effective technique for addressing Lee’s concern (e.g., Person1 is not Person2, is not Person3, is not Person4). The use of indexing can remind journalists that members of the same group are not the same and that it is dangerous to make assumptions about them because of their nationality, race, religion, party, or other characteristics.

**Multivalued orientation:** Aristotle’s law of the excluded middle (A thing is either “A” or “not A”) encourages us to think that every question can be answered in terms of “either-or.” The structure of the English language also pushes us in that direction. With its many polarizing terms (good/bad, tall/short, liberal/conservative, etc.), English supports reasoning through extremes rather than with gradations.

General semantics notes that either-or thinking keeps us from seeing the great diversity in the world. For example, rather than being tall or short, or liberal or conservative, most people fall “height wise” and politically somewhere along a continuum. Ethical reporters are mindful that accurate descriptions of people and events involve more than just assigning them to one of two dichotomous categories.

**Beware the “is” of projection:** “She’s a knockout.” “That painting is not art.” “King Kong was a great movie.” When individuals make statements like these they tell us precious little about what they are describing. Instead, they say something about themselves. They are projecting their ideas of what they consider to be “beautiful,” “art,” and “outstanding cinema.” They are confusing opinions with facts.

To demonstrate awareness that our thoughts or comments are products of our internal condition, rather than reports of external “reality,” general semantics advocates the use of qualifying expressions like “it seems to me,” “as I see it,” “apparently,” “from my point of view,” etc. These phrases signal to others that we are transmitting personal observations about reality, not divine truths.

**The “meaning” of words:** What’s the difference between a “freedom fighter” and a
“terrorist”? Were the victims at the Abu Ghraib prison in Iraq subjected to “abuse” or “torture”? Are organizations that comment on news reporting “media watchdog groups,” or are they “pressure groups”? Don’t look to the dictionary to answer these questions. Their answers depend on how people perceive things.

General semantics observes that strictly speaking, words don’t “mean;” people do. The physicist P. W. Bridgman put it this way, “Never ask ‘What does word X mean?’ but ask instead, ‘What do I mean when I say word X?’ or ‘What do you mean when you say word X?’” (3) Words do not have “one true meaning.” For the 500 most used words in the English language, the Oxford Dictionary lists 14,070 meanings. (4) Ethical journalists understand that conveying meaning is a complex and tricky matter, and that possibilities for confusion are a constant threat.

Natural penchant for partiality: General semantics recognizes that there is a tendency for individuals to select (or abstract) from reality those portions that are consistent with personal values. In reporting a story a new person may choose what is appealing, what coincides with preferences, what gives pleasure. Ethical journalists guard against such egotistical inclinations and are able to force themselves to include information in stories that is uncongenial to them and with which they disagree.

II. Some GS Observations on Media Bias, Abstracting, Presentation, and Perception

Bias

In his book Language in Thought and Action, the general semanticist S. I. Hayakawa points out that when a newspaper carries a story we don’t like, omitting facts we think important and emphasizing certain facts we consider unfair, we are tempted to berate the paper for slanting the story. (5) But, he argues, we assume what seems important or unimportant to us would seem equally important or unimportant to the journalists. We make an inference about the writer of the story or about the editors. The assumption of bias leads us to believe that the editors purposely made the story misleading. Such an inference, according to Hayakawa, is not rational. It may well be that our (the readers’) bias is the problem in that the process of selection and abstraction imposed on us by our own interests and background is already slanted.

Yet there are cases when journalists deliberately slant stories. When they do this they are not giving us “good” maps of the territory — too much will be left out, and the map will tend to be one-dimensional and misleading. Ethical journalists will look at the same subject from many perspectives and will, therefore, be in a better position to draw for the reader a good map, one that is reliable.

Abstracting

Stuart Chase, the author of the GS-popularization The Tyranny of Words,
suggests that in analyzing verbal passages we try to identify abstract words and phrases that don’t have discoverable referents — and substitute a blab for every meaningless term. (6) He calls the blab a “semantics blank” where nothing of significance comes through. Journalists who use a high degree of “blab” language communicate very little.

One may take any newspaper or periodical and scrutinize a story for blab language. Merrill offers this hypothetical sentence for such analysis. “The American society today, steeped as it is in multicultural sham, has retreated into a dark abyss where every kind of verbal description is tinged with implied prejudice and other demeaning implications.” (7) Translated into blab, this sentence would read: The blab blab today blabbed as it is in blab blab, has retreated into a blab blab, where every kind of blab blab is tinged with blab blab and blab blab. Blabbing compromises truthful, accurate, and objective reporting.

**Presentation**

Gregg Hoffmann, an award-winning journalist and the author of *Mapping the Media* — a media literacy guidebook based on general semantics formulations, notes that a news story goes through a process made necessary by the organization of media businesses. “Reporters collect information by observations in the field, or from secondary sources. They must then write or produce their story to a deadline, and fit it into a designated space in a newspaper, or a time limit for a newscast. Editors may cut the length or time of the story. They will write a headline and may add photos or charts for a newspaper. They may include graphics and video for TV.” (8) Ethical reporters and editors remain vigilant to not let the process of the news business interfere with the objective of presenting fair and balanced news stories.

**Perception**

General semantics recognizes that human perception is not a simple matter of stimulus-response (the human nervous systems is the essential intermediary) nor is it ever complete. In their article “Using General Semantics Principles in the Basic News Reporting Classroom,” Russell and Many offer this example: Something that we would label “an event” occurs in the world. Reporter #1 comes to it and perceives it, or parts of it, and this perception is different than that of reporter #2. What this signifies is that there will always be differences in reports of the “same” news events. (9) But, say Russell and Many, “If they (journalism students and reporters) can be taught their observations are by definition incomplete, perhaps they will learn to ask even more questions and search for more sources and vantage points before concluding they have observed and reported everything.” (10)
III. Conclusion

I began this talk with John C. Merrill’s assertion that an orientation to general semantics will raise the linguistic consciousness of journalists, bring them to a higher level of sophistication, instill in them a recognition of the weaknesses and the power of words, and generally help them overcome the enslaving tendencies of language. To conclude this talk I offer Merrill’s observations on the benefits of GS training for journalists.

…most people hardly ever think about a Korzybskian emphasis. Therefore, they fall into poor language habits, that provide only a one-dimensional, inflexible world in which concepts are drawn in either-or terms and people and institutions are depicted as static, stereotyped entities. Most journalistic maps are poorly drawn; the lines are fuzzy and significant developments are left out. A new sensitivity to language coupled with a recognition of its potent impact on thinking and action, will enable journalists to be more ethical, to become more symbolically sophisticated, and to draw more progressively reliable maps of the complex and rugged territory of reality. (11)

NOTES

4. Ibid., 21.
10. Ibid., 294, 295.
THAT WAS BY
MY OTHER MOTHER
CHAPTER 3
DAVID A. LINWOOD, PH.D.*

WHAT YOU SEE and conclude about another person at a distance can be quite different from your opinions after you speak with them a bit and get acquainted. Watching and listening to Korzybski in the summer seminar at Millbrook in 1948 was a turning point in my education. After the seminar, Korzybski requested that I prepare a biographical sketch, give him a chance to review it, and then he would interview me, in his office on the second floor of the Institute at Lime Rock. There was nothing special or unusual about those interviews. Korzybski took a great personal interest in every student’s background.

Both Kendig and Korzybski had made the personal biographical sketch, with an attached photograph, a standard part of the application process for the summer seminar. Both of them reviewed these applications. The personal interviews with Korzybski usually were scheduled during the seminar, for those students who agreed to it.

Korzybski was greatly handicapped by his old injuries suffered in World War I. Between seminars he came downstairs only for very special occasions. It was obvious he had great difficulty in moving around. He would stay at his desk all day in his office next to his bedroom on the second floor of the Institute at Lime Rock, working on writing and correspondence. He also interviewed visitors and students, privately, in his office for long hours.

I remember my interview with Korzybski with some pleasure. I prepared a long, detailed biographical sketch that also contained some of my writing and plans — what I had studied, what hopes I had for the future, etc. At that time my writing was stored mostly in typewritten format, copies being made on onionskin

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paper by using carbon copying sheets. The copies I had left of some of my most "prized" written works (science fiction and fantasy) were third and fourth carbon copies of the originals. Now I had no difficulty at all reading those copies, and so I included them with the other materials I sent to Korzybski for the interview. I did not realize that the only reason I could read the fourth carbon copy was because I knew what was supposed to be written there.

I appeared at Korzybski’s office for the interview the first thing in the morning after breakfast — about nine-thirty a.m. Charlotte Schuchardt (Read) ushered me into Korzybski’s office, made sure AK was comfortable and had all the written materials he needed for the interview, and then left.

The first thing Korzybski did was to hold up a huge magnifying glass and inform me that it took him about three hours of intense labor to decipher my “writing,” word by word. I was stunned when I finally realized what my assumptions had been about the clarity of the typing. I apologized to Korzybski immediately, and started to explain, but he held up his hand to stop my flow of words and accepted my apology. By mutual consent we dropped the whole topic and continued with the interview. He was very gracious, and I still felt very much at ease.

We talked for a long while about my family history. He was very taken with the fact that my parents were both Jewish immigrants who had come to America as children, my mother from a tiny village south of Kiev in the Ukraine, and my father, born in London, England, the son of emigrants from the tri-state area of Lithuania-Poland-East Prussia. He was especially interested that my father’s parents spoke Lithuanian, Polish, Yiddish, and German, and had learned English too, and that my mother’s parents spoke Russian and Yiddish, and had also learned English.

Korzybski seemed somewhat disappointed when I revealed that I spoke only English, even though I could read and write a good deal of Russian and some Latin. I also told him I understood Yiddish, spoken in the house, but did not speak it myself. When he asked me why I understood but did not speak Yiddish, I explained that my grandparents and parents both spoke Yiddish when they did not want the children to understand what they were saying. I learned to understand Yiddish as a ‘defensive measure.’

Korzybski thought that was hilarious and gave a big, booming, hearty laugh. That broke the ice. When I revealed that my father was an engineer, Korzybski was convinced I had an A-OK family. We then chatted about my schooling and my plans for further education and for a career.

I had a chance to ask him about some of the people he knew. There was a picture on the bookcase behind his desk showing him with another military man, an American, standing together with him on a vintage World War I tank. At the foot of the tank was a lady lying down in front of the tread, pretending she was being run over. Another
lady was draped over the fender of the tank as if she had just been hit. Alfred and the American colonel were obviously ignoring “the peasants” they had just run down. The American was Colonel George S. Patton — later General George S. Patton, commander of the Third Army in Europe in World War II. The two ladies were their wives, horsing around — playing it for laughs (crazy adults?).

General Patton had a reputation in the media as a tough, profane, mean bastard, but he also had the reputation of being the best field commander in the world, at this time, or any other time.

Alfred quickly disabused me of the “media” portrait of Patton and explained that he indeed became the best field commander of all time, but that he was a very polite, well-educated gentleman, with an unusually sensitive, incisive mind. Patton spoke flawless French and was delighted to converse with Korzybski in that tongue.

Alfred had no children of his own. He and Mira Edgerly were in their forties when they married. Mira was older than Alfred. Alfred tended to treat his younger students, in some respects, in a “fatherly” manner.

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The Strange Life History of Smith (continued)

It had been some years now that Jason Smith had been in therapy, visiting Dr. A.C. Chaplin once a week. Dr. Chaplin had a large stack of notebooks detailing his conversations with Jason.

“Jason, I have been reviewing the notes I made of our therapy conversations. Do you know that we’re in a very fixed, repetitive pattern? At first I thought we were making great progress, when you decided to stop calling yourself ‘Napoleon Bonaparte’ or ‘Julius Caesar.’ The goals you told me about that you had set for yourself seemed really a very good idea.”

“What did I say? I’m sorry, Doctor. I don’t really remember in detail.”

“You told me you would like to continue your education at the graduate level. You have a BS in Physiology with a minor in Biochemistry. But you never have made a decision, or even discussed what your further studies might be.”

“I can’t decide. I’m not sure. I thought I would wait until I was out of the hospital before I addressed that decision. What else did I say?”

“You said that when you were well advanced into your education, or perhaps finished with your formal training, you and Juliet Kaiser planned to adopt a child.”

“We could really do that any time I was out of the hospital and able to function properly. She has the money. Her family left her very well off.”

“What really concerns me is that you periodically regress back to your old patterns, as if we had never spoken. We have to break this vicious cycle. We have
to dig deeper into that ‘mineshaft into your inner being’ that we opened up, to find out why you keep regressing.”

“As hard as I try, I feel like I am riding on a carousel. I’m a ghost, dressed in old rags with a cocked Napoleon hat, or a balding, bandy-legged ghost, dressed in a toga that flaps in the wind as we go round and round.”

“That’s a pretty accurate description of what’s happening in your mind. Is there any brass ring to reach for on that carousel?”

“Yes, there’s a brass ring — but it’s only brass, not silver or gold. A brass ring just gets you another ride — unless you can get off the carousel and claim a prize — I don’t need that kind of ring. I haven’t even tried for it. What can I do with that ring unless I can get off the carousel?”

“Good question. You know, there has been some new research done in France by Henri Laborit. He has been experimenting with a new chemical he has invented — chlorpromazine. It has the trade name, ‘Thorazine.’ It’s the breakthrough we might be looking for — the way to slow down and stop that ghostly carousel of yours, so you can get off.” (1)

“What’s wrong with what we’ve been doing — the insulin-shock therapy? I thought that was the very best solution we had to my illness — not so?”

“Well, insulin-shock therapy is just a shot in the dark. So is electro-shock therapy. And pre-frontal lobotomy or leukotomy is a horror — a murderous reduction of a human being to an automaton — no prefrontal lobe to the cortex — like a de-corticated pigeon on a hot plate, lifting first one foot and then putting it down and raising the other — repeating endlessly.”

“I know you wouldn’t let them do that to me, Doctor. Has the insulin-shock helped me at all?”

“Only a small bit. No permanent good results. We can’t use electro-shock therapy on you. You have a curvature of the spine near your neck vertebrae — too dangerous to use electro-shock. It could snap your spine. But I don’t really think that kind of therapy would help you much, even if we could do it.”

“Does that Henri fellow have a better idea?”

“Yes, I think so. The reports coming out of France are very encouraging. Laborit could get a Nobel Prize for this.”

“All right, Doctor Chaplin. How soon can we try it?”

“We have the money for it now. I think the top brass in the hospital have already made the decision to try it on certain patients. I can put your name in for the first trials.”

“OK, let’s do it. It makes sense to me that the human mind cannot be permanently molded and steered by words, words, words, and only words. They do have some effect — but the human is just not controlled completely by words in a psychiatric session. We have a biochemistry too.”
“Well, there are many psychoanalysts who disagree with you. But they’re highly prejudiced—they make too good a living from the fees they get. You notice we don’t have any psychoanalysts here in the Hospital. They’re mostly in fancy offices on Park Avenue in New York.”

“Aren’t they useful for people that are not hospitalized? The doctors call them neurotics. Neurotics are not locked up and psychotics are locked up. Isn’t that the distinction?”

“Not too bad a dichotomy, Jason. That’s roughly it. I sometimes wonder whether these verbal classifications of mental aberrations are useful at all. Many doctors believe in these classifications as if they were some kind of intrinsic, or structural, truth. Those definitions have never helped me too much in treating my patients.”

“How am I classified?”

“Not too clear. I have records on you from some previous doctors which classify you as paranoid schizophrenic, and others that classify you schizophrenic, mixed type. None of these classifications is helpful, because there is absolutely no reliable correlation between these classifications and an effective treatment procedure.”

“In other words, nothing we have tried so far really works?”

“That’s my conclusion.”

“All right. So we have nothing to lose by trying this Henri Laborit’s biochemical procedure—not so? There have been good results recorded?”

“A very good percentage of excellent results. Some doctors are predicting that therapy with chlorpromazine will empty out the mental hospitals.”

“Really? Are there failures?”

“There have been no complete failures as yet—but there is evidence that one must be very careful to monitor the dose levels. Too high a dose level produces very bad side effects. Too low a dose level produces nothing.”

“Do we know what a good dose level is?”

“So far, the effect of the dose level seems to vary widely from person to person. It’s not an automatic procedure. It can be destructive if not monitored closely.”

“How do you mean, ‘destructive’? What happens?”

“Well, let’s see if we can get you into the program first, and then I’ll explain it to you, step by step, as I learn a lot more about it myself.”

“Well, that does send a ray of light into my life—maybe a red light to make the carousel slow down enough for me to hop off?”

“We’ll try it and see. How are you getting along with Juliet Kaiser?”

“She has not given up on me. Without her I might well consider suicide. She has been lately talking about adopting a young boy—her youngest sister’s son. Her sister is in a sanitarium now out in Ojai, California, with tuberculosis. The doctors have collapsed one lung so it can heal properly while they are treating her
with antibiotics. It is a difficult case.”

“Juliet loves you very much, Jason. I notice she comes to visit you on every visiting day. You are right. She has not given up on you, and she will not give up on you. You are together until death do you part. A lovely sensitive, loyal woman. I see you do have some good luck after all.”

“Have you stopped crying for me, Doctor?”

“Yes, indeed. Tearful empathy helps me, but it doesn’t help you.”

“You’re wrong about that.”

“See you next week, Jason.” Dr. Chaplin waved his hand as he started to write carefully in his notebook.

NOTE

THE WIZARD OF IS
MARTIN H. LEVINSON

[Ed. This chapter from Levinson’s Practical Fairy Tales for Everyday Living tells how the word “is” can lead people to confuse opinions with facts.]

IN A MAJOR metropolitan area there once lived a big-mouthed woman who was not an easy person to talk to. You think I’m exaggerating that she wasn’t easy to talk to? Consider the following conversation between that woman and her coworker, Mary.

Mary: I saw The Godfather at a revival film festival yesterday. I really enjoyed it.

Susan: That was the best movie ever made. Nothing comes close to it.

Mary: I’ve liked other movies equally well. I found Citizen Kane and Lawrence of Arabia quite entertaining.

Susan: They can’t hold a candle to The Godfather. Francis Ford Coppola is the best director who ever lived and nobody acts better than Brando and Pacino. You obviously don’t know much about movies.

Mary: Maybe not, but I know what I like. Anyway, after the movie I went to the Museum of Modern Art and caught their latest exhibit. I found it quite interesting.

Susan: Modern art isn’t art. It’s hype and pretense disguised as art. There’s no real art anymore. Art went out with the nineteenth century.

Mary: You’re entitled to your opinion, but I disagree. I think the twentieth century has produced its share of art. But let’s talk about something else.

Susan: Okay. Did I tell you that I went out to dinner at Chez Magnifique last night?

Mary: No you didn’t. What did you think of the food?

Susan: It’s the worst food in the city. No one could like that food. I’m surprised the restaurant is still in business.

* Excerpted from Practical Fairy Tales for Everyday Living, IUniverse, Inc. © 2007 Martin H. Levinson.
Mary: *The New York Times* gave Chez Magnifique four stars.
Susan: So what. That doesn’t change the facts. The food in that restaurant stinks.
Mary: Whatever you say, Susan. Listen, I can’t talk any more. I have to get back to work.

Weekends were tough for Susan. Her dogmatic conversational style caused her to have no friends and her parents didn’t want her visiting them. Although she occasionally dated (Susan was physically attractive, she had been elected high school beauty queen), her relationships never lasted long. Susan’s two main companions were her cat and her living room television.

Dr. Flugelman, Susan’s therapist, had tried for many years to get Susan to understand that her unequivocal positions turned people off. But he had been unsuccessful in helping her see this. “Dr. Flugelman,” Susan said, “I tell it like it is.”

One day Susan told Flugelman that he was the worst psychiatrist in the world. He responded by saying, “Susan, I have worked with you for five years and we haven’t made much progress. Perhaps you should see someone else.”

Susan went home that night and spoke to her cat. “You’re the only one I can really communicate with. That’s not a good situation for a twenty-nine-year-old woman who wishes to get married and have children. I so want things to change for me. I really do.”

At that moment her doorbell rang. It was Frank Wizard, a new neighbor from the apartment across the hall. “Sorry to bother you Susan,” he said, “but could I borrow a cup of sugar? My mom is coming to visit me and I want to bake her a cake.”

Susan liked Frank. He was very muscular and he sported nifty tattoos that read “I love Mom” on both his arms. He was also a gentleman. Frank always held the door open for Susan in the building lobby.

“Not a problem, Frank. Is it only sugar you need? I also have flour, eggs, flavorings, a Williams and Sonoma rolling pin, and a wide assortment of baking pans.”

“Thanks, Susan. I think the sugar will do just fine.”
“Okay, By the way, what kind of cake are you making?”
“Devil’s food cake.”
“That’s not a great cake to make. It’s too chocolatey.”
“My mom likes devil’s food cake. And she likes chocolate.”
“Suit yourself, Frank. I was only trying to be helpful.”
“Thanks Susan. I appreciate hearing your opinions.”
“I wasn’t giving you an opinion. Devil’s food cake does contain too much chocolate.”

“Susan, when you say that devil’s food cake contains too much chocolate you are telling me very little about what you are describing. You are telling me instead,
something about yourself. You are projecting your idea of what you consider to be too much chocolate. You are confusing opinions with facts.”

Susan’s positive feelings for Frank overrode her desire to debate so she said, “That’s interesting. What do you suggest I do about my confusion?”

“I suggest you use qualifying expressions like ‘it seems to me,’ or ‘as I see it,’ or ‘from my point of view’ when you talk about things like devil’s food cake having too much chocolate in it. Such phrases signal to others that you are communicating your beliefs, not absolute truths.”

“Well, Frank, it seems to me that you know something about human communications. Are you a therapist?”

“No, I’m a welder. But what I do is a little like therapy. I repair damaged connections.”

Susan liked the metaphor. She also liked the metaphor-maker. Susan decided to level with him. “Frank, I have been told before that I have a problem separating what is going on in the world around me from what I say about it. Do you think you can help me to overcome that difficulty?”

“I think I can, Susan. I’m a student of general semantics and I’ve learned from that discipline that the word ‘is’ can contribute to the problem you just described. When a person uses ‘is’ to link a noun and an adjective modifying that noun he or she may unconsciously project. For example, when we say ‘She is lazy,’ or ‘He is smart,’ we are suggesting that ‘laziness’ is found in her or that ‘smartness’ is found in him. That contradicts what is really going on: we are projecting our opinions concerning ‘laziness’ and ‘smartness’ onto other people. Qualifying our responses conveys that reality—for example, ‘She seems lazy to me,’ or ‘From my point of view he is smart.’”

Susan’s initial response to his remarks was, “Frank is just perfect” and “Frank is the smartest man in the world.” But she now knew that thinking way was factually incorrect. “To be more accurate I should describe Frank as ‘being perfect to me,’ and “From my vantage point, Frank is the smartest man in the world.”’ While she understood reasoning this way would not be easy to do, Susan resolved to give it a try.

It took some time, but through perseverance and hard work Susan overcame her propensity for pomposity and she married Frank. They moved to a house in the suburbs where they live today with a cocker spaniel and two junior Wizards. Frank manages his own construction company and Susan, who went back to school for a degree in psychology, is a highly successful personal coach and communications consultant. I know it’s a fool’s bet to prophesy that Susan and Frank will live happily ever after, but at least for right now, they both seem pretty happy to me.
DETERMINING how much information to include in a document challenges most writers. When communicating to audiences with contrasting knowledge about the topic of discussion, writers rightfully wonder whether their messages sufficiently address their readers’ concerns.

The truth is that we cannot be certain where our use of language will take our readers. In a lifetime, we experience many moments that come and go, most of which never return to our memory. However, we practically define ourselves by the moments we do recall. Our interpretations of those experiences—our use of language to describe them to others or ourselves — often become emotional reference points to the world we continue to experience.

Experience and language are inseparable. British philosopher John Locke (1632–1704) argued in *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding* that the mind begins as a “white paper” and “the soul begins to have ideas when it begins to perceive.” (1) Locke said that we have no innate knowledge and that all our ideas derive from two types of experience: sensation (experiences of the external world) and reflection (our interactions with our mind). In *Language in Thought and Action*, semanticist S.I. Hayakawa presented a clear parallel to Locke’s argument by showing how language works in both the sensation and reflection.

Report language…is *instrumental* in character — that is, instrumental in getting work done; but…language is also used for the direct *expression* of the feelings of the speaker. Considering language from the point of view

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of the hearer, we can say that report language informs us but that these expressive uses of language (for example, judgments and what we have called presymbolic functions) affect us — that is, affect our feelings. When language is affective, it has the character of a kind of force. (2)

According to Hayakawa, words have informative connotations, whose meanings the sender and receiver generally share, and affective connotations, whose meanings cohere to our unique perceptions.

Two moments that I experienced at the same time of day on two consecutive days remind me of the power of what Hayakawa calls the informative connotations and affective connotations of language relative to Locke’s depiction of sensation and reflection. I refer to these two episodes as The Smart Tourist and The Lost Girl.

The Smart Tourist

One late summer afternoon in Lower Manhattan, I was passing through a revolving door of 2 Broadway from the first day of a two-day meeting, eager to make the 35-mile commute home. Between the revolving door and the long staircase down to the Bowling Green subway station were only fifty or so paces. I tore a beeline toward my subterranean departure, ignoring the crush of the rush-hour commuters dashing from office buildings and the leisurely tourists strolling past the National Museum of the American Indian at the old U.S. Customs House to the left, the picturesque Bowling Green Park to the right, and, slightly north of the park, the famous Arturo Di Modica bronze statue The Charging Bull.

Just before I descended the subway staircase, a woman holding a map turned to me. She was about forty, stunningly beautiful, and casually but expensively dressed. With a French accent but perfect English diction, she said, “Excuse me, sir. Would you direct me to the Number One Rector Street subway station?” Without even breaking stride, I said, “A left at the bull and a block down.” I was already two steps down the staircase when she said, “Thank you” and headed in the direction I had indicated.

You may well be thinking that my response to her question was brusque at best, but withhold judgment until Part 2 of the story ends. The truth is that I would have never remembered this five-second encounter if the second encounter, the one with the Lost Girl, had not occurred.

The Lost Girl

The following afternoon, I was walking through the same revolving door of the same building at the same hour heading for the same destination in the same beeline when, at nearly the same spot, a girl who could not have been older than
six looked up at me and said, “I don’t know where’s my mommy.”

I stopped dead in my tracks, looked at her a moment, gazed at the sea of strangers around us, and bent to her level. I said, “I don’t know either.” Without missing a beat, I pointed to a police officer who was standing some hundred feet away and said, “But do you see that police officer? Let’s go ask if she can help you find her.” The girl seemed relieved to be walking with me toward the police officer.

Within a few steps of the police officer, a voice from behind us called, “Hi sweetheart.” We turned and there stood the girl’s mother, a young woman carrying her own handbag and her daughter’s knapsack. Evidently, she had just stepped out from the museum, as she said, “I told you to wait on the steps while I went to the restroom.” Seeing that the girl acknowledged her mother, I said nothing to either of them and slowly walked toward the subway station. How could someone leave a child unprotected for even a minute in New York City at rush hour, I thought.

**From the Sensation to Reflection**

Five minutes into my subway ride, after stewing about what I believed to be a negligent act by an absentminded mother, my thoughts turned to how differently I had addressed the Smart Tourist and the Lost Girl. When I told the Smart Tourist, “A left at the bull and a block down,” I had made many assumptions about her ability to understand me. For one, when I said, “bull,” I assumed that she knew I meant *the bronze statue of the bull* and that she would not be looking for a farm where she might find a real bull. Also, I was sure that I did not have to speak a grammatically complete sentence, as in “You will need to turn left at the statue of the bull and proceed a block west.” Another given for me was that she would compensate for my inexact directions. Actually, if she turned left at the bull, she would have walked into the post office, because the corner stands another thirty feet north. In addition, after a block walk, she would be standing in front of the R train; however, her desired Number One train was within sight across the street, and I assumed that she would spot the entrance.

Why did I make those assumptions? For at least seven reasons:

1. She spoke impeccable English. (Remember her fluently phrased question.)
2. She was intelligent enough to read a map.
3. She was independent enough to travel alone in one of the most intimidating cities in the world.
4. Her attire showed she was sufficiently acculturated to modern society.
5. She was probably accustomed to international travel, as I guessed from her foreign accent.
6. She was relatively safe in this part of the city even if she took a wrong turn.
7. She understood me, as suggested by how she immediately thanked me and headed in the right direction.
Of course, these assumptions could have been all wrong, but they were reasonable assumptions. We make such assumptions in our daily encounters all the time. When I heard, “Excuse me, sir. Would you direct me to the Number One Rector Street subway station?” I responded as if hearing, “Excuse me, sir. As you can see, I am an intelligent, responsible, independent adult who knows exactly how to ask for what I want, and I just want you to point in the right direction of the Number One train. I am also attractive and weary of men who make untoward passes. So please get to the point so that I can get to where I’m going and you can get to where you’re going.”

The Lost Girl’s situation was something else. A direct and honest answer to her statement, “I don’t know where’s my mommy,” could have been, “That’s nice to know,” or “Kid I don’t know you or your mommy. How can I know where she is?” But what I responded to was, “Sir, I am lost in this dangerous city and as a six-year-old, I am incapable of caring for myself. I cannot seem to locate my mother, so I have just appointed you my moral guardian until I do find her. And if you cannot serve as my moral guardian until I find my mother, would you please designate someone who, in your best judgment, could play that role just as well as you or better?” I filled in what I assumed to be the blanks left by her inexact statement.

Why did I make that assumption? Wouldn’t you? After all, she was just a child. More interesting than why I made those assumptions about the Smart Tourist and the Lost Child is how I made those assumptions so quickly. That explains the immediacy of sensation. Reflection happens more quickly as we accumulate sensations, which reflection mediates as we deal with one experience after another. In fact, sensation and reflection seem to work in harmony in instances like these. American writer Robert Penn Warren had it right when he wrote:

> The unexamined life, Socrates tells us in the *Apology*, is not worth living, and the past, the great general past and the personal past, gives us a paradigm and perspective by which we can inspect the life we live—that of our own age and of ourselves. — Robert Penn Warren, “The Use of the Past.” (3)

Examining the way we communicate with people is essential to an examined life. It explains why I gave the Smart Tourist a mere sentence fragment for a fully detailed question and why I gave the Lost Girl far more than she had asked for in response to her imprecisely worded statement. Examination accounts for the totality of experience: the sensed as well as the reflected.

This thought makes a great starting point for writers trying to determine how much content their reader needs. Sometimes they write to people who know as much as they do. Examples include two senior structural engineers discussing the
stability of a bridge they have inspected, or two seasoned accountants conferring over an internal audit report. In spirit, their communication with each other would be much like mine with the Smart Tourist. But when those structural engineers contact the Commissioner of Public Works about allocating a budget for shoring up the bridge, or the accountants consult with the chief financial officer about the state of her company’s fiscal affairs, they may well be communicating in the way that I did with the Lost Girl. They need to anticipate problems that the reader is too inexperienced or too removed from the situation to foresee. They should provide more detail to shed light on the darkness that shrouds the reader.

Informative and affective connotations play such an important role here. Informed writers, like the structural engineers or accountants, need to know the vocabulary of their field and communicate it precisely. They also need to understand the emotions that their communication invokes in uninformed readers, because language is laden with ambiguity, inaccuracies, and misinterpretations. Finally, they should counter the inconsistencies of language, not by writing what they feel but to what their readers feel. In this way, the gap between sensation and reflection, between informative and affective connotations, narrows.

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The search engine is one of the most important pieces of the Internet system. There may be billions of web pages in existence, but if we can’t find what we are looking for, these pages are useless. We can use many metaphors to describe and understand search engines. The search engine is a “doorway” to the vast and dizzying universe of the Internet. Or is it a “telescope”? Or is the search engine a “map developer”? A “dictionary”?

What better way to look for search engine metaphors than to do a Google search? As it turned out, this was not a great way to proceed.

When I entered the term “search engine metaphor” on Google, I got quite an assortment of documents. Many of them used metaphors. The first document was from the “Search Engine Blog.com”, which headlined that “The Web Site Metaphor is DOA.” Well, all my terms were here, but there was not really a discussion about search engine metaphors. The article claimed that web sites are being replaced by basic pieces of data as the key elements of the web. OK, maybe, but I moved on. (http://www.searchengineblog.com/2006/03/web-site-metaphor-is-doa.html.)

The second document was “Googling for the Right Metaphor: the World’s Leading Search Engine, and the Reason We Trust It.” This was an article about why users trust different online sites. Again, interesting, but not really on my topic. (http://www.drorism.com/blog/googling_for_the_right_metapho.php.)

And so it went…on to the third page of results, where I came across a site ready to sell me a term paper on metaphors. This site had its own search engine, where I could search for a paper tailored just to my needs. For only $34.99 I could get a high-quality term paper, essay, book report, or research paper emailed to me the same day. Maybe I will try this out some day. (http://www.essaytown.com/topics/implicit_metaphor_essays_papers.html.)

As often happens in this age of electronic information, I was quickly swamped with articles, references, and more references. None of them, that I could see, just gave me a nice list of metaphors to use to describe the search engine.
Plus, I had started wondering about the term “search engine” itself. Where did this come from? Was “search engine” itself a metaphor? So I tried other searches: “definition: search engine” and “word origin: search engine.” I got some information about search engines, but again not quite what I was looking for.

The different documents agreed that a “search engine” was software, a “tool”, an “information retrieval system”, which developed out of programs developed in the early 1990’s to create indexes of files. “Archie” was created in 1989 to index the names of “useful” computer files, and “Gopher” in 1991 indexed text documents and displayed their contents remotely. These were followed by a group of programs that were known as “web crawlers” (a metaphor, since the programs do not even figuratively crawl the web.) The 1994 program called “Web Crawler” searched for any word on a web page, and this became the standard for search engines since. (A good summary of this evolution appears on Answers.com, http://www.answers.com/topic/search-engine.)

Search engine generally consist of three main parts, the Spider software, the Index software, and the Query software.

First, the Spider software “crawls the web looking for new pages….This is a metaphor. In reality the spider doesn’t do any ‘crawling’….It requests pages from a website….it is only interested in texts and links AND the URL…. (McGaffin, 2006) Next, the Index software processes the information gathered by the Spider software, and works it up according to various criteria, creating a large database. Finally, the Query software handles our requests when we type our search term(s) into a box. McGaffin (2006) notes that “(t)he query software doesn’t search the web—it checks the records that have been created by its own index software.” So we speak metaphorically when we say that the query software “searches the web” to respond to our query, because it actually just scans its own records, created by the associated Index software.

So, even in simple discussions of the development and composition of search engines, we run into metaphors. But the term “search engine” itself escapes attention. It appears in the discussion without comment. It poses as an objective, scientific term. Yet I believe that the term is a metaphor. It names an ever-increasingly complex set of computer programs. It allows us to talk about this mixture of programs easily and coherently, as a good metaphor should.

If we are “searchers” using an “engine”, this portrays us in military or technological terms. “Search and destroy” comes to mind, as a related term. If, instead, we speak of using an electronic “card catalog,” we are seeking information. The association is with reading books and periodicals.

Couldn’t this complex of computer programs be called a “cataloger?” Isn’t the “search engine” like a library “catalog?”
This is just a thought. Perhaps the Internet is too complex for such a metaphor to really apply. The “search engine” can lead us to videos, movies, TV shows, music, even storefronts. Some businesses do seem to feel that the search engine can destroy them, for example travel agents or record companies, cut out of the buying process by search engines that deliver what they used to. So perhaps the military-technological metaphor, posing as objective scientific language, is appropriate after all.

And my little search, for metaphors which might illuminate “search engines” did come up with some material. But once again I came to the conclusion that metaphors just don’t fit too well into our neat, rationally ordered cataloging systems. Which is one reason I like them.

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Despite recent controversies surrounding evolution and intelligent design, the ethics and utility of stem research, and the integrity of clinical trials in medicine, science still possesses an enormous amount of cultural and prestige. When we want to know anything about how the natural world works, we ask a scientist. For this reason, figures such as Galileo, Descartes, Newton, Darwin, Mendel, and Einstein have been admired and revered throughout history because of the profound and sustaining insights they provided into the meaning of the universe.

But as Peter Dear, the Andrew D. White Professor of the History of Science at Cornell University and the author of *Discipline and Experience: The Mathematical Way in the Scientific Revolution*, shows in *The Intelligibility of Nature*, that is only one face of science. Just as important is science’s role as applied knowledge, a function that turns theories into vaccines, observations, and inventions. The creative tension between those two aspects of science—knowing and doing, realism and instrumentalism—has shaped attitudes toward science since the ancient Greeks.

Using well-known episodes from the history of science, such as mechanical philosophy and Newtonian gravitation, elective affinities and the chemical revolution, natural history and taxonomy, evolutionary biology, the dynamical theory of electromagnetism, and quantum theory, Dear here reveals how the very different principles of knowing and doing were brought together as a new enterprise, science, which would be practiced by a new kind of person, the scientist.

Elegant and nuanced, *The Intelligibility of Nature*, will help readers understand how science became what it is today—and how it shapes our very experience in the world. I found it an enjoyable and rewarding read.

Harry G. Frankfurt, a professor emeritus of philosophy at Princeton University and the author of the bestselling extended essay *On Bullshit* (previously reviewed in *ETC*), in his latest book is not interested in discussing the process of inquiry into what is true. Rather, he is concerned with the questions of why is truth important and why should we care about it?

Frankfurt notes that in the fields of architecture and engineering, truth (objective fact) is obviously important because structures that are built using false information can come crashing down with disastrous consequences. But, he argues, truth is also vitally important in other aspects of our lives and that without an appreciation for truth humans cannot behave as rational entities. Indeed, “A society that is recklessly and persistently remiss in [supporting and encouraging truth] is bound to decline.”

Frankfurt finds a disregard for truth “endemic” among publicists and politicians, but he has discovered a similar attitude growing among social commentators and those who do historical analysis. While the element of subjectivity in both these areas is inescapable, Frankfurt argues, there are important limits concerning the range of interpretations of facts that serious historians, for instance, may display. “This is the spirit of Georges Clemenceau’s famous response, when he was asked to speculate as to what future historians would say about the First World War: ‘They will not say that Belgium invaded Germany.’”

In general semantics we talk about using an *extensional orientation* (a focus on the facts) to get to an “objective reality” (a truth) of a situation. I think that Frankfurt, unlike “postmodernists” who believe that objective reality is fiction, would approve of this GS notion. I also think Frankfurt would agree with the great comedian Groucho Marx who said, “Whatever you say about reality, it’s the only place to get a decent meal.”

**Review by Martin H. Levinson, PhD**

Marty Levinson, aka Martin H. Levinson, PhD, brings general semantics to life in 25 fresh and fast-paced tales that blend the mundane and the bizarre into serious fancy. The *Mary Poppins* lyric, “A spoonful of sugar helps the medicine go down,” could describe what Levinson is doing here in these individual GS lessons, each sharply written from a wild imagination with entertaining whimsy, and each aptly supported by a wacky Paul Johnston illustration. This 115-page book demands extensive field trials by GS-inclined parents, as bedtime reading to young children, and by GS-inclined teachers, as classroom content for elementary and middle schoolers. Everyone (forgive the “allness”) can find enjoyment here, while having their good personal GS habits and practices reinforced.

Each tale stands alone. The table of contents includes subtitles stating the specific GS lesson emphasized in each tale. For example, “Amanda and the Good-Looking Plumber,” a clever and funny account of romantic pursuit, is subtitled, “To make accurate inferences, consider the many possible causes of an event.” Among his time-traveling characters, Levinson gives us a couple of kings, a genie, some extra-terrestrials, gnomes, talking animals, holograms, S.I. Hayakawa, Neil Postman, Albert Einstein and Alfred, the groundskeeper in the land of Reality. But most characters are ordinary people like the plumber Rod and his pursuer, Amanda – “She liked the way he walked, she liked the way he talked, she liked the way he caulked.”

By creating an imaginative space so enjoyable, comfortable, and relaxed, Levinson makes GS extraordinarily accessible. Students of general semantics in these tales include Frank, the welder, and Peggy, the office worker, who apply general semantics matter-of-factly in their homes, on their jobs and with their friends.

With *Practical Fairy Tales for Everyday Living*, Levinson now has published two GS books in the short time since his retirement from a 35-year career as teacher, counselor, and administrator with New York City’s Department of Education. In Tale #25, “Carol’s Extraterrestrial Adventure: To not be bored, treat the familiar as unfamiliar,” Rudy, the chief greeter from Planet X, seems to speak for Levinson when he tells Carol, “I’m always looking for ways to better my performance, I could work on doing that for a thousand years and there’d still be plenty of room for improvement. We Xers have an inquisitive outlook. It helps us to stay young and alert to possibilities for personal growth.”

*Review by Phil Ardery*
I. SYMBOLISM: OUR INESCAPABLE FREEDOM

Today more of us are forced to regard the symbol not as just a mental lens, but as an integral part of the very phenomena which are studied by the physical and behavioral sciences. Whatever the “reality” we choose to explore and comprehend, it can no longer be taken as some pure “essence” or “substance” beyond the pale of all languages and syntactical systems. As our knowledge grows more vast and complex, what we know seems to depend less on what we see and hear, and more on the way we talk. While the continuing discovery of subatomic particles, for example, still needs a minimum of visualization, their significant descriptions rest almost wholly on the logical role their names play in the discourse of modern physics. Similarly, the diagnostic powers of the social sciences are coming to rely less on the raw data of laboratory and street reports, and more on interpretative schemes built on definitions, postulates, and implications. In short, what we once called the “laws” of nature and society have become increasingly indistinguishable from the “rules” of language.

At the same time, the tenor of the above statements runs contrary to many of the intellectual fashions of our era. Rebellions against society, disgust with current values and conventions, cynicism about language, and the search for a more “natural” and authentic existence have come to mark the behavior of growing numbers of sensitive people. It is perhaps not surprising to find among these refugees the usual array of youthful seekers, certain devotees of the arts and humanities, and a traditional sprinkling of philosophers, theologians, psychologists, and psychiatrists. But a substantial number of students of language have also come to share this dis-
position for some ultimate quest. For example, some students of general semantics, with training to discern how language gets mistaken for fact and with a passion for “extensionality,” have also used Alfred Korzybski’s stress on the “unspeakable” level of reality as a stepping-stone towards Zen Buddhism and other kinds of mystical contacts. I, having been influenced by the schools of positivism and semantics, have much sympathy for this mounting distrust of language and socially induced symbolic roles. But I have one important reservation, namely, that no human being, retaining consciousness, can ever migrate to a nonsymbolic land. He can only find a different symbolic one.

To insist on this reservation will be a main purpose of this article. The aim will not be to reject the newer philosophies and psychologies of language, but to give them a cast even more congenial with the definition of man as a symbolic animal. Those axiomatic truisms that “the map is not the territory” and “the word is not the thing” were derived from a conventional empiricism and, as such, have made clear and useful distinctions within our ubiquitous symbolic world. The distinction between words and things will thus retain significance, but instead of confining its focus on the thing as a nonsymbolic entity, it will also contrast those words which refer to things with those words which mainly refer to other words. In terms of this new slant, what has been called the “territory” will also be regarded as another (and “better”) map, and what has been called the “thing” will be treated as a more accurate, referential word. This does not imply that it is worthless to distinguish territories from maps or things from words. It simply suggests that such discriminations are often not the ones actually being made when we are enjoined to oppose language to “extensional” or nonsymbolic reality. In this respect, then, the more hidden value of the injunctions of general semantics lies in the attention they call to the ways in which “pretend reality” names have come to displace and usurp the roles of our “genuine reality” names, luring us into “false-to-fact” responses and upsetting our neural orientations. If many of the alleged differences between maps and territories turn out to be differences between useful maps and useless ones, or if the distinction between the word and the thing becomes that between an “intensional” and an “extensional” word, we can still be most grateful for the discernment. And here we are not deluding ourselves into some imaginary grasp of pure “being.”

One of the more deceptive escapes in our “escapist” age is not the escape from reality but the attempted escape into it. The verbal and behavioral games we have learned to play are indeed full of their agonies, and the urge to shun them is most understandable. But to where do we flee? To psychoanalysis, communism, mysticism, entomology, lysergic acid, existentialism, pacifism? Flights in all directions take off daily, and they are easy enough to join. None of them are necessarily ventures of folly. Many of them step up the flow of adrenalin, and convince their voyagers of the
correctness of their decision. What can be questioned is the philosophic rationale so commonly given for them. So often it is claimed that the journey is from a “spurious” to a “real” world, from a phony to an honest morality, from a social “game” to a transcendent insight, from a desiccated word to a throbbing thing. This kind of exodus summons some of the more admired human traits—taste, creativity, and courage. Yet, whatever the invoked virtues, it seems here to be important that the refugees know what they are doing; that they realize they are prying themselves away from oppressive symbols to more promising ones; and that they are not flying from talk, philosophy, politics, or social games into some pristine reality, remote from the trappings of language, culture, and institutions.

To stamp in this point requires no great sophistication or polemics. Yet the effort meets tremendous resistance. At each end of the symbolic spectrum, there are different kinds of western people: those who obediently play the behavioral and language games of their culture without knowing what they do, and who fancy they are somehow “facing facts” all along the way; and those who see the games for what they are, only to seek some Elysian isle of “truth,” unaware that their retreat is but another artifact of the same kind of symbolic world they think they are leaving behind. Both groups in their extremity have assumed that they and their chosen, world can be somehow described by the treacherous term “real.” The two groups need each other. They obligingly provide the excuse for the other’s fantasies. While all this play-acting must be put in some perspective, our overriding concern must be with the logical interplay within and between symbol systems, both verbal and nonverbal, and with the world of nonsymbolic data (or extensional fact) so far as it shines through some cognitive symbolic formulation. In this way we shall try to avoid the insoluble dilemma of the historical mystic along with his modern heirs: the dilemma of trying to send messages which deny that messages can be sent, of speaking to an audience while feigning speechlessness.

The following argument is greatly indebted to the philosophic, linguistic, psychological, and anthropological radicals of this century: to both the early logical positivists and the current analytic and semantic schools; to the developments of non-Aristotelian logic; to the general semanticists; to the studies in interpersonal, non-directive, and transactional psychology; to the anthropological linguists and the students of culturology; to modern descriptive linguistics; to cybernetics and information theory. Yet no responsibility for the forthcoming conclusions should be attributed to these eclectic sources. Their influence on the author has been speculative and fecund rather than detailed and imitative. Together, however, they form a store of resources for the study of symbolic man which has hitherto been unequalled. It is somewhat disappointing that not even much attempt towards a unified perspective has yet emerged from this wealth of disciplines. Academic
specialization is doubtless in part guilty for the continuing parochialism, but the problem of synthesis is formidable indeed.

Much of contemporary language and communication carries the implication that man is a slave to his symbols. Of course many of us are, and probably all of us are some of the time. But this need not be the case. Because symbols are inescapable does not mean that they must become our tyrants. Symbols have also given the human race the only real freedom of which it is capable. I shall try to stress this affirmative aspect of symbolism, rather than repeating the negative warnings which have been so popular in the semantic writings of our time. At any rate, a new kind of start will be made.

We must come to realize that men have been symbolic creatures all the way along; that they have used their symbols, not only for base and destructive causes, but for noble and prodigious ones; and that only in our own time have we been able to see symbolic power in all its dimensions. Today we can study symbols in terms of their logic and grammar, or in light of their ability to refer to and control the outside world, or through the power they yield us to master or cooperate with one another. Their gifts make man the most exciting of the animals—an achiever of both tragedy and glory unknown to other species. Now we must examine our symbolic world in more detail—and see what the adventure will bring.

II. THE LANGUAGE-REALITY DISTINCTION

While the study of all kinds of symbolism is ready for more intense pursuit, our initial focus will be on speech and its chief substitute, writing. In speech we find our most clear and familiar model for symbolism generally. Whenever we talk, certain noises which would otherwise be mere signals like the sounds of animals, become part of a system of signs whereby they serve multiple communicative purposes. The “tweet-tweet” of a bird is a sign which transmits one and only one kind of information. It does not combine with other bird sounds like “chirp-chirp” to yield different information under new conditions. If we take a single human sound formation, like “run,” we find a more expanded set of possibilities. Were the sound “run” always used by itself it would have a single fixed meaning like “tweet-tweet.” It could, for instance, be used over and over as an imperative to move quickly out of danger, as when we shout “Run!” to get someone to avoid a fire or a speeding car. But “run” is more commonly used within a chain of other voice-sounds. The context may vary almost indefinitely: e.g., “John can run swiftly,” “The Giants scored a run in the fifth,” “He wants to run for office,” “There is a run in my stocking,” etc. In these and scores of other usages, the sound “run” participates in varied message-sending acts, with different meanings and results. This ability to function differently
in different contexts is one of the prime distinctions between those signs we call “symbols” and those we call “signals.”

Today man seems to be the only symbolic creature, at least within our solar system. His most effective symbolism lies in his use of one or more of the earth’s languages. Yet he also creates and uses other kinds of symbols. His gestural, facial, postural, dream, and artistic expressions are symbolic too. They also are part of some more extensive code, but often this fact is unrecognized. Occurring alone, they too would just be signals and on a par with animal communications. But, again, the fact is that they do not happen alone; furthermore, they are usually learned responses and are not instinctual like the signs of other animals. In painting, music, or architecture, for example, a given stroke, note, or shore requires the larger gestalt of the mural, sonata, or cathedral to send its full and proper message, just as an individual word usually needs the rest of its phrase, if not the complete sentence or paragraph.

These symbolic contexts permit man to send and receive information about a greater range of physical and organic events than any device available to other creatures. But the magic does not stop here. Symbols, we say, are used to “give” or “convey” knowledge about something else-usually something nonsymbolic. Such idioms, however, are metaphors which are full of wayward implications. A nineteenth-century American philosopher, Alexander Johnson, much ahead of his time, stated that “Words are like mirrors; they vary their representations as we vary the objects we place before the mirror.” There is some truth in this, namely, that most normal language words have no fixed role and are easily capable of acquiring an indefinite number of meanings. Yet even here we have the analogue of a mirror, reflecting something other than itself, something that is not a mirror; and of words representing something that does not belong to language, things and events that are quite apart from it. We must remember, however, that our own particular speech more or less compels us to think this way and so shapes much of the “commonsense” dialect of the western world.

It is perfectly obvious, of course, that symbols are distinct from nonsymbols. Thus we have been trained to talk. By virtue of the distinction, it follows that most of the objects and movements we sense around us-trees, mountains, buildings, automobiles, rains, soil, moon, etc.-belong to this vast class of nonsymbolic things. They do not normally send us messages nor were they so intended. We often say that “they are what they are”; and then we are content. At times we try to know what they are; then we start to analyze them, hunt down their component properties and their important relations, detect their origins, describe their actions, and announce their possible uses and effects. Throughout such endeavors, we still assume that we are making nonsymbolic things somehow more understandable by relating them to other nonsymbolic things. In addition, we must identify such non-symbols as nonsymbols
Retrospéct

in order to make symbols themselves significant. If all things, by definition, were symbols, it would not be worth mention that any one thing was a symbol; no new information would be gained. We know that it is somehow quite important to classify speech sounds, hand-script, cave hieroglyphics, and Morse codes as symbolic phenomena. In terms of such platitudes, the view that symbols are at best instruments for learning about a nonsymbolic universe seems almost foolproof.

Yet as we consider the matter more fully, two additional insights come to disturb us. First, no matter how clear and patent the difference between symbols and non-symbols may seem, the distinction is not an absolute or intrinsic one, arising from the things themselves. No object, event, quality, or relation in our experience is, by its ipso facto, physical existence, either symbolic or nonsymbolic. We constantly make our own arbitrary decisions as to whether or not we are going to regard a given phenomenon as symbolic. To an untutored camel driver, the Rosetta stone—to us one of the most priceless of symbolic artifacts—might have been no more than a slab of curiously scratched basalt. Even today, the Rosetta stone would to many people still be nothing more. With all our cultivation, it is still in our power to regard this specimen as just a piece of rock with marks. Or a human voice in a strange jungle at night might seem to be no more than the shriek of an animal. It is easy to view symbols as plain events of nature.

But what of the world of nonsymbols? What of the sun and stars, the mountains, rivers, and seas, and the streets we tread? Can these be symbols too? The answer is plainly “Yes.” It may usually be useless and inconvenient to employ them as symbols, but we can so use them any time we care to. True, they were not created to be symbols, but this has nothing to do with the point. A symbol need not be caused by a symbolizer in order to be a symbol. It must only be used as a symbol by some creature who so responds to it. We can, as in rebus games, pause in the middle of a sentence such as “Astronomers say the-has spots right now”; and instead of pronouncing “sun” in place of the pause, we can point to the actual sun instead. The physical sun, previously a mute, distant ball of fire, has now, for our purposes and for anyone who understands us, assumed the role of a word in the English language, namely, the role of an adequate synonym for the word “sun.” A simple analogy is found in the game of chess—a favorite illustration of Ludwig Wittgenstein. If the white bishop is missing from our set, we can place a dime on the appropriate square and agree to the proposal, “From now on this dime will be the white queen’s bishop.” As we proceed to move the dime by the same rules that would have governed the bishop, it becomes clear that the game is no worse off for the substitution, and that the dime has indeed become the white queen’s bishop. An object of any shape or color within the necessary size range is the bishop when it functions as the bishop. Similarly, any object or event in the universe becomes a particular symbol when, in
the syntax of some sender or receiver, it functions as that symbol. At the very least, this means that the distinction between the world of symbols and nonsymbols is not as independent, objective, and intrinsic as we tend to think, for we can draw the boundary line anywhere we want!

The second qualifying insight is even more complicated and raises issues similar to the old metaphysical disputes between the materialists and idealists. The question is: how is it possible to escape the universe of discourse at all, even in experiencing the most obdurate objects? Of course we know very little about what goes on in the brains of higher animals and preverbal human children. The data of neurophysiology are increasingly impressive, but they yield little knowledge of what we directly intuit as to our own cognitive states. That unsymbolic creatures are able to act effectively in many situations is clear. But we have no knowledge of their “introspection,” nor do we even know that they are capable of such experiences. They cannot tell us. (It is interesting that the limit of clear childhood recall seems so often to coincide with the onset of effective speech.) As older children and as adults, however, we acquire what we call “consciousness”; at least we say we do. It is practically tautologous to say that our cognitive knowledge and certainty about the world, even about our immediate sensations, rests on our exercise of symbols-silent, invisible symbols much of the time—perhaps what the behaviorists call “sub-vocal responses”—but symbols all the same. We feel most sure of this tree we are climbing, of this ball in our hand, of this car we are driving when we also feel able to articulate our feelings (if called upon) for the benefit of another person.

There is also, of course, the kind of pre-symbolic certainty which the beasts show in their physical encounters, what George Santayana called “animal faith” and to which David Hume attached such great importance to the dismay of philosophic “reason.” Certainly we also have this biological sense of security (at least before we are too well educated) for we are animals too. But so far as we know, no animal has an intellectual belief in an external world—he simply may act as we act when we have such a belief. Perhaps this is all that is needed even for our own survival. But perhaps not.

The symbolic invasion and conquest of the human body is a mighty one, and the need for our symbols to confirm and elucidate what our bodies have already decided is a mighty need. Long before people became philosophers they sought the assurance of strong, “infallible” sentences to go about their business.

As much as we prize them, our kinesthetic feelings, our sensuous gratifications, and our prehensile contacts with “solid,” “consistent,” and “permanent” things do not in themselves bring us cognitive satisfaction. At least in our western cultures, we seem to need statements like this: “What you control in your hand, what resists the push of your wrist, what responds to your acts as you expect it to—all these things are there and real.” Only when we accept such “truisms” do we become eligible for
popular “sanity.” The extra-symbolic world needs something more than what it is in itself. We are content with it only when we are content with the symbols which translate it into the “reality” in which we move and think.

These suggestions should be enough to show that our notion of an external world apart from language is not so clear and simple after all; and that this very idea is not pressed on us purely by such an “external world,” but arises from the logic of our language. We should now be ready to give this logic a deeper and more extensive look.

From the Archives at Read House:

ROBERT P. PULA, DOS AND DON’TS OF COMMUNICATION *

1. Do try to be a time-binder.
   a. Cooperate
   b. Try to avoid defensiveness
2. Don’t expect to be fully understood.
   a. Expect ‘distortion’ related to abstracting.
   b. Do whatever follow-up seems needed to maximize message-reception congruence.
3. Don’t spend excessive amounts of time at high orders of abstraction.
4. Do check higher orders against lower orders: i.e., seek the object and event levels.
5. Try to avoid identifying levels of abstraction:
   a. M [Map] ≠ T [Territory],
   b. M not all T,
   c. M self-reflexive.
6. Try to avoid ‘allness’ statements — most of them clash with non-verbal structure.
7. Accept notion of successful communication as primarily active.
8. Try to increase awareness of your own projecting (n.b., very difficult to do without outside help).

Congratulations to IGS member and trustee, Marty Levinson, on the receipt of the Susan K. Langer Award for his book, *Sensible Thinking for Turbulent Times*:

The Media Ecology Association has chosen Martin H. Levinson to be the recipient of the 2007 Susanne K. Langer Award for Outstanding Scholarship in the Ecology of Symbolic Form for his book *Sensible Thinking for Turbulent Times* (iUniverse, 2006). The book, which is based on the formulations of general semantics, contains topics such as practical ways to improve one’s thinking ability, emotional self-management, creativity, and analysis of important social issues. *Sensible Thinking for Turbulent Times* was reviewed in the January 2007 issue of *ETC*.

Look elsewhere in this issue for an excerpt and review of Marty’s latest book, *Practical Fairy Tales for Everyday Living*. Marty has also provided the Institute with two concise and articulate guides for teaching general semantics, one focused on middle-schoolers and the other on adults. You can view a printable copy of these guides from the Institute’s Learning Center, on the web at http://www.time-binding.org/learningctr.htm

Also on the website, you can now view the table of contents and selected articles from the Institute’s 2006 *General Semantics Bulletin*, including the 54th Annual Alfred Korzybski Memorial Lecture given by Dr. Renee Hobbs, the Director of the Media Education Lab at Temple University.

On the “home front,” IGS Executive Director, Steve Stockdale, tells us that his very successful class on general semantics has become a catalog course at TCU: JOUR-30253, General Semantics for Mass Communications. Congratulations on that great achievement! Both students and faculty at TCU have provided enthusiastic feedback on Steve’s course, and appearing in the regular catalog should greatly increase the interest and enrollment in this class.
One such enthusiastic student, Marisa Sleeter, was named our new 2007 Berman Scholar. In her final exam, Marisa noted: “I believe that this course has truly shown me way through which I can live closer to ‘the height of the times.’ … general semantics has truly been a course that has changed my life and the way I view it. Or at least given me a cohesive subject under which many of my previous beliefs can come together and help me deal more rationally with every day occurrences.” See her review of Robert Carneiro’s *The Muse of History and the Science of Culture* on page 244 of this issue.

From the Left Coast: Among Bob Wanderer’s many contributions to the SF Chapter, he took responsibility for preparing and mailing The MAP, a monthly meeting agenda and newsletter about Chapter meetings. According to Issue #413 (if we read that correctly, this would work out to the 34th year of publication!), produced by Bob from his hospital bed in January, the Chapter planned to watch the documentary “The Shadow of Hate: A History of Intolerance in America” in February and in April, member Michael Ponting planned to present a talk titled “Up & Down California: An Epistemological Profile of People, Places & Things.” In May, the Chapter attracted 35 attendees for Bob’s memorial, highlighted by the sharing of fond memories, the enjoyment of good company, and a discussion of the future of the Chapter and The MAP. Muriel Wanderer, Bob’s wife, writes: “I’m so glad our life together allowed him to do his “passion” — it enriched us both. I think gs helped him greatly during the ordeal he suffered … I look on Bob’s passing as a push for me to become more gs-involved.” Muriel will take over production of the MAP, with help from Jeremy Klein.

On the Other Coast, the NY Society of General Semantics GS Book Study Workshop is reading Bruce I. Kodish’s *Dare to Inquire!* Member Phil Ardery spoke on “General Semantics: A System for Sustainable Living” and Jackie Holtzman discussed the paintings of Piet Mondrian and her father, Harry Holtzman, in a session titled “Modern Art: Impact, Imagination and Insight.” In May, the Society offered an evening presentation featuring excerpts from Margaret H. Baker’s *My Life as a Bald Soprano.*

Readers in France can visit the recently renovated website of Isabelle Aubert-Baudron, at http://semantiquegenerale.free.fr/. Isabelle provides links to portions of *Science and Sanity* and the Olivet lectures translated into French, and commentary and links to other GS-related articles by French writers.

We invite submissions from teachers who use general semantics in their lessons describing their work for possible inclusion in a future issue of *ETC* to focus on general semantics in education.
Writer’s Guidelines for  
*ETC: A Review of General Semantics*

1. We prefer that you submit your articles or manuscripts electronically. If possible, use Microsoft Word for Windows, although we can handle WordPerfect and plain text (.txt) files if necessary. E-mail documents as attachments to igs@time-binding.org. If you cannot e-mail the document, you can send a floppy disc, CD, or paper manuscript to the Institute of General Semantics, 2260 College Avenue, Fort Worth, TX 76110-1952.

2. We recommend the *Chicago Manual of Style* for determining document format, citations, and references.

3. Use, but do not rely on, spell checking and proofreading aids.

4. Include photos, illustrations, and graphics as separate files (not embedded). Acceptable formats are JPG, JPEG, GIF, TIF, and BMP. Graphics should be as high resolution as available.

5. Do not use automated footnote or note referencing programs. Below are some examples of end notes as they appeared in a recent *ETC*:

**NOTES**


**REFERENCES**


6. We especially encourage submissions by students.

7. If you submit an article that has been previously published, please obtain reprint permissions prior to submission to *ETC* and provide such permission with the submission.

8. While we do occasionally publish articles that do not relate directly to the subject, we encourage writers to make a connection with general semantics or explain how the topic relates to general semantics.

*For more details see our writer’s guidelines at www.time-binding.org.*