GENERAL SEMANTICS

A Critical Companion

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A Thumbnail Sketch of General Semantics

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> Human *symbol* reactions depend upon evaluation, not animal reflexes. The difference is in the *delay* in reactions where our cortex may enter and work. And by extensional training in delayed reactions we can train the cortex, and when we train in extension, we automatically train in delayed reactions. This is very slow. We must work at it. Work with ourselves. With GS we can add to life values, because it is the science of values in life. (Alfred Korzybski, 2002, p. 152)

> ...the origin of most quarrels is using one term in *different meanings*, on *different levels*, in *different orders of abstractions*. (ibid., p. 221)

Orientation

How much unnecessary suffering occurs because someone jumps to conclusions or fails to contextualize some bit of information? How many problems within everyday life take root and draw sustenance from unexamined beliefs taken as fact? To what degree do word choices and language habits create conditions for order and disorder within human affairs? Might increased self-awareness coupled with delayed reactions significantly alleviate many forms of human misery? In short, how would one go about finding the best practical means for minimizing confusion and mutual misunderstanding while maximizing sanity and collective peace of mind? Such important and far-reaching questions lie at the heart of General Semantics (GS), and, in this relatively brief paper, I attempt a response to these questions by providing an overview of GS and identifying a couple of areas for future scholarship and embodied practice.

Introductory Overview of GS

One of the residual difficulties Alfred Korzybski left in his wake was the term "General Semantics" itself. This expression, both inept and inapt, was too easily and popularly appropriated as a subfield of linguistics or grammar or an equally specialized subfield (see Sharp, 2012a, 2012b). GS, as Korzybski meant it, much more broadly referred to a *general science of human evaluation*, where "evaluation" implies multileveled assessments and responses of the-human-organism-as-a-whole-within-particular-and-always-fleeting-situations. Such a science of evaluation lays bare the many different ways that nervous systems,

sensory capacities, linguistic habits, and semantics reactions, all infiltrate, color and compose our "neuro-semantic environments." By exploring how organisms *transact* with their environments rather than passively represent them (see Dewey and Bentley, 1949; also see Anton, 2001), GS acknowledges that experience is always some function of various abstracting processes, that our neuro-semantic environments are partly products.

The world we experience is never unfiltered or unmediated. Our nervous systems and/or languages cannot provide a translucent window upon a world complete to itself and independent of all and any transaction. On the contrary, experience always everywhere shows itself as a *product*, an *outcome*, and a *function* of the organism's capacities and tendencies for abstracting. Although experience always remains open to further interpretation, this should not push from view how whatever we experience, as a transaction, occurs and unfolds in accordance with varieties of abstracting processes (i.e. neurological, emotional, linguistic).

Most people who know anything about GS likely understand it more as an embodied practice for increasing awareness than as a collection of scientific facts regarding awareness. GS is thus largely approached as a practical method for cultivating self-understanding rather than as an academic field with research lines and an accumulated body of facts. This is not to deny that, for at least some scholars, GS serves as an open-ended form of inquiry. Systems-theorists, communicologists, media ecologists, phenomenologists, semioticians, and others explore how nervous systems can be extended through various kinds of communication technologies and also examine how GS fits within other traditions. One might say that just as Buddhism can be studied historically and can include the emergence of new techniques, new schools, and new traditions, so too within GS new developments, practices, and sectarian breaks occasionally occur (for example, S.I. Hayakawa's "Ladder of Abstraction" or D. David Bourland's "E-prime"). Still, for most people, GS largely consists of learning primary tenets and principles and then putting them into practice, and ultimately, without concrete, actual embodied practice of GS, there is no GS. As Korzybski stresses in the "Preface to the Third Edition" of *Science and Sanity*, "If they [the methods of GS] are not applied, but merely talked about, no results can be expected."

Arguably, general semantics might be understood as a fully Western scientific form of Zen Buddhism (for further considerations also see Bois, 1961; Christ, 1986; Holmes, 1993; Klein, 1957). Because we routinely bring unnecessary suffering to our lives due to forms of attachment and because we cling to expectations by verbally

constructed ideas of how we think everything ought to be, GS offers remedy for the agony of "reality" not living up to what we had hoped. This remedial spirit pervades Korzybski's various strategies for learning how to minimize expectations while maximizing efforts, and, Wendell Johnson, in his GS classic *People in Quandaries*, outlines a highly common malady, "IFD disease," a sequence that unfolds as: "Idealization, Frustration, Demoralization." This "disease" refers to a particular sequence where people first overdraw expectations and then experience forms of frustration because their hopes were set too high (their fantasies too out of touch with facts), and then, as a consequence, they become demoralized, suffering a kind of existential languor and indifference. As correctives to such problems, GS provides strategies not only for recognizing the illusion of permanence and for accepting the deep fact of impermanence, but also for giving words and ideas sufficient conditionality (e.g. "Don't believe everything you think!"). In his introduction to Thich Nhat Hanh's *Zen Keys*, Philip Kapleau writes,

> Speaking of the way in which language falsifies reality, Korzybski, the father of general semantics, points the accusing finger at the verb "to be" as the chief offender. "The difficulty with the verb 'to be,'" Korzybski is quoted as saying, "is that it implies a static, absolute quality, whereas the law of the universe is constant change." (Kapleau, 1974, p. 9)

Just as Zen teaches people not to confuse the pointing finger with that to which it points, we learn from general semantics that "the map is not the territory" and "the word is not the thing." So much of GS, in a fashion similar to Zen, helps people attend to the process nature of reality and the intermingling of duality and unity, part and whole. It reveals how the categorization of events, occasions, or individuals easily slides into oversimplifications and distortions; it discloses the confusions that language and thought can introduce if taken literally and too dogmatically. Alan Watts nicely illustrates some of the parallel concerns between GS and Zen where he writes,

> Professor Irving Lee, of Northwestern University, used to hold up a matchbox before his class, asking, 'What's this?' The students would usually drop squarely into the trap and say, "A matchbox!" At this Professor Lee would say, "No, no! It's this —" throwing the matchbox at the class, and adding, 'Matchbox is a noise. Is this a noise?" (Watts, 1989, p. 130; also see Watts, 1961, pp. 34-59)

Of theoretical interest in this account is that Lee, when he openly states, "*Matchbox* is a noise" but then asks if "*this*" is a noise, changes levels of abstraction. His point seems mainly to turn attention "beyond"

language. In doing so, he stresses the difference between the verbal and non-verbal levels. Though he may have succeeded in his goals, he did so without further inspection of different verbal levels, including "indexicals" within "descriptive" language per se (for a more detailed account see Elson, 2010; Anton, 2011).

My final introductory statement about GS concerns Korzybski's early scheme for differentiating classes of life. He argued that people need to appreciate the different "dimensions" introduced by evolutionary processes in the "developments" from minerals to plants to animals to humans; we see successive layers whereby latter dimensions emerge from and depend upon prior dimensions and yet include properties not implied by those prior ones. For example, minerals seem to occupy a kind of zero-point, a dimension characterized by minimal to no transactive commerce and/or self-integrating interaction with the immediately surrounding environment. Plants and vegetative life, then, add an organic first-order dimensionality that Korzybski called "chemistry-binding." His point was that various functions and properties of life, in contrast to minerals and the inorganic, necessitated forms of "chemistry-binding" for their continuation. The world of vegetation requires light and gases and other nutrients absorbed from the environment and integrated into the organism. To this first order-dimensionality, a new second-order dimensionality, "animality," or what Korzybski called "space-binding," emerges, which implies a need to rove, traverse and incorporate space to obtain the necessary chemicals for living. Such space-binding includes the experience of fleeing from predators, attempting to chase down distant prey, searching for mates, performing and witnessing dominance displays and territorial markings, etc. Reserving third-order dimensionality for humans, called "time-binding," Korzybski suggested that humanity, more than mere "chemistry-binding" or "space-binding," exemplifies a new class of life. He further elaborated by claiming that humans need to fall into history, learn their cultures, heritages, and languages in order to live. We, like other animals, have nervous systems that abstract and communication systems that both abstract and allow for sharing our abstractions in various ways, but we, *unlike other organisms*, can become conscious of abstracting and can consciously deal with our abstracting processes and technologies at multiple levels.

Walker Percy, a thoughtful student and critic of Korzybski's work, nicely captured some of the issues of third-order dimensionality in his wonderful little book, *The Message in the Bottle: How queer man is,*

how queer language is, and what one has to do with the other (also see Anton, 2011). Percy provocatively argued that: "The collision of two galaxies and the salivation of Pavlov's dog, different as they are, are far more alike than either is like the simplest act of naming. Naming stands at a far greater distance from Pavlov's dog than the latter does from a galactic collision" (1954, p. 154). His point, well conveyed throughout GS, is that human symbolic responses, as *self-reflexive evaluations*, are qualitatively different than animal reflexes. We need to appreciate reality and life itself, including forms of language and communication, as fundamentally multileveled.

Unfortunate for GS, when Korzybski suggested that humans are not best understood by the term "animals," his idea created much confusion, as some people took him to mean that he denied naturalism or evolution (see Kodish, 2011). His more technical points, on the contrary, were: 1) that categories often mislead as much as they help and, 2) that sometimes a little evolutionary difference makes all the difference. In fact, in his 1949 Colloquium at Yale, when he was asked to provide just one quantitative difference between humans and other animals, Korzybski retorted, "Quarter-inch of cortex" (cf. Kendig, 1983). Much more obvious now than it was to some people then, human symbolic responses are qualitatively distinct from animal reflexes, and this difference between humanity and animality is to be found not according to religious dogma but according to brain science and better—more extensional—classification systems. One of the simplest ways of underscoring his point is to note that although the brain produces language, any language produced becomes part of the environment that now impacts and shapes the brain (see the Preface to the Second Edition of *Science and Sanity*).

A Few Key Concepts and Principles

Korzybski pioneered many principles, techniques, and working devices all designed to enable people to wake up and become more conscious of abstracting, become more aware of the disparities between what is and whatever we think, or say, about what is. An excellent summary resource for graphically displaying some of the more important basic ideas in GS comes from the "Blackboard Notes From Alfred Korzybski—IGS Seminar,—July 1944," reprinted in the 1985 *General Semantics Bulletin*, #54, many of which also are discussed in Korzybski's *General Semantics Seminar 1937: Olivet College Lectures* (2002). Rather than attempt to enumerate each image in detail, a total of over 40 different schematics, I review a few of the most significant

ones. For much more technical and nuanced accounts, see Kenneth G. Johnson's *General Semantics: An Outline Survey* (2004) and Robert P. Pula's *A General-Semantics Glossary: Pula's Guide for the Perplexed* (2000).

One way to introduce GS to the uninitiated is to stress the importance of differentiating different levels of abstraction as well as different orders of experience. The first and most primary order sometimes called the "event-level," or "happenings external or internal," refers to the silent, what is going on ("WIGO"). 'WIGO' tries to capture the indefinitely detailed *sub-microscopic* processes, within the body or outside of it, of which human "neuro-emotional-linguistic" capacities can abstract and present only a fragment. Note also WIGO is never, in actual fact, a direct lived-experience. We assume it pragmatically, taking our bearings to it largely from failed expectations or direct experiences with faulty mappings. WIGO is furthermore a basic postulate of science; it is presupposed in all of our attempts to understand the world scientifically. Out of this silent and forever unspeakable WIGO, sensory and emotional capacities carve out and register meaningful objects and feelings regarding those objects. There is, then, a leap of abstraction that occurs between the event-level and the sensed objects that humans can perceive and the ways they feel about them. Similarly, we find a leap between those abstracted out objects (sensed and/or felt) and whatever we are able to say about them. And our sayings, too, hold multiple levels, orders of abstractions, and various hierarchies of logical types.

Consciousness of abstracting demands near continuous attention to different levels of reality, carefully staving off confusions that come from conflating the unspeakable event-level and the abstracted object-levels and the various verbal-levels (e.g. description and inference). One of Korzybski's highly quoted lines, "*Whatever one might say a thing is, it is not*," provides a tight koan-like expression of these concerns. We make serious mistakes wherever we confuse the word for the thing, and/or the thing for the event, and we make double-level mistakes if we confuse words for the event-level.

An essential part of GS is learning how to become, in Korzybski's terms, more "*extensional*" rather than "*intensional*," which means building knowledge according to careful observation rather than merely relying upon verbal definitions and what others have to say about things (Korzybski, 2002, pp. 17-71). In this context, we should recall his notion of "$^{\text{over}}/_{\text{under}}$-defined terms," by which he maintained that most people, most of the time, define their words intensionally rather than extensionally; they largely rely upon mere verbal definition, hearsay,

speculation, and other forms of uncritical employment of language rather than upon careful attention to the facts of the matter. Too often people fail to ask whether or not some piece of language or way of talking actually fits the facts.

Korzybski outlined what he called his five "extensional" devices. Three of these, the *working devices*, are "indexes," "dates," and "etc.," while the other two, known as *safety devices*, are "quotes" and "hyphens." All of the devices, if they are to help us move beyond our largely intensional orientation, need to be embodied and practiced to the extent that they become habit and ingrained into one's being. As we do so, we become more extensional. We rely less upon verbal fictions and more upon "facts of reality." Examples of *indexes* would be where John Smith$_1$ is recognized as different than John Smith$_2$ or, pizza slice$_1$ is not the same as pizza slice$_2$ even from the "same" pizza. *Dating*, in a somewhat similar fashion, acknowledges that changes occur over time, and so, an example might be how Hitler$_{1922}$ can be quite different than Hitler$_{1939}$. Both indexes and dating help to implement the working mindset of "*not all*" into our everyday dealings, helping to alleviate the troubles the come from expectations and overgeneralization. The "etc." refers to the fact that, of the event-level, we always could explore more and know more. That is, even if we carefully index and date, more could always be said. Ultimately, although the above devices are important, what remains more important is cultivating the proper *conditional*, "not-all" attitude—i.e., the extensional-orientation—within our judgments and language habits.

Whereas the "working devices" primarily enable practical instruments for designating the particularity and event-level qualities to all evaluations (i.e. they handle the fact that the "territory" itself is unique and always changing), the "safety devices" mainly enable one to stay vigilant in recognizing the tentative and probabilistic nature of our terms and our language, to stay cognizant of the degree to which our concepts do not align to "the joints" of nature (i.e. they underscore the fact that "maps" always have various inaccuracies). For example, within GS, the use of quotation marks around terms such as "mind" or "self" or "memory," rather than signifying a direct quote or reference to a prior text, often intends to provide visual reminders that language introduces artificial boundaries, hides unrecognized connections, and offers an appearance of self-contained and independent "entities" where none ultimately exist. Using quotes within GS might be seen as similar to using rubber gloves within the scientific laboratory. They serve as explicit indicators that appropriate caution needs to be exercised while handling such volatile and unsettled contents. Hyphens, somewhat similar in operation, attempt to express a connection between what

language and/or thought would otherwise invite us to treat as separate. One of Korzybski's most well known uses was to suggest that one should study the "organism-as-a-whole-in-environment."

A highly related idea refers to the difference between elementalistic and non-elementalistic orientations to "things" and "relations." Korzybski stressed again and again that experience is non-decompositional, non-decontextualizable, meaning that what we commonly consider independent cannot, in fact, be extricated from a web of constitutive relations. For example, we too commonly seem to think of the person as a discrete object separable from the environment. Language, too, undoubtedly serves as key component within our total abstracting processes, but we need to avoid treating "language" elementalistically, as if language were independent of the nervous system, emotions, and social-historical context, etc. For even further example, carefully reflect back upon the previous paragraphs and make sure that you have not been treating the working devices ("indexing," "dating," "etc.") elementalistically. The words themselves may unfortunately give the impression of three discrete "things" or break into units what can only be conveyed, *in practice*, only as a complete extensional-attitude regarding the absolutely unique and particular eventfulness of our dealings in all aspects. Hence, the type of awareness (i.e. consciousness-of-abstracting) cultivated through GS helps people realize that these devices are not separate nor can "they" be understood independently of their particular contexts of employment.

Another important idea cluster to be addressed is what Korzybski called the "Natural Order of Evaluation." We might best explain by beginning with the difference between symmetrical and asymmetrical relations. Symmetrical relations, reversible because they deal with equivalence (e.g. 1+4=5), can be seen in the mathematical sign "=." But most relations of importance to humans in their daily affairs traffic in "more or less" (e.g. 3>2), meaning that they are asymmetrical and not reversible. Here, the mathematical sign ">" identifies an asymmetrical relation. I have gone into the importance of asymmetrical relations because, according to Korzybski, people not only ignore this difference but, we find a tendency in the history of Western humans to reverse the natural order. Inferences and conclusions, often gathered and accumulated intensionally rather than by extensional practice and inquiry, drive our judgments and evaluations. For example, people increasingly consume what is labeled as "food" even if it contains little to no nutritional value, and, just as likely, people ignore countless edibles because such aspects have not been labeled "food." In short,

many people unwittingly have come to prefer 'eating the menu' to 'eating the meal.' People reverse the natural order of evaluation, at least to some extent, whenever they fail to act extensionally. The Natural Order of Evaluation, then, refers to a primacy that warrants recognition and accommodation: The *event-level* is *more important than*, the *object-level*, which is *more important than*, the *description-level*, which is *more important than* the *inference-level*. Unfortunately, many people have inverted this order, live their lives in a mostly intensional way, taking the bulk of their beliefs and ideas—their evaluative judgments about the world—from hearsay and unexamined chatter.

One final key idea needs to be reviewed in this section: Korzybski's "Extensional Theory of Happiness" (see 2002). His theory explicates the role of expectations in our neuro-semantic and neuo-linguistic environments, and much of it already has been hinted at or alluded to throughout this brief essay. His main point is that "the same facts of life" will be judged and evaluated quite differently depending upon the kinds of expectations we bring to those facts; the facts will be experienced in terms of the particular expectations. Imagine, for example, that someone is invited to a party and is told that the finest chefs from around the world will share their best recipes. In contrast, imagine that person had been invited to that same party but told that there might not be food there or likely would be some leftover "junk food." Now, further imagine that the person finds, when arriving to the party, a few local cooks who have some well-prepared fresh food to share. These same facts met by highly different expectations produce quite different evaluations and experiences. Thus, if one were able to retain minimal expectations at all times, one likely finds facts more pleasant, more amenable than if one has maximum expectations. In fact, too high of expectations can serve as the perfect recipe for disappointment, frustration, cynicism, hopelessness, etc. Additionally, the Aristotelian quest for certainty unfortunately has led many people to have too high of hopes which often slope into a "two-valued orientation" where everything falls into categories of either "good" *or* "bad." If, on the contrary, we recognize an "infinite-valued orientation" whereby things can't be either "all good" or "all bad," (that is, if we bring an adequate "*non-allness*" orientation to our evaluations) we cultivate more realistic, extensional, expectations. I close this section by allowing Korzybski to speak for himself as he did in his 1937 Olivet College Lectures:

> Disregard facts and live by intension and you will be quite unhappy—but the same fellow will be quite happy expecting nothing by extensional orientations…Don't be cynical as American youth is. American youth is spoiled from the bottom up. Parents, teachers, and preachers all educate you in the intensional way. Make life for your children happier; prepare them for the hardships they will find in life. (Korzybski, 2002, p. 93)

Future Research

In this final section, I outline three areas of future research for students of GS. The first identifies various residual ambiguities and lines of continued scholarship regarding the GS conceptual system itself. The second area explores how GS principles extend into and apply to media forms and modern communication technologies, many of which have been taken up and advanced in the tradition known as "media ecology." The third and final area addresses how GS merges together with schools of semiotics and phenomenology to provide the foundations for the heady field of "communicology."

"Levels" and "Aboutness"

A main area for future research within GS revolves around the question of how reality itself can be multileveled. Embedded within this question is the persistent difficulty noted by Gregory Bateson: "Relations between logical types cannot be stated" (cited in Wilden, 1972, p. 395; also see Wilden, 1987; Elson, 2010; Anton, 2011, pp. 27-60). Indeed, what exactly does it mean to say that reality occurs at more than one level or that abstractions or logical types occur at multiple levels? If GS remains firmly committed to a scientific worldview, how exactly should people account for and understand the existence of various kinds of abstractions? Are the objects produced through abstractive processes, and/or verbal realities such as names, merely "epiphenomena" (i.e. "not 'really' real"), or, on the contrary, might they occur at different levels of reality in their own right (cf. Deacon, 2012). Hillary Putnam's *Realism with a Human Face* (1981) nicely brings this issue to a head where he shows, indirectly, how Korzybski's program unfortunately leaves "reality" one-step removed. Carefully consider, for example, Korzybski's well-known three axiom's regarding maps and territories: 1) the map is not the territory; 2) the map cannot cover all of the territory; 3) maps are self-reflexive. As helpful as these axioms are, we might, as a conceptual remedy, offer these three corollaries: 1) there is no not territory; 2) any map is only part of the territory; 3) "maps" is the word used to refer to parts of the territory becoming reflexive to other parts at different levels of abstraction. Once we recognize how all maps, as part of the territory, are the means by which one part selectively

releases and appropriates another part at different levels of abstraction, we no longer need to postulate that "reality" lies somehow "behind" and/or "beyond" our experiences and/or language.

These issues have become even more relevant recently with the resurgence of interest in Aristotle's notion of formal and final cause, where scholars have shown how any thoroughgoing attempt to denude nature—including human endeavors—of formal and final causes fails to comprehend the whole of nature (See McLuhan and McLuhan, 2011; Deacon, 2012; Anton, 2012a). We can sum up this concern by suggesting that language habits and forms of abstracting (i.e. *general types and conscious decisions*) seem less and less illusory and more and more part of the multileveled nature of reality itself (also see Elson, 2010; Anton, 2011).

The Media Ecology Tradition

Neil Postman, one of the founders of the Media Ecology doctoral program at NYU and the editor of *ETC* from 1975-1986, gave an address at the 1974 annual Alfred Korzybski Memorial Lecture titled: "Media Ecology: General Semantics in the Third Millennium." In his address, Postman not only reviews the failure of Korzybski to grasp the implications of his ideas for media and communication technologies, but he points out how Korzybski, though admittedly recognizes the vital role that positional notion played in the development of mathematics, completely passes over the just as vital role of pencil and paper. Postman continues:

> But this is only one illustration of Korzybski's failure to appreciate the role of media as environments. Throughout his work, he makes almost no distinction between speech and writing. He conveys the impression that their neuro-semantic environments are the same. And yet he himself formulates the principle of non-additiveness; that is, when a new factor is added to an environment, you do not have the old environment plus the new factor. You have an entirely different environment. For Korzybski not to have pondered what changes writing, or print, or radio, or the telephone would make on one's neuro-semantic environment is almost incredible. But hold, my friends. There is nothing to fear. It is precisely at this point that media ecology comes into existence.
>
> Media Ecology is General Semantics writ large. It starts with the assumption that people do their thinking and feeling not only in and through language but in and through all those media which extend, amplify and transform our senses. Further, Media Ecology assumes that what is important in understanding these processes is not so much the content of the media but the ways in which they structure our transactions with them. Media ecologists want to know what kind of environment we enter when we talk on the telephone or watch television or read a book. (Postman, 1974, p. 76)

By the late 1990's, with the formation of the Media Ecology Association, GS had gained increasingly powerful contemporary allies and a robust advancement of many of its ideas into research regarding media and technological mediation. A significant undercurrent to much of the media ecological tradition is to show media are extensions of the body, amplifications of our abstracting capacities, and they operate upon our senses, altering and adjusting each and the ratios between them (McLuhan, 1964, 1969; Ong, 1967, 1982; Anton 2010a, 2010b, 2011, 2012b).

Different communication technologies have different degrees of self-effacement or transparency (also see McCloud, 1993; Bolter, 1991). For example, one's native tongue remains self-effacing to such a high degree that it is hard to imagine hearing the speech sounds as mere sounds rather than as words. The meaning spontaneously appears *through* the sounds to such a degree that it seems as if the sounds themselves are meaningful. Only when we encounter an unfamiliar word or a foreign tongue (or perhaps when we repeat a word over and over) does its fleshy opacity reveal itself. The written word, in contrast, is much more opaque: it sits visibly still in objective space. Nevertheless, written words—even though visible, tangible, physically isolatable from their speakers and contexts—display a considerable amount of transparency and self-effacement during the moment of reading. We routinely attend not *to* the words but *from* them, and in doing so their physical form is surpassed and rendered largely transparent as we attend to what the words make possible (also see Leder, 1990; Anton, 2001). They are mostly flights beyond themselves, and this is one reason why proofreading can be so tedious and painstaking. Moreover, when typos or misspellings pass undetected we can legitimately blame something other than mere laziness or inattentiveness; we find solid evidence of the natural tendency to look through and beyond the materiality of communicative forms.

In talking about George Steiner's book *Language and Silence*, noted Korzybski scholar M. Kendig discusses Steiner's chapter called "On Reading Marshall McLuhan," to which she further adds:

> In the rough and concisely, Steiner has written much of what I had intended to say about McLuhan — as he says, The Gutenberg Galaxy (1962) <sic> remains his most important statement. For

> all McLuhan's faults, I consider Gutenberg an absolute must for Korzybski teachers and students. In a way, McLuhan 'is' a terrific popularization of orientations, etc., urged in S&S: nonlinearity, multi-dimensionality, organism-as-a-whole, 'unified field', etc., and the premise not-all. McLuhan stretches you, cracks the shell of verbalism, etc." (1983, p. 77)

Hence, whereas Korzybski identifies the mediation mainly performed by the abstracting processes of the nervous system and of language practices (producing our neuro-semantics environments), scholars such as Marshall McLuhan, Walter Ong, Neil Postman, Christine Nystrom, Gary Gumpert, Lance Strate, and many others, sought to show the various ways that communication media are technologies of abstraction in their own right. They are dynamic processes whose routine functioning hides itself. It requires training and increased awareness to see the screens themselves, the ground rather than the figure, as it were.

The Media Ecology Association (MEA) has regular representation at many national and international level conferences, including the International Communication Association (ICA), the National Communication Association (NCA), Eastern Communication Association (ECA), Canadian Communication Association (CCA), and they also host their own annual convention. For more information about media ecology, go to <http://media-ecology.org/>.

Communicology

Third and finally, a good amount of GS research occurs in the fairly recently established International Communicology Institute (ICI). The ICI, founded by Richard L. Lanigan in 2002, provides a rigorous synthesis and contextualization of the insights of general semantics within a larger framework of continental philosophy, the areas of semiotics and phenomenology more specifically (see Lanigan's excellent, "Appendix B: Communicology: An Encyclopedic Dictionary of the Human Science," 1992, pp. 197-236; also Eicher-Catt & Catt, 2008, 2010). The term, "communicology" comes from Wendell Johnson, one of the key figures in the early development of GS, and the word "communicologists" refers to scholars who seek a rigorous science of lived-experience, one that moves out from a multidisciplinary body of knowledge regarding constitutive elements in communication and existence. By combining the insights of structuralism and semiotics along with the methodologies and orientations of phenomenology, communicology opens GS to more sustained scholarly examination and critical reflection.

Communicology distilled the logic of the research methods within semiotics and phenomenology so as to make possible a rigorous science of human consciousness and behavioral embodiment. It examines discourse within global culture by focusing on four sub-areas: (1) *Art Communicology*, meaning the study of art forms and performative creativity, with the attempt to understand aesthetic forms as modes of cultural transmission and diffusion; (2) *Clinical Communicology,* which includes not only the therapeutic focus upon physical communication disorders (e.g. speech pathology and audiology) but also kinds of behavioral troubles caused by forms of semantic confusion and pragmatic misinterpretations; (3) *Media Communicology,* where scholars analyze the cultural, psychological, and sociological dimensions of action, largely within the context of different media forms, often electronic; (4) *Philosophy of Communicology,* which opens the study of communication to the area of linguistics, cognitive science, cybernetics as well as metaphysics, epistemology, logic, and axiology.

With strong research agendas, rigorous methodologies, a good number of annual conferences and a growing number of communicology programs cropping up around the globe, communicology represents a significant area for future scholarly research into GS and its related traditions. For more information go to: <http://www.communicology.org/>.

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The Unity of Human Problems Through Method: Korzybski's General Semantics as a Transdisciplinary Discipline

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'Art', 'Science', 'History', 'Philosophy', etc.— We may confront such traditional disciplinary divisions with awe, forgetting that on the level at which we all live, they don't exist as entirely separate, discrete entities (outside of university departments), nor do they exist entirely apart from the humans who have studied and made them. Rather, when we pull aside the curtains of seemingly disparate disciplines, we see only men and women; writing, teaching, experimenting, constructing, creating, etc.—*and always talking*. Pulling the dividing curtains aside, looking at the various disciplines as forms of human behavior, rather than Platonic forms provides one way to move towards a perspective that goes beyond any particular discipline. Welcome to the world of interdisciplinarity.

In this essay, I'll explore interdisciplinarity, and related notions, which involve various means devised to build bridges between different disciplines. General Semantics (GS) will be my main focus, a transdisciplinary discipline that works as a metadiscipline providing a unified framework and language for understanding and talking *about* other disciplines. I'll conclude with some suggestions for how the evaluative tools of GS might help advance knowledge exchange and development among the disciplines.

The Necessity and Danger of Disciplines

Let's start with some working definitions. First, what do I mean by a "discipline"? I'm treating the term as synonymous with *a field of specialized knowledge and practice*. Increasing specialization and the concomitant multiplication of disciplines seems inevitable, for no two individuals—however much they share—are exactly the same in all respects. No two individuals—however similar—will see any thing or situation in *exactly* the same way. However much alike, they will have had different experiences and will necessarily live and work on the basis of somewhat different viewpoints and values, even in the same field. With the increasing size and complexity of social groups, the specialized knowledge developed by different humans will tend to grow as well. What initially began as one field or discipline can expand and diverge into many subfields and branches. Since no one individual