

M. KENDIG: TIME BINDER

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THERE ARE a few individuals who live across time, individuals whose work has not been limited to a single achievement or to a given period. M. Kendig is such a person. For more than thirty years she has been a kind of educator's educator, patiently working to stimulate others to study and practice the rigorous discipline of general semantics.

Learning to apply general semantics is similar to learning to fly, in that no one ever became a pilot by studying the principles of aeronautics and watching a demonstration; much less by ability to carry on "philosophic disputations" on the subject. This is an over-simple analogy but perhaps it will suggest the complexities involved in a re-education which aims to bring so many unconscious habitual responses under conscious control.¹

I first learned of M. Kendig in Alfred Korzybski's 1935 seminar at the Williams Institute in Berkeley. At that time Cora L. Williams, mathematician and president of Williams, advanced the evaluation in one of her lectures on general semantics that *Science and Sanity* completes a trilogy, of which Aristotle's *Organon* is the first volume and Bacon's *Novum Organum* the second. While widely separated in point of time, all three volumes deal with our human quest for reality. The *Organon* formulates the laws by which the subject thinks; the *Novum Organum*, the laws by which the object is known; and *Science and Sanity*, the laws which unite these two processes.

In his seminar Korzybski frequently referred to M. Kendig,

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¹ M. Kendig, "Introduction," *Papers from the Second American Congress on General Semantics*, p. xviii, Institute of General Semantics, Chicago, 1943.

who had studied with Jean Piaget in Geneva, and her work at the Barstow School. Speaking of her work at that school in a paper presented before the American Association for the Advancement of Science in St. Louis, Missouri, in 1935, Kendig said:

The educational program which we are formulating and attempting to develop at the Barstow School, Kansas City, is built around the language-function in all twelve grades, though this paper deals with the language re-orientation of the high-school curriculum and the new curriculum of the eighth grade which becomes a general language course in preparation for the high school. Though seldom stated, and I believe never before stated in a workable formulation, language is obviously the common denominator (or base) of all school subject-matters, mathematics and science included, as it is of human life.

WHEN the Institute of General Semantics was founded adjacent to the University of Chicago campus in 1938, it was Kendig who worked most closely with Korzybski in developing the training program. In the *General Semantics Bulletin* (1949-50, I & II, p. viii) of which she was founder and editor, she included this little-known background material:

In 1931, Korzybski coined the term General Semantics for his studies of Time-Binding in a paper presented before the American Mathematical Society at New Orleans, Louisiana, December 28, 1931 (See "Supplement III" of *Science and Sanity*). Korzybski had previously completed the first draft of *Science and Sanity* in 1928 in which he did not use the words semantic, general semantics or semantic reaction, and had attended the *Congres des mathematiens des pays Slaves* at Warsaw, Poland, in 1929. In this 1931 paper, "A Non-Aristotelian System and its Necessity for Rigour in Mathematics and Physics," Korzybski presented material on "the restricted semantics school represented by Chwistek and his pupils . . . characterized by the semantic approach," and first used the term General Semantics for his non-aristotelian, non-elementalistic general discipline. He reported that his

researches had resulted "in the discovery of a general semantic mechanism underlying human behavior, many new inter-relations and formulations culminating in a (non-aristotelian) system." Thus the background of Korzybski's use of the term General Semantics is found in work of the Polish mathematical logicians, although some writers have erroneously presented it as an outgrowth of "semantics," a branch of philology, a term often used as a popular synonym for word study, etc. However, as pointed out by Allen Walker Read, the lexicographer, in "An Account of the Word 'Semantics'" (*Word*, IV, 2, August 1948), "the great popular vogue of the word semantics can be traced to the ferment caused by the works of Alfred Korzybski."

Kendig, Director Emeritus of the Institute of General Semantics (now located in Lakeville, Connecticut), writes in a recent letter of its work in offering "methods of re-education, re-training of nervous systems—a means for mass therapy of attitudes that might make many of our man-made problems more open to change, along lines suitable for human living, in and with modern technological civilization."

In her introduction to Korzybski's *Manhood of Humanity*, she writes further of the aims of general semantics and the Institute:

Pioneering the discipline has, of necessity, been carried on in an amorphous atmosphere. To go forward we shall need to coalesce. We need not less spontaneity but more consensus on essentials, on directions. We need inter-discipline, cooperation and some mechanism for working in groups. Fostering such development now becomes a function and aim of the Institute as the center for non-aristotelian training and work. Thus Korzybski's time-binding efforts will live and grow.²

There are those who recognize in M. Kendig the time binder of general semantics.

² M. Kendig, "Introduction," Alfred Korzybski, *Manhood of Humanity*, p. xxxvi, 2nd edition, The International Non-Aristotelian Library Publishing Company, Lakeville, Connecticut, 1950.