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***THE INSTITUTE AND
THE SOCIETY:
A Self-Reflexive Assessment of Two
Organizations, One Discipline***

STEVE STOCKDALE*

THIS YEAR marks three noteworthy anniversaries within the community of general semantics. The first issue of *ETC: A Review of General Semantics*, was published by the Society for General Semantics 60 years ago this fall; the Institute of General Semantics was founded 65 years ago; and Alfred Korzybski introduced *general semantics* in his seminal work, *Science and Sanity: An Introduction to Non-Aristotelian Systems and General Semantics*, 70 years ago.

As the two organizations now stand on the threshold of radical restructuring for the future of the discipline, this historical perspective is offered as prelude for the changes to come.

*Steve Stockdale currently serves as Director for Programs for "the Institute" and as a Director for "the Society." Effective January 1, 2004, he will assume the duties of a new position, Executive Director of the Institute. The Institute will shortly thereafter relocate to Fort Worth, Texas.

The Institute of General Semantics (IGS, “the Institute,” 1938)

The Institute was established as a not-for-profit corporation in Chicago in 1938. The incorporation certificate listed the names of four Incorporating Trustees: Alfred Korzybski, Cornelius Crane, Douglas Gordon Campbell, M.D., and Charles B. Congdon, M.D., (Campbell and Congdon were both affiliated with the University of Chicago Health Service). Additionally, Marjory [sic] Kendig was listed as an “ex-officio member of the Board.”

In its original organizational structure, the Institute did not provide for members or memberships. Korzybski served as both Director and President of the Board, Kendig as Education Director and Board Secretary.

The Institute published “A Memorandum” by Alfred Korzybski in 1940 to document the impressive accomplishments of the two-year-old organization. “A Memorandum” lists the names and affiliations of the original thirty-one “Honorary Trustees” and the names of 138 colleges and universities represented by students or professors who had attended seminars at the Institute; it summarizes the “Results of Training in General Semantics and the Mechanisms Involved”; and it reports that 3,000 copies of *Science and Sanity* had been sold “on direct order without advertising or sales promotion.”

The Society for General Semantics (SGS, “the Society,” 1942/43)

By 1942, the Institute faced mounting financial difficulties. Several of Korzybski’s prominent students, including S. I. Hayakawa, Wendell Johnson, Irving J. Lee, and others primarily in the Chicago area, formed the Society for General Semantics. The Institute published an eight-page “Prospectus” for the new Society in April 1942 that carried the title, *etc: The General Semantics Bulletin*.

The “Statement and Preamble” to the Prospectus began:

The hopes and plans of many people interested in general semantics are finally being translated into action. The Society for General Semantics is now under way. Some may say that this is an inopportune time for an undertaking of this kind. Maybe in some ways that is true, but in a deeper sense the wider dissemination of the extensional method is more important now than ever. We are aware of the uncertainties and difficulties we are facing. That, however, is not a sound reason for shrinking from our responsibilities. If the formulations of general semantics have value for cultural reconstruction — and we believe they have — then the time for action is now.

It continues, addressing one of the Society’s primary objectives:

... To be specific: one of the purposes of this Society is 'to secure financial support and wider recognition for the Institute of General Semantics.' This financial support will be procured both by the collection of dues from the membership and by the encouragement of gifts to the Institute.

... Through the Society it is hoped that all those deeply interested in Korzybski and his work will have an opportunity to formulate and carry out a sound program for extending the understanding and use of general semantics. It is apparent that if the Institute is to survive as an active organization, some well planned financial program must be undertaken immediately. If the Institute were forced to discontinue its activities, the loss would be irreparable. This places the future of the Institute directly in our hands. Whether we go forward or lose ground will be determined in some measure by the decisions that we make now.

The Prospectus provides the text of the Society's original one-page charter and by-laws, which details the financial commitment to the Institute:

5. Out of all membership fees of whatever classification, Five Dollars (\$5) from each annual membership and Five Dollars (\$5) annually for each existing Honorary Membership shall be retained by the Society for its own activities, publications and maintenance; the balance shall be turned over to the Institute of General Semantics to be used in whatever way its Board of Trustees and Directors see fit.

Also contained within this first *etc.*, publication are two "Letters from A. K." dealing with "Permanent Etc.," and "Low Grade Thinking," an article titled "Politics and Magic" by Edwin Green, and three responses to the topic "How to Write on General Semantics" authored by Hayakawa, Johnson, and Lee. Coincidentally (perhaps, perhaps not), this short announcement also appears:

Institute Appoints Fellows

In recognition of their work promoting GS through their writings, three fellows of the Institute of General Semantics were appointed last fall. They are: Wendell Johnson, associate professor of psychology and speech pathology at the University of Iowa; S. I. Hayakawa (IGS '38) assistant professor of English at the Illinois Institute of Technology; and Irving J. Lee (IGS '39) chairman of the speech division at University College, Northwestern University.

Fourteen months later, in August 1943, the Society published Volume I, Number 1, of *ETC.: A Review of General Semantics* under the editorship of S. I. Hayakawa. The inside cover proclaimed the journal to be "the official organ

of the Society for General Semantics” and “devoted to the encouragement of scientific research and theoretical inquiry into Non-Aristotelian systems and General Semantics.” An annual subscription cost \$3.

By the publication date of the first *ETC*, the Society named 150 individuals as ‘charter’ members, 130 of whom had attended seminars with Korzybski. (1) Over the next three years, the Society continued to use the Institute’s mailing list of seminar attendees and prospects in its membership and fundraising campaigns.

The Institute and the Society

Almost from the beginning, confusion arose regarding the two ‘official’ GS organizations that operated independently out of two separate offices in Chicago. The minutes from the Institute’s board meeting of January 11, 1945, noted:

She [M. Kendig] pointed out the misunderstandings on the part of the public, and the mix-ups about contributions to the Institute and memberships in the Society, as a serious handicap ... She said that if a central office was set-up for sales, etc., enough money could be saved and made to help pay the salary of a competent secretary, eliminate wasted effort, friction, etc. She also pointed out the immediate need for some sort of coherent plan of cooperation with the Society, before continuing the drive for funds from those on our own lists which was started in December 1943.

The “misunderstandings on the part of the public” are typified by two letters received by the Institute in February 1946. A letter from Mr. Robert K. Adams was dated February 13:

I herewith request you send me complete price lists of all available publications on subjects relating to general semantics.

I wish to further remark: I forwarded a similar request to the Society for General Semantics, 3300 Federal St., Chicago, under the assumption that the Society and your Institute were one and the same organization; only after several months have I discovered my error.

Since this false assumption is held by at least two other people in my own very limited circle, it follows that possibly a similar situation obtains by a rather large number of interested readers of Korzybski’s ‘Science and Sanity.’

And C. A. Nugent, Jr., wrote on February 17:

A reminder was sent to me by the Institute informing me that you had not received my \$15 pledge for the year 1946. On January 15, 1946, I sent a \$15 money order to the Society for General Semantics rather than to the Institute. I did this in an attempt to insure my getting "ETC." this year, which incidentally has never come, and on the advice of Dr. Hayakawa who said, "Society? Institute? — financially it's all the same thing."

In truth, things were most definitely *not* the same — financially or otherwise with regard to the operations of the Institute and the Society.

As early as April 1945, the Society's Board of Directors recognized their own financial plight and realized that, for the survival of their own organization, they could no longer maintain their financial commitments to the Institute. (2) In November 1946, they formally acknowledged this change by sending to their members a resolution to change the by-laws of the Society (ratified less than four years earlier) concerning financial support to the Institute:

Financial contributions from Society funds shall be made to the Institute of General Semantics by two-thirds vote of the Governing Board.

The resolution passed, despite vociferous objections by Korzybski and Kendig. (3)

All of this is recounted, from one perspective, in a remarkably candid and straightforward "Report of the Retiring President" by Wendell Johnson in the Spring 1947 *ETC.*

By May 1947, one year after relocating from the south side of Chicago to the pastoral setting of Lime Rock, Connecticut, the Institute's Board of Trustees responded by implementing its own membership program in an effort to compensate for the funds it would no longer receive from the Society. (4) This decision created the awkward situation in which the Institute appealed for funds using the same mailing list it had been providing to the Society for over four years. In effect, the Institute and Society 'competed' for financial support from the same limited pool of prospective contributors.

The following year, the Society acknowledged another point of confusion. Several other affiliated 'societies' had been established in cities such as Los Angeles, New York, Boston — even Chicago. In order to clarify this situation and to distance itself from the local Chicago 'society,' the organization adopted the more global name of the International Society for General Semantics. (5)

The year 1949 proved to be a pivotal year in the history of the two organizations. Francis P. Chisholm, President of the ISGS since 1947, ran for reelection in 1949 on a platform based on 'unifying' or 'merging' the two organi-

zations. This plan, supported in principle by the Institute and four of six members of the ISGS Governing Board,

... would create a new unified general program for present and future activities of the Institute, Society, and other organizations concerned with forwarding the use and development of General Semantics. The proposed organizational structure would eliminate duplications of expenses and administration, improve public relations, and make possible securing adequate funds for needed studies, research and experimentation in various areas. (6)

The two ISGS Directors who did *not* support the unification plan were the Editor of *ETC*, S. I. Hayakawa, and the Associate Editor, Anatol Rapoport. So strongly did Hayakawa oppose the notion of merging or unifying the organizations, he chose to oppose Chisholm as President of ISGS.

Hayakawa took justifiable pride in his role as Editor of *ETC* and the Society's growth to 1,800 members and 400 subscribers. He emphasized that the strength of the Society came from its different organizational structure and focus as compared to the Institute.

... the Society, in any case, will continue to be the most effective agency for spreading general semantics — IGS or no IGS. GS is bigger than AK, MK, or any one of us, just as the theory of relativity is bigger than Einstein or any of his students. And the Society, which is built on the subject and not the man, will survive as long as the subject survives. It was structurally conceived that way, planned that way, and *ETC*. is run that way. And by running for president, I wish to re-assert this policy. (7)

Despite endorsements from the Institute (i.e., Korzybski, Kendig, *et al*) and the leadership of the New York, Los Angeles, and Boston Societies for General Semantics, Chisholm could not withstand the challenge from the more publicly well-known Hayakawa. (8) Talk of 'unifying' the two organizations was shelved as Hayakawa assumed the presidency of the International Society in addition to his duties as Editor of *ETC*.

Korzybski died on March 1, 1950, a few hours after he collapsed while counseling D. David Bourland, Jr., the promising 21-year-old student who was working at the Institute as the second (and so far, the last) Korzybski Fellow. (9) Kendig assumed the duties of Acting Director, and together with Charlotte Schuchardt, Korzybski's literary secretary and Executrix of his estate, guided the Institute through the difficult transition period of the next year. The following year, Kendig was appointed Director of the Institute and Charlotte was elected as Trustee.

Over the next two decades, the Institute operated in a stable manner, for the most part living hand-to-mouth financially, and it maintained a consistent level of 700-750 supportive members. Kendig successfully introduced new projects such as publishing the Institute's 'yearbook,' the *General Semantics Bulletin*, and the Alfred Korzybski Memorial Lecture series. She managed the Institute's summer and winter seminar-workshop schedule, bringing in guest lecturers and workshop presenters such as Buckminster Fuller, Abraham Maslow, Dr. Russell Meyers, and Dr. Marjorie Swanson. Charlotte Schuchardt, through her activities in the sensory awareness movement, introduced Charlotte Selver and her work to the general semantics community through the seminar-workshops in the mid-1950s.

Denver University

The Third American Congress on General Semantics at Denver University, 1949: from left, J. S. Bois;



two unidentified men; Frank Chisholm, Anatol Rapoport, Dr. Russell Meyers, Elwood Murray, Alfred C. Nelson from DU standing, M. Kendig, Douglas Kelley, Alfred Korzybski, Allen Walker Read

Meanwhile, the International Society's fortunes, as measured by membership and subscriptions to *ETC*, grew impressively. By 1968, due primarily to Hayakawa's growing reputation and editorial command, the Society had grown to over 9,000 members. (10) Hayakawa later became a figure of national prominence when he, as acting President of San Francisco State College, confronted anti-war student protesters who threatened to take control of campus buildings.

The March 1970 *ETC* "Dates and Indexes" section announced the results of the recent ISGS Board of Directors meeting:

The most important news of the January meeting is the appointment of Dr. Thomas Weiss as the new editor of *ETC*. Dr. Hayakawa has been for many

years an outstanding spokesman for general semantics and has served as editor for the past twenty-six years. The Society is deeply appreciative of the time, effort, and talent he has contributed to making this magazine one of the finest professional journals in existence. However, his appointment as president of San Francisco State College has made it impossible for him to devote as much time to *ETC.* as heretofore.

Mexico City

Notables attending the 1958 International Conference in Mexico City, standing: Anatol Rapoport third from left, S. I. Hayakawa with arms crossed, then left to right Robert Holston, Dr. Russell Meyers, M.



Kendig, Abraham Maslow; kneeling: Bill Pemberton center, J. S. Bois second from right.

The period of 1968-1970 marked a high point of the two organizations in terms of combined membership. As both began thereafter to realize steady loss of members, various joint initiatives toward “ecumenical progress” were pursued in order to “integrate efforts,” “eliminate duplications,” and “work more closely together,” etc. These well-intentioned “initiatives” never materialized into substantive results, other than, perhaps, cooperative and collegial commiseration.

Over the past decade, the two organizations have increasingly cooperated on general semantics projects, including organizing and sponsoring conferences and workshops, publishing books, sharing mailing lists, assisting one another

with editorial matters, promoting and retailing each other's publications, and consulting on business matters. The boards have also grown more interrelated, with seven individuals now serving on both boards. In the past three years, the Institute, as well as the New York Society for General Semantics, has made significant cash gifts to the Society, which have allowed operations to continue.

The Organizational Situation as of October 2003

The Society has, for cash flow purposes, run out of money (there is a small endowment fund, but only its earnings may be used for general expenses). Society staff members, Paul D. Johnston and Emily Shomaker, have made willing sacrifices by reducing their own work schedules, giving up rented office space for home offices, and stretching every possible penny. These measures are simply not enough, however, to make up for the steady decline in membership revenues, sales, and the absence of significant financial support contributed by such long-standing patrons as the late Mary Morain and the late D. David Bourland, Jr.

On the other hand, the Institute has, during these same recent years, received sizable bequests from several individuals — most notably Michael Ruberto, Charlotte Schuchardt Read, and Allen Walker Read. Their beneficence provides a long-term, modest foundation upon which the Institute can build with assurance.

Therefore, for the past four months, the leaders of the Institute and the Society have discussed various options and alternatives for what type of organizational structure will best serve the interests of *general semantics* in the future. The result of our collective deliberations is that the best alternative for the future is to merge the Society and the Institute and create *one* organization to accomplish *one* shared mission.

As this *ETC* goes to press, a formal plan for merger is before the boards of both organizations. In the next issue of *ETC*, we look forward to sharing with you our joint vision for the future of general semantics.

NOTES AND REFERENCES

1. From the IGS archives, a bound stack of 3x5 index cards labeled, "Charter Members of Society for General Semantics."
2. A letter dated April 15, 1945, to Society Members from Karl Hauch, Secretary-Treasurer, advises members of a proposed change regarding "a re-adjustment" in the sums "which will be retained by the Society ... The new by-law is designed to be more flexible than the old."
3. Text copies of telegrams sent to SGS on November 15, 1946, from Korzybski, Kendig and Charlotte Schuchardt.
4. IGS Board of Trustees meeting minutes, May 17, 1947.
5. Minutes from Society's Governing Board meeting, March 20, 1948.
6. "STATEMENT ABOUT PROPOSED UNIFIED PROGRAM FOR GENERAL SEMANTICS" dated May 1949, presumably distributed to members of both organizations, compiled as a 'neutral' document by Kendig, Allen Walker Read, and others.
7. Text copy of a letter to Robert L. Read from S. I. Hayakawa dated May 9, 1949.
8. Copies of letters to their respective local memberships from: Peyton Parks Callo-way, Los Angeles, May 10, 1949; Allen Walker Read, New York, May 11, 1949; James O. McDonough, Boston, May 17, 1949.
9. Contemporaneous accounts of Korzybski's collapse and subsequent death exist in typed statements from Kendig and Werner von Kuegelgen, IGS accountant, as well as from the author's personal interviews with D. David Bourland, Jr., and Charlotte Schuchardt Read.
10. Post Office Department Form 3526, "STATEMENT OF OWNERSHIP, MANAGEMENT AND CIRCULATION," inside the back cover of the December 1968 *ETC*, notes a total paid circulation of 9,152.