

IDENTIFICATION: THE ILLUSION-DELUSION BUILDER*

Robert P. Pula

Alfred Korzybski reportedly used to annoy some participants at his seminars by stating, quite emphatically, "Whatever you say anything is, it is not!" We can imagine the incredulous to resentful reactions of those participants, many of whom were established professionals, i.e., masters of hard to come by terminologies. Some may even have harbored the suspicion that Korzybski never really learned English; that that was the source of his strange way with language. Yet that cryptic, zennish aphorism economically summarizes and focuses a whole phalanx of Korzybskian formulations related to identification and its potential for inducing pathology.

Before I discuss those formulations and their possible usefulness in the prevention of nervous system dysfunction, let me distinguish identification as used by Freud and identification as used by Korzybski. Since many of you are in the business that Freud influenced so profoundly (whatever your present reservations about the continuing value of his formulations), it seems likely that the term 'identification' might trigger responses in you quite different from what a Korzybskian would intend. A linguistic-epistemological prologue seems, therefore, not only advisable but necessary.

First, let me say a few words about the words 'illusion' and 'delusion' as used in the title of this paper. Those two terms are usually kept quite distinct (in dictionaries and in many brains): 'illusion' reserved for simple, presumably benign, 'errors' in sensing; 'delusion' for those broader 'errors' in evaluating (including sensing) which may lead to or constitute pathology. I have chosen to join the two terms because I perceive them as representing extremes of a continuum which our language artificially (elementalistically) separates. In the Korzybskian view, since what we sense is not what science¹⁹⁷⁸ infers to be 'out there', even our simplest most 'innocent' abstracting-sensing places us 'on the continuum', the 'other end' of which is delusion-pathology. This may very likely be the case particularly if we identify, as discussed below. We may readily agree that all 'delusion' involves 'illusion'. By joining

the terms I wish to emphasize that even 'illusions', if we are not conscious of abstracting, may be proto-pathological.

Perhaps the most important first distinction to be drawn between Freudian and Korzybskian identification is that in Freud's formulations the term labels a mechanism that is sometimes appropriate and sometimes not; in Korzybski's system identification labels a mechanism that is never appropriate, always productive of misevaluation and, potentially, pathology. This radical (in its root and rigor senses) difference will lead me to suggest that what Freud meant by identification may be seen as a limited case of the general mechanism Korzybski was talking about; that Korzybski's uncompromising rejection of identification necessarily includes rejection of those presumably benign behaviors Freud and others have described; and that Korzybski's rejection of all forms of identification may have significant preventative and/or therapeutic value.

Here is a characteristic discussion of identity from Science and Sanity¹:

... it must be stated that 'identity', defined as 'absolute sameness', necessitates 'absolute sameness' in 'all' aspects, never to be found in this world, nor in our heads. Anything with which we deal on the objective levels represents a process, different all the 'time', no matter how slow or fast the process might be; therefore, a principle or a premise that 'everything is identical with itself' is invariably false to facts. From a structural point of view, it represents a foundation for a linguistic system non-similar in structure to the world or ourselves. All world pictures, speculations and s.r based on such premises must build for us delusional worlds, and an optimum adjustment to an actual world, so fundamentally different from our fancies, must, in principle, be impossible.

If we take even a symbolic expression

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1 = 1, 'absolute sameness' in 'all' aspects is equally impossible, although we may use in this connection terms such as 'equal', 'equivalent',. 'Absolute sameness in all aspects' would necessitate an identity of different nervous systems which produce and use these symbols, an identity of the different states of the nervous system of the person who wrote the above two symbols, an identity of the surfaces., of different parts of the paper, in the distribution of ink, and what not. To demand such impossible conditions is, of course, absurd, but it is equally absurd and very harmful for sanity and civilization to preserve until this day such delusional formulations as standards of evaluation, and then spend a lifetime of suffering and toil to evade the consequences. This may be comparable to the spending of many years in teaching and training our children that one and one never equal two, that twice two never equal four., and then they would have to spend a lifetime full of surprises and disappointments, if not tragedies, to learn, when they are about to die, that the above statements are always correct in mathematics and very often true in daily life, and finally acquire the sadly belated wisdom that they were taught false doctrines and trained in delusional s. r from the beginning.

In this part of the discussion I will not stress those various uses of identification having to do with classification, recognition, etc., and will emphasize those uses common to the psychiatric and psychoanalytic literatures, uses which label various modes of 'adjustive' behavior. No attempt at scholarly exhaustiveness will be made; I will merely list a few definitions appropriate to my purpose.

A broad definition of the psychiatric/psychoanalytic type is given in Hinsie and Campbell, Psychiatric Dictionary:²

When an individual incorporates within himself a mental picture of an object and then thinks, feels, and acts as he conceives the object to think, feel, and act, the process is called identification, but the process is largely an unconscious one.

The same source defines the verb identify in this way:³

... to incorporate an object into one's ego system and to act toward that object as if it were originally one's own self and not something

borrowed from the environment...

Erickson⁴ defines self-identification or ego identity as

That sense of identity which provides the ability to experience one's self as something that has continuity and sameness and to act accordingly.

English and English⁵ distinguish three general meanings for identification, the latter two pertinent for our discussion:

- A. recognizing an identity;
- B. transferring response to an object considered as being identical with another;
- C. becoming identical through affiliation

The same source lists a mode of identification wherein the importance of 'time' is explicitly recognized:⁶

... reacting to a situation as if it were the same as one previously experienced.

English and English also present as definition a misleadingly limited definition of identification as used by general semanticists:⁷

(gen. semantics) applying a class name, and thus implying a large degree of identity, though it does not in fact exist. MISIDENTIFICATION or OVERIDENTIFICATION are more descriptive of this meaning.

As we have seen, general semanticists, or at least Korzybski, intend a lot more by identification than that.

Examples of identification generally considered to have psychiatric relevance may be placed on a behavioral continuum from such extremes as folie á deux through wish fulfillment, projection, imitation, sympathy, empathy, etc.

Since this is not a paper on the intricacies of presumed id-ego-superego relationships as powered by what Freud called the primary and secondary processes, I will call a halt to this parade of definitions. I assume enough has been presented to show that however identification and its 'cognates' are used in psychiatric/psychoanalytical literature, what is always being described is a process whereby something is substituted for and accepted as something else. As strictly descriptive formulations these seem

powerfully insightful -- perhaps among the most profound contributions of Freud and his school.

I suggested above that in the Freudian dispensation, identification as a process having overtly behavioral consequences is seen as alternately beneficial and injurious depending on results: relative success or failure in reducing tensions, developing the personality, etc. Hall and Lindsey⁸ present a useful, brief discussion:

In the present context, identification may be defined as the method by which a person takes over the features of another person and makes them a corporate part of his own personality. He learns to reduce tension by modeling his behavior after that of someone else. Freud preferred the term identification to the more familiar one imitation because he felt that imitation denotes a kind of superficial and transient copying behavior whereas he wanted a word that would convey the idea of a more or less permanent acquisition to personality.

We choose as models those who seem to be more successful in gratifying their needs than we are. The child identifies with his parents because they appear to him to be omnipotent, at least during the years of early childhood. As the child grows older, he finds other people to identify with whose accomplishments are more in line with his current wishes. Each period tends to have its own characteristic identification figures. Needless to say, most of this identification takes place unconsciously and not, as it may sound, with conscious intention.

It is not necessary for a person to identify with someone else in every respect. He usually selects and incorporates just those features which he believes will help him achieve a desired goal. There is a good deal of trial and error in the identification process because one is usually not quite sure what it is about another person that accounts for his success. The ultimate test is whether the identification helps to reduce tension; if it does the quality is taken over, if it does not it is discarded. One may identify with animals, imaginary characters, institutions, abstract ideas, and inanimate objects as well as with other human beings.

Identification is also a method by which

one may regain an object that has been lost. By identifying with a loved person who has died or from whom one has been separated, the lost person becomes reincarnated as an incorporated feature of one's personality. Children who have been rejected by their parents tend to form strong identifications with them in the hope of regaining their love. One may also identify with a person out of fear. The child identifies with the prohibitions of the parents in order to avoid punishment. This kind of identification is the basis for the formation of the superego.

The final personality structure represents an accumulation of numerous identifications made at various periods of the person's life, although the mother and father are probably the most important identification figures in anyone's life.

In Korzybskian terminology identification most broadly formulates a process whereby orders (levels) of abstractings are confused. The abstracting process may be said to involve at least four activities characteristic of nervous systems in general and a fifth apparently reserved in its presently known complexity for humans: (1) structurally determined selecting-filtering, (2) transducing, (3) integrating, (4) projecting and (5) symbolizing. A nervous system responds to silent events in the electro-magnetic (etc.) field in which it is immersed, or, better, within which it is a focus of density. This selection is said to be pre-conscious, pre-symbolic. But the 'selection' (some events are responded to, some are not, i.e., do not function as detectable stimuli) is done in accordance with the special structure of the nervous system and necessarily involves transformation (transducing) of the stimulus in keeping with the structure of the 'host' structure. What the nervous system 'gets', then, is never what's 'out there'.

In passing, we might remember that the structure of what's 'out there' is strictly inferred, not directly known ('observed' in the naive sense). This formulation (which may be seen as an extension of Heisenbergian uncertainty⁹) would seem to force us to recognize that there is no 'direct' knowledge, that even non-verbal processes such as 'simple' seeing manifest the inferential character.

Selected-transduced stimuli are integrated and constitute 'bottom line' awareness. Most nervous systems, human and otherwise, it seems safe to say, are not aware of these issues. They are not conscious of abstracting. They, therefore, inevitably project 'out there'

experiences which are, strictly speaking, primarily expressions of nervous system structure-function. It seems worth stressing that, perhaps in contrast to psychiatric/psychoanalytic usage, projecting here is seen as characteristic of electro-colloidal structure-functions in general, almost certainly at least from blobs of undifferentiated protoplasm up through man. Without lapsing into anthropomorphism, we may assert the likelihood that the roach which scurries away when the kitchen light is switched on experiences the 'light' as external to 'himself'. (Pace, Archie and Mehitabel.) This same generality may be claimed for selecting and transducing.

The mode of abstracting whereby symbols are assigned to various non-verbal, silent (extra- and intra-organismic) events, or happenings, brings us into the human (and, therefore, potentially psychiatric) realm. Symbolizing may occur 'at' many orders of abstracting, but no matter how sophisticated it gets, the symbol is obviously not the extra-and/or intra-organic happening which it represents. As with projecting, many nervous systems seem unaware of this, or at least behave as if they were not aware. And, since symbols always represent at least events within the host organism (electro-bio-chemical processes), it seems that, through feedback mechanisms, a disordered symbol system will inevitably produce a disordered nervous system, particularly if identification occurs.

This subject has been treated at length elsewhere, most fundamentally and forthrightly by Korzybski.¹⁰ Here we need only this brief summary as a reminder so that we can appreciate the importance of Korzybski's emphatic denial of identity.

As we have seen, identification may be said to occur at non-symbolic and symbolic orders of abstractings; on a 'bright, sunny day', if I experience what I call 'blue' and silently treat that experience as 'belonging to' (a property of) the sky, I am confusing orders of abstractings (the scientifically inferred structure of electro-magnetic events with their effect on 'my' eye-brain system), i. e., identifying. If I respond to a person to whom I can assign the symbol 'Jew' as though he were an expression of whatever (flattering or otherwise) that symbol connotes for me, I am confusing orders of abstractings.

There is yet another aspect of identification that Korzybski stressed which derives from the recognition of all phenomena as in process. This broadly accepted formulation of the natural sciences seems to have striking implications particularly in the

psychiatric realm. It forces a sharpened awareness of the relevance of time in whatever is under discussion. It may be expressed this way: "No thing is identical with 'itself'." What does this suggest for so-called 'identity crises', etc. ? I will have something to say about that later.

Insofar as identity is verbally expressed, its most common vehicle is the verb to be in its various forms that express predication and identification. This linguistic fact led Korzybski to often express his formulation of non-identity as a denial of the 'is of identity'. One of his characteristically emphatic utterances on this subject has to do with the problem of artificial languages and their potential benefit to mankind:¹¹

The general and serious defect of all these languages is that their authors have, as yet, entirely disregarded the non-aristotelian problem of non-identity, and so of structure, without which general sanity, or the elimination of delusional worlds is entirely impossible.

That seems just about as emphatic as we would like -- perhaps more emphatic than some might prefer.

One writer, D. David Bourland,¹² has attempted to make a linguistic revision that would eliminate the 'is of identity' by eliminating all uses of to be. He calls this form of English with to be removed, "E-prime". I don't propose to discuss it here, but recommend its study to anyone looking for a far-reaching linguistic tool for helping patients practice revising the ways in which they talk to themselves.

Korzybski constructed many formulations to directly or indirectly express and promote non-identity: structure as the only 'content' of knowledge; multiordinality of terms; semantic reactions; the famed extensional devices, specifically designed to 'break up' identifications; consciousness of abstracting, the sine qua non for overcoming identification; the map is not the territory and many others, but none with the 'punch' of our opening quote, "Whatever you say a thing is, it is not."

Well, what use can a practicing psychiatrist make of this radical epistemology? I won't presume to say. Perhaps some of you will tell me. But I will presume to suggest some implications of the non-identity formulations to some popularly recognized problems that center on the identity issue. Specifically, what follows will identify (classificatory sense) some

illusions or illusion-generating expectations growing out of identification as just discussed.

I have already mentioned the popular 'identity crisis'. An appealing version of it was recently presented in a hit record by Sammy Davis, Jr., "I Gotta Be Me." Now, if by "I gotta be me," the speaker-singer means "I can't be you" (and, therefore, "Get off my back.") all well and good. If, however, the speaker is envisioning some sort of finally-arrived-at-self, the desire may be father to pathology. In the Korzybskian view, if achieved, the condition of being 'me' ("that's it") would be ipso facto pathological.

I quoted earlier Erickson's definition of ego identity as "...the ability to experience one's self as something that has continuity and sameness and to act accordingly." A rigorous application of Korzybski's non-identity would require the speaker to say something like, "I can't be me if by 'me' I mean something static, fixed in space-time, impervious to 'corruptions' from outside, always true to 'myself', etc. Even if I attempt this, the process of which I am a dynamic focus will continue, resulting in intolerable stresses between my futile fixity and 'its' inexorable fluidity."

The notion of invariance under transformation has been suggested by some general semanticists as a way of 'allowing' retention of the feeling of self-hood, the recognition that through all the undeniable changes something persists. The feeling seems to be that a radical internalization of non-identity would lead to personal disintegration. I suggest that this need not be the case; that rather, the failure to recognize that one is not the same from moment to moment seems to be what keeps us blushing today for yesterday's peccadillos, and that this persisting identification of present cells, tissues, organs, etc., with 'their' former arrangement very likely promotes the very personality disintegration it is marshalled to prevent. In other words, even as Freud and others have envisioned it, identification seems not to have beneficial effects except very temporarily and misleadingly.

I might venture a definition of the mature person ('fully functioning', etc.) as precisely the person who has achieved non-identity -- with 'self' as a starter, but extending to all other conceivable foci of energy: personal, social, cosmic. His motto might be, "Whoever I say I am, I am not."

The objection might be raised, "What of aliena-

tion?" My apologies to the Age of Aquarius, but what of it? If the best information we have about the structure of the universe, 'ourselves' included, leads us to recognize that no two space-time point-events are identical, do not the requirements of sanity demand that we cooperate with this postulated structure and stop lusting after illusory-delusory states of one-ness, in-dwelling, I-am-you-ness, we-are-it-ness? I suggest that only through uncompromising internalization of non-identity can this be achieved.

I suggest further that, having internalized non-identity, the on-goingly new (mature) organism might be more able to interact with other foci of energy in ways beneficial to both. This would seem to require what non-identity would automatically provide: the ability to recognize differences and similarities (no 'sameness'). The mature, non-identifying person would be at home in the cosmos not because he confused him-'self' with other structures, but because he recognized and accepted him-'self' as a continuum of point-events in an indefinitely extended field of processes all of which seem to be, at deepest levels, asymmetrical and irreversible.

The daily examples of identification in action are legion: "Tell it like it is."; "America: love it or leave it."; "Black is beautiful." Each one conjures an illusion-delusion based on identification.

I stress again that these identifications may wreak havoc at deep non-verbal, electro-colloidal (ultimately, cellular, tissue, organ) levels. The semantic reaction as formulated by Korzybski includes the totality of these psycho-logical (silent-'emotional'-verbal-'intellectual') responses. The deep organismal reactions to such identifications as to an authority figure as if it were 'mother' or 'father', or to present speaking opportunities as though they were 'the same' as previous, unsuccessful ones ('stagefright') illustrate the largely unconscious and pernicious effects of identifying.

Even in cases where arguments can be made for the temporary efficacy of a slogan, e.g., "Black is beautiful," a deeper examination suggests that the expedient slogan is a trap. Positive stereotyping is as misevaluative as negative stereotyping, and may be just as disruptive of optimal functioning. Specifically, rather than encourage black people to imitate white pathology, the better road might be to help them benefit from the white man's misevaluations (racism, based on identification, etc.) and go beyond to mature non-identity.

SUMMARY

In Korzybski's system identification always involves a misevaluation, specifically, confusion of orders of abstracting. The cure for identification ("invariably false to fact") is said to be the internalization of the formulation of non-identity, through achievement of maximum consciousness of abstracting.

I conclude with a story that is a favorite among general semanticists:

Three umpires are discussing their approaches to the calling of balls and strikes.

The first, a forthright character, says, "I calls 'em like they is."

The second, a bit more sophisticated, says, "I calls 'em like I sees 'em."

The third, probably a general semanticist says, "They ain't nothin' 'til I calls 'em."

To which we might now add, "And whatever he calls 'em, they ain't." *

NOTES

1. Korzybski, A., Science and Sanity: An Introduction to Non-Aristotelian Systems and General Semantics. 1933. 4th ed. 1958. Lakeville, Conn.: Institute of General Semantics, pp. 194-195.

2. Hinsie and Campbell, Psychiatric Dictionary (3rd ed.). New York: Oxford University Press, 1960, p. 365.
3. Ibid., p. 366.
4. Erickson, E., Childhood and Society. New York: Norton, 1950, p. 38.
5. English and English, A Comprehensive Dictionary of Psychological and Psychoanalytical Terms. New York: David McKay, 1958, p. 248.
6. Ibid., p. 249.
7. Ibid., p. 249.
8. Hall and Lindsey, Theories of Personality (2nd ed.). New York: John Wiley and Sons, Inc., 1970, pp. 45-46.
9. Pula, Robert P., "Knowledge, Uncertainty and Courage: Heisenberg and Korzybski." Methodology and Science, Vol. 10-2-1977. Haarlem, The Netherlands.
10. Korzybski, op.cit., passim.
11. Korzybski, op.cit., p. 763.
12. D. David Bourland, "A Linguistic Note: Writing in E-Prime." General Semantics Bulletin, Nos. 32 and 33, 1967, pp. 111-114.

*See Don Washburn's version of this story in his paper "The Epistemology of Murder" in this issue. Ed.

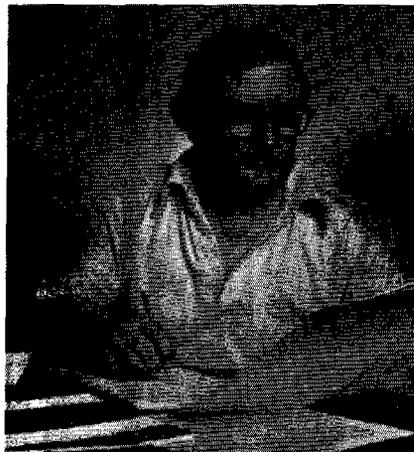


Photo by Peter Severinsen,
Baltimore, Maryland.

INTRODUCTION TO KENDIG COMMENTS

In early September, 1972, I sent M. Kendig, then Director of the Institute and Editor of the General Semantics Bulletin, a copy of my paper for the Pocono Conference. In late September and early October (too late to 'save me' before the learned doctors and others gathered at the Mount Airy Lodge, but in ample time to make some points before publication) she very generously sent me - written in pencil, words scratched out, genuine working papers - the extended comments printed below.

As the careful reader may see, I have incorporated only some of her suggestions. In preparing my paper for publication in the Bulletin (the book that was to have resulted from the conference not having materialized) I re-read Kendig's rough, informal, entre nous comments and was struck by their cogency. After all, Kendig was not only a pioneer in general semantics but for nearly forty years functioned as a leading formulator in the field. On more than one occasion she called Korzybski on what she perceived as confusing or incomplete statements, often 'forcing' him to reconsider, rewrite -- and, no doubt, grumble. I also experienced this notion: Why not present Ken-

dig's comments as she wrote them? This can serve as a good example to the Bulletin readers of how writers in the field work together, of how we 'experts' struggle, even agonize, to make our formal writings as accurate and rigorous as we can.

I asked for and received Kendig's permission to publish her comments with minimal editing to ensure clarity but with no re-writing to make them 'smooth', etc. What follows, then, may be seen as a rare opportunity to see an important formulator 'thinking out loud' in an attempt to help a developing formulator remain on target. The statements are identified by the date on which they were prepared. I have deleted from the October 3-4 document observations which merely overlap with those made on September 18.

M. Kendig, now 86, resides in a hospital in Connecticut, where she is recovering from a stroke. In recent weeks (August, 1978) her improvement has accelerated but her poor eyesight will prevent her from reading this issue of the Bulletin. Perhaps just this note might be read to her. I publicly thank her here for her time-binding efforts. Ed.

Identification: The Illusion Builder
Rough Draft - Comments - September 18, 1972

Dear Pula - Thanks paper for October Conference. Only have had time to scan it -- comment on the factors that 'stick' in my nervous system.

I suppose useful to differentiate 'all' the uses of the word in physiology - psychology -- everyday life as per dictionaries, etc. I miss if present, some crisp 'summary' of Korzybski's usage given in many places S&S. Identity: "Absolute sameness' in 'all' aspects", (p.194) and the re-actions, 'thinkings', 'feelings', etc., engendered thereby, or vice versa, that lead to such feelings, etc. Call it as we may, intensional orientations or orientation by definitions, therefore verbal, static, etc., confusing orders of abstractions, etc. Extensional orientations, 'contexts'; differences: first order: similarities: second order. I like AK's crisp: 'pure' extension impossible; humanly 'always' a mix of extension-intension, question of order, 'ordering our reactions'. I like Mc Culloch's pet admonition: "Don't bite my finger; look where I am pointing" -- or 'expressing the general through

the particular'. Yet this pointing business often leads to gross misunderstanding of human neurological mechanisms; electro-colloidal processes... But I must stop haranguing you with what of course you 'know'.

The other 'factor' I note is one of my pet peeves... leaving the s off the phrase 'orders of abstractions' (see S&S almost throughout) the so-called 'human mind', 'brain', 'nervous system', electro-chemical structure-function being too complex ('ensembles' of ensembles of ensembles, etc., over-lapping processes) to allow us to adequately 'think' in terms of some one 'single abstraction' (at any one order -- immersed as we can be described to be when we contemplate the human dimension of our immersion inside and outside our 'self', i.e., the neuro-linguistic-neuro-evaluational environmental dimensions, which give the mechanism of the time-binding function.

Let us always remember never to forget Fido - Fido-ism. Without Fido in the time-binding differential, generalized in the structural differential --

we tend to drop Fido out too frequently in using this model, or analogy. "Copying animals in our nervous reactions," which AK found an essential notion, seems to me to have got lost: The structure-function 'associated with' identification. Humans through the potentialities of time-binding, the '1/4 inch cortex' have produced the sciences by which we can study ourselves, 'apart' from ourselves. Thus we can know that we abstract, and Fido cannot abstract beyond a few orders and therefore cannot 'know' he abstracts. Thus the title Science and Sanity. We through time-binding science have the potentiality of achieving high degrees of conditionality and, unlike Fido, can control in various degrees our conditioning by our neuro-evaluational, neuro-linguistic 'invisible' environment. The gist of prevention of so-called mental illness (disorders) may thus be stated as ordering our semantic reactions (stop copying animals), to avoid identification, stop identifying, changing the structure of language -thinking-feeling -- without changing the language - by using automatically the extensional devices: indexing, chain indexing, dating, etc., (awareness of 'not-all', of factors left out, of the x's that may change our generalizations, our experiential generalizations 'embodied' (bad word) in our electro-colloidal functional levels) - powerful preventive 'agencies' against evaluational-behavioral disorders (or mental illness, cursed term). This is not to decry or ignore psycho-pharmaceutical agencies which non-elementalism, or non-el orientation, of course, included in ensemble of ensembles thinking. Nor does it ignore the powerful agencies of biofeedback, or cybernetic mechanisms. Let me end this 'bringing of coals to Newcastle' by a quote from a recent letter of Russell Meyers: [In his argument 'Smith x'] "clearly revealed that he has never caught on to the basic principle of AK (fully supported by modern physics and biophysics) that no behavior we exhibit, overt or covert, is not characterized by electro-colloidal counterparts, many of which are revealed by modern instruments -- electro-myography (for recording the effects of muscular contractions), electro-encephalography -- and many others which we may safely assume exist, but which as yet remain undemonstrable, while we develop instruments for their detection."

Anyone, I would say, who does not take such into consideration is bound to be baffled how, for instance, so called anxiety (supposedly a psychological state) can change and interfere with (disorder) our bio-chemistry in such a way as to promote for example dental caries. For instance, Tarski, supposedly a modern scientific-logician, sneered at general semantics and AK for just such a 'reason' -- I've forgotten where published -- "He believes that semantics can 'cure' dental caries.

What's that got to do with language and logic?" I don't have his wording which was much more revealing*. Of course the word 'cure' is taboo (involves a single value causality) in our vocabulary with a cause-effect theorem. Another consideration: How can one demonstrate prevention? I'd say it's not possible (in an infinite-valued orientation) -- the way I see of getting at it is to demonstrate the alleviation of some undesirable, damaging conditions by the use of some technique or method that reverses the process presumed to 'cause' the condition -- such processes being describable on many, many levels. For instance I am 'suffering' with 'something' that disorders my nervous-chemical, etc. functioning, and so my overt behavior. I am given electro-shock treatment -- 'condition' changes, my behavior changes, or I am given some psycho-pharmaceutical product, or I talk with some psycho-therapist 'about my problems', he challenges, he, so to say, leads me to change my 'attitudes', with similar 'beneficial results' -- that may be lasting if I am able to learn from him how to use 'my' nervous system more efficiently perhaps and if he trains me in some extensional methods he may or may not call Korzybski's general semantics; anyway, I get de-conditioned and re-conditioned to a more conditional way of evaluating/behaving. But, a very large but, let us never forget that if my condition or symptoms arise from or have been largely the result of say a brain tumor, not suspected and tested for by brain scanning, they apparently cannot be changed, altered, re-ordered by any psychotherapy and/or training in re-ordering my reactions. The classic example of ignoring such factors -- George Gershwin, who died under the care of several psychoanalysts; autopsy revealed the brain tumor -- maybe removal could have returned him to happy productive living. In my experience in school work, I encountered such a case -- the girl was supposedly 'just neurotic', 'just lazy', 'would not concentrate', 'was not involved', etc. "There's nothing wrong with x's mind" said Mama. "She just won't concentrate," etc. She got pills and admonitions. She got pills for this and that. One day she fell over on the bench, dead. Autopsy revealed massive tumors (brain tumor).

Enough! And Best to you. -- Kendig

*Tarski's exact words, the ones pertinent here are (he is discussing semantics as opposed to general semantics), semantics "... is a sober, modest discipline which has no pretensions of being a universal patent-medicine for all the ills and diseases of mankind." See Alfred Tarski, "The Semantic Concept of Truth and the Foundations of Semantics" in Philosophy and Phenomenological Research 4, 341 (1944). Ed.

Identification: The Illusion Builder

Rough Draft - Comments - October 3-4, 1972

Identification: In context of this writing, I suppose it is important to consider the various usages or values given that word, especially in psychotherapy. Identification, identify, identity: doubtless you feel the need to consider usages of this terminology as widely and variously used in psychology, psychopathology, psycho-therapy, etc., to establish a context for differentiating their usage in general semantics and their central role in both theory and practice of the discipline. And you do a good job.

However, I miss (though I may have overlooked it in your paper) the clarification afforded by Korzybski's crisp definition of identity: 'absolute sameness in all aspects'. This makes explicit the Korzybskian usage of the terms identification, identifying reactions, etc. 'Absolute sameness in all aspects' is not empirically demonstrable at any 'level' of the structures of our assumptive world (1972) of dynamic processes, ourselves included.

Non-identity becomes the basic principle or premise for our dealings with any 'elements' our nervous systems abstract from the assumed indivisible non-elementalistic continuum.

A note on Identification re identification, identity, identifying, etc. The extensive usage of these terms varies considerably in different areas of psychology, psychotherapy, psychiatry, etc., as well as in everyday speech. To avoid confusion and disputations, we need to clarify the specific usage and role of this wordage in our discipline. Start out bluntly with Korzybski's crisp "Identity: absolute sameness in all aspects" (repeated in various contexts throughout Science and Sanity, 1933: See index.) And please remember not to ignore the subtitle which I consider most important in getting the purport of our discipline and usually find omitted in references to the book: An Introduction to Non-Aristotelian Systems and General Semantics. Don't miss the 's' on systems. (Also see my 'Note: On Updating an Open Ended System', 1971) And never, never ignore the word, General; far, far more essential to the usefulness of the discipline than the word, Semantics; too long a story for this note. Just don't take this as merely my personal opinion, though -- it's buttressed by my experience since 1934. In his later writings -- Korzybski said it over and over again in his later writings -- mostly apropos the distortions that began to pile up in the 'popularizations', and so-called simplifications during the early forties.

'Identity'; "Absolute sameness in all aspects." Korzybski did not pick this out of his fancy as any student of western thought must know. It goes back to ancient times; it survives unblemished from the ancient times in the history of Western thought.

This makes explicit the way to understand the Korzybskian use of the terms identification, identity and identifying reactions etc., and the principle or premise of non-identity. Since 'absolute sameness in all aspects' is not empirically demonstrable in a structurally dynamic process world, ourselves included, Korzybskian usages such as non-elementalism and non-identity are of central importance.

Our dealings with any elements our nervous systems abstract from the assumed non-elementalistic continuum... (Non-elementalism may be explained as a synonym for the term 'holism' long used in philosophic discourse to express an equivalent world orientation or outlook. The term 'holism' (or 'holistic') is 'unworkable' or without benefit since it has not been fit into a consistent structurally inter-related general system and methodology...)

I suppose no one today is 'happy'.

'Mental' illness.

Today we seem to be unwilling prisoners of the term -- I assume we have to remain prisoners of that unhappy term 'mental' illness, as the quote marks imply. The principle or premise of non-identity -- the denial of the 'is of identity' (of which denial the 'is of predication' represents a special case) on which this non-aristotelian system is based, since 'Absolute sameness in all aspects' is not empirically demonstrable in a structurally dynamic process world, ourselves included, requires the denial of the 'is of identity' linguistically, empirically, epistemologically. We assume the non-elementalistic world view and in the non-Aristotelian system and methodology of human evaluations called general semantics we deny the linguistic, epistemologic, scientific validity of the 'is of identity' as a form of representation and the consequent behaviors exhibited in semantic reactions; and we also deny the validity of the 'is of predication' as a special case thereof. This applies to the whole structure known as subject-predicate form common at least in 'all' Western (or Indo-European) languages except the limited and universal language called mathematics. The analogy premise: we summarize this premise with the map-territory analogy. The Map is not the Territory. K.

M. KENDIG

M. Kendig is often referred to by people working in general semantics as a person "who needs no introduction." Yet, inevitably, since her retirement in 1975, preceded by years of reduced activity related to ill health, new students of the discipline, seminar and conference participants, etc., have raised the question, "Who's Kendig?" Thus this biographical note.

Marjorie Mercer Kendig was one of the original officers of the Institute of General Semantics when it was founded in 1938. One of Korzybski's earliest and keenest students (1934), she quickly became a co-worker in developing the discipline both organizationally and methodologically. From 1938 to Korzybski's death in 1950 she served as Educational Director and then Associate Director. She directed the Institute from 1950 to 1965.

In 1950 she founded the General Semantics Bulletin, serving as its editor until 1963 and subsequently acting as consultant and, from time to time, editor pro-tem.

In 1971, following the directorships of Elwood Murray, Christopher Sheldon and Charlotte Schuchardt Read, Kendig resumed the leadership

function, remaining 'on the job' until forced by illness to retire.

Most of Kendig's published writing has been in the form of editorials, methodological and historical notes and book comments (nineteen of them) for the General Semantics Bulletin. But three major pieces not related to the Bulletin deserve special mention: her "Introduction" to the Papers From the Second American Congress on General Semantics, 1941, published by the Institute in 1943 and now a collector's item; "A Memoir: Alfred Korzybski and His Work" in the Second Edition of Korzybski's Manhood of Humanity; and the "Foreword" to General Semantics Monograph Number III, A Theory of Meaning Analyzed which she co-authored with Korzybski in 1942.

Perhaps Kendig's greatest contribution has been her self-imposed role as formulational gad-fly, giver of rigorous tutorials, editorial co-developer of many of the papers published in the Bulletin and/or delivered at various conferences -- through her time-binding efforts many lecturers and writers in general semantics became much sharper formulators. If general semantics persists as something more than parlor game philosophising, much of the credit must go to M. Kendig. R. P. P.

In 1968 Kendig wrote:

After 34 years of study, training and self-training, editing, and teaching, I feel only mildly secure or justified in labeling myself a "non-Aristotelian," or to make it more limited, a "Korzybskian." So far as my experience goes, I would guess that I have known about 30 individuals who have in some degree adequately, by my standards, mastered this highly general, very simple, very difficult system of orientation and method of evaluating -- reversing as it must all our "cultural conditioning," neurological "canalization," etc.

Learning to unlearn, for me, best describes the process of learning the discipline theoretically (verbally) and organismically. It is a very tough continuous "fight" to maintain a high degree of conditionality, against identification. . . .

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