

INTRODUCTION

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AS *TIME-BINDERS*, we inherit the potential to build on the accomplishments of those we follow. Our time-binding legacy comes with many responsibilities, one of which is to recognize and honor our benefactors such that *our* accomplishments not be confused with *theirs*.

This special issue of *ETC* offers a selection of “old school” articles that reflects both the breadth of general semantics, and its relevancy to many of the ‘educational’ — both institutional *and* individual — challenges that confront us in 2004. Drawn from the archives of this journal, the *General Semantics Bulletin*, and the Institute’s library, these articles offer the dual benefits of a) insightful perspective, and b) current relevancy.

For example:

1. Read Walter Probert’s “Law Talk and Words Consciousness” from the perspective of the Patriot Act, “zero tolerance” laws and “three strikes and you’re out” sentencing mandates.
2. Read Ken Johnson’s “Epistemology and Mass Media” and see how it affects your watching, listening, and reading of “the news” in light of the recent “Rathergate” affair.

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3. Remembering the hysteria that followed the Janet Jackson “wardrobe malfunction” during the Super Bowl halftime last year, read about the underlying attitudes that result in our various forms of cultural taboos in Allen Walker Read’s “The Geolinguistics of Verbal Taboo.”
4. Consider the prevalence of disaffected youth, gangs and graffiti wars in cities across the nation, then read “How to Teach General Semantics to Those Less Likely to Succeed” by Alfred Fleishman.
5. Read any of the general descriptions of general semantics — even those intended for secondary school students — and analyze the inability to differentiate *symbol* from *what is symbolized* in this political ad:

(Shots of the American Flag, Jefferson Monument, Washington Monument)

Voice-over: Symbols. They represent the best things in America. Freedom ... Valor ... Sacrifice.

(Footage of Marine Honor Guard)

Voice-over: Symbols, like the heroes they represent, are meant to be respected.

(Footage of WWII Veterans)

Voice-over: Some didn’t share that respect ... and turned their backs on their brothers.

(Footage of anti-war rally/Medal Toss event attended by John Kerry in Washington, April 23, 1971) (Interview with John Kerry, “Viewpoints,” 1971)

Kerry: “ ... renounce the symbols which country gives ... and that was the medals themselves ... I gave back — I can’t remember — six, seven, eight, nine ...”

(Picture of John Kerry)

Voice-over: How can the man who renounced his country’s symbols now be trusted? (1)

As you read the articles in this compilation, you may notice that certain formulations or principles of GS tend to appear again and again, such as:

- the process of *abstracting*
- problems associated with *identification*, or not recognizing the different orders or levels of *abstracting*
- instances of *allness* thinking-feeling-behaving
- the difference between *extensional* and *intensional* orientations
- failure to distinguish between *facts* and *inferences*
- application of the *extensional devices* — indexes, dates, quotes, hyphens and the *etc.*
- the importance of bringing new ways of thinking to problems; in other words, applying a *scientific attitude* toward everyday life situations

That these formulations tend to be repeated underscores their importance. As Alfred Korzybski was said to have reiterated in his seminars, “you have to *rrrub* it in!” A lesson we might infer from these articles is to not underestimate how difficult it is to consciously apply these ‘simple’ notions when we need them. It takes practice.

The articles in this compilation were written from 1935 through the mid-1980s. For the most part, the original text has been retained but some formatting has been changed to ease readability. References to gender have not been altered or edited to reflect a more current sensibility toward, for instance, using “man” rather than “human” or “he” as applying to both genders. Most of the authors died long ago, and references to their contemporaries who are now dead have not been amended. Certain words and terms may seem awkward, and perhaps even ‘offensive’ to 21st-century sensitivities.

These editorial decisions may prove challenging to some readers. I hope you’ll accept the challenge to consider this as a type of experiment. Can you read something from the perspective of the time in which it was written, applying, say, 1950 standards instead of current ones? Can you resist the temptation to quickly dismiss ‘dated’ notions and explanations; instead, can you maintain an attitude of open-mindedness: “What is here for me to learn? How can I relate this to my own experiences?”

If you find yourself tempted to disapprovingly judge a phrase, a term, or attitude because you₂₀₀₄ “know better,” perhaps you might keep in mind the caution of Cassius J. Keyser:

The present is no more exempt from the sneer of the future than the past has been. (2)

‘A Word’ about Allen Walker Read

Within this issue dedicated to time-binders *across the curriculum*, we pay special tribute to Allen Walker Read. Allen died in October 2002 at age 96, three months after his wife of 49 years, Charlotte Schuchardt Read, died at age 92. Charlotte’s professional life concentrated on general semantics (she began her work as Korzybski’s literary secretary in 1939) and also included work with Charlotte Selver in sensory awareness.

Allen’s professional work, however, did not pertain directly to general semantics, *per se*. A professor of English at Columbia University from 1945 to 1974, his professional achievements were more widely recognized within the disciplines of linguistics, lexicography, and etymology. While he wrote about two dozen papers specifically for GS audiences, he wrote over two hundred papers that documented his investigations in these more specialized academic areas.

The notion for this tribute to Allen came last April. I received a copy of *GEOLINGUISTICS*, annual journal of the American Society of Geolinguistics, compliments of editor Wayne H. Finke. (3) The issue featured a memorial about Allen written by Professor Jesse Levitt, as well as a previously unpublished speech Allen presented in 1970, “The Geolinguistics of Verbal Taboo,” edited by Professor Levitt.

I sought permission from Professor Finke to reprint both articles in *ETC*. He graciously approved the request. I then contacted Professor Richard W. Bailey at the University of Michigan, editor of *Milestones in the History of American English*, a collection of Allen’s papers published by Duke University Press in 2002. (4) Professor Bailey agreed to edit his introduction to *Milestones*, originally written before Allen died.

From the two dozen articles that have been published in *ETC* and the *General Semantics Bulletin*, I selected two for this special tribute. (A listing of his articles in these publications appears on page 463.)

These five selections by, and about, Allen Walker Read reflect his passionate dedication to his work. This passion manifested itself through a necessarily dispassionate, “matter-of-fact,” and scientific methodology. He observed that unique dimension of human behavior we call “language” and investigated that behavior through painstaking and meticulous research. He theorized his findings, then sought additional evidence to confirm or disprove those findings, never satisfied with any finding as “final.” He did so with such an evident joy, humility and lack of pretension that a featured profile of him for the *New Yorker* magazine was titled, “At Play in the Language.” Michelle Stacey’s profile includes an accounting of Read’s arguably most notable achievement, formulat-

ing the definitive (so far) explanation of how that distinctively American term, “O.K.” originated. (5)

Allen and Charlotte each served as role models of what Korzybski called the “extensional orientation.” As Susan Presby Kodish noted in last year’s *General Semantics Bulletin*, “Were Abraham Maslow still alive, I’d nominate them for inclusion in his pantheon of self-actualized, fully-human individuals.” (6)

I thank Professors Finke, Levitt, and Bailey for their cooperation and contributions to these pages. I also wish to recognize and thank William Safire of the *New York Times* for his *homage* that prefaces this well-deserved and overdue tribute to Allen Walker Read.

About the Cover Photo

The cover photo documents the staff and participants who attended the IGS summer seminar-workshop at Bard College, NY, August 13-28, 1955.

This photo supports the overall theme of “General Semantics Across the Curriculum” in that a) the setting is a college campus, complete with walls of ivy; and b) some noteworthy individuals participated in this seminar.

- Buckminster Fuller (first standing row, second from right), author and inventor, lectured during the second-week workshop.
- Abraham Maslow (second standing row, center, with mustache), psychologist, author, also presented as a guest lecturer.
- Dr. Russell Meyers (first standing row, fourth from left with tie), Chief of Neuro-Surgery at the University of Iowa, former President of the International Society for General Semantics, presented as a guest lecturer.
- Ray Bontrager (first standing row, third from right), Professor of Education and Psychology at California (PA) State College, Fellow of the Institute of General Semantics, and principal lecturer for the seminar.
- Dr. Marjorie A. Swanson (first standing row, far right), Professor of Bio-chemistry at Bowman Gray Medical School (now Wake Forest University, North Carolina), lecturer for the seminar.
- M. Kendig (first standing row, center), Director of the Institute.
- Charlotte Schuchardt Read (first standing row, third from right), Trustee of the Institute and seminar lecturer.

- Allen Walker Read (not pictured), presented as a guest lecturer.
- Harry Maynard (fourth row standing, far right, dark shirt), *Time Magazine* executive, later to serve on the Boards of both the Institute and International Society for General Semantics.
- Robert K. Straus (fourth row standing, immediately behind Maslow), served on the Board of the Institute and presented as guest lecturer.
- Catherine Minter (not pictured), studied at Northwestern University under Irving J. Lee, taught secondary school English, authored two books for students, *Understanding in a World of Words* and *WORDS and What They Do to You*.

NOTES

1. Text of script for the Swift Boat Veterans for Truth “Medals” television advertisement: <http://swiftvets.com/medalsscript.html>.
2. As quoted by Elton S. Carter, recorded comments at the 1973 Alfred Korzybski Memorial Lecture, New York. Institute of General Semantics archives.
3. *GEOLINGUISTICS* 29, 2003. Edited by Wayne H. Finke and Leonard R.N. Ashley. Published by Cummings & Hathaway for The American Society for Geolinguistics. Email: wayne_finke@baruch.cuny.edu.
4. Allen Walker Read, *Milestones in the History of English in America*, 2002. Edited by Richard W. Bailey. Published by Duke University Press for the American Dialect Society.
5. Michelle Stacey, “At Play in the Language,” *The New Yorker*, Vol. 65, No. 29. September 4, 1989.
6. Susan Presby Kodish, Ph.D., “Wisdom, Wit and Warmth on the Upper West Side: Memories of Charlotte Schuchardt Read, Ann Dix Meiers, and Allen Walker Read,” *General Semantics Bulletin* No. 69-70. 2002-2003.
7. Please visit the online library on the Institute’s website for complete versions of the abbreviated articles in this issue, as well as other special features:
www.time-binding.org.