

CLASSROOM EXERCISES IN GENERAL SEMANTICS, Mary Morain, ed., 1980. San Francisco, CA: International Society for General Semantics.

Comments by Jeffrey A. Mordkowitz

I experienced a great deal of pleasure in reviewing Ms. Morain's new compilation for a variety of reasons. For one, her assemblage of almost two dozen authors from around the country impressed me as a strong indication of the continued growth of general semantics literature. Also, with the appearance of some bright new faces (such as Martin Levinson) and solid contributions by such established 'veterans' as Catherine Minter and Kenneth Johnson, I'd say Ms. Morain has produced another very popular book.

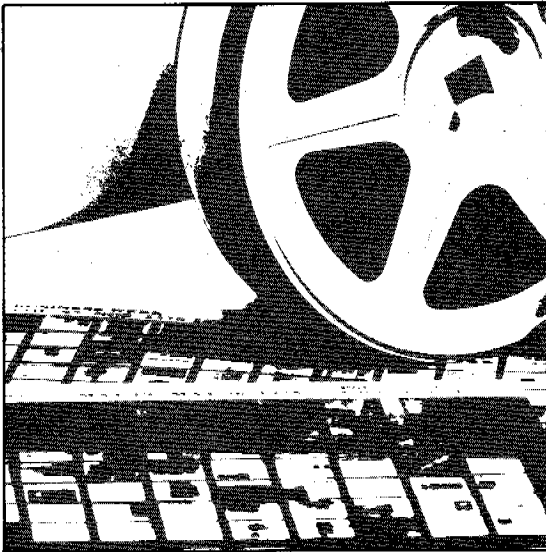
For example, one article, by Ernest Mazatenta, entitled "A Semantic 'Punt, Pass or Kick' Contest," seemed particularly well-suited for exploring the multi-'meanings' inherent in any situation. His use of a 'daily life occurrence' such as a TV black-out of sporting events served as a basis for much fruitful discussion and as an example of how exercises can come from almost anywhere. Other articles, including Donald Washburn's 'peanuts', Evelyn Stagg's 'cartoons' and Ms. Minter's moving story of a boy killed in a car accident, also illustrate the point that with a little imagination one can turn almost 'anything' into an exercise in general semantics.

I have, however, some reservations. I encountered quite a few articles which could have used a little 'sharpening up' from a methodological point of view. In particular, Stewart Holmes' use of the term 'mind set' in his "Perceptions and Descriptions" seems ill-advised, as his students evaluated their experiences in terms of this 'mind set'. Suffice to say that the elimination of this term might allow for a structurally more accurate representation of the various 'causes' for the children's 'attitudes' towards the painting (Van Gogh's "Starry Night"). Another article, "Lewis Carroll's Alice . . . and General Semantics" by Ruth McCubbrey also seems to merit special attention. In it, Ms. McCubbrey seemed not to differentiate between the terms semantics and general semantics. True, an old story but none the less important for its constant repetition. Achieving an understanding of and differentiating between these two terms seems no less important today than it did forty years ago. I've had the experience myself that only after making an effort to differentiate these two terms does one come to an understanding of the importance of doing so. I suggest Ms. McCubbrey and others with similar tendencies make this effort.

So with a small 'caveat emptor', I certainly do recommend this book to anyone teaching or planning to teach general semantics. I also look forward to the next (in what I hope Ms. Morain plans to make a series) collection of exercises in general semantics. Maybe we'll even see a contribution from the Editor of this Bulletin!*

*Well, why not? (Ed.)

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