RESEARCH NOTE

A COROLLARY TO THE THIRD AXIOM OF GENERAL SEMANTICS

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Perhaps the single most important neglected theoretical perspective in contemporary political science research is the general semantics approach of the late Count Alfred Korzybski (1879–1950) as developed by his greatest student S. I. Hayakawa (1949). The general semantics approach has three fundamental postulates:

(1) $cow_1 \neq cow_2$
(2) $cow_t \neq cow_{t+1}$
(3) The map is not the territory.

The general semantics approach provides a way to reconcile the concerns of praxis and gnosis in a hermeneutics linked to a cognitivist axiology that can best be characterized as neither behavioral nor post-behavioral, and neither marxist nor post-marxist. The purpose of this brief research note is to develop a new corollary to the Third Axiom of General Semantics and to demonstrate the practical relevance of the approach in dealing with a problem that numerous political scientists have confronted in the past and are likely to confront again in the near future — to wit, finding one's way around the San Francisco Hilton.

Some background will be useful. I have recently returned from the 1991 APSA Convention. It was a convention at which I had no trouble locating the meeting-rooms. In contrast, in 1990, finding my way around the San Francisco Hilton was one of the greatest intellectual challenges I had ever faced — a perspective I found was shared by many of my colleagues. Yet my girlfriend had no trouble locating the Grand Ballroom, and she could be counted upon to unerringly find her way to the Tamalpais Room (4th Floor, Building 3) while lesser mortals such as I were still contemplating the crowds in front of the bank of Building 3 elevators and failing to guess whether the next elevator to stop would come from the left or from the right, toward the front or toward the back. I was especially puzzled by her navigational skills because, as possessor of an APSA Program, I had a map of the San Francisco Hilton and she did not, yet she found her way around the hotel better than I did.

A number of explanations for her marvelous navigational abilities, as compared to my own incompetence, occurred to me. One of these explanations, of course, was that she was simply smarter than I. As a good Popperian (Popper, 1968), I was naturally reluctant to accept this explanation — at least until I had ruled out competing hypotheses. Since I had recently been a visiting faculty member at the University of Michigan, I did the obvious: I commissioned a survey. The survey, conducted with the assistance of the former Director of the University of California, Irvine Survey Research Center, proved even more revealing than I might have dared hope.

Cross-tabular analysis of the results of the survey[1] showed that:

1. 100 percent of those persons who made use of the map of the Hilton in the APSA Program repeatedly got lost;
2. 100 percent of those persons who had never seen the APSA map of the Hilton had no trouble finding their way around the hotel.[2]

More sophisticated approaches to the data, including log-linear, probit and causal models, did not fundamentally alter these results.

Of course, as a theoretically oriented social scientist, I wanted to move beyond barefoot empiricism. This led me to explore applying the third postulate of general semantics to account for the patterns in my data. As a specialist in political geography, I carefully reviewed the evidence.

Voila! There were two critical fallacies of the Hilton mapmaker's art that allow us to account for the striking empirical regularity found in the survey.

FALLACY I: The San Francisco Hilton, like Gaul, is divided into three parts (each of which is a separate building).

FALLACY II: The San Francisco Hilton has no stairs.

Let us consider Fallacy I. Because of the shading of the Hilton map and the labeling of each of its parts as a separate building, it took me days to realize that, for purposes for navigation, not only did I not have to know the archaeological history of the Hilton's construction, but thinking about the Hilton as comprising three separate buildings got in the way of recognizing the simple fact that, regardless of where you were going, all you needed to do was to get to the right floor level and then walk from there. For any floor on which convention activities were taking place, the way to picture the Hilton was as one building, whole and indivisible. To get to a meeting room in Building 3, for example, it was not necessary to take the Building 3 elevator! Indeed, just prior to checking out, my girlfriend empirically demonstrated to me that, in terms of walking distance, the elevator that was closest to our 7th-floor hotel room in Building 3 was, in fact, the Building 2 elevator!

Fallacy 2 is also important in accounting for the unnecessarily high frustration levels of convention participants as they waited for the 'right' elevator, when they could simply have taken the stairs — *had they known where the stairs were!* No stairs were shown on the Hilton map given to APSA participants in 1990. Certainly the easiest way to get to and from the 4th-floor meeting rooms (in Building 3) would have been to take the stairs from the Ballroom level of the building rather than waiting for the ever-crowded Building 3 elevator. Similarly, the fastest way to the Ballroom level was probably via the escalator on the lobby floor, but the fact that that escalator was in the Building 3 part of the Hilton made it harder to realize that it was also a sensible way to get to the parts of the ballroom level (e.g. the Imperial Ballroom) that were not part of 'Building 3'.

I am thus led to:

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1. $N = 3$, but the results readily generalize.
2. Most notably, my girlfriend.

WUFFLE'S COROLLARY TO THE THIRD AXIOM OF GENERAL SEMAN-TICS. Since the map is not the territory, sometimes it's easier to find your way around if you don't have a map.[3]

REFERENCES

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3. Or, to put it in a way more intelligible perhaps from a postmodernist perspective: 'Wenn den mappen haben sie nicht, vielleicht den rechts haben sie yetz'.