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GENERAL SEMANTICS, ZEN BUDDHISM, AND DADA: A HOLONOMIC VIEW

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A Thesis

Presented

To the Faculty of

California State University Dominguez Hills

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In Partial Fulfillment

Of the Requirements for the Degree

Master of Arts

In

Humanities

_____

by

Rachael L. Smithey

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300 North Zeeb Road
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THESIS: GENERAL SEMANTICS, ZEN BUDDHISM, AND DADA:

A HOLONOMIC VIEW

AUTHOR: Rachael L. Smithey

APPROVED:

William M. Hagan (signature)

William M. Hagan, S.T.D.
Thesis Committee Chair

C. Michael Mahon (signature)

C. Michael Mahon, Ph.D.
Committee Member

Arthur L. Harshman (signature)

Arthur L. Harshman, Ph.D.
Committee Member

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ABSTRACT

General Semantics, Zen Buddhism, and Dada: A Holonomic View identifies,

through whole systems thinking, a fundamental core underlying the three distinct

disciplines of General Semantics, Zen Buddhism, and Dada. Although these three

disciplines may initially appear philosophically and historically incompatible, a

consistent similarity emerges when examining key writings within each discipline.

Selected writings of these disciplines are examined within the framework of the five

General Semantics concepts of extension, abstraction, multiordinality, non-elementalism,

and semantic reaction. Using a framework constructed from these General Semantics

concepts, a holonomic or unifying view of General Semantics, Zen Buddhism, and Dada

is presented.

CHAPTER 1

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

General Semantics

Shocked by the human and cultural devastation of World War I, Alfred Korzybski

(1879 - 1950) began to formulate a theory of human behavior. He published his findings

in his 1921 book Manhood of Humanity: The Science and Art of Human Engineering,

where he identifies a fundamental distinction between animal and human behavior.

Korzybski asserts that animals merely hunt and gather ("space-binding") in the pursuit of

food, while humans have developed (and have taught to subsequent generations) the

science of agriculture. Korzybski defined this uniquely human ability to learn from

experience and to teach over time as "time-binding." He concluded that "animalistic"

notions of human nature contribute to non-rational thinking and actions (Manhood of

Humanity 186-187).

From 1928 until 1933 Korzybski continued his research on time-binding. In 1933

he published his philosophy of language-meaning in Science and Sanity: An Introduction

to Non-Aristotelian Systems and General Semantics. In Science and Sanity, Korzybski

asserts that human beings have progressed beyond animals because of the human ability

to symbolize through language. While language allows us to generalize our experiences

and pass them on to others, it also allows us to misrepresent or misunderstand these

experiences (leading to confusion). The principles of General Semantics outlined in

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Science and Sanity thus present a "training program" for students to link the rational methods of science with their everyday perceptions, evaluations, and communications.

In studying language as a representation (or "abstraction") of reality, Korzybski uses various tools including those of psychology, linguistics, relativity theory, quantum mechanics, and mathematical logic. Korzybski describes General Semantics as a "non-Aristotelian" system as it rejects the two-valued either-or logic (either X is Y or X is not Y) attributed to Aristotle. Non-Aristotelian systems employ a many-valued logic, thereby recognizing degrees of difference or similarity among objects, events, and ideas. General Semantics specifically incorporates a scientific, non-Aristotelian framework to address the differences between symbols (or words) and reality, and the manner in which words affect human thinking. General Semantics asserts several fundamental points: (1) sensory information is an abstraction of what we call "reality," (2) language and symbols represent the results of the abstracting process, and (3) our abstractions may be (and generally are) different from those of other people. Consequently, General Semantics aims to improve one's ability to reason and to communicate clearly, thereby enhancing human understanding in our increasingly complex modern world.

Zen

A number of key figures assisted in formulating and spreading Zen Buddhism across Asia and, later, throughout the world. Among the important Zen proponents are Gautama, Bodhidharma, Eisai, and Dogen. It is generally accepted that Gautama was born into a royal family in India around 560 BC. When Prince Gautama first traveled

outside of the safety and isolation of the palace, he encountered (and was shocked by) sights of infirmity and death. Moved by the sight of a happy and peaceful holy man in the midst of such suffering, Gautama abandoned palace life and became a wandering ascetic. He sat in meditation under a bodhi tree and vowed to stay until he had seen ultimate reality. On the morning of the seventh day, Gautama attained enlightenment. He became known as Buddha Tathagata (the Awakened One) and emphasized seated meditation as a means to enlightenment. In addition, he presented the Four Noble Truths which became the foundation of Buddhism: (1) life is suffering; (2) suffering is caused by selfish craving; (3) selfish craving can be overcome; and (4) selfish craving can be overcome through the Eightfold Path. The Eightfold Path consists of (1) right understanding, (2) right purpose, (3) right speech, (4) right conduct, (5) right livelihood, (7) right alertness, and (8) right concentration. Although Tathagata left no written teachings upon his death, his followers spread his verbal teachings throughout the Indian subcontinent and Southeast Asia (Low, An Invitation to Practice Zen 19-30).

In the sixth century AD, the Sri Lankan monk Bodhidharma arrived in southern China. In a discussion with the Chinese Emperor Wu, Bodhidharma declared that Buddhism's basic principles and teachings lay outside of any written texts. Its teachings were based on the experience of enlightenment gained through such mind-body techniques as seated meditation and the challenges of koans (unanswerable word-plays). Thus, he asserted, Buddhism need not rely on (or attach itself to) any explanation through words. To spread his philosophical teachings (known as Ch'an Buddhism) throughout China, Bodhidharma founded the famous Shaolin monastery (Thien-An 17-22).

In the twelfth century, the Japanese monk Eisai (1141-1215) traveled to China; upon his return home, he established the Rinzai school of Zen. This school emphasized koans, where students are challenged by paradoxical and illogical statements in order to facilitate enlightenment. In the thirteenth century, the Japanese monk Dogen (1200-1253) traveled to China to study Ch'an Buddhism. Upon returning home he founded the Soto school of Zen. The Soto school emphasized zazen where, to facilitate enlightenment, students sit in quiet meditation (Humphreys 92).

Through the writings of such twentieth century masters as D.T. Suzuki and Eugen Herrigel, Zen became increasingly popular in the western world. Zen's emphasis on spontaneity, simplicity, and personal experience mirrored the cultural trends of post World War II American life. Furthermore, the anti-authoritarianism of Zen strongly appealed to the Beat Generation of the 1950s and to the counter-culture of the 1960s. With its emphasis on improving the quality of personal life, Zen continues to play an important philosophical role in western life and culture.

Dada

The western art movement of Dada developed nearly simultaneously in several cities (Zurich, New York, Berlin, and Paris) as a reaction against the personal, social, and cultural devastation of World War I. Many artists were disgusted with and outraged by the manipulations of governments, the horrors of war, and the destruction of western culture and civilization. Interestingly, the origin of the term Dada remains unclear. Hans Richter, in Dada: Art and Anti-Art, believes the phrase may have originated from Tristan

Tzara's and Marcel Janco's frequent use of the Slavonic affirmative phrase "da, da" (yes, yes) (31). Richard Huelsenbeck, in <u>Memoirs of a Dada Drummer</u>, asserts that he and Hugo Ball selected the term at random from a French-German dictionary and that it refers to a child's hobby horse (Motherwell 280). While the term's origin may be a subject of dispute, its overall meaning is not: it functions as a nonsense term reflecting the state of meaninglessness into which European culture had evolved.

Zurich Dada arose as artists and writers fled from diverse areas of Europe and arrived in neutral Switzerland. In 1915 the German writer Hugo Ball founded Zurich's center for creative activity, the Cabaret Voltaire, which served "to remind the world that there are independent men, beyond war and nationalism, who live for other ideals" (Ball qtd. in Hamilton 251). Other members included the German writer Richard Huelsenbeck, the Romanian poet Tristan Tzara, the Romanian painter/sculptor Marcel Janco, the Alsatian painter/sculptor/poet Jean (Hans) Arp, and the German painter Hans Richter (Arnason 224). Zurich Dada was most influential in its experimental approach to literature, film-making, photography, and typographic design.

New York Dada similarly arose in 1915 from the collaboration of the French refugee artists Marcel Duchamp and Francis Picabia, and the American photographer Alfred Stieglitz. Together they founded the periodical entitled <u>291</u> to present their radical, ironic, machine-inspired, anti-art ideas. In addition to contributing to the development of New York Dada, Marcel Duchamp also profoundly influenced many artists of later generations. His use of found-objects-as-art (readymades) helped to redefine art in western culture (Arnason 227-231).

German Dada developed in 1917 when Richard Huelsenbeck left Zurich and returned to Berlin. Here he joined other German artists including Wieland Herzfelde, Johann Herzfelde, Raoul Hausmann, George Grosz, and Johannes Baader. The artists created political propaganda in various forms; most importantly, they creatively and successfully used the technique of photomontage. Other important German Dadaists who were not affiliated with this group but nevertheless created profound (and unique) works include Kurt Schwitters and Max Ernst (Arnason 241-243).

Paris Dada arose and became established in 1918. Many writers in Paris (including Louis Aragon and André Breton) began to contribute to the Zurich periodical Dada; conversely, Tristan Tzara began writing for Aragon and Breton's periodical Littérature and arrived in Paris the following year. The Paris Dada movement emphasized manifestos, literature, demonstrations, and events rather than painting and sculpture. The formal demise of Dada occurred at the Dadaist Congress of Paris in 1922, where many Dada artists allied themselves with André Breton and the Surrealist movement. Although the Dada movement was relatively short-lived, it contributed such elements as anti-formalism, spontaneity, absurdity, and humor to the development of modern art. In addition, it also offered a new artistic philosophy of liberation and freedom. According to Duchamp, Dada was "a metaphysical attitude . . . a sort of nihilism . . . a way to get out of a state of mind—to avoid being influenced by one's immediate environment, or by the past: to get away from cliches—to get free" (qtd. in Gardner 827).

CHAPTER 2

COMPATIBILITY OF RATIONAL/NON-RATIONAL THINKING

Arguments Against Compatibility

<u>General Semantics</u>

General Semantics incorporates a modern, scientific, non-Aristotelian framework to address the differences between symbols (or words) and reality, and the manner in which words affect human thinking. It uses current scientific knowledge (including psychology, linguistics, relativity theory, quantum mechanics, mathematical logic, neuroscience, and communication theory) to study the way in which human neurological, cultural, and personal representations impact perception. Due to its scientific and analytical framework, General Semantics is a rational approach to improving communication and enhancing the quality of life.

<u>Zen</u>

As a non-western and non-scientific philosophy influenced by Taoism and Buddhism, Zen embraces many ideas and practices which seem irrelevant in modern western society. In <u>Levels of Knowing and Existence: Studies in General Semantics,</u> Harry L. Weinberg states that Zen is fundamentally incompatible with General Semantics because Zen undervalues the symbolizing process. Through its emphasis on the non-verbal (or feelings and sensations), Weinberg asserts, Zen is an effective system only at the lower levels of abstraction. The Zen practitioner, he thus concludes, is "only half a

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man" because of an inability to operate on the level of abstraction most suited to a given situation (249). The scientific, rational and logical framework of General Semantics is thus fundamentally different from the non-scientific, non-rational, and illogical elements of Zen.

<u>Dada</u>

Like Zen, Dada uses non-rationality as a guiding principle. While Zen undervalues the symbolizing process (through which words gain meaning), Dada attempts to destroy it altogether. It achieves this aim primarily through the use of provocative language (multiordinal and nonsense words). In (1) expressing contempt for social and cultural degradation, and (2) desiring to destroy bourgeois values, Dada incorporates the illogical and the absurd. Like Zen, Dada is based upon the non-rational, which conflicts with the rationality of General Semantics.

Proposed Argument For Compatibility

Whole systems thinking, through the methods and tools of the sciences and the humanities, seeks to understand the process and functions of dynamic systems. In <u>Earth Ascending: An Illustrated Treatise on the Law Governing Whole Systems</u>, José Arguelles defines a discipline called *holonomics*. First cited by George Leonard in his book <u>The Silent Pulse</u>, the term holonomics describes knowledge which is holistic, or simultaneously rational and non-rational, logical and non-logical, scientific and artistic. Arguelles writes that holonomics "accounts not only for the interrelationships between fields in the phenomenal world, but for the interaction of man with this world—man with

all of his cumulative history, thought, and forms of expression inseparable from the planet upon which he finds himself" (15). From the viewpoint of holonomics all objects, events, and concepts are interrelated. The whole systems approach demonstrates that key elements of Zen and Dada are evident in the framework of General Semantics. This includes such General Semantics concepts as extension, abstraction, multiordinality, non-elementalism, and semantic reaction. By reexamining General Semantics, Zen, and Dada through a whole systems approach, a bridging of three very different disciplines— and their approaches to the symbolizing process in human communication and experience—can be achieved.

CHAPTER 3

CONCEPTS, TOOLS, AND METHODS

Extension

<u>General Semantics</u>

As human beings, we experience the surrounding world through our five senses. We communicate these experiences (and our thoughts and feelings about them) through language. General Semantics proponents use the phrases "the map is not the territory," "the word is not the thing," and "whatever you might say the object 'is,' well, it is not" to emphasize that our language merely describes our lived experience; it does not duplicate it. Frequently, human miscommunication arises due to the discrepancy between (or confusion of) lived experience and its symbolic counterpart. Thus, one of the fundamental tools of General Semantics is the awareness of the difference between extension (lived experience—sometimes called the territory, the silent level, the non-verbal level, facts, the un-speakable level, or the object level) and intension (the verbal description of lived experience).

According to General Semantics, miscommunication frequently occurs when we allow the intensional evaluation of information to take precedence over extensional evaluation. From an intensional perspective, terms are defined only by other words; these words refer to more words, and cause us to move farther away from the actual thing or event we were initially describing. Intensional evaluation is faulty as it leads to

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reverse order abstracting, where labels (e.g. drug-free zone, user-friendly) take on a greater meaning than the objects they intend to describe. Recent examples of intensional descriptions include single-use (vs. throw-away) cameras, pens, and lighters; and politically correct (vs. euphemistic) speech. Furthermore, intensional evaluation also leads to the erroneous notion that the change of a name or description can, in fact, change the characteristics of an object.

In contrast, by using the methods of scientific observation, General Semantics emphasizes extensional evaluation. Extensional evaluation occurs in several stages. First, we experience an object or event through any or all of our five senses. Next, we consciously and intellectually observe our experience, focusing on certain aspects while ignoring or disregarding others; this is known as the process of abstracting. Third, we formulate a description of the object or event, keeping the description as close to the actual experience as possible. This is most readily achieved through defining terms by example rather than through the use of other terms.

Robert P. Pula's Preface to the Fifth Edition of <u>Science and Sanity</u> clearly states the importance of extensional evaluation:

> Realizing that a person's epistemological-evaluational *style*, a person's
> *habitual way with evaluating determines* how life will go, he [Korzybski]
> recommends adoption of an extensional orientation, with its emphasis on
> 'facts.' If a person is *over*-committed to verbal constructs, definitions,
> formulae, 'conventional wisdom,' etc., that person may be so trapped in
> those *a priori decisions* as to be unable to appropriately respond to new

> data from the non-verbal, not-yet-anticipated world. By definition, the
> *extensionally* oriented person, while remaining as articulate as any of
> her/his neighbors, is *habitually* open to new data, is *habitually* able to say,
> "I don't know; let's see" (xviii-xix).

Korzybski, in the Introduction to the Second Edition of <u>Science and Sanity</u>, recognizes

that a purely extensional orientation is a humanly unattainable goal...but a goal worthy of

striving towards. He writes: "'Pure' extension is humanly impossible; 'pure' intension is

possible, and is often found in hospitals for 'mentally' ill . . ." (xli). It is this goal of

improved communication and quality of life for which Korzybski developed his

methodology.

General Semantics uses several extensional devices to facilitate communication.

The intensional verbal definitions of such terms as *table* or *person* emphasize the

similarities of all things which can be classified as a table (a thing designed to set things

upon) or a person (a member of the species *Homo sapiens*). In emphasizing these

similarities, however, the differences of individual things within each classification are

frequently ignored. The tools of indexing (subscript numbers) and dating (superscript

dates) thus serve to call attention to the uniqueness and individuality of each thing

described.

Because modern science (e.g. relativity, quantum mechanics) has demonstrated

that all physical elements are in continual flux, no individual object or event can be the

"same" from one moment to the next. In General Semantics, the fact that no two things

are identical is known as the principle of *non-identity*. The individualizing and temporal

tools of indexing and dating, respectively, recognize the principle of non-identity and thus bring communication closer to actual experience. This becomes clear when we recognize that $table_1^{1990}$ (shiny and new) is not the same as $table_1^{1998}$ (scratched and dirty) and that $Smith_1^{Monday}$ (rested after a nice weekend) is not the same as $Smith_1^{Friday}$ (exhausted from work activities). By reorienting our language in such an extensional way, we become aware of the process of abstraction. When we generalize, we will focus attention on specific aspects of a thing. Some aspects we will consciously ignore or disregard, while other aspects we will not notice. From this, we become aware of the possibility that, when evaluating information, new aspects may arise at any time; these new aspects may require that we modify our generalizations or evaluations (Korzybski, Science and Sanity lxiii).

The erroneous and static intensional orientation is concerned merely with the definition or generalization of objects, events, and concepts. In contrast, the scientific and dynamic extensional orientation attends to objects, events, and concepts at a more concrete level by formulating examples which appeal to our senses and experiences. As our everyday lives actually occur on this concrete level (walking on pavement, eating food, hearing sounds), it is apparent that our quality of life can improve by adopting such an extensional orientation.

Zen

Like General Semantics, one of Zen's fundamental elements is the emphasis on experience rather than words. Both Gautama and Bodhidharma emphasized the experience of seated meditation as a fundamental means of enlightenment.

Bodhidharma, in a legendary discussion with the Chinese Emperor Wu, explicitly

declared that direct experience—rather than words or written texts—leads to

enlightenment. Dogen's Soto school of Zen continued this emphasis on the experience of

seated meditation as fundamental in the process of enlightenment. Although it may seem

incongruous that Eisai's Rinzai school of Zen used language (the challenging word-plays

of koans) to facilitate enlightenment, these koans are compatible with Zen's distrust of

language. Because koans are essentially meaningless, they are not to be analyzed or

answered. As koans do not use language in a representational way, they serve as an

extensional tool for enlightenment. In The World: A Gateway—Commentaries on the

Mumonkan, Albert Low explicitly defines the experiential function of koans in Zen

instruction:

> It is just because words can no more hold the truth than a net can hold
>
> water that koans are used. Koans are sayings, or doings, of Zen masters,
>
> the patriarchs, and Buddha. Take for example the koan: The Sound of
>
> One Hand Clapping. In its entirety it reads: "You know the sound of two
>
> hands clapping. What is the sound of one hand clapping?" The obvious,
>
> intellectual answer is no sound at all! But then what is this no sound? In
>
> other words, what is silence? If one is to work on this koan, indeed on any
>
> koan, one must demonstrate its meaning. Explanatory words, such as
>
> "the two hands represent duality, the one hand is unity" or "the sound of

one hand is the sound of the true self" are useless. A teacher of Zen would

reject them. . . . (2)

In The Heart of Being: Moral and Ethical Teachings of Zen Buddhism John Daido Loori

similarly emphasizes the extensional value of koans. He forcefully writes: "whatever

you think this koan means, forget it. It has no meaning whatsoever. If you are looking

for meaning, you are wasting your time. This practice has nothing to do with meaning.

Meaning is the words and ideas that describe reality. We are not talking about that here.

Practice is directly experiencing that reality" (211). It is thus clear that Zen, in addition

to disregarding written teachings or sacred texts, further emphasizes extensional practice

through its use of zazen and koans.

Because Zen rejects doctrines and scriptures in favor of "direct-pointing" or

experience-as-it-is, many of Zen's important documents are the discussions,

interpretations, artworks (including poetry, painting, and calligraphy), and personal

recollections of Zen teachers and students. One of the early documents is the

Mumonkan, a series of traditional Zen parables accompanied by Master Mumon's

commentary. Like the koans, many of these parables seem non-rational in their

expression and content. This non-rationality serves to illustrate the limitations of

words. In one parable, a monk asks Joshu why Bodhidharma came to China.

Joshu replies, "An oak tree in the garden." According to Master Mumon, Joshu's

seemingly illogical response intentionally demonstrates his recognition of the

intension/extension distinction. Master Mumon asserts that "words cannot describe

everything. The heart's message cannot be delivered in words. If one receives words

literally, he will be lost. If he tries to explain with words, he will not attain enlightenment in this life" (De Smedt n. pag.). Low further clarifies the intension/extension distinction as presented in both the parable and in Mumon's comments. He writes: "When we use words, as we are using them now, truth slips through the cracks. Words freeze experience into solid blocks. We try to fit the blocks together with reason and seal them together with logic, but they fit badly, and we cannot help leaving gaps through which the vitality of a situation leaks away" (The World: A Gateway 1-2).

Low further addresses the limitations of intension in his assertion that words, symbols, parables, and signs merely point to reality. As Alfred Korzybski states that "Whatever you might *say* the object 'is,' well it *is not*" (Science and Sanity 35), Low similarly writes: "Metaphors bring us close to true nature because they point to it. Some are of the opinion that all words are in some way metaphors. . . . Metaphors make the peculiar claim 'this is that' but all the time we know 'this is not that'" (The World: A Gateway 3). To solidify the distinction of intension and extension, Low discusses the metaphor "the slings and arrows of outrageous fortune" from Shakespeare's Hamlet:

> This is a powerful metaphor, but we all know perfectly well that fortune has neither slings nor arrows. In a similar way we talk of true nature; but we must be careful because, using a formulation of Buddha, "True nature is not true nature, that is why we call it true nature." True nature in this case is a metaphor; "this is that" "this is not that." When we know intimately the truth of Buddha's formulation, we can use words with impunity. (The World: A Gateway 3)

In Korzybski-like terms, Low continues his warning on the dangers of an intensional orientation:

> It is said that Buddha uses words as words. This is like an entomologist using a magnifying glass to see an insect, but he does not mistake the glass for the insect. Until we know this intimately and can use words as words, we must beware of words and metaphors, as we beware of scorpions and poisonous snakes, and treat them with the utmost care and respect. (The World: A Gateway 3-4)

Low's intensional/extensional distinction between the instrument (the magnifying glass) and the specimen (the insect) is remarkably similar to that of Ajahn Sumedho. Sumedho asserts that the methods of Zen allow the practitioner to recognize that (1) the world as experienced through the senses is a world of conditions, and (2) sensory information can be observed through conscious awareness. If the Zen practitioner pays conscious awareness to such conditions as fears or negative thoughts, then these become powerless. He writes: "Hence we say the mind is like a mirror: it reflects everything. But the reflections are not the mirror. The ugliest thing can come up in front of a mirror without harming it. Maybe the reflection isn't nice to see, but it's only a reflection" (107). These statements are almost identical—in concept and structure—to several frequently used phrases in General Semantics. Just as (1) the magnifying glass is not the insect and (2) the reflection is not the mirror, the General Semanticist would similarly state that (1) the map is not the territory and (2) the word is not the thing. All of these phrases emphasize the distinction of intension (language, symbol) and extension (experience).

The recognition that words attempt to solidify objects, concepts, or experiences (all of which are in perpetual flux) is addressed in Alan Watts' essay "The New Alchemy." Watts was very familiar with General Semantics and its tool of E-prime, a variant of English that eliminates the use of the verb *to be* in order to avoid erroneously (1) identifying one thing as another (is-of-identity), and (2) ignoring the impressions and perceptions that arise in us (is-of-predication). Although Watts does not explicitly mention the tool of E-prime, he describes this tool in the hopes of bridging intension and extension:

> Now the language of science is increasingly a language of process—a description of events, relations, operations, and forms rather than of things and substances. The world so described is a world of actions rather than agents, verbs rather than nouns, going against the common-sense idea that an action is the behavior of some *thing*, some solid entity of "stuff." But the common-sense idea that action is always the function of an agent is so deeply rooted, so bound up with our sense of order and security, that seeing the world to be otherwise can be seriously disturbing. (140)

He continues his discussion of the present scientific view of process (versus historical views of stasis), and concludes that one can comfortably perceive and describe the world from a current scientific viewpoint: "Upon reflection, there seems to be nothing unreasonable in seeing the world in this way. The agent behind every action is itself action. If a mat can be called matting, a cat can be called catting" (141). He continues in this General Semantics E-prime tone: "Thus what we call the agent behind the action is

simply the prior or relatively more constant state of the same action: when a man runs

we have a 'manning-running' over and above a simple 'manning'" (142). Finally, he

concludes with a discussion of non-elementalism, the General Semantics notion that

objects, events, and concepts which can be separated through language (intensionally)

may be impossible to separate in everyday experience (extensionally). He writes:

"Furthermore, it is only a somewhat clumsy convenience to say that present events are

moved or caused by past events, for we are actually talking about earlier and later stages

of the same event" (142).

It is clear that the distinction of intension and extension has been paramount since

the origin of Zen. Almost 2500 years ago Shakyamuni Buddha stated that "Bodhisattvas

never engage in conversations whose resolutions depend on words and logic." Similarly,

in the twentieth century, Dwight Goddard comments that "the only clear idea is an

experienced idea," and that language and words are "limited, defective, deceiving, [and]

prejudiced" (112-113). These statements embody Zen's philosophical approach to (1) the

limitations of language and (2) the importance of experience. In essence, such elements

as truth, meaning, and enlightenment exist independently of words; these elements must

be experienced directly. Extension, therefore, serves as a fundamental element of Zen.

Dada

One of the fundamental goals of the Dada movement was to "make art a

meaningful instrument of life" (Richter 48). In transforming daily experience into art, the

Dadaists created an entirely new and revolutionary art form. In Memoirs of a Dada

Drummer, Richard Huelsenbeck explicitly compares the extensional quality of Dada with

that of Zen. He writes: "You cannot comprehend dada, you have to experience it. Dada is immediate and self-evident. A person is a dadaist simply by living. . . . Dada is the American aspect of Buddhism: it rages because it can hold its tongue; it acts because it is at rest" (xlvii).

One of the most significant and extensional contributions of the Dada movement was its new approach to poetry. Variously called sound poems, phonetic poems, poems without words, or abstract poems, these literary works "renounce[d] the language that journalism has abused and corrupted" (Ball 71). Outraged at rationality taken to its illogical extreme (the destruction of western civilization through war), Ball fought against the errors of intensional thinking. He writes: "Each thing has its word, but the word has become a thing by itself" (221). Thus he developed the sound poem, which abandons words (and their associated meanings) in favor of sound. These sounds, devoid of recognizable meaning, actually create meaning through the emotions they stimulate in the listener. The first known sound poem was created and recited by Hugo Ball in 1916. Wearing a cylindrical costume and hat, Ball began to recite *O Gadji Beri Bimba*:

> gadji beri bimba
>
> glandridi lauli lonni cadori
>
> gadjama bim beri glassala
>
> glandridi glassala tuffm i zimbrabim
>
> blassa galassasa tuffm i zimbrabim
>
> . . . (Ball 70)

The words of sound poetry thus deliberately served no denotational purpose. This poetry rejected predefined intensional terms (words) in favor of the sonic experience of the speaker and listener (Ball 68). These works are not limited to serving as an emotional provocation, however. When art is brought into the sphere of everyday life and individual experience, then art ceases to be an emotional stimulus and becomes, as Ball states, "the fruit of experience and joy in life" (qtd. in Richter 49). Thus, verbal language changed from representation (symbols, words) into presentation (the sensory experience of sound).

The Dada rejection of "words (to say nothing of sentences) that are not newly invented for our own use" became problematic, however (Ball 71). The most fundamental limitation of the sound poem is that, for greatest effect (rhythm, meter, pitch, pause, breaths, etc.), it must be heard rather than read. The Dadaists thus extended the sensory experience of poetry beyond its sound effects. Raoul Hausmann created the optophonetic poem (Figure 1) by typographically rendering the sounds in various font styles and sizes (Richter 121). Thus, poetry could be experienced aurally and visually.

Figure 1. Raoul Hausmann, 'kp' eriuUM' (1918)

In addition to their extensional approach to literary language, the Dadaists also

similarly transformed visual language. Marcel Duchamp viewed his daily life activities

as art experiences, and began to develop works of art called readymades. These

readymades were essentially found objects (a urinal, a bicycle wheel, a bottle rack)

reclassified by the artist as works of art. By redefining everyday utilitarian objects as art,

Duchamp forced the art public to reexamine its perceptions and daily lives. Art and life

became, to the Dadaists, inseparable.

Like that of General Semantics and Zen, the philosophy of Dada emphasizes

extension over intension. Recognizing the limitations of language, Dada attempts to

transform the traditionally representational quality of art into a presentational, extensional

daily life activity. Dada's emphasis on the sensory level, as heard in the sound poems,

further strengthens its extensional orientation. Furthermore, the uniqueness of individual

experience, and the influence it brings to human communication and comprehension (emphasized in the evocative nature of the sound poems), plays a key role in development of Dada. Dada's attempt to merge art and daily life thus strongly parallels the extensional emphasis of both General Semantics and Zen.

Abstraction

General Semantics

General Semantics defines the term abstraction as it relates to the process of acquiring knowledge. Human beings process information by focusing on particular pieces or elements. Some of these pieces of information are selected, while other pieces are rejected; the rest are simply ignored or unnoticed. The process of abstraction occurs in stages, from sensory information (experience) to words (symbols); at each stage in the abstraction process, pieces of information become discarded. Although this process produces useful working knowledge, it is important to recognize that it also produces incomplete knowledge. Several key elements arise from this awareness. First, a single word may have different meanings based on its level of abstraction; in General Semantics, this is known as multiordinality. For example, the word "reality" can have countless meanings: to a single parent, "the daily struggle"; to a soldier in wartime, "survival"; to an astronomer, "the universe and its history." Second, two people may attach very different meanings to the same word based on their very different abstractions. For example, an inexperienced hiker attacked by a mountain lion may have entirely different meanings for the term "lion" than will a wildlife conservationist.

Rachel M. Lauer asserts that "we must focus less upon what the word means and more upon what the person means. Our own words may need much more clarification to prevent misinterpretation. We need practice in checking our perceptions and symbols against each other's meanings and realities" (294-295). This practice can be developed through an awareness of the abstracting process, or what is known in General Semantics as the *consciousness of abstraction.*

Although the process of abstraction provides us with our working knowledge, it also prevents us from being able to say or know everything about any object, event, or concept. In General Semantics, this is known as *non-allness.* Because we process information by abstracting, we cannot know or say everything about an object, event, or concept. By adding the term *etc.* to our statements, we can remind ourselves (and those with whom we communicate) that there is always more information that can be noticed or inferred.

To illustrate more clearly the process of abstraction, Korzybski devised the Structural Differential (Figure 2).
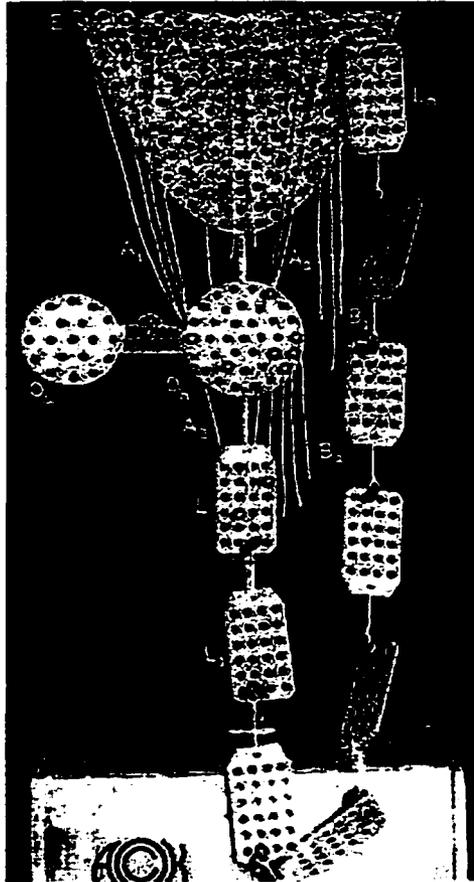
Figure 2. The Structural Differential

The parabola labeled *E* represents the non-linear *Event Level*, comprised of everything

that is occurring around us. The circular *O* regions represent the *Object Level*, comprised

of those things occurring around us that we perceive through our senses. This is the

non-verbal process of watching, listening, touching, tasting, and smelling, forming

impressions which our brains organize into the world that we experience. The *Oa* circle

represents the Object world perceived by animals; the *Oh* circle represents the Object

worlds perceived by humans. The *L* tag represents the *Label and Descriptive Level*,

comprised of the labels and names we assign to the objects we perceive. The Label and

Descriptive Level can continue on to higher levels of abstraction (represented by physically lower constructs on the Structural Differential) such as *L2*, comprised of sentences made up of those labels and names in *L*. We can then use those discussions for the next higher level of *L3*. The highest order of abstraction *Ln* links back to the Event Level *E*, indicating the process of the scientific method. The scientific method attempts to (1) determine the occurrences of the Event Level, (2) create high order inferences (or a model) of the Event Level, then (3) project this model onto the Event Level. The levels of abstraction outlined in the Structural Differential demonstrate the meaning of the phrase *the word is not the thing*: any verbal label we create for a specific object, event, or concept is far removed from the actual thing. The Structural Differential also illustrates the concept of *non-allness*: it is impossible for us to know everything about anything.

In the process of abstraction, we move increasingly distant from the Event Level. As we move down the length of the Structural Differential, we move to a higher order of abstraction. This is called abstracting from a lower order to a higher order. When we abstract from a lower order to a higher order, we selectively omit information about the object, event, or concept we are describing. The Structural Differential illustrates this process of omission through the use of holes and strings. Each characteristic of an object, event, or concept is represented by a hole; if the characteristic remains in a higher order abstraction, the holes are linked across the levels by a string. If a characteristic is omitted (not noticed, ignored), then either no string is attached, or the string is left to dangle. This aspect of the Structural Differential demonstrates the meaning of the phrase *the map is not the territory*. As we construct our verbal "map" (represented by the *L* levels), we

selectively omit certain characteristics (represented by holes and strings). Our verbal description therefore is different from the actual thing.

To make sense of the world, human beings use the process of abstraction as exemplified in the Structural Differential. It is clear, however, that the results of this process are unique to each individual. General Semantics asserts that all statements represent the attempts of unique nervous systems to respond to perceived experience; these responses are influenced by each person's understandings, values, biases, etc. Additionally, all statements represent a unique abstraction based upon limited and interpreted sensory information. An awareness of this uniqueness is necessary in understanding our own knowledge and responses, thereby improving the quality of our interactions and our lives.

Zen

The concept of abstraction plays a fundamental role in the philosophy of Zen. In an ancient Chinese tale, Zen master Hogen overhears four traveling monks arguing about subjectivity and objectivity. He asks one of the monks: "There is a big stone. Do you consider it to be inside or outside your mind?" One of the monks replies, "From the Buddhist viewpoint everything is an objectification of mind, so I would say that the stone is inside my mind." Hogen then humorously remarks: "Your head must feel very heavy if you are carrying around a stone like that in your mind" (De Smedt n. pag.). This story explicitly demonstrates the difference between the object itself and the representation of that object. Master Hogen realized that human beings frequently mistake intensional

words and phrases with actual extensional "things." As stated in General Semantics, "the word is not the thing."

Like General Semantics, Zen recognizes that human beings process information by focusing on particular pieces of information; some of these pieces of information are selected, other pieces are rejected, and the rest are ignored or unnoticed. John Daido Loori writes of the process of abstraction in a manner similar to that of General Semantics. He describes the way in which human beings experience the surrounding world through the six "organs of perception"—the five senses and the mind (29). Because each human being is unique, we each abstract differently. This consciousness of abstraction is strongly emphasized by such scholars Thomas Merton and Alan Watts. In his essay "A Christian Looks at Zen," Merton describes the falsification occurring through each individual's unique process of abstraction. "For Zen," he writes, "from the moment fact is transferred to a statement it is falsified. One ceases to grasp the naked reality of experience, and one grasps a form of words instead" (4). He continues:

> The language used by Zen is therefore on some sense an antilanguage, and the "logic" of Zen is a radical reversal of philosophical logic. The human dilemma of communication is that we cannot communicate ordinarily without words and signs, but even ordinary experience tends to be falsified by our habits of verbalization and rationalization. The convenient tools of language enable us to decide beforehand what we think things mean and tempt us all to easily to see things only in a way that first our logical preconceptions and our verbal formulas. Instead of seeing things and facts

as they are, we see them as reflection and verifications of the sentences we have previously made up in our minds. We quickly forget how to simply see things and substitute our words and our formulas for the things themselves, manipulating facts so that we see only what fits our convenient prejudices. Zen uses language against itself to blast out these preconceptions and to destroy the specious "reality" in our minds so that we can see directly. Zen is saying, as Wittgenstein said: "Don't think: Look!" (13)

Albert Low similarly emphasizes the uniqueness of each individual's process of abstraction. He discusses the mind's tendency to group objects, events, and concepts into similar fixed categories (such as men, women, Englishmen, Americans). He argues that although the human mind typically perceives these characteristics as reality, they are actually abstractions. In General Semantics-like phrasing, he concludes that "what we see are only conventional realities, but we can live our lives operating on the assumption that these are the real things. People talk about the 'real world,' but the real world that they talk about is not reality; it is only conventional appearance. It's the way it seems to be, according to the way one has been conditioned to perceive it" (The World: A Gateway 128).

In his philosophical discussion of the nature of self, John Daido Loori similarly discusses the falseness of words, the importance of recognizing the difference between reality and abstraction, and the uniqueness of each person's process of abstraction. He states:

> Self-nature cannot be described with words. No matter how hard we try to explain it, we speak a falsehood. How could we possibly explain it? No matter how many times we say the word bitter, things do not become bitter. No matter how many times we say the word fire, things do not become hot. The word is very different from what it depicts. The word is an abstraction of the reality. It is for that reason that it cannot be explained. . . . What is true and what is false? There are no such bottom-line certainties. Truth and falsity always exist within a specific framework. Our ways of seeing are very different. What is true for one person is false for another. (91)

He then asks: "But what is the truth? Is it good or is it bad? It depends on where you sit. It depends on your position. It depends on your reference system, your matrix" (93). Alan Watts similarly writes that there are no such things as truths by themselves; a particular truth exists only from a given point of view. The structure of the world appears to us each in a unique way: it appears to us each through our senses, but our minds select, evaluate, reject, and ignore different elements (37). A clear example of this is evident in Watts' presentation of various experiences of enlightenment.

> The terms in which a man interprets this experience are naturally drawn from the religious and philosophical ideas of his culture, and their differences often conceal its basic identity. As water seeks the course of least resistance, so the emotions clothe themselves in the symbols that lie

most readily to hand, and the association is so swift and automatic that the symbol may appear to be the very heart of the experience. (19)

He continues:

As one and the same pain may be described either as a hot pang or as a cold sting, so the descriptions of this experience may take forms that seem to be completely opposed. One person may say that he has found the answer to the whole mystery of life, but somehow cannot put it into words. Another will say that there never was a mystery and thus no answer to it, for what the experience made clear to him was the irrelevance and artificiality of all our questions. One declares himself convinced that there is no death, his true self as eternal as the universe. Another states that death has simply ceased to matter, because the present moment is so complete that it requires no future. One feels himself taken up and united with a life infinitely other than his own. But as the beating of the heart may be regarded as something that *happens* to you or something that you *do*, depending on the point of view, so another will feel that he has experienced, not a transcendent God, but his own inmost nature. One will get the sense that his ego self has expanded to become the entire universe, whereas another will feel that he has lost himself altogether and that what he classed his ego was never anything but an abstraction. One will describe himself as infinitely enriched, while another will speak of being

> brought to such absolute poverty that he owns not even his mind and body, and has not a care in the world. (20)

Zen, like General Semantics, recognizes that human beings perceive the surrounding world through the senses. Because each individual is unique, we select, evaluate, reject, and ignore sensory information differently. Through recognizing that the process of abstraction is different for each individual, the Zen practitioner can gain a greater understanding of human communication and behavior, thereby improving the quality of life.

Dada

Like General Semantics and Zen, Dada also places great importance on the process of abstraction. The extensional qualities of the sound poems and the readymades create different meanings depending on the listener/viewer's personal experiences. The Dadaists recognized the importance of unique evaluations, and they used this to their advantage. In the Introduction to <u>Memoirs of a Dada Drummer</u>, Hans J. Kleinschmidt argues that:

> [Huelsenbeck] might even go along with Wittgenstein's belief that all theories based on empirical data, all attributions of meaning and significance to observed phenomena, are ultimately drawn "from an experience in ourselves." Dada philosophy seems to be expressed in Wittgenstein's remark: "What is true is that every view is significant for him who sees it—and in this sense every view is equally significant." (xxxviii)

The recognition of the process of abstraction—that each of us brings our own personal experiences in our creation of meaning—is a fundamental element of Dada art.

Like Kleinschmidt, Hugo Ball also addresses the importance of the process of abstraction. In his autobiography <u>Flight Out of Time: A Dada Diary</u>, Hugo Ball writes:

> Since dada is the movement, the experience, and the naiveté that sets great store on having common sense—viewing a table as a table and a plum as a plum—since dada is a nonrelationship to all things and therefore capable of relating to all things, *it opposes any ideology whatsoever*, i.e., any kind of warfare, any inhibition, any barrier. Since dada is inner elasticity and since it cannot understand how anyone could commit himself to anything—whether money or an idea—it serves as an example of a freedom of character totally devoid of claptrap. The dadaist is the freest human being on earth. The ideologist is any man who falls for the fraud perpetrated on him by his own intellect: that an idea, i.e. the symbol of momentarily perceived reality, can possess absolute reality; or that you can manipulate a collection of notions like a set dominoes. (xlviii)

This criticism that an idea ("the symbol of momentarily perceived reality") can become real to an individual, or that the intensional can erroneously be perceived as extensional through a faulty process of abstraction, forms the basis of General Semantics philosophy. Recognizing that each individual has his own unique process of abstraction, Ball continues: "The dadaist puts more trust in the honesty of events than in the wit of

people. . . . He no longer believes in the comprehension of things from one point of view" (66).

Marcel Duchamp also demonstrated an awareness of the process of abstraction through his readymades. Duchamp's readymades included such everyday objects as a bicycle wheel, a bottle rack, a snow shovel, a typewriter cover, a hat rack, and a urinal. These objects became works of art solely through the artist's definition. Responding to criticism hurled at his works, Duchamp defined most paintings as essentially readymades: "Since the tubes of paint used by an artist are manufactured and ready-made products we must conclude that all the paintings in the world are *ready-mades aided*" (qtd. in Richter 90). Duchamp thus forced the world to view art in an entirely new way by deliberately manipulating the process of abstraction to transform everyday functional objects into the greater concept of art.

Multiordinality

General Semantics

Human beings assign different meanings to the same word based upon the level of abstraction (or context) of the particular word; consequently, a single term may have multiple meanings. When the desired meaning is unclear, miscommunication can arise. General Semantics defines those words frequently used on many levels of abstraction as multiordinal terms. Among the most frequently used multiordinal terms are *yes, no, true, false, fact, reality, cause, effect, agreement, disagreement, proposition, order, structure, characteristics, love, hate,* and *doubt* (Korzybski, Science and Sanity 14). One of the

most common multiordinal terms is the word *reality*. At the Event level of the Structural

Differential, we may use the term *reality* to describe everything within and beyond our

perception. At the Object level, we may use the term *reality* to describe our own personal

views of the world around us. The confusing use of a single term to represent the

unknowable Event level (what-goes-on) and the abstracted Object level (what-I-infer-

goes-on) illustrates the problems which multiordinality presents.

Alfred Korzybski claims that he discovered the true properties of multiordinal

terms in 1925. Korzybski's non-Aristotelian infinite-valued logic (that propositions are

best examined in degrees of qualities or probabilities) reflects the scientific discoveries

(including relativity and quantum mechanics) of the early twentieth century. This logic

also refutes the traditional Aristotelian two-valued logic, where propositions were

deemed either right or wrong. Korzybski also asserts that, before his discovery,

multiordinal terms were assumed to be single-valued (or have only one "right" meaning).

He asserts that, through the awareness of the multiordinality of terms, infinite-valued

terms can be consciously abstracted into single-valued (meaningful) terms (Science and

Sanity 465). Of multiordinal terms, Korzybski writes:

> The main characteristic of these terms consists of the fact that on different
>
> levels of orders of abstractions they may have different meanings, with the
>
> result that they have no general meaning; for their meanings are
>
> determined solely by the given context, which establishes the different
>
> orders of abstractions. Psycho-logically, in the realization of the
>
> multiordinality of the most important terms, we have paved the way for

the specifically human full conditionality of our semantic responses.

(Science and Sanity 14)

Through our awareness of the process of abstraction, we can look to the particular context of a word and determine its particular level of abstraction. We can then more readily ascertain the meaning which the user of the word intended. Through recognizing and addressing multiordinal terms, we can improve our communication and the quality of our lives.

One of the extensional tools Korzybski devised to call attention to the multiordinality of terms is the use of quotation marks. Quotation marks around multiordinal words alert us (and those to whom we communicate) that the term should be regarded with caution. By writing multiordinal terms in quotation marks, such as "reality," "truth," "function," we can emphasize that the context of the word provides it with its meaning.

Through the principle of the multiordinality of terms, we can recognize that infinite-valued terms have different meanings depending on the order of abstraction. If the level of abstraction is not specified (i.e. if the word is taken out of its context), then the term is ambiguous. Korzybski states that all of our most important terms are multiordinal, and that multiordinality is inherent in the structure of human knowledge (Science and Sanity 74). The awareness of the multiordinality of terms provides the key to recognizing and understanding many of the contradictions and misunderstandings in human communication.

Zen

Zen recognizes the fundamental flaws and inherent ambiguity in the use of words to describe experiences. Much of Zen writing addresses the value of direct experience, and warns of the dangers which human communication (through language) presents. In Buddha's Golden Path, Dwight Goddard explicitly warns that all words posses multiple meanings, and that this multiordinality creates confusion: "Words in themselves are powerless to express ideas. . . . We never have exactly duplicate word meanings; some words have five or six or even more quite different meanings. . . . One must constantly keep in mind the differences between words, meaning, and the thing itself" (110-112).

In the koan (a word or phrase with no intellectual meaning) and the mondo (the master/pupil interview), Zen uses this multiordinality to its advantage. Both the koan and the mondo are used to force the mind to move beyond rational thought. Probably the most famous koan is "Has a dog Buddha-nature?" (to which Joshu answered "mu") or "What was your original face before your parents were born?" Christmas Humphreys describes the process of the mind's attempt to struggle with a koan and its possible multiplicity of meaning. First, the intellect tries unsuccessfully to solve the koan. Next, the mind futilely attempts to recognize or derive some type of symbolism, analogy, or metaphor in the koan. Tension begins to build as the mind tries to solve the insoluble. As Humphreys writes, "the engine of thought is forced down a narrowing corridor with high walls on either side—only to face a high wall at the end" (111). Finally, through great effort and struggle, the Zen student breaks through rational thought and recognizes the genuine essence of the koan.

The mondo similarly lies beyond the realm of reason and logic. The master/ student interview attempts to enhance intuition and push the mind beyond rational thought. As Humphreys writes, mondos "stop the mind from thinking and rouse it to *know*" (109). Because mondos are recorded moments of conversation between master and student, they are infinitely varied. Some are verbal joustings, while others are physical demonstrations. In <u>Zen: A Way of Life</u>, Humphreys retells several mondos.

> A teacher noticed that a pupil sat all day long in the crossed-leg position, meditation. 'What are you seeking in this way?' he asked. 'To become a Buddha.' The master took up a piece of brick and began to polish it on a stone. 'What are you doing, master?' 'Making a mirror.' 'You won't make a mirror by polishing a brick.' 'And no amount of sitting cross-legged will make you a Buddha,' replied the master. The story ends as the student asks what he should do instead. The master replies 'It is like driving a cart. When it won't move, do you whip the cart or the ox?' (112-113)

The following mondo continues the aim of inward understanding—an understanding which defies all reason or logic:

> Abbot-Roshi had to select a master for a new monastery. He summoned the monks, and placing a pitcher on the floor said, 'If you cannot call this a pitcher, what would you call it?' Said the chief monk, who hoped to get the appointment, 'You can't call it a stump.' But the cook got up and kicked the pitcher over. He got the job. (116)

Like General Semantics, Zen acknowledges the dangers which multiordinality presents in human communication. Unlike General Semantics, however, Zen uses multiordinality as a useful and enlightening tool. Koans and mondos appear to be irrational, nonsensical, paradoxical riddles. Because words cannot explain or convey the experience of satori, the Zen master must push the student to "a KNOWING beyond all thinking, a position at rest beyond and above and yet within the opposites and all duality" (Humphreys 102). As the Zen student attempts to derive some logical meaning from the multiordinal koans and mondos, the student is finally pushed beyond the futility of rational thought into an inward understanding.

Dada

Like the students of General Semantics and Zen Buddhism, the Dadaists strongly recognized the communication difficulties which multiordinality presents. The underlying philosophy of Kurt Schwitters' poetry parallels much of General Semantic theory. This becomes explicit in Schwitters' outline of Logically Consistent Poetry, a form of writing which transcends the multiordinality of language and attempts to convey directly the poet's intent. Schwitters asserts that all words (1) contain letter combinations, (2) have elements of sound, (3) possess denotation or significance, and (4) bear associations and ideas. Schwitters argues that Logically Consistent Poetry must be unequivocal. He thus addresses each of these characteristics to illustrate the misunderstandings which the multiordinality of words creates, and to support his defense of the *letter* (not the multiordinal *word*) as the basic element of his poetry. In General Semantics-like phrasing, he writes:

1. The sequence of letters in a word is unequivocal, the same for everyone. It is independent of the personal attitude of the beholder.

2. Sound is only unequivocal in the spoken word. In the written word, the sound depends on the capacity of the beholder to imagine it. Therefore sound can only be material for the reciting of poetry and not for the writing of poetry.

3. Meaning is only unequivocal when, for example, the object signified by the word is actually present. Otherwise it is dependent on the imaginative capacity of the beholder.

4. The association of ideas cannot be unequivocal because it is dependent solely on the associative capacity of the beholder. Everyone has different experiences and remembers and associates them differently. (qtd. in Richter 144)

First, Schwitters addresses the unique points of view and meaning which each of us brings to any given word. Second, he defines sound as arising from each individual reader's phonetic expression. Third, intensional meaning is distinct from the extensional object; the term "table" is an abstraction of those specific things upon which we set our coffee cup, pile tons of papers, place vases of flowers, etc. Fourth, he recognizes that each of us brings our own experiences and memories—those things which contribute to our individuality—to our formulations of associations and ideas. Considering these elements, Schwitters explains his method for creating clarity in art: "Logically consistent poetry is made up of letters. Letters have no conceptual content. Letters have no sound

in themselves, they only contain possibilities of sounds, which may be interpreted by the performer" (qtd. in Richter 149).

This aim of clarity in art is further emphasized in his comparison of the aims of abstract poets and Dada painters. He states that "the end pursued by abstract poetry is pursued, logically, by Dadaist painters, who, in their pictures, evaluate object against object by sticking or nailing them down side by side. Concepts are easier to evaluate in this way than they are when signified indirectly by words" (qtd. in Richter 148-49). This attention to precision in art strongly parallels the General Semantics and Zen approach to addressing multiordinality inherent in language.

Non-Elementalism

General Semantics

The term elementalism refers to the tendency of language to separate objects, events, and concepts that cannot actually be separated in everyday experience. This artificial separation of terms creates a structure of language which conflicts with the structure of the extensional (non-verbal) world, thereby leading to misunderstanding and miscommunication. Frequently used elemental terms include *mind* and *body*, *observer* and *observed*, *thinking* and *feeling*, and *space* and *time*. Korzybski writes of the importance of constructing a non-elemental (or non-el) language structure:

In 1933, the general tendency of science . . . is to build languages which take into consideration the many important invariant relations, a condition made possible only by the use of non-el languages. In my case, I must

construct a non-el language in which 'senses' and 'mind,' 'emotions' and 'intellect,' are no longer to be verbally split, because a language in which they are split is not similar in structure to the known empirical facts, and all speculations in such an *el* language must be misleading. (Science and Sanity 30)

He continues:

As 'knowledge,' 'understanding,' and such functions are solely relational, and, therefore, structural, the unconditional and inherent condition for adjustment on all human levels depends on building languages of similar structure to the experimental facts. Once this is accomplished, all the former desirable semantic consequences follow automatically. (Science and Sanity 130)

To create a non-elemental structure of language, Korzybski used the extensional tool of hyphenation to link typically separate words. Through this extensional tool, artificially separate terms become transformed into such holistic non-elemental terms as *mind-body, observer-observed, thinking-feeling, space-time*, and *organism-as-a-whole-in-an-environment*. The linked terms remind us that we cannot physically or empirically separate these elements, as they are functionally interrelated. Korzybski writes: "In dealing with ourselves and the world around us, we must take into account the structural fact that everything in this world is strictly interrelated with everything else, and so we must make efforts to discard primitive *el* terms, which imply structurally a non-existing isolation" (Science and Sanity 108). Of the value of non-elementalism, he concludes:

"The non-el principle formulates a structural character inherently found in the structure of the world, ourselves, and our nervous system on all levels; the knowledge and application of which is unconditionally necessary for adjustment on all levels, and, therefore, in humans, for sanity" (Science and Sanity 130). Through non-elementalism, therefore, the structure of language more clearly reflects the structure of physical and biological processes.

Zen

Zen addresses the principle of non-elementalism through its emphasis on structural relationships. Later writers such as Alan Watts describe the methods and language of modern science as an improved means of expressing process and interconnection. As an example, Watts describes the great debates of western philosophy (realism v. nominalism, idealism v. materialism, free will v. determinism) as issues arising from the artificial linguistic separation of concepts which cannot be separated extensionally. In This Is It and Other Essays on Zen and Spiritual Experience, Watts writes: "We get into conflicts and debates about these problems because our language and our way of thinking are somewhat clumsy in their grasp of relationship. In other words, because it is much easier for us to see opposites as mutually exclusive than as mutually interdependent" (53). He continues this discussion in applying the ideas of modern science to eastern philosophy:

> The sensation I am trying to describe is the experience of things and events in relationship, as distinct from the partial experience of things and events in separation. I have sometimes said that if we could translate the

modern Western theory of relativity into experience, we should have what

the Chinese and the Indians call the Absolute—as when they say that

everything which happens is the Tao, or that all things are of one

"suchness." What they mean is that all things are in relation, and thus

that—considered simply by itself—no thing, no event, has any reality.

(53)

He urges us to reject the elementalism of language and to adopt a more extensional

orientation—a theme present in many of Watts' writings. Of the aim of This Is It and

Other Essays, he writes:

> The whole point of these essays is to show the fallacy of this opposition,
>
> to show that the spiritual is not to be separated from the material, nor the
>
> wonderful from the ordinary. We need, above all, to disentangle ourselves
>
> from habits of speech and thought which set the two apart, making it
>
> impossible for us to see that *this*—the immediate, everyday, and present
>
> experience—is IT, the entire and ultimate point for the existence of a
>
> universe. (11)

He asserts that we must remain aware that we frequently and erroneously use language to

separate that which cannot be separated in experience. The awareness of the errors of

elementalism becomes more apparent as Zen students realize that they are inseparable

from the greater universe. When Zen students recognize this interconnectedness:

> It is not that the outlines and shapes which we *call* things and use to
>
> delineate things disappear into some sort of luminous void. It simply

becomes obvious that though they may be used as divisions they do not really divide. However much I may be impressed by the difference between a star and the dark space around it, I must not forget that I can see the two only in relation to each other, and that this relation is inseparable. (36)

John Daido Loori similarly asserts a philosophy of non-elementalism: "Master Dogen said that 'Practice and enlightenment are one.' What that means is that zazen, the process undertaken to reach enlightenment, and enlightenment itself are the same thing. When you sit, you manifest the enlightenment of all Buddhas" (23-24). Like Watts, Loori also recognizes the linguistic errors—and corresponding philosophical errors—of elementalism: "We tend to look at truth as one side and lies as the other side. We see two distinct polarities. Or we elevate truth to some sort of absolute constant, as if there were a reference book of truth somewhere in the heavens and all things could be checked against it" (91). He continues:

> From the absolute point of view, to even give rise to the thought that there is such a thing as truth or falsity violates the precept. That is what Bodhidharma meant when he said, "Not speaking even a single word is called the precept of refraining from telling lies." An old master once said, "If anyone said that truth and falsehood are two separate things, this is also deluded speech." These are two parts of the same reality; one cannot exist without the other. (93)

While Zen acknowledges the existence of such elements as cause and effect, good and bad, enlightenment and delusion, it emphasizes their relationship of interdependence. Thus Zen recognizes western dualistic thinking as a form of elementalism—the artificial verbal and conceptual separation of objects, events, or ideas which does not exist in the experiential world. Elemental Aristotelian classification schemes (such as true/false and good/evil) are convenient tools for organizing information, but they are faulty in their artificial and false implications. In the "Faith Mind Poem," Chao-chou summarizes the importance of non-elemental, non-Aristotelian thinking and language:

The Way is perfect, like vast space where nothing is lacking and nothing is in excess.

Indeed, it is due to our choosing to accept or reject that we do not see the true nature of things.

Live neither in the entanglements of outer things nor in the inner feelings of emptiness.

Be serene in the oneness of things.

(. . .)Do not remain in the dualistic state.

Avoid such pursuits carefully.

If there is even a trace of this and that, right and wrong, mind essence will be lost in confusion. (qtd. in Loori 162)

Like General Semantics, Zen addresses the principle of non-elementalism through its emphasis on structural relationships. Zen asserts that separate objects and events exist

only in relation to one another. The Zen practitioner thus overcomes restrictive, dualistic Aristotelian thinking and gains an awareness of non-elementalism. This non-elementalism, typically referred to as the "Way," the "Absolute," or the "Void," serves as a primary component of Zen.

Dada

Outraged by the destruction of western civilization and culture, the Dadaists attempted to establish an entirely new way of thinking. Furthering the cause on non-elementalism, Hans Richter wrote of Dada's essential "theses, anti-theses and a-theses" (34), while Tristan Tzara recognized that "order = disorder; self = not-self; affirmation = negation" (qtd. in Richter 34). Many Dadaists abandoned the elemental separation of art and life, and began to view their lives as art. The most notable examples of Dadaist non-elementalism can be found in Marcel Duchamp's readymades and in his alter-ego Rrose Selavey. Duchamp asserted that works of art could be designated (rather than produced) by the artist; consequently, he elevated everyday objects to the level of art merely by his definition. Additionally, he created a persona named Rrose Selavey as a means of merging art with life. He thus destroyed the traditional elementalism of art by associating non-art with art, and art with life.

The non-elemental ideas of Hans Richter are apparent not only in the title of his autobiography Dada: Art and Anti-Art but also throughout the work itself. While Dada art encompassed a variety of forms, it was fundamentally based on the principle of non-elementalism.

> [Dada] arose from the rejection of what needed to be rejected. This
> rejection arose from a desire for intellectual and spiritual freedom.
> However differently this freedom may have expressed itself in each of
> us ... we were all propelled by the same powerful vital impulse. It drove
> us to the fragmentation or destruction of all artistic forms, and to rebellion
> for rebellion's sake; to an anarchistic negation of all values, a self-
> exploding bubble, a raging *anti-, anti, anti,* linked with an equally
> passionate *pro, pro, pro!* Thus we let sense escape into the realm of
> nonsense, although it never left that of the senses. Ball's idea of the
> *Gesamtkunstwerk* (total work of art) played a part in this; the interplay of
> different arts was maintained in all our activities. (Richter 35)

In a very General Semantics- and Zen-like manner, Richter continues:

> Dada took hold of something that can neither be grasped nor explained
> within the conventional framework of 'either/or.' It was just this
> conventional 'yes/no' thinking that Dada was trying to blow sky high.
> This radical attack on dualistic thought was in the very nature of the
> movement. The liberation and expansion of thought and feeling was to be
> followed by the integration of both in verse, in painting, and in musical
> sound. "Reason is a part of feeling, and feeling is a part of reason" (Arp).
> As soon as this premise is accepted, the contradictions of Dada resolve
> themselves and a picture of the world takes shape in which, besides
> 'causal' experiences, others that were previously unknown and

unmentioned find a place. Laws appear which include within themselves

the negation of law. (60)

He continues his emphasis on non-elementalism by asserting the primacy of

relationships over form. "Form," he writes, "could be placed in context only by its

opposite, and could be brought to life only by the establishment of an inner relationship

between the two opposites. This was the only way to create a unity, that is to say, an

artistic whole" (64). He defines this unity of opposites as *contingence*, and concludes:

> Our scientific and technological age had forgotten that this contingence
>
> constituted an essential principle of life and of experience, and that reason
>
> with all its consequences was inseparable from *un*reason with all its
>
> consequences. The myth that everything in the world can be rationally
>
> explained had been gaining ground since the time of Descartes. An
>
> inversion was necessary to restore the balance. The realization that reason
>
> and anti-reason, sense and nonsense, design and chance, consciousness
>
> and unconsciousness, belong together as necessary parts of a whole—this
>
> was the central message of Dada. (64)

Thus, like General Semantics and Zen, Dada places a fundamental emphasis on the

relationships among such components as non-art, art, and life. The Dadaists opposed the

elementalism which western Aristotelian logic presents, and incorporated a synergistic

non-elemental approach to art and life.

Semantic Reaction

General Semantics

The non-elementalism of mind and body discussed above becomes even more clear as we recognize that human beings respond both emotionally and physically to the meaning of words. This emotional-biological response to the perceived "meaning" of objects, events, or concepts usually arises from the meaning we derive from words rather than from the actual thing itself. This is most easily recognized in emotionally-charged words such as "conservative," "liberal," "racism," "affirmative action," "illegal immigration," etc. The psychological responses can include anger and frustration, and the physiological responses can include changes in muscle tension, digestive fluid, and adrenaline levels. General Semantics defines such emotional and biological responses to symbolic input as semantic reaction (often abbreviated as *s.r*). Korzybski describes the importance of our awareness of non-elementalism and its relation to semantic reaction:

> The working tool of psychophysiology is found in the semantic reaction.
> This can be described as the psycho-logical reaction of a given individual
> to words and language and other symbols and events in connection with
> their meanings, and the psycho-logical reactions, which become meanings
> and relational configurations the moment the given individual begins to
> analyse them or somebody else does that for him. It is of great
> importance to realize that the term 'semantic' is non-elementalistic, as it
> involves conjointly the 'emotional' as well as the 'intellectual' factors.
> (Science and Sanity 24)

Through the tool of General Semantics, Korzybski asserts, the (seemingly) unavoidable

neurologic tendency of semantic reaction can be controlled. In a simple, straightforward

Zen-like manner, Korzybski writes:

> [W]hat could be simpler or more 'common sense' than the [non-
>
> Aristotelian] premise that an object is *not* words; yet, to my knowledge,
>
> no one fully applies this, or has fully acquired the corresponding s.r .
>
> Without first acquiring the new s.r, it is impossible to discover this error
>
> and corresponding s.r in others; but as soon as we have trained ourselves,
>
> it becomes so obvious that it is impossible to miss it. . . . All scientific
>
> discoveries involve s.r, and so, once formulated, and the new reactions
>
> acquired, the discoveries become 'common sense,' and we often wonder
>
> why these discoveries were so slow in coming in spite of their
>
> 'obviousness.' (Science and Sanity 28)

Korzybski asserts that this notion—that s.r seems obvious—is evidence of semantic

reaction. He argues that our tendency towards faulty semantic reaction arises from our

historical absence of structural (psychological, physiological, scientific, and linguistic)

investigations and consciousness of abstracting (Science and Sanity 28). He considers

identification, or the confusion of the orders of abstractions, as extremely harmful. He

promotes the non-Aristotelian system as it eliminates the dangers of stasis and identity.

He continues:

> Any identification, at any level, or of any orders, represents a

non-survival s.r which leads invariably to the reversal of the natural

survival order, and becomes the foundation for general improper

evaluation, and, therefore, general lack of adjustment, no matter whether

the maladjustment is subtle as in daily life, or whether it is aggravated as

in cases of schizophrenia. A non-aristotelian system, by a complete

elimination of 'identity' and identification, supplies simple yet effective

means for the elimination by preventive education of this general source

of maladjustment. (Science and Sanity 187)

Korzybski thus asserts that the methods of General Semantics reduce the likelihood of

semantic reaction. Korzybski argues that the semantic problems of correct symbolism

underlie human existence and that, similarly, incorrect symbolism undermines the

construction of what Korzybski considers a truly human civilization (Science and Sanity

84). Semantic reaction, therefore, must be overcome so that improved communication

and quality of life can be achieved.

Zen

Like those of General Semantics, the methods of Zen allow the practitioner to

recognize that the world as experienced through the senses is a world of conditions.

Sensory information can be observed through conscious awareness, where some

information is accepted, some rejected, some ignored, and some unnoticed. If the

practitioner pays conscious awareness to such conditions as fears or negative thoughts,

then these conditions can have no power over the practitioner. In The Mind and the Way,

Sumedho writes of this awareness in a manner reminiscent of the General Semantics

phrase "the map is not the territory." Sumedho writes: "Hence we say the mind is like a mirror: it reflects everything. But the reflections are not the mirror. The ugliest thing can come up in front of a mirror without harming it. Maybe the reflection isn't nice to see, but it's only a reflection" (107). Sumedho thus clearly recognizes the human tendency of semantic reaction and the importance of its potential harm.

Christmas Humphreys similarly emphasizes the importance of actual experience of events/processes rather than on those symbols (words) that merely describe or represent experience. He recognizes that although words are necessary for communication, they are not a substitute for experience; in fact, words are inherently inaccurate and incomplete. In Zen: A Way of Life, he writes:

> Words are sounds or marks of agreed meaning in terms of ideas or
> thoughts or feelings. They are symbols. When, therefore, we wish to
> transmit to another some spiritual experience, we must descend to the
> level of thought and wrap our discovery in the opaque material of thought
> and feeling in order to hand it to our friend. The friend must unwrap the
> symbol and extract for his own understanding whatever is left of the actual
> experience. This three-legged process must be repeated for the reply.
> 'How can I describe it?' we say to a friend of a sunset or a ballet or a book
> just read. How can I, save by this clumsy process of transmitted symbol?
> Will any symbol suffice to transmit the experience of being in love, or the
> fear of imminent death, or Satori? (94)

The convolutions required to describe experiences are inefficient and typically erroneous. Compounding this problem is the human tendency of semantic reaction, which he illustrates through the example of concepts. Humphreys defines concepts as "thought wrapped up in agreed symbols" (94). Due to their representational nature, concepts are "second-hand, and dead, as a bucket of river-water is dead in relation to the flow that is the river. These concepts are the bricks of thought, with which we build a hovel or palace of thought, in speech or novel or play. They are made of the substance of thought in a form which has meaning to those who know that language and to no others" (94). Although concepts are static generalizations, they become powerful (and dangerous) through faulty semantic reaction. To communicate, we give words meaning; it is faulty semantic reaction, however, that gives words their power. He continues:

> Yet these thoughts are things, containing a greater or less degree of life. A curse pronounced with full venom of hate behind it is a powerful weapon, as powerful on its own plane as a javelin on the body; the same curse may be no more than a conventional expression of mild annoyance. In the same way a blessing may be a mouthful of words, or a force for good directed with great knowledge. Thoughts are indeed things, but powerful by the force which they encapsule. Only to this extent have they any power; for the rest Jung was right when he greatly said that 'no concept is a carrier of life.' (94)

Humphreys recognizes that words are powerful due to (1) the meanings we give assign and (2) the human tendency to react to these meanings. He reminds us that words are

simply symbols to which we may respond differently. Thus, like the student of General

Semantics, the student of Zen recognizes the human tendency for semantic reaction and

attempts to minimize its impact.

Dada

The General Semantics principle of semantic reaction is clearly apparent in the

work of the Dadaists. Recognizing the human tendency to react to intensional terms, the

Dadaists became the artistic masters of symbol manipulation. Among the most notorious

and provocative of these artists was Marcel Duchamp. In using (and breaking through

the barriers of) semantic reaction, Duchamp developed an entirely new approach to

twentieth century western art.

In his attempt to force the art world to view art in a new way, Duchamp conceived

of the readymades, or everyday objects reclassified as art. The first of these subversive

objects was the Bicycle Wheel (1913), comprised of a bicycle wheel and fork mounted

upside-down on a kitchen stool. Next was his Bottle Rack (1914), a store-bought

galvanized iron rack which Duchamp declared as art by signing his name to it. Other

works included the snow-shovel In Advance of the Broken Arm (1915), the typewriter

cover Traveller's Folding Item (1916), the metal Comb (1916) inscribed with the date

and time of its selection as an art object, and Hat Rack (1917). With the exception of the

Bicycle Wheel, each of these items was to be suspended from a ceiling to create a sense

of weightlessness and to enhance their identification as art (Moure 17). Among his most

provocative works was the urinal Fountain (1917), which he signed "R. Mutt" and

submitted to the first Independents Exhibition in New York. Each of these readymades effectively served to provoke an angry reaction in the viewer.

Duchamp delighted in stimulating responses of outrage in the art world. In addition to displacing objects from their ordinary and logical context, Duchamp also took great joy in displacing multiordinal words in order to provoke a semantic reaction. He writes: "If you introduce a familiar word into an alien atmosphere, you have something comparable to distortion in painting, something surprising and new. . . . [One discovers] unexpected meanings attached to the interrelationships of disparate words. . . . Sometimes four or five different levels of meaning come through" (qtd. in Schwarz 31). This displacement becomes apparent in his mastery of the pun. One of his more notorious works was a reproduction of Leonardo da Vinci's <u>Mona Lisa</u>, but with the addition of a moustache. To provoke a semantic reaction in the viewer, he entitled the work <u>L.H.O.O.Q.</u> The French pronunciation of these letters intentionally sounds like "elle ha chaud coule," or "she's got a hot ass." Similarly, Duchamp's attempt to destroy the elemental separation of art and life by creating the female alter-ego Rrose Selavey also deliberately provokes semantic reaction. The French pronunciation of this name sounds like "eros c'est la vie," or "lust is life." It is clear that, by removing words from their ordinary logical context and relating them to other ideas, Duchamp effectively uses multiordinality to provoke the human tendency of semantic reaction. Like the proponents of General Semantics and Zen, the Dadaists recognized the human tendency of semantic reaction. They effectively used this tendency to (1) provoke the art world into seeing art in an entirely new way, and (2) redefine art entirely.

CHAPTER 4

CONCLUSION

Whole systems thinking, through the methods and tools of the sciences and the humanities, aims to understand the process of dynamic systems. Whole systems thinking incorporates holonomics, or the awareness that human knowledge is holistic (simultaneously rational and non-rational, logical and non-logical, scientific and artistic, etc.). From the viewpoint of holonomics, all objects, events, and concepts are interrelated.

The modern linguistic philosophy of General Semantics, the traditional eastern philosophy of Zen, and the modern art movement of Dada initially appear to be distinct phenomena with very different characteristics and aims. In <u>Levels of Knowing and Existence: Studies in General Semantics</u>, Harry L. Weinberg reinforces this notion by explicitly stating the incompatibility of General Semantics and Zen. A holonomic examination of these three disciplines, however, reveals that they share a fundamental core.

General Semantics recognizes five key concepts in its approach to improving human communication: extension, abstraction, multiordinality, non-elementalism, and semantic reaction. The first concept—extension—arises from a modern scientific view of the universe (and all of life) as continually in flux. In an attempt to bring language closer to actual dynamic human experience, General Semantics promotes extensional

57

descriptions, or examples which appeal to our senses and experiences. Indexing and dating are two tools by which we can reinforce the unique and dynamic qualities of objects, events, and concepts, thereby reorienting our language and perceptions in a more extensional way. Zen similarly asserts the importance of an extensional orientation through its emphasis on direct pointing, or the actual experience of enlightenment. Zen uses such extensional tools as zazen as a fundamental part of the enlightenment process. Dada also emphasizes extension in its attempt to bring art into the sphere of everyday life and individual experience. This is particularly evident in the use of sound poems, which transformed representational language into presentational language, and in Marcel Duchamp's readymades, which redefined everyday utilitarian objects as art.

General Semantics identifies the second fundamental concept—abstraction—as it relates to the process of acquiring knowledge. Human beings process information by focusing on particular pieces of this information. Some of these pieces are selected, while others are rejected, ignored, or unnoticed. Through a consciousness of abstraction, made apparent through the Structural Differential, we can recognize the uniqueness of each individual's perceptions and understandings. This awareness improves the quality of our interactions and our lives. The concept of abstraction plays a fundamental role in the philosophy of Zen, as Zen recognizes that human beings perceive the surrounding world through the senses. Many Zen writers, including Alan Watts, Albert Low, and John Daido Loori emphasize the uniqueness of each individual's process of abstraction. The Dadaists similarly recognized the importance of the process of abstraction, which Hugo Ball defined as "the symbol of momentarily perceived reality." The Dadaists

recognized that the extensional qualities of the sound poems and the readymades intentionally create different meanings depending on the listener/viewer's personal experiences.

The third fundamental concept of General Semantics is multiordinality, or the awareness that human beings assign different meanings to the same word based upon the level of abstraction (or context) of the particular word. When the desired meaning of a word is unclear, miscommunication can arise. Multiordinal terms become apparent in non-Aristotelian logic, where propositions are examined in *degrees of qualities or probabilities*. Through recognizing multiordinal terms, we can exert greater awareness and control over semantic responses and improve our quality of life. Much of Zen writing addresses the value of direct experience, and warns of the dangers which language presents. In the koan and mondo, however, Zen deliberately uses multiordinality to its advantage. By forcing the mind to move beyond logical thought, these non-rational phrases and discourses push the student to "a knowing beyond all thinking." The Dadaists similarly recognized the communication difficulties which multiordinality presents. In his outline of Logically Consistent Poetry, Kurt Schwitters attempted to transcend the multiordinality of language. By reducing the fundamental component of poetry from the *word* to the *letter*, Schwitters attempted to create a new clarity in art.

The fourth component of General Semantics—non-elementalism—attempts to remedy the tendency of language to separate objects, events, and concepts that cannot be separated in everyday experience. To create a non-elemental language structure,

Korzybski used the extensional tool of hyphenation to link typically separate words. Through this extensional tool, artificially separate terms become transformed into such holistic terms as mind-body, observer-observed, thinking-feeling, space-time, and organism-as-a-whole-in-an-environment. The linked terms remind us that we cannot physically or empirically separate these elements, as they are functionally interrelated. Through non-elementalism, the structure of language more closely reflects the structure of physical and biological processes. Zen addresses the principle of non-elementalism through its emphasis on structural relationships. Zen thus recognizes western dualistic thinking as an artificial separation of objects, events, and ideas which does not exist in the experiential world. Zen acknowledges the existence of such elements as cause and effect, good and bad, enlightenment and delusion, but it emphasizes their non-Aristotelian relationship of interdependence. The Dadaists similarly asserted non-elementalism though attempting to unify art and life. Such artists as Tristan Tzara, Hans Richter, and Hugo Ball wrote of the necessity to reconcile order/disorder, self/not-self, affirmation/negation, art/anti-art, anti/pro, reason/feeling, and art/life. Hans Richter defined this non-elementalism as *contingence*, or the necessary reunification of opposites.

The fifth component of General Semantics—semantic reaction—asserts that the emotional-biological response to the perceived "meaning" of objects, events, or concepts typically arises from the meaning *we* derive from words rather than from the actual thing itself. Through General Semantics, this (seemingly) unavoidable neurologic tendency can be controlled, and improved communication and quality of life can be achieved. Zen similarly asserts that the world as experienced through the senses is a world of

conditions. Through a conscious awareness of fears or negative thoughts, the Zen student can overcome these conditions. Many Zen writers acknowledge that words are powerful due to the meanings we assign and our tendency to react to these meanings. They further emphasize that words are merely symbols to which each individual may uniquely respond. Zen thus recognizes the human tendency for semantic reaction and attempts to minimize its impact. Like the proponents of General Semantics an Zen, the Dadaists recognized the human tendency of semantic reaction. Through displacing objects and words from their ordinary and logical context, the Dadaists effectively provoked semantic reaction. In doing so, they created an entirely new definition of the term art.

Despite the historical and conceptual differences among General Semantics, Zen, and Dada, each discipline promotes a conscious awareness of the limitations of human language. Zen and Dada attempt to address this limitation in ways corresponding to the five components outlined in General Semantics. It is thus clear that, from the viewpoint of holonomics, these three very different disciplines share a fundamental and unifying core: each acknowledges the value of extension, the consciousness of abstraction, the inherent qualities of multiordinality, the necessity of non-elementalism, and the dangers of semantic reaction.

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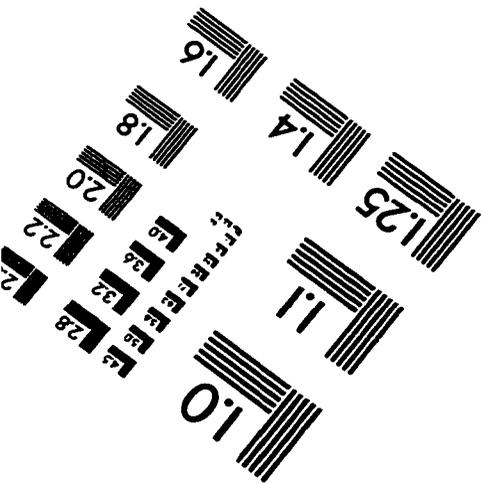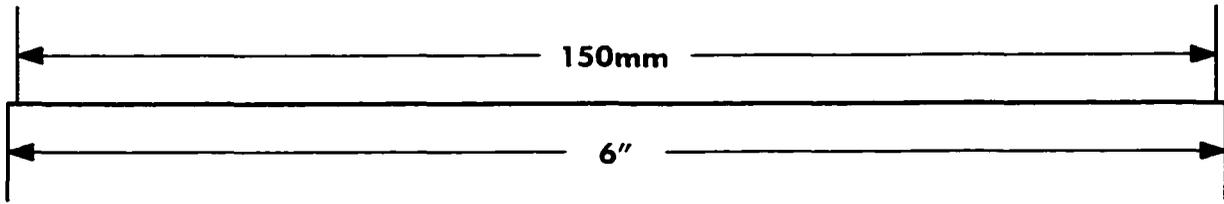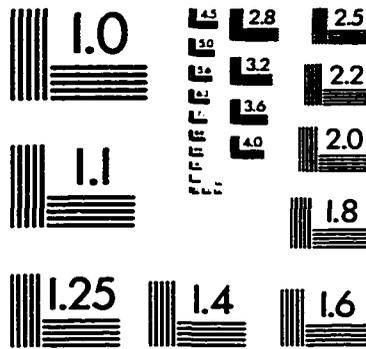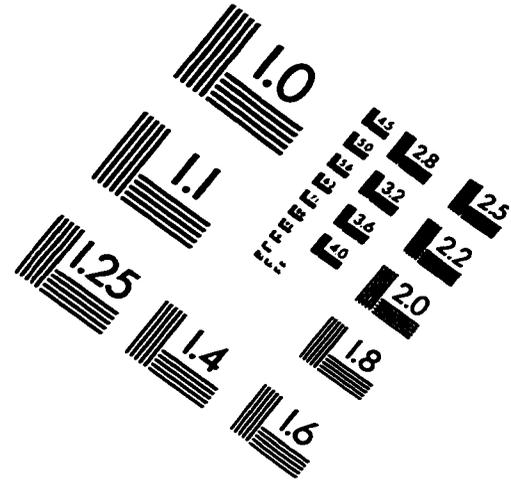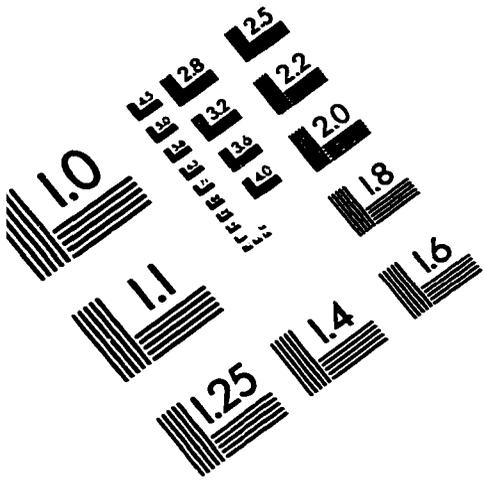
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