

Samuel Bois was born in 1892 and died in 1978. He was a distinguished member of the "second generation" of general semanticists that also included Wendell Johnson, S. I. Hayakawa, and Anatol Rapoport. This issue of Et cetera commemorates Bois' centennial with a reminiscence by his associate Ethel Longstreet and a collection of excerpts from his writings selected by Gary David. JK

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HOMMAGE a SAMUEL BOIS †

On a fine November day in 1945 late in the afternoon, I was landed on an airstrip in southern Japan. From there a jeep was to take me over the mountains to join a ship which lay in Nagasaki harbor. I can even remember the tune that was coming from the ship. It was a dance tune popular in 1945. It was called "Is You Is Or Is You Ain't My Baby?"

—From *Science and Human Values* by Jacob Bronowski.

AS THE FRAGRANCE of the Madeleine tea cakes inspired Marcel Proust's *Remembrance of Things Past*, so the dance tune came to me on a fine November afternoon in 1985, forty years after Nagasaki, when a question was put to me by a young man in a class I taught at the University of Southern California called *General Semantics and Writing for Films*: "How is this subject relevant?"

How is this relevant? "Is you is or is you ain't my baby?" With a welling up of feeling came a rush of heat to my eyes. Not only a remembrance of things past, but a surge of passion for the immediacy of things present encompassing a past and an anticipated future. Relevance...I put this ques-

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† Adapted from an address delivered at the 1988 general semantics conference held at Yale University.

tion to myself. What moves me to stand here on a fine afternoon forty years after Nagasaki? What have I to offer (in Stephen Sondheim's words) "a later generation which knows all the hell that was going to break loose?" I have myself, my passion, my time-binding capacity, my movement which brought me to this day.

Today, science and the scientific method have been accepted by an overwhelming majority of educated people in western and eastern cultures. We know that evolution, with variations, is a theory we accept as a "given"; that we live in a world of processes...on the move. Even Galileo has been reinstated into the Church. We postulate that all we know is "structure": things, people, and events in relation to one another.

We know that our language and symbolic activities shape and structure our perceptions, our experience, and our behavior. We see through a semantic screen darkly or brightly in relation to our individual and unique "structured unconscious" (as Bois put it). We cannot perform any act without "disturbing the universe." We feel that events have peripheral dimensions for which we require peripheral vision; and that no technological advances, no chants of love will save us. We will have to create new maps to take our bearings, "and need a new star to steer her by."

I was introduced to Samuel Bois in 1957 by S. I. Hayakawa. Bois had recently retired and had moved to Southern California. He was already, and I quote him, "released from the Catholic Clergy by privilege." Born in 1892, he received his B.A. from Laval University in Quebec, and was ordained a Catholic priest. Eventually, he took his Masters and Doctoral degrees from McGill University in Montreal. After the second World War, in which he served as a Lt. Colonel in charge of Research and Information, he shifted his professional activities to industrial psychology, while continuing to work for the development of psychology in Canada.

Bois relates that he came across Korzybski's *Science and Sanity* in 1939 and took a seminar with him in 1945. In 1947, 1948, and 1949, Bois lectured at the seminars conducted by Korzybski, and in 1950, after Korzybski's death, he conducted the regular seminar in Korzybski's stead. Bois became a Vice-

President and Trustee of the Institute of General Semantics, and served on the Board of the International Society for General Semantics, becoming a frequent contributor to the *Bulletin* and *ETC.*, the respective journals of these organizations.

I had invited Hayakawa to address *Viewpoints Forum* — a platform for thinkers, scholars, and dreamers. I founded the Forum in 1957 after working for Linus Pauling's efforts to block the detonation of the H Bomb; and after the American people had decided for the second time that "Adlai Stevenson didn't have it."

When Hayakawa became unavailable for the scheduled date, I invited Bois to speak. He read my brochures, and being cautious, attended a few of the bimonthly meetings of the Forum. Bois approved of the company we kept and agreed to address us: His subject, *Man, the Semantic Reactor*. The talk was interesting, the French accent intriguing, but even our sophisticated audience was not prepared to receive what Bois was talking about, nor was I.

After the talk, Bois invited me to attend his seminars in *Executive Semantics*. I began to see some light and with it the realization that creativity was not contagious, however we might explain it: the creative leaps of a Linus Pauling, a Harrison Brown, or an Aldous Huxley were special intuitive techniques of very special people. I knew then where I wanted to direct my movement: toward general semantics, a teachable, learnable, general system of evaluating for order-meaning-values and behavior. Bois' development of the matrix *A Semantic Transactor* was a path through the tangled forest of specializations into a clearing with a view of the whole. I was beginning to understand what was meant by "being born again." In October, 1959, Samuel Bois and I joined in a symbiotic relationship: Bois as Director of Education and Research and I as Executive Director of *Viewpoints Institute*: a center for guided awareness, where the recent sciences of man, the new art forms, and general semantics were used to facilitate self-understanding, self-acceptance, and self-management.

Bois published his first book, *Explorations in Awareness*, in 1957, and four subsequent books during the almost twenty years he participated at Viewpoints Institute: *The Art of*

Awareness, Communication as Creative Experience, Breeds of Men, and, finally, *Epistemics*, the science-art of innovating, or as he often called it, a guiding system through behavioral space.

Bois carried a heavy teaching schedule. We worked together offering daytime and evening classes at Viewpoints, at conferences, seminars, at many colleges, universities, and private institutions in Southern California. Gary David and Ada Beth Lee were two of the creative teachers developed at Viewpoints, and thousands of students have attested to the value of their experience there.

A short time before Sam's death in 1978, we were sitting in a dry room in a dry place in the desert, with Sam very frail and quiet. He held my hands in his delicately boned fingers, looked up at me and asked "Ethel, what has kept us working together all these years?" I sensed his puzzlement and his trust and affection.

I knew that my answer was important to him. I smiled and answered "Sam, I've always known; we share a dream in common." The old man's tears came slowly and brought on my own.

A coincidence became a "marker" for me. Before I had heard of General Semantics or Bois, he had published *Explorations in Awareness*. In my first prospectus for Viewpoints Forum in 1957 and in Bois' *Explorations* at the very end, we had both quoted the same paragraph of Jean Paul Sartre.

The serious error is to think that the word is a gentle breeze which plays lightly over the surface of things, which grazes them without altering them; and that the speaker is a pure witness who sums up with a word his harmless contemplation. To speak is to act; anything which one names is already no longer the same, it has lost its innocence.

At a seminar for the California Teachers' Association in 1971, Bois distributed a paper to the participants: "What Our Work In General Semantics Is About." I saw it then as an attempt to go beyond formulations, models, or systems into an episteme of participation. I will read only a few paragraphs:

It is not a matter of changing the world around us, but a matter of making the most of that limited part of the world that is within our field of influence: Our Own Self.

It is not a matter of imposing on the rest of humankind our technology and our way of life, but a matter of making available to all inhabitants of this planet the most advanced mental and physical tools that may bring about abundance, peace, and self-actualization.

It is not a matter of repudiating as altogether false former myths, religions, and theories, but a matter of extracting from these earlier systems what kernels of everlasting wisdom they kept wrapped up in formulations that are now obsolete.

We do not belong to any group that binds us together in a common religion, profession, pressure group, or political party. But we undoubtedly have something in common, not easily expressed in sharp formulation, perhaps, but surely effective at the preconscious level, otherwise, we would not gather together to participate in a common experience.

RELEVANT? IS YOU IS OR IS YOU AIN'T MY BABY?

Adieu, mon ami,

Adieu, mes amies.