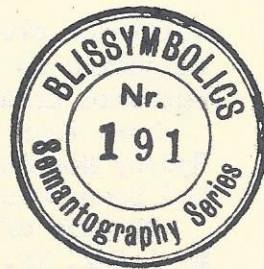


NEW ADDRESS
'BLISS' INSTITUTE
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Semantography Series No. 191.

SEMANTOGRAPHY AND THE ROAD SAFETY

AUTHORITIES.

(see also Sem. Series Issues No. 26, 113, 138, 144, 146.)

This is the last issue dealing with the incredible phenomenon that I have been unable to get permission to demonstrate my symbols for road safety before the competent committee, not before an underling or upperling who does not make the decision, but the whole committee which decides ^{on} road warning signs. I have tried for over 10 years to get this permission. I have repeatedly stated that I do not want any money, nor a post, nor anything, except a demonstration of my Semantography by which every possible warning and more can be shown in almost self-explanatory symbols. Hardly a day passes without a smash-up on a dangerous intersection, or on a level crossing. I have advocated an idea on which the taxpayer of Australia need not spend a single penny for adequate warnings and protection on the road. I have shown that important motor & tyre firms would only be too glad to erect warning systems, and even traffic lights, in return for a visible sign somewhere that Dunlop or Goodyear, or General Motors have erected this or ^{signs} that manufacturers thought it a good idea to use the main space for their ad for some good advice on road safety. But the money thus spent would have been better spent on frequent road warning signs in Semantography. The meanings of the symbols should always be printed in smaller form underneath, as for instance WINDING ROAD, and underneath on a separate board in even smaller print Donated by Dunlop. The symbols in themselves are sheer simplicity ^{and} should be the overall impression when approached by a motorist, who would see and recognise it even in fog, rain, darkness and even drunkenness. Thus millions spent on newspaper ads would be put to ^{on} much better and permanent use.

But my request for a demonstration before any committee was never granted. Already in 1947 I began my approach to the Minister for Transport in N.S.W. Realising that I should first offer something of immediate value for the Transport authorities, I hit upon the idea to help in a matter which was raised in the newspapers time and time again. Every year the authorities lost over half a million pound in Sydney alone, because so many passengers in Sydney trams did not pay their fares. The construction of trams with two separate doors to every double rows of seats made it too easy for "scalpers" to evade having their fare taken. I remembered then the system of trancars and buses in Italy, where it is impossible for a passenger NOT to pay his fare. I made a number of drawings how Sydney trams could easily be adapted for the Italian system and approached then the Minister and authorities concerned. My idea was also to submit my ideas on symbols for road safety.

Needless to say that it all came to naught. I was received by the secretary to the Minister who had no power of any kind over the transport commissioner, and I learned too that the Minister himself has no power once the commissioner declines to hear anything, especially when it comes from an outsider.

In 1949 a new Commissioner for Transport was appointed with much fanfare. He made such wonderful speeches, talked so much on reform and new innovations that I tried again. I bring the letter herebelow because it tells of my previous attempts. I was careful not to mention semantography explicitly, but reserved this for the talk with the commissioner. Having seen the previous commissioner treated me with so much contempt, I adopted an aggressive attitude, knowing that Mr. Windsor is very sensitive to public reaction.

Mr. Windsor
Commissioner for Transport
Sydney.

23rd September, 1949.

Dear Sir,

I have read with sympathy and interest your statements to the press, that the annual loss of money through scalers amounts to not less than £ 500,000 and you appeal to the public for co-operation. I hope therefore that you will be interested in my co-operation and I submit to you the following facts.

On the 17th June, 1947 I submitted to the Ministry for Transport a detailed description of the Milan tramcar, which has been successfully introduced to all Italian towns. Its main features are that scaling is impossible, that the fare:

collector sits comfortably in a box inside the car, and ^{the} mounting and alighting is much quicker. I also showed in drawings how the present outmoded outboard tramcars could be quickly converted into this most modern car system.

More than one year later on the 17th June 1948, I sent a cutting from the Sydney Morning Herald, in which it was stated that the the Italian car system had been successfully introduced into Sweden.

Shortly after my letter in 1947 I was invited by the then secretary to the Minister, Mr. Leo M. Grouse and I gave him a close description of the system. I offered even to show some movieshots which I have made in Italy. I explained also how the present Sydney tramcars could be converted with very little cost. There was an exchange of letters afterwards.

However, all came to naught. The same thing happened again, which I have seen happening in my life-long technical experiences. An engineer resents any outsider who comes out with an idea, which rightfully the engineer should have found himself - but hadn't. I was told that the then commissioner of transport doesn't like the idea, and I was consequently not invited by him.

Seeing that he himself did nothing, except inventing that amazing "honesty box", and realising that the taxpayer, including myself have to foot the bill, I had in mind to call a press conference of reporters of Sydney's 4 dailies. They would have jumped ^{at} the story, because what I proposed was not an outlandish idea, but something which is successful in operation in a country with 40 million people with great industrial towns and great rushes in the peak hours. But in the meantime I have come to regard Mr. Grouse almost as a personal friend, and I did not want to embarrass him. However, he has retired.

I propose therefore to come to you for a practical talk. I am familiar with all the counterarguments, and I have a life-long experience as a trouble shooter in engineering. I shall not talk however, to a minor official, who by virtue of his minor vision, can't visualise any unusual ideas. And please reserve half an hour for this talk.

If you put my proposal into operation one way or the other, I expect a remuneration, because I make a living as a consulting engineer. If nothing is done in this respect during your term of office - well, then I have only wasted my time.

It might be interesting for you to know that I am in direct contact with the Federal Department of Transport, and have received from them a letter for the Australian delegates to the United Nations Conference on Road and Motor Transport in Geneva, and I have submitted my proposals there. The Federal Department is interested in my forthcoming book, and had asked for a copy.

My work in this respect deals with certain problems of transport in general, and those who have studied my proposal believe that eventually all the Motor Transport Departments the world over will accept my or some improved proposal. I shall be glad to show it to you, because I believe that one day in the future, it will be in operation also here in Sydney.

Kindly fix a date in the morning hours, because at present I work in a factory in the afternoon. Thursday morning of the 29th September is out too, because I have a meeting at this date with Professor Copland, Vice Chancellor of the National University in Canberra, at Usher's Hotel.

I shall bring with me some sketches of the foot board tramcar, and you will see, that very little adjustment with very little cost is necessary to convert them to cars with the most modern design.

Awaiting your invitation, I remain,

Yours sincerely,

C. K. Bliss,

Needless to say that my demonstration of the Milan tramcar and Semantography was a futile attempt. It was ^{not} long before the people of Sydney and the government realised that Mr. Windsor was ^{not} man incapable of introducing reform. He was later dismissed in disgrace.

Having failed in my attempts to the top I went to the committee responsible for road warning signs. It works within the standards association of Australia. I handed over to them all I had with the following letter.

The Standards Association
of Australia

21st December 1949

Science House, Gloucester Street, Re: Semantography
Sydney

Dear Sirs,

I beg to hand over to you volume I and II of my work "Semantography", 100 symbols elements to overcome Babel in Reading, Writing, and Thought" (there is a third and last volume available). Here is a simple ideographic system to express any meaning with geometrical symbols which somehow follow the outline of real things.

I enclose also three sets of various pages stapled together. If you peruse these only, please realise that they are torn from their context, and don't be prejudiced when you cannot read the symbols "right away" without training (although some are self explanatory). These pages etc., comprise

Title Page with short synopsis

Leaflets No. 3 and 4 containing Opinions of Learned Men about Semantography.

Copyright Page and example of Public Signs.

Page 57 containing ideograms already in use.

Pages 71 / 76 The Babel of Highway Signs now existing

Page 225 Symbols from the Chapter on Railway Signs

Pages 357 - 365 Proposed Symbols for Highways

Pages 609 - 610 A Translation of a Poem by Wordsworth to show that even abstract meanings are depictable.

And here are my requests:

- (1) When you debate my Semantography please let me wait in the next room and call me in for examination and for any test, for writing down any meaning you wish. Then decide.
- (2) A letter to Lord Nuffield, asking him for support only so far, that I shall be able to put the idea for discussion to the world.
- (3) A letter to all Standards Associations to make them acquainted with the idea, with no obligation on your part.

Thanking you in anticipation, I remain

Yours faithfully,

C. K. Bliss.

At the same time I approached the National Roads and Motorists Association of N.S.W. (N.R.M.A.) This is a private organisation, and therefore more inclined to listen to private people who are not professional bureaucrats.

Dear Mr. Bliss,

18th January, 1950.

Referring to your letter of the 19th December, I would advise that this Association is of the opinion that the adoption of your system of symbol writing throughout the world would contribute to much safer traffic conditions in international motoring.

As requested, I have much pleasure, therefore, in attaching herewith a letter addressed to Lord Nuffield asking that he grant you an interview so that you may place before him details of your scheme and your plans for its adoption universally.

Wishing you every success with your endeavours,

Yours faithfully,

H. E. Richards.

General Secretary.

Lord Nuffield, the former Mr. Morris and owner of a great Motor Company in Oxford had given away ten million pound for a scientific foundation, the Nuffield Foundation. He was at that time in Sydney, so I asked the N.R.M.A. to give me an introduction to him. This they wrote.

Lord Nuffield

SYDNEY.

18th January, 1950.

Dear Lord Nuffield,

Mr. C. K. Bliss B. Sc. of 5 Maroubra Bay Road Pagewood has submitted to this association an outline of a system of symbols writing, on which he has been working for many years.

It would appear ^{no} that he has ambition for monetary gain, but is anxious that the world should gain by the adoption of such a system.

This Association is particularly interested in the scheme as the sections relevant to road signs so vitally effect the safety angle of international motoring.

I have no hesitation, therefore, in response to Mr. Bliss' request, in recommending that he be granted an interview so that he may place before you the details of his system and his plans to promote its adoption throughout the world.

Yours faithfully,

H. E. Richards.

General Secretary.

I thought that now I am on the right road. But I was mistaken. My story of my futile attempt to Lord Nuffield and the Nuffield Foundation is told in S.S. No. 119. I wrote a lengthy letter to Mr. Snee of the Standard Association asking for a similar endorsement of my Semantography. Naturally they refused to commit themselves.

Mr. Snee

Standards Association

Gloucester Street,

Sydney.

21 st January, 1950.

Dear Mr. Snee,

I refer to my letter of December 21, and the recent visit concerning my request of a letter to Lord Nuffield. I understand now that the Committee will most probably not come together during the nexts weeks or so. On the other hand, Lord Nuffield will stay in Sydney not more than a few weeks.

As you had an opportunity to see for yourself, the Executive Body of the N.R.M.A. has ^{ap}proved a letter of recommendation to Lord Nuffield, and consequently the secretary Mr. H. E. Richards has furnished me with the letter.

I believe therefore that there are no principle obstacles for the Standards Association to follow the example of the N.R.M.A. except the fact, that the letter must be officially approved by the whole committee. As time is short I may make a suggestion.

I will be satisfied with a letter from the Association, written by you and the chief, explaining that the Committee does not meet during the coming few weeks and that therefore the opinion expressed is solely private and unofficial. Then you may suggest that the matter is worthwhile to look into - nothing more.

Indeed, I do not want that Lord Nuffield should use his influence to adopt Semantography. On the contrary. What I want is, that he should enable me to present the idea for motorist bodies and persons concerned.. In short, the printing of a small brochure to be issued to all Standards Associations, Motorists Associations, etc., in the whole world - they may adopt it or reject it, or transform it.

Your letter may not suggest that you are in favour (if you don't want to say this.) Just say that the matter seems worthwhile of investigation. And as you know, I feel cursed to slave for this idea, and I am not driven on by any monetary gain motifs. Therefore I hope that you and your chief will not let me down. And please let me have it, latest at the end of this week.

With thanks

Yours sincerely,

C. K. Bliss.

Dear Mr. Bliss,

25th January, 1950.

I have your letter dated 21st, January 1950. together with copy of the letter addressed to you by the N.R.M.A. Your suggestion has been discussed with the Director and it is felt that at this stage, as explained to you earlier, that the Association is unable to supply you in any way with a letter which implied its endorsement or acceptance of your signwriting for use in road signs. As indicated to you in our discussion, such matters are entirely in the hands of the relevant technical committees, and as the Road Signs and Traffic Signals Committee will not be meeting in the immediate future, it is impossible to forecast what their opinion on this matter may be.

I read with great appreciation your lengthy letter dealing with early writings and their significance. I have one or two friends who will be intensely interested in the subject, and after discussion with them would like the opportunity to again talk to you about this matter.

Yours sincerely,

Smee.

In a number of visits and telephone calls I begged Mr. Smee to help me to interest and gain an interview with Prof. Elkin who is chairman of the committee for road warning signs.

Dear Mr. Smee,

8th March, 1950.

You have been kind enough to promise me, that you will arrange a meeting with Professor Elkin. The University starts in a few days, and Prof. Elkin might later not have the necessary time.

I would be much indebted to you, if you could get a definite date from Prof. Elkin. Excuse me bothering you, but I depend on you and a few other people who have the vision to recognise my work.

Take my thanks in anticipation,

Yours sincerely,

C. K. Bliss.

Smee declined and when I wrote a letter to Professor Elkin, he only ignored it. See S.S. No. 113. ^{And} he is an ordained minister of the Church of England. Meanwhile the slaughter on the roads went on and on. See also S.S. No. 138.

An approach to the Australian Automobile Association was also fruitless; this is what I got, but not what I wanted: a letter to Lord Nuffield.

Dear Sir,

26th January, 1950.

Your letter of January, 21 1950, addressed to Mr. L. King acting secretary of this Association, together with your dossier of your suggested Semantography has been referred to me with your request for an official comment on your ideas.

For the most part, the whole idea goes beyond the scope of anything that this Association could regard as its province. I would, however, be prepared that we would welcome anything that had for its object the universalisation and / or standardisation of indications for traffic signals, road signs, and road courtesy, etc.,

I am pleased to say that I have read your material with interest, and feel sure that you would receive an attentive hearing from anyone like Lord Nuffield, who has at heart the more harmonious working of international affairs.

Yours faithfully,

Harold Norrie.

President.

Nearly a year later I wrote to the Road Safety Council.

The Secretary
Road Safety Council of N.S.W
Palladium Building, Yurong Street,
Sydney.

6th December, 1950.

Dear Sir,

Enclosed you will find a letter of Mr. H. E. Richards, General Secretary of the N.R.M.A. In addition, I wish to point out, that Semantography is a modern picto-ideography which has been praised by such authorities as Lord Russell, Lancelot Hogben, Carelton Washburne etc., See p.9 - 15 of the enclosed brochure. On page 15 you will find the statement of the N.R.M.A. relating to international motoring. Professor Patrick Meredith of the University of Leeds has published a review of nearly 2000 words about Semantography, which closes with these words:

"Semantography is such an important creative advance in language design that the strategy of its presentation to the world merits as much care as the author devoted to the system itself."

Considering the strategy of my presentation to the Road Safety Council, I wish to point out that, I shall under no circumstances submit my proposals in writing. This might entail a rejection without a proper demonstration and trial. I would like an opportunity to demonstrate my symbols for road warnings before the full Council at one of its sessions. I could answer any argument, could dispel any doubts by direct presentation.

I am of course ready to come to you first, provided that you will give me nevertheless the opportunity to appear before the full council. If you could make it any day after 4.30p.m., I would not leave my job, which would cause some inconvenience. In closing this letter, I wish to point out that my work is under consideration by various governmental agencies with regard to other uses, as for instance as a picture writing for the natives in the Pacific. Even the Prime Ministers Department in Canberra considers my work serious enough to honour me with a speedy reply to my communications. Awaiting your reply I am,

Yours sincerely,

C. K. Bliss.

Needless to say that this approach came to naught too.

Then a Mr. James took over the Road Warnings signs at the Standards Association. Perhaps in a burst of interest, or perhaps my work has been vindicated by events in the United Nations he wrote to me the following letter.

Dear Mr. Bliss,

1st March, 1951.

I have been advised by Mr. Snee of your sign system, or Semantography, and appreciate the potential value of such a system.

There is, at the present time, a committee of experts appointed by the United Nations considering the world-wide system of road signs, and they have expressed in a progress report of their preference for the use of symbols rather than inscriptions in such signs.

The next meeting of the committee of experts is to be held in New York on the 19th March, 1951, to consider inter-alia, the use of symbols in road signs.

If you're interested I shall be happy to give you further details on request.

Yours faithfully,

J. H. James

Engineer Secretary

ROAD AND TRAFFIC SIGNALS SECTIONAL
COMMITTEE.

This letter threw me into a turmoil of hasty activities and heavy expenses. I sent large airletters to every member of the U.N. Committee, whose names Mr. James was kind to supply. I wrote to them the letter which I printed in S.S. No. 26. In addition I sent out imploring letters to Australians in the U.N.O. and to officials of the U.N.O. The result was 0. The delegates treated my letters as if they had never arrived. I knew of the symbols they were contemplating from an article in the New York Times which my friend Trener sent to me. Today June 1960 and 9 years later, none of their symbols have been adopted. But they have hopped around the world from one conference to the other. The muddle on the highways of the world is still as terrible as ever, only the death disasters have increased many fold.

Two years later in 1953 Professor Elkin adopted the leg symbols which I submitted in 1949. And he said that he saw it in Ceylon. A controversy developed between me and the Minister for Transport ^{and} in the Press, and ^{with} his secretary. This controversy ^{is} told in S.S. N. 144. Herebelow is one letter ^{ham} which I missed because it was in another file. My defatigable defender Dr. Evering, who has written many a letter to the editors of Australian papers, joined in the controversy by writing the following letter.

The Editor
 "Sydney Morning Herald"
 Dear Sir,

ROAD SAFETY SIGNS.

A great deal of public money and time went into investigation to find that a triangle was the most striking shape for a road sign but for the sake of structural economy a diamond, allowing the same size of symbol on a much smaller area, was the next best thing. Actually there are a number of signs which fit much better on a triangle (equilateral pointing upward) than on a diamond, and among these is the "walking legs" symbol. "Trousered legs" seem to imply rather needless detail, particularly if the sign has to be outlined by a few reflector studs to make it prominent at night. The Institute for Semantography, 5 Maroubra Bay, Road Pagewood has long since been commended by the N.R.M.A. and an authority on international readable signs, Professor Lancelot Hogben (Author of Mathematics for the Million, co-author of From Cave Painting to Comic Strip etc.,) for its universal readily learnable and instantly readable symbols, of which a simplified "walking" symbol (reminiscent of the stylised ancient Egyptian representation of legs) would appear in reflector studs like this.



One of the Institute's signs (for DIP, which would appear in studs thus:) has been in use at the Hospital satisfactorily for some months, and is clearly intelligible to New Australians. It seems a pity that the N.R.M.A. has not taken up at this stage in accord with their earlier statement of recommendation. If any experiments are to be made, this system by an internationally recognised Australian symbol expert should be among the first to be tried.

Yours faithfully,
 Douglas N. Everingham.
 Medical Officer.

Now that the controversy was in full swing, I remembered the apathy of the Standards Association and wrote to them.

Dear Sir,

17th September, 1953.

I beg to inform you that the Ministry for Transport is conducting an investigation concerning the fact that the system of road symbols as part of the system of Semantography has been offered for a number of years to your Association and the Road Signs Committee with the request for a personal demonstration. This request has never been granted. Recently a leg symbol picked up in Ceylon, has been proposed. This symbol is part of the road symbols of Semantography.

I request the grant of an interview, if possible coming Tuesday September, 22 10 a.m. If this is ^{not} convenient, let your secretary inform me which time is suitable. I can be reached by telephone at my home every day at 1 p.m. FJ 5901. Yours faithfully,

C. K. Bliss.

Dear Sir,

13th October, 1953.

I find it hard to understand or to appreciate the tone of your letter of Sept. 17. The system of semantography which you are sponsoring has been referred to our Road Signs Committee on two occasions and you have already been advised that the committee does not favour this system. The whole question of the use of symbols on road signs has been examined very carefully and the committee is following the principles which would not permit of any general adoption of a symbolic system such as yours.

Following receipt of your latest letter, the Secretary to the committee has again mentioned the matter to the drafting panel which has reiterated emphatically that it cannot at this stage see any possibility of practical application of your system to road signs and that there would be no point in any interview on the subject.

So far as the Association is concerned, we must be guided by the opinion of our responsible committee. It appears therefore that no useful purpose can be served by further negotiation and we must regard the matter as closed. Yours faithfully,

(Director) A.H. Stewart.

The fact is that I never was "advised that the committee does not favour this system". This is simply not true. All my pleas for a consideration and for a demonstration by myself were always turned down.

Yes, the Standards Association regard the matter as closed, just as the Secretary of the Minister for Transport considered the matter as closed. But not closed is the ever increasing toll on Australian roads. Not closed is the ever increasing fact that no substantial improvements in warning signs have been made in Australia, for the last seven years since my leg symbol appeared which Professor Elkin copied from Ceylon, though I offered it to him and to the whole committee 4 years before. This fact itself proves the incompetence and inefficiency of this committee which "did not favour this system" but did nothing to find a better one.

T H E. E. N. D.