



RUBBERNECKING THROUGH BABEL

An article in the American Magazine "Industrial Design" and an unhappy correspondence

The following article appeared in the American Magazine "Industrial Design" written by the editor Mr. Scott Kelly. It appears that he got some information from Mr. Soichi Kato of the International Committee for breaking the Language Barrier (see S.S. 237), further more from Icoграда (see S.S. 249) and of course from Mr. Henry Dreyfuss (see SS. No. 309 and 310). None of them are my friends. The symbols shown are some of those advocated by Kato, then the idiotic symbols from the Icoграда competition, then some of Dreyfuss' symbols for farm equipment, and some others.

Mr. Kelly has also shown two of my symbols for INFORMATION (the question mark within the open box) and for AIRPORT (showing the symbol element for a house, for wings and for the wheel, the last two meaning airplane). Naturally he didn't bother to explain the pictorial meanings of the elements and how they combine.

In order to show how Mr. Kelly is being prejudiced against me and my symbols, here are only a few sentences of the paragraphs he gives to my symbols.

"Blissymbols are strung together to express what in effect are compound nouns and fairly complex instructions."

"Something like a cross between symbols from a monopoly board and Sanskrit..."

"His expressions are put together with the awkwardness of Japanese and German"

"His language is incapable of expressing complex chains of thought".

After these samples let us read the whole article with its idiotic title.

RUBBERNECKING THROUGH BABEL.

A maxim values one picture over many words, suggesting that pictographs might silence the Babel which has grown as the world has shrunk. But lacking research and standards, untenable symbol systems have proliferated adding more confusion than order.

In an East African port, longshoremen tossed crates of glassware overboard. Stenciled on the crates were stylized broken cocktail glasses and it seemed obvious that no one would want to keep boxes of broken glasses. In Zagreb, a vacationing American lady went looking for a pair of slippers to send to her son-in-law and found herself in a men's restroom. After all, there was a silhouette of a man's shoe over the door. At Expo 67, various foreigners came upon doors marked with a drawing of an open hand, so they pushed the door open and went through - they were supposed to keep out. And so it goes as transportation shrinks the world and Babel, in many forms, intensifies.

A three week vacation or a corporate decision to enter foreign markets, opens the way to more languages than anyone can ever hope to get by in, let alone master sufficiently for a simple conversation. Nevertheless, a little lady from Dubuque must be able to find a restroom, the baggage counter, a place to eat, or someone to provide her with information, if her trip is to be a pleasure. One way around this language barrier is the use of pictorial symbols and signs, but symbols create their own confusion if they are not clearly understood by those who have reference to them. The longshoremen, the lady in Zagreb and those visitors to Expo were all victims of pictographs, either misunderstood or out of national context.

Unlike a written language, which is a symbolic representation of the spoken language, a pictograph is supposed to indicate the nature or use of the object to which it is attached with the economy of a single picture or drawing. Glyphs, most successful of these, will be understood universally, which means that the glyph or the object it depicts is in use throughout the world. There are surprisingly few universal glyphs: most are regional or continental.

A pictograph of a telephone is not particularly universal even though the use of telephones is. The problem is that telephones do not look the same throughout the world. Difference in form, in fact, is one of the chief problems encountered in developing symbolic languages. Even a pictograph which is clearly understood in one country today may not be understood in 20 or 30 years. The telephone in this country, for example, looks entirely different from the old uprights once so common and bears little resemblance to the new single unit uprights which carry the dial in their bases.

The pictograph least likely to become outdated or to be confused with one common in another country is the one which is the most abstract. But very abstract symbols have no instantly understood meanings until the meanings

are learned, like a second language, by everyone.

Because there is no universally understood symbolic language, there is no authoritative guide and thus, it seems almost everyone is an expert. ICOGRADA, for example, sponsored a student contest in 1964 for the design of international sign symbols. All the contestants were given was the list of 24 subjects that the signs were to depict and they were told that judging would be based on intelligibility, visual impact, unity of conception and suitability for different uses. These are meager criteria, indeed, considering prejudices, tricks of memory, cultural references, past associations and all the other factors which come into play when people see and try to understand a new sign.

Students, of course, are not the only ones dreaming up new symbolic languages these days. Industrial designers have begun using symbols in lieu of written operating instructions on every thing from dictating machines to machine tools and no fair or exposition would be complete without a set of symbols for its signage. Virtually every designer, of course, has felt free to make up his own language and why not? There is very little research on the retention, understanding and cultural objections factors met when the public confronts a symbol for the very first time. Established symbols in one industry or business are usually known by designers beginning a project in a different field. Even within an industry, regional groups work independently and, occasionally, at cross-purposes. It was to bring some order to this chaos that a group called the International Committee for Breaking the Language Barrier was formed. Executive Secretary for ICBLB is Soichi Kato, whose offices are at 268 West 12th Street in New York City.

Kato describes the primary purpose of the organisation as encouraging scientific research. ICBLB's aim is to develop a body of fact upon which, within 3 to 4 years, an international symbol language can be established which all nations will be able to accept without having to justify their actions in terms of expediency. The problem today, he notes, is that there is no reason for a country or trade group to accept one language over another other than expediency. And all the symbol languages extant, he thinks, probably miss the mark.

Another purpose of ICBLB is to provide a clearing house for information about work being done with graphic languages throughout the world. Although the Committee conducted a survey of trade groups, travel organisations, tourist agencies and business organisations a few years ago and came up with a list of 37 messages and symbols for many of these, Kato does not see his organisation as making the final recommendation to the countries of the world. This, he hopes, will be done by some agency of the UN or a group such as ISO, The International Organisation for Standardization. ISO has members from 80 national standards groups, including the U.S.A. But unable to draw upon much research, ISO cannot make a very strong case for acceptance of its recommendations other than the fact that any standard is better than none. For the most part, none exists although ISO has had some success with its suggestions for colors on safety signs.

NATIONAL ARROGANCE ON HIGHWAYS

Fairly typical is the highway sign muddle. ECOSOC, one of the UN's three major councils, has a committee which drew-up recommendations for international road signs. The suggestions were based largely on signs in wide use throughout continental Europe. Most of the continent, including the Eastern Bloc countries, decided to follow the recommendations and, recently, so has Great Britain. Many Far Eastern nations such as Malaya, and Thailand and Vietnam have also accepted the standard and Japan has just started to switch over. But in South America, members of the Pan American Union, with one large exception, have their own standard and show no signs of adopting the International standard, although the two are not greatly different in most cases. The U.S. of course, is too important to heed the rest of the world and we follow neither the UN's recommendation nor the standard adopted by the Pan American Union. (Except for highways built with federal money, there is not even a standard within this country. The usual excuse offers the empty logic that although present signs must be replaced periodically, it would be too expensive to replace them with ones using the International standard or any other. The "rights" of states are jealously guarded, indeed.)

MONEY TALKS IN MANY TONGUES

The communication picture is somewhat less cloudy within the international business sector. One bit of brightness is the work done by Henry Dreyfuss & Associates for Deere & Company. The designers received a list of instructions, labels and other information which were to be translated into symbols as an aid to sales in foreign markets. The designers then made lists of existing symbols which might serve, including those of ancient Greek, Chinese and Egyptian origin. National, international and trade groups were questioned about work they had or were doing and all the replies were checked against the other known symbols. The result, according to Dreyfuss associate William Purcell, gave the designers a check for logical consistency and guarded against conflict with symbols in use elsewhere in the world.

Many of the Deere symbols which cover all the operating instructions for tractors and earth-moving equipment, combine parts of other symbol languages. One meaning "Pressurized, open slowly," for example, shows an exclamation mark (a caution symbol) within a triangle (the international traffic sign shape for dangerous situations). The triangle is being pressed on all three sides by arrows, which are supposed to represent pressure. This symbol will doubtless have to have its meaning taught to foreign operators because, while one can sit and work out its meaning with some logical thought, its meaning is not apparent immediately on first viewing. For "fast" and "slow" the Dreyfuss offices employed a hare and a tortoise. If the fable about these animals does not exist, in say, northern India, however, where a tortoise may be an unknown animal, the symbols may have little communicative value. But at least the design office attempted to find out what was going on in the field of graphic communication.

The ISO has made recommendations for symbols used on machinery and it has taken into consideration such things as the non-universality of the hare and tortoise legend. One ISO committee is comprised of machine tool builders and with the aid of this group some U.S. machine tool manufacturers are beginning to adopt the ISO recommendations. The Cincinnati Milling Machine Company has published a catalog of symbols it is now using on its equipment. Wherever possible, ISO symbols are used, but where none existed, the company developed its own, following the logic of the ISO symbols.

Obviously, there is a very large number of symbols needed if the requirement of the machine-tool builders, the heavy-equipment manufacturers, the highway managers, the tourist trades, the exporters and others are to be met. A logical question, frequently asked, is whether it would not be easier to adopt an international language. The letter symbols involved in the written language would most likely be far fewer than the symbols already developed by one or another of the graphic languages, and thus might be easier to learn. But as Mr. Kato of the ICBLB points out, even if there was an international spoken and written language, such as Esperanto, symbols would still be needed because of the ease they offer for expressing instructions with the economy of a single drawing or picture.

TOWARDS ANOTHER IDIOGRAM LANGUAGE?

Australian C.K. Bliss has long advocated the adoption of an universal symbol language. In the one he has developed, Blissymbols are strung together to express what are in effect compound nouns and fairly complex instructions. Looking something like a cross between symbols from a Monopoly board and Sanskrit, the symbols also make use of Arabic numerals to make one symbol serve many items. A potato, for example, is the symbol for an underground vegetable followed by the number "1". If followed by "2" the symbol becomes "radish". To Bliss's credit it must be admitted that his language follows an easily embraced logic, but although his "alphabet" uses fewer characters (there are 59) than say, Japanese, his expressions are put together with the combined awkwardness of Japanese and German. A motel, to illustrate, is a building for a man who travels next to a building for a vehicle - four symbols are necessary.

Bliss claims that a child can learn his language without much difficulty. But the same can be said for most written languages, of which at least one would have to be commonly learned in addition to the Blissymbols since his language is incapable of expressing complex chains of thought. Finally, however, the problem with the Bliss scheme, as with all others proposed to date, is that there is no evidence that any would be universally acceptable. For emergency medical service, a red cross serves well in Europe, but the Arab nations prefer a star and crescent moon (Bliss uses a stylized version of the physicians' staff with entwined serpents). A policeman's cap might indicate the law enforcers in the U.S. but what would a Tunisian make of it - his policeman wears a fez.

Until there is some solid research basis for a recommended symbol language, it appears we will continue to be confused and perhaps amused by the symbols designed to help us.

The International Air Transportation Associations (IATA) has one symbol to indicate the presence of restrooms, in general. It is a silhouette of a man and of a woman standing next to each other. The Air Transport Association of America, however, uses a different set of symbols. One of the American symbols used the IATA restroom mark as an element of a sign which has a rather different meaning. Should you ever forget momentarily in which country you are landing and which set of symbols it uses, you may find yourself looking for an elevator and being directed to a toilet which goes up and down. The End

Herebelow is my correspondence, and the article which I proposed to correct the false impression created by Kelly's unfavourable and incorrect comments. Needless to say that he did not bring the article, partly because he didn't want to be contradicted in the eye of his boss the publisher, but ^{perhaps} because his publisher fired him as I found out.

INDUSTRIAL DESIGN

Oct 9, 67.

Whitney Publications, Inc.,
18 East 50th Street,
New York, 10022. Plaza 1-2626
Charles E. Whitney, President

Dear Mr. Bliss,

I have enclosed a tear sheet of an article I wrote, appearing in the September 1967 issue of INDUSTRIAL DESIGN. I thought you would be interested in this piece, because of the subject matter discussed and reference to your work.

With best wishes,
Scott Kelly,
Managing Editor.

I answered

Dear Mr. Kelly,

6.12.67

I have received your letter of October 9 with your article "Rubbernecking through Babel" and I am utterly astounded about the critique of my work in which you used such expressions as "fairly complex instructions", "a cross between a monopoly board and Sanskrit", put together with the combined awkwardness of Japanese and German". And that my symbols are "incapable of expressing complex chains of thought", and some other downgrading remarks.

Now I don't mind a critical review, and I have said to all my previous reviewers: "You can tear my work down as much as you like, but in order to do so, you must study my book first". You had before you only the little tourist folder "Universal Pictorial Blissymbols for the International Traveller (Semantography Series No. 280) on page 8 of this little folder there is the title of my book and where it can be bought in the United States. I would have gladly told my distributor to send you a review copy. You know very well that the least a reviewer does, even if he tears down completely the work of another guy, is to mention the title of the book, the number of pages, the price and the publisher. You have not mentioned anything.

In my 25 year^s work on this idea I never had any negative critique except from you. Professor Oliver L. Reiser of the University of Pittsburgh praised my work in his lecture to the American Association for the Advancement of Science. He spoke of my "heroic" work. Professor P.G. Meredith wrote a 2000 words review in ^{the} London journal THE NEW ERA which review he classed as an "unconditional eulogy" and spoke of my work as a "important creative advance" and that reading my books was for him "sheer fascination". I can go on and on and quote more to show you how other people write about my work.

Please do me the favour and send out your office boy to get a journal copy which appeared 3 weeks ago. It is Scholastic NEWSTIME, No. 9 November 16, 1967 and you will find that my work is prominently displayed as the COVER STORY. Read this story and see how others are writing about me and realise that you have done me a grave injustice.

I am writing to you believing that you will be fair and just enough to print a small article under the title BLISS EXPLAINS HIS SYMBOLS, in which article I would explain the symbols you mention. I would go even so far as print the whole article with all the symbols and would send it to you so, you would have nothing else to do than to have your printer print it by photo-offset process or any other process. I shall be grateful if you would give just one page of your magazine. It will surely make an interesting article, and even give spice to an interesting controversy. Hoping to hear from you very soon, I am,

Sincerely yours,
C.K. Bliss

He didn't answer and two and a half months later I wrote a short letter.

Dear Mr. Kelly,

Sydney 27.2.68

On Dec. 6 I wrote to you a detailed letter. Surely you will accord me the courtesy of an answer. I am looking forward to it, and thank you in anticipation.

Yours truly,
C.K. Bliss, B.Sc.

No answer again but his editorial assistant Miss Arlene Latman wrote me a very sweet letter

Dear Mr. Bliss,

March 6, 1968

We certainly understand your disappointment in us for not having answered your letter of December 6th. But unfortunately, we never received it. (If it is any small consolation to you, the efficiency of our postal system is an understatement.)

Nevertheless we would be pleased if you would send us another copy of this letter (if you are still so inclined to send it).

Again, we are truly sorry for the aggravation this delayed correspondence has given you and we hope that under the circumstances explained above, you will no longer consider us discourteous.

With best wishes
Arlene Latman,
Editorial Assistant.

I replied

Dear Miss Latman,

Sydney 15.3.68

This is to thank you for your kind answer to my letter of February 27. Attached is the copy of my letter which I wrote to Mr. Kelly on December 6. All the time I felt that Mr. Kelly has ignored my letter, as this is sometimes done by editors. Moreover, nobody likes to hear an adverse critique of what he has written, and this applies to me as well as to Mr. Kelly. The more so do I hope that now a satisfactory solution may be found.

From my letter you will see that I felt very unhappy about the critique of Mr. Kelly. Now I know that since the first paleolithic man drew designs on the walls of his cave, he had his critics. But in my case, there is nothing of art, or artistic design. It is something entirely new, something which can benefit mankind in many ways. And a deprecatory critique in an esteemed magazine like yours can damage and delay the acceptance of my work for many years. This alone makes me write to you, because if the damaging critic prevails, then a great dis-service is done to mankind as a whole.

Let me now explain what I mean. We all know that the greatest hindrance to human understanding is the Babel of so many languages. Esperanto has proved useless, simply because it is just another foreign language, and people don't like to learn foreign languages. But symbols like $1 + 2 = 3$ can be read and understood in all languages. I have been an industrial research chemist, and I have used the symbols of mathematics, geometry, chemistry, and the pictorial symbols of electronics to a great extent. And so 26 years ago I set down to work out pictorial symbols which can in combination be used for writing letters in commerce, industry, even in science. At that time, everyone considered me crazy. But now 26 years later people have realised that symbols are the only solution to bridge the language barrier, and consequently my work finds more and more acceptance and admiration by great scholars. See the attached pages from my book.

I believe therefore that the critique of my work may have already worked detrimental to the esteem of your paper, and to the author of the article. Everyone who knows a little of my work, and reads that article must feel that a great injustice has been done to me and my work. It is out of this consideration that I asked Mr. Kelly to give me say one page of the magazine for a small article profusely illustrated and titled say "Bliss explains his Semantography". Once Mr. Kelly agrees to this suggestion I would send him the complete text filling in 10 pt Times Roman (the same type of his article) exactly one page including the symbols. I would then - once Mr. Kelly agrees - have my printer set the text, and I paste in the symbols, so that all the work would have been done for the photo-offsetting.

Let me show you how valuable and even important such a short follow-up article would be for your esteemed magazine. You are concerned to give your subscribers and readers the latest on industrial design. And Mr. Kelly in his article describes a number of symbols which have been evolved to be displayed on new industrial machinery, etc. On page 35 there are symbols on a machine tool. On page 34 there are symbols displayed on agriculture tractors of the Deere Co. And Mr. Kelly deplores in the subtitle to his article the confusion created by the many symbols.

And here is where my system comes in. Nobody, repeat nobody, in the whole world has worked out a complete symbol system in which every meaning can be expressed, that is nobody but me. Once industry and commerce people realise that I have indeed the system which can be used anywhere and everywhere in the design of industrial machinery, etc. etc., they will take a closer and more interested look, and a follow-up article would be most helpful for your readers, and for the cause for which your magazine is working.

On page 34 Deere symbols are displayed which are designed for special agricultural machines. But what when the design of this machine is completely altered. Then all the agricultural workers in many parts of the world who have become familiar with the Deere symbols would find that they don't fit the new machine at all, and that new symbols would have to be designed. But once a machine company decides to use my symbols it can use them again on completely different machines. I shall soon explain this below.

Another consideration which I hope will make Mr. Kelly give me some space in his magazine is the fact that other symbols have been displayed lavishly over whole and half pages, whereas only 2 of my symbols are shown on the bottom of page 32, accompanied by a deprecatory critique on page 35. The very title of this critique is misleading "Towards another idiogram language?"

There is no other-but mine. Nobody in the whole world has conceived a complete symbol language which can be written, just like the alphabet, with a few basic pictorial symbols. There is of course Chinese, but you surely know that this is utterly archaic, complex, and unusable in modern industrial design.

Now whereas other designers have received lavish space for large symbols,

though these are most of the symbols they have designed, I am represented by only 2 symbols, and these on a small scale. But these 2 symbols contain a lot of information, once this is explained. So let me show you what I mean.

The first of my symbols means information [?] but for the student of semantography it means much more. The question mark is surrounded by 3 lines which mean open [] and with a 4th line closing it means closed []. Consequently, my symbol for information [?] means in fact open for questions. Now these 3 and 4 lines for open [] and closed [] can be used on the doors of shops, restaurants, museums, consulates, etc. etc. indicating whether the shop, etc. is open or closed. Together with my symbols for the days of the week (see page 4 of the attached folder) my symbols for open and closed can now be used to tell tourists, visitors, in fact everyone, when the consulate is open, and when it is closed. Likewise for museums, theatres, etc. etc. But most important for industrial design. Any machine anywhere in the world which has some levers, handles, etc. which must tell the users where to open and where to close can then use my symbols, and it doesn't matter when the design of the machine is altered later.

Now let's come to the second of my symbols displayed in the article. You find it on page 32 compared with other symbols for AIRPORT. Now what do other designers suggest for this meaning. You see the outline of an aeroplane, and one wholly abstract symbol in a square, but none suggests an AIRPORT, an AIR-TERMINAL, a house where you have to go to find an aeroplane- except my symbol. But here again my symbol contains much more than is shown.

My symbol for airport [] shows first the outline of a house []. Now look up the attached tourist folder, and see that I use this outline for any house [] a post office, a hotel, a garage (on page 3), a railway station, a harbour wharf, (on page 4), a car service station, a HOSPITAL (on page 5), a bank (on page 6), a theatre, a cinema, an opera house, a concert hall, and a stadium or race course (on page 7) where I use my house symbol also to tell House Full and Second Balcony, and in my book I show how my house symbol can be used for hundreds of other meanings as barn, tractor shed, silo, etc. etc. Please realise that this small folder is only devoted to show what my symbols can do for the international traveller.

But this again is not the whole story, The house symbol [] is actually a combination of 3 symbols, namely basis, ground — walls | | and roof ^ . The basis symbol — can be used in industrial products, and if you care to study my tourist folder you will see a lot of meanings in which this symbol is used in combination. The roof ^ symbol means also cover and protection. It can be thus displayed on covers of industrial machinery and equipment, and also to say "protect the machine against rain, etc."

Now to my symbol for an aircraft []. It is again a composition of a wheel [] and the wings of a bird []. And thus it means a flying machine []. And thus it becomes a timeless symbol. Those backswept wings shown in other symbols of aircraft on page 32 of the article were unknown 20 years ago, and will be unknown perhaps 20 years hence, when deltawing aeroplanes will be used. But my symbol for a flying machine is timeless, just as timeless as the wheel and the bird's wings are. But look into my folder and see that I use the wings for airletter (p.3 of the folder) for flight numbers (page 4), etc. Furthermore, I use the symbol of the wheel for all industrial apparatuses where a wheel is used, also for factory, etc. etc. I have forgotten to show that my symbol for open can also be used on tins "open here", and everywhere where "open" is needed.

So you see this demonstration shows you how much there is in these 2 symbols displayed in Mr. Kelly's article, and how interesting a little explanation on one page could be. It will be in the greatest interest of your esteemed magazine if you would bring my article, and I hope Mr. Kelly will agree. As for me, I never asked for a penny, I am an idealist, an artist, a musician, a poet and an inventor. And hence, I think Mr. Kelly should let me explain my work. For you personally, please receive a memorial card for my late wife. I am,
Yours sincerely, C.K. Bliss.

And I received the following letter.

Dear Mr. Bliss,

19 March, 1968

I was extremely impressed and touched by your poem written in memory of your wife. Being an incurable romantic, your theme of love and loss enhanced by your skilful use of imagery made it that much more enjoyable for me to read. Although I have never had the pleasure of meeting you, I feel I can say that you are truly a compassionate man. May I just add that correspondence in itself is at its best an endurable chore. It is only when I receive such charming and thoughtful replies such as yours (which is rare, very rare) that I feel all is not for nought.

Alright, enough of my feminine "gushiness" -- you no doubt are much more interested in Mr. Kelly's response. Mr. Kelly will be pleased to give you the opportunity to explain and clarify your work: following are a few of his suggestions to aid you in the preparation of this article.

1. Due to the limited number of editorial pages prescribed for each issue, we cannot give you more than two (2) pages (one for your text and one for your illustrative material). Our page set-up is 180 lines at approx. 37 type-characters per line. It is not necessary for your printer to set the text, as we prefer to reproduce editorial copy by letter press.
2. Since few, if any of our readers are students of Semantography, he feels your work would be best understood by our readers if you presented it in as simple (layman) terms as possible.
3. Although Mr. Kelly realises that you would like to explain to our readers that your present article has been prepared in an effort to deal with his criticisms, he feels that if you dispensed with this type of introduction you will have more space to explain the validity and workability of your language.
4. He would appreciate your submitting a variety of reproduceable graphics, so that he may have the opportunity to pick and choose those illustrations which he feels will fit in best with the space allotments we are required to follow in addition to augmenting the quality of your article.

Lastly, it might be necessary to do some slight editing of your material, but only stylistically so that it will fit in with the existing pattern of our publication. Mr. Kelly will not distort or change the meaning of your information.

Well that's it Mr. Bliss -- I hope these suggestions will not be too restrictive for you.

As for myself, Mr. Bliss, I feel a man like yourself who is capable of writing such embracing poetry, has an awful lot to contribute to humanity. I for one anxiously await your article. Until then I remain,

With very best wishes
Arleen Latman.

I answered

Dear Miss Latman,

For the wonderful words you have found for me, I can only say "God bless you!" If you are (as you say) "an incurable romantic", if I am "sentimental", I believe this is the only possible attitude to have in a world of cynicism. We can make a better world to live in, if more people like you would be around.

I have closed my draft by referring to the "breath-taking" implications of my work. This is no exaggeration. Here is but one. In hundreds of millions of homes there are quarrels between husbands and wives, between lovers, between parents and children, and between friends. Nobody quarrels whether $2 + 2 = 4$ or perhaps 5, because we all have learned in school how to handle and profit by the mathematical symbols. A day will come when children will learn the implications of my simple symbolic logic, and then many millions of quarrels would not happen. It could make a better, a wonderful world, when people will realise that it is useless to argue with words which are vague, ambiguous and even false.

There are other more "breath-taking" implications in my work, and you will find a summary on them in the pages 13-14, and on p. 52ff. You will see there that I have found something unbelievable operating in our world: a natural ethics, acting within the cells of animals and birds, making them love and feed, protect and defend their children. Only we human beings have been perverted in our thinking by vague and ambiguous words, and my symbols enable even children to spot these words.

Now I have to thank Mr. Kelly and you for making it possible for me to explain some aspects of my work in your esteemed magazine. I wish Mr. Kelly would follow up my suggestion to write the article, or perhaps to let you write it along the lines indicated in my draft. Now here are a few points.

1. The draft contains exactly 37 type-characters per line. Hence, I had to type it on the right margin, as otherwise my typewriter would run away with me, and I would not be able to adhere to the 37 types per line.
2. I enclose a copy of the leaflet distributed by Prof. Reiser during his lecture

at the American Association for the Advancement of Science. It carries a picture of Leibnitz, and Mr. Kelly may perhaps agree to bring this picture within the article.

3. As soon as I know which symbols will appear, I would re-draw them, and send them to you in the exact size, as those shown in the article in NewsTime.

4. Please paste my dedication for Mr. Kelly on the front page of the copy which you will receive from the book firm Acme Code Company, 102 First Street, Hackensack N.J. 07601. Should the book not arrive within say 2 weeks, please claim it from the order department of this firm, which will receive my letter at the same time you are receiving this letter. And now, thanks again a thousand times.

Sincerely yours,
C.K. Bliss.

There was no answer and I wrote again.

Dear Miss Latman,

Sydney 31-5-68

I hope this letter will find you and Mr. Scott Kelly healthily engrossed in the mass of manuscripts and work which usually deluge editors. I hope that this is the only reason why I haven't received an acknowledgement of my letters and article (draft) sent 2 months ago.

I was delighted by the prospect that an article about my work will appear in your esteemed magazine, as said in your letter of March 19, and I sat down to work it out. Knowing that designers (the majority) still believe that symbols should be understood "right away" (a fallacy, as pointed out by Mr. Scott Kelly in his article) I endeavoured to show that my symbol writing : ~~can~~ do much, much more than give pictorial symbols for public conveniences and machinery. But perhaps the first impression of an idea too "utopian" may have delayed the acceptance. But after all, it is the noblest aim of any publication to put forward new ideas which could help humanity.

So, I hope that you will tell me in your reply that my article will appear. Again, I wish to state that I would be also happy if my name is not mentioned at all. What I want is that interested persons should know that such a work has been done.

Hoping to hear from you soon, I am with my best regards to you and to Mr. Scott Kelly,

Sincerely yours,
C.K. Bliss.

And not a word for a whole year. I wrote then

Dear Mr. Kelly,

18.4.69

Before I go into the matter, allow me to say that I am a man of 72 years of age and that eminent men and scholars have testified that I am the first man who has evolved and designed a practical and complete pictorial symbol language even for scientific communication. The I.B.M. people have agreed that a special Pall Font of my symbols can be cast for their electric Ball typewriter 72. In the meantime you have received my large book on which eminent professors have commended favourably.

I still do not know why you have criticised my work in your article, and why you have not even mentioned the title and publisher of my book. This is a courtesy which is a must for every reviewer.

Later on Miss Latman wrote to me and you have agreed to bring a short article. I sent you my article, calculated to the exact space Miss Latman prescribed. Then Miss Latman left your employment and I heard nothing more about it.

Can I please get my book back? I have only a very limited edition and every book which collects dust uselessly somewhere is a loss for me. Please tell your office boy to have it packed and shipped to me and I will send you immediately the postage for it.

I said in the beginning I am an old man and I do not think I deserve your contempt. Hoping to hear from you by return, I am

Yours sincerely,
C.K. Bliss

And then I learned that Mr. Kelly had been fired. The new Editor-in-chief wrote to me

Dear Mr. Bliss,

April 21, 1969

Mr. Kelly has not been in our employ since August, 1968. However, I regret any misunderstanding which may have arisen between INDUSTRIAL DESIGN and you as a result of your correspondence with him.

Under separate covers, I am returning your manuscript and other materials which you sent Mr. Kelly. Your book is also being returned. Thank you for your patience.

Sincerely,
J. Roger Guilfoyle,
Editor-in-chief

I answered,

Dear Mr. Guilfoyle,

Sydney 9-5-69

Accept my thanks for sending back the article and informative literature which I sent to Mr. Scott Kelly on his request. It was not necessary to send it by airmail. I take it that you want to let me know that you will help me.

However, what I want actually is my large book, and I hope that by this time it has already been posted and will reach me by surface mail. Thank you for this. I am,

Yours sincerely,

C.K. Bliss

And now I reprint the proposed article which I measured exactly to fill two pages of the magazine "Industrial Design". All the symbols shown are from the tourist folder (S.S. 280) and a few which I combined from my lecture leaflet for the Geological Society of Sydney University (S.S. No. 43) I showed also how I used the THING and the ACTION indicators to indicate nouns, verbs and by using the two bracket signs for past and future how to use the verb for the past and the verb for the future. However, there is no need to redraw all the symbols here. I shall only mention the page of the tourist folder and shall write only the explanatory words for my geological and industrial symbols which I produced in the manuscript.

A D R A F T F O R A 2 P A G E A R T I C L E

which may be altered, discarded and completely re-written

suggested title:

A SYMBOL LANGUAGE FOR INDUSTRIAL DESIGNERS

The text at right contains ^{not} more than 37 type-characters per line, and about 60 lines per column, that is 180 lines for 1 page.

Scott Kelly demonstrated in his excellent article on graphic symbols "Rubbernecking through Babel" (INDUSTRIAL DESIGN, September, 1967) the confusion already created by various symbols for the same meanings. He emphasized the need for a truly universal symbol language.

A complete symbol language

So far, only 20 to 50 symbols have been designed for industry and travel. But a complete symbol language must express every meaning needed. This is only possible if a small number of "symbol letters" are used in much the same way as the 26 letters of the alphabet.

Furthermore, the symbols must be pictorial. They must be typeable on an IBM ball typewriter together with the alphabet for names, addresses, etc. Industrial firms must be able to use them for directions on their products and for typing and printing price lists, directions, invoices, and letters that can be read in any language.

"An impossible dream"

said linguists for 300 years, since the great Leibnitz dreamed about such a "Symbolis Universalis".

C.K. Bliss, an industrial research chemist didn't know of Leibnitz' "impossible dream". He knew only of the amazing advantages of mathematical, chemical, and pictorial electronic symbols. And so, following Gray's words "Where ignorance is bliss, 'tis folly to be wise" he embarked on the impossible.

Nine years later, eminent scholars agreed with Professor Oliver L. Reiser of the University of Pittsburgh, who told the American Association for the Advancement of Science: "Bliss realised the ambition of the great mathematician Leibnitz".

Bliss is now over 70, and all he wants is that young minds should take over. He is immensely grateful to the editor of INDUSTRIAL DESIGN for making this short exposition of his work possible. His book on SEMANTOGRAPHY (2nd edition, 882 pages, library price \$9.00) is distributed by the book firm Acme Code Co., Hackensack, N.J. 07601, and booksellers.

The 100 "symbol elements"

Bliss uses 30 already well-known:

(tourist folder page 2)

The "Line Letter"

Alphabetical letters are formed by lines. In much the same way we can combine the "line letters" of semantography to thousands of meanings:

(tourist folder page 3)

The symbols for "open" and "closed" can be used on appliances and machines, on containers (open here, close after use), and together with time numbers, on doors when the bank, consulate, etc. will be open, and when closed.

The line and arrow can form many meanings in travel and transport:

(tourist folder page 4)

The word DEPARTURE needs 9 typings, the symbol only 2. This space economy

holds true with most symbols.

Symbols for travel and transport

(tourist folder page 2)

Some of these "symbol elements" are already combinations. A "house" can be symbolized by "roof" over "ground", a "ship" by "vessel" over "water". Here are some postal symbols.

(tourist folder page 3)

Scott Kelly points out correctly that the present-day outline for "telephone" is already obsolete, as the new upright with the dial in its base is coming into use.

Timeless industrial symbols

We need symbols that will remain unchanged, no matter how much the industrial design is changed. Here is the timeless symbol for a "telephone":

(tourist folder page 6)

And here is the timeless symbol for a "machine" composed of the symbol for the "sun", source of all energy, and the "wheel" product of inventive man

sun	wheel	machine
Here is the timeless symbol for a	"flying machine" of any shape:	
machine	wings	aeroplane

Here are other "machines"

machine for opening anything	machine for opening letters	
water below ground	machine for sinking bores	mountain
machine for pumping wells	machine for drilling tunnels	machine for mining

If you consider these symbols cumbersome, think of the engineers in Finland, Somaliland, or Italy who will be happy to read them in their own languages. (see next paragraph).

A new idea for magazines

Imagine a future issue of INDUSTRIAL DESIGN or LIFE INTERNATIONAL. Underneath the pictures and their captions there are subcaptions in symbols. Imagine a picture showing a complex machine. The reader, who can't read English, reads in the symbols, that it is a machine for drilling, or pumping, tunneling, mining, etc. If he is an engineer, he can get more information (see next paragraph).

The catastrophe of scientific publications

About 2 million articles appear yearly in 35,000 journals in many languages. Research is hopelessly handicapped. Computer information is out of reach for many lands.

In his lectures at Sydney University Bliss advocated small index cards carrying a summary in say 100 words written in 2 or 3 corresponding lines.

1. The language of the country in which the article appeared (if it is not English)
2. In English
3. In the symbols of semantography.

Engineers, doctors, and researchers would subscribe to these cards for their special fields only, and receive them from a distribution centre.

For instance, there would be a card for every article of every issue of INDUSTRIAL DESIGN. Subscribers to the index cards could then order a copy of INDUSTRIAL DESIGN that carries that special article.

An international spoken language

You may say that we need a spoken international language. We have already one: English. It is the language of commerce and science, and taught in all countries. Semantography is closely fashioned after English. By seeing the corresponding symbol and the English words, the reader would learn the English words. Bliss advocates that road and travel signs in symbols should carry the native words and English words underneath. Native children would playfully learn English.

But we need a grammar

Yes, not the artificial "laws of language", but the "laws of nature" where MATTER and ENERGY, or in simple words THINGS in ACTIONS can be observed. A crystal cube is a THING, the eruption of a volcano is an ACTION.

MATTER, THING	ENERGY, ACTION
(crystal outline)	(volcano outline)

We use these 2 symbols as "indicators" on top of other symbols:

opening	to open	to fly	
These indicators are often not necessary on machinery, etc.			
For indicating the past and future we use these 2 symbols)(on top			
pen	to write	have written	shall write

These few words must suffice. For more information see the book.

Symbols for logical thought

So far, we have seen only symbols which "picture" the outline of real THINGS. But a modern "symbol language" must have simple symbols to reason with, as we do in ordinary language.

Leibnitz demanded that the symbols must be pictorial "for easy communication with distant nations." But he also predicted that they will contain a simple symbolic logic "for giving thoughts less absurd and verbal than we now have."

Bliss realised that we think and speak of two different world, the world "outside of our brain", and the world "inside of our brain." In the outside world we see, and can picture and photograph the real THINGS and their ACTIONS. Hence we can come to an agreement of what we are talking about.

But we also talk in thousands of words which refer only to meanings "inside our brain". These words cannot be pictured, and they can cause serious disagreement, as for instance: "Your idea is bad, clumsy, ridiculous!" Such words prevent co-operation and break up friendships, marriages, and lives. Can symbols help us here?

Symbols for unpicturable mind meanings

Our mind is a piece of brain matter protected by the upper skull.

brain to think reason

(outline of upper skull)

Now we can form symbols for mental attitudes, favourable or not:

favourable (positive) unfavourable (negative)

Adding an exclamation mark we get

good, right bad, wrong

Alas, what one mind considers "good" another may reject as "bad". And not two minds are alike and think alike.

mind 1 differs from mind 2

From this we derive a simple rule for avoiding quarrels and useless debates: When we hurl statements at each other which contain an unpicturable mind word, we may only lose friends and infuriate people. How to overcome this?

By using the small four letter word: WHAT? Good in WHAT? Or bad in WHAT? A design may be good for use, but bad for sales (too dear). We may agree on that. A semantographic symbol may be "not so good" as the symbol of another designer, but semantography as a system of a complete symbol language is "the best so far designed." And on this all designers may agree.

Industrial designers are engineers, and engineers have evolved a fine symbol.

tolerance

tolerance

in engineering

in semantography

When we unite the meanings of "good" and "bad" in our mind we gain the highest virtue of a human mind: tolerance. Our symbol tells us that when we believe that we are right, and the other guy is absolutely wrong, we realise that perhaps we are wrong too. Co-operation and friendship may result.

This article gives only a few hints of the idea of the great Leibnitz, the greatest language planner who ever lives. For more implications - truly breathtaking - see the book.

End of article

As said before, my article never appeared. Even the new editor-in-chief didn't dare to wade into a matter unknown to him. What a pity! I had spent so much time on putting the new symbols for all kind of industrial machinery together for the printer. Alas Miss Latman was not more with "Industrial Design". Otherwise, I feel sure, she would have pressed the article through to be published. What a pity!

The End