



Semantography Series No. 310

VARIOUS MAGAZINE AND NEWSPAPER ARTICLES WHICH
DEPRECATE BLISS' WORK BUT LAUDS THE MAN WHO
WANTS ONE MILLION DOLLARS FOR COMPILING A
SYMBOL DICTIONARY - AND CAN'T COMPILE ONE.

This Issue is a sequel to the Issue No. 309 which carries the title:

THE MAN WHO WANTS ONE MILLION DOLLARS FOR COMPILING A SYMBOL DICTIONARY -
AND CAN'T COMPILE ONE.

In the foregoing issue No. 309 I have shown my correspondence with the designer Mr. Henry Dreyfuss. In my very first letter (when I did not know that he had already received \$6,000 for "A Feasibility Study for a Symbol Dictionary" and who then wanted \$1,000,000 for the compilation of such a dictionary) I have offered my help and co-operation without any money compensation. But what is more important is that I told him in my very first letter (see page 1 of S.S. 309) that a Symbol Dictionary is a two-way affair. There must be a part ENGLISH-SYMBOLS, and a counter part SYMBOLS-ENGLISH, and this is most difficult to compile as there is no system by which an arrangement can be made to list all the symbols, like this is done in all dictionaries by using the system of the sequence of the alphabet A B C etc. I wrote that my large book contains already a Symbol Dictionary and that the counterpart is easy to make. Indeed I have already indicated in my publications how the other part of the dictionary is to be made. See my large book "Semantography" 2nd edition, pages 827 - 867 (40 pages). And the other part Symbols-English is shown in S.S. 2 already printed in 1950, more than 20 years ago. The idea is that the symbols can be listed like the Chinese Telephone Directories. And my symbols whether they depict concrete or abstract meanings can again be used as the guidelines for all other symbols to be listed in such a dictionary.

As I said in S.S. 309, the fact that I have already worked out a symbol dictionary must have been a great shock to Mr. Dreyfuss, and hence he did not mention this fact, nor did he mention my books in his "Feasibility Study" which he submitted to that Foundation which gave him the \$6,000. But he went further. He induced magazine and newspaper writers to write articles in which they were told to laud his endeavours for a symbol dictionary. At the same time they were induced to write in deprecatory words about my own symbols, by not explaining how the symbol elements really work and by not mentioning my book at all (though this is standard procedure with reviewers and article writers) and least of all telling their readers that I have worked out a symbol dictionary. This Mr. Dreyfuss simply withheld from his back writers for obvious reasons.

He did send me only one article which appeared in the IBM journal THINK, and which I shall reprint here below together with my comments which will be - for recognising them as my comments only, and not being the text of the article - underlined.

But when Dreyfuss received my letter of March 5, 1969 in which I refuted that man who wrote that article, Dreyfuss did not send me any other article. But I got them nevertheless from friends in various parts of the world, and they all show the same pattern: Dreyfuss is lifted up into Heaven, and Bliss is degraded down into hell. This is a clear indication for everyone to see that it was Dreyfuss who gave all the information and that it was Dreyfuss who alone had an interest that my work be deprecated - because of that \$1,000,000.

Now here below is the article in the IBM journal THINK of November/December 1968. In the introductory note the editor says that George A.W. Boehm is a long-time science writer and a frequent contributor to THINK. The picture shows a man wearing a kind of beard which old Chinese have favoured in the old days. In the introductory words to the Contents of the issue the editor says: A NEW SIGN LANGUAGE - STRAIGHT AHEAD by George A.W. Boehm and in the second line the editor says: "A universal set of symbols will say the same thing in any language." This is indeed what I have done already, but what a symbol dictionary will never accomplish, and Mr. Dreyfuss has in his "Feasibility Study" never said that he would attempt such a set of symbols. All he will do is to compile existing symbols. Now here is the text of the article:

A NEW SIGN LANGUAGE - STRAIGHT AHEAD

by George A.W. Boehm

Fragile..Emergency Exit..Keep off the Grass..Lifeguard on Duty..Wet Paint..
Turn Right to the Football Stadium..Pedestrian Crossing..No Smoking..Restrooms
Downstairs..Free Parking..Danger, Blasting..Oil Pressure Gauge..Merry Christmas.

Many a tourist has found himself losing something in the translation - his way, usually - and the problem is far more serious for international airlines, highway officials, industries heavily involved in export-import. A universal sign language, many authorities believe, could go a long way toward coping with the babel of our society.

So many elementary ideas must be relayed to such a variety of people, and yet, there is no complete satisfactory way to make them clear to everyone. Ordinary languages, written or spoken, can no longer bear the whole burden of communication among young people of different backgrounds. A worldwide crisis in comprehension bedevils public safety officials, managers of international airports, manufacturers of machinery, cartoonists, designers of posters, and others who want to make themselves instantly intelligible. They need a common language - one that will function as smoothly in everyday life as church Latin, diplomatic French, Morse code and mathematical notation have among specialists.

Oddly enough, the very developments that are knitting the world together aggravate the problem. With jet travel, no corner of the world is more than a couple of days away. Any two people can exchange messages electronically within minutes. And the world thrusts itself upon all people, even those who seldom venture out of their neighbourhoods. Booming international trade is putting unfamiliar products with inscrutable labels into millions of homes; international television will soon fill the air with new ideas voiced in strange tongues.

Bliss: And now the two "great symbolists" are named Margaret Mead and Rudolf Modley and their "Glyph Organisation" I have written about them in S.S. 269 and 270. As to the name of "Glyph" this is one of the hilarious stories in a sad story on symbols. Mead and Modley looked for a new name for interlinguistic symbols, and they hit on glyphs (from hieroglyphics). - But glyphein means carving in Greek, whereas graphein means writing. Hiero-glyphs means sacred carvings, not writings. And indeed Mead and Modley did not know that the Egyptian hieroglyphs are not interlinguistic symbols but alphabetical symbols in which every picture represents an alphabetical letter. See for instance in my book "Semantography" on page 771 where I show the hieroglyphs of the name CLEOPATRA. The picture of an eagle appears twice. Why twice? Because the eagle represents the letter A, and this letter appears twice in CleopAtra. Now let's continue Boehm's article:

What should be the new lingua franca? A sign language more or less standardized, according to Margaret Mead, the grande dame of anthropology, and graphic designer Rudolf Modley. They are co-chairmen of a young scholarly organisation called Glyphs, Inc., which aims to develop universally understandable graphic symbols. A basic requirement for a technologically developed world, they explained in a recent issue of Natural History, "is a set of clear, unambiguous signs that can be understood by the speakers of any language, and by members of any culture, however primitive. These signs will enable mankind to use the great new freedom of worldwide travel. Without them hungry, frightened, confused people will continue to clog the travel lanes, come to grief on the roads, return disenchanted to their small provincial worlds, and contribute to the isolation and hostility in which many human communities live today.

The objectives of Glyphs, Inc., have been widely acclaimed by scholars, businessmen and other who view the world as a whole. Now a somewhat more concrete proposal has stirred up added excitement.

Bliss: And now Boehm begins his laudatory story about the great designer Henry Dreyfuss, and it was from this article that I learned that Dreyfuss has already got money from a Foundation and that he asks for \$1,000,000.

The noted U.S. industrial designer Henry Dreyfuss has decided independently to compile a "dictionary" of all the signs and symbols in common use throughout the world, and to explore which them work well and why. Aided by a skeleton staff in his Pasadena office, he has completed a preliminary study, which was supported by a modest grant from the National Endowment for the Humanities. The whole project will probably cost about \$1,000,000 and will pre-empt a great deal of Dreyfuss' time for several years. He wants to enlist a staff of advisers from every part of the globe, who will not only help collect symbols in use but also judge which of them can be safely transported from one culture to another.

HARE-TORTOISE OR CHEETAH-SNAIL?

For example, Dreyfuss himself in designing machinery has used the hare and the tortoise to indicate fast and slow. This is all very well for people whose folklore includes Aesop's fables. But in parts of Asia he suspects, a cheetah and a snail might be better comprehended. Bliss: No Cheetah in Asia Mr. Boehm.

Dreyfuss is currently busy rounding up financial backing for the project.

Several publishers who have gone over the plans expect that worldwide sales of the dictionary will be so great over a period of years as to make it a self-liquidating venture.

The dictionary is bound to be an extremely fat book - more likely, several volumes. During his preliminary study, which includes a personal visit to the Soviet Union, Dreyfuss uncovered more raw material than he had anticipated. Actually, bits and pieces of a serviceable universal graphic language have been accumulating for thousands of years. Cave dwellers eloquently portrayed mammoth and bison hunts. Early civilizations, before developing formal writing, recorded their history, commercial transactions and religious beliefs in lucid pictographs that are not much harder to decipher than a child's rebus. Europeans have always compensated for widespread illiteracy by using symbols, including the signboards on English pubs, the barber's striped pole and the pawnbrokers three gilded orbs.

The modern world would be severely handicapped if it lacked the terse language of symbols. A skull and crossbones is easily the most emphatic way to label poisons. The familiar red cross on a white background stands for medical aid in many countries. Motorists depend upon arrows when road signs flash by too fast for words to be read. Distinctive trade marks identify many products and services - most notably the familiar designation of a telephone by a bell.

A Babel of Symbols

Current symbol language, useful though it is, satisfies almost no one who studies it seriously. Except for a relatively few standard symbols, every designer makes up his own as he pleases. A case in point is the symbolism created especially for the Olympic Games in Tokyo and Mexico and for Expo 67 in Montreal. The problems were identical: to give directions to throngs of tourists from many nations. But three separate graphic languages evolved, and although all were artistically excellent, they used different symbols to point the way to various events and exhibits and such facilities as restaurants and information booths. To be sure, international bodies have managed to standardise some special symbol codes, such as those used in electronic diagrams. But even among these, few are universally understood by all the people who are supposed to use them. Although one set of traffic signs is standard throughout Europe, a recent survey reveals that one third of British motorists do not grasp the meaning of the "no passing" symbol, and two thirds don't recognise another prohibiting all automobiles. With so much confusion and ambiguity, it would be simpler to start again at the beginning.

A MENU FOR DESIGNERS

But probably one can't, and Dreyfuss does not intend to try. Instead of dictating a list of "correct" symbols, he will work like a modern lexicographer. His dictionary will present all ideas that have been used successfully, so that it will serve as a sort of menu for individual designers and for national and international groups that want to set standards. In no instance will Dreyfuss try to impose his own taste in graphics. If, for instance, a particular size utilizes an arrow, the designer is free to use any kind of arrow he fancies - barbed, feathered, notched, or a slim triangular pointer.

Dreyfuss brings plenty of practical experience to this new project. He and his organisation, Henry Dreyfuss and Associates, have in the last 15 years created about 100 symbols for various industrial clients, including manufacturers of sewing machines, cameras, farm machinery, machine tools and telephone equipment. He is aware of the basic rules. A symbol must be distinctive so that it is instantly recognizable. And it must be geometrically simple so that it can be engraved, printed, or stenciled.

Bliss:

To the last paragraph I wish to say that my own research has brought out the fact that the firms which Dreyfuss mentioned especially Deere Co. and Polaroid have abandoned his symbols. But now Boehm comes to me and, apparently instructed by Dreyfuss, makes a statement which is designed to deprecate my work. Apparently he got the tourist folder (S.S. 280) from Dreyfuss and took the first symbol combination on page 7 to mean waiter. He does not explain why that symbol for man shows a man standing on his two legs. He describes my symbol simply as an "inverted Y" which makes my symbol seem abstract and downright idiotic. Why should an inverted Y stand for man? And the lie that I have published "hundreds of standardised symbols" though even the tourist folder which he perhaps got (or not) says on the very first page "100 Symbol Elements to overcome Babel". One hundred only, not "hundreds". This has given me sleepless and unhappy days and nights.

Dreyfuss is also studying synthetic symbol languages. Perhaps the most ambitious of these was formulated by an Australian, Charles K. Bliss, who 20 years ago published hundreds of standardised symbols with rules for combining them. For example, he uses a straight line for "earth", a circle for "mouth", and an inverted "Y" for man. The first two together mean "food"; all three in a cluster stand for "waiter".

Bliss: Now the article has two pages of text, and about two pages of symbols. Of these nearly one page shows a lengthy document in Egyptian hieroglyphs. To this Boehm says: "Bits and pieces of graphic language, like these Egyptian hieroglyphics, have been accumulating since the beginning of civilisation - and before. Apparently Dreyfuss did not enlighten Boehm (because Dreyfuss doesn't know it himself) that Egyptian hieroglyphics are not a graphic language but an alphabetical language, the pictures standing for letters only as explained before. But the thing which made me extremely unhappy is this: The symbols shown (most of them known long ago as the arrow, and a few of Dreyfuss' own design are drawn very large in size. How simply it would have been to show my symbols for earth, mouth, food, man and waiter. But no. Apparently the reader may grasp the simplicity of my symbols. Hence, no picture, but the saying that a man is depicted by an inverted Y. The remainder of the article is common place. The last paragraphs stress again the great advantage of the symbol dictionary. And Boehm ends with the jubilant words: "And this would be a running start towards a universal sign language".

Another gambit is to make use of colour. The fact that panic buttons are almost always red has probably saved thousands of lives. But colour also has limitations. For one thing many people are colour-blind. For another the symbolic connotations of colour differ from one culture to another. In China, for instance, the bride wears red, and white is used for mourning.

Can other sensory clues be used? Dreyfuss intends to explore them all, because he is confident that some will prove helpful in special applications. In some complicated machines every knob and button is imprinted with a symbol that implies its function - e.g. a toothed wheel for a gearshift. It might help further to make each control a different shape and even to use different textures so that an operator could rely more on his sense of touch.

The success of any symbol depends largely on context - i.e., where it is used and who looks at it. It is safe to assume, for example, that a man who uses a sophisticated electronic test apparatus is familiar with the standard symbols in electronic diagrams, and so these can be used freely to label controls and dials. Similarly, a seamstress has a pretty good idea of how a sewing machine works and will immediately recognize a stylized drawing of a bobbin.

But in some notable instances, designers of symbols have gone far astray because they assumed too much specialized knowledge on the part of the people who were to read the symbols. An extreme case is the South African designer who made a sign that was supposed to tell miners to pick up any rocks on the railroad track and put them in the ore car. Realising that most of the miners were illiterate, he drew a series of cartoons showing a man in a mine car approaching a rock, stopping the car and then getting out and putting the rock in the car. What he did not realise was that illiterate people are as likely as to read the messages from right to left. As a result, some puzzled miners wondered why the boss was apparently telling them to take rocks out of the car.

Designers are split mainly into two camps. Some favour frankly pictorial symbols; others prefer abstractions. Dreyfuss is neutral. Pictographs are more rapidly learned; he admits, but become dated.

"Would a young child today recognise the outline of a 1920-model telephone, or an 1860 locomotive?" he asks.

He points out that some of the world's most useful symbols are pretty far-fetched. The Red Cross was founded in Switzerland, and so its symbol happens to be the Swiss flag with colours reversed. The plus sign is an unrecognisable abbreviation of the Latin word et. And the familiar emblem of telephone service is a graphic pun on the inventor's last name. Dreyfuss himself is not above using graphic anachronisms. For one of his clients he has specified a bugle to represent a warning horn and an old-fashioned gasoline pump for a fuel gauge. Both have worked out well, as he says.

AS BIG AS AN ATLAS

The dictionary when it is finally finished will probably be as big as a world atlas, with plenty of text discussing the uses and derivation of each symbol. The keystone would be a book including all the symbols that are used in many contexts - e.g. stop and start, push and pull, open and close, fast and slow, and warnings of various sorts.

Publication of the dictionary will provide a great impetus for setting standards for symbols in fields where chaos now reigns, in the opinion of F. Crampton Frost, manager of standardization programs for the USA Standards Institute. The USASI has published national standards for symbols in a few fields, including air-conditioning, wiring diagrams for buildings, railway signals and electronic data processing. But establishing standards for symbols has been slow, tedious work, mostly because the committees in charge usually have very little to start with. Frost foresees the possibility that whole sections of the Dreyfuss dictionary will provide standards for many fields in the U.S. and perhaps internationally. And that would be a running start toward a universal sign language.

Bliss: Of course it wouldn't. And I told this to Dreyfuss in my letters. The accumulation of symbols and signs from anywhere and everywhere would only result in a hodge podge of symbols, and this would discourage anyone who might think that this could be the start of a sign language. A consistent system of symbol elements for a complete sign language must come from a total disregard of most of the symbols which have been designed so far. And I am the only man who has devised a system of simple pictorial symbols for a complete sign language.

The second article induced by Dreyfuss is one which appeared in the Wall Street Journal of December 4, 1968. The author is Charles Alverson. Here again Dreyfuss' idea of a dictionary is lauded into high heaven, but my symbol system is degraded with shameful words. In this article three of my symbols are shown, but again without explaining the symbol elements. Naturally, the reader is convinced that I am talking and designing nonsense. No wonder that Alverson says that I am "dabbling in symbols". Another hackwriter Mr. Ralph Champion copied Alverson's article in a shorter version, but more vicious as far as my symbols are concerned. He too does not explain the meaning of my symbol elements, and consequently speaks of Bliss' "squiggles and doodles". And having not been told by Alverson or Dreyfuss that my symbols are in fact pictorial, he says that my symbols are abstract. I shall quote the full articles of Alverson and Champion below, and shall quote also a letter, which my previous secretary Maureen Bates wrote in London to that Mr. Champion who wrote for the Sunday Mirror of London. Now here below is the article by Alverson.

Signs of confusion

S i g n s o f C o n f u s i o n

THOUSANDS OF SYMBOLS USED TO OVERCOME LANGUAGE BARRIERS, BUT CHAOS STILL REIGNS. An article by Charles Alverson, which appeared in the Wall Street Journal of December 4, 1968 of which journal Alverson is staff reporter.

Bliss: Question: Which of the following symbols means "No Smoking?"

The first shows my symbol combination. The second an oblong rectangle crossed out by an oblique line, and the third, a burning match crossed out by an oblique line.

Answer: They all do. And that's the problem.

In recent years corporations and government and private agencies have been busily creating thousands of symbols called pictographs or glyphs. Their aim is to devise a means of communication that transcends languages in times of greatly increased international commerce and travel.

Yet in many cases the result has been confusion. Many, if not most, of these symbols are being created independently without consulting either language experts or others who might be likely to use a similar set of symbols. Many of the symbols are poorly designed, say authorities in the field, and the duplication of effort is enormous.

"TOWER OF BABEL"

"Designers all over the place are creating ^{different} symbols to say the same damn thing", says Rudolph Modley of Kent, Conn. He is a management consultant who is co-chairman of Glyphs Inc., a recent formed organisation aiming to bring some order to the chaos of newly conceived symbols. "It's becoming another Tower of Babel", he complains. For instance, Expo 67 at Montreal had hardly begun when complaints began to come in about men barging into the ladies' rooms. Apparently the symbols designed for the rest room doors didn't sufficiently differentiate between the sexes. (One theory has it that Europeans viewed the women's dress as a man's trench coat). The pictographs were hastily replaced by symbols of more obvious gender. Even some symbols that have won wide acceptance can backfire. In many countries the pictograph for "fragile" is a cracked wine goblet. Prominent industrial designer, Henry Dreyfuss, however, recalls that long-shoremen at an East African port not long ago took the symbol to indicate broken glass, and they threw several cases of glassware overboard.

No one doubts the need for symbols that can transcend language. In the past five years, Deere & Co., a Moline, Ill. maker of tractors and other heavy equipment has more than doubled its International sales to \$166 million from \$75 million. As a result, Deere has adopted a set of wordless operating symbols for nearly all its vehicles.

"When you are selling world-wide it's useless to put English words on equipment," says a Deere official, "and we think it too costly to give all operating instructions in the languages of the 100 countries to which we sell."

SYMBOLS FOR TRAVELERS

World travelers have been the special target of the symbol makers. Separate sets of travel symbols - indicating such things as ticket counters, baggage claim areas, and currency exchanges - have been created by the International Air Transport Association and the Air Transportation Association of America. In addition, many large airports are designing their own symbol language. Trying to untangle the resulting confusion is a special committee of the United Nations' International Civil Aviation Organisation. The Committee reports little success so far.

Moreover symbols abound at international events. Completely new sets of symbols

appeared at this year's Mexico City Olympics, at the 1964 Olympics in Tokyo, at Hemisfair at San Antonio, Texas, and at Expo 67.

If symbols are proliferating, so are groups trying to standardize them. One is the International Committee for breaking the language barrier, New York, a group of amateur-designers that conducts symbol-designing contests and lobbies for adoption of a single standard for travel symbols.

On a larger scale the International Chamber of Commerce in 1966 formed a committee to sift travel signs and symbols created by a broad range of national and world groups. The International Organisation for Standards, or ISO, a 55-nation body that creates technical standards, is also concerned about symbol standardisation. But its spokesman in New York sees little hope for immediate progress in that direction.

"One of the biggest obstacles to international standardization of symbols", says Don Peyton, managing director of ISO's U.S. arm, "is an absolutely God-awful overlap of international authorities."

CREATIVE CONFLICTS

Creative conflicts are considerable too. Most designers are convinced their symbols are best. And not only designers get involved in the creative process. "When you get into creating symbols," says an official of an airline that is trying to devise sign symbols for a new terminal, "your messing with the esthetic sense of every vice president in the company and that of their wives too."

Social and cultural patterns are another hurdle for symbol designers. For example, most Western nations agree that a red cross means "first aid", Moslem countries object, however, they prefer a star and crescent moon. And the traditional Western symbols of a man in trousers and a woman in a skirt for restroom doors lose their meaning due to national dress in many Asian and African countries.

Another internationally misunderstood symbol is the triangle, which is used widely to indicate "caution". Nonetheless, to helicopter pilots a triangle means a safe place to land. And in the Philippines it often designates a church.

Indeed, it's hard to forecast when a symbol will boomerang. At Expo 67, for example, a silhouette of an open palm was placed on certain doors to indicate "do not enter". Many people, however, figured the symbol meant "place your hand here and push", so they pushed open the doors and strolled in. The symbols were hastily scrapped.

To overcome such misinterpretations a few designers favor abstract symbols such as those created by C.K. Bliss, an Australian chemical engineer who dabbles in devising pictographs. Two Blissymbols reproduced below indicate telephone (left) and restaurant (right); his "no smoking" symbol appears on the left at the beginning of this article.

The Blissymbols however, have met with little acceptance. Says one critic who compares them to hieroglyphics: "You have to learn a whole new language. If you do that you might as well learn one you can speak."

Mr. Dreyfuss, the well-known industrial designer, sees one answer to the confusion on symbols: He's putting them all in a dictionary. He expects the project to take more than three years and to cost nearly \$1 million.

Mr. Dreyfuss who has created functional symbols for Polaroid cameras, Deere tractors, the Bell System's Picturephone and others says "I want to accumulate the best of the symbols currently in use so that people can pick from among them rather than just add to the current flood of new symbols."

There are some modest indications of willingness to adopt existing symbols rather than create new ones. Deere's operational symbols have been adopted by the American Society of Agricultural Engineers as its standard for all farm equipment, and are being considered for use by a number of other equipment makers. At least one Hyster Co., Portland, Ore., expects to have the Deere symbols on its control panels within six months and its working toward replacing all its equipment's operating instructions with symbols.

Bliss comment: Concerning the unfriendly words about my own symbols I wish to say that Mr. Alverson does not explain with one single word that my symbols are composed of symbol elements and once you know the meaning of the symbol elements, the meaning of the combination becomes understood. The critic who says that it might be better to learn a whole new language is perhaps Mr. Alverson himself or Mr. Dreyfuss. To learn a whole new alphabetical language and to make the whole world learn this new alphabetical language, that this should be better than learning my pictorial symbols, this opinion of Mr. Alverson and Mr. Dreyfuss is idiotic. When Mr. Alverson writes that my symbols met with little acceptance, this is true, simply because all the designers who are trying to design symbols must of necessity condemn and even ridicule my own symbols. But have Mr. Dreyfuss' symbols met with acceptance? Not at all. The Deere Co. and the Polaroid Co., have paid Mr. Dreyfuss for his designs and have abandoned them as I found out. That a symbol dictionary will not help but rather confuse, this I have proved a number of times.

And now we are coming to another hack writer who copied Mr. Alverson's article in the Wall Street Journal and used even worse words with regard to my symbols. He is Mr. Ralph Champion who reports from New York in the Sunday Mirror of December 8, 1968 an article under the title "The Trouble with the New Sign Language". He too shows the same Blissymbols for a telephone and for a restaurant but does not explain that the symbol for telephone contains the pictures of a mouth (speech) the picture of an ear (hearing) and together both mean language, and the added picture of a lightning to mean electricity and altogether these three symbol combinations mean speaking and hearing by electricity. This is a timeless symbol combination for telephone no matter what different shapes telephones will have in the many years to come. Similarly Mr. Champion copies Mr. Alverson by not explaining the symbol combination for restaurant. My symbol combination for restaurant shows the combination of three symbol elements namely: the first shows a box with an opening at the side which is a room large or small as for instance a room where food is served and eaten. Food is taken into the mouth, hence the pictorial outline of a mouth is shown. Where do we get all our food including our water, our wine and all our beverages? We are getting it from mother earth, therefore the third symbol shows the horizontal earth line. The mouth and earth line together means food in the widest sense of the word and altogether the combination means a room where food is served and eaten, a restaurant.

Had Mr. Alverson and Mr. Champion explained my symbols in this way every reader would have realised that I make very much sense and they are much better than all the other symbols which Alverson and Champion have shown and commented upon. But whereas where Alverson uses at least polite language in condemning my symbols, Mr. Champion of the Sunday Mirror London uses shameless words for which I could take him to court. He says that I am "dabbling" in symbols, and that my symbols are nothing but "squiggles and doodles". Theoretically, I could take him to court but I can't. I am not in London and I have not the money to take the Sunday Mirror to court. But my former Secretary, Maureen Bates, married to Barry Gibb, wrote Mr. Champion a long letter which letter I shall quote after the article of Champion. But the reader may believe me that I have spent sleepless nights and unhappy days about these shameless tricks. I thought long whether I should write to Alverson and Champion and the others. First I have not the time to do it. Secondly, nobody wants to be told that he is a fool, and has written a foolish article. And should I send them a thunderous letter they would only be glad that they have made me mad. This is the reason why I put all this in my Semantography Series to show the future researcher the troubles I went through and to prove that innovators of new ideas in the past and now are besmirched by envious and ignorant contemporaries. Here below is now the article by Mr. Ralph Champion.

SUNDAY MIRROR December 8, 1968

The Trouble with the New Sign Language
AMERICA '68
Ralph Champion
reporting from New York

The consequences of misunderstanding a glyph can sometimes be most embarrassing, not to say alarming.

Gentlemen blunder into the "ladies". Smokers unwittingly set fire to buildings. Travellers lose themselves in airports...

Glyphs or pictographs, are symbols now being used by American manufacturers and transport companies as a new sign language by which they hope to bridge gaps in international communication.

A sign showing a red zig-zag lightning flash with a skull and crossbones, for instance, will probably indicate to a worker who understands nothing but Swahili that there is danger of electrocution. Other signs are equally simple. Unfortunately, so many thousands of overlapping and contradictory designs are pouring out all the time that what had been planned as a kind of visual Esperanto has become instead a Pictorial Tower of Babel.

Attempts to standardise the new signs, choosing the most readily understandable symbols, run into all sorts of troubles, including artistic temperament among rival creators.

Montreal's famous Expo '67 went in for pictographs to illustrate the exhibition's facilities for foreign visitors - and sometimes regretted it.

For instance, signs for the public lavatories showed a silhouette of a man in trousers, a woman in a skirt. Even Westerners didn't always catch on, and tourists from Asia accustomed to men wearing robes were totally confused.

Expo '67 also displayed a sign consisting solely of a big black hand to indicate "Do not enter". However, there were so many gadgets on exhibition that many visitors thought doors bearing the sign were a special kind which could be opened only by placing a hand into the design, and they kept on barging into banned areas.

The triangle is widely taken everywhere in the West to indicate "caution" but to helicopter pilots it means a safe landing.

The familiar red cross understood by most of us to mean a first-aid station or hospital, causes objections in Moslem countries where they prefer a star and crescent moon.

The Olympics have been an abundant source of a Babel of Symbols. But the old symbol for the meaning of FRAGILE showing a broken wine goblet has caused confusion. A broken wine glass used by American exporters on their packing cases to warn foreign stevedores of fragile contents, is an example of a sign with a double meaning.

Unloading a ship at an East African port, stevedores took it as a sign that everything inside the crates was broken and began to toss the whole lot overboard.

"Designers all over the place are creating different symbols to say the same thing," complains Rudolph Modley, co-chairman of Glyphs Inc., an organisation recently set up to get some sense into the sign business.

The position is not helped by the proliferation of societies trying to standardise the signs. There are a half a dozen in the States alone, many more abroad.

FOOTNOTE to further confusion: One designer C.K. Bliss believes that the only way to solve the problem of international communication by signs is to concentrate on the abstract symbol.

Here you see what he means. His squiggles (above) are to indicate a telephone, the doodle on the right is a restaurant.

To me, just two more signs of confusion.

Bliss comment: And here below is the letter which my former secretary Maureen Bates wrote to Mr. Champion. The interested researcher is advised to look up Maureen's study and teaching of my symbols to children which comprises S.S.No. 282.

Dear Mr. Champion,

I am writing to you regarding your article on "The Trouble with the New Sign Language". In particular, your reference to Mr. C.K. Bliss, mentioned in your footnote. I found your article very interesting and most of all very true. You clearly explained the problem of increasing, confusing signs quickly becoming a "pictorial Tower of Babel". (a phrase used by Mr. Bliss himself).

I am an actress and a dancer and I am 21. I am now residing in London. However, I lived in Sydney, Australia for several years and while there I had the pleasure of working for Mr. Bliss, firstly as only a typist but I became so interested in his work I eventually became his personal assistant and co-worker before leaving for England.

The main reason I am writing is because compared to your detailed article, your mention of Mr. Bliss seemed so sketchy and gave no picture of the work and dedication concerning Mr. Bliss' ideas. Mr. Bliss is now 70 years old. He spent time in the dreadful concentration camps "Buchenwald" and "Dachau". He was released due to the brave fighting efforts of his wife, Claire, and they escaped the Gestapo and fled to China and after the war went to Australia.

After seeing the greatest massacre in human history caused through the linguistic concept of a "national language" and "nationality" whereby nations had slaughtered each other by millions, he set about to try and conquer the fallacy of words so that such a disaster would not happen again.

Thus he invented a simple semantics and symbolic logic which he called Semantography. For the past 26 years he has dedicated his life to improving his work down to the finest details so that his work can even be applied to the complex work of science and chemistry. He has offered his work to the world FREE, but like all inventors of new ideas (such as Braille) his work is not recognised and despite this fact, despite his realisation that it may probably be many years after his death before his work will be put into use, he goes on every day of his life improving his work and applying it to any modern use he can envision. International signs to help people visiting foreign countries, road signs, etc. as mentioned in your article is only one phase of his work. I enclose a folder he and I worked on as an example. All his books and printing of folders are done totally at his own expense. He is not after fame but only to help humanity.

I wrote a biography about him (only a short one of course) showing Mr. Bliss firstly as a human being, personality and secondly accounting his bringing up and the facts of his life and work. I would be happy to send you one if you should so wish. The main point Mr. Champion is that his work holds so much more than you seemed to speak of. The two "squiggles" (as you put it) meant obviously nothing without being explained and his idea is not to "concentrate on the abstract symbol" but on the simplest of symbols. Most scientists contradict themselves over his work by firstly saying it is too difficult to learn and then saying that it is too simple.

the two symbols demonstrated in your article are easily seen if you look at it. means telephone, but why? Within his language of Semantography it is simple. It involves his symbol of mouth and ear and then electricity. These combined gives you "speech and hearing" (language) through the means of electricity - a telephone. All of his symbols are easily learnt and understood.

I taught a child of 7, 50 basic symbols in 3 hours. He was not only able to write words he couldn't spell, but the important thing is he was able to pick out lies in a statement, to see nonsensical symbols where they shouldn't be. This child was not an exception, I worked with the other children and got the same successful result, and also they loved every minute of learning this work. For example, one child asked me what the symbol for television was, trust a child. So I compiled the symbol using the necessary basic symbols e.g. box electricity, @ seeing hearing and I also added the symbol of speech but the little boy quickly pointed out that you ~~don't~~ speak to a T.V. You ~~see~~ it yes, and hear it, but you ~~don't~~ speak to it.

This may seem trivial, but it shows and proves that lies cannot be written in Semantography - Hitler could not have shown in Semantography that "all Jews are bad" that "Germany should wake up", etc.

I hope I have been able to explain properly the basic outline of his work. If you should want further information I can send you the address of his publisher and distributor in the United States where you can get his detailed book of 882 pages (all written, typed and designed and then reproduced by photo-offset by himself). This man and his work really do deserve more attention than a footnote, as you will agree I am sure on reading of his ideas more closely.

I will be most pleased to receive a reply from you and I thank you in anticipation for your attention. A very happy Xmas to you and your colleagues.

Yours sincerely,

Maureen Gibb

Bliss comment: I need not add a word to Maureen's kind letter. We still correspond with each other and we are both devoted to a common aim - the propogation of my work. Mr. Champion didn't reply to her kind letter.

Another article lauding Mr. Dreyfuss' idea and condemning my work is to be found in S.S. No. 276. An article which appeared in the American magazine "Industrial Design" and written by the editor himself Mr. Scott Kelly under the idiotic title "Rubbernecking through Babel". I advise the researcher to look up the issue No. 276 which also includes my correspondence and my article which should correct my image in the eyes of the readers of "Industrial Design." Needless to say that Mr. Scott Kelly did not bring my article. I am glad however to report that I found out that he was fired from his post by the publisher.

Another article which appeared in the journal "Natural History" August/Sept, 68 carries the title "Communication among all People Everywhere". It is written by Margaret Mead and Rudolph Modley. No mention is made of Dreyfuss but my symbols are shown for "no smoking" which symbol has been taken over by Mr. Alverson in the Wall Street Journal (see above). This article by Margaret Mead and Rudolph Modley is in S.S. No. 356 and the researcher is advised to look it up there.

Needless to say that neither Mead nor Modley have made any attempt for a comprehensive system of symbols for a complete language. But they advocate a new international language which can also be spoken. Alas, it is not Esperanto which is already spoken by over 20,000,000 in the world. Mead and Modley recommend that the whole world should learn (hold onto your seats) ARMENIAN. Unbelievable but true. Needless to say that neither Mead nor Modley explained my symbol elements, leaving it to the reader to think I am crazy and that my symbols are not pictorial but abstract.

Other articles written by Mr. Dreyfuss or by journalists about Dreyfuss himself are to be found in the foregoing issue No. 309.

All in all a shameless exhibition of degrading my own work. I hope the reader will understand my terrible unhappiness.

End of this Issue.