

A PARISIAN CARTOONIST MR. JEAN EFFEL
SKETCHES UNIVERSAL LANGUAGE IN SYMBOLS

An Article by John L. Hess which appeared in the New York Times on 27 Nov. 1967

Introduction by Bliss: This article is significant because it shows that any newspaperman who tries something in symbols can get publicity by a fellow newspaperman. My approaches to the New York Times have not yet met with any response. Similarly, the newspaperman Karel J.A. Jansen who invented Picto got a write-up in Time Magazine because he too is a journalist. It didn't help when professors and other people wrote to Time Magazine protesting that my system is vastly superior and should be shown too. At that time I was very unhappy indeed, because I believed - at that time years ago - that what I need is publicity to make the professors look up and take notice. Today I am wiser. I know that even my picture on the cover of Time Magazine and a big cover story would not move them to make a move to study my work, least of all to implement it. Perhaps the threat of the guillotine might help. The lecture of Mr. Effel was held in Unesco House Paris with the help of two professors. My files of my correspondence with all the Director Generals of Unesco and their chief officers prove that all the Unesco "hopofficials" can do is to hop to conference to convene new conferences "Unesco" said the famous Professor Lancelot Hogben "is a comic synonym to Fiasco". I say it is a "tragic synonym to Fiasco". Today when writing these lines more than four years have gone by and Effel's lecture and his symbols are forgotten.

The other significance of this article is to be found in S.S. 356 the article on symbol languages by Margaret Mead and Josef Modley which appeared in the journal "Natural History". There Modley has found it necessary to whack my work by declaring that my symbols are "abstract" whereas Mr. Effel's symbols are "less abstract". My symbols are pictorial, Mr. Effel's symbols are less than pictorial, they are mostly abstract, and the examples shown are grammatical symbolisations. Again when Mead's and Modley's article appeared I was raging with unhappiness. Today I have calmed down. Today I know that my work will prevail, and the other attempts will disappear and be forgotten as it has happened with Effel and Jansen. And now the article, so that the reader who knows my symbols may be the judge.

Paris, Nov. 26 - Man is developing a universal language of symbols, in the view of some linguists here.

John Effel a Paris newspaper cartoonist, is convinced of it, and recently with the help of two Sorbonne professors of Oriental languages, he presented his findings to a fascinated audience at Unesco House.

The people at the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation were particularly interested because of the difficulties they have had in developing alphabets for hundreds of languages spoken by illiterate peoples.

The Western alphabet, all agree, is inadequate to express the sounds and, above all, the pitch and rhythm of these languages, which convey a rich variety of meaning.

Every good African proverb can be expressed on a drum, an African expert told the session, which was sponsored by the International Typographical Association.

Existing Forms Adapted

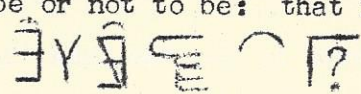
Among the solutions proposed are a variety of phonetic symbols. The new art of phototype-setting makes it easy to create an unlimited number of combinations, it was pointed out.

But a sign language, like Chinese ideograms and Egyptian hieroglyphics, bypasses the problem, since it has nothing to do with speech.

Mr. Effel calls his language a discovery rather than an invention because in fact, he says, he uses nothing but symbols men have already developed for communication without words.

In his own trade, Mr. Effel said in an interview, a host of wordless conventions have appeared. A falling object, for example is defined by two or three diagonal strokes:





Grammar posed fewer problems than one might think. Take Mr. Effel's translation of "To be or not to be: that is the question".

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