glyphs inc

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Please send us reproduction proofs of signs and symbols you have designed, put in use, published, or tested. We would also like to have any articles, books, publications or other material that you have run across that may be of interest to our readers. Please address all mail to Glyphs, Inc., Kent, Ct. 06757, USA.
Margaret Mead, Rudolf Modley

## Signs and Symbols in Review

The publication of three important—important—but greatly different—books gives us a good reason to look back at the modern history of signs and symbols—and to make a guess at the future.

The role of Otto Neurath. (1)

The "renaissance of hieroglyphics" can be traced back to the work of Otto Neurath in Vienna. What was then called the Vienna Method was developed in the early 1920's and reached its high points in the Social and Economic Museum in the City Hall of Vienna (opened in 1927) and in the publication of the monumental 100 colored plates of "Geselschaft und Wirtschaft", by the Bibliographic Institute in Leipzig in 1930. Neurath's way of expressing social and economic facts was through stylized symbols of men, women, homes, ships, etc. And, to show statistical facts, Neurath's basic method insisted that, "a greater number of things is always represented by a greater number of signs and that a sign for a thing always remains the same."

Neurath and his collaborators did not limit the application of stylized symbols to statistical charts; they also made maps, models and even used photographs when they felt that they were more effective. Neurath was backed by a carefully selected and competent staff. For the planning of presentations there were Marie Reidemeister (later Mrs. Neurath) and Bauermeister. Among the graphic designers were Gerd Arntz and Augustin Tschinkel as well as Bernath and Pfitzner.

Neurath, a man of encyclopedic knowledge and enormous vitality, ranged far beyond the field of graphics into the world of philosophy, economics, and politics. Only a single chapter in "Otto Neurath, Empiricism and Sociology" is devoted to "From Vienna Method to Isotype."

While Neurath spoke of "an international picture language", he was aware that the uses of a picture language are much more limited than those of normal languages. In one of the manuscripts on which Neurath was working at the time of his death in 1945 he had this to say: "The tendency . . . is not to intrude into the verbal field by building up a sort of international writing. . . .; the tendency is, on the contrary, to remain self-explanatory as long as possible, to create narrative pictures composed of self-explanatory symbols, aided by words, and as an aid to words."

Pictorial and Public Symbols in the United States. (2)

It is in the direction of a limited number of self-explanatory symbols that Glyphs is trying to continue Neurath's vision.



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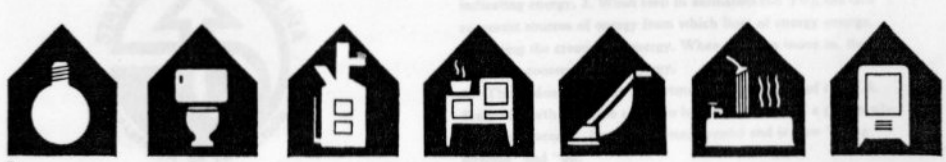
It did not take long for Neurath's work to become known in the United States. In March, 1932, the "Survey Graphic" of New York published an article on the Vienna Method. This was followed in January 1933 by an article by Waldemar Kaempffert in the "New York Times Magazine" which attracted wide public attention. In 1934, Pictorial Statistics, Inc. (later called Pictograph Corporation) was established in New York. In 1937, Harper's published "How to Use Pictorial Statistics" and Random House (and Modern Age Books) "The United States: A Graphic History" which was selected as one of the 50 best designed books.

In this issue, we publish some of the symbols designed in the United States by Pictorial Statistics in the 1930's. Also shown is a cartoon-type sequence without words which illustrates how symbols can be employed for diagrams. A similar use for safety posters, organization charts, etc. is possible.

This editor, who worked with Otto Neurath from 1923 to 1930 in Vienna, directed the work in the United States from 1934 to 1945. Glyphs was established in 1966 with Margaret Mead and the editor as co-chairmen and a distinguished board of directors. It directs its efforts exclusively at aiding in the establishment of universally usable graphic symbols.

Theory and Practice of Signs and Symbols. (3)

There are, today, only a few people who work in the field of theory of graphic communication and barely a handful in the field of graphic symbols. Among the early students was Martin Krampen, who did a special edition on "Signs and Symbols in Graphic Communication" in "Design Quarterly" (Walker Art Center, Minneapolis, 1965). It is there-



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fore welcome news that Krampen and Otl Aicher, the designer of the signage for the Munich Olympics, of the trademark for Lufthansa, and of the diagrams for the Frankfurt airport, have prepared a book which combines both theory and samples of application. While text and "art" have been completed, the book, which is both in English and German, is still in the "negotiating stage" with publishers while this is written. We shall discuss it if and when it is published.

## What Next?

At the present time, it is apparent that pictorial statistics have not been as widely accepted in the educational systems of different nations as was once expected. The outstanding exception is the work of Dr. Herbert Koberstein in Germany (4). The major emphasis is currently on the design of graphic symbols for public information. In this field, one might almost say that too much work is being done, with many conflicting symbols appearing in different countries. Many of these symbols are shown in "2,000 Pictorial and Public Symbols." The need now is for coordination. In the words of the Austrian Standards Institute, which is charged with the standardization of public symbols, "There is an urgent need for international standardization of basic graphic symbols for public information." (5). Let us hope that the technical and financial resources will be available to answer this need.

Rudolf Modley

1. Marie Neurath and Robert S. Cohen, Editors, "Otto Neurath, Empiricism and Sociology," D. Reidel Publishing Co., Dordrecht-Holland/Boston-USA, 1973. Also published in Spanish, Taller de Ediciones JB, Madrid, 1973.
2. Rudolf Modley, with the assistance of William R. Myers, "2,000 Pictorial and Public Symbols," Dover Publications, New York, 1973
3. Martin Krampen and Otl Aicher, "Sign Systems of Visual Communication," (in preparation; under consideration by Alexander Koch, Stuttgart), text in German and English.
4. Herbert Koberstein, "Statistik in Bildern," Sammlung Poeschl, Stuttgart, 1973
5. Oesterreichisches Normungsinstitut, "Graphic Symbols for Public Information: Scope, Stage of Work and Outlook for Further Activity" Vienna, January 1975, in English.

## News Shorts on Items of General Interest

A course on graphic semiotics has been taught over the last eight years by Professor Luc Vanmalderen (Galerie du Roi 18, B 1000 Bruxelles, Belgium). There are 12 hours on theorie, followed by workshops. Among the research projects is one on graphic semiology-signs, symblos, codes. Professor Vanmalderen has issued a glossary of terms.

A Society for Environmental Graphic Designers has been formed (P.O. Box 8183, Washington, D.C. 20024, USA).

Pictographic identification systems for safety systems and other communications have been issued by Dymo Industries, 1 Embarcadero Center, San Francisco, Cal. 94111 and by W. H. Brady Co., P.O. Box 2131, Milwaukee, Wis. 53201 USA.

The ideal writing system appears to be Japanese, says Thomas R. Hofmann, an assistant professor of linguistics at the University of Ottawa, Canada in an article entitled "the possibilities for a useful pasigraphy" (an artificial written language designed for universal use). Kanji would be used for the commonly used ideas, supplemented by phonetic writing where the need arises.

A challenge to the semitic origin of the Western alphabet by Kenneth Klarner appears in the same issue of ECO-LOGOS. Klarner thinks that the sequence of the letters of the alphabet may be Latin, although the symbols themselves may not be.

Symbols for personal-social self awareness which have a cross-cultural, crossdiscipline communications content are being sought by Ed Hedden, Southern Illinois University, PO. O. Box 430, Olney, Ill. 62450. The symbol language of the gnosis is of special interest.

The steps from realism to symbolism in Pueblo Indian art are graphically shown (an eagle's head is the object) in Frederick J. Dockstader's "Indian Art in America," N.Y. Graphic Society.



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1 Trademark of Pictorial Statistics, Inc. Designed by Walter Huxley / 1936

2 Cartoon-type story promoting the electrification of farms. Prepared by Pictorial Statistics, Inc. for the U.S. Rural Electrification Administration, 1935. Designed by Karl Koehler

3 Equipment of homes with electric light, flush toilet, central heating, stoves (gas or electric), vacuum cleaners, tub and shower and refrigerator. Designed by Henry Adams Grant for Pictorial Statistics, Inc. / 1930

4 Occupations, Crime and suicide. Designed by Karl Koheler for Pictorial Statistics, Inc. / 1930

5 A trademark designed by Fred Troller for the U.S. Federal Energy Administration. Troller explains the symbol in three ways: 1. The star is an American symbol. Also, the sun, the source of all earth energy is also a star. 2. The symbols appeas to be in motion, indicating energy. 3. When seen in animation (on TV), the dots represent sources of energy from which lines of energy emerge, indicating the creation of energy. When the lines move in, they represent conservation of energy.

6 The trademark of the Department of Correction of the U.S. State of North Carolina seems to indicate the idea of a person who has "gone wrong", has been turned around and is now "going straight" and "up."