

**NEW ADDRESS**  
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Sydney 10th December 1951

HOW I CAME TO WORK OUT SEMANTOGRAPHY

Some biographical notes by C.K. Bliss

I am an Austrian by birth (5th September 1897). My father was an optician and I inherited from him my love for the natural sciences. My mother was of a poetical nature. She taught me at an early age to recite immortal poems. I believe this had a lasting effect.

I studied first at the Hochschule fuer Welthandel (University for World Commerce) in Vienna, then at the University of Czernowitz and graduated from the Technische Hochschule (University of Technology, Department of Chemistry) in Vienna in 1922. Considering my studies, my degree equals that of a B. Sc.

I went into industry and got a job in a factory making electric lamps, electronic tubes, etc. (Joh. Kremenezky of Vienna). I stayed at this my first post for nearly 16 years, (was loaned for 2½ years for a research project of the General Electric Co. ) and rose to an important position. In all probability, I would have stayed there for the rest of my useful days - if Hitler had not invaded Austria.

Besides my industrial work, I was very much interested in other spheres of human endeavour. I had some success as a musician and dabbled in art, but my main hobby was teaching. I felt that science has a message for the common man, if told to him in the simple language he understands. After a weary day in the factory I went to evening classes, educational halls, colleges, etc. and lectured to people eager to learn. I told them the message of scientific humanism, although at that time, I did not know of the term and of its prophet Professor Oliver L. Reiser of the University of Pittsburgh, Pa., now my friend and benefactor.

I was head of the patent department of our firm, when in 1938 the Nazis over-ran Austria. In the past, living in a free country, I had spoken my mind freely. They had me on their list and I was among the first to be arrested. Later, together with thousands of other unfortunates and innocents I went through the hells of Dachau and Buchenwald. Release came 13 months later, mainly through the untiring and heroic efforts of my wife. She smuggled my musical instruments into the camp which helped me to bring about a friendly attitude with regard to my release, thus co-ordinating her efforts outside.

I had to leave hurriedly for England, got there immediately a job as factory manager, and made all preparations for her to come over, when the war broke out. I anticipated the worst for her. Feverishly I tried to find a friendly country where we both could go, as England was at war, and closed to new entries of refugees. South American and other countries too closed their doors. My quota expectations for the United States meant years of waiting. There was only one spot in the world where we both could go freely - one spot where no national government, but an international government ruled: the international settlement of Shanghai. But part of it was in the hands of the Japanese, with the rest waiting every day to be taken over by force. Going to Shanghai meant - in all probability - going into another concentration camp - being in the hands of the allies of the Nazis.

It was a desperate situation, and many thousands of refugees safely in England but their wives and families still on the continent, faced the same alternative: Reunion in perilous Shanghai or abandoning hope of rescuing them. Together with a small group of refugees I went to Shanghai.

Arriving there in August 1940, I realised that my troubles have only begun. Besides trying to make a living, I set to the task for which I came to Shanghai : getting my wife out of Europe. I sent her all the money earned and borrowed, and directed her by cables from one country into the other, through the maze of passport, visa and traffic restrictions of a war-torn world. Thinking back, those were the most anxious days of my life. On the 24th December 1940 we were united. I felt that I had accomplished the masterpiece of my life.

I mention all this, because I can't help feeling that it has some bearing on my work. In my third volume, where I dealt with the symbolisation and interpretation of some of the most controversial meanings of our time, I have endeavoured to show that all the researches of physicists and biologists carried out during the last 30 years, have utterly destroyed the false credo of the nineteenth century that this world of ours is the product of chaos only, in which only the fittest can survive. "Fittest" - what do you mean by that ?" asks the semanticist. In the concentration camp I have seen young and strong men die, because they gave up the struggle mentally. And I have seen old and decrepitate men, mere skeletons, survive the harshest treatment, because, as one told me "I pray for strength and strength is given to me."

The deeper the scientists probe into the secrets of nature, especially of organised living communities of atoms and cells, the more it becomes clear that a great intelligence, a great purposive force is at work in this universe of ours. Sir James Jeans points to the possibility that the mysterious force which works in our brain cells creates the atoms and the nebulae. Julian Huxley points to the scientific validity of inexplicable parapsychic phenomena. In the interpretation of my mind symbol, I have pointed out that we have been given a brain in order to follow the evolutionary trend in creating higher order out of lower order. Even the scourge of totalitarian dictators seems to be necessary in order to demonstrate to the human race what can happen to people and nations, driven into madness by semantic delusion and confusion.

Seen from this point of view, I feel that I had to go through all the terrible experiences in order to realise that the disasters which modern man brought upon himself are caused by our muddled thoughts and muddled ideas, that in this age of semantic labels new and simple methods of Semantics and Logic are necessary for a better future of humanity. I feel too, that my mind has been chosen as the helpless vessel for a new idea and I feel too that this was not accidental.

In Shanghai I happened to read the sequel to the American book MAGNIFICENT OBSESSION. There some inexplicable instances are recorded. Give yourself away in the help for another human being, and some of your secret longings will be fulfilled. My great secret longing since my boyhood was, that my life should not be wasted, that it should have a purpose, that I may create something by which later generations might benefit.

I felt then, that my wish was granted, I had left the safety of the Allied camp, had given myself into the hands of the Japanese in order to rescue my wife who had rescued me. As it happened, the Japanese segregated us, together with thousands of other refugees. But then my mind was immersed in a most exciting venture.

Scholars have now stated that my work is the first practical realisation of an idea of the great philosopher Leibnitz. His speculation was considered an impossibility for 300 years. And somehow, Leibnitz and I got the idea in the same way. Leibnitz learned from missionaries in China about the Chinese way of writing. John Locke had published his ESSAYS CONCERNING HUMAN UNDERSTANDING and Leibnitz answered with his NEW ESSAYS CONCERNING HUMAN UNDERSTANDING. This is written as a dialogue between two men, representing Locke's and Leibnitz's view. There Leibnitz developed his idea about a Characteristica Universalis, similar to the Chinese, but "better than theirs", a simple picture writing for the human race, regardless of language barriers, a writing which would contain a simple Semantics and Logic, "to make our conceptions more real", an auxiliary writing to be sure "without however renouncing ordinary writing." To this, the representative of Locke is made to reply: "I think these thoughts will some day be carried out, so natural and agreeable appears to me this writing."

I was fascinated by Chinese writing. I hired a teacher and tried to scale the great wall, the second great wall of China, as Lin Yutang called it, the ideographic writing of the Chinese. And as Lin Yutang predicted, I found myself in a world of

wonder. A world, where people of different languages could read the same newspaper, the same book, even the same poetical verses. A world where poems written 2500 years ago in languages long dead, were still as fresh and beautiful in the languages of today, even when read in English, or French or other European languages. I understood then Professor Ernest Fenollosa's words, who wrote: "I believe that the Chinese written language has absorbed the poetic substance of nature... and has, through its very pictorial visibility, been able to retain its original creative poetry with far more vigor and vividness than any phonetic tongue."

I began to understand what all sinologists know, that the main unifying factor, which brought about the largest nation on earth, which unified thousands of tribes, was the ideographic writing, which even invaders learned to read in their language, and which made them Chinese in the end. Sinologists believe that a European nation would have been a reality many centuries ago, if Europe had a universal writing, which Englishmen and Frenchmen, Germans and Russians, Spaniards and Bulgarians and all the other nations could read and understand in their own language. The sinologist Basil Hall Chamberlain prophesied in 1904: "Ideographic writing will surely achieve the final victory over phonetic writing!"

In Vienna, I had done scientific library research for years, and I realised the great handicap for science, produced by scientific publications in too many languages. I realised too, that the peoples of this planet stick to their mother-tongue and won't take to Esperanto or any other foreign language. It was exactly Shanghai, the most international city of the world, where I saw more than 22 different nations speaking their own languages at home and among their own community, and resorting to the scantiest vocabulary for making business with the other people.

"This is it!", I said to myself, "an ideographic writing, very simple, but scientifically constructed, which laymen and scientists could read in their mother-tongue." And I realised there and then, that my opportunity had come.

As an engineer, specialised in making electric lamps, my professional hero was Thomas Alva Edison, who said, that the success of a work depends on 2 % inspiration and 98 % perspiration. Perspiring in boiling Shanghai was easy, but trying to work in the evening hours after an exhausting day was another matter. I had established a photo and cine business in Shanghai in 1940. In 1943 the Japanese took away my workshop and living quarters, as they did with all the other refugees, and herded us in a segregation area. Somehow I carried on and in the evening hours I tried to work at my "World Writing", as I called it. I hired a language teacher for no other purpose than to keep me awake and fire criticism at my work. He drove me almost mad with his sentences which he asked me to translate into my writing. I am a practical factory man, who knows how to drop a thing which is not practical. But I found that my writing works, that it could become a practical reality.

When the war ended, Shanghai woke up, for the last time, to its former self. Ships loaded with goods filled the river and there were jobs galore and money to make. I had given some lectures on my work previously. Now, the educational branch of the United States Force China Theatre invited me to a lecture. So did the reinstated American Rotary Club. They cheered me after my speech and many said: "Stick to it!" "Don't drop it!", "You have got something!", "Write a book about it!"

We left Shanghai for Australia on the 1st July 1946. I had some modest savings made and so I said Good-bye to China and the Chinese, who indeed had given my life a new direction. Arrived in Australia I had to decide about my future. I could go into industry, I could set up a modest business, but my heart was set at my idea and the cheers of the Rotarians were still in my ears. I decided to use my savings, to study the matter thoroughly and then to write my book. I thought it would take me 1 year. It took me 3 years. Instead of 1 book 3 large volumes emerged. I had to work it out in detail in order to show that my work is not a mere scheme only.

Now I have the words of great praise by Bertrand Russell and other great scholars. My manuscripts in mimeographed form have been recommended by John Metcalfe to the libraries of the world. Russell and Metcalfe have realised my plight: so far, I could not find a publisher. Moreover, the Europeans living in China and the Chinese who know that even the complicated Chinese ideography works, were convinced of the value of my work, whereas the people in the Western world find the idea strange, although they have already installed an ideographic writing on the highways of the world. My hopes that the universities will put me to work solely on this idea, especially for a science abstract, these hopes have not been fulfilled. And so, two and a half years ago, I was forced to take up employment again. In order to keep my

my mind free of managerial responsibilities and worries (because my mind is filled with Semantography only) I have taken manual work at General Motors in Sydney. The factory is very conveniently situated - opposite my house. After a day of work I come home, take a shower and a nap, and then work till well past midnight on my work. I had given some lectures at the University, but most of my work consists of letters to important scholars in the world. Alas, most of my letters are now letters of plea.

I had leaflets printed and brochures made, hoping that this will attract the attention of the universities of the world. More and more I see my financial situation deteriorate. Mortgages and overdrafts are used up in a desperate spendthrift action. I have now started with pleas to foundations, with applications for fellowships, etc. In this my plight, the correspondence with a few understanding scholars, notably Russell and Reiser are the only rays of hope, which give me courage. My wife is my true companion. She believed in my work from the very first moment, and since then has stood valiantly with me in all the ups and downs of our work and hope. Now, we both work very late, turn the duplicating machine, send out letters and letters - something must turn up. So much work and study cannot be wasted - or perhaps it can. More and more it becomes clear to me that men who pioneer new ideas are destined to go down the grave in desperation. And we are both over 50 years of age.

In three weeks time, Professor Oliver L. Reiser will give an account of my work in his paper UNIFIED SYMBOLISM FOR WORLD UNDERSTANDING IN SCIENCE, which he is going to read to the American Association for the Advancement of Science. What will the outcome be? Will the American scientists take notice of my work and will they take me out of the factory and put me to work on this idea? Professor Reiser, in his magnanimity, will distribute a leaflet, showing samples of my work and carrying an appeal in form of a question:

"Men who pioneer unusual ideas - must they, even today, waste away their lives without help?"

What will the answer be? Hope and help, or new depths of desperation?

*C. K. Bliss*

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These notes are accompanied by Leaflet No. 12, Reprint from the General Motors Magazine, showing my picture and an article on Semantography, and Leaflet No. 52, for the lecture of Prof. Oliver Reiser before the American Assoc. for the Advancement of science