



BLISS AND THE
COLUMBIA BROADCASTING SYSTEM
OF AMERICA

The following short report appeared in Time Magazine, February 17, 1967.

Son of 20th Century

In science the gap between prophecy and fact has narrowed amazingly. The most remote-seeming theories are speedily turned into fact, at least in the lab. Hence the future often seems to arrive with a flick of the TV dial. A late-season sleeper called The 21st Century, narrated by Walter Cronkite (CBS, Sundays) is bringing forth little weekly chunks of the future as it exists today. On this week's program, for example, Co-Producers Burton Benjamin and Isaac Kleinerman, both nine-year veterans of CBS's distinguished series, The 20th Century, set out to make some documentary sense of the maze of recent discoveries in genetics. An explanation of man's increasing control over the mechanics of reproduction is backed up by films of parthenogenetic frogs swimming in a tank. They are identical to their mother, and so might they be, having been made in a laboratory without benefit of father.

When Geneticist James Bonner appears on-screen to speculate about a test-tube superman race between the nations of the world a century from now, the uneasy viewer may feel that he is in the tank with those frogs. A man will not "brazenly go out and propagate himself," Bonner predicts coolly, but will contribute sperm cells to a central bank, his heirs to be manufactured after his death if a committee decides that he has been a desirable and useful figure in society. On this forecast, echoing the ancient complaint against Plato's "Guardians," English Professor Ritchie Calder comments: "Who is going to determine all this? Who are the wise men?"

If 21st Century doesn't always **startle** its audience to **this** extent, it invariably manages to give it pause. In earlier programs, it photographed an operable mechanical grasshopper that man will use on the moon, and an esoteric air-tight container that will extract water from moon rock by heating it to 3000° C. Sometimes the producers are lucky enough to be on hand for a rare event, as is soon-to-be-shown film of a kidney transplant at Cleveland Clinic. Producers Benjamin and Kleinerman first envisioned the program as a limited project of perhaps six specials, but found after four months of research that they had material enough for a full series. Now scheduled for at least 16 segments, the program will explore oceanography, the megalopolis, transportation, housing, computers, demography, education and leisure.

I hoped that they will be interested in my "Writing for the 21st Century" and therefore I sent the following letter:

Messrs. Burton Benjamin and Isaac Kleinerman
Co-Producers of the CBS TV Show THE 21st CENTURY
51 West 52 Street, NEW YORK.

Sydney 2/2-1967

Re: TIME February 17, 71 and
February 25, 66
Essay about THE FUTURISTS
Looking toward A.D. 2000

Dear Mr. Benjamin and dear Mr. Kleinerman,

The report on your admirable show published in TIME February 17 has greatly intrigued me, and I am writing to you hoping that you will be intrigued by the content of this letter, and by the promise it contains for an intriguing show. Allow me to write about it, and forgive me if I write about it at length, simply because it contains such a novel idea that it may easily be dismissed if explained in a too short letter.

As you are dealing with the shape of things to come in the 21st Century, you have surely read with interest the TIME Essay "THE FUTURISTS: Looking toward

A.D. 2000." I have studied this essay with great interest hoping that it will reveal a new idea, not only the promising ideas which have been discussed many times in many a magazine. Alas, there was nothing new, and alas, there was nothing in it about my work which - allow me to be very immodest - will change the 21st century more than any of the futuristic ideas discussed in the TIME essay.

Not that my idea is very new. It is in fact 300 years old, but for 300 years all scientists have considered it a speculation impossible to realise. And impossible means impossible in any language. By some quirk of circumstance the very same TIME issue contains also on p.30 a picture of the great mathematician Gottfried Wilhelm Leibnitz of whom Amherst Philosophy Professor Joseph Epstein said in the TIME article "Leibnitz was doubtless the last man who knew everything." But what has Leibnitz to do with your show?

Leibnitz wrote an essay "New Essay concerning Human Understanding" in which he developed a fantastic idea, a "Symbolis Universalis" a simple system of pictorial symbols so simple that even children and illiterates can easily grasp it. Anything written or printed in these pictorial symbols could be read and understood in all languages. No wonder that all linguists laughed about this futuristic idea. In 1922 Prof. Richards and Ogden wrote in their MEANING OF MEANING that Leibnitz' speculation "still remains where Leibnitz left it". In 1937 Prof. E.T. Bell wrote: "The very diffusion of Leibnitz' genius made him capable of the dream which Archimedes, Newton and Gauss missed, the "Universal Symbolism". Others may bring it to realisation. Leibnitz did his part in dreaming it to be possible."

But in 1951 Professor Oliver L. Reiser of Pittsburgh University said in a lecture to the American Association for the Advancement of Science:

"Bliss realised the ambition of the great mathematician Leibnitz". Alas, he preached to deaf ears. To linguists, the very meaning of the word "impossible" means impossible. To children however, who have learned only a smattering of my pictorial symbols it is clear that impossible may be possible. Other great scholars like Julian Huxley, Bertrand Russell and many more have praised the accomplishment, and the immense promise my work holds for the future of mankind.

The scholarly apathy which followed Professor Reiser's announcement about my work has made me think that I shall go down the grave unrecognised, and little more than a crank. Fortunately I have survived all disappointments and am now able to see that hard-headed businessmen in the travel and tourist industry have realised that the only solution for the greatest handicap of enjoyable travel - the Babel of Languages - is the use of pictorial symbols which tells tourists of any language what they want to know. These people in the railways, shipping and airlines, in the motorcar industry, and the hotel industry they are now realising that my pictorial symbols can be used for every meaning needed in international travel, commerce and communication. TIME-LIFE is greatly intrigued by my proof that pictorial magazines can now carry a subcaption in my pictorial symbols which magazine gazers in all countries can read in all their languages. The IBM Corporation has realised that their ball typewriter IBM 72 can be used to type my symbols, so that people and firms can write letters or circular letters to each other each one speaking and writing and reading only in their own language, yet understood in other languages.

Realising that my work will be a practical fact in the coming decades, the New York publishers Lothrop, Lee & Shephard Co. Inc. of 419 Park Avenue South are now working through their editor Mr. James Giblin on a book to be published this year with the title SIGNS AND SYMBOLS AROUND THE WORLD. The author is Mrs. Elizabeth Helfman, a noted educationist and author of a number of books and articles. A large chapter of her book will be devoted to my work. As surely some months will pass until you could possibly consider a TV show on my pictorial symbols, there is every indication that at least parts of her book will be available for showing on TV. She and Mr. Giblin will be only too happy to co-operate with you, and I too. My book has appeared in the second edition and is available from Acme Code Co. one of the largest book wholesalers in the U.S. (President Mr. Wm.J. Mitchel) 102 First Street, Hackensack, N.J. 07601

So far, the idea to write in symbols appears feasible to everyone, and hence this aspect of my work seems to be acceptable for people who can see the shape of things to come. Surely, a system which promises "One Writing for One World" is fascinating to merit also your serious consideration for a show on the 21st Century. But there is another aspect of my work which few people have realised, those few who took the time to study a bit of my work. This aspect is the one of which I said in the beginning that it will change the face of the 21st Century more than all the space feats, all the genetic feats, and other feats of technological improvements. Leibnitz said 300 years ago that

the new "Symbolis Universalis" will contain a simple semantics and symbolic logic, so simple that even children will learn to use it in their daily problems. In the promotion leaflet and dustjacket (which I enclose herewith) this aspect is stressed in these words:

"Einstein was once asked which invention would be most disastrous. No, it isn't the atom bomb. It would be a device, said Einstein, by which people could read each other's thoughts. Mankind couldn't stand this for 24 hours.

"Bliss' invention is worse in one way, but wonderful in other ways. Everyone would choke - that is not literally, but literally as far as words are concerned. With many words formed in our minds about to speak, we would realise their innermost vagueness, ambiguity, fallacy, and demagoguery. We would choke crestfallen about the lies in our convictions and beliefs, and we would think twice before saying anything."

Having read so far, you may now be ready to dismiss the whole letter - or to ask for more. I am ready to show you something of the simple semantics and logic which can be taught to children even in the kindergarten, but I must see that you are willing to follow me. A short letter from you after studying this letter and the attached papers will be the incentive for another letter from me.

But there are other aspects of my work which are even more fantastic. They will be commonplace in the 21st Century, though today they appear contrary to many theories taught in schools and universities. I have however the testimonies of great scholars who agree with me, and once I am sure of your serious consideration, I shall try to convince you too.

Lastly, there is the "human interest" aspect in every story whether shown on TV or in print. I am already recognised as a pioneer by universities and governmental institutions. As usual, pioneers must be dead first until the full impact of their new ideas reaches the common people, and the common scholars in the universities who still cling to and teach the old theories. What man am I to have thought these strange thoughts? I was born in the multilingual Babel of old Austria where 20 different nationalities hated each other, mainly because they spoke and thought in different languages. I graduated from the Vienna University of Technology, and worked as a research chemist in the electronic industry. As such I realised the wonderful semantics of chemical symbols. H_2O means water in all languages and electronics engineers use the pictorial symbols in wiring diagrams which technicians of all countries can read in all their languages. This my background explains why I began to work on universal symbols 25 years ago.

But in order to realise the catastrophic use of languages by demagogues and dictators, and in order to realise that something should be done against this, a shock treatment was necessary. This came when Hitler overran Austria and the Gestapo shipped me and other unfortunates to the extermination camps of Dachau and later Buchenwald. There I had an opportunity to analyse the Hitler and Goebels words, and to find the simple logic how to defeat them so that future generations could be taught to recognise the demagogue even before he can do harm. Freed by the efforts of my own and my good wife we fled to China, only to find ourselves prisoners of the Japanese in the Hongkew Ghetto. At last in Australia and in a free country I could work and complete the 3 volumes of my work.

Please receive now with this letter the following papers:

Semantography Series No. 52, Leaflet distributed in 1951 at Professor Reiser's lecture to the American Association for the Advancement of Science.

Semantography Series No. 157, Leaflet indicating some of the aspects of my work.

Semantography Series No. 280, A Sample Tourist Folder for the travel industry.

Lastly, the promotion leaflet and dustjacket for the second edition of my work.

One more thought, I am now in my 70th year. I don't seek any publicity, or any money, or any gain whatever. I only want that young minds should be introduced to this idea, so that they can go forth and make it a reality in the 21st century. And this indeed is my sole purpose of this letter to you.

I am ready to waive my copyrights (which I want to give away anyway) provided you will show my symbols as I have conceived them, and not otherwise. Otherwise this would mean a new Babel of symbols.

Hoping to hear from you, I am

Yours sincerely,

P.S. I also add Semantography Series No. 243 the first 4 pages of my new book.

I have marked with a red pencil paragraphs which might interest you.

I then received a form from CBS in which I was to state the scope of my invention and the way I have protected it legally, and also to agree that it might be possible that the CBS has already some similar project in hand and that therefore I cannot claim any exclusive rights if CBS should come out with a similar story.

I signed the form and sent off the following letter

The Registry Office
Columbia Broadcasting System
51 West 52 Street
NEW YORK N.Y. 10019, U.S.A.

Sydney 7-3-67

Attention Miss Helen Lahn

Dear Miss Lahn,

Thank you for your explanatory letter of March 3. I am well aware of the legal implications and necessities, and have pleasure to return to you the 2 forms signed and including a shorter summary than that in my previous letter dated February 24, and addressed to the Co-Producers of the TV show "21st Century".

I wish to state right in the beginning that I do not want any monetary compensation. I am now 70 years of age, and all I want is that this idea being introduced to young minds so that they can make it a practical reality for the people of the 21st century.

Should your investigators want also to see the book, please ask for a review copy from the American distributor

Acme Code Company Inc.
102 First Street,
Hackensack, N.J. 07601

I have already notified the president of Acme Code Mr. Wm. J. Mitchel to send you a copy when your request comes through to him.

I hold all copyrights not only for the book and all my papers but also for all the symbols, even their likely derivations and deviations. I consent that all my material be used for your TV show, but I have to make only one proviso, one which will help you in your task. The fact is that in the past draughtsmen and commercial artists employed in the various newspapers and magazines have re-drawn my symbols for presentation in the paper. Artists want to show their artistic interpretation and hence, they simply altered my symbols. Unfortunately this cannot be done, because my symbols are designed to fit the keys of a typewriter. Hence, they must not be altered. For this reason, I make a condition for any reproduction that only my symbols be shown by photographic reproduction (or TV camera reproduction in your case) from the original book, or other original papers. Therefore, no re-drawing, please.

One more request, but this is not essential. This idea to write and type in symbols seems absurd at first, and it may well be that the man who explains it on TV may deprecate and ridicule the whole idea. I don't mind. But I beg only that in such a case let me know the counter-arguments, and let me explain their irrelevance. If after that your man is still unconvinced, let him go ahead and denounce my work if he still wants to do it. I hold myself in readiness to give you all the assistance you want. Please realise that this idea could help humanity more than voyages to all the planets, and more than all the technological gadgets promised for the 21st century. I am, awaiting your reply,

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

SEMANTOGRAPHY - BLISSYMBOLICS
The solution of two world-wide problems for the 21st
Century

Previously a summary has been given in my letter dated February 24, 67 and addressed to the Co-Producers of the CBS TV show "The 21st Century" Messrs. Benjamin and Kleinerman. On this page a shorter summary will be given.

There are two world-wide problems which must be overcome should mankind survive into the 21st century. The first problem is the breaking of the language barrier which blocks understanding between the peoples of this planet who speak in thousands of languages and dialects. People don't like foreign languages. They go on babbling from the cradle to the grave in their mother tongue. Yet, they can learn to read the symbols $1 + 2 = 3$ in any of their languages.

The second problem threatens the peace and the lives of all people. No school and even no university has a method for teaching people how to recognise those vague and ambiguous words by which rabblers and dictators stir up trouble in all parts of the world. What is needed is a simple semantics and logic which even children can learn to handle in their daily problems.

The first problem can be solved by the use of pictorial symbols which can be read in all languages. This has already been realised on the highways of the world where motorists can read pictorial signs in any of their languages. This introduction of pictorial symbols has now been extended to airports and railway stations.

Within a few months three stationery TV satellites will provide TV shows for the whole world. Subtitles will be needed to explain what happens on the TV screen, but in which language, and in how many languages? It's an impossibility. But when we use pictorial Blissymbols as subtitles then people of all countries can soon learn to read them in their own language. Equally well, such pictorial Blissymbols can be used as subcaptions under the pictures of illustrated magazines, so that people of any language can understand what they see and read. Many more applications are feasible. Home movie projectors have already pictorial symbols near their knobs and levers, etc.

Now Semantography as invented by the scholar C.K. Bliss provides at last a complete system of pictorial symbols for easy interlinguistic understanding in communication, travel, commerce, industry, and even science. The symbols are so simple that even children can learn to read and write them within the first hour. However, the symbols can be typed on an adjusted IBM typewriter for invoices, travel arrangements, pricelists and general commercial correspondence, even for facsimile telegrams which need no coding, no decoding and no translating, as it can be read right away in the language of the sender and the language of the receiver.

That pictorial symbols can also help in the solution of the second problem, the demasking of the demagogic talk of dictators seems at first unbelievable, until we realise that vague and ambiguous words cannot be pictured in the same way as words which refer to concrete things of which we can make a picture in our mind. Yet, the logic and semantics of semantography is so simple that even children can learn to recognise which words will harm and hurt, and which words are vague, ambiguous, or downright lies. Children have already learned that $1 + 2 = 4$ is a lie in any language.

With the abovementioned previous letter of February 24, the following papers have been submitted Semantography Series No. 52, 157 and 280, also the dustjacket of the book. With this summary an additional paper is sent, No 243, the first 4 pages of the book SEMANTOGRAPHY-BLISSYMBOLICS by C.K. Bliss. Should you be willing to show this idea Acme Code will send you a copy.

And then I received the following letter which finished all my hopes.

Re: SEMANTOGRAPHY - BLISSYMBOLICS

Dear Mr. Bliss,

Thank you for submitting your material. I regret to advise you that it will not be feasible for us to use it.

I should add, as may have been indicated to you previously, that we have a very extensive file of program ideas developed by CBS personnel and others. It may be, therefore, that we have already been exposed to an idea similar to yours.

Thank you again for the interest that prompted you to write to us.

Sincerely,
Helen Lahn
Registry Office.

An afterthought written 5 years later

I have wondered why I cannot score with some newspapermen who should be interested in such new ideas for a new article they may write or a production on TV. The reason is simple.

I had success with journalists whom I met personally and whom I could convince by a practical demonstration that my symbolic logic and semantics work. Even then they relied on me to correct their article, simply because the idea is so novel that it goes beyond their own grasp, understanding and therefore representation.

But in a letter I cannot convince thoroughly a man thousands of miles away. I cannot answer his counter arguments as he would loath to prove to me and himself how ignorant he is, and how much he would have to learn to grasp my work and to represent it properly. And this is the crux of the matter. The journalist would have to learn, and this they don't like normally. Hence, they prefer to write about journeying to the stars, unleashing the secret powers in the atoms, altering man biologically, etc. etc. And by writing about these marvels, which everybody understands already, they can quote and quote professors and professors of this and that university. In short, such articles are easy to write. But an article on my work? This involves learning, studying, and convinving oneself. In short, hard work. And this they prefer not to do, realising also that they would have great difficulties to convince the reader or the TV viewer. And he provides them with their bread and butter. And so - Good bye Mr. Bliss, so sorry!