





# **ALPHABET OF IMAGES**

COMMUNICATION THROUGH A  
UNIVERSAL VISUAL LANGUAGE

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“...And the Lord came down to see the city and the tower, which the children built. And the Lord said, Behold, the people is one, and they have all one language; and this they begin to do; and now nothing will be restrained from them, which they have imagined to do. Go to, let us go down, and there confound their language, that they may not understand one another’s speech. So the Lord scattered them abroad from thence upon the face of all the earth: and they left off to build the city. Therefore is the name of it called Babel; because the Lord did there confound the language of all the earth: and from thence did the Lord scatter them abroad upon the face of all the earth.”

Genesis 11:1–9

From the beginning of time we have found ourselves developing language to facilitate communication amongst us. The explanation given by the Bible through the story of the Tower of Babel demonstrates the divide between the people of the earth and the languages they use. It also shows that the key to success is communication. "...Behold, the people is one, and they have all one language; and this they begin to do; and now nothing will be restrained from them, which they have imagined to do." Once the barrier of language is broken, a whole new level of possibilities emerge from the sharing of ideas.

Before the development of written language different methods of communication were used. As I. J. Gelb mentions in *Signs, Symbols and Ciphers*, optic signals by means of fire and smoke were used. He also states "within the span of human knowledge there has never existed a group of men who have not possessed a fully developed language." (Jean, 1989) The development of a written language only made sense in the natural evolution of man. Spoken language has only a momentary value and, at the time, could only be used between people who were near each other. So "the need for finding a way to convey thoughts and feelings in a form not limited by time and space lead to the development of communication by means of objects and markings on objects." (Jean, 1989) This was the next step into making messages last longer and for them to be passed on to the next people who would receive them.

We live in a society of messages. From the Internet, TV, radio, newspapers and blogs. The evolution of social networking in the past ten years has enabled any person with Internet access to connect to millions of others around the world. We are under constant bombardment of information. On a global scale society has developed communication to extreme levels. We are, at any moment, informed about a 'fact'. This fact can be of different importance. It could be the war in Iraq or the meetings of the heads of state at the G20 conference; it can be a football match or a speech by the Pope on Easter Sunday, or an advertisement against the spread of AIDS. Whatever the 'fact' is, it can be communicated to the world instantly. So if the exchange of ideas is key and information can be passed on around the world within seconds, what is the next level of communication? Is there

a simpler way of communicating, without language barriers and cultural differences?

As languages have developed throughout hundreds of years, they have always been adapted to the time they were used in. At the same time they might not have evolved for the better. In *After Babel*, Steiner discusses the way language adapts also to its environment: “Far more important and diffuse are the uses of inflection, grammatical structure, and word choice by different social classes, and ethnic groups to affirm their respective identities and to affront one another. It may be that the agonistic functions of speech inside an economically and socially divided community outweigh the functions of genuine communication.” (Steiner, 1998) In his proposition language is moulded to create an identity for the person using it. In this case the evolution of a language is stunted by division of social classes. Language is no longer used for “genuine communication” and creates boundaries within society. So the language barriers are not only between two different groups of people (divided by geographical boundaries) but also within a society in which the language is the same but is used differently according to class.

In the early 20th century, during the outbreak of the First World War, many artistic movements emerged in Europe and North America. Most notably that of the Dada movement. It was a reaction to the capitalist ways of Europe and the continuing violence. The Dadaist looked at the aspect of deconstructing a language and making it new, “hence the anarchic bitterness of the late-comer and the impeccable logic of Dada when it proclaims that no new impulses of feeling or recognition will arise until language is demolished.” (Steiner, 1998). The Dada movement questioned the standardization of language when in its manifesto Hugo Ball proclaims “each thing has its word, but the word has become a thing by itself. Why shouldn’t I find it? Why can’t a tree be called Pluplusch, and Pluplubasch when it has been raining?” It was not only a reaction to the standards in language, but also in society. The problem with this particular art movement was that it was kept elite, and although it picked up on social problems of all classes, it was always discussed in closed circles.

One of the most significant attempts to eliminate these language barriers was that made by L.L. Zamenhof when he created the now most widely spoken constructed international auxiliary language in the world: Esperanto. The name of the language means 'one who hopes'. The use of Esperanto was supposed to break the linguistic boundaries and bring people together. But is new constructed language really the solution to world peace? Is it really the way forward for international communication?

If not directly, Japanese Illustrator and painter Yoshiko MacFarland, was influenced by Zamenhof and his views of a universal language. This is why since 1988 she has been developing Earth Language. A Universal Visual Language based on existing languages but made up completely of new symbols. It is similar to Esperanto in the way that it takes from different cultures (in her case from whichever culture you are from) but at the same time enables communication between people from different nations.

Although both successful in their own ways in terms of constructing the languages, Zamenhof and MacFarland were never able to reach as many people as they might have hoped. They are both just additional languages to the ones we already have, and although MacFarland's attempt has an added visual feature, all the symbols must still be learned from scratch.

To be able to communicate universally a step backwards must be taken. An example of a completely iconographic language is that of Isotype. This is a system of pictograms designed by Otto Neurath. His work, with the help of artist Gerd Arntz, was created in order to communicate information in a simple non-verbal way. Neurath takes a step back from the written language, full of social and cultural obstacles and created more than 400 pictograms to help convey information in a simpler way, thus becoming the most successful attempt at a universal visual language.

What follows are three sections - Deconstruction, Reaction, and Solution - where I look at different groups of people and their attempts at creating a universal mode of communication.



# DECONSTRUCTION

Undoubtedly the beginning of the 20th century brought many changes to the world. As monarchies were brought to a halt the rise of the working class enabled the masses to advance in society. Revolutions around the world showed the lower class how their voice could be heard. The biggest, and probably most significant, event of this period was the outbreak of the First World War. Europe was brought to destruction and millions of lives were lost. It was a moment which spawned new ideas of a modern way of life and adapted new ways of thinking.

One of the movements, which emerged during the war, was that of Dada. It began in Zurich and peaked from 1916 to 1922. It encompassed many different ways of artistic expression: in literature with poetry, through theatre, and also through graphic design. The idea created was that of anti-art, which went against existing rules and standards in art and literature.

Having been born during the war Dada was about the rejection of intellectual conformity. For many Dadaists the root cause of the war came from the elite class and the thirst for power. It was the logic and structure of the capitalist society of the time that Dada went against. They did this by adapting chaos and irrationality into their artwork. This is where the label of anti-art emerges. Art until then had been moulded through rules, which artists used to create their own pieces. Dada's aim was to go

against these rules and break the boundaries set before them. It was a way to deconstruct the preconceptions of art and what it stood for.

One of the major figures in the movement was Tristan Tzara. A Romanian born French poet who was heavily involved with the development of the basic ideas of Dada. In an interview given on French radio in 1950 Tzara explains the reasons behind the emergence of the movement:

“To understand how Dada came about one must imagine, on one side, the mood of a group of young people in that sort of prison which was Switzerland at the time of the First World War and, on the other, the intellectual level of art and literature of the time [...] But towards 1916–1917, the war didn’t seem like it would ever end [...] and moreover, for us, it seemed to take proportions faked by a too wide of perspective. And from here our disgust and revolt.” (Hugnet, 1972)

To Tzara and his friends it was only logical to react to a situation that directly affected them and the people of Europe. They were disgusted by the forms taken by modern society, and their basis of logic and language. It was the elite which had brought them to ruins and they were the root of all problems.

Steiner states that “language [...] is the most salient model of Heraclitean flux. It alters at every moment in perceived time.” (Steiner, 1988) So technically the numerous revolutions, the war and the social changes that took place during the first twenty years of the twentieth century should have been enough to change language because “the sum of linguistic events is not only increased but qualified by each new event.” (Steiner, 1988) For the members of the Dada movement this natural evolution of language was not enough of an attack on the elite as they proclaim that no new impulses of feeling will arise until language is demolished. We find this direct attack on the higher class even in the Dada manifesto, written by Hugo Ball, in which he states that “[...] a line of poetry is chance to get rid of all that filth that clings to this accursed language, as if put there by stockbrokers’ hands, hands worn smooth by coins [...] Dada is the heart of words.” (Ball, 1916) In the manifesto Ball also mentions this need for a newer language. It reads: “I don't want words that other people

have invented. All the words are other people's inventions. I want my own stuff, my own rhythm, and vowels and consonants too, matching the rhythm and all my own.” (Ball, 1916) This was the basis of the Dada thought. A need to change the old and bring in the new, and not have to go by the rules set by people before them. It was a personalization of the language and a new way of expression.

Hugo Ball shows this need for regeneration of the language in one of his poems, *Karawane* written in 1916, which is made up of nonsensical words. The real meaning behind the poem is that there is no meaning, which is the basic principal of the Dada movement.

Right about the same time the Futurists, and especially the Russian futurists, were astonished at the advancements made in society. The emergence of radio and film gave unsurmountable possibilities of communication. For the futurists that period in time of social revolutions had a dual process of development. The first being the degradation of the older classical bourgeois culture and, the second being the emergence of numerous elements of a new, progressive culture. Because the stronger the crisis, the stronger is the impulse given to that new culture. (Arvatov, 1973)

It should also be noted that the Futurists anticipated the Dada movement in their ideas. Especially the pre-revolutionary Russian Futurists. The difference between the two is that while Dada was born out of the crisis created by the First World War, the Futurists saw in war a ‘new beginning’ and ‘a cleansing of the world’. (Arvatov, 1973)

So the Russian futurists look at the evolution of language going hand in hand with the social revolution of the time. In December 1912 the Hileya group was founded by Russian avant-garde artist David Burliuk along with other writers and artists. At the same time they issued the manifesto *A Slap in the Face of Public Taste*. In it they address the issues of modernization and how this new era of modernity must rid itself of the past, which in their words ‘is too tight’. The manifesto ends with two strong points on how the modern poet must act in his profession by saying that one “[should] enlarge the scope of the poet's vocabulary with arbitrary and derivative words” and “feel an

insurmountable hatred for the language existing before their time.” (Burliuk, 1912).

Much like the nonsensical poems of Dada, some Russian Futurist poets experimented with *zaum*. Zaum is a movement within the Futurists where words were used not for their meaning but for their sound. In a very similar fashion to Dada it was a way of rejecting the language used at the time.

Both Dada and the Russian Futurists were looking at the situation in which they found themselves and reacted by attacking society and ‘re-inventing’ the rules of language through their work and manifestos. On the other hand these two movements have their own limits. The Russian Futurists’ violent separation, between their radical proposition and what level society was at the time, was too strong. And with Dada which quickly dissolved into a more experimental movement in art.

These examples show a violent reaction to an already violent world. Zamenhof, father of Esperanto, took a completely different approach one of peace and unification of the people. With his language he wanted to rebuild society and bring all together. In the first book of Esperanto grammar, Zamenhof includes a letter he wrote to a friend a couple of years earlier explaining the reasons behind creating the language. In the letter he describes the conditions in which he grew up and the division between the people of his town. He says that “the inhabitants were divided into four distinct elements: Russians, Poles, Germans and Jews; each of these spoke their own language and looked on all the others as enemies. In such a town a sensitive nature feels more acutely than elsewhere the misery caused by language division and sees at every step that the diversity of languages is the first, or at least the most influential, basis for the separation of the human family into groups of enemies.” (Okrent, 2009).

It is very true that these ideals have stuck with the modern Esperanto speakers (ranging from 50,000 which is the most conservative estimate, to about two million) (Okrent, 2009). On one of their pamphlets it clearly states the idea behind Esperanto when it says that “Esperanto is a ‘linguistic handshake’, a neutral ground where people of different nations can communicate as equals.” But why is Esperanto so important in the realm

of invented languages? The official birth of the language is 1887 which is the year in which Zamenhof published *Unua Libro*, a book explaining the language. The difference between Esperanto and previous attempts was that instead of starting from scratch and composing the language on numerical equations, Esperanto took from what was already there. It was more logical. One did not have to check the number equivalent of a certain word in a specific dictionary to understand its meaning, but instead learn a few set rules. So by taking from French, German, English and Latin, Esperanto became more accessible than the other experiments.

Esperanto could have worked. The problem was that as more people knew about it and used it, it became more and more serious. Members of the Esperantist group asked for revisions to the language, which Zamenhof initially did but refused to continue later on. Another group within the Esperantists took it further and formed Ido. They were more interested in the logical approach of the language which they thought was the strong point, and not the ideological side which Zamenhof advocated in order to bring the people of the world together.



# REACTION

According to the Japanese calander, Yoshiko McFarland was born one day before Pearl Harbour. She lost her father during the war and was raised by her mother with her three sisters in Osaka. As a child she was never taught much about the devastation of the war, but had experienced the aftermath that it brought. As a young woman she moved to Kyoto in 1964 where she graduated from the Kyoto Art College in Interior Design. On her biography page she describes that time where “most Japanese were working hard to catch up to Euro-American lives.” She soon realised that because of the bombings much of the tradition of Osaka had been lost, and that before she moved on to design she would need to find out more about her culture.

She went on to make many exhibitions of her work, which included sliding door paintings for temples and murals for hotels, restaurants, museums and houses. In the first part of the 80s she wrote several essays for local newspapers, and in 1983 she was part of an NHK (Japan Broadcasting Corporation) history program on television as a reporter, narrator and illustrator. The program went on to win an award as best annual TV show by NHK.

In 1987, at the age of 45, Yoshiko moved to San Francisco. It was the cultural shock which sparked her first interest in

making *Earth Language*. She realised that language can be a boundary between people, but at the same time being aware of your background and culture is also key to life.

Below is an interview I conducted with Yoshiko:

**What was the initial reason for developing EL?  
Was it purely a study of language and communication or were there personal reasons behind it?  
Or both?**

Briefly, it was because I like feeling and thinking in one: including everything from the origin to the future.

A few more details:

I was born precisely on Pearl Harbor Day in the American calendar, also lost my father and the house I was born in by WW2. So I naturally wanted to work for the opposite direction from creating wars.

My former occupation was a batik painter in Japan; focusing on the ancient world, seeking universal senses and ideas that can bloom in the future. I noticed that the people in that area have respected sacred ropes; and wondered why. I believed it was because a new life or thing is always born by a connection of different lives or things, and ropes were the very tool to connect them. The Stone Age natives and newcomers with rice culture got tied in peace because of their belief of sacred ropes. I wanted to bring their wisdom up to the future.

My linguistic knowledge was very poor until I started the EL project. In 1988, I came over to America with no English ability. In my culture shock at being a minority, I felt how English was powerful but not kind as a universal language. One day at a museum, I could understand the meaning of a 1.5 thousand year old Chinese calligraphy, despite that I couldn't understand spoken Chinese at all. That shock suddenly filled me with the EL inspiration. The EL system is basically the same as the ancient rope. I've learned English while developing EL. EL was helpful to learn it.

### **What research did you do to create the language?**

Overview of the system of the human brain and nature, ancient communication ways including gorillas', overview of histories and structures of some main traditional languages, looking around to see what types of constructed languages and signs and scripts have been made. International Phonetic Alphabet.

There were too wide subjects, so I couldn't go to any school; and mostly I researched through books and the Internet, also I was taught by the visitors of the EL website.

### **Were there things which inspired you graphically, or with the system of the language?**

[I would say] nature, including the human body system, which always inspired me.

### **Graphically speaking how did you come about the symbols? What were the criteria used?**

The idea naturally came with the overlay system following the nature system. Bases have to be visible, being compounded with others; so they must be simple, and have to be in the same frame. To ease memorization, basic geometrical lines are their elements.

### **How does Earth Language work?**

EL is based on graphical symbols, not on sounds:

EL works with a total of 91 symbols including 70 bases, numerals, grammatical marks, hyphen and brackets for managing information.

Every EL symbol has its multi method signs such as: a number, ASCII, hand and body signs and its one-syllable name (vocal codes). All visual signs and symbols are related to its basis shape; so all together help holding the language memory in the whole body without extra effort to learn. Also you can communicate with others at any condition, whenever and wherever, choosing the most suitable method.

To increase *symbols*:

All symbols except hyphen have a simple geometrical shape, located in a same size square; and EL can create almost unlimited new symbols by compounding bases on top of each other, for the simplified pictures of the new concepts or for the combination meanings (or functions) of the element bases.

Fundamental ideograms are pictogram (visually understandable simplified pictures); and their meanings are based on nature, but not a particular culture.

*Using grammatical marks:*

EL expresses any words or sentences with flexible sequences for its parts such as the subject, the object and the verb.

There are special brackets to distinguish phonetics from ideograms, to classify a name or a type of living thing, to rationally create a logo or an abbreviation for a complicated thing, to create personal symbols, and so on; using these functions, worldwide information can be managed in an easier way to see.

Fifty bases are used for phonetic scripts too, completely distinguishing from the definition system. By compounding a basic phoneme with another or a functional mark, EL expresses the way to pronounce any vocal sounds with as many details as the International Phonetic Alphabet can, in a much kinder way. Using this system, people can protect original names in the traditional pronunciations; also this system helps for improving vocal arts.).

### **How does EL work with linguistic or cultural boundaries without interfering on someones language?**

You are able to speak EL pronouncing names of symbols (vocal codes), but this way is the secondary way in EL; and not so convenient as the mother tongue. In EL, visual communication takes priority over speech. You communicate with others in your own mother tongue showing the meanings by EL hand signs or written forms; and the other reads them directly in his or her own language, just like '1+2=3' is read now.

This way protects local languages from collapse. When EL

grows, every traditional language grows with it at the same time. Also in this way, while understanding the other's message, at the same time you recognize how the other's background is different from yours through his or her vocal language and EL expression way. Knowing differences is a big step to understand the other more deeply. Respecting each other's culture through this custom makes human society into a real global structure.

### **What is the aim of EL?**

Briefly, it's to activate the global world into colorfully varied and healthy 'one'.

*EL is seeking to be a new tool for an individual person to work for the following purposes:*

- To open another aspect of themselves based on nature
- To stimulate a new discovery or inspiration by an intentional or accidental compound of concepts.
- To enjoy graphics, creating almost unlimited patterns with the EL Font.
- To stimulate creating a new vocal art and record it with the EL phonetics.
- To help little children to learn their own language with picture-like symbols.
- To raise children's ability to distinguish shapes relating to meanings while they play with the Font.
- To enjoy creating one's own personal logos and symbols.
- To help awaken one's inner nature, getting back the healthier connection between his or her thoughts and body, as the original humans had.

*EL is seeking to change the global society into the following ways:*

- Everyone equally has a global status and a local one, respecting each other's local ideas.
- While building the EL dictionary and various EL databases worldwide together, the society raises cooperative and volunteer hearts, cheering them up instead of competing and fighting against each other.
- Also while spreading and using EL, people experience comparing their own culture and others, and open more ob-

jective eyes to help better and deeper understanding of the human world.

- By spreading EL, people can communicate with others wherever they go, whatever condition they have, as long as their brains work. Less difficulty for minorities and no communication boundaries not only between races, but also between general populations and disabled people.

- After spreading EL, researching world information would be simpler and easier. Also the EL data can be used beyond time and places, since the expressions are varied, but the EL basic rules are stable. Even sharing with extraterrestrial intelligences would be easier.

- By spreading EL, local languages and cultures are protected from collapse and keep growing as long as the owners don't want to shut them down.

- By spreading EL, the world saves a lot of energy and materials for translations, education, welfare and medication, also reducing armament needs with no reason to bring up a war.

- Through all these potentialities, everybody gets hope for the future.

# SOLUTION

“The desire for an international language is an old one, and it is more than ever in men’s minds at this time of international connections in business and science. But ‘debabilization’ is a very hard and complex work. The attempt to make one international language has given us a parcel of new languages. The best way out seems to be the use of instruments which are, or have become, international [...] The question of an international language has now become more important. There are a number of signs pointing to a great development of international organization in the near future-though we are living in a time of warring interests and broken connections. Any work done on the question of international languages- with a view to making a word language, or a helping picture language-will give support to international developments generally. An international language has to take into account international needs, and at the same time it has to be as simple as possible.” (Neurath, 1936)

Otto Neurath starts off his book, *International Picture Language*, stating the essential need of an international language. He had already foreseen the future built of connections between countries and mass communication in the world. He believed in a language which would be able to send across a message to anyone: from young to old, rich to poor, from any country in the world. A true universal language.

Neurath was born in Vienna in 1882. When he was younger he studied mathematics in Vienna and later went on to get a degree in Political Science and Statistics in Berlin. He was secretary of an organization which provided housing to its members, and in 1923 became the director of Siedlungsmuseum, a museum dedicated to housing and city planning. He then opened the Gesellschafts-und Wirtschaftsmuseum (Social Economic Museum). This led him to work on design and visual education. In 1925 he developed, with Gerd Antz and his wife Marie Neurath, Isotype (International System of Typographic Picture Education) which was the combination of the studies he had done with graphic design and visual education.

International Picture language, published in 1936, is the result of an agreement between Neurath and C.K. Ogden. Ogden first came in to contact with Neurath in Vienna while the latter was still working at the Social Economic Museum. In the same years Ogden had developed Basic English, which is a stripped down version of English composed of only 850 words. He went to Neurath and asked if he could illustrate and develop the graphic symbols to represent the words. Neurath agreed at the condition that he too would publish a book using Ogden's Basic English to explain Isotype. The result on Neurath's side was International Picture Language. Work on the two books began in 1934 but due to the outbreak of the Austrian Civil war Neurath and his team moved to The Hague. There the book was finished and finally released in 1936.

In his book he explains, "the Isotype picture language is not a sign-for-sign parallel of a word language. It is a language which may be put into words in very different ways." This is a major difference from McFarland's Earth Language, where the message is written within a structure with grammar and punctuation. Isotype cannot be read, it is understood. This is why it completely

breaks down the barriers of regular written languages. The reason why it works is because it is based on scientific reasoning and psychological experiment. When looking at Isotype one doesn't read, they interpret. And the interpretation is universal.

The detail in the process of making Isotype was incredible. Marie Neurath explains how “[Otto] Neurath developed the notion of the transformer [...] to describe the process of analyzing, selecting, ordering, and then making visual some information, data, ideas, implications.” (Neurath, 2009) These points were the first step into making Isotype. Marie, after working with Otto for a few months, took the ‘title’ of transformer. She had to, along with Neurath (and later on Arntz), understand which way was the most universal and convenient way of representing a statistic. The simplest explanation in order to fully comprehend the job of the transformer is given by Marie herself in the book *The Transformer*: “From data given in words and figures a way has to be found to extract the essential facts and put them into picture form.” (Neurath, 2009)

It is quite beautiful the way the Isotype team found and created the symbols for words to be used in the system. In the *Transformer*, Marie explains the method:

“To introduce vocabulary with the help of pictures is often quite simple, for example, in the case of ‘comb’ and brush or ‘dog’ and ‘cat’; but with ‘bread’ and ‘cake’ we showed several of the common types of these things. Instead of ‘tree’ we showed ‘trees’, in three different forms: a deciduous tree, conifer, and palm.”

This might all seem quite simple which, in some way, it is. But what is more interesting is what she explains next where she says that “in order to explain ‘a’ and ‘the’, we first drew sun, moon and stars; the: the sun, the moon, a star.” (Neurath, 2009)

The limit which impeded Isotype from being a complete universal visual language was the fact that it was used to explain and demonstrate statistics. Although, to a certain extent, Isotype could be used to communicate quite complex information, it was always accompanied by some small amount of text. Otto Neurath described it as a ‘helping language: some words of explanation are necessary in any chart.’ (Neurath, 2009)



So in the last one hundred years we see numerous attempts at creating a universal language, whether visual or written, or just a deconstruction of a previously used language. What is the difference between the Dada movement, the Futurists, Esperanto, Earth Language and Isotype?

The Dadaist, because of the times they were living in, needed to react to society. They needed to react to a world where language was used as an oppressor. It was used to control the masses and it had done just that until the outbreak of the First World War. The Futurists, like the Dada movement, reacted to the changing world around them but in a positive way. Zamenhof saw a universal language as a glue that would bring people together, a way of uniting the people of the world. This too, like the Dada and the Futurists, was a reaction to his environment. Having seen the divisions amongst society and the world he thought his solution would finally break down the boundaries created by language. In the same manner Yoshiko McFarland had reacted with her invention of Earth Language. Her environment pushed her to find a solution to constant conflict between the people of the world. In all these examples we can sense a feeling of frustration with the world. With the way it develops around us and why certain events take place. A feeling of dissatisfaction with the way things are going. This is why, in my opinion, Isotype

was so successful as a mode of simple universal communication.

Neurath didn't disregard the problems of communication between different people, but didn't use it as a base for his "language". He just wanted to create a simple and efficient system of symbols which communicates universally without having to think of the already existing boundaries. Being a system to display statistics, Isotype is designed in a way that is understood on first impact. Without maybe realising he was a great anticipator of global communication today. His symbols are in every way like computer icons. We take for granted the simple icons that sit on our desktop. We know the little trashcan is there for deleting files off our computers, whether our system is in Japanese, German, English or Finnish. We know because the message is simple, but more importantly, universal. So with Isotype Neurath gives us some solutions, but not the solution to a universal visual language. Unfortunately it didn't stop wars (or in that case prevent them), it didn't stop uncruel working conditions in third world countries so that on this side of the world we can 'communicate' our fashion sense, and it didn't help bring countries together. But it was successful in what he originally intended it to do: communicate information universally. So we go back to Babel having solved some of the problems that are created by language, but we still struggle sometimes when it come to communicating between us.



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