

Designing a Pictorial Language: Rudolf Modley's Search for Philanthropic Support for the Development of a Universal System of Symbols

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Abstract

In 1966, acclaimed cultural anthropologist Margaret Mead, and graphic designer Rudolf Modley established the nonprofit Glyphs, Inc., to advance the research, classification, and promotion of universal graphic symbols around the world. Creating a visual language and system of symbols, they believed, could transcend language and lead to greater international understanding and harmony. But despite their esteemed records and vast international contacts, Mead and Modley's ambitious and utopian vision was never fully realized, stalled by lack of financing, unclear and unrealistic goals, differences over philosophy and methodology, and competition and criticism from other comparable endeavors. The correspondence, memos, proposals and reports available in the Rockefeller Archive Center holdings -- notably those of the Ford Foundation (and its affiliate, the Fund for the Advancement of Education), the Rockefeller Foundation (specifically those of the Rockefeller-funded General Education Board), and the Russell Sage Foundation -- provide rich insight into the journey and obstacles faced by Rudolf Modley in raising philanthropic support for his ambitious vision in the decades leading up to the formation of Glyphs, Inc. They shed light on the competing effort of renowned industrial designer Henry Dreyfuss to create an international dictionary of symbols, their differing methods and approach, and their lack of familiarity as designers with the nuances of raising philanthropic funds for their ambitious endeavor. Both Modley and Dreyfuss would go on to publish seminal books on graphic and pictorial symbols in the 1970s, but their tireless efforts to garner support from philanthropic foundations were fraught with false starts and disappointments.

Introduction

The pioneering collaboration over fifty years ago between acclaimed cultural anthropologist Margaret Mead, and graphic designer Rudolf Modley represents an historic milestone in social design history. But little has been written about Mead and Modley's collaboration in the mid-1960s and early 1970s to create a visual language and system of symbols that, they believed, could transcend language and lead to greater international understanding and harmony. As they wrote in their joint article "Communication among All People, Everywhere" in the August-September 1968 issue of *Natural History* (the journal of the American Museum of Natural History), a visual, universal language "would remove the dangers symbolized by the story of the Tower of Babel" and enable understanding among the people of the earth who speak some 2,000 different languages. They called the signs of this visual language "glyphs." And in 1966, Mead and Modley established a nonprofit organization by that same name, Glyphs, Inc., to advance the research, classification, and promotion of universal symbols around the world.

Mead is perhaps the most recognized anthropologist in the United States. She is best known for her studies of the non-literate peoples of Oceania. She was a vocal advocate for civil rights, nuclear non-proliferation, and international peace and understanding. Her deep curiosity about the cultures and complexities of people led to pioneering collaborations with colleagues in many other disciplines. Having studied multiple languages around the world, Mead recognized the difficulties of communication among and between peoples of different cultures and nations. She had a deep appreciation of design, seeing it (and particularly visual communications and symbols) as a means of enabling greater understanding beyond the written word.

Mead connected with a kindred soul in Austrian-born Rudolf Modley, a protégé of renowned Viennese political economist and sociologist Dr. Otto Neurath. Neurath was the founder of the ISOTYPE (International System of Typographic Picture Education), a movement of designers, social scientists, economists, and

political scientists in the inter-war period who devised a pioneering method of showing important public information in pictorial form. Modley had worked during his high school and university years for Dr. Neurath at the Gesellschafts und Wirtschaftsmuseum (Museum of Society and Economy) in Vienna before emigrating to the United States in 1930 and receiving permanent residency in 1932. Much of Modley's work after emigrating to the United States focused on importing Neurath's philosophy and process: first as the US Field Secretary for the Organizing Committee of the Institute for Visual Education (directed by Dr. Neurath from The Hague); and later, in 1934, as executive director and secretary of Pictorial Statistics, Inc. in New York, through which he consulted with industry and other educational, news, and public agencies to illustrate data utilizing the Neurath process and methodology.

It is not entirely clear through whom, where, or exactly when Mead and Modley first met but their high profiles and overlapping interests presented multiple opportunities, and their distinct skill sets and training made for an attractive and strategic partnership toward their common purpose. But despite their vast international contacts and high profiles, Mead and Modley's ambitious vision was never fully realized, stalled by lack of financing, unclear and unrealistic goals, differences over philosophy and methodology, and competition and criticism from other comparable endeavors. While the author has pieced together much of the story of Glyphs, Inc. from the perspective of Mead (primarily through correspondence and documents found in the vast holdings of the Margaret Mead Papers of the Library of Congress), little is known about the journey leading up to the formation of Glyphs, Inc. from Modley's perspective.

The holdings of the Rockefeller Archive Center (RAC) provided unique insight into the evolution of Modley's work and thinking around pictorial visualization and symbols from the time of his emigration to the United States in 1930-32 until founding Glyphs, Inc. with Mead in 1966. Most especially, the RAC holdings of the Ford Foundation (and its affiliate, the Fund for the Advancement of Education), the Rockefeller Foundation (specifically those of the General Education Board), and the Russell Sage Foundation, each provided chronological details of Modley's tireless (and largely unsuccessful) efforts to leverage the

philanthropic funding support he so desperately needed to demonstrate the potential (and test the effectiveness) of pictorial visualizations and symbols. Modley's story intersects directly with that of renowned industrial designer Henry Dreyfuss, whose parallel effort to establish an international "dictionary of symbols" both competed with and complemented that of Modley. The correspondence, memos, proposals, and reports available in the RAC holdings provided rich insight into the real obstacles faced by both Modley and Dreyfuss, their sometimes conflicting relationship and competing efforts, their differing methods and approach, and their lack of familiarity as designers with the nuances of raising philanthropic funds.

Russell Sage Foundation (1933-1936)¹

Rudolf Modley's attempts to garner support from philanthropic foundations in the United States to advance his work around pictorial statistics and symbols goes back as far as 1933, just a year after receiving his residency in the USA, with his outreach to the Russell Sage Foundation (RSF). In 1934, Modley incorporated Pictorial Statistics, Inc. to, in his words, "adapt a rigid European system of standardized symbols to the varied needs of American clients." Modley served as executive director and secretary, with a board of directors of twelve others, including Evans Clark, CEO of the Twentieth Century Fund, as chairman. Pictorial Statistics, Inc. was established as a nonprofit, membership corporation, operating on a fee-for-service basis and "without any financial subsidies." In a 1937 letter, Clark noted that "It is a tribute both to the work of Pictorial Statistics and to the vision of its clients that so valuable an educational organization is completely self-supporting." Pictorial Statistics was already providing consulting services to a variety of media, publishing, nonprofit, business, and government clients. A 1937 brochure included a list of nearly forty clients ranging from the American Petroleum Institute, Fortune, Harcourt Brace Publishers, Milk Research Council, the New York Times, Progressive Education Association (PEA), Survey Graphic, Time, Twentieth Century Fund, and the United States Departments of Agriculture, Education, Interior, Social Security, among others.

Despite his seemingly impressive list of paying clients, Modley actively sought philanthropic funds for Pictorial Statistics, Inc. to develop and test pictorial graphics for education. In the early/mid 1930s, Modley specifically requested funds from the Russell Sage Foundation to import the ideas and methods of the ISOTYPE movement to the United States through the establishment of a US-based workshop under the direction of Dr. Neurath. Modley's primary advocate and ally at the RSF was Mary van Kleeck, director of the Department of Industrial Studies (and also, not coincidentally, the vice president for the USA of the International Foundation for Visual Education (IFVE) of which Dr. Neurath was the director and Modley was a US field representative). On May 27, 1933, van Kleeck also wrote to Shelby Harrison, general director of the RSF, regarding cooperation with the IFVE and Dr. Neurath: "As you will note, we are co-operating by giving desk space to Dr. Rudolf Modley in Room 600 [in the offices of the Russell Sage Foundation at 130 East 22nd Street] and by providing a small amount of clerical assistance." The intent, as described in an IFVE brochure, was to "promote an interest in and the use of the Neurath method in the United States." The IFVE also proposed to establish a non-profit, self-supporting workshop, run by a staff of statisticians and artists specially trained by, and working under the supervision of, Dr. Neurath, to produce (at cost) "charts, exhibits and other material by this method for all agencies and individuals in need of them." Van Kleeck further explained to Harrison: "I am very much hoping that Dr. Modley is going to interest enough organizations to give us some assurance that a workshop here would have orders, tending to make it self-supporting." In a letter to Harrison, dated June 28, 1933, Modley himself also included a pamphlet of the newly-incorporated Pictorial Statistics, Inc., outlining the concept of the workshop.

In her notes to files at the RSF, van Kleeck outlined, in great detail, her meetings regarding the strategy for the workshop, including (unsuccessful) attempts to attract funds from the Carnegie Corporation. In a memo dated September 1934, van Kleeck described her deliberations with Dr. Frederick Keppel, president of the Carnegie Corporation, who had for a long time been interested in Dr. Neurath's work and had tried, unsuccessfully, to convince his trustees to appropriate money for a traveling exhibit of Neurath's work to be shown in US museums. Van Kleeck

recounted a conversation with Keppel: “He quoted a former professor of his at Columbia University who said that if one digs a well one must go deep enough to strike water. This applies to the initiation of projects by foundations which can only yield their best results if continued.” Keppel explained to van Kleeck the hesitancy of the Carnegie trustees to support Neurath’s workshop and that if the RSF could take “some favorable action in this matter” it would go a long way with the Carnegie Corporation. Van Kleeck’s internal memo described their discussion in further detail:

Dr. Keppel said that if the Russell Sage Foundation were to endorse Dr. Neurath’s work, even though the RSF might not contribute any money, this would go a long way in helping to get such a plan established. He cited the comment of Russell Leffingwell, a trustee of the Carnegie Corporation, (a partner in the firm of J.P. Morgan & Company), that in the making of appropriations by the foundation one had nothing corresponding with an evaluation of security in the financial world. The only guide would be whether or not the group responsible had a reputation to lose. If the RSF were willing to risk its reputation for sound work by utilization of Dr. Neurath’s graphic methods for presentation of its own material, that would correspond to the security desired by Mr. Leffingwell in deciding upon an appropriation.

Van Kleeck clearly heeded Keppel’s advice, committing funds from her Russell Sage Foundation budget to purchase and display posters of Neurath’s work in the RSF offices in New York, commissioning visualizations of economic and social data of relevance to RSF programs, and partially funding an extended visit and speaking tour of Neurath to the United States. By the sheer extent of correspondence on the topic, van Kleeck was clearly professionally convinced of the value and potential of Neurath and Modley’s work. But she was also personally committed, as RSF memos indicate, as she also used her own vacation time to travel to the Netherlands to visit and consult with Dr. Neurath. Between July 1933 and September 1935, there was a flurry of correspondence from van Kleeck to RSF leadership advocating for financial support of Neurath in the form of a monthly honorarium and/or monthly commissions of graphic charts visualizing data and information of relevance to the Foundation. “Because the continuance of Dr. Neurath’s workshop at The Hague is in jeopardy.” In October 1934, van Kleeck

allocated \$500 (equal to approximately \$10,000 today) from her Department of Industrial Studies budget to purchase a series of charts on employment and earnings in the United States from Dr. Neurath. The purchase was approved by Harrison in a response dated October 16, 1934. The purchase represented a desperate attempt by van Kleeck to get funding to Neurath:

There is a very grave emergency,” she wrote. “May I make clear that, though there is urgency, this would not be the primary reason for our undertaking the work. The primary reason is the present urgent need for reaching a much wider public with the results of social and economic research, and the Foundation which has pioneered in visual education might well write a new chapter in its work in that field by some such addition to its work of publication and distribution of books.

Modley was simultaneously working to cultivate colleagues within the Russell Sage Foundation, distributing samples of Neurath’s methods applied to visualize important social and economic data. On March 9, 1936, Modley wrote to Dr. Stacey May, assistant director for social sciences at the RSF, seeking \$500 to cover costs of inviting “foremost representative of graphic presentation, Dr. Otto Neurath” for a 2-3 month visit to the United States starting in September 1936. On March 13, 1936, van Kleeck wrote to Harrison in support of Modley’s appeal: “I would favor a contribution from the Russell Sage Foundation toward Dr. Neurath’s visit ... to bring about a cooperative relationship which will make available the high standard of graphic material for use in presentation of social and economic studies here.” On March 18, 1936, Harrison forwarded a check from the RSF for \$25.00 (equal to approximately \$500 today) “as a contribution toward the expenses incident to the visit of Dr. Otto Neurath ... and in the interest of a greater public appreciation of high standards of statistical presentation.” Modley had also secured funds from other organizations, among them the National Tuberculosis Association that, according to a July 21, 1936 letter from van Kleeck to RSF Director John M. Glenn, had “set aside \$1,000 (equal to approximately \$20,000 today) in its budget this year to bring Dr. Neurath here and to obtain his services as consultant and as a producer of materials for their educational purposes.”

In van Kleeck's July 21, 1936 letter to Glenn, she also appealed for his help in reaching out to the committee constituting the Board of Design for the 1939 World's Fair in New York to engage Neurath in the design of the epic exhibition. Van Kleeck argued convincingly that the Fair was intended to "look toward the future rather than toward the past, emphasizing at all points the general social welfare" and that Dr. Neurath's expertise in graphic presentation and museum design was "just the skill needed for the World's Fair, since it is not merely the visualization of details, but the plan as a whole, which is important." Moreover, she argued Dr. Neurath's work in the social sciences qualified him to design the exhibit in such a way as to "bring out the social aspects." On that same day, Glenn wrote to George McAneny, a member of the World's Fair committee, advocating for Dr. Neurath:

You have probably had...some information about Dr. Neurath with a suggestion that he might be called on in connection with the layout and design of the New York World's Fair. I am writing this to say that I have known about Dr. Neurath's work in preparing charts explanatory of social conditions. We in the [Russell] Sage Foundation have been much interested in his work and think it of exceptional value not only as a matter of charting but as a matter of clear representation of statistics in such a way as to show what they mean by way of the presentation of social conditions and social needs ... The special value that Dr. Neurath would have for the World's Fair is his knowledge of social conditions and social problems derived from first hand study.

Pictorial Statistics, Inc. ultimately did produce a publication entitled "Now It Can Be Shown: Fact Pictures for Exhibitors" as suggestions to exhibitors at the New York World's Fair 1939 and recommended to the management of the World's Fair. In a December 11, 1936, letter to Modley, Robert D. Kohn, chairman of the Board of Design for the Fair, wrote: "I may say that I was very favorably impressed by your demonstration and have recommended the system to the attention of the Exhibits Division of the Fair."

An April 5, 1937, letter from Dr. Neurath to Shelby Harrison of the RSF graciously expressed sincere thanks "for the kind hospitality which you and the Russell Sage Foundation offered to me and my Institute during my stay in the United States."

General Education Board (1935-1937)²

The General Education Board (GEB) was a nonprofit, philanthropic organization established in 1903 by John D. Rockefeller to support aid to higher education and medical schools in the United States, to raise educational standards and widen educational opportunities and to modernize farming practices, especially in rural South. The GEB ceased operating as a separate entity in 1960, when its programs were subsumed into the Rockefeller Foundation.

Rudolf Modley's inroads into the use of pictorial graphics in education attracted the attention of the General Education Board in the mid-1930s. The GEB and other foundations were increasingly interested in "visual education" overall, particularly in utilizing the emerging technologies of film to extend educational access and opportunities. Correspondence between Modley and the team of the GEB began as early as 1935. An internal GEB interview memo dated April 2, 1935, written by "L.K.H." and circulated to ten GEB staff members, shared details of a call from Modley, noting that Modley "has been in the country for the past few years earning his living by doing commercial jobs but trying so far as possible to develop the use of graphic methods in research and educational programs." Modley had called to introduce his work through Pictorial Statistics, Inc., and to inquire about potential GEB support for three proposed projects:

- a pictorial-graphic history of the United States;
- a systematic testing of the advantages and limitations of the use of graphic representations for different age levels in both secondary and adult education;
- organization of a systemic program for the use of graphic representation in education.

The memo's (unidentified) author reflected positively on the conversation and proposal:

To the writer, these ingenious methods of graphic representation which Neurath developed and which have been improved by Modley offer an exceedingly interesting possibility for use in secondary education and adult education. These methods would make it possible to convey ideas and conceptions that would ordinarily be difficult, if not impossible, of acceptance by large sections of the population who cannot comprehend either statistical tables or involved textual explanations. In this respect graphic representation offers a procedure intermediary between evidential material and esthetic experiences and for that reason is peculiarly appropriate for many aspects of the social studies.

On January 26, 1937, Modley sent to GEB his “Proposal of a Graphic Center for Educational Purposes,” outlining a strategy and request for funds to supply pictograph charts and maps “for the teaching of the Social Sciences in cooperation with other agencies working in the field.” The proposal included plans to supply products and services to schools, camps, adult education groups, magazines, authors of textbooks, and events/exhibits. Modley’s budget request totaled \$55,000 per year (equivalent to roughly \$1m today), including \$34,000 for staff and operating expenses, \$8,000 for a travelling exhibit, and \$13,000 for testing. Modley’s strategy involved offering these products and services “at the lowest price” with the intention of making the nonprofit Pictorial Statistics, Inc. “self supporting after two years of existence.” The proposal indicated that all income from the sale of charts or services was “to be set up as a reserve for the self-supporting organization.”

Modley’s primary contact at the GEB was John Marshall, assistant director for the humanities at the Rockefeller Foundation, and an officer of the GEB. Following a conversation between Modley and Marshall, an internal GEB memo dated February 1, 1937 indicates “little possibility of a request for this purpose being considered” and that “experience so far suggests that its effectiveness varies to a considerable extent with the age of students and with the type of material dealt with.” But on February 3, Marshall wrote to Modley indicating that “we need to undertake some further consideration of the whole area of visual aids in education before attempting to give you an answer to the equations you raised as to the possibility of obtaining support for studying the effectiveness of the methods your organization is utilizing.” On that same day, Marshall wrote to George Zook,

director of the American Council on Education, requesting a meeting “to talk with me about the Council’s interests in visual aids to education apart from motion pictures.” An internal GEB memo from Marshall, dated February 11th expressed interest from Zook, in exploring graphic representation within the broader field of visual education.

Later that month, on February 25, 1937, Evans Clark, chair of the board of directors of Pictorial Statistics, Inc., and executive director of the influential Twentieth Century Fund, wrote to W.W. Brierley, secretary of GEB, in which he noted the “rapid strides” and potential of graphic representation and the successes of Pictorial Statistics, Inc.:

[Pictorial Statistics, Inc.] is a nonprofit, membership corporation, operating on a strictly cost basis and without any financial subsidies. It is a tribute both to the work of Pictorial Statistics and to the vision of its clients that so valuable an educational organization is completely self-supporting. We suggest that, in planning exhibitions, books, museums, and reports, Pictorial Statistics, Inc. is the logical organization for you to consult and to use.

Over a year later, on February 24, 1938, Modley wrote to Marshall: “It is now over a year since I have proposed to the General Education Board the establishment of a graphic center for educational purposes. I wonder if you have given this matter any further attention.” Modley noted that “we have gone ahead” and were providing schools with pictorial education supplies but that he was “still unable to finance testing of the effectiveness of our materials.” Modley also forwarded copies of Pictorial Statistics, Inc. publications “Instructions for Chartmakers,” “Pictorial Charts and Maps,” and “Now It Can Be Shown: Fact Pictures for Exhibitors.”

Correspondence in March 1938 between Modley and Marshall focused on questions of testing of the effectiveness of pictorial graphics among various age groups in aiding reading, counting, and interpretation of facts. In a March 25, 1938, letter to Modley, Marshall noted that after discussion among GEB colleagues there was consensus that testing should be undertaken by an

independent entity: “...we have come to feel that if a study of this kind is to be undertaken, it should be by some organization that is not to be concerned with the production of materials of this kind.”

Ford Foundation and the Fund for the Advancement of Education (1956-1970)³

Especially illuminating in documenting the fundraising efforts of Modley are the many correspondences in the RAC holdings of the Ford Foundation and the Fund for the Advancement of Education (TFAE) archives. TFAE was established in 1951 and funded by the Ford Foundation to support new and experimental programs at all levels of formal education. The flurry of correspondence between TFAE’s director, Dr. Alvin Eurich and Modley, beginning in 1956, demonstrate an intensive (albeit largely unsuccessful) campaign to leverage funds from the Ford Foundation and TFAE in support of Modley’s efforts to research, categorize and promote a universal system of symbols. The trail began with an April 24, 1956 meeting between Modley and renowned industrial designer Henry Dreyfuss who agreed upon the need for a comprehensive study of the use of signs and symbols in modern communications. Modley drafted a proposal for the study and shared this with Dreyfuss in early May 1956. Soon thereafter, Dreyfuss discussed the proposal with Eurich and United Nations Under-Secretary-General Ralph Bunche on May 17, 1956. Modley met with Eurich again on June 18 in New York, at which time Eurich suggested the proposal be simplified to include a preparatory survey to evaluate the feasibility, cost, and curation of the symbols project. The outcome of these initial conversations was a narrowed proposal prepared by Modley entitled “Preparatory Survey for a Study on Communications through Symbols,”⁴ dated July 7, 1956, “out of which would come a recommendation to proceed or abandon the larger scale project.”

On July 16, 1956, Dreyfuss wrote to Eurich acknowledging receipt of a copy of the preparatory survey proposal but questioning the budget:

While I have never been one to be extravagant with dollars, either other peoples' or my own, I nevertheless feel that a sum insufficient to do an adequate job can often be wasted money ... [If] you believe that the initial stage is just to collect a goodly sample of existing (and even extinct) signs and symbols, perhaps the outline and cost estimate are sufficient -- but even for this stage, I would consider it meagre. When we talked with D. Bunche, his attitude was, I believe, to approach the problem on a broader scope than Rudolf Modley's outline would indicate.

Dreyfuss also questioned Eurich about the wider vision and purpose of the survey as defined by Modley:

One item I have left to the last -- perhaps because I think it the most important. What about IMAGINATION? Of course, one cannot easily put a dollar value on this commodity. However, in this initial period, I believe a great deal of time must be put on the real use of symbols, and a top flight person must be available to do some crystal gazing and to interview the heads of large corporations (both manufacturing and sales groups) to awaken and stimulate the idea and importance of symbol uses. This is selling rather than research ... Certainly for a while some group would have to do missionary work to interest and induce the use of symbols.

On August 4, 1956, Modley also wrote to Eurich explaining that the preparatory survey would involve key people in industry, professions, government, etc. and that what would be learned from this would inform what is needed for the wider study and categorization of symbols. "I wholeheartedly agree with Henry [Dreyfuss] that our eventual goal should be a 'Dictionary of Symbols'," wrote Modley: "As I mentioned to you, Harold Lasswell of Yale and I submitted a project with exactly that title to the Carnegie Corporation almost 20 years ago. If we are successful, such a Dictionary would be the climax of our work. If it can be compiled, it will be compiled after the preparatory survey and after the basic research period of the larger study." Modley further outlined the budgetary needs of the survey, limiting its scale and scope to "graphic signs and symbols used in Western Civilizations" since, as he says, "to include the Far East, Africa etc. frankly scares me."

On September 28, 1956, Dreyfuss wrote to Eurich following a breakfast meeting (and again on October 3, 1956) rearticulating his enthusiasm and impatience regarding the project: “I have been giving a lot more thought to establishing a realistic program on this research project. I’m sure I don’t have to tell you of my interest -- not only because of my own personal enthusiasm for the idea, but also because I honestly believe that this kind of project would profit by the thinking of a designer. This decision of course must properly be yours - but sooner or later we’ll have to decide what cooks, by whom, and how!” Eurich responded a few days later, on October 9, 1956, expressing his initial concerns about the viability of the survey:

Thanks for your note on Symbol Research. I am equally impatient. Apparently, however, we have no one immediately available who is sufficiently interested in the project to chart with some clarity and precision the direction for the research. When Rudolf Modley gets back to New York I will try to see him and talk with him further about it.

Later in October, Eurich shared with Dreyfuss a response he received to a September 28th letter to C.M. Berkeley, executive officer in the Office of the Director-General of UNESCO, regarding the symbols project. Berkeley expressed interest but recommended a more “piecemeal” approach and fell short of committing significant resources to the endeavor:

It does not appear that we have tackled symbols as a whole. I imagine the UN would be interested in the standardization of communication and cartographic symbols; ICAO [International Civil Aviation Organization] must have done some work on air traffic symbols and WHO [World Health Organization] perhaps on medical symbols. We in UNESCO would be happy to give some modest help from the strictly scientific point of view, under the general authority we have to promote understanding and exchanges between the nations.

On November 25, 1956, Modley wrote to Eurich asking for “an indication as to the status of our symbol project” and on December 22, 1956, wrote again sharing a copy of *The Picture Book of Symbols* by Ernst Lehner (1956) with reproductions of several hundred symbols from different sources, organized into twenty-nine

categories. But in early 1957, Eurich appeared to still have some reservations as he continued his due diligence on Modley. On January 30, 1957, Dreyfuss wrote to Eurich, evidently a response to an earlier request from Eurich for additional background information on Modley. Dreyfuss's letter includes a dossier on Modley -- his educational background, professional accomplishments, and current consulting work. Dreyfuss presented a positive but guarded image of Modley, noting that while he was "one of the best research minds," that he "does not like running an organization but rather prefers to work by himself."

In February 1957, Eurich made a concerted effort within the Ford Foundation to garner support for the symbols project. On February 19, 1957, he wrote to Thomas Carroll, vice president of the Ford Foundation,⁵ following up on a previous phone conversation. Eurich attached a copy of Modley's preparatory survey proposal and emphasized that "the need for a dictionary of symbols in our present-day world is urgent." He attached a list of books (assembled by Dreyfuss) on symbol-related topics and asked Carroll for a meeting with him and Ford Foundation Vice President Don Price to discuss possible next steps. The Foundation's internal routing sheet attached to the letter indicates that it was circulated to numerous colleagues inside the Ford Foundation, but brief handwritten notes expressed nothing but skepticism about the project. A March 28, 1957, memo to the files from Price included reflections following a meeting he had had with Modley two days prior regarding the survey proposal. Price outlined what he perceived as the difference between Dreyfuss' and Modley's approach:

While Mr. Dreyfuss, as an industrial designer, is primarily interested in a study which will point toward the possible standardization of symbols for commercial use (e.g., in the international transportation and communication business), Mr. Modley believes that a study should start out as a quite basic job of research covering the whole field (religious symbols, scholarly symbols, map symbols, etc.) and the question of possible utility should not be prejudged.

Price expressed his own reservations about recommending funding for the project: "I wanted [Modley to know] that it was enough out of our line of interest that he ought not to bet on a favorable result..." Price sent an additional memo on

the same day to four or five of his Ford Foundation colleagues with more blunt recommendations: “I do not believe that there is clear enough evidence that this could come to anything so that we would be warranted in putting a heavy amount of staff time into helping develop the idea and finding the sponsor. And unless any colleague wants to take over, I will tell Mr. Modley we cannot help him.”

By April 1957, the correspondence between Modley and the Ford Foundation and TFAE teams became increasingly pessimistic regarding prospects of funding. On April 8, 1957, Price wrote to Modley:

The very interesting ideas you suggested about the need for a study on communications through symbols ... is a most interesting one but I am afraid I have to report that we do not see much likelihood that we can help develop it and give it support ... it does not seem possible to offer any encouragement to this project within the limits of our present programs here at the Foundation.

Modley replied on April 16th with a defeated but stoic response: “Mr. Dreyfuss and I will probably take the matter up with Dr. Eurich before we finally decide that the time for a study of this type is not ripe.”

On June 2, 1957, Modley reached out to Eurich expressing openness to meet him and Dreyfuss “to see if anything further can be done on the communications project. Personally I feel that my contribution does not seem to have helped very much and it may well be better for Henry to carry on by himself.” Dreyfus wrote to Eurich two days later, on June 4th, also expressing disappointment and evident frustration with the Foundation’s delay and inaction:

I must admit I am in crocodile tears over our Symbol problems being stymied. I hope you are going to reactivate this, for sooner or later I think we should see a dictionary of international symbols! If I kept after potential clients the way I seem to be keeping after you about this I would probably be the best designer in the world -- or at least second best. Now I am embarrassed to keep on talking about it and I wish you would pick up the ball and carry it and run like hell -- I will be at the other end of the field to catch it!

There was a lull in correspondence for nearly nine months until a February 28, 1958 TFAE memo from Eurich to Joseph McDaniel, secretary of the Ford Foundation, with the subject line: “Communications Through Symbols.” Eurich’s typewritten memo with copious handwritten notes, edits, and deletions, outlined proposed funding plans for a “Dictionary of Symbols Planning Survey.” Eurich included a handwritten note: “Recommended Action: Approval of \$25,000 [reduced from \$45,000 in the typed version] for a Foundation administered project to determine the feasibility of preparing a dictionary of symbols.” (Note: \$25,000 in 1958 would be equivalent to approximately \$228,000 in 2021). Eurich cited both Dreyfuss and Modley’s support for the project as well as numerous other national and international industry and government leaders. The survey, he said, would include covering such fields as mathematics, sciences, religion, architecture, transportation, economics, printing, color, geography, engineering, language, music, astronomy, criminology, mythology, and geology. He concluded by emphasizing the importance of the undertaking:

In view of the current importance of symbols in the world today it is surprising to find that no effort has been made to date to bring together a compendium that might be used by educators, public officials, research workers, industrialists, and a variety of professional workers. Such a compendium might prove to be as useful a reference book as dictionaries and encyclopedias.

On April 10, 1958, McDaniel responded to Eurich with an inter-office memorandum suggesting “the most direct and practical way in which to proceed” with the symbols project. In the memo, McDaniel recommended contracting the “prospective survey director” (i.e., Modley), splitting funds 50-50 between the Ford Foundation and TFAE, and subsequently issuing a grant to a tax-exempt university press to publish the dictionary. Modley joined TFAE as a consultant on June 1, 1958, and continued to undertake work on the preliminary survey through much of 1958-59. His travel itinerary included stops in Chicago, Cincinnati, New York, Philadelphia, San Francisco, and Washington, DC, for meetings with industry and design leaders, conventions, and conferences. Especially prescient was the speech entitled “The Challenge of Symbology” that Modley delivered on April 1, 1959, at the Waldorf during the Fourth Annual Communications

Conference of the Art Directors Club of New York, in which he called for the creation of a new science, the science of symbology. Eurich committed \$1,159 (equivalent to approximately \$11,000 today) from the TFAE for the printing of 5,500 copies of the speech for distribution to 5,000 members of the National Education Association (NEA)'s Department of Audio-Visual Instruction (DAVI), a network of educators interested in exploring all forms of "visual education" in public schools.

Five months later, on October 22, 1959, Modley wrote to Eurich with an attachment entitled "First Progress Report: SYMBOL PROJECT (June 1 to September 30, 1958)", including a summary of inquiries and interviews with international organizations, associations, professional societies, standardization agencies, trademark offices in Europe and the USA, professors, and designers. The report included three papers commissioned as a part of the preparatory survey, two from Martin Krampen: "An Approach to Classification of Graphic Symbols" and "Classification of Graphic Symbols and the Scientific Method"; and a third by Rivka Eifermann, titled "The Efficacy of Affirmative and Negative Signs and Words." Dreyfuss also wrote to Eurich thanking him for sharing Modley's progress report and acknowledging the complexity of the undertaking: "I think all [Modley] says makes sense, as I expected it to. The situation seems complicated, but then it probably would not be worthwhile doing if it were completely obvious."

The reception of the progress report and papers among colleagues at the TFAE was not warm. A letter dated December 7, 1959, to Eurich from Dr. Sidney Tickton expressed skepticism about the viability of the symbols project:

I have been trying to warm up to the Modley proposal for an international dictionary of symbols and it certainly is difficult ... the reports prepared by Krampen and Eifermann are unintelligible to the layman ... and their submission to their present form serves to throw cold water on the whole project. ... [Modley's] estimate, it seems to me, is just a stab in the dark. The cost could run substantially higher, in as much as no one knows how many symbols there are, how they can be classified or what they mean in various countries, in various areas within a country, in various industries or in various social or economic activities One big trouble with the whole project it seems to me, is that it

tries to prove for a tremendous job; that is, to figure out a system of classifying symbols and then to classify a large number of symbols according to that system. Why is this necessary? Would it not be possible to start out with, say, 50,000 common symbols that can be classified easily and then to set down for each symbol the definitions commonly associated with it. ... What I have in mind is something like Webster's Pocket Dictionary instead of Webster's International.

On November 23, 1959, Dreyfuss wrote again to Eurich, requesting a meeting to discuss the project. Correspondence in the autumn of 1959 between Dreyfuss, Eurich, and Modley again shifted to questions of scale, scope, and funding of the wider symbols project. In early 1960, the three continued to correspond and share resources regarding symbols but their correspondence indicated a collective acquiescence and recognition that funding for the wider symbols project would not flow from the Ford Foundation or TFAE. On March 12, 1960, Eurich and Dreyfuss met for breakfast in New York, again discussing their mutual interest in symbols, and sharing books, articles, and references on the topic. In a March 16, 1960 letter to Eurich, Dreyfuss includes a copy of Susanne K. Langer's book exploring semantics and symbolism, *Philosophy in a New Key: A Study in the Symbolism of Reason, Rite, and Art*, with a note: "Here is Susan Langner's [sic] book which I know you will enjoy -- she acknowledges symbols in varied ways." On April 26, 1960, Dreyfuss wrote to Eurich in a seemingly last-ditch attempt to reignite interest: "At this time, I certainly would like to talk to you about what might be done about the study of symbols. I feel our steer into this has been unfortunate and yet I know that today more than ever the interest in symbols has been revitalized and is more important." On July 15, 1960, Dreyfuss again wrote to Eurich, sharing a copy of *Unified Symbolism for World Understanding in Science*, a 1955 book by American philosopher Oliver Leslie Reiser.

But by early 1961, Modley's correspondence indicated that he had moved on to advance his work on symbols independent of the TFAE. In February (and again in April) of 1961, he wrote to Eurich sharing the news that he'd incorporated a new nonprofit organization in Washington, DC, Symbol Research, Inc., and his intention was to publish "a small magazine tentatively called SYMBOLS." Eurich responded on May 4, 1961, expressing delight and granting permission for Modley

to turn over to Symbol Research, Inc., all of the materials and research on symbols that he'd assembled while conducting the preparatory survey as a consultant at TFAE. Correspondence between them ended at this point as Modley's priorities and strategy shifted, Eurich departed the TFAE, and the Fund ceased operations as a separate entity of the Ford Foundation.

By the early 1960s, Modley and Dreyfuss's efforts around symbols became increasingly separate and competitive. The departure of Eurich and closure of the TFAE left them both without a champion at the Ford Foundation. But eight years later, in May 1968, Dreyfuss attempted again to reopen channels with the Foundation. On May 28, 1968, he wrote to Dr. Julius A. Stratton, chairman of the Ford Foundation (and president and former chancellor of Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT)), requesting a meeting to discuss a "big idea" to "develop an international dictionary for symbols of all sorts." Dreyfuss had secured funding from the National Endowment of the Humanities to complete a feasibility study on symbols. Dreyfuss and Stratton met in the summer of 1968, and Dreyfuss wrote to him again on September 13, 1968 that he was "working intensively on a new project - a world-wide visual language of symbols to be published in dictionary form." Dreyfuss attached a press release announcing his retirement from his acclaimed industrial design firm to develop the "International Symbol Dictionary," among other endeavors. In an October 29, 1968 letter to Stratton, he indicated potential interest among publishers and endorsements for his symbols dictionary from the U.S.A. Standards Institute, American Institute of Graphic Arts, International Council of Societies of Industrial Designers, and the US Commission for UNESCO. But despite these "encouraging" developments, Dreyfuss acknowledged his need of funding and his lack of familiarity with the process of raising philanthropic funding: "The immediate task seems to be to determine the possibilities for funding," he wrote. "We have not stopped, as the momentum is great, but I question how long I should continue this operation at my own cost. I find myself embarrassed by my lack of knowledge of how to proceed in matters of this sort, but as I told you, dealing with publishers and foundations and grants is all entirely new to my design oriented background."

A letter dated December 20, 1968, from Dreyfuss to Stratton indicates a

productive meeting between Dreyfuss and the Ford Foundation's Executive Vice President David Bell and Howard Swearer, the program officer in charge. However, in a January 29, 1969, letter, Swearer expressed to Dreyfuss "considerable regret" that the prospects for Ford Foundation financing "are quite bleak" despite the "intrinsic appeal of the project." Swearer explained that the project was:

simply too remote from our major program targets and the proposed budget is very high for our badly strained resources ... We have been influenced by doubt that the dictionary would in fact prove to be a strong force for promoting widespread adoption of uniform symbols. Several knowledgeable persons with whom we have consulted, while expressing support for your project in general, are skeptical that this would be the most direct route to achieve uniformity in the use of symbols in various fields.

Notes from Swearer and Bell dated January 27, 1969, regarding their meeting with Dreyfuss expressed skepticism about the project but indicated that Stratton felt "the case should be looked at carefully -- in view of Mr. Dreyfuss' reputation and standing in his profession -- and that the response to him reflect that careful consideration despite its negative response." Internal notes, dated February 3, 1968, indicate that Dreyfuss called in reference to the January 29th letter and "sounded disappointed" and requested an appointment: "Mr Dreyfuss said he understands, and will not pursue the matter further with regards to dollars, but he would like your advice about other places to approach." A Dreyfuss letter to Stratton dated February 5, 1969, acknowledged the unlikelihood of funding from the Ford Foundation and asked for advice from Stratton on whether to proceed with the dictionary: "As you may know, I have not approached any other foundations for financing and if I decide that the project does warrant being pursued, I would very much appreciate your thinking on how, where and who."

Correspondence between Dreyfuss, Modley, and Margaret Mead in 1968-69 ⁵ indicate continued attempts at collaboration but expose considerable differences of approach, competing efforts and egos, and continued frustrations regarding funding. On September 24, 1968, Dreyfuss met with Mead over lunch and followed up with a letter: "I am so pleased that you look with favor on the idea of

a compilation of symbols that would have some authority -- and appreciative of the list you are going to send me as suggestions for an Advisory Board.” A few months later, on November 17, 1968, Modley wrote to Mead: “Here are my suggestions of what Glyphs, Inc. might do for Dreyfuss’ dictionary. If you agree with this approach, I think Dreyfuss would pay Glyphs a consultation fee to consult on the most appropriate classification system for the dictionary. This, by the way, is a very tough nut to crack. We learned that when [I worked on this at] the Fund for the Advancement of Education.” Modley advocated for defining a relationship with Dreyfuss that “would give us some control over what Dreyfuss does.” In their subsequent proposal to Dreyfuss on December 9, 1968, Mead and Modley referenced the “private collection of symbols which have been collected for Glyphs and were previously organized for the Fund for the Advancement of Education.” Dreyfuss responded to Mead on December 20, 1968:

The Glyphs proposal is indeed an interesting one, but I am afraid as things stand now any consideration of formal cooperation of this sort would be premature. We are currently talking to foundations about funding and are continuing consideration of various potential arrangements about publishing -- and until all of this is sorted out, we cannot develop a firm work program. As I have mentioned to you and Rudy, we certainly have in mind the desirability of involving Glyphs actively in our program and sincerely appreciate your offer of cooperation.

On April 18, 1969, Modley wrote again to Dreyfuss, outlining a detailed proposal and process for collaboration in developing a classification system for categorizing symbols, selection, evaluation, and publication plans. In a May 15, 1969 handwritten note to Mead, Dreyfuss called for collaboration around a “central archive for all collected symbols” but the philosophical and methodological differences were evident. Dreyfuss emphasized the distinction between the “graphic” system for symbols being advocated by Mead and Modley versus the “meaning” system he proposed for his symbol dictionary.

Following several unsuccessful attempts at meeting again with the Ford Foundation team, Dreyfuss confirmed in a May 29, 1969, letter to Stratton his intention to delay the symbol dictionary project:

After a good hard look at the current funding situation in which (as you wisely warned), principal logical money sources are currently giving priority to the underprivileged and urban problems -- I've decided to postpone the publication of a Dictionary of Symbols. This in no way diminishes my interest in collecting and collating symbols and we plan to establish a Data Bank of symbols, and make it available to responsible persons or organizations. I am able to personally support this for the time being. The principal need for funds was for global research and that will have to be deferred. However, it is remarkable how many people from all over the world have heard about our endeavor -- our daily mail is overflowing with contributions of symbols (not dollars!). This will form the backbone of the future Dictionary.

Dreyfuss wrote Stratton a year later, on July 28, 1970, with an update: "I wanted to tell you that we have signed a contract with McGraw-Hill to proceed with what we now call THE HENRY DREYFUSS SOURCEBOOK OF SYMBOLS. Symbols are literally covering all of us, we are hard at work, and by mid 1972 I hope we will see a book on the market." Dreyfuss included in his letter a copy of "Our Search for Symbols," a flier about the project including a call for entries he was distributing "around the world" as one method of researching and collecting symbols for his dictionary. Dreyfuss indeed did publish his book, *Henry Dreyfuss Symbol Sourcebook: An Authoritative Guide to International Graphic Symbols*, in 1972 with McGraw-Hill. The book included over 20,000 symbols from various industries and disciplines. In the book, Dreyfuss recognized the National Endowment for the Humanities for "a feasibility study grant" and offered special thanks to Mead and Modley of Glyphs who had "worked with us throughout the project (and it was Dr. Mead who gave us the inspiration for the Graphic Forms Section)." Dreyfuss also included Mead and Modley's 1968 *Natural History* article in the bibliography, along with two articles by Modley, including "The Challenge of Symbology" (which is the only mention of the TFAE and Ford Foundation in the book). On October 5, 1972, Dreyfuss and his terminally-ill wife and business partner, Doris, committed suicide together in their South Pasadena, California home.

The efforts of Glyphs, Inc. gained momentum in the late 1960s and early 1970s through Mead and Modley's writing and speaking, and Modley's engagement in

international standardization committees and commissions among governments and industry, principally in Europe and the United States. But as Glyphs, Inc. shifted from merely articulating and promoting the idea of a universal system of symbols to putting that idea into practice, the magnitude of the undertaking became evident, and Mead and Modley faced increased criticism and competition, and struggled with funding shortages and limited capacity. Modley's book, in collaboration with William R. Myers, *Handbook of Pictorial Symbols: 3,250 Examples from International Sources*, was published by Dover Publications four years after Dreyfuss's and just a few months after his own death from pancreatic cancer, in September 1976. But the Mead-Modley duo had not achieved their more ambitious vision for developing a viable system of universal graphic symbols.

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⁵ Margaret Mead Papers and the South Pacific Ethnographic Archives, Library of Congress, Manuscript Division, (Washington, DC), Box E66, Glyphs, Inc., Container K62-K64.