ABSTRACT

My initial direction was a historical look at cultural symbols that have transformed and lasted since their physical depiction. Ranging from symbols like the Yin Yang that hold religious importance but is universally recognizable to depictions of the sun which show up across cultures and hold similar meaning and importance. My focus shifted to the isotype and graphics with an emphasis on communication and design. The isotype is intended to relay information to anyone looking at the design. My goal became to try to understand the relationship of the isotype and modern-day signage both commercial and municipal and how it can be better improved for the viewer. I will explore the idea of mass communication; both what it means and what it looks like today.

CONTEXTUAL REVIEW

This paper looks at how icons, symbols, Isotypes and other image-based forms of communication can be used to relay information effectively regardless of cultural background, language or education. It considers research from Otto Neurath's autobiography regarding his work on the Isotype, T.I. Lesnevskaya's and Natalya Zakharova's article on pictography as it relates to city planning, Tracy Ma's article exploring commercial signage and Milton Glasser's analysis of Olympic logotypes. Each of these authors address visual communication from a different angle for a separate purpose but each share a common thread: effective visual communication with their audience.

Otto Neurath's autobiography explored his early interest in Egyptian hieroglyphics, Chinese stamps, maps and illustrations in Rene Descartes books. He was drawn to the opportunity to learn from hieroglyphics. Unlike fantastical depictions of myth and legend that are found on Greek and Roman artifacts, hieroglyphics show fishing, farming and a glimpse into Egyptian lifestyle. Neurath was most drawn to images that were informative rather than beautiful leading him to wonder "why a picture with artistic

qualities should be uninformative – as if conveying information was beneath an artist – and why a picture that had to be informative should lack higher artistic qualities" (Neurath, 2010, p. 83). His goal became to create symbols that represented quantitative information through easily comprehensible icons. Neurath started with his visualization by making exhibitions in Isotype style and chose his subject to have direct and immediate appeal to the masses. The subject matter ranged from "Home and Factory Weaving in England" depicting total pounds of production, number of home and factory weavers to "Employees of the USSR" depicting the number of workers being employed by state, cooperatives and private industry. He would then prove further information by layering symbols to show agricultural, transportation, construction, textile and clothing, and small trade workers. His images were clear, concise and understandable to those who came to see his exhibits. Unlike traditional art featured in museums, Neurath's isotypes depict day to day happenings and were easily accessible to anyone as the subject matter was both tangible and relevant.

The pictogram as defined by Lesnevkaya and Zakharova is a sign that reflects the characteristics, most often in the form of diagrams, recognizable, expressive features of an object or phenomenon to which it points. They found that pictography is an independent field of artistic and communication culture with its own functional structures and rich artistic language with ancient roots (2016). Communicating cross culturally becomes systematically important when designing cityscapes and urban environments geared towards tourism or international events like the Olympics or World Cup. Lesnevkaya and Zakharova outline what designers must understand and tasks they would have to accomplish to see "functional visualization tasks by pictographic means of important communicative zones" (2016). Designating pedestrian walkways and traffic intersections are examples where a universal graphic style for a number of cites could be effective but would have to consider not only the composition and spatial solution of urban information display systems, but also style, characters, location, size, typography, national ornaments, symbolism, and color (2016). Lesnevkaya and Zakharova focus on pictography as it applies to

the urban landscape, but the message is essentially the same as Neurath's in that the goal is to "– to communicate knowledge as far as possible, reducing the gulfs between nations and language groups" (Neurath, 2010, p. 127).

Visual editor for *The New York Times'* style section, Tracy Ma, offers her stream of consciousness and opinion on various storefront signage surrounding her walk through of Chinatown in her article for AIGA Eye on Design. She comments on a non-Chinese-owned business that opt to use Simplified Chinese instead of Traditional Chinese as part of their identity design. Though this act is done in an effort to be more accessible to the consumer, Ma points out that along with the majority of China, Chinatown read and write using Traditional Chinese. In an effort to be more relatable to the surrounding environment, non-Chinese-owned storefronts not only stick out like a sore thumb but Ma states they border on offensive. She also observes that many of the Cantonese bakeries use a "type of swash ligature" as part of the logo design. This catches Ma's eye as it is essentially a knockoff of calligraphic type used in Romance languages and so does not lend well to Chinese lettering but leaves her with a nostalgic feeling for a bakery in Hong Kong. Ma then eyes the Kiki's Greek Restaurant, newly opened in what used to be a Chinese offset printing shop, the new signage doesn't cover but is instead posted up next to the original sign for the space and is in Simplified Chinese. She describes it as "so slap-dash and ugly" and "if not ignorant, then at the very least cynical and self-indulgent" (Ma, 2018). Through shared signs and symbols, Ma connects with the characters outlined in neon and Traditional Chinese signs, she identifies with a simulation of home and shares "a collective longing" with other Chinatown locals searching for the things they left behind in China. While the signs she writes about aren't pictographic but focus on written language to communicate and advertise, this exemplifies the importance of understanding cultural symbolism and significant aesthetic elements when looking to design accessible graphics with the ability to transcend mentality, culture and language. Ma sees identity and community in the signs and storefronts

throughout Chinatown. They interconnect home and nostalgia as much as they communicate information about what is inside the store.

For the Olympic games each host country produces a unique logotype meant to represent their country while still evoking a sense of global unity. Milton Glaser analysis of each Olympic Logo exemplified the mindset and principles that Neurath used and described in his autobiography. Glaser describes each logo using words like unrelated, understandable, unpleasant, effective, clear, excitement, distinction, memorable and each of their synonym in tackling every logo design dating back to 1924. The logos score points for effective communication and memorability. Glaser found the London logo for Summer 2012 to be “unattractive” but so aggressive that it was memorable and earned a top score of 80/100. Tokyo’s Summer 1964 logo marked 92/100 was the most stripped-down logo with a description to match, calling it appropriate and without any confusion. Logos like Lake Placid – Winter 1980 might have had “some graphic energy” but lost point and were scored below 50 for being unrecognizable, unrelatable and confusing. These logos had too many lines, details or forced content and stand in opposition to the universally understandable Isotype that Neurath had created. While Neurath’s purpose for creating the isotype was different, each Olympic logo strives for clarity and universal accessibility. Tokyo 64, Athens 04, Beijing 08 and Rio 16 were all top scorers, had the least amount of line work and featured one symbolic icon to represent their city as host. Many cities focused too much on being distinctive and trying to emotionally relate to the viewers, but it was the most simplistic most iconic imagery that had the largest emotional impact on the viewer.

Boiled down, isotypes, pictograms, logotypes and commercial signage strive to communicate effectively with their audience. Neurath focused on data visualization and found the isotype to be the most effective method of communication for his audience. Ma explored the idea that simplification does not always create the most understandable signage. Lesnevkaya and Zakharova investigated the method for creating globally accessible signage and the importance behind cultural meaning when creating pictograms and

any iconography. Each of these articles brought a unique perspective on how to create universally understood messages through image. They have helped me think about the approach to my project. Creating effective isotypes must include a thorough cultural and statistical analysis of the information I want to communicate and the result of that understanding should be simplistic in style and an easily comprehensible display of that information.

PRACTIVE REVIEW

Each of the projects highlighted are focused on awareness design in some shape or form. They involve data visualization, creative problem solving, artistic expression and use graphic design as a tool.

Johan Elmehag's project A-Z: Coast to Coast Shore to Shore aimed to find new ways to present geographical impact of climate change. He argues that climate change is abstract and difficult to grasp visually and emotionally. To address this, he created a typeface based on future vulnerable coastal areas, each letter is shaped after the way the world would look if every inch of ice were to melt. He presents this typeface in an alphabet book as an understandable way of presenting the global effects of climate change. The letters help organize the information and allow the reader to better visualize a changing shoreline. He used statistics and mapping tools offered by National Geographic. His goal was for the reader to be more open to reading and understanding unpleasant information if laid out in an aesthetically pleasing format. Elmehag's approach was both creative and informative, however I think he could have carried more information in his book. The creativity and attractive way he presents his information is inspiring and something that I hope I can accomplish as well.

Parks Project founders Keith Eshleman and Sevag Kazanci saw that younger generations were neglecting parks and becoming disconnected from nature. Through being one of five people at park clean ups and speaking with park rangers they uncovered a need for activists and decided that the best way to spread their message – "support the parks" -- was through a line of basic, artistically driven T-shirts. Their goal is

to connect people outside of the park to what's going on inside of the park. Eshleman and Kazanci talk with each park and try to understand their individual needs then apply it to their business. Communication is a huge part of their project as each park has different needs and also different identities with need to be accurately portrayed through their products. They need to be in tune with not just the parks but also the consumer, what kind of graphic someone would want to wear or put on their notebook or water bottle. Their method of bringing awareness to the National Parks Service is inspiring in that it takes advantage of consumer culture in an effort to bring awareness and communicate with the consumer on the importance of the parks.

The Accessible Icon Project is another project that inspires me, one icon was able to unite so many people and open conversations up to so much more than just the blue and white sign itself. The disability isotype was always clear and understandable but lacked the appropriate emotional message. The project started as street art and a question rather than a movement to change every sign immediately. Starting a project with just one question and a desire to ask that question to the public through transparent sticker placed on signs is inspiring in itself and to create something universally impact would definitely be something I aspire to do within my own project.

Johan Elmehag's project uses creative data visualization to make climate change more understandable. The Parks Project uses product and artistic design to bring awareness to the National Parks System and Foundation and The Accessible Icon Project brought awareness to how individuals with disabilities are portrayed and aimed to change that.

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