

Symbol Sourcebook: An Authoritative Guide to International Graphic Symbols

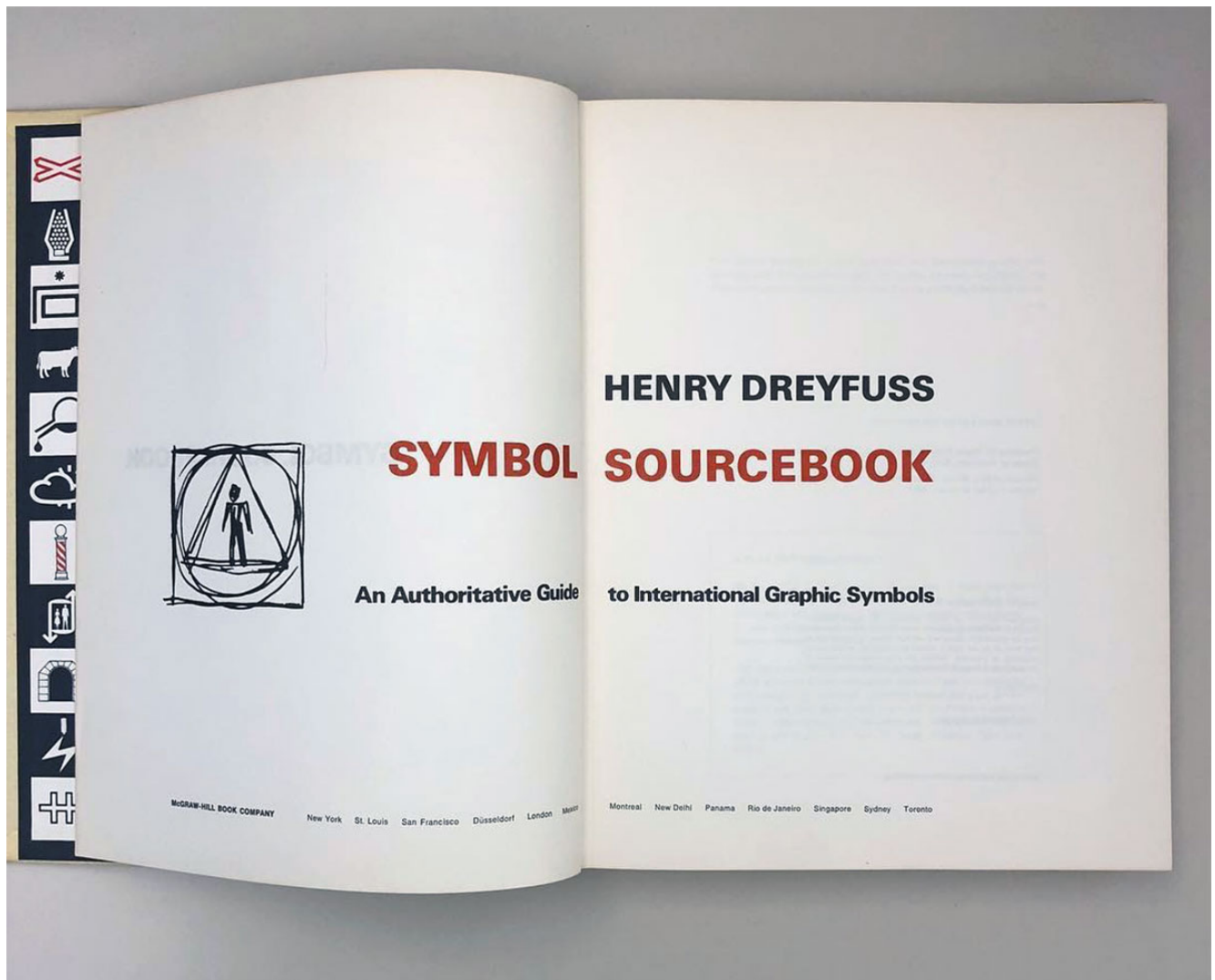
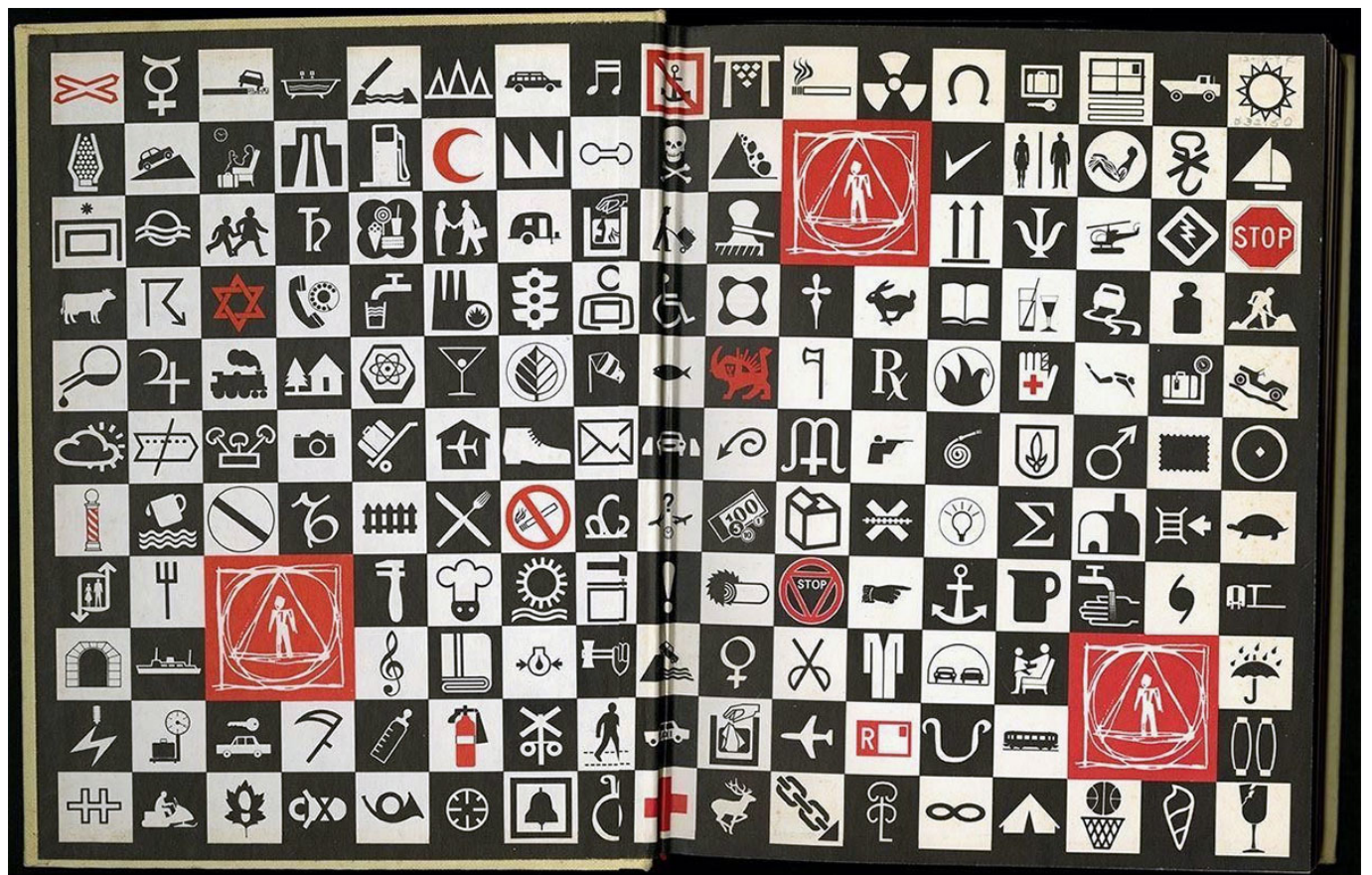


Photo via Deskgram

The book was first published as a hardcover by McGraw Hill Higher in 1972, the year of author Henry Dreyfuss' death. Henry was an acclaimed industrial designer and native of Brooklyn, New York. His firm designed a broad range of products including vacuum cleaners, telephones, fountain pens, alarm clocks, a locomotive, tractors, a wall-mounted thermostat, cameras, and other items, many becoming ubiquitous in 20th century America.



Susan Kare used the *Symbol Sourcebook* for inspiration when she designed the original Macintosh icons. She said in an interview, “One of my favourite parts of the book is its list of hobo signals, that hobos used to contact each other when they were on the road.”



Over a number of years Henry and his staff assembled a database of more than 20,000 symbols. The collection served as raw material for the 1,000 or so graphic marks categorised in the *Symbol Sourcebook*. Here's a good bit from the introduction.

Here is a word

{

in Greek

in Japanese

in Russian

in Hebrew

δηλητηριον

毒

отрава

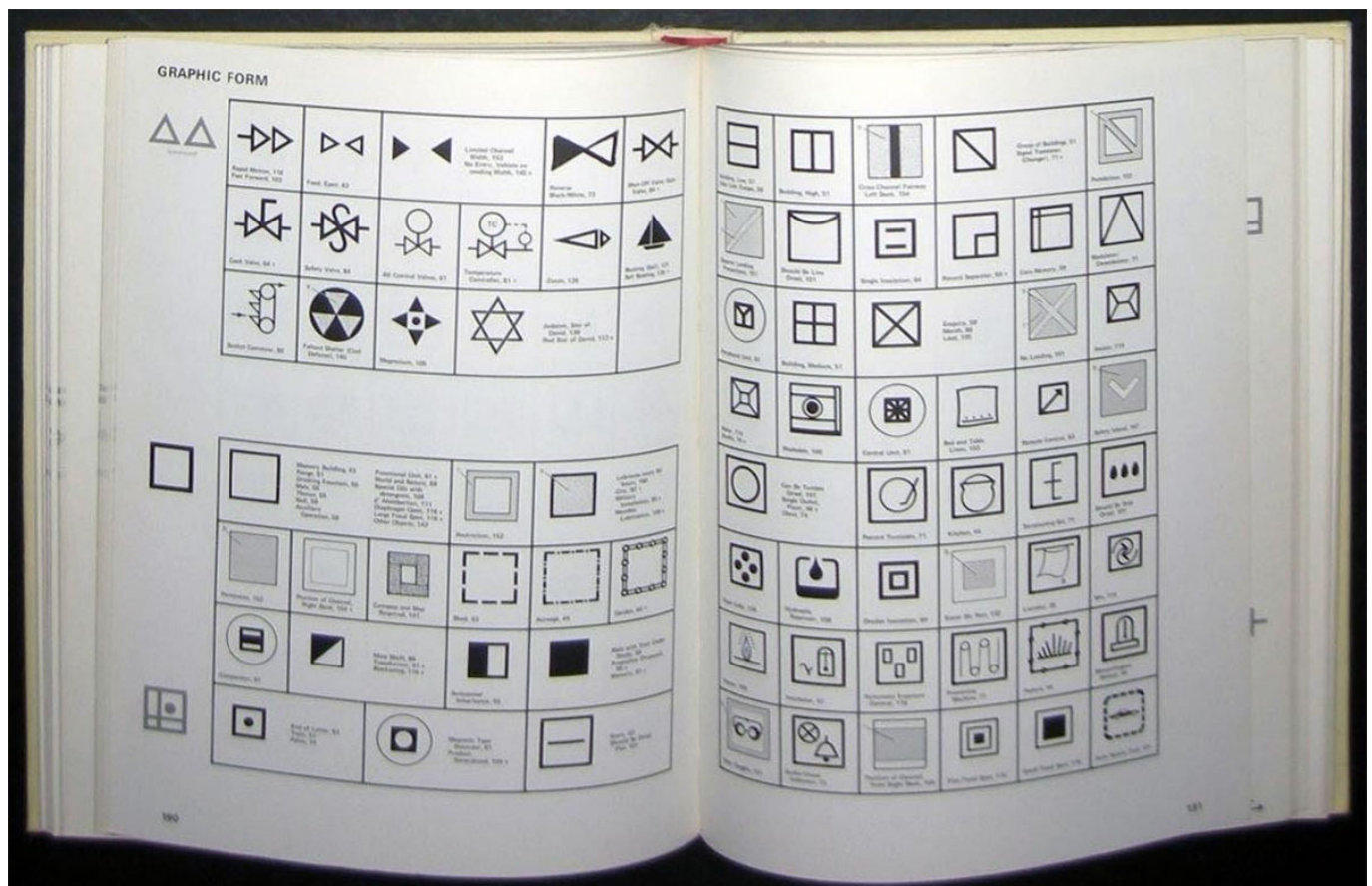
לצל



I could go on and write this word in every language in the world and literally fill several pages of this book. Yet in the interest of expediency, all I need do is substitute one simple drawing. The symbol means exactly the same as each one of these words: POISON. And it is equally intelligible whatever the language of the viewer – and perhaps even more so than the word itself. The viewer who can neither read nor write immediately recognizes the danger this symbol so graphically conveys.

Adweek asked design historian Russell Flinchum, author of the

Henry Dreyfuss biography, for a comment about the book. "The origins began with a desire to label John Deere and National Supply Co. (oil drilling equipment) with standard international labels that wouldn't have to be changed from country to country, thus saving much time and effort." Gathering the symbols was mostly a joint project for Henry and his wife, Doris, who worked closely with Paul Clifton, the main designer on the job. "It began with a mass mailing of every organisation involved with symbols they could think of, then collating this information and boiling it down to standard appearances."



"If a system of symbols could be compiled that would be equally recognisable in Lagos and Lapland, perhaps the dream of a universal basic means of communication could be realised. I believe this is possible."

– Henry Dreyfuss



Second-hand hardcovers (1972) and new paperbacks (1984) can be picked up on Amazon (.com, .co.uk, .ca).

<https://www.logodesignlove.com/symbol-sourcebook-henry-dreyfuss>