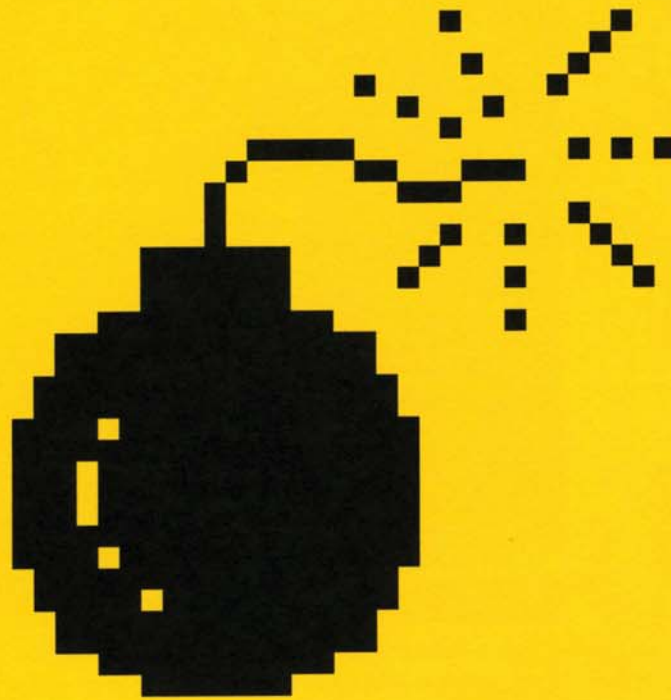


RL

Left to Right /

the cultural shift from words to pictures

David Crow



Opposite (Top). **NASA**. The message sent from Earth to Space on board the Pioneer 10 spacecraft.

Opposite (Bottom). **US Dept of Energy** WIPP warning markers. A series of warning signs for buried nuclear waste. The material buried at the Waste Isolation Pilot Plant in the New Mexico desert will remain radioactive for 10,000 years.

Above. **Susan Kare**, 'Bomb' icon designed for the Macintosh operating system, 1983.

Internationalism

5. Kare, S.
www.kare.com/design_bio.html

6. Jury, D. TypoGraphic 64
– the National issue,
Jan 2006

Pictograms are also undeniably economical. International traders rely heavily on the use of these pictorial signifiers to help distribute their products and services in a number of differing linguistic territories. Technical instructions and signals on a host of products allow global trade to avoid the costly business of manufacturing independently for each of their markets. This sense of internationalism extends beyond the practical and recognises the economy of message in communicating brand values through an industrial heraldry that draws on a similar metaphoric language of symbols. Pictogram designers are often tasked with bringing together the mood of a particular event or company with a set of instructional pictures. The results are a corporate identity exercise in symbolic communication where a balance has to be achieved between finding the most appropriate 'icon' and the most appropriate 'voice'.

One of the most international of products in recent years has surely been the desktop computer. The arrival of the *Apple Mac* in 1984, like all international products, needed a series of instructional pictograms. Susan Kare, who worked for Apple between 1983 and 1986, was given the task of transforming small grids of 30 x 30 pixels into a set of symbols that would help users operate the new computer. It was an exercise in 'searching for the strongest metaphors'⁵ for a whole set of actions and commands. The result was a series of classic symbols, such as '*the trashcan*', 'the spinning watch' and '*the bomb*'. It is a testimony to her skill as an interface designer that these icons are still with us today. The combination of common sense and humour generated a set of symbols that has successfully personalised the computer interface. The 'smiling Mac' face at start-up is as reassuring and affectionate now as it was when it was launched in the 1980s.

What all these examples have in common is that they provide a bridge between a technical world and reality. They help us to navigate a constructed landscape of things and places by supplying a pictorial equivalent of the ubiquitous *Helvetica*. They are a necessary adjunct for any society that plays a part in the globalisation of culture through consumption. Without them we are lost in a world of local customs, ambiguous signification and unique experience. Yet as David Jury commented:


*'The last thing one wants to see on the streets of a foreign country is Helvetica.'*⁶

Right. **Susan Kare**. A series of icons designed for the Macintosh operating system, 1983-86.

Below. **Jonathan Hitchin / Beaufonts**. Symbols designed to add individual character to software icons.

Below (Right). **Jonathan Hitchin / Beaufonts**. Interface design for the 'Image Bin', a virtual silkscreen print generator, 2002.




IMAGE BIN
06.0330

[INFORMATION](#) | [GALLERY](#) | [DEMO](#) |

[Instructions](#)
getting started 1 : 2 : 3
prev : next

Settings	Layer Name	Patch	Pattern	Color	Stroke
<input type="checkbox"/>	solid 01	<input type="checkbox"/>			
<input type="checkbox"/>	solid 02	<input type="checkbox"/>			
<input type="checkbox"/>	solid 03	<input type="checkbox"/>			
<input type="checkbox"/>	solid 04	<input type="checkbox"/>			
<input type="checkbox"/>	solid 05	<input type="checkbox"/>			
<input type="checkbox"/>	GROUND	<input type="checkbox"/>			

1 : Patch all image layers to the group controller. This means that all layers will be affected by any button clicks. Each layer has its own patch button to add or remove it from the group control layer.

* open the image bin demo from [here](#) : requires **shockwave**