

Angela and Edward are visiting an art gallery. Angela saw the exhibition publicised in the Forthcoming Events section of a recent issue of Arts Magazine. Angela invited Edward to accompany her to the gallery.

They enter a large room. In the middle of the room is an art installation of what looks like a long line of short rows of brown cardboard boxes, the whole art installation being about twenty metres long, about two metres wide. Each box is just under a metre tall. Each box has a plastic item, a bottle top or a fitting from a bottle of shower gel, affixed to the middle of an outside side. Each such affixed item is of a colour different from the colour of all of the other affixed bottle tops. The colours go, along the length of the art installation, from black at the front, then brown, then broadly through the spectrum, though with pink just after red, then greys, then white then a few metallic-look plastics. The short rows are for different types of plastic as indicated by the recycling number code of that type of plastic that is often moulded into the plastic item. So rows are of different types of plastic of the same colour.

Angela speaks. "The idea behind this is to make people think. The thing is, some Local Authorities do not recycle plastic bottle tops from things like bottle of water, and the plastic fittings of things like bottles of shower gel. So this art installation is to produce a sort of time capsule, so whereas most time capsules conserve things like newspapers and typical kitchen items of the time when the time capsule is prepared, this time capsule conserves various types of plastic so that at some time in the future the plastic can all be recycled, perhaps when the recycling would be more cost effective than it is now. I read about it in an article in Arts Magazine."

"Ah."

"The thing is, the art installation is interactive in the sense that visitors can come along and add bottle tops and so on, different types of plastic and different colours of each type of plastic. I have brought a bagful along to add and a bagful for you too, so you can have a go too if you wish. I was thinking, could there be a symbol for a localizable sentence to mean something like 'Plastic pieces stored for recycling in the future.' that could be added onto the side of the installation. And maybe there could be one for 'This time capsule was produced at the following time.' and then there could be a date. I suppose that there could be two private use ones, but then again I suppose that if they were private use then maybe people who saw them in the future would not know the meanings."

"Well, maybe you could draw some symbols and send them to Arts Magazine with a Letter to the Editor. Arts Magazine has featured localizable sentences, so you never know, your letter and illustrations might get published, I don't know how these things are decided. Maybe they get lots of letters and only publish a selection, or maybe they get very few letters and publish everything they get or maybe somewhere in the middle. It is probably worth a try."

"That's a good idea."

"If you do that, while recognising that a private use symbol can, in principle, be any shape you wish, when we, we at the research centre when we use a private use symbol we

make each symbol about five times wider than high so that the private use symbols are clearly different from the regular set, which are each about three times wider than high, but it is up to you to decide. Though it is not exactly five times and three times, it is thirty-nine wide to seven high and twenty-three wide to seven high because they fit into boxes forty by eight and twenty-four by eight.”

“Would it help if I made the designs symmetrical, from left to right?”

“Well I suppose that it could do. They would be free-standing symbols often used on their own, so that could perhaps be a good idea. It might be an idea to design them so that they could be compressed horizontally in case the sentences were to become mainstream and make it into the standardized set at some future time.”

“How do you mean? ‘compressed horizontally?’” asks Angela, somewhat puzzled.

“Well, suppose that you designed a symbol with two different symmetrical motifs within it, one of the motifs used twice, one at each side and the other motif in the centre.”

“Yes”

“Well, suppose that you had a line all along over the top so as to show that the three motifs are all part of the same glyph or a line all along underneath or along the middle if you wish then if you leave spaces between the three motifs, then if horizontal compression were needed, reducing the size of each of the two spaces would keep the look of the symbol with its three motifs, yet also have the look of the original private use symbol, yet not so wide.”

“Ah yes. Yes, I think that I shall have a go at producing some designs. Could you write down those numbers you mentioned about the shapes for both regular and private use please?”

“Yes, certainly.”

“So I suppose that the symbols could be placed on the side of the sculpture as if it is a steam locomotive. Yet, neither is specific to this particular installation.”

“How do you mean?” asks Edward.

“Well a steam locomotive might have a nameplate for the name of the specific locomotive but it might also have a word or two or more or some initials on it so as to indicate to which railway it belongs. So the name would be individual to the particular locomotive but the word or two or the initials would be the same for a number of locomotives. So if, say, somebody somewhere else, maybe at a recycling site, produces a sculpture inspired by this sculpture yet maybe much larger using metal skips rather than cardboard boxes so that members of the public could throw bottle tops that are not recycled at present into those skips, then the two localizable sentence symbols for ‘Plastic pieces stored for recycling in the future.’ and ‘This time capsule was produced at the following time.’ would be the same as for this sculpture, but the individual name of the sculpture would be different. Though maybe ‘This time capsule was produced at the following time.’ would not be quite right, maybe something like ‘This time capsule was started at the following time.’ would be better for a longer term project built somewhere on a recycling site.”

“Like a steam locomotive only it does not move.”

“True, but there was that television series called The Time Tunnel and there was a structure that was meant, in the story, to be the time tunnel, and that did not move.”

“Yet this sculpture does not have an individual name as such. The exhibition is called Recycling through Future Time and I suppose that there is only the one exhibit, yet it does not have a name such as Recycling Star or something like that.” adds Edward.

“So, if, say, an individual version of this type of sculpture had a name, could there be a localizable sentence for that name?” asks Angela.

“Well, I am not sure, I suppose that there could be and there could be a symbol and there could be two nameplates. The thing is, how would someone looking at the glyph get a localized meaning for the name of the sculpture? I suppose that there could be a QR code near each nameplate and the QR code could have the address of a webspace and a code number for the individual name of the sculpture and the name be registered with the owner of the webspace. Though that is only part of the process. Each localization depends on someone having previously translated the particular localizable sentence, or in this case the particular name, into the language into which localization is being sought. So there could be problems. Though registration would state the name in at least one language, so that would be something at least. The thing is, with a localizable sentence that is part of a standardized set of localizable sentences that could have widespread use, there may well be localizations available into many languages, so the system could work smoothly. But for localizable sentences that have rarer use, and especially things like individual names for sculptures, then there could be practical difficulties. But, well, it is all part of the mix, we will need to find out how it all works out.”

“As it is a time capsule and many webspaces can come and then go over periods of time, perhaps there needs to be some sort of standardized system for listing such things, sort of like they have International Standard Book Numbers. Then the list could be housed permanently at some on-going webspace run by an institution such as the The British Library. Maybe people could pay a one-time fee to get it registered then permanently conserved, I do not know how the system would work.”

“I suppose that that is possible. We can have a think about that.”

Angela and Edward then proceed to add the pieces of plastic that Angela brought to the exhibition into some of the cardboard boxes. Some of them, such as the bottle tops of bottled water from various brands and the own label brand of one of the big supermarkets, are straightforward. However, a few are difficult to decide. Eventually they are left with just a few for each of which there just does not seem to be a box for that colour of plastic. However, there is an unlabelled row of boxes at the end of the sculpture, after the metallic-look plastics. Angela and Edward add the few remaining items into a box in that row, hoping that maybe the artist will arrive sometime and perhaps add some more rows of boxes to the sculpture to accommodate plastic items of those colours.