Otto Neurath's contribution to visual communication (1925-45): the history, graphic language and theory of Isotype

Robin Kinross: MPhil thesis: University of Reading: 1979

The subject of the thesis is the work in visual communication of Otto Neurath (1882-1945), the Austrian sociologist and encyclopedist. This work, carried out by teams under Neurath's direction, was, after 1935, designated by the acronym Isotype (international system of typographic picture education).

In an introduction, the place of Neurath's work within the history of visual communication is suggested, and the influence of the work on subsequent practice is considered.

In part 1, Neurath's childhood interestin visual communication and his activities before 1925 are outlined. Then follows a description of the work of the Gesellschafts- und Wirtschaftsmuseum in Wien (1925-34) under Neurath's directorship and the work of the organizations through which Neurath continued his visual work after forced emigration from Vienna: the International Foundation for Visual Education (The Hague, 1934-40) and the Isotype Institute (Oxford, 1942-5). The work of the Isotype Instituteafter 1945, under the direction of Marie Neurath, is then outlined.

Part 2 opens with a general survey of graphic aspects of the charts made by the Gesellschafts- und Wirtschaftsmuseum. Then follows detailed commentary on selected charts. A summary conclusion points out the main lines in the development of the vocabulary and syntax of graphic elements of the work between 1925 and 1930.

Part 3 contains a presentation of the ideas expounded by Neurath in his writings on visual communication, which range from discussion of graphic detail to considerations of the place of visual means of communication in museums, schools and in society. By means of this presentation of ideas, the approach that informs Neurath's graphic work is suggested.

A number of texts, principally by Neurath, of especial relevance to the thesis are appended; these are given in English translation, with commentaries.

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xvi + 218 pages, with 244 illustrations on 83 facing pages

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corrigenda to the microfiche text

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heading to microfiche: correct 'Neurth's' to 'Neurath's'

page ix (line 7): correct 'Johoda' to 'Jahoda'

page ix (line 10): correct 'Mr J.A.Edwards' to 'Dr J.A.Edwards'

page 2 (line 1): correct 'work' to 'works'

page 9 (line 36): correct 'Amersterdams' to 'Amsterdams'

page 78 (line 9): correct 'conture' to 'contour'

page 105 (footnote): correct 'right-facing' to 'left-facing'

page 139 (line 4): correct 'unit' to 'unite'

Robin Kinross MPhil Thesis
(some comments by MN)

VIII Thank you !

XI The translator of the N/C correspondence is Yolanda Broyles (but I helped a lot; so it does not matter here).

XIII I think the list of names would be more consistent with these alterations:

Mundaneum Institute The Hague (1934-(40)

Somewhere later you mention the Int.Institute for the Unity of Science; this was a department of the Mundaneum; it had no separate charter and therefore a legal existence only as long as the Mundaneum existed.

Both the Mundaneum Institute The Hague and the International Foundation for Visual Education were never dissolved.

14* There are philosophical publications since 1909; I think at least broken lines should have been shown, for the time before 8 192

(*) 31 The last sentence sounds a bit wrong. Otlet had his Palais Mondial in Brussels; I have never seen it, but Otto has; It contained vast amounts of material from all over the world. Some of it was reproduced in filmstrips---our first introduction to this medium. It seems those large collections were rather unorganised.

190 Why do you say: N's reference...to...large and small coffins is not readily explicable? I do not remember that we have made a chart in that infant deaths were shown as a sub-group of deaths. But we may have tried.

(*) 17.06.1979, MN said that Otlet & Neurath met in The Hague in the 1930s (after 1934): three [women] sisters who looked after ON, Olga Neurath & Marie (each of whom had their 'own' of these 3 sisters). It was at their house that they met Otlet. A daughter (yes?) of one of these women was professionally involved with classification/documentation (Unesco etc): ~~the~~ Milesa Loops (spelling?). This must be the woman in the Hague who lent Otlet material to the Gemeentemuseum

In the same conversation M. spoke of going from Braunschweig to München as a student, at the time of the revolution. (I was she thinking of going to the University there?).

She doesn't remember being engaged N. then (through mutual learning etc. in Saxony). Back in N.-Germany, a little later, she did become conscious of N's activity: a pamphlet about the socialization of women. She told him about this afterwards