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Matthew Eve

Isotype in trouble, 1946–1948

This article is based on documents and correspondence held in the Otto and Marie Neurath Isotype Collection at the University of Reading. It describes the friction between the Isotype Institute, in the person of Marie Neurath, and Adprint, represented by Wolfgang Foges, in the two years following Otto Neurath's death. This was a crucial and transitional period for the Isotype Institute, during which were raised questions about the nature of its work and future direction.

After studying history of art and English literature at the universities of St Andrews and Oxford, Matthew Eve joined the 'Isotype revisited' project at the University of Reading, where he is a post-doctoral research fellow, presently working on an edition of Otto Neurath's visual autobiography 'From hieroglyphics to Isotype'. In a parallel life he is the biographer of the designer Enid Marx, and honorary secretary of the Artworkers' Guild.

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Otto Neurath, creator of Isotype, died unexpectedly on 22 December 1945 aged 63. He left numerous projects unfinished, and Marie Neurath (*née* Reidemeister), his wife and 'chief statistical assistant', was left to steer the Isotype Institute and its work through the period of post-war austerity in British publishing. The Neuraths had endured five years of flux: sudden flight from the Netherlands to Britain in May 1940, a subsequent period of internment, the establishment of the Isotype Institute in Oxford (previously named the International Foundation for Visual Education in the Netherlands, *c.* 1935–40), finding new people to work at the Institute and selling Isotype's work. There was also, and significantly, a strong but uneasy alliance with the book-packagers Adprint since 1942 through the person of its director, the Viennese émigré Wolfgang Foges.*

In Foges, Otto Neurath may have seen a kindred spirit with a shared background, and in Adprint the potential for a mutually beneficial collaboration. However, from their early correspondence it is evident that Foges saw Isotype as just one of several suppliers of material for Adprint publications. As he stated in a letter to Otto Neurath in 1943: '[in] any Adprint series there will always be an editor who will be finally responsible towards Adprint for the whole book.'[1] (Foges to Neurath, 26 July 1943) Two years later and under pressure from Neurath, Foges stated plainly that 'In whatever way the relation between the Isotype Institute and the Adprint organisation may be defined, Adprint functions as a selling organization for the Isotype Institute and I have the honour of being the main salesman.'[2] (Foges to Neurath, 27 March 1945) As Otto Neurath and his team had always worked independently and were used to producing work under their own direction, the role in which they now found themselves caused friction and some exasperated exchanges with Adprint. From late 1942 onwards exclusive contracts between the two companies were signed, agreed, and on occasion flagrantly disregarded by Neurath – much to Foges's chagrin – who, with regard to financial arrangements and unfulfilled orders, variously called Otto Neurath 'the greatest puzzle in my life'[3] (23 March 1945) and 'a substantial nail in my coffin'[4] (12 June 1945).

After August 1945 the differences between Adprint and Isotype seem to have been put aside and, despite intermittent cavils, a new period of harmonious co-operation established. But with the death of Otto Neurath late that year and the consequent reconfiguration of the Isotype Institute under Marie Neurath from 1946 onwards, new tensions surfaced.

* For Foges, see David Lambert's article in this volume pp. 113–28.

1. File 1/31 May 1943–March 1944. From Box: Isotype 1/30–34 Correspondence: Correspondence of the Isotype Institute with Adprint Ltd.
2. File 1/33 December 1944–April 1945 (Isotype/Adprint Correspondence).
3. File 1/33 December 1944–April 1945 (Isotype/Adprint Correspondence).
4. File 1/34 May 1945–May 1946 (Isotype/Adprint Correspondence).



Figure 1. Marie Neurath, 1945.

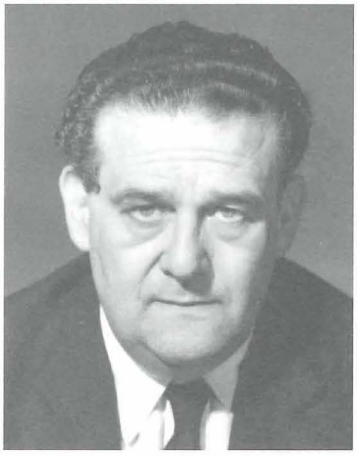


Figure 2. Wolfgang Foges, undated but *c.* 1950.

The first of these arose in mid February 1946 when Marie Neurath complained to Foges that orders for Adprint were progressing slower than expected due to the latter's tardiness forwarding information. As she stated in a letter to Foges: 'the *Future* data [is] coming in very much slower than expected ... the *Education* book does not proceed, I am waiting for the last charts for *Human problems in industry*.'[5] (Neurath to Foges, 18 February 1946) Less than a week later, Foges responded with a new contract giving Adprint exclusive rights over Isotype charts produced for books and periodicals. In such an arrangement Foges would act as the Isotype Institute's agent and intermediary by chasing sluggish information providers and supplying the Institute with a constant flow of work. It also allowed a much closer working relationship between the two companies. This was suggested in Foges's concluding note to Neurath, appended to the contract: 'I feel that you should inform me much more about the hitches and delays from the different contributors so that I can prod them regularly and so that you do not face an accumulation of so many outstanding things.'[6] (Foges to Neurath, 26 February 1946)

However, within a couple of months it became apparent that Adprint was not honouring its word either by returning work to the Institute or agreeing on dates for completion. Neurath wrote to Foges that there had been 'nothing on *Education* for months. For weeks I don't get any decisions from *Future*. How should I go on? We are wasting our time here, and later we should compress an abundance of work into a few months.'[7] (Neurath to Foges, 7 March 1946) Only five days later Neurath wrote to Eva Feuchtwang at Adprint, frustrated and annoyed with its failure to deliver:

> I have received
> – nothing from Lovell [Russian Book]
> – nothing from Edwards [Education charts]
> – nothing from Crosby
> – nothing from Shearman [Education charts]
> I have to follow this year's practice of just doing charts which have no OK yet. This is very unpleasant. But for many charts I had to ask for more material etc. so that they are not even in that state.[8] (Neurath to Feuchtwang, 12 March 1946)

Three days later, on 15 March 1946, Neurath received a letter from Feuchtwang, which at first reads as an apology. Matters at Adprint, Feuchtwang said, 'are ... slow ... and nothing can be extracted from the respective editors or authors.' However, she then seemed to put the blame upon the Isotype Institute:

> I think you might make work on these roughs easier if they were carried out a little more carefully ... If all the material from which the charts are made could be sent in together with the roughs it would be a great help, and also avoid alterations on the finished charts, which is of course a nuisance to everybody concerned.[9] (Feuchtwang to Neurath, 15 March 1946)

Feuchtwang concluded: 'Please be convinced that we are doing everything on our side to get things moving more quickly.'[10] (Feuchtwang to Neurath, 15 March 1946) In reply, to another member of Adprint's staff, Mrs Foyle, Neurath repeated the sentiments expressed in her

5. File 1/34 May 1945–May 1946 (Isotype/Adprint Correspondence).
6. File 1/34 May 1945–May 1946 (Isotype/Adprint Correspondence).
7. File 1/34 May 1945–May 1946 (Isotype/Adprint Correspondence).
8. File 1/34 May 1945–May 1946 (Isotype/Adprint Correspondence).
9. File 1/34 May 1945–May 1946 (Isotype/Adprint Correspondence).
10. File 1/34 May 1945–May 1946 (Isotype/Adprint Correspondence).

earlier letter to Foges: 'Our office is wasting its time with corrections', and 'we are executing charts before they have got their OK, [which] means of course more work for us in the long run.'[12] (Neurath to Foyle, 18 March 1946)

Relations between Isotype and Adprint continued in this volatile manner throughout 1946 and early 1947.[13] Now the problems escalated. What at first appeared to be a minor contractual issue of copyright developed into a significant dispute that threatened to undermine the Isotype–Adprint alliance and, indeed, the foundations of the Isotype Institute and its work.

The crisis arose primarily from a conflict of interests. When Otto and Marie fled from the Netherlands in May 1940 they left behind the bulk of Isotype records and design work, and some members of their team. Gerd Arntz, German by birth, who had given Isotype its visual character, remained in Holland, working after the Neurath's departure as a designer for the Nederlandse Stichting voor Statistiek (NSS). For the nominal sum of 100 guilders and a signed agreement with the Dutch directors of the International Foundation for Visual Education, but without the Neuraths' knowledge or consent, Arntz secured the right to use the symbols cut, from 1934 onwards, for that organization in new design work for the NSS, and included Isotype's 'signature' icon. Arntz continued in the NSS until he was called up to serve in the German army in 1943 but resumed work for them in the Netherlands after the war, at first as an illegal alien. It was then that the issue of Dutch *vs.* British Isotype copyright arose. This caused grave concern to Foges and Paul Rotha, another key commissioner of Isotype's work, for use in still photographs, filmstrips and in his animated 'Films of Fact'. Foges and Rotha had been led to believe that they owned, in their respective fields, the world rights to Isotype symbols.

Throughout 1946 and early 1947 letters about copyright ownership were exchanged by Marie Neurath and Martin Lederman, a friend, management consultant, negotiator for Isotype and 'a fourth partner in the scheme, a shareholder, who guarantees (financially? or by orders?) part of the regular Isotype work'.[14] (Neurath to Lederman, 25 April 1947) In March 1946, Neurath wrote to Gabriele Lederman, Martin Lederman's wife: 'we wrote a draft agreement for the Dutch people, and they seem to accept it more or less, only they want a bit more bargaining.'[15] (Neurath to G. Lederman, 10 March 1946) However, four months later Marie received a letter from the General Secretary of the NSS regretting that 'negotiations have ended in a deadlock' and that 'In view of this they concluded to put the matter before the Board of the old International Foundation for Visual Education.'[16] (Neurath to M. and G. Lederman, 9 July 1947). Explaining the 'difficult situation' a month later to Mary Fleddérus (board member of the International Foundation for Visual Education), Neurath wrote:

> what we tried to do all these months was to find a friendly solution of co-operation. The plan was to revive the International Foundation in a new way – make it a centre to which national organizations can be affiliated. The easiest way seems to be to dissolve it and make a new one in England, with its executive here, and members in different countries.[17] (Neurath to Fleddérus, 5 August 1946)

12. File 1/34 May 1945–May 1946 (Isotype/Adprint Correspondence).

13. Correspondence between Adprint and the Isotype Institute (in file marked 'Correspondence – Adprint/Isotype Institute') ends suddenly in May 1946. But the story continues in the Isotype Institute's alphabetical 'Correspondence Files' for 1946–7.

14. File 1/16 1946–1947 H–L. From Box: Isotype Institute Correspondence 1/14–17.

15. File 1/16 1946–1947 H–L. From Box: Isotype Institute Correspondence 1/14–17.

16. File 1/16 1946–1947 H–L. From Box: Isotype Institute Correspondence 1/14–17.

17. File 1/15 1946–1947 D–G (Isotype Institute Correspondence).

By the year's end the deadlock with the NSS remained much as it had been since March. In a letter to Fleddérus in December, Neurath confided: 'Our co-operation with the Nederlandse Stichting voor Statistiek does not come to much; we are just fixing somehow our spheres of interest, going on separately, though maintaining some lose [*sic*] friendly contact I hope.'[18] (Neurath to Fleddérus, 18 December 1946)

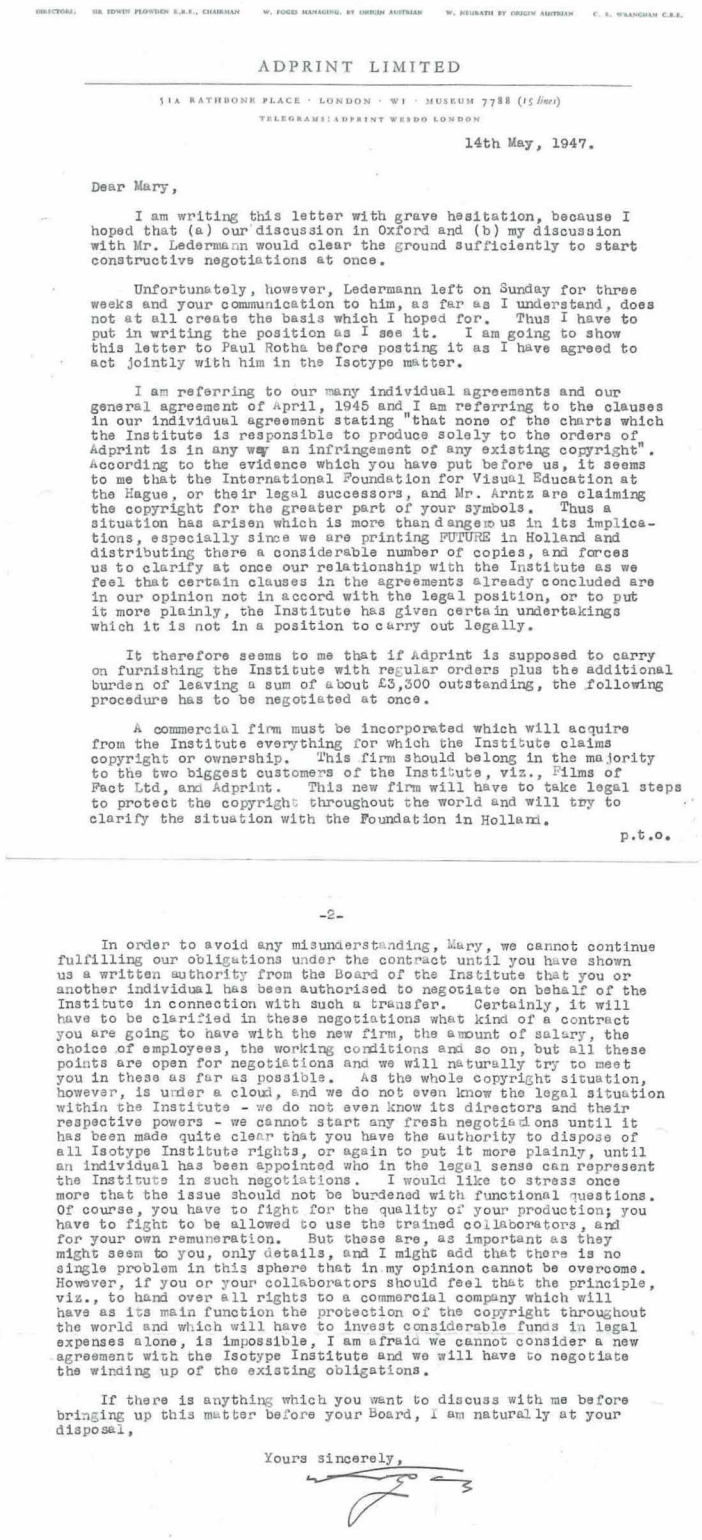
The Isotype–Adprint relationship looked bleak. Regular meetings were arranged periodically throughout 1946 in Oxford and London, and attended by Neurath, Foges and Lederman. By April 1947 Foges deemed it necessary to take swift and definite action to secure and protect 'Isotypes', as he called them, against imitation in the British and opening American markets. Neurath wrote to Lederman:

> [Foges] wants to create a new organization, composed of Adprint, Rotha and Isotype (with equal shares), to which Isotype gives or sells its Copyright, and which is then to defend the copyright position.
>
> This is a very different plan from our International Isotype Association, much more capitalistic, monopolistic but also realistic. [Otto] ... often said that one world centre could produce for the whole world, of the best possible quality.[19] (Neurath to Lederman, 14 April 1947)

Eleven days later Neurath wrote to Lederman expressing her concern about Foges's proposed merger: the 'new company [would be] a *producing* company not only marketing; it should employ all the persons who do the Isotype work, and to the Isotype Institute should only be left research and other non-commercial actitvities'. She felt that Foges' whole approach was a 'great danger to our independence and to the smooth working of the team' and that he threatened to 'interfere with advice and suggestions from his own staff and teach us "modern methods" of production'. She concluded: 'I don't want our working team to be destroyed which we have built up these six years. I said so.'[20] (Neurath to Lederman, 25 April 1947) Clarifying her requirements in a letter to Lederman about the proposed union between Adprint, Isotype, and Films of Fact, Neurath stipulated that 'the Isotype Institute should not lose any rights through the creation of the new organization' and that 'All symbols and methods developed in the work of the new organization should be owned by the Isotype Institute or by both organizations jointly.' She also requested that 'After a certain time, say a year, the Isotype Institute must have the right to give six months' notice' after which time 'the copyright goes back to the Isotype Institute exclusively', and concluded by stating 'The Isotype Institute should have a third of the shares.'[21] (Neurath to Lederman, 6 May 1947) A week later Foges wrote 'with grave hesitation' to Neurath, threatening that unless she agreed to the establishment of the new firm with Adprint and Films of Fact, 'we cannot consider a new agreement with the Isotype Institute and we will have to negotiate the winding up of the existing obligations.' As negotiations depended on the Isotype Institute proving its legal claim to Isotype symbol use and copyright, Foges asked Neurath for proof 'that you have the authority to dispose of all Isotype Institute rights, or to put it more plainly, until an individual has been appointed who in the legal sense can represent the Institute in such negotiations.'[22] (Foges to Neurath, 14 May 1947) By July, and two meetings later,

18. File 1/15 1946–1947 D–G (Isotype Institute Correspondence).
19. File 1/15 1946–1947 D–G (Isotype Institute Correspondence).
20. File 1/15 1946–1947 D–G (Isotype Institute Correspondence).
21. File 1/15 1946–1947 D–G (Isotype Institute Correspondence).
22. File 2/1 Business Papers (*c.* 1942–1948).

Figure 3. Letter from Wolfgang Foges to Marie Neurath, 14 May 1947. (Isotype 2/1 Business Papers, *c.* 1942–48).



DIRECTORS: SIR EDWIN PLOWDEN K.B.E., CHAIRMAN W. FOGES MANAGING. BY ORIGIN AUSTRIAN W. NEURATH BY ORIGIN AUSTRIAN C. S. WRANGHAM C.B.E.

ADPRINT LIMITED

51A RATHBONE PLACE · LONDON · W1 · MUSEUM 7788 (*15 lines*)

TELEGRAMS: ADPRINT WESDO LONDON

14th May, 1947.

Dear Mary,

I am writing this letter with grave hesitation, because I hoped that (a) our discussion in Oxford and (b) my discussion with Mr. Ledermann would clear the ground sufficiently to start constructive negotiations at once.

Unfortunately, however, Ledermann left on Sunday for three weeks and your communication to him, as far as I understand, does not at all create the basis which I hoped for. Thus I have to put in writing the position as I see it. I am going to show this letter to Paul Rotha before posting it as I have agreed to act jointly with him in the Isotype matter.

I am referring to our many individual agreements and our general agreement of April, 1945 and I am referring to the clauses in our individual agreement stating "that none of the charts which the Institute is responsible to produce solely to the orders of Adprint is in any way an infringement of any existing copyright". According to the evidence which you have put before us, it seems to me that the International Foundation for Visual Education at the Hague, or their legal successors, and Mr. Arntz are claiming the copyright for the greater part of your symbols. Thus a situation has arisen which is more than dangerous in its implications, especially since we are printing FUTURE in Holland and distributing there a considerable number of copies, and forces us to clarify at once our relationship with the Institute as we feel that certain clauses in the agreements already concluded are in our opinion not in accord with the legal position, or to put it more plainly, the Institute has given certain undertakings which it is not in a position to carry out legally.

It therefore seems to me that if Adprint is supposed to carry on furnishing the Institute with regular orders plus the additional burden of leaving a sum of about £3,300 outstanding, the following procedure has to be negotiated at once.

A commercial firm must be incorporated which will acquire from the Institute everything for which the Institute claims copyright or ownership. This firm should belong in the majority to the two biggest customers of the Institute, viz., Films of Fact Ltd, and Adprint. This new firm will have to take legal steps to protect the copyright throughout the world and will try to clarify the situation with the Foundation in Holland.

p.t.o.

-2-

In order to avoid any misunderstanding, Mary, we cannot continue fulfilling our obligations under the contract until you have shown us a written authority from the Board of the Institute that you or another individual has been authorised to negotiate on behalf of the Institute in connection with such a transfer. Certainly, it will have to be clarified in these negotiations what kind of a contract you are going to have with the new firm, the amount of salary, the choice of employees, the working conditions and so on, but all these points are open for negotiations and we will naturally try to meet you in these as far as possible. As the whole copyright situation, however, is under a cloud, and we do not even know the legal situation within the Institute - we do not even know its directors and their respective powers - we cannot start any fresh negotiations until it has been made quite clear that you have the authority to dispose of all Isotype Institute rights, or again to put it more plainly, until an individual has been appointed who in the legal sense can represent the Institute in such negotiations. I would like to stress once more that the issue should not be burdened with functional questions. Of course, you have to fight for the quality of your production; you have to fight to be allowed to use the trained collaborators, and for your own remuneration. But these are, as important as they might seem to you, only details, and I might add that there is no single problem in this sphere that in my opinion cannot be overcome. However, if you or your collaborators should feel that the principle, viz., to hand over all rights to a commercial company which will have as its main function the protection of the copyright throughout the world and which will have to invest considerable funds in legal expenses alone, is impossible, I am afraid we cannot consider a new agreement with the Isotype Institute and we will have to negotiate the winding up of the existing obligations.

If there is anything which you want to discuss with me before bringing up this matter before your Board, I am naturally at your disposal,

Yours sincerely,

Mrs.M. Neurath,
194 Divinity Road,
Oxford.

Martin Lederman had grown weary, writing that her responses to Rotha's proposals were 'incompatible with what you had agreed upon with Mr. Foges' and concluding that he could not 'in future participate in futile negotiations.'[22] (Lederman to Neurath, 8 July 1947)

Here the correspondence in the University of Reading's archive regarding the Isotype Institute's claim of copyright, and the merger with Adprint and Films of Fact, finishes. Yet Neurath evidently held resolutely to the ideals and vision of the Isotype Institute. On 5 September 1947 a new exclusivity 'agreement' was drawn up and signed by Adprint and the Isotype Institute (and implemented on 1 January 1948). Films of Fact was not mentioned; Paul Rotha was by then bankrupt. With a few minor changes to the agreement signed by Otto Neurath and Foges in April 1945 and a slight redefinition of the two companies working arrangements, Neurath had managed to jointly resolve the issue of copyright and retain the Institute's independence. What had happened in those two heated summer months of 1947 to turn matters in her favour? In Marie Neurath's unpublished memoir of 1980–82, 'What I remember', the missing pieces can be found, and her own words provide a conclusion to this glimpse into the alliance between Isotype and Adprint in the years 1946–48. She writes first about copyright and then about the tripartite merger:

> our problem was put to a barrister ... [*who*] gave a clear picture of our situation ... What it amounted to was this: one cannot protect an idea such as this one of Otto Neurath's; your published charts are protected through the law of copyright; the individual symbols used are, however, not protected, and can only be if you publish a book that contains nothing but one symbol on every page; these symbols would then be protected by copyright ... after a while Foges proposed a meeting in The Hague to plan such a publication together with the Dutch ... we never got round to such a symbol publication; why should we have; the symbols are not so important. I myself agreed with the Nederlandse Stichting voor Statistiek that they would no longer use the name Isotype nor the signature that belongs with it; when Arntz returned to work he designed a new signature. We found that the world was big enough for the two of us.
>
> Besides this, there were other plans that attracted me for a time; there was a wish to start a commercial Isotype company ... [*with*] Foges and Rotha ... In a sleepless night it became clear to me that I had allowed myself to get put on a false track with this ... In the morning I was resolved not to let myself in for anything commercial and to safeguard my independence of production. Foges was furious, but I kept my head ... The current work with Foges went on undisturbed; he soon asked me to move with the office to London, and offered me space for this in Adprint House ... perhaps my resistance was even welcome to him.[23]

22. File 1/16 1946–1947 H–L. From Box: Isotype Institute Correspondence 1/14–17.

23. Marie Neurath, 'What I remember', unpublished manuscript, 'told and written down for Henk Mulder', 'December 1980, revised 1982; translated by Robin Kinross and approved by Marie Neurath' 1984, pp. 92–3.

Acknowledgments
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