

Die Konturen der Welt: Geschichte und Gegenwart visueller Bildung nach Otto Neurath. Gernot Waldner, ed. Vienna: Mandelbaum Verlag, 2021. 335 pp. 25€. ISBN 978385476-966-8

Over the past decade and a half, the work of the Viennese philosopher, political economist, and sociologist Otto Neurath has increasingly achieved wider international recognition across disciplinary and geographical boundaries. The title of Gernot Waldner's edited volume is therefore apt, emphasizing the extent to which Neurath's multifaceted activities highlighted the "contours" of the world between past and present. The focus on the visual education projects of Neurath and his team—both in Vienna and around the world—offers new perspectives on the global implications of the Vienna Method of Pictorial Statistics, also known as Isotype. With this publication, Waldner has assembled a striking collection of viewpoints and methodologies, which is very much in the spirit of Neurath's own position between history, theory, and practice. In the foreword, Waldner articulates the intersection of diverse themes across Neurath's work, including, among other things, the social and economic foundations of democracy, the need for a common language between experts and non-experts, taking shape in his museological approach, and how contemporary issues surrounding migration are addressed in works composed of visualized data (7).

By bringing together academic researchers and creative practitioners from the fields of cognitive science, design, history, pedagogy, philosophy, and sociology, Waldner has seamlessly woven together the diverse threads of Neurath's own practice in visual education, with a constant focus on its continued relevance and adaptability for our world today. Readers will recognize some key names in Neurath scholarship—Christopher Burke, Hadwig Kraeutler, Elisabeth Nemeth, Günther Sandner, and Friedrich Stadler—however, there are also several new contributors to the body of work on Neurath and Isotype. All chapters are accompanied by black-and-white and colour reproductions of archival photographs, Isotype charts, and contemporary engagements with Neurath's approach to visual education. These rich illustrations are, in their own right, a strong feature of the book as they illustrate Neurath's visual processes of communication. Bringing into conversation both historical and contemporary text and image, the volume builds on the foundational work of the "Isotype Revisited" research project, based at Reading from 2007 to 2011, as well as Sandner's political biography of Neurath. It also references curatorial works, such as Maria Holter's *(Zeit)lose Zeichen*, which was exhibited in Vienna and London from 2013 to 2015. Waldner's compact, yet far-ranging, collection is unique in its integration of multiple approaches to Neurath's work. It foregrounds the inclusive ethos of his initiatives in the first half of the twentieth century, while also cultivating a space to ruminate on the possibilities of transforming his ideas and practices for future generations.

Waldner's volume is clearly organized. Beginning with a contribution by Sandner, it offers a compelling contextual overview of the Vienna Method of Pictorial Statistics from the outset. The collection then lays out Neurath's distinctive approach to visual education, illuminating how the Vienna Method was not merely a form of modern graphic design. Christopher Burke's text maps out the journey from the Vienna Method to the more internationally oriented picture language of Isotype. In focusing on the atlas *Gesellschaft und Wirtschaft* that was created by Neurath in collaboration with his wife Marie and the German graphic designer Gerd Arntz, Burke sheds new light on the global nature of these projects, closing with an examination of Marie Neurath's Isotype initiatives to distribute health and education information in West Africa. In her article, Elisabeth Nemeth goes on to address the economic impetus of Neurath's interdisciplinary work. She highlights how Isotype charts communicate different aspects of human life in relation to economic position. Moreover, Nemeth emphasizes the relevance of this mode of communication for today's complex

configurations of social class and living standards. In the last article of the first section, Alexander Reutlinger and Sandner analyze the role of expertise in democratic societies. They reconsider Neurath's disruption of the hierarchical power dynamics between experts and the wider public, and how this is bound up with today's political debates surrounding expertise—particularly in light of the COVID-19 pandemic and the climate crisis (94-97).

The second part of *Konturen der Welt* includes some of the more self-reflective essays. Gerhard Halusa, archivist and historian at the Austrian Society and Economy Museum, shares stories of the institution after Neurath's emigration. His piece is invaluable not only for its documentation of shifts in this historically important museum, but also in its consideration of how the current institution remains aligned with its original aims of social education. The contribution by Friedrich Stadler also offers personal insights into Neurath's legacy, from both an academic and curatorial perspective. The text is based on an interview between Stadler and Waldner and its conversational tone is deeply affective. Stadler reflects on the renewed interest surrounding the Vienna Method of the 1980s, and how this interest was inextricably linked with his own intellectual connections to the Vienna Circle, as well as personal relationships with colleagues at the University of Vienna. In many ways, Stadler's contribution is the perfect companion piece to Halusa's text, as both authors share their experiences of continuing Neurath's passion for public education and lively research collaborations with friends and colleagues. Hadwig Kraeutler contributes a critical museological perspective, analyzing how the historical display strategies created by Neurath and his team are in dialogue with contemporary curatorial approaches to "engagement and empowerment" (140). As Kraeutler situates these discourses largely in relation to Anglo-American case studies, yet she has missed an opportunity to consider how Neurath's exhibitions in interwar Austria speak to recent endeavours to decolonize museums, especially given the post-imperial circumstances in which he and his team worked. That said, Nephthys Zwer and Philippe Rekacewicz's contribution to *Konturen der Welt* moves towards a decolonial perspective. This is one of the most powerful texts in terms of its ability to visually communicate the direct links between Neurath's Isotype maps and the critique of a hegemonic worldview in cartographic inventions of the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries, including some striking examples from Trevor Paglen and Rekacewicz himself. Zwer and Rekacewicz assert that a Marxist-informed worldview is at the heart of both Isotype and radical cartography (200), a point that echoes earlier observations in the book by Sandner and Nemeth.

The final contributions to the volume are perhaps the most original in their focus on future-oriented, practice-based responses to Isotype. Günther Schreder, Nicole Hynek, and Eva Mayr present the results of their cognitive experiments on the efficacy of information graphics in processing information of varying complexity. It will come as no surprise that their findings confirm that the use of pictograms, such as Isotype, improved participants' understanding of complex facts and their interpretation (237). Beyond the Global North, Salvador Perez outlines how his Isotype-inspired educational charts have been used in parts of Mexico and Bolivia as a means for members of the wider public to engage with their pre-Columbian cultural histories. While Perez does address the fact that participants perceived him to be a "tourist" in these regions (260), a more rigorous engagement with decolonial methodology is again lacking here. Although Perez connects his research nicely to Marie Neurath's projects on public health and education in West Africa, one wonders how these Isotype projects in the Global South relate to critical histories of progress and reflect the facilitation of subaltern voices in creating counternarratives of modernity and coloniality. The penultimate chapter details the pedagogical innovations led by Gökhan Ersan and his team at Binghamton University. In designing a toolkit that linked MINT/STEM subjects with the Humanities, the team utilized Isotype's focus on visual communication to bring important

connections between art history and scientific approaches to light, in order to create a dynamic and integrated learning environment for first-year undergraduates. The book concludes with an interview between Waldner and the migration sociologist, Raimund Haindorfer. This interview focuses on a set of charts from 2016 that capture how migrants are valued in Austria today. This is a fitting end to the volume, as it raises issues of social structures, economics, education, living standards, and mobility that are just as pertinent in today's globalized world as they were in interwar Vienna.

Die Konturen der Welt is a timely publication that will be of considerable value to a range of audiences, including artists, curators, designers, Germanists, historians, philosophers, and scientists—a diversity that is at the crux of what Neurath had set out to achieve with Isotype and the Society and Economy Museum. While in a handful of instances it misses opportunities to cross-reference decolonial methodologies, it does leave the reader with questions about the extent to which Neurath's work prefigured moves towards decolonizing curricula, museums, and other institutions of knowledge formation. The book promises, however, to be an incubator for such practices, and its forward-looking perspective is bound to serve as a catalyst for important new research on Neurath and the contouring of the world in which we live.

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