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Building a New Picture of Neurath: Review of Groß's Die Bildpädagogik Otto Neuraths

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Angélique Groß: Die Bildpädagogik Otto Neuraths: Methodische Prinzipien der Darstellung von Wissen. Dordrecht: Springer. 2015, pp. xii + 288 and 116 figures. Hardcover, $129. ISBN 978-3-319-16315-4.

Once upon a time, logical empiricism, or logical positivism, was buried under its (allegedly) defeated, dogmatic, intellectualist and abstract-technical package of problems and paradoxes. As a prominent member of the movement, after his death in 1945, Otto Neurath was regarded also as a bad guy, a narrow-minded logical positivist. He was attacked from various angles already: in the early- and mid-1940s, the New York philosopher, Horace Kallen eagerly insisted that Neurath was a(n at least pink) fellow-traveler and his ideal of social and economic planning was not compatible with the democratic, liberal, and anti-communist era of the (Cold War) United States. But Neurath had problems also with his Vienna Circle friends: Moritz Schlick and Carl G. Hempel claimed that his style was commercial-like, ambiguous, lacking solid and precise argumentations; he fell out with Rudolf Carnap over semantics and probability, furthermore disliked Friedrich Waismann's and Herbert Feigl's uncritical attraction towards Ludwig Wittgenstein. It was no accident that Neurath's usual signature at the end of his letters was a huge and clumsy elephant.

Nonetheless (thanks to the works of Rudolf Haller, Friedrich Stadler, Thomas Uebel and others), Neurath's exegetically reconstructed ideas and personal context played an important role in rehabilitating logical empiricism in the last two decades. Though during this process he was remembered in the philosophical community, but he was more than an academically inclined philosopher. And this is not just due to the fact that Neurath's theoretical inquiries and writings arose from such specific *practical interests* and *social*

settings that were always reflected by him, but because the ideal route to his goals did not necessarily cross the paths of philosophy *per se*.

Besides his posts in sociology and economics, the two most important non-philosophical fields of Neurath were pictorial education and the practice of museums. Angélique Groß's *Die Bildpädagogik Otto Neuraths: Methodische Prinzipien der Darstellung von Wissen* (*Otto Neurath's Pictorial Education: Methodological Principles of Representing Knowledge*), which was published as the 21st volume of *Veröffentlichungen des Instituts Wiener Kreis* series, deals exactly with these subjects. Due to its concise organization and structure, the book shall be an important contribution to the recent historical and practical re-evaluation of Neurath's legacy and relevance.

During the age of mass communication and education, when entertainment was replaced by infotainment, Neurath's ideal of pictorial education and transmission become an intensive interest of philosophers and communicational experts. Neurath developed in the 1920s the so-called *Wiener Methode der Bildstatistik* [*Vienna Method of Pictorial Statistics*] because he thought that conceptual languages are ambiguous and able (or inclined) to serve metaphysical aims. Pictorial languages, or pictorial representations of knowledge, on the other, aim to convey information to educate everyone irrespectively of one's social class, nationality, and sensorial skills. As Neurath famously declared, 'words divide, pictures unite.'

The Vienna Method was, in course of time, renamed and slightly restructured (with his future third wife, Marie Reidemeister) as *ISOTYPE*, that is, *International System Of TYpographic Picture Education*. The most important idea behind this educational ideal was to represent the quantitatively changing information not with an enlarging image, but by a greater number of the same symbol (or pictogram, designed by the artist, Gerd Arntz), though the ISOTYPE method was also able to transform another type of linguistic information into pictures (like how tuberculosis spreads in a community, etc.).

Neurath's method and approach, while often without his name and in different contexts, remained inevitable in the twenty-first century too: we are faced with almost the same characters and pictograms everywhere in our social era. These symbols convey and

transform to us the relevant and important information at the railway and bus stations, at hospitals, in the media, on the road signs, and the list could be continued. This huge and in the literature highly underappreciated achievement of Neurath is the subject of Groß's book: at the end, the reader shall be satisfied since we got a detailed treatise on Neurath's life-work.

After a summarizing introductory chapter that sets the tone for the later investigations, in the second chapter Groß turns to the manifesto of the Circle: "The Scientific World-Conception: The Vienna Circle" (SWC, for short). The manifesto has many translations (also a Hungarian, published in 1991) and is viewed as one of the most important documents from the so-called official phase of the Circle. Though the authors, Rudolf Carnap, Hans Hahn, Neurath, and partly Feigl and Waismann, did not consider the question of pictures and pictorial education, the manifesto contains almost all those relevant social and political factors and life conditions that help us to understand how the Vienna Circle (or at least a part of it) conceived the relation between science, politics, and society.

The SWC is, after all, "the continuation of the close connection between science and society and stands for a formation program [Gestaltungsprogramm] of the social and political life" (p. 25.). In order to support this claim, Groß painstakingly elaborates the various educational, social, theological, and scientific backgrounds of the Vienna Circle and the so-called Austrian enlightenment.

She guides us through Neurath's "Museum of Society and Economy in Vienna" ("Gesellschafts- und Wirtschaftsmuseum in Wien") established in 1925, which was, in many respects, a forerunner to the pictorial education ideal (though the projects roots are going back to the First World War and to Neurath's war museums), we got to know Neurath's ideal of "Utopie" and the exact meaning of "humanismus" in an age of disaster. The two most important notions of the chapter are "enlightenment" ["Aufklärung"] and "Bildung", which could be rendered into English in many ways, the most often used versions being "personal development" and "self-cultivation". Neurath was quite determined to educate masses and to help people in shaping their own character via reliable scientific methods.

While no one shall be excluded from the domain of knowledge and education, one social class seems to be positively discriminated: working class. In the section about "aufklärischen Arbeiterbildung" (p. 52.), Groß reconstructs Neurath's ideas about how and why the working class supposed to be the holder of metaphysics-free knowledge and practices. "It is the working class that builds up that social stratum," summarizies Groß (p. 54.) the ideas of Neurath, "which has been so far excluded from the scientific Bildung and social constructions, but that shall not remain so."

Chapter 3 ("The Practice of the Pictorial Education") is perhaps the most fascinating and engaging chapter of the book. It contains more than one hundred pictures, photos, posters, pictograms, advertisement related to Neurath's pictorial education method. The six main sections of the chapter are about important milestones in the history of the pictorial education and ISOTYPE. Groß shows us how Neurath's method changed and evolved over time with the help of different artists and friends: as she claims (p. 92.), Neurath did not have an explicit and detailed theory of education or depiction, he just practiced his ideals and developed the required forms and patterns through a "trial and error" methodology over the years. This is shown by the aforementioned sections: Groß presents us all the famous and less-known pictures from the important books, maps, and illustrations and thus reconstructs how Neurath's practices achieved their final and internationally known design known as ISOTYPE. Her reconstructions and discussions helps to understand the contexts of such works as *Die bunte Welt* [*The Colorful World*, 1929], *Gesellschaft und Wirtschaft* [*Society and Economy*, 1930], *Technik und Menschheit* [*Technology and Mankind*, 1932], *Die Gesundheitserziehung* [*The Health Education,* mid-1930s], and *Modern man in the making* [1939].

Though Neurath did not have a detailed and comprehensive theoretical background and theory of pictures and education, certain regularities, and principles that had a constitutive force (p. 234.) regarding the evolving character of the ISOTYPE could be detected. Groß collected many of them in Chapter 4, providing the implicit *conceptual background* of Neurath's longstanding method.

After a summary chapter about the method, education, and practices of Neurath, the book is closed with a detailed biography of Neurath's life, his exhibitions, films, institutions, museums, etc.

Enriched with the many pictures, figures, and tables, *Die Bildpädagogik Otto Neuraths* will be an important monograph devoted entirely to the method, principles, and practices behind Neurath's perhaps longest standing contribution to twentieth and twenty-first century social and cultural life: ISOTYPE. In 1936, the American magazine, *Survey Graphic*, devoted to visual information and communication, celebrated Neurath, who just visited the United States, with a two-page long editorial article entitled the "Social Showman" and introduced him as the "Big Man who created the little man." Given that narrative, Angélique Groß's book will introduce to the reader the Little Man who created the Big Man.