

Otto Neurath 1882, Vienna – 1945, Oxford

Otto Neurath was a polymath whose life's work encompassed political economy, sociology, philosophy, urbanism, and visual communication; in the last of these fields he was the leading figure in the work that is now most commonly termed 'Isotype'.

During the First Austrian Republic, Neurath was a principal organizer of the settlers' movement, helping to provide well-designed, affordable housing. From this work grew a Siedlungsmuseum (settlement museum), which transformed at the beginning of 1925 into the Gesellschafts- und Wirtschaftsmuseum in Wien (Social and economic museum of Vienna). As director of this museum, Neurath became fully engaged in the use of visual methods for explanation and education. Working with Marie Reidemeister in a gradually developing team of collaborators – the main other one was the artist Gerd Arntz – Neurath created Isotype.

Alongside his work in pictorial education, Neurath also became a committed logical empiricist. He was the main author of the Vienna Circle manifesto (1929), and is reputed to have given that group its name. Later, in the 1930s and 1940s, he was the driving force behind the successor Unity of Science movement.

After the brief civil war in Austria of February 1934, Neurath and his core group at the Gesellschafts- und Wirtschaftsmuseum left Vienna for The Hague, where they continued work under the aegis of the International Foundation for Visual Education. The international spread of their work, which had already started in Vienna, intensified and extended. In 1935 the name 'Isotype' was devised to describe what had been known as the Wiener Methode (Vienna method). With the German invasion of the Netherlands in May 1940, Otto Neurath and Marie Reidemeister escaped to Britain. After internment – along with all other 'enemy aliens' – they resumed their work, now living in Oxford.

Otto Neurath died suddenly in December 1945, with many new projects in progress.



Marie Neurath
(née Reidemeister, 1898–1986) was from 1925 the principal Isotype 'Transformer', a role that prefigured the modern information designer. In the 1950s and 1960s she became a prolific author (as well as designer) of children's books on science and history subjects.



Gerd Arntz (1900–1988) gave Isotype its distinctive graphic style with his designs for pictograms. He went to work at the Gesellschafts- und Wirtschaftsmuseum in Wien in 1928 and established the linocut as the museum's means for producing pictograms.

(Photograph by Wolf Suschitzky)

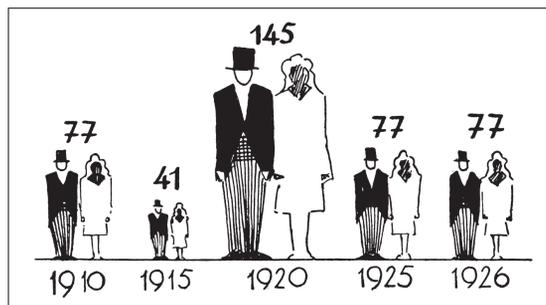
Isotype (International System of Typographic Picture Education)

Isotype was a method for assembling, configuring, and disseminating information and statistics through pictorial means.

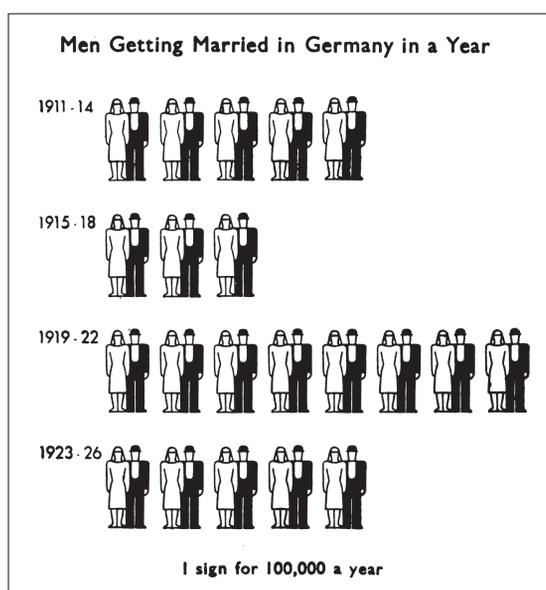
Its initiator, Otto Neurath, described it as a 'language-like technique' characterized by consistency in the use of graphic elements. The basic elements are pictograms – simplified pictures of people or things, designed to function as repeatable units.

During its early years in Social-Democratic Vienna of the 1920s, Isotype was known as the Wiener Methode der Bildstatistik (Vienna method of pictorial statistics), due to the city government's support of the Gesellschafts- und Wirtschaftsmuseum, where the method was developed. The work in visual education carried out there formed part of the cultural programme of so-called 'Red Vienna'.

From its Viennese beginnings, Isotype spread to the Netherlands, Britain, the Soviet Union, the United States, and elsewhere. Its potential for communicating with people of all ages and nationalities was explored in a wide range of projects and publications up to the 1970s. It has exerted an undeniable influence on the design of information today.



The principal rule of Isotype is that a greater quantity should not be represented by an enlarged pictogram (above) but instead by a greater number of pictograms repeated at the same size (below).



GESELLSCHAFTS- UND WIRTSCHAFTSMUSEUM

Sonntag 9-1
 Dienstag 5-7
 Freitag 5-7

EINTRITT FREI
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Diagram showing the location of the principal exhibition of the Gesellschafts- und Wirtschaftsmuseum in the Volkshalle of the Neues Rathaus in Vienna, and a photograph of the exhibition taken around 1933, one year before the Museum was closed.



TIME(LESS) SIGNS

‘There is no field in which some humanization of knowledge through the eye would not be possible.’ Otto Neurath, *From hieroglyphics to Isotype: a visual autobiography* (1945)

How do artists relate to today’s visual language?

Signs, icons and ideograms determine our daily communication; pictographic guidance systems dominate public space. Much of what we understand as visual language originates in Otto Neurath’s Vienna Method of Pictorial Statistics, later known as ISOTYPE (International System of Typographic Picture Education).

During the 1920s and 1930s the Austrian social economist and Vienna Circle philosopher Otto Neurath and his team developed a pictorial language, which included highly simplified pictures for humans, animals and objects of all sorts, now commonly known as pictograms. These were created to help people of every social background understand political and economic data more easily.

TIME(LESS) SIGNS, originally conceived for the Vienna Künstlerhaus to honour Neurath’s 130th birthday in December 2012, features over 30 contributions from renowned contemporary Austria based artists, whose work is either directly or indirectly inspired by Neurath. The exhibition presents various artistic strategies for using pictograms and pictorial statistics to visualize political, social, global or purely individual agendas, alongside original material from the Otto and Marie Neurath Isotype Collection at the University of Reading (UK).

Participating artists

Bernhard Cella, Ilse Chlan, Hazem El Mestikawy, Nikolaus Gansterer, Wilfried Gerstel, Christoph Hinterhuber, Barbara Höller, Christian Hutzinger, Martin Kaltenbrunner et al., Karl-Heinz Klopff, Matthias Klos, Lena Knilli, Clemens Kogler/Karo Szmit, Richard Kriesche, Gert Linke, open3.at, Bernd Oppl, Olaf Osten, Hermann Josef Painitz, Waltraud Palme, Andrea Ressi, Christian Rupp, Sito Schwarzenberger, Niko Wahl, Michael Wegerer, Peter Weibel, Jun Yang, and Anthony Burrill (UK)

Curators

Maria Christine Holter, Christopher Burke

Editorial Consultants

Christopher Barber, Robin Kinross (Hyphen Press)

Exhibition Graphic Design

Christopher Burke, Olaf Osten (logo)

Building Services

Christopher Gunson

www.acflondon.org

www.zeitlose-zeichen.at

www.isotyperevisited.org



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