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**Part I: The Social and Cultural Context  
of the Isotype Picturebooks**



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# “What I Remember”: Autobiographical Reflections by Marie Neurath

## 1 Introduction

A biographical reconstruction of Marie Neurath's life and work can be based on the following texts: an interview which was carried out in 1977 and two autobiographical texts, written in 1980 and 1986 respectively. The interview, which lasts around 57 minutes was conducted by Josef Doekal, then-director of the Gesellschafts- und Wirtschaftsmuseum (Social and Economic Museum) in Vienna, on the occasion of a visit by Marie Neurath, and is available on YouTube.<sup>1</sup> The first autobiographical text, “An was ich mich erinnere. Erzählt und aufgeschrieben für Henk Mulder” (What I Remember: Told and Written Down for Henk Mulder),<sup>2</sup> contains 119 pages and has not yet been published. It is now part of the estate of Otto Neurath in the Austrian National Library.<sup>3</sup> A revised version of this document, dated 1982, is part of the Moritz Schlick Collection at the Wiener Kreis Archief, Haarlem, the Netherlands.<sup>4</sup> Robin Kinross translated this text into English, as Christopher Burke and Günther Sandner explain:

The first draft of “An was ich mich erinnere” is dated December 1980, and it was revised in 1982. In 1984 an English translation, “What I Remember”, was made by Robin Kinross and approved by Marie Neurath. The original typescript is in: University of Reading, Otto and Marie Neurath Isotype Collection (IC), “What I Remember”, unpublished typescript, 1984. (2022, 127 fn. 14)

The second autobiographical text, “Lehrling und Geselle von Otto Neurath in Wiener Methode und Isotype” (Apprentice and Partnership with Otto Neurath in the Vienna Method and Isotype) had been written by Marie Neurath at the request of Robin Kinross and was to be published in a book. The original version is a 25-page

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1 <https://youtu.be/fsV16AwRHTc?si=KofITxzc1ZUcW58r> (2 June 2024).

2 Dr. Henk Mulder is Lecturer and Program Director of the Master Science Education and Communication at the University of Groningen, the Netherlands.

3 Cod. Ser. n. 31883-31886 HAN MAG.

4 This document consists of 102 pages and includes multiple changes made by Marie Neurath. These changes have either been inserted in the form of handwritten remarks or written on additional typewritten pages. A meticulous comparison of the two typescripts has obviously never been carried out and would be a research project of its own. A digital version can be found at: [https://valep.vc.univie.ac.at/virtualarchive/public/Marie\\_L\\_Neurath\\_An\\_was\\_ich\\_mich\\_erinnere\\_1982\\_M/d:990997](https://valep.vc.univie.ac.at/virtualarchive/public/Marie_L_Neurath_An_was_ich_mich_erinnere_1982_M/d:990997)

text written on A4 sheets and typed in June 1986. Robin Kinross translated this text into English in August 1986 and added some changes by Marie Neurath (Neurath and Kinross 2017, 16 fn. 1). This English version was published in the book *The Transformer: Principles of Making Isotype Charts* (2009) by Marie Neurath and Robin Kinross, of which a German translation appeared in 2017.

The interview mainly covers the early years in Vienna, the foundation of the museum, the development of the first exhibitions, and the escape of Marie and Otto Neurath to The Hague and later to England, while nothing is said about the postwar years and the Isotype picturebooks. The first autobiographical text encompasses Marie Neurath's childhood memories, her academic education, the collaboration with Otto Neurath, and the continuation of the Isotype project after Otto Neurath's death. The second document focuses on Marie Neurath's position as a transformer, thus presenting information about the collaboration with Otto Neurath and his team as well as the attempt to go ahead with the Isotype project in the postwar years. Both texts deal with the Isotype picturebooks, albeit very briefly and rather superficially.

Considering these texts, the question arises as to what extent the information given in these texts is trustworthy.<sup>5</sup> Studies on autobiographical memory have shown that memories are subject to continual processing (Anderson 2001; Markowitsch and Welzer 1995). Since autobiographical memory is fragmentary per se, the question of the coherence of the recalled events arises. While many authors choose a holistic strategy by filling in the gaps between individual fragments of memory with second- or third-hand information to create the impression of a self-contained and homogeneous text, other authors point to the fragmentary nature of their memories (Fivush 2011).

Although Robin Kinross attributes to Marie Neurath a general "concern for accurate and honest statement" in his obituary for her (Neurath and Kinross 2009, 120; see also Kinross 2002), this does not exclude the possibility that Marie Neurath portrayed certain successes or failures in a false light or that she omitted relevant information consciously or unconsciously. This attitude may particularly concern those situations where she felt potentially committed to protect her own or other people's privacy. Moreover, as Burke and Sandner noted on the trustworthiness of "What I Remember": "As a memoir written by somebody aged 83 – unedited and not intended for publication – it must be approached with caution, yet it displays remarkable recall and precision" (2022, 108).

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<sup>5</sup> A brief biographical survey of Marie Neurath can be found in Blumesberger (2014). See also Burke (2024).

A case in point is the interview of 1977 in which Marie Neurath endeavors to provide precise information, but at the same time she emphasizes that she is occasionally unsure whether she was recalling something correctly. The story of the escape from Scheveningen to England, with which the interview ends, stands out as Marie Neurath presented it in a particularly lively fashion. This may be due to Marie Neurath’s vivid memory, but perhaps also to the fact that she had told this story several times on different occasions.

So far, only two studies on Marie Neurath’s autobiographical texts have been published. Burke and Sandner (2022) reconstruct the relationship between Otto and Marie Neurath based on the autobiographical texts (without the interview), with an emphasis on “What I Remember”, and aim to carve out Marie Neurath’s independent achievements. Moreover, they address Marie Neurath’s attempt to shape and protect the public image of Otto Neurath. By contrast, Stina Lyon (2021) explores the entire intellectual environment in which Otto and Marie Neurath collaborated by focusing on Marie Neurath’s increasingly independent role as a transformer.

Less is known about Marie Neurath’s development after Otto Neurath’s death, although her productivity in the period after World War II is quite unique. Therefore, in addition to the description of her significant literary work for children (Walker 2013), the autobiographical texts must be scrutinized to determine whether there are any self-declarations to be found or, if there are none, to consider the potential reasons for their omission.

Against this backdrop, a thorough historical reconstruction to verify the information provided in the autobiographical documents is a task for the future. This chapter will provide summaries of the different autobiographical documents by paying attention to those sections in which relevant information is given about the books Marie Neurath wrote for children and how she has conceptualized them. A comparative analysis will then extrapolate the differences and commonalities between these texts.

## 2 “An was ich mich erinnere” (What I Remember)

The typescript written in German has a title page on which the individual chapters are listed. The text starts with Marie Neurath’s early childhood memories, and it then continues with details about her academic career and her collaboration with Otto Neurath. In recounting all this, she addresses the political circumstances as well as their numerous acquaintances in artistic and scientific circles. The text concludes with a report on her efforts to continue the Isotype project

after Otto Neurath's death. In the following, an overview is provided of the auto-biographical recollections of Marie Neurath about her childhood and youth, her collaboration with Otto Neurath, and the period after Otto Neurath's death.

## 2.1 Childhood and academic education

The record begins with a memory of her brother's christening, when Marie Neurath was two years old. She recounts that she began to draw and play music at an early age and that her mathematical talent also seems to have been recognized early on. In this respect, she mentions that she learned arithmetic from her brother Kurt, who was five years older, even before she started school. The report also touches on her emotional state of mind: she notes that she never felt very close to her mother, while she considered her father to be a rather unsuitable caregiver: "I came alive when I got out of that oppressive and spoiled atmosphere" (*An was ich mich erinnere*, 11). By contrast, she has positive memories of her school lessons: "Mathematics was a fascinating game to me" ("An was ich mich erinnere", 14). In 1917, she began studying at the Technical University in Braunschweig. At the same time, she was fascinated by the lectures on drawing and calligraphy offered there. In the ensuing sections, she describes in detail her studies at the universities of Munich, Berlin, and Göttingen, with an emphasis on Max Planck's lectures on theoretical physics given at the Humboldt University of Berlin. Nothing is said about the reasons for why she changed her place of residence several times.

In 1924 she moved to Vienna, since she was deeply interested in the Viennese school reform. Her brother Kurt Reidemeister, who was a professor of mathematics at the University of Vienna, introduced her to the so-called "Neurath Circle", where she met Otto Neurath and Hans Hahn,<sup>6</sup> among others. During this time, she completed her studies in physics and passed the state examination at the University of Göttingen. Marie and Otto Neurath began an extensive correspondence and continued their personal conversations ("An was ich mich erinnere", 33). They met secretly in Austria before she started working at the *Gesellschafts- und Wirtschaftsmuseum* on 1 March 1925.

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<sup>6</sup> Born 27 September 1879 in Vienna, died 24 July 1934 in Vienna, was an Austrian mathematician and philosopher. Kurt Reidemeister met him at a mathematics congress and arranged for him an appointment as assistant professor at the University of Vienna.

## 2.2 The collaboration with Otto Neurath

The texts focus on the professional collaboration with Otto Neurath in Vienna, their escape to the Netherlands and England, and the restart of the Isotype project in Oxford; in general, Marie Neurath is rather reserved about her personal relationship with Otto Neurath.

Yet, she describes her first encounter with Otto Neurath in quite a dramatic manner:

For Friday, 26 September 1924, in the afternoon at 5 o'clock, I was registered for my first visit to the Neuraths. [ . . . ] A red-bearded giant in a brown-striped shirt opened the door, looked at me in a friendly manner and said "So this is Mieze". ("An was ich mich erinnere", 29) [ . . . ] I was quite unprepared for the fact that I would be completely won over and overwhelmed by the first impression. I can hardly recall anything of the conversation, I only remember that I listened to everything that Otto said with the greatest interest and growing approval. [ . . . ] For the first time I felt a harmony between thinking, feeling, and action. ("An was ich mich erinnere", 30)

Marie Neurath then continues to recall their conversation as exactly as possible and concludes:

Otto saw how impressed I was, and asked me if I could perhaps design things of this kind; but what should I say – I had never seen anything quite like it before. "But", he asked, "If I start a museum where such charts are designed, would you be willing to join in?" To which I replied without qualifications "yes" and I meant it. ("An was ich mich erinnere", 32)

In the ensuing sections, Marie Neurath elaborates on the working conditions at the museum in Vienna, where her main task initially consisted in analyzing data and translating it into graphic design. She recalls that her first job was to run the cash register, type letters, and draw up an inventory. She also spent many hours in the showroom, where she was acquainted with the method of creating wall charts.

In 1929, Otto Neurath and his team started a close collaboration with Gerd Arntz,<sup>7</sup> who had moved to Vienna. This close cooperation gradually developed into the so-called Vienna Method of Pictorial Statistics, which shaped an exhibition opened in the Volkshalle on 7 December. It is interesting that Marie Neurath admits that one of the charts that she had made in Otto Neurath's absence provoked his displeasure, because it was too colorful and the colors did not correspond to the precisely defined purpose, that is, each color needs to have a specific

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<sup>7</sup> Born 11 December 1900 in Remscheid, died 4 December 1988 in The Hague, was a socio-critical artist and graphic designer.

meaning (“An was ich mich erinnere”, 42). Nevertheless, Otto Neurath tolerated this chart.

Marie Neurath dedicates many sections to the contacts the Neuraths had with artists, writers, scientists, and politicians, for instance, Martha Tausk and Lise Meitner, both aunts of Robert Frisch, but also Elsa Brandström and H. G. Wells. Occasionally, Marie Neurath describes these contacts in detail, while others are only mentioned in passing. Some of these encounters turned into long-lasting friendships, including with El Lissitzky,<sup>8</sup> who designed charts about letters and numbers based on his artistic exchange with Otto and Marie Neurath. Another important person was Rudolf Brunngraber,<sup>9</sup> an expert in social statistics, whose first novel *Karl und das zwanzigste Jahrhundert* (Karl and the Twentieth Century, 1932) drew heavily on Otto Neurath's research regarding the economy and statistics.

Marie Neurath also recalls the search for a new name for the “Vienna Method”. She suggested the name “Isotip” (International System of Teaching in Pictures), which in turn then became Isotype. According to her, Otto Neurath was very positively surprised by the name and Arntz was commissioned to design a signature symbol for it (“An was ich mich erinnere”, 64).

## 2.3 Knowledge transfer

Time and again, Marie Neurath stresses that sharing knowledge was key to her and Otto Neurath, which resulted, for instance, in the cooperation with the newly-founded institute Izostat (an abbreviation for “All-Union Institute of Pictorial Statistics of Soviet Construction and Economy”) in Moscow. However, the fact that they may have served as part of Stalinist propaganda is not mentioned in the memoirs. Occasionally, Marie Neurath included political comments, for example when she writes that the Social Democrats in Moscow were called “social fascists” and that a coworker joined the Communists, as did Grete Schütte-Lihotzky (“An was ich mich erinnere”, 55). Marie Neurath does not explicitly address her own political views; in this respect she also seemed to have been greatly influenced by

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<sup>8</sup> Born 22 November 1890 in Potschinok, Russia, died 30 December 1941 in Moscow, was an important Russian avant-garde artist and graphic designer.

<sup>9</sup> Born 20 September 1901 in Vienna, died 5 April 1960, was an Austrian writer, journalist, and painter. In 1933 Brunngraber was elected chairman of the newly founded Austrian Association of Socialist Writers. Brunngraber was unable to publish in Austria during the Austrofascist period. However, he continued to be very successful in Germany and was temporarily appropriated by Nazi cultural policy.

Otto Neurath, who was a member of the Sozialdemokratische Partei Österreichs (SPÖ; Social Democratic Party of Austria) according to the interview of 1977.

Marie Neurath repeatedly tells of new connections that helped to spread the knowledge of Isotype. As a result, Otto Neurath was invited to the World Social Economic Congress, organized by the International Industrial Relations Institute (IRI) in Amsterdam, and it becomes clear that these connections made it easier for the Neuraths to stay far away from Nazi Germany. Otto Neurath set up a foundation in The Hague, and he began to learn English with Marie Neurath's support. In this context, Marie Neurath mentions a cautious measure: in the event that the political situation should worsen and make a return to Vienna too dangerous, they agreed that he should receive a telegram saying "Carnap is expecting you" (because Rudolf Carnap was staying in Prague at that time). After Otto Neurath's office was searched, Marie Neurath sent the telegram and prepared everything for their departure. In the meantime, Otto Neurath had founded the Mundaneum, a kind of comprehensive museum, in The Hague.

Despite the grim situation, they aimed at fulfilling commissions they had received while still in Vienna, for instance, a series of photographs for the Norwegian Workers' Educational Center and two books for the publisher C. K Ogden. Marie Neurath also reports on the worsening political and financial conditions they had to face. In 1934, Otto Neurath's doctorate was questioned, but he was able to show his diploma and thus this accusation was dropped. At almost the same time, the Russian contracting parties informed the Neuraths that the contract between them contradicted Russian laws and that payment could no longer be guaranteed. As Marie Neurath comments, "Years of absolute hardship were coming" ("An was ich mich erinnere", 65). Her family supported her with remittances, but she and Otto Neurath were so afraid of being deported that they did not officially declare how little they earned, and therefore they paid far too much in taxes. As she explains, "It was only later, when we could stand on our own two feet, that we dared to admit it and we were recompensed" ("An was ich mich erinnere", 65).

In 1936, a collaboration arose with Dr. Kleinschmidt from New York, who worked for the National Tuberculosis Association and was responsible for health education. This resulted in a fruitful collaboration that lasted for years. An exhibition was conceived that traveled across the USA. Marie and Otto Neurath were also invited to Mexico for consulting activities, which were arranged by Alice Rühle, who knew Otto Neurath from Dresden where she had worked as a translator. Otto and Marie Neurath felt so at home with Alice and Otto Rühle that they even thought of emigrating to Mexico.

Until the outbreak of the war, Otto and Marie Neurath worked on illustrating a children's encyclopedia (neither the title nor the content is made clear in the

memoirs). Moreover, Otto Neurath received a commission from the publisher Alfred A. Knopf to write a book, which resulted in *Modern Man in the Making* (1939). This book represented an innovative picture–text style where the picture had to be read alongside the text in order to follow the logic: “The whole thing is of one piece, the most beautiful book we have made” (“An was ich mich erinnere”, 74). Knopf asked for another book proposal, so Marie and Otto Neurath prepared a book about the history of persecution and tolerance all over the world. The honorarium of 400 dollars per month enabled them to research intensively before they were forced to make their escape.

After having settled in Oxford, they continued to work on their book project in addition to the lectures that Otto Neurath gave. At the same time, the first Isotype film was made, *A Few Ounces a Day* (1941), a call to produce less waste. In the months that followed, more and more Isotype films were commissioned. To fulfill all these requirements, Otto and Marie Neurath worked with photographers such as Peter Bradford and several scientists.

Since foreigners were not allowed to work independently at that time, Marie and Otto Neurath had to find employment, and therefore they founded the Isotype Institute Limited. Their home office enabled Marie and Otto Neurath to work as joint secretaries and directors of studies. Shortly before his death, Otto Neurath was involved in a housing project where he advocated building barrier-free flats for older people.

Marie Neurath also mentions two unfinished manuscripts that were left behind after Otto Neurath’s death. These were “Visual Education – Humanisation versus Popularisation”, for the Karl Mannheim series, and “From Hieroglyphics to Isotype – a visual autobiography”, commissioned by Adprint. The head of Adprint, Max Parrish, discarded Otto Neurath’s original design, which greatly annoyed Marie Neurath.

Otto Neurath’s death meant a major turning point in Marie Neurath’s private and professional life. While she did not elaborate extensively on her emotional distress, she described the changed situation at the institute, since she no longer had anyone with whom she could discuss the Isotype work, but on the other hand she knew that Otto Neurath would expect her to continue their joint work as best as she could. Since all contracts were transferred to Marie Neurath, there was no problem with the continued running of the Institute. She also mentioned in passing that in 1951 she was asked by Franz Rauscher, the director of the Austrian Social and Economic Museum, to return to Vienna. He offered her the management of the production department, but she declined, as she no longer felt any attachment to Vienna.

Almost at the end of this autobiographical document, Marie Neurath informs quite matter-of-factly about the development of the Isotype picturebooks for chil-

dren. Together with Max Parrish, with whom there were apparently disagreements about illustrations suitable for children's books, she released the "Visual History of Mankind" series and the "Visual Science" series and experimented with designs for children's books (Burke, Kindel, and Walker 2013). The first children's book *If You Could See Inside* (1948) was written, followed by *Railways under London* (1948). Afterwards, the company Cable & Wireless asked her to create comprehensible materials, and, to achieve this goal, she sought advice from experts, such as Otto Robert Frisch and Hermann Bondi. Apart from that, the publisher Walter Foges, who produced an illustrated magazine for western Nigeria, asked Marie Neurath to produce suitable illustrations to convince the government that pictures could be very helpful in the literacy campaign. Marie Neurath received a monthly allowance and her travel expenses were covered. Her first commission consisted in designing a booklet on education to promote compulsory education. Subsequently, further booklets sixteenth pages in length were produced in which contemporary problems, tasks, and solutions related to Nigeria were shown step by step.

Very briefly, Marie Neurath mentions the twenty-volume series "They Lived Like This . . ." aimed at children. At the same time, she writes that it became more difficult to work with the publishers, as there were always new staff people who did not know much about Isotype. Moreover, she was worried about the future of the Isotype Institute, because she could neither find experienced employees nor suitable successors.

At the end of this text, Marie Neurath tells of how she handed over her estate and working materials to the University of Reading. She also explains the reasons for writing her memoirs, which were to be published in the series "Vienna Circle" (Wiener Kreis):

I don't know what the secret is that I get into storytelling in Henk's presence. [ . . . ] Now I have sat down and written, for him; but slowly I am getting used to the idea, also for other friends of Otto Neurath's world of thought. It gives me pleasure to bring up the old memories. ("An was ich mich erinnere", 119)

Two female students, who were studying design in what was then the Unit of Typography at the University of Reading, got the ball rolling as they wanted to hear the history of the Institute. Ultimately, Marie Neurath met Henk Mulder, with whom she edited an anthology for the "Vienna Circle" series and for whom she eventually wrote the autobiographical report, as indicated in the subtitle.

### 3 “Lehrling und Geselle von Otto Neurath in Wiener Methode und Isotype”

At the beginning of this text, Marie Neurath apologized for not being able to provide an introduction to pictorial statistics, because she had already forgotten most of it. However, she stresses that it was important for her to describe chronologically those moments that had remained in her memory. Under the heading “The first encounter” she describes how she got to know Otto Neurath’s work when she came with a small group of fellow students from the University of Göttingen to Vienna: “Neurath took me round the Siedlungsmuseum [Museum of Estate Housing]. Some of his charts were on display there” (Neurath 2009, 11). Marie Neurath writes that she was deeply impressed by his graphics, especially those about the depiction of cities:

[. . .] it was not so much the manner of presentation that impressed me, but the formulation of the question: the idea of showing the five largest cities, and the anticipation of this outcome, that enabled so much of the history and character of these countries to be indicated. It was in front of this chart that I agreed to join Neurath in the making of such visual presentations. (Neurath 2009, 11)

Immediately after completing her studies, Marie Neurath moved to Vienna. She describes her everyday work in the first office in Vienna’s third district, where she was responsible to produce the design drawings. She had fond memories of working on the large exhibition “GeSoLei” (an abbreviation for “Gesundheitspflege, soziale Fürsorge und Leibesübungen”), which took place in Düsseldorf in 1926 and focused on healthcare, social welfare, and physical exercise. Above all, she remembers the satisfaction of having depicted well the age structure of Vienna’s population before and after World War I. With each draft, she went into the next room to consult Otto Neurath, but as she concedes, “Most of the charts that we were commissioned to make have gone from my memory” (Neurath 2009, 17).

In contrast, she remembered the exhibition “Vienna and the Viennese” (1927) quite well. Her job at that time was to supervise the work and pay out wages. Meanwhile, she cooperated with the draftsman Friedrich Jahnel, who created, among other productions, the map “Gliederung eines industriellen Unternehmens” (Structure of an industrial enterprise). In this regard, she emphasized that in order to set precisely every line connecting the different departments, one had to understand these structures beforehand. In 1927, the first booklets *Die Gewerkschaften* (The Trade Unions) and *Die Entwicklung von Landwirtschaft und Gewerbe in Deutschland* (The Development of Agriculture and Trade in Germany) were published. In the chapter “Transformation”, Marie Neurath describes how this project involved her own design work. She maintains that her knowledge of

social contexts and her good rapport with Otto Neurath led to quick and very satisfying results and stresses how important Otto Neurath's ideas were in this undertaking. An example she mentions is the correct placement of the symbols in order to perfectly display the development of the number of employees from 1882 and 1925:

I remember that the last stimulus to a further improvement came from Neurath: align the middle-sized business under each other; then we have an axis, which makes clear the shift from small- to large-sized business. How much more satisfying is his solution to that in which one should show that the number of those employed in small businesses has stayed the same, that the number in middle-sized businesses has doubled and those in large concerns have multiplied by five. (Neurath 2009, 19)

Otto Neurath also made sure that the employees were well equipped:

I was provided with good tools for my transformation work: coloured pencils and carbon-copy notebooks of roughly quarto size, in which the top sheet was squared; this was useful for my sketches, and I retained a copy of each in the book. At that time, we also searched stationery shops for materials with which to make the charts. (Neurath 2009, 21)

According to Marie Neurath's report, a milestone in her work seems to have been the exhibition in the Volkshalle, which opened on 7 December 1927. A decision was made in favor of a modern design; the consulting architect Josef Frank suggested, for example, that the wooden design of the display walls be retained. Lighting was used selectively: only the charts were illuminated, while the rest of the room remained dark. Another new feature was the use of a magnetic board, which was later used again, for instance in school lessons. In her report, Marie Neurath dedicates a lot of space to the description of this exhibition and points out the pleasure she took in guiding school classes through the exhibition, asking the children questions that they could answer by looking at the charts. In this way, she could easily determine if a chart was still too complicated, and this experience seems to have been a significant preparatory work for her later children's books. In this regard, Marie Neurath also pointed out that the maps and charts should please children of all ages, as those who did not yet understand the meaning enjoyed at least the symbols and colors.

This exhibition contributed to the fact that Otto and Marie Neurath's work became better known. As a result, the Viennese publisher Arthur Wolf asked them to create *Die bunte Welt* (The Colorful World), conceived as a schoolbook, by using the Vienna Method of Pictorial Statistics. Marie Neurath remembers that this book demonstrates how quickly the development of their collaborative work progressed, because many different styles had been mixed. Once this book had been completed, they were contacted by the publisher Bibliographisches Institut

in Leipzig, resulting in books on society and the economy. In view of this, Otto Neurath could afford to pay specialists, such as the statistician Alois Fischer or the historian Robert Bleichsteiner, as well as the art historian Schwieger. As Marie Neurath remembered:

For my own part, I learned especially from Professor Peucker, the cartographer. When I showed him my simplifications of maps in *Die bunte Welt*, the equal area projection certainly seemed right to him; "but", he said, "we have to give the thing a bit more life". (Neurath 2009, 29)

This made it clear to Marie Neurath that purely mechanical simplification was not enough; rather, it was also important to adopt different perspectives and to be very careful with comparisons.

During the last years that Marie and Otto Neurath spent in Vienna, particularly Otto Neurath received numerous commissions for lectures to be given in Berlin, Amsterdam, and Moscow, among others. In Vienna they had the opportunity to work closely with schools. This allowed them to determine how their work affected students, apart from numerous discussions with teachers. The results of these experiences shaped the book *Bildstatistik nach Wiener Methode in der Schule* (Image Statistics According to the Vienna Method at School, 1933). Due to the charged political situation, however, Otto and Marie Neurath were forced to flee. Marie Neurath described the consequences of this as follows: "We could survive only as citizens of the world. Never again did we have a home like Vienna" (Neurath 2009, 46).

In the next chapter, Marie Neurath describes the naming of Isotype, which was also first made public in 1935. Before, they never dispensed with words in their charts, but it was their aim now to create a language of sign. It is interesting that Marie Neurath does not mention the forced change of location at all in this chapter, although it is entitled "The Hague". It was much more important for her to show how their work went on. In this regard, she elaborates on the collaboration with Dr. Kleinschmidt from New York that resulted in charts depicting the development and the appropriate handling of infections such as tuberculosis; these charts were part of a traveling exhibition throughout the USA. While the Neuraths were working on a booklet to present the respective material, they received an invitation to Mexico City, where a museum for science and industry had been founded. They stayed there for six weeks and shared their expertise. Quite soon after that, the publisher Compton asked them to draft a children's encyclopedia, the prime goal of which should consist in representing contemporary scientific knowledge by means of accessible texts and visuals. As Marie Neurath summed up, "We became more confident in the belief that every kind of scientific statement is open to a visual treatment" (Neurath 2009, 55). This work reinforced

Otto Neurath's wish to create a visual thesaurus as part of the *International Encyclopedia of Unified Science*.

When a department-store chain inquired about an exhibition to be displayed in three cities – The Hague, Rotterdam, and Amsterdam – Marie Neurath suggested the Dutch painter Rembrandt as the theme, to which Otto Neurath readily agreed. The result was the exhibition “Rondom Rembrandt” (Around Rembrandt) that showed a lot of historical background information, but also photographs of Rembrandt's self-portraits. In addition, interactive methods were included such that knowledge transfer could be tested.

The records evidently demonstrate that Marie Neurath could increasingly assert her ideas, and during the production of *Modern Man in the Making* (1939), she acted not only as a transformer but also arranged the text. After the completion of this book, war broke out in Europe. Otto and Marie Neurath fled to England and were initially interned as “enemy aliens”. In February 1941, they learned that they could stay in Oxford, where they collaborated with Paul Rötha, a pioneer of documentary film. He needed diagrams to show the different blood groups, which resulted in the documentary *Blood Transfusion* (1941). This was the beginning of a long-term collaboration. Another film was *A Few Ounces a Day* (1941), encouraging people to collect certain kinds of waste for recycling. Though Otto Neurath died, when *Visual History of Mankind* was two-thirds finished, Marie continued the work with all partners.

Through the mediation of the publisher Wolfgang Foges, she met the Prime Minister of Nigeria in 1950. The Prime Minister presented her a booklet and asked her to transform the most important ideas therein into visuals that align with the Isotype method in order to promote compulsory school attendance. While staying in Ibadan, she drafted a 16-page booklet in which she explained the arguments step by step, complemented by other topics such as agriculture, health, and finance. To foster the learning effects, Marie Neurath visited school classes and instructed teachers to link the pictures and the written information. Moreover, she indicates that her simple explanation of how elections work led to a significant increase in voter turnout. However, she admits that she failed in training Nigerians in her method.

Another setback was the sudden death of a publisher for whom Marie Neurath was working on a filmstrip about the history of medicine; she was no longer able to work with his successors, and the same happened with the books that were in preparation:

I had to deal with people whose values had nothing in common with ours. I was now over 70 years old and I decided to bring the work to a close. So, it had a real end, just as it had a very clear beginning. (Neurath 2009, 75)

In view of this situation, Marie Neurath was eager to find a convenient place for all her material so that it could be of use to younger generations. She reports on the felicitous coincidence that two students from the University of Reading had contacted her for an interview. As she detected a genuine interest in her work, a contract was signed with the University of Reading. Numerous boxes of working materials<sup>10</sup> were then transferred to Reading. Moreover, an exhibition on Isotype was showcased in 1975. Marie Neurath concludes her account with the following statement: "And elsewhere in the world there are people for whom our work means something. I have written this sketch for them" (Neurath 2009, 76).

Considering the fact that Marie Neurath and her team created more than 70 Isotype picturebooks for children, it is interesting to see how Marie Neurath described the creation of the children's books. Otto Neurath originally wanted to develop a book on boxes that looked the same but contained completely different components inside, and thus have different functions. This was the starting point for Marie Neurath to make cross-sections of different objects to visualize how they look inside, whether a lighthouse or a wasps' nest. These ideas shaped the children's book *If You Could See Inside* (1948), which attracted the interest of Max Parrish. In the ensuing years, Parrish published several of Marie Neurath's children's books in which complicated mechanisms are explained as simply as possible. These books were very successful and prompted the Cable & Wireless Company to commission a book that could describe technical problems in a simple way and be used in schools (Kinross 2009, 89).

The different book projects, portrayed in detail in Walker (2013), are just mentioned in passing and Marie Neurath presents herself primarily as the solver of technical problems rather than elaborating on the narrative and visual aspects of the Isotype picturebooks: "I learned to master the technical problems by breaking them down into the smallest elements and showing them side by side at the same time" (Neurath 2009, 90). Although Marie Neurath emphasizes that mastering the scientific aspects was easier for her than the historical ones (90), this is somewhat at odds with her very positive memories of designing the twenty-volume series "They Lived Like This . . ." . One can speculate that the renunciation of typical Isotype requirements in this series also had a liberating effect, as Marie Neurath admits openly: "I was given complete freedom and I enjoyed the work" (Neurath 2009, 93). Basically, a certain step is taken here into a more descriptive and narrative mode of presentation, while the purely analytical-explanatory approach of the earlier Isotype books is abandoned.

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10 <https://www.reading.ac.uk/typography/collections-and-archives> (3 June 2024).

## 4 Conclusion

The two autobiographical texts and the interview show different emphases and cover different time periods. The most detailed text is "What I Remember", which begins with childhood memories and tells of the important stages of Marie Neurath's life until her retirement as director of the Isotype Institute. The second text, "Apprentice and Assistant to Otto Neurath in Vienna Method and Isotype", omits the phases of childhood and adolescence while focusing on the collaboration between Marie and Otto Neurath and the continuation of the Isotype project in the postwar years, until the closure of the Isotype Institute in 1981. The interview, however, concentrates on the early years in Vienna, the foundation of the museum, and Marie and Otto Neurath's escape to the Netherlands and later to England, while nothing is told about Marie Neurath's achievements after her husband's death. Moreover, it is noticeable that only the first text provides some information about Marie Neurath's family relationships, while this is totally absent from the second text.

Even though both texts refer to the most significant stages of Marie Neurath's life, so that a superficial reading gives the impression that the same facts are repeated, on closer consideration they prove to be quite distinct from one another. One reason for this could be that the first text was not intended for publication, while the second one appeared in a book. Another observation is that the first autobiographical text is very associative, shows gaps in the narrator's memory, and does not always follow a stringent chronological order. This report resembles an oral narrative rather than a self-contained autobiography. Almost without transition and very erratically, Marie Neurath merges sequences from different periods of her life. The development of her academic and graphic work often remains in the dark, not to mention the lack of detailed information about the production of the Isotype picturebooks. Even the second text is characterized by a fragmentary character and a subjective approach. Nevertheless, potentially due to the revision process on the occasion of the English translation, this text is much easier to understand. Moreover, it has a clearer focus, because Marie Neurath intended to represent her own development as a transformer. But here, too, the children's books are only mentioned in passing, as if she did not give them any significant credit with respect to the development of informational picturebooks for children in the postwar period. Under these circumstances, one can only speculate about the reasons for this obvious negligence of the picturebooks in the two autobiographical documents. Did she attach less importance to the picturebooks in comparison to books for adult readers? Did she rather want to honor the achievements of Otto Neurath, although she points out that she played a major role in the development of Iso-

type? Overall, it seems that her own life remains in the shadow of Otto Neurath. What is striking, however, is Marie Neurath's aspiration to document the numerous encounters with prominent artists, writers, scientists, and politicians, thus emphasizing that she and Otto Neurath were part of international artistic and scientific networks since the 1920s. How these networks functioned exactly, and what impact they exerted on Marie and Otto Neurath's work, has not yet been investigated in all its facets. Seen in this light, the autobiographical texts of Marie Neurath are valuable historical documents that provide insight into the author's self-assessment as a graphic designer, transformer of knowledge, and mediator of the Isotype system, as well as embedding these issues into the contemporary social, political, and artistic context.

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