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Blind Eyes, Innuendo and the Politics of Design

A Reply to Clive Chizlett

Robin Kinross

The foundations of Clive Chizlett's arguments in his article, *Damned Lies*, are contested. Against the notion that Otto Neurath was a communist and an agent of Soviet propaganda, the facts of Neurath's political commitment are set out. In his life and work, Neurath was a democratic socialist, committed to the ideals of open discussion. Much of Chizlett's case rests on W.W. Bartley's book, *Wittgenstein*, which is shown to be a flawed source. The claim that Neurath borrowed ideas from Willard Brinton is shown to be trivial and equally without foundation. Chizlett's view of graphic information rests on the view that it is either hard science or pure art. This dichotomy prevents an understanding of his subject.

In his article *Damned Lies* (*Visible Language*, 26: 3/4) Clive Chizlett makes some grave claims about the work of Otto Neurath and his associates. These require a detailed response.

First, one can observe that Chizlett relies almost exclusively on second- or third-hand sources for his evidence. Extensive selections of the writings of Otto Neurath are in print and an archive of Isotype work exists and can be consulted.¹ I am surprised that an article which so resolutely turns a blind eye to evidence could come to be published in a serious journal. Chizlett's essay is so riddled with wild claims—and with tough assertions extrapolated from these claims—that it is hard to know where to begin with a response. I will start with a set of accusations drawn from one source.

William Warren Bartley III and rumor

Chizlett makes three claims on the basis of remarks in William Warren Bartley's biographical essay, *Wittgenstein*. These are: that "Neurath was, for a short time, an active member of the revolutionary Spartacist Party which governed Munich for a few months during the year 1919" (page 301); that Neurath "visited Moscow in 1930-31 to try to persuade Stalin to adopt physicalism (Neurath's personal variant of logical-positivism) as the official form of scientific, materialist, analytical philosophy to be followed by all straight-thinking Marxist-Leninists" (page 305); that Neurath "purported to believe that the picture-theory of thought proposed in Wittgenstein's book, *Tractatus*, endorsed the picture-based internationality of the Isotype system" (page 315).

Bartley provides no sources or evidence for these statements. Given the controversy that Bartley's book has provoked in its description of Wittgenstein's sexual life, Chizlett would have done well to treat these assertions with caution. A calm dissection of Bartley's use of evidence has been

written by Ray Monk, Wittgenstein's most recent biographer.² But the discussion that follows here is based on published sources and on notes that I made on an exchange of letters between Bartley and Marie Neurath in 1974.³

In the years under discussion, Otto Neurath was a democratic socialist; before this time one might characterize him as a liberal. I do not know of any good evidence to suggest that he was ever a member of any communist party. His commitment to democratic-socialist ideas was so public and so prolonged that no one, apart from a few badly informed commentators, has ever suggested anything else. Let me quote from a letter that Marie Neurath wrote to the *Times Literary Supplement* (18 January 1980) in reply to a reviewer's suggestion (evidently derived from Bartley's book) that Neurath had been a Spartacist: "Otto Neurath belonged to no political group at all when he was young. He was never a Spartacist. He joined the Social Democratic Party when he was in his mid-thirties [around 1918]. He never became a member of any other party."

At the end of the First World War and in the months of revolution in Russia and in Eastern and Central Europe, Neurath joined the Social Democratic Party in Germany.⁴ He went to Munich as a civil servant, working in the Central Planning Office for the Social Democratic government in Bavaria. When a "soviet republic" was declared there, he stayed on, to try to carry through the project of "socialization."⁵ After the brief civil war in Bavaria and the victory of conservative forces, Neurath was arrested, tried and sent back to Austria.

In Neurath's own writings and in accounts of him by those who knew him, one encounters an independent thinker, outside any orthodoxy and not ashamed or afraid to adopt untimely ideas. He was a utopian thinker, but also a pragmatist who wanted to be involved in practical projects. So he was drawn to difficult and dangerous adventures, as in Munich and the Soviet Union. In his chilly prosecuting-counsel manner, Chizlett insinuates that Neurath was a party-member, a straight-thinking Marxist-Leninist and an agent of the Comintern. This is a delusion.⁶

Now, turning to the story about Stalin: Marie Neurath, who worked with Neurath from 1925 onwards, contested it in her correspondence with Bartley. She wrote: "he would never have wished or attempted to see Stalin; he would never have wished or attempted to introduce something like 'physicalism' by political means." Bartley replied that the story came from Karl Popper and may have been a joke, and that Popper may have taken it seriously. Chizlett uncritically swallows a possible joke, which

Popper may have taken seriously and which Bartley used to spice his narrative.

Marie Neurath did not contest the third story from Bartley about Otto Neurath's invocation of Wittgenstein. There is nothing in print to support Bartley's assertion, and given Neurath's distance from and reservations about Wittgenstein's ideas, there is no reason to suppose that he should have claimed that they supported his Isotype work.

Having mentioned Karl Popper, this is the point at which to dispose of another of Chizlett's fancies. Popper had no "colleagues in the Vienna Circle" (page 313). When he came to write his memories of Neurath, Popper wrote: "I myself was never a member of the Circle, though Neurath used to describe me as the Circle's 'official opposition'."⁷ Popper ended these memories of Otto Neurath thus: "Yet though we had disagreed so deeply about so many and so important matters, I shall always feel that he was one of the strongest personalities I ever met; a real original thinker and an undaunted fighter who dreamt of a better and more humane world."⁸ As to the "bitterness and hostility" (page 313) with which Neurath reacted to Popper's theory of falsification, one can notice that Chizlett's source is the book that seems to have provided much of his knowledge of philosophy: John Passmore's *A Hundred Years of Philosophy*. If he had read Neurath's main discussion of Popper, Chizlett might have been persuaded to take off his blinkers and see that it is an open disagreement, without bitterness or hostility and largely sticking to philosophical issues.⁹ Marxism-Leninism is not mentioned. I don't think it is even there to be decoded by prosecuting counsels.

Willard C. Brinton and precedence

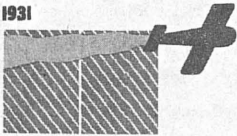
Before coming to the leading story of Clive Chizlett's article — the work in the USSR — I want to examine another of his insinuations: the relation of Neurath's Isotype to the work of Willard Brinton. This is a story that has surfaced several times in print in recent years and Chizlett at least does us the service of allowing some fresh observations to be made. But first, here are the steps of Chizlett's argument (page 309). It goes like this: 1) Neurath knew an American, Charles Morris, who "may have" introduced him to the work of the American philosopher C.S. Peirce; 2) "it is also possible that" Morris "may have" drawn Neurath's attention to the work of Brinton, another American; 3) Brinton's work preceded Isotype and "may well have" provided inspiration and example. Well, so what? Even if one believes in a history-of-ideas lineage-tracing approach that discounts individual initiative, I think that this story doesn't sound very convincing. Didn't Neurath know any other Americans? Why should it be Morris who

Picture of the growth and the planned growth in the combating of pests in agriculture. Each block represents 60,000 hectares of land. The vermin to be exterminated is represented at top right in a simple, recognizable outline form.

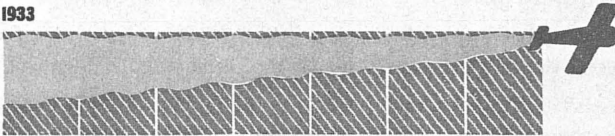
From: *Aviacija i vozduchoplavanie*, Moscow, 1934. See also, Gerd Arntz and Kees Broos. 1979. *Symbols for Education and Statistics*. The Hague: Mart Spruijt, introductory essay.

САМОЛЕТЫ В БОРЬБЕ С ВРЕДИТЕЛЯМИ СЕЛЬСКОГО ХОЗЯЙСТВА В СССР

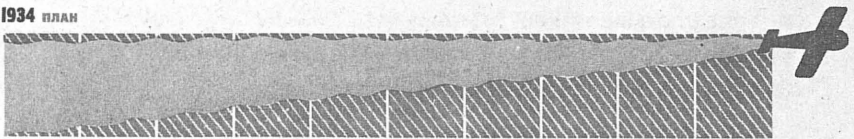
1931



1933



1934 план



Каждый прямоугольник обозначает 60 тысяч гектаров опыляемой площади

was the virus-carrier? Presumably because Morris is the only American friend of Neurath known to Clive Chizlett.

But let us look at Brinton's book, *Graphic Methods for Presenting Facts*. As usual, Chizlett has not made the effort to go to the source, but relies rather on a recently published compendium (Nigel Holmes, *Designing Pictorial Symbols*). If one reads chapter 3 of Brinton's book, Simple Comparisons Involving Time, it is clear that: Brinton is in favor of representing quantities by bars rather than by forms such as circles that cannot be simply read off; that he thinks pictorial representation has advantages; that he advocates putting exact figures by the side of a chart.¹⁰ He has no concept of the unit symbol to represent a precise quantity. This idea is at the heart of Isotype practice. Furthermore, Brinton recommends his pictorialized bars as just one good method among several and he provides no sustained exploration of this method of showing quantities.

If one does want to find precursors of Isotype, I think that a trawl of the newspapers, magazines, pamphlets and ephemera published in Europe and America between, say, 1880 and 1925, would throw up relevant material. For example, I could cite a booklet, *Zur Geschichte und Statistik des Volksschulwesens im In- und Auslande*, which shows several Isotype-like charts, using rows of pictorial symbols. This was published in Vienna in 1898.¹¹ One doesn't need to posit any "Chicago connection" to find precursors of Isotype. But the point I would want to make is that Isotype work has to be judged for what it is, not by what its ancestry might have been.

The USSR and guilt by association

As Clive Chizlett recounts, Neurath and his associates worked in the USSR, as consultants to a Soviet body, the Institut Isostat. A pool of five people from the Social- and Economic Museum of Vienna worked there in shifts. According to Marie Neurath, the invitation to work in the USSR came from the Soviet embassy in Vienna and the arrangement started late in 1931. Towards the end of 1934, their contract was terminated without explanation and without honoring payments due.

The Soviet chart that Chizlett discusses on page 307, but doesn't reproduce, was certainly done under the influence of the team from Vienna. However, it is not signed "Institut Isostat." It uses a unit symbol, but also introduces a confusing element of visual distortion in the expanding spray-trail left behind by the airplane. The quantity of this spray cannot be read off: it becomes a rather vague decorative element of the kind that the Isotype team refused. I doubt that it is the work of an Isotype trans-

former. Chizlett is not bothered by this weakness, but thinks he finds other ones. He says that the symbol showing area of land sprayed is not quantified and then makes fun of this: "as small as a tennis court or as large as a whole region." But at the bottom of the chart, the land symbol is quantified: each rectangle represents 60,000 hectares. Here again our prosecuting counsel seems to be blind.

Clive Chizlett's one other actually-existing Soviet chart, which he does reproduce (page 318), was made earlier and is signed "Institut Isostat." It follows Isotype principles more closely. Chizlett can find nothing to say against it, except that it is "very pretty." Then, in a passage worthy of a Stalinist show-trial prosecutor or of Senator Joseph McCarthy, he postulates an Isotype chart about the famine years in the USSR. In the absence of evidence, Chizlett resorts to this slur, imagined in cool detail. For a better sense of how the Isotype work in the USSR was conducted, I would like to quote from Marie Neurath's memories of visits there. Her account exemplifies the precision with which she could remember events of years ago. It also suggests the realism and lack of illusion in her and Otto Neurath's perceptions of life in the Soviet Union then.

"We travelled to Moscow by train: the journey took three days and two nights. On the first occasion (1931) I went with Arntz and Scheer, taking cases full of material as luggage; duty had to be paid at every border; Jodlbauer had calculated it exactly, and my money was just enough. The entrance gate, on which had been placed the inscription 'workers of all lands unite,' was actually rather miserable in appearance; but the atmosphere of something like festivity was touching. I stretched out my hand to a Red Army soldier standing there, hand on cap. What should he do? He took it. In Moscow we stayed in the Grand Hotel. For an office, we were given first a room in the state publishing house. Otto had his table in a niche separated off by a glass wall. I sat with the others at a long table and could hardly move my elbows. When I began to teach transformation to Maria Alexandrovna Orlova (who later married Bauermeister), I was able to do this in Otto's room, and he listened with half an ear, smiling. Ivan Petrovich Ivanitsky was a scientific collaborator; he had made pictorial statistics in the USSR before we arrived, but then had to acknowledge that ours were better, and he worked with us quite happily. We were once invited with him to visit Orlova; there was a photograph of her father—a general in Tsarist times—hanging on the wall. Once at the opera she pointed out her husband to us; life in a single room together had become unbearable and they had split up. Apart from an administrative director, the Institut Isostat had a 'red director.' The first of these was called Asmus, an attractive educated man, still young, who spoke perfect

German. Rather against his will, Otto was once taken by him to see Bukharin, then still tolerated; but I remember nothing of what impressed Otto there. The next red director was an older man, who also made a very good impression and could speak German well: Komarovski. The activity grew markedly in his time; we had more space and seventy-five co-workers. We suggested to Komarovski that our teaching could succeed better if we divided this mass up into several parallel groups, each of which could then learn every phase of the work and how to operate as a team. A gathering was called at the end of the day, to explain this and to discuss it; then a vote was to be taken. I protested. But Komarovski, standing by the wall on the other side of the room, said in German: 'just leave it to us, we know what we have to do.' But I was glad when the vote supported our view. I came across this Komarovski in the book by Alexander Weissburg, *Conspiracy of Silence*. Weissburg met him in prison in 1937 and asked him, as with all the others, 'what did Stalin really intend?' Komarovski was profoundly sad. The number on his Communist Party membership card was said to be less than ten. Asmus was ambassador to Sweden or Finland. One day he was recalled and shot. We learned this from the newspaper. He told us he had been with the revolution as a sixteen-year-old. He told of a lecture at which it had been discussed who should be killed first, when they reached Berlin: the Social Democrats or the National Socialists. 'The problems they have!', he said laughing. We Social Democrats were called 'Social Fascists' in Moscow. One of the women in our group from Vienna left the Social Democrats and became a Communist Party member. The architect Grete Schütte-Lihotsky, Otto's old friend and colleague in the Siedlerverband [estate-housing association], underwent a similar change: surprising and disappointing. She had gone from Vienna to Frankfurt in order to work with the architect Ernst May, and then she and her husband went with May and several of his group to Moscow. We spent many lively evenings together with various colleagues of hers, in her apartment, drinking tea, eating apples. They talked about how little they could feel at home in Moscow, with the change to neo-classicism. Now they stuck many extra columns into their plans, so that as many as possible would be done away with again. Other stories, too, could fill one with sadness or scepticism: the starving people who came to the trains; the loss of material through uncontrolled unloading, and so on. Like all foreigners, Grete Schütte-Lihotsky had to leave the USSR after the show trials. She read the reports inside the country, while we read them from outside—which may have made all the difference. She came to visit us in The Hague. After a long conversation with Otto, she came crying to me. The disappointment was obviously mutual. I could not really be of comfort to her."¹²

Miscellaneous mistakes

"A superficial outline of Neurath's career reveals he was a professional philosopher, political revolutionary, museum-director and descriptive statistician." (page 299) "Superficial" is right, but "misleading" would be more accurate. Neurath was certainly not a "professional" philosopher, and I would not call him a philosopher at all (neither would he have wanted to be called one). "Political revolutionary" is a dull and inaccurate term for someone who wanted radical political change; but who believed in dialogue, socialist democracy and who was not a communist. "Descriptive statistician" hardly seems the right term for someone who neither gathered nor computed statistics. Yes, Neurath was a museum director. But if one wants a single label, I think that "encyclopedist" would do.

"Thematic museums with an ideological mission and a propagandist function are phenomena which are unique to Austro-German cultural life and history." (page 301) One would like some evidence for this extraordinary assertion. As it stands, one doesn't know whether to start contesting Chizlett's notion of "ideology" and "propaganda" or to point out that, within his own world-view, Austro-German culture cannot be "unique" in this, because there is the example of museums in the USSR.

"The museum was developed by Neurath as a medium of political propaganda rather than public education." (page 301) Here one should point out to Clive Chizlett that Neurath's "Gesellschafts- und Wirtschaftsmuseum in Wien"—to give its full title (Social- and Economic Museum of Vienna)—was an integral part of the city of Vienna from 1925 to 1934. It was one of the network of organizations supported by, working with and for the Social-Democratic city government. Vienna in these years was the setting for one of the more remarkable episodes in the history of European socialism: a genuinely popular and democratic experiment in city government. This museum was one of public education, in support of the Social-Democratic municipal policies. Chizlett's fervid accusations ("totalitarian ideologist") and lumbering statements ("The semantic distinction between a political museum and a museum of politics is subtle but very important to distinguish") suggest ignorance of history, as well as of how to make an argument.

For all his air of exact and total description, Chizlett manages to muddle the simplest point of Isotype. Reading Chizlett, I doubt that anyone would understand that the first and founding principle of Isotype is this: a pictorial symbol is taken to represent a number of things; then it is repeated. The wish was always to stick to things, rather than abstractions, and to what could be easily and comfortably comprehended. Chizlett writes that

“individual pictographs may have a value such as a percentage” (page 303), but Isotype work avoids this more abstracted level of data. Isotype work uses equal-area projections for maps. The particular projection used was drawn by the cartographer Karl Peucker. Mollweide’s equal-area projection was not “normally used” (page 302).

In conclusion

Otto Neurath’s Isotype work is certainly open to criticism and discussion, but I do not think that Clive Chizlett’s piece makes a serious contribution to the debate. A crux of Chizlett’s misunderstanding of Isotype lies in this passage: “. . . the charts are unscientific. It is no use generating descriptive statistics as *objects d’art*. The only purpose of descriptive statistics is to provide a useful and useable basis for inferential statistics. It follows that many of the charts published by Neurath and his associates in the 1920s and 1930s are either inept or their purpose is merely to function as *objets d’art* or propaganda.” (page 303)

The either/or dogmatism here—as throughout Chizlett’s piece—cannot account for what he attempts to describe. Isotype work was self-evidently something other than the hard notion of “science” that Chizlett seems to want. It was not simply propaganda, nor was it simply art. Isotype was an approach to treating and graphically configuring material: an approach to design. The best Isotype charts show a system, a logic, an honesty of thinking that is remarkable. In this work, some principles are discovered and are seen to inform the configuration of material, which then finds its own form. This logic is there in the rules of arrangement and (less precisely) in the way in which the graphic elements are drawn. It is this approach, or way of thinking, that is the enduring value of Isotype—for any kind of design.¹³

The typical Isotype products were large charts in a public space. This place was a municipal institution, open in the evenings, free of charge and accessible to anyone. Groups of people gathered around the charts and argued over the issues they presented. People learned about the life of their city, about their place in the world; they learned to think and to argue, to get on with each other. This was Neurath’s ideal. It was a democratic and a socialist ideal. This vision began to be realized—in fits and starts, inconsistently, but sometimes truly—above all in Vienna between 1925 and 1934.

Robin Kinross is a typographer, writer and publisher, working in London. He studied typography at the University of Reading, and then went on to write an MPhil thesis on Otto Neurath's Contribution to Visual Communication (University of Reading, 1979). He has worked as an editorial typographer and written extensively on typography: its practice, theory and history. His book *Modern Typography* was published in 1992. He is now working on a book with the Dutch type designer Fred Smeijers and on a documentary monograph about the typographer Anthony Froshaug.

Endnotes

1 The best single English-language source remains: Otto Neurath. 1973. *Empiricism and Sociology*. Dordrecht & Boston: Reidel. This is an anthology, edited by Marie Neurath and R.S.Cohen, comprising biographical memories by contemporaries, a wide range of texts by Neurath and an extensive if incomplete bibliography of his writings (277 items). It was published as the first volume of a Vienna Circle Collection. The second Neurath work in this series was his *Philosophical Papers 1913-1946*, edited by Marie Neurath and R.S.Cohen (Dordrecht & Boston: Reidel, 1983). Much of Neurath's writing is now available in German in a projected complete works published by Hölder-Pichler-Tempsky in Vienna: *Gesammelte philosophische und methodologische Schriften* (2 volumes), edited by Rudolf Haller and Heiner Rutte, 1981; and *Gesammelte bildpädagogische Schriften*, edited by Rudolf Haller and Robin Kinross, 1991.

The Otto and Marie Neurath Isotype Collection was given to the University of Reading in 1971 and is now housed in the Department of Typography & Graphic Communication at Reading. In 1975, an exhibition was made at the University from this material. The accompanying catalogue, *Graphic communication through Isotype* (University of Reading, 1975) was revised and reprinted in 1981. In 1980, the Department of Typography at Reading published an edition of Otto Neurath's *International Picture Language*. These two documents are still available. Much can also be gleaned from a critical reading of a work that accompanied another exhibition: *Arbeiterbildung in der Zwischenkriegszeit*, edited by Friedrich Stadler, Vienna: Löcker, 1982.

I should add that my own involvement in Isotype stems from work with the group that made the 1975 Reading exhibition, from postgraduate research resulting in an MPhil thesis at Reading, "Otto Neurath's contribution to visual communication (1925-45): the history, graphic language and theory of Isotype" (1979) and from ten years of editorial and translation work and friendship with Marie Neurath until her death in 1986.

2 Ray Monk. 1990. *Ludwig Wittgenstein*. London: Jonathan Cape, 581-586.

3 Marie Neurath wrote three letters to Bartley in July and August 1974, soon after his book had been published in its British edition. Bartley replied in two letters written in July 1974. I have notes on, but

not copies of these letters, which Marie Neurath showed me when I was working on my MPhil thesis. After her death, and after a dispute over her will, Marie Neurath's papers were sold to the Österreichische Nationalbibliothek in Vienna.

4 See, for example, the memories of his friend and colleague, Wolfgang Schumann, in Neurath, *Empiricism and Sociology*, 15-17.

5 Neurath wrote a vivid and detailed account of his experiences in Munich: Neurath, *Empiricism and Sociology*, 18-28.

For a full account of the episode, with some description of Neurath's role, see: Allan Mitchell. 1965. *Revolution in Bavaria 1918-19*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.

6 If Clive Chizlett is determined to go hunting for Communist users of graphic statistics, he might investigate the career of Alexander [Sandor] Radó. Obituaries of Radó in British newspapers (*The Guardian*, 21 August 1981, *The Times*, 22 August 1981) emphasized his career as a 'Soviet spy master.' Radó was the author of *Atlas für Politik, Wirtschaft, Arbeiterbewegung*. 1930. Vienna: Verlag für Literatur und Politik and *Atlas of Today and Tomorrow*. 1939. London: Gollancz. The graphic mediocrity of these works provides striking contrast to similar Isotype productions.

7 From his contribution to: Neurath, *Empiricism and Sociology*, 55.

8 In: Neurath, *Empiricism and Sociology*, 56.

9 The article of 1935 is available in English as Pseudorationality of Falsification, in Neurath, *Philosophical Papers 1913-1946*, 121-131.

10 Willard C. Brinton. 1914. *Graphic Methods for Presenting Facts*. New York and London: McGraw-Hill, see especially page 40.

11 *Zur Geschichte und Statistik des Volksschulwesens im In- und Auslande*. 1898. Vienna: Verlag des Sonderausstellungs-Commission "Jugendhalle."

12 This is taken from a long unpublished autobiographical text, written (in German) by Marie Neurath in 1980. In 1984, I made an English translation — titled "What I remember" — from which I quote here. After Marie Neurath's death and the dispute over her will, copies of the manuscript in its German and English versions would have been among the papers sold to the Österreichische Nationalbibliothek.

Among the people mentioned here: Joseph Scheer was a technician who helped construct charts; Josef Jodlbauer was the administrator of the Social and Economic Museum; Friedrich Bauermeister was a "transformer," together with Marie Neurath.

13 For attempts to draw lessons of Isotype for graphic design, see Michael Twyman's essay, The Significance of Isotype in *Graphic Communication through Isotype*, 7-17 and Robin Kinross, On the Influence of Isotype, in *Information Design Journal*, 2:2, 122-130.

SPIRALS 91.

Thomas Ockerse, editor.

Providence, Rhode Island: Rhode Island School of Design. Large format, five softbound books in a slipcase, printed in two colors, many illustrations. \$125.00

One of my art history friends, when recently caught in a collegial mood, reminded me of the value of the theme “people, products and processes” as a useful way to organize content. It seems that the producers of *SPIRALS 91* were also aware of the value of this approach. The project coordinator, Thomas Ockerse, in the introduction to Book 1, states that the basic rationale for the publication is to “provide a simple and direct means to share our activities and thoughts with others.” This generosity deserves attention by all serious design professionals.

As a record of activities by faculty, students and visiting lecturers at Rhode Island School of Design, *SPIRALS 91* is impressive for its physical form as well as for its content. It comes as a boxed set of five paperback publications, called “books” and is in an A4 metric format (210 x 297 mm). The layout is unusual in that the flow of pages moves in opposing directions depending on the orientation of a given book thereby locating two books in each single physical volume. As one would expect from RISD, the entire series is beautifully designed and exquisitely printed. Progressive typographic page layouts complement the information in the articles. Black and white as well as color photographic reproductions of student work and other materials appear

crisp and detailed as presented on quality coated stock. The slipcase is cardboard which has been imprinted. This package for the books might have been of more substantial material as it initially gives one less than the qualitative feel that is so apparent when one reaches the books contained inside. The contents of *SPIRALS 91* include in Book 1 program philosophy and information about the Graphic Design Department at RISD, Book number 2 articles from lectures by RISD alumni and visiting lecturers, in Books 3, 4, 5 and 6 results from teaching, in Book 7 graduate teaching results and in Book 8 information about the Tomas Gonda Prize. It is difficult to review this publication without commenting directly on the educational program in graphic design at RISD. After reviewing the books, I was attracted to John Dewey's quote from 1929 (mistakenly attributed in *SPIRALS 91* to Siegfried Maser) "Theory without practice is empty; practice without theory is blind." Theory is at the heart of the program at RISD and my perception is that it drives the curriculum and makes it vital, fresh and innovative. I found myself pulled back again and again to the article by Thomas Ockerse titled, *Graphic Design Education: A Position Paper*. The document was developed over a number of years and articulates the ideological framework of the program at

RISD in a manner that reads like poetry. With both the practice of graphic design and education in such a current state of flux, it is a good sign to read such an eloquent statement about education and practice. Professionals involved in every facet of graphic design would benefit substantially from the solid dose of theory that is so well represented in *SPIRALS 91*.

In the design professions, documenting important historical events is not unusual, but it has been erratic at best. *SPIRALS 91* joins distinguished company from the past that has shared similar purposes. For example the famous Bauhaus Books which totaled fourteen volumes and were produced through 1931, were an outstanding record of many creative people, products and processes that happened in those years in Weimar and Dessau. These books dealt with problems of art, science and technology, and for the specialist of today they attempt to furnish information about the complex problems, working methods and research results in various areas of design, thereby providing the individual with a criterion for his own studies and with progress made in other areas. Without the Bauhaus documentation, much of the detail of the significant theory of the famous German school would be lost. Between 1950 and 1968, also in Germany,

the Journals of the Institute of Design, Ulm, were initiated by Anthony Froshaug. In their way, these journals save for us a history of that school's unique work in developing a systematic theoretical approach to various design disciplines. The most profound contribution of *SPIRALS 91* is in its documentation and preservation of important visionary messages about design education. Faculty at RISD have recognized the significance of their activities in graphic design and taken the initiative to record it in time and space. They deserve our collective applause for this record. As author Wallace Stegner has said, "Every action is an idea before it is an action, and perhaps a feeling before it is an idea and every idea rests upon other ideas that have preceded it in time." It is obvious that important things happened before and they will happen after *SPIRALS 91*, but this slice of history is safely preserved for the record. If, in fact, *SPIRALS 91* is the first in what will be an annual publication, the project becomes even more valuable as it gives us all a great deal to look forward to in the future. *SPIRALS 91* hopefully will influence others to document their efforts. Having long been a respectful viewer of the excellent educational program at RISD and also one who is very committed to documentation and preservation, I am delighted that this publication exists. Other progressive schools and institutions should learn from

the example set by *SPIRALS 91*. Those involved in its creation have made a contribution by which all graphic design professionals benefit by making visible otherwise intangible aspects of the people, processes and products of Rhode Island School of Design's Graphic Design Department.

R. Roger Remington, the reviewer of this book, is a professor of graphic design, Rochester Institute of Technology and author of *Nine Pioneers in American Graphic Design*.

***Black Riders, The Visible
Language of Modernism***

Jerome McGann

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A title like *Black Riders, The Visible Language of Modernism* is guaranteed to get my attention and a review here. My interest in this title was sharpened by having recently reviewed a new typographic history by Robin Kinross *Modern Typography* (see *Visible Language*, 27:3). That these two books explore the phenomenon of modernism in language use indicates that a certain analytical distance from modernism has been achieved. Not only can we point to but we can also dissect modernism. Looking back from the future, what will appear as a unique aspect of modernism is the widespread specialism and sharp differentiation between the wordsmiths and the typographic creators and interpreters. But crossovers between language use (words as prose or poetry) and its visual form (calligraphy, typography or the word made visible) were also a modernist event. It may well be that the twentieth century brought forward the metaphor of language used as a means to explore the order, syntax and code aspects of sensory experience including visual, auditory, and kinesthetic expressions.

Jerome McGann observes on an early page (xii) that "All texts run as difference engines." He is not content to merely state this, he executes his text with an invisible interrogator who interrupts his

line of argument to query and cajole—he draws our attention to the text and its ability to state and to be contradicted. He insists on the social aspect of language. In this way he folds and refolds relationships concerning the physicality of the text and the self-referential aspects of writing and reading and the investigation of language itself.

The surface of the text is another of his modern filters. The late nineteenth century publishing renaissance of William Morris' Kelmscott Press and the Bodley Head are prominent characters in this book. But this is not a fussy, antiquarian interest—these presses signify a particular attitude. "Don't misread the aesthetic significance of the Renaissance of printing. Brecht's epic theater and Stein's writing are both part of its legacy. Self-conscious text production like that of Kelmscott and Bodley Head put a frame around romantic writing (as Brecht threw a frame around realistic drama and thereby brought important constructivist and reflexive elements to the scene of textuality." (21) The publishing activity itself signified another modern shift. The innovative approach to publishing and distribution developed at the Bodley Head went beyond audience definition by economic characteristics alone and into defining audience by their cultural or ideological points of view.

This foreshadows much of the mass marketing and segmented marketing science of this century—getting even intellectual goods to market was subject to rational analysis.

Once seen, editions from the Kelmscott Press are not easily forgotten. The boldness and authority of appearance that these volumes display insists on a physicality, a truly tangible word. Here the letterpress "kiss" is far from timid and the vigor and high contrast of the typographic design interferes with easy reading. The words do not fade into thought but state again and again "see me." In contrast, the Bodley Head approach to typography was lighter, simpler and more elegant, here the page was clear and easy to read.

From a literary point of view, McGann sidesteps Mallarmé as the usual point of departure and instead works from an American frame of reference discussing for example, Emily Dickenson, Ezra Pound, Gertrude Stein and Susan Howe. All these authors used the materiality of the text as evidenced by literary and bibliographic cues: calculated line breaks, execution by handwriting on selected paper, careful choice of publisher and exploitation of the spatial field of the page and the codex.

I am particularly indebted to the author for introducing me to Robert Carlton Brown's *The Readies*. Brown states his program upfront: "I'm for new methods of reading and writing and I believe the up-to-date reader deserves an eye-ful when he buys something to read." (*Readies*, 1) And McGann observes, "At the center of Brown's program was his half-serious half-playful invention, a "reading machine." This apparatus was supposed to provide the reader with the power to read in all directions and at any speed, to change type size and typeface at will, to leap forward or backward in the text: to browse, to speed-read, to connect any and all parts of the text in any and all ways." (*Black Riders*, 88) This brings us to a decription of hypertext, as yet unnamed in 1930, but increasing in both appearance and utility at the end of the twentieth century. Hypertext blurs the roles of reader and writer, of prose writer or poet and typographer, interpreter, annotator, diagrammer or visualizer of a text. The boundaries are fading as language expression is reconstituted in its entire set of references to language itself and its disposition on page or screen and to it's particular physical appearance.

While McGann's audience is largely the literary and literary criticism community, the previously reviewed Kinross book

addresses largely a design or typographic community. That the ideas of modernism pervade both communities is obvious, but what seems increasingly strange is the separation of attention to content and form along disciplinary lines. McGann understands that connection but chose to address his own scholarly community. Personally, I am waiting for a textual celebration that brings the multi-layered heroic language picture into view with Baudelaire, Mallarmé, Pound, Stein, Dickens, Mayakovsky, E.E. Cummings, zaum, the Noigandres Group, El Lissitzky, new typography . . .

Sharon Helmer Poggenpohl, the reviewer of this book, is an associate professor of design, Institute of Design, IIT, and editor and publisher of this journal.

Stop Stealing Sheep and Find Out How Type Works

Erik Spiekermann and E.M.

Ginger. Mountain View, California: Adobe Press. \$19.50 and \$24.95 (Canadian).

ISBN 0-672-48543-5

Herr Spiekermann, Curb that Meta-phore!

When Edward Johnston was approached to design a new typeface for the Nonesuch Press, he said there was little point as 'There are two or even three good roman types already.' The authors (on behalf of Adobe Systems) set out to explain to the layman and to us why we need more typefaces and how we should use them.

This is Erik Spiekermann's second book and he draws on an insight into the mystery of type gained as a very successful typographic practitioner; founder of MetaDesign Berlin and designer of Meta typeface. E.M. Ginger was the editor of the sadly missed magazine *Fine Print*.

The 'Gingermann' pattern of this book is aimed to show appropriate type layout and detailing through pictorial analogies between a typographical arrangement and something more familiar.

For instance a formal page arrangement of a book is set opposite the picture of a room centered around a bed; whereas a magazine page faces a multi-functional drawing-room; a recipe book is within a spread that says 'kitchens are rooms with clearly defined purpose . . .' and shows you a picture of a kitchen.

So the book goes on, 80 or so spreads, 160 illustrations to make a useful introduction of typographical truisms to its well targeted audience, the casual reader who may use a desktop system.

The problem is that typography is not a kitchen, type is not the gear you pack for the beach, nor is there much parallel with different line measures and a marathon when compared to the 100 yard sprint. *Type is Type* and maybe that is what Gill was saying in his famous but gnomic phrase 'Letters are things, not pictures of things,' or as the authors quote Freud, 'Sometimes a cigar is just a cigar.' Kipling put it more crudely, and Michel Foucault said it again more recently in his thesis 'This is Not a Pipe.' Analogies are a distraction that conceal the truth.

About three quarters of the way through the pattern really comes to pieces for it is stated that short lines of text need reduced word and letterspacing and for long lines of text we should 'steel sheep'; this is of course Goudy's analogy with just such felons who would letterspace lower case type. This proposition is illustrated with a picture of a traffic jam and spaced out vehicles in highway lanes.

It is accepted that long lines need increased *leading* but all that

needs to be said here is what the layman can himself observe, that the eye otherwise can return to the beginning of the line it has just read. More basically than that, letters must combine well into words and then the eye and mind will take in whole groups of words at a pass. So with rare exceptions we need letters that make evenly weighted words and words that make harmonious texts.

The way of achieving this in text was set out by Edward Johnston and seems still to be unassailable: given the felicitous disparity in letter shapes, the space *between* letters should balance the largest inherent space *within* the letters. It follows that two lowercase 'oo's should have the same visible space separating them as the space represented by each counter: Words should have just enough space between them to distinguish them as whole entities without interrupting the flow of the phrase.

Very simple diagrams have often explained this. However, we all should usefully and properly re-examine all these old precepts, but it does no good to advance new ideas here to a lay audience as though they were engraved in tablets of stone. Such ideas need examination, debate and consensus before they are exposed to a wider world.

The text of this book is presented throughout, in three different ways, each in its own type style, all three on one spread. This is a well intentioned 'hyper-presentation' technique, but it is confusing. I found it difficult to settle to one thread of the argument, and the sensible thing would be to read the book three times covering up the polygraphic glosses in turn with a spare sheet of paper.

The more informative paragraphs (and there is a lot of copper-bottomed information buried in there) are sometimes printed in a yellow ink that disappears under any ordinary tungsten reading light. Maybe I should buy a blue bulb to go in my dedicated bedside reading lamp; or better, I should remove myself and this book and the masking apparatus to my multi-functional drawing-room.

For sound, proven rules of typography, I recommend Jost Hochuli's series of little books published by Agfa/Computographic. These cost no more than a phone call.

A very interesting and serious study of many typographical issues raised in *Stop Stealing Sheep*. . . is a substantial report, *In Black & White* — a research and development report on typography and legibility, just published in English by the

Graphic High School (Glentvej 67, DK-2400 Copenhagen NV, Denmark).

Colin Banks, the reviewer of this book, is a principle in Banks and Miles, a design consultancy in London. He is a longtime typophile and advisory board member to this journal.

Regarding Clive Chizlett's article
Damned Lies. And Statistics.

Those who know of my connection with Isotype and notice my name on the list of members of the advisory board of this journal might well assume that I endorse the views expressed in Clive Chizlett's article, Damned Lies. And Statistics. Otto Neurath and Soviet Propaganda in the 1930s, (26:3/4). I should therefore like to disassociate myself publicly from it. I was sent a draft of it some time ago, which I responded to critically and, I had hoped, constructively. In particular, I made it clear that some of the assertions made in it could not be supported by the facts as I understood them.

In this issue Robin Kinross convincingly refutes many of the points made by Clive Chizlett, drawing on primary sources wherever possible. I would merely add that the Isotype archives at Reading University are no more than a two hour journey from Clive Chizlett's home and that, to my knowledge, he has not consulted them.

Michael Twyman
University of Reading
United Kingdom

Regarding the need for typographic criticism

I continue to be surprised by the plugs given by the type manufacturers for themselves in the print material that they generate in the name of good typography. They do not remind us that they are in the type business for a profit. Yet it is evident in the nuances of the speeches they give and the catalogs and newsletters they circulate.

Without going broke on the matter, I am buying up the last old books written by masters like Stanley Morison. These books force me to realize that the profession is staggering from a total industrialization of phenomenal proportions. Consequently, we apparently must undergo all that comes with total democratization: the few good faces, the many bad, the oversight of the typographer's responsibility to language, the plethora of 8th grade copy of new glitzy magazines on a hot issue that sells—type.

You have mentioned that you are very interested in figuring out how the journal can participate in a dialogue revolving around the idea of developing typographic criticism. Contemporary typography is wild and undisciplined with a proliferation of poor type design and a lack of standards for the dozens of interpretations of a single cut of one face. *Visible Language* certainly can contribute to the profession

and forge new ground by elevating a rather straggling design mentality that is all too eager to accept that which comes to them from the type manufacturers.

Now more than ever, we need type cops—to protect us from the hype of the manufacturers, to protect us from the nasty cuts in the marketplace, to compare and contrast the typographic products of various manufacturers. Further, visual communicators need to be reminded more than ever (in a climate of lightly taxing graphic design showcase literature) about our roles in society as they were seen in the 40s—as role models themselves—for careful typographic design. We need to talk about legibility and to revive authorities who have no major commercial interests to sacrifice.

Daniel Picard
Majuscule Design
Montréal, Canada

Bassnett-McGuire, Susan. 1991. *Translation Studies*. New York: Routledge, Chapman & Hall. ISBN 0-415-06528-3 paper, \$15.95, 168 pages

Global communication and contact give rise to a more intense interest in translation and the problem of language 'equivalence.' The author presents a clear and readable introduction to the central issues of translation, a history of translation theory from the Romans through George Steiner and ends with the particular problems of literary translation.

Bonsiepe, Gui. 1993. *Teoria e Pratica del Disegno Industriale: Elementi per una Manufattura Critica*. Milan: Feltrinelli. ISBN 88-07-42067-8 60.000 Lire, paper, 250 pages, many illustrations

Gui Bonsiepe has a long perspective on industrial design—as a teacher at Ulm, as a government consultant in Argentina and Brazil, as an interface developer in the United States and most recently as a teacher in Germany. His observations of method and pedagogy in *Theory and Practice of Industrial Design* are worth our attention. To date, the book is available only in Italian.

Broos, Kees and Paul Hefting. 1993. *Dutch Graphic Design, a Century*. Cambridge: MIT Press. ISBN 0-262-02358-X \$75.00, large format, 224 pages, extensive full color illustrations

For a small country the Dutch have had an inordinately large impact on design. When I asked a Dutch designer how he accounted for this, he said simply that because the Netherlands was so small, they had to trade—to compete in the international marketplace and attention to design gave them a competitive edge. This beautiful book covers Dutch design from 1890 to 1990. There is much to contemplate here: the evolution of a typographic sensibility, the changing of the guard from constructivism and De Stijl to a dada excursion,

through modernism to postmodernism as shown by the design of pre-eminent Dutch designers. The threads that hold the century together in this work are consummate attention to craft and attention to meaning and its relationship to form rather than to formalism alone.

Danesi, Marcel. 1993. *Vico, Metaphor and the Origin of Language*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.
ISBN 0-253-31607-3
hardbound, \$35.00, 200 pages

The origin of human language remains open to debate, in fact the debate was so ill-formed that at various points (1866 in Paris and 1911 in London) the linguistic and philological societies of those cities banned the topic. Danesi reconsiders the work of the eighteenth-century philosopher Giambattista Vico. He begins by exploring glottogenic theories and research, moves on to an indepth investigation of Vico's contribution and ends with a look at Vico's ideas in terms of contemporary research in cognitive, social and biological science. It is worth noting that this is part of Thomas A. Sebeok's series for Indiana University Press: *Advances in Semiotics*.

Hefting, Paul, ed. 1992.
Tel Design 1962-1992.
Amsterdam: BIS Publishers.
ISBN 9072007239
hardbound, 88 pages, extensively illustrated in full color

This book celebrates one of the oldest Dutch design consultancies. (It is interesting to observe that the Dutch Ministry of Welfare, Public Health and Culture subsidized the book.) The text is in English and Dutch and covers various aspects of Tel's practice which began as an industrial design consultancy, but evolved into one that is primarily con-

cerned with communication design. While the text is brief and to the point, the work of this firm is carefully documented and sometimes presented in a photographic environment that maximizes the impact (and importance) of the work. The production values are superlative—like the glossiest of annual reports.

Heusser, Martin, ed. 1993. *Word & Image Interactions*. Basel: Wiese Verlag. ISBN 3-909158-56-0 hardbound, 272 pages, illustrated

During the summer of 1990, the University of Zürich hosted the Second International Conference on Word and Image. The contents of this book were selected from the papers presented. They are gathered into sections titled: text, illustration, the sister arts, painting, photography and film and varia. For the most part the articles owe their focus to either art history or literary criticism. It is a substantial, scholarly and well produced book.

Hodges, Matthew E. and Russell M. Sasnett, eds. 1993. *Multimedia Computing, Case Studies from MIT Project Athena*. Reading, MA: Addison-Wesley ISBN 0-201-52029-X hardbound, \$ 32.95, 304 pages, illustrated with a few in full color

Over time, multimedia applications may rival the book, but at present we are at the beginning of an evolutionary search for structure and form for this media. Hodges and Sasnett's book is a valuable resource for reflection. Part 1 provides an overview of the conceptual issues in the design of multimedia, part 2 surveys applications from Project Athena, while part 3 examines major technical issues including time, pacing, synchronization and document structure. The book moves between general concepts and specific examples with ease.

Lanham, Richard A. 1993.
*The Electronic Word: Democracy,
Technology and the Arts.*
Chicago: University of Chicago
Press.
ISBN 0-226-46884-4
\$19.95, two high density floppy
disks
ISBN 0-226-46883-6 (book
version), \$22.50

Rand, Paul. 1993.
Design Form and Chaos.
New Haven: Yale University Press.
ISBN 0-300-05553-6
hardbound, \$45.00, 218 pages,
extensively illustrated in full color

Sassoon, Rosemary, ed. 1993.
Computers and Typography.
London: Intellect Books
ISBN 1-871516-23-4
paper, £14.95, 208 pages,
illustrated

The title and the form of presenta-
tion are one. Lanham, a professor
of English at UCLA, presents his
essays in hypertext. While I do not
like to read the screen, I found
myself thoroughly engaged with
his thoughts on the changes to
reading and writing, creating and
consuming, making and criticizing
that the computer poses. The
navigation is simple, the electronic
book is under-designed (perhaps
for utility), the type is boring or
cute but the author's ideas are
well worth pondering.

Paul Rand has become an Ameri-
can design icon for the last half of
the twentieth century and he is
increasingly speaking his mind.
Many of the essays in this book,
while updated, appeared else-
where. The book is a tour de force
of book design à la Rand—its
most important aspect is the
documentation of his work along
with his commonsense commen-
tary on design process.

Typographers and designers decry
the democratization of typogra-
phy, nevertheless powerful typo-
graphic tools are routinely avail-
able on personal computers. The
author now more fully controls
the text. Sassoon has assembled
papers from experts whose inten-
tion is to raise visual awareness of
letterform and text and to point
to other sources of information
rather than to provide a quick
typographic fix for the computer
user.

Turner, Sylvie. 1991.
*Which Paper? A Guide to Choosing
and Using Fine Paper.*
New York: Design Press.
ISBN 0-8306-3967-5
paper, \$24.95, 144 pages,
illustrated

Paper is a beautiful and even magical surface on which we communicate our ideas. Turner's book focuses on fine paper for book artists, printmakers and calligraphers. The qualities of paper, handmade, mouldmade or machine made are described, cultural traditions regarding paper are explored and the appendices contain paper sources, a glossary, paper sizes and a list of the papers discussed within the book. This is a fine resource.

Viscomi, Joseph. 1994.
Blake and the Idea of the Book.
Princeton: Princeton University
Press.
ISBN 0-691-06962-X
hardbound, \$49.50, 424 pages,
extensively illustrated, a few in
color

Viscomi is both a professor of English and an accomplished printmaker. It is the later attribute that makes his investigative approach to Blake's book production unique: the author created facsimiles of Blake's work in his own studio in order to better understand the method. His conclusion is that Blake did