

# Reaching the People: Isotype Beyond the West

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The potential of Isotype for communicating to diverse, international audiences is generally attributed to the simplified imagery it employed to produce compelling and easily understood visual explanations. While it frequently supported and was supported by verbal language, Isotype's 'picture language' circumvented linguistic complexities and the obstacles to communication they created.<sup>1</sup> The emphasis placed on the international application of Isotype is embedded in its name and in the title of Otto Neurath's *International picture language*, the book that describes Isotype most fully.<sup>2</sup> But how effective was Isotype when deployed beyond the modernised West where it was mainly used? An answer does not come readily to hand since very few opportunities arose to test it in the developing, non-Western world during more than four decades of Isotype activity. One opportunity, however, did arise through work in British colonial West Africa. Between 1952 and 1958 commissions were undertaken in Sierra Leone, Nigeria and the Gold Coast (Ghana), countries then moving towards independence (figure 1). Those in Nigeria, for its Western Regional Government, were the most substantial and provide some evidence of how Isotype fared at the further reaches of the international sphere its inventors hoped it might serve.

Before the Isotype Institute's contact with Nigeria, its director Marie Neurath had never visited Africa; nor had her late husband Otto. But Africa was, in key respects, fundamental to Isotype. It was there that knowledge about economy, governance, health, agriculture and much else was urgently needed; and there that conditions of sub-literacy or illiteracy were thought at once most suitable and most challenging for visual education. Such conditions offered the

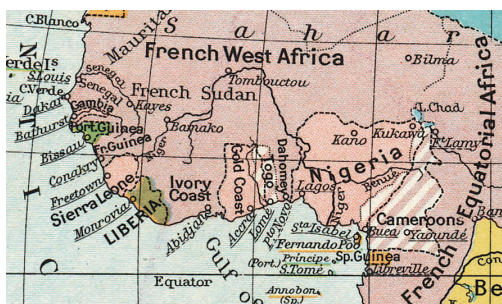


Fig. 1

West Africa  
(political),  
early 1950s.

possibility of testing the claim that visual education in general and Isotype in particular—conceived and, by 1940, deployed only in Europe and North America—could function effectively beyond the West.<sup>3</sup>

Despite the lack of opportunities early on to test Isotype so far afield, a substantial meeting with Africa did draw near in 1943 that hints at how it might have been used in this context. That year Otto Neurath and the Isotype Institute became involved in plans for a travelling exhibition about Africa, initiated by the British Colonial Office (figure 2). A proposal for the exhibition, titled ‘Human life in Africa’, was written by Neurath; it was informed by the view that Africa should not be placed in ethnographic isolation but instead seen as having much in common with Britain. Human knowledge in both places was essentially comparable if not always developed to the same extent. This view is seemingly reinforced by the proposal’s display strategies that make no concession to differences among those attending the exhibition, whether in Britain or in Africa. A meeting with the Africans should therefore take place on (more or less) equal terms through communication techniques able to reach a variety of audiences. As Neurath insisted, ‘the cosmopolitan pure human approach should prevail.’<sup>4</sup>

By the early 1950s, and after Otto Neurath’s death, Africa was finally met when Marie Neurath and the Isotype Institute became involved in publishing initiatives there. These were being pursued by the London-based book packaging company Adprint; it, in turn, had been encouraged by the British Colonial Office, which ‘wanted parts of West Africa ... linked by magazines and books’.<sup>5</sup> The work would be handled through a new Adprint subsidiary, Buffalo Books. The Isotype Institute had already contributed to numerous Adprint publications since the early 1940s and Buffalo Books was an

Fig. 2

Otto Neurath, sketch, added to a letter to Paul Rotha, 24 May 1943 (detail); IC 1/44.

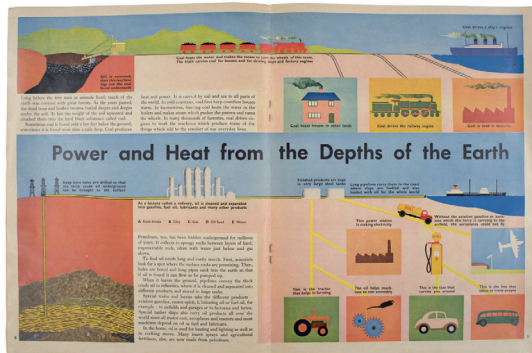
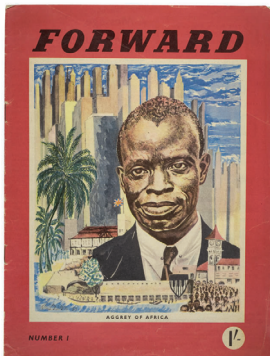
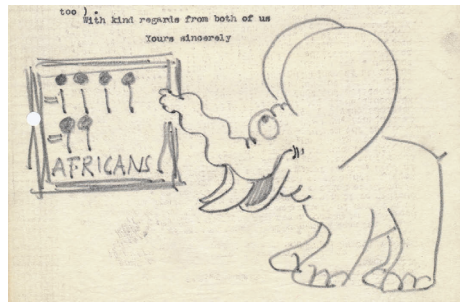


Fig. 3

*Forward* magazine, no. 1, probably 1954, front cover and spread with Isotype illustrated diagram, 325 × 250 mm (cover); distributed in the Gold Coast (Ghana).

extension of this relationship.<sup>6</sup> The first project was a prospective colour magazine named *Forward*, developed in consultation with several West African governments (figure 3). A trial number was produced in English and vernacular languages, and incorporated articles, illustrations and comic strips by West African writers and artists; Isotype contributions included illustrated diagrams. Despite its encouraging blend of content, *Forward* made it no further than its trial number, issued in the Gold Coast. But other, related initiatives were already well underway, now with the government of the Western Region of Nigeria.<sup>7</sup>



Fig. 4

**Portrait of Obafemi  
Awolowo**, around 1950.

The 1950s were a unique period in Nigerian history. Over the course of the decade the country made increasing gains in self-determination until, in 1960, it achieved full independence from Britain. Much of Nigeria's growing independence during the 1950s was exercised regionally, and of its several regions the governance of the Western Region was by some distance the most politically and socially progressive. In 1953, the British Government convened one of a series of conferences intended to strengthen Nigeria's constitutional footing in the period leading up to its anticipated independence. One of the Western Region's delegates was Obafemi Awolowo who, as Minister of Local Government and leader of the ruling Action Group party, shaped the region's political programme (figure 4). While in London he was introduced to Isotype and the possibilities it held for communicating his government's programme of reform to the Western Region's people.<sup>8</sup>

In her memoir 'What I remember', Marie Neurath recalls her first contact with Awolowo:

One day Awolowo ... was expected. Foges came to me with a short text by him and said: 'I would like to make clear to these people that they need visual methods in their country; read through this text quickly and make drawings for its main theses; not that [Awolowo] wishes to illustrate it; he should just see how pictures would help him.' So I read quickly, plucked out a few points, and made some pencil sketches on slips of paper. I was there when Awolowo arrived in his Yoruba robes, together with his private secretary. After a while

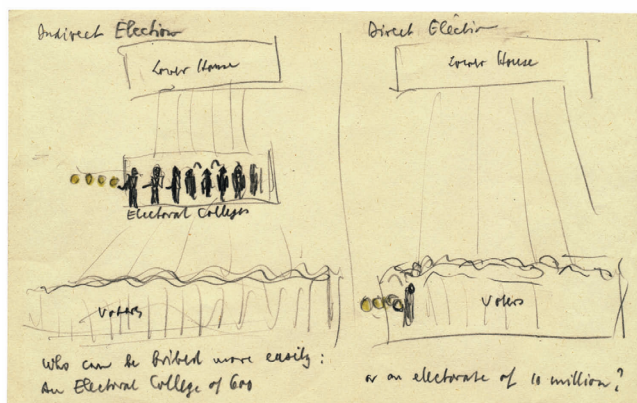


Fig. 5

Marie Neurath,  
**sketch**,  
 probably 1953,  
 126 × 203 mm.

my sketches were given to him; he looked at them quietly and began to talk with his secretary; ‘how could we best use them?’<sup>9</sup>

The sketches shown to Awolowo included simple visualizations of federal structures, indirect and direct elections, political hierarchies, and constituency make-up (figure 5).<sup>10</sup> His response must have offered cause for optimism, as shortly she afterwards wrote ‘It is a pleasure to see how quickly these highly intelligent representatives grasp the roughest of my sketches, and how the method seems to appeal to them’.<sup>11</sup> Awolowo’s ‘grasp’ suggests that he quickly understood Isotype and the possibilities it held for the Western Region.

Some months after her meeting with Awolowo, the Western Regional Government invited Marie Neurath to Nigeria to develop a programme of public information. Her title would be ‘Visual Aids Expert’ and she would be based in the regional capital Ibadan. A first trip would take place from June to September 1954, with a second planned for the following year. Both trips would take her away from London and the Isotype Institute for lengthy periods. That she accepted such arrangements as necessary (though she declined a first proposal of a single 6-month stay) indicates her understanding of the importance of local immersion.<sup>12</sup> While this was no doubt a practical arrangement, giving her direct and on-going contact with ministers and civil servants in the Western Region, it also enabled her to experience conditions on the ground. She could observe how, where and by whom visual aids were used—if at all—before resolving on how Isotype work might be best designed and integrated into the local scene.

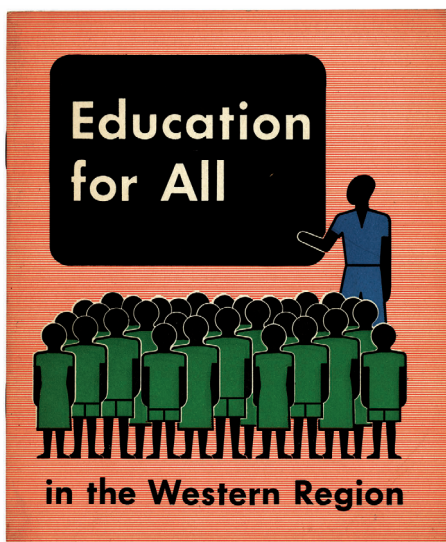


Fig. 6

*Education for all in the Western Region*, front cover, Ibadan: Western Regional Government, 1955, 204 × 163 mm.



Fig. 7

*Education for all in the Western Region*, pages 2-3.

Among the first items on Marie Neurath's itinerary after arriving in Ibadan were visits to primary schools. The visits headlined in regional newspapers and the accompanying articles describe what she saw of education both in the capital and in nearby villages.<sup>13</sup> She encountered a range of visual aids made by pupils that dealt with topics such as water supply, imports and exports, geography, health, agriculture and basic maths; and she was impressed by their efforts. Another experience had even more direct consequences:

Already in London I had been given a 'white paper' on education to read ... From this I had designed a large summary chart; it went straight into the wastepaper basket after I had walked through the streets of Ibadan; why should these people have to struggle with my chart? I made a booklet of 16 pages out of it; problems, tasks, solutions were shown step by step. This format was retained for all the other subjects.<sup>14</sup>

The booklet to which Marie Neurath refers, *Education for all in the Western Region*, was the first in a series that would explain the government's plans for social reform and betterment in simple and direct terms (figure 6). Booklets were commissioned by ministers in connection with their portfolios and became known as 'White Paper' booklets.<sup>15</sup> For each booklet, effort was initially directed towards identifying and detailing themes. Designs then evolved through a series of mock-ups with visualizations and texts that depicted and narrated existing circumstances in the Western Region and how reforms and new initiatives would lead to improvements in the lives of all. The aim was to explain rather than instruct. Work was mainly done in the Ministry of Education where Marie Neurath was given an office. Throughout the process ministers and civil servants played an important collaborative role in shaping content, reviewing design work in progress and resolving details of a specialist nature.

The results can be seen in the printed booklets. In the first spread of pages in *Education for all*, for example, a blend of local content with Isotype technique plays out in a scene whose function is to introduce the benefits of education (figure 7). Pictograms are integral to the scene but among them are figures whose profiles are naturalistic and whose clothing is in the Yoruba style.<sup>16</sup> The figures assume postures typical of village living: a child sits on the ground, a woman with a child strapped to her back kneels over a cooking pot, a chicken pecks the ground. The houses as depicted are made of mud, straw

and timber, or cement block and corrugated iron. These locally identifiable elements are then brought together using a familiar Isotype strategy: comparison. Parallel village scenes each include a box that frames a child's development with and without education; alternative outcomes and the material benefits of education are made plain. Text is precisely keyed to the graphic arrangement and reinforces the pictorial narrative.

In a second example, *Better farming for better living in the Western Region*, the visual argument again begins with local elements: crops and agricultural processes indigenous to the Western Region (figure 8). These are shown on subsequent pages in scenes and contexts that are at once familiar to farmers (the booklet's intended audience) and newly configured to illustrate how cooperation and partnership with the government would bring about change (figure 9). Graphic sequences present farmers and officials facing problems and finding solutions; comparisons show improvements in methods and productivity. Throughout, text is structured in parallel to graphic matter, further explaining scenes or clarifying issues. As in all of the booklets, the English is plain and clear. This was no doubt done to accommodate audiences of mixed reading abilities, but also in anticipation of the text's translation into the vernacular Yoruba, in which specialist terms might not be available.<sup>17</sup>

By the end of her first visit, Marie Neurath had completed work on several booklets and agreed their design and accompanying texts with government officials. When she returned to the Western Region in late February 1955 for a second three-month stay, proof copies of several booklets were in hand (figure 10); these she was eager to try out on their intended users.<sup>18</sup> She again visited schools where, at one school, *Education for all* was handed out to several classes. The pupils reacted to it with enthusiasm and curiosity. Notes taken by their teachers record the pupils' understanding of graphic comparison, before-and-after scenarios and relative advantage or improvement. The notes describe classroom scenes in which teachers led the looking and reading, but where pupils also gathered around and pointed to the booklet's pictures. These interactions sometimes led to more detailed teaching demonstrations or to complementary activities.<sup>19</sup> *Better farming for better living*, on the other hand, was tested out on farmers, though exactly where and how these encounters played out is not clear. Marie Neurath did venture into a forest one day to a nearby village where she gave the booklet to a family, to study their reactions. They were intrigued and asked to keep



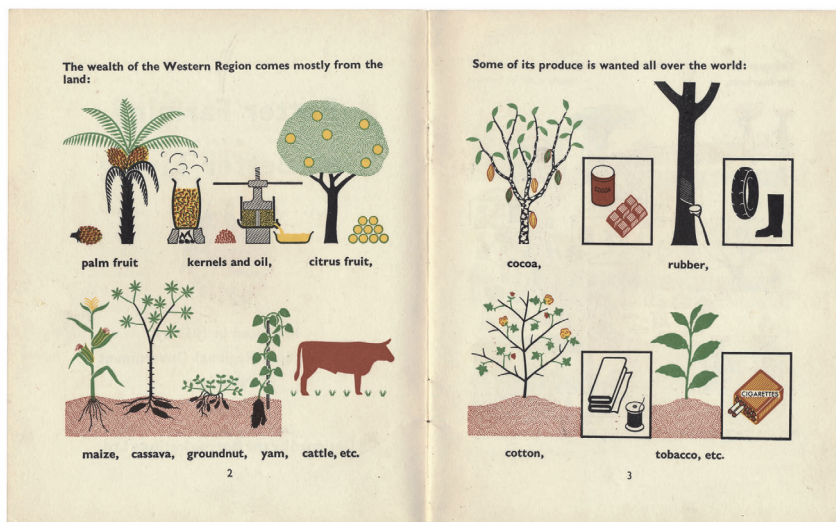


Fig. 8 *Better farming for better living in the Western Region*, pages 2-3, Ibadan: Western Regional Government, 1955, 204 × 163 mm (single page).

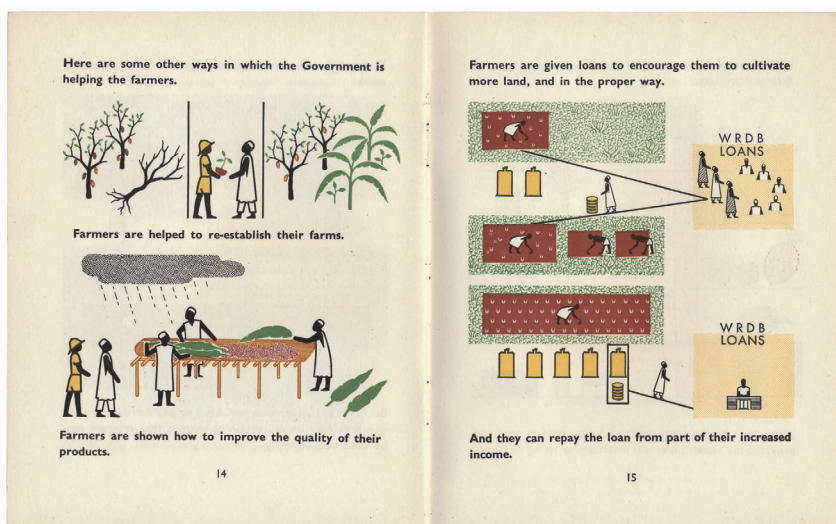


Fig. 9 *Better farming for better living in the Western Region*, pages 14-15.



Fig. 10

*Better farming for better living in the Western Region, Health for all in the Western Region, Paying for progress in the Western Region, front covers, Ibadan: Western Regional Government, all 1955, 204 × 163 mm.*

it. Reflecting on her experiences, she concluded that in general the booklets functioned best when they were looked at collectively (as in schools), then taken home and absorbed there.<sup>20</sup>

Other work completed around the time of Marie Neurath's second trip to the Western Region included a series of 'poster-leaflets' on health topics, designed for use in surgery waiting rooms (figure 11). These had been conceived the previous August while Marie Neurath was in Benin City to learn more about health care provision. There she visited a leprosarium, a hospital, several first aid stations and a surgery. Seeing the surgery's waiting room 'crammed full' of patients returning again and again with the same complaints, she suggested producing educational pictures with which medical assistants could explain to patients, while they waited, the nature of their condition and how it could be prevented. 'They would then perhaps grasp what they were doing wrong and how they should do it better.'<sup>21</sup> She consulted the resident doctor (Ogunlesi) about which health care themes he considered most pressing and with him decided to address four: food, water, leprosy and tuberculosis. Poster-leaflets in a 2-fold format were then produced in English and Yoruba. Unfolded, they could be displayed on a wall; folded, they could be taken away and studied at home. The poster-leaflets again combine locally familiar figures and scenes with graphic configurations typical to Isotype.

Fig. 11  
 Poster-leaflet,  
 'Leprosy',  
 380 × 506 mm  
 (unfolded).

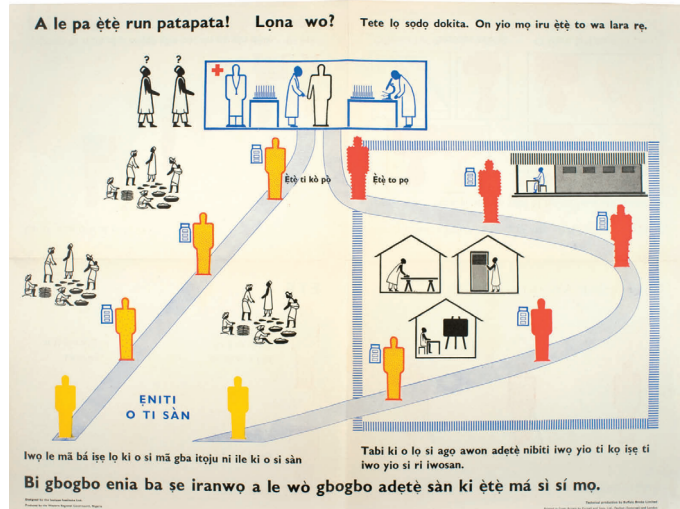
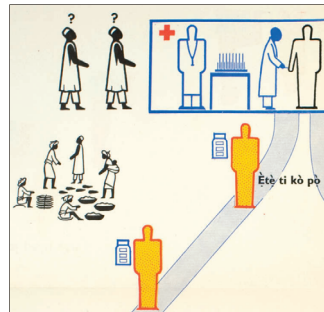


Fig. 12

Poster-leaflet, 'Leprosy', (detail).



In places, generalised pictograms work side-by-side with specific ones; in one instance ('Leprosy') 'Nigerian man' examines 'Isotype man' to assess his condition (figure 12).

Among the projects completed by the Isotype Institute in the Western Region, those associated with election processes should also be mentioned. The work involved the design and production of posters and booklets for regional elections. The booklets gave instructions on how to register for the election, and how and where to vote; the posters variously identified registration and polling stations, and illustrated the voting process.<sup>22</sup> A poster was also made to

explain the Western Region's structure of government; it is unusual in that it is the only design among all the Nigeria work that relies wholly on generalised pictograms. Overall, the programme of information on voting was considered a success, as attested by a government minister who informed Marie Neurath that voter turn-out in the Western Region had been double that in the Eastern Region. He was convinced that Isotype deserved the credit.<sup>23</sup>

Apart from the work so far described, Marie Neurath undertook another initiative during her second visit: the establishment of a Visual Aids Office in Ibadan. A memorandum was drawn up detailing how a team of local workers would be recruited and trained.<sup>24</sup> The team would include a teacher, who would act as the transformer, an artist, and a technical assistant. Training the team would be in the hands of Marie Neurath. Crucial to the new office, as she saw it, was the need to test work on the local population. It is clear that she harboured some doubts about the effectiveness of Isotype work in the Western Region up to that time: after remarking 'Our visual material should be understandable to the literate, and easily explained to the illiterate', she admitted that 'How far it fulfils these claims has still to be tested.' To find out, she suggested setting up a permanent exhibition site where designs could be shown and public's reactions noted. She also recommended conducting tests in locations where she herself had done so, including at schools in villages and towns, in hospital waiting rooms, among village farmers and in adult education classes.

Considerable efforts were made by Marie Neurath to find candidates for the Visual Aids Office. The tone and phrasing of the memorandum, however, suggest that she was not entirely optimistic about the prospects:

In the course of training, a number of such pamphlets [i. e. like those already made by Isotype] should be produced by the Nigerian trainees under the supervision and guidance of members of the Isotype Institute. The rate of such production will obviously be handicapped; unsatisfactory work will have to be repeated; unsuitable trainees will have to be replaced.

But the initiative never got that far, as no suitable candidates were found. Whether for this reason or for other political or financial ones, the government gave only qualified support to the plan, and by the end of Marie Neurath's second stay the possibility of establishing a local office and training scheme had been given up on. Efforts continued in London where

a promising candidate was identified. Surviving documents record the heavy programme of training he embarked on; it involved intensive exposures to cultural products including films, exhibitions and books, and instruction to develop his critical and artistic faculties. But for reasons that are not clear, this initiative also faltered and came to an end.<sup>25</sup>

These, then, were the main projects completed in the Western Region by Marie Neurath and the Isotype Institute, as part of the Buffalo Books partnership.<sup>26</sup> In retrospect, the Isotype Institute's engagement there was brief but significant. The Nigerians were undoubtedly enthusiastic about this new and colourful visual method, and the Isotype Institute produced work of a high standard. After 1957, however, the projects fell away. It may be that the programme of public information had simply fulfilled its brief, culminating in the 1957 regional elections. Thereafter and in the run-up to Nigerian independence (1960), one might surmise that more immediate political concerns occupied the attention of the Western Regional Government at the expense of projects like those it commissioned from Isotype.

In her memoir, Marie Neurath offers little by way of summary. She remarks only that

it was good that we were able to have this experience. Otto had said that we were creating the method not, finally, for the Viennese, but rather for the Africans, and so it proved. That we had to alter the symbols for man, woman, house and so on in the process, was within the scope of the rule that the symbols should 'speak', that is, be immediately understandable. The international character was maintained in the basic approach.<sup>27</sup>

This approach, of course, was Isotype's underlying techniques of graphic explanation whose effectiveness had been demonstrated through long application. But Marie Neurath also points out what may at first seem paradoxical in Isotype: that to enhance its international effectiveness, it had to take on a more local flavour, its existing elements (pictograms and other visualizations) requiring variations that were identifiably of the place. This international character was based not on inflexible universality but on negotiated accommodation: the familiar had to be adopted if Isotype was to be usable.<sup>28</sup>

If one returns to Otto Neurath's *International picture language*, one sees that his notion of Isotype is similar to Marie Neurath's summary statement. It is of an approach intelligible to all, but one that was flexible, that could

produce specific meanings, and where necessary could be supplemented or updated. What is missing though is the extent to which international differences needed to be afforded, as Marie Neurath later discovered through her contact with Nigerian audiences. And this suggests something else that goes unacknowledged in *International picture language*: that if Isotype was to indeed function internationally, it needed to be taken places and created *there*. The envisioned demands of the Nigeria work surely compelled Marie Neurath to experience the place and meet the people—the subject experts. When reading her recollections, one realises how much of it is devoted not to the work itself but to descriptions of a country that was very different from any she had previously encountered. Flora and fauna fascinated her, as did people and places, and her many encounters with Nigerians young and old were clearly experiences she wished to preserve. They show her getting to know the place, knowledge that was surely crucial to getting the work right.

Finally, the Isotype Institute's work in the Western Region of Nigeria demonstrates the challenges of operating internationally. The several instances of Isotype's export to distant places—geographically or culturally—show that spreading it so far afield could be difficult, whether in the Soviet Union, North America or Africa. The right conditions of commission, application and dissemination were essential before it became usable in these places; and thereafter its long-term success was hardly assured. Especially problematic were local offices for making work based on Isotype principles; where they could be established and suitable locals recruited (neither of which happened in Nigeria), considerable time and effort were needed to secure good working practices. But would the work go on being done correctly? And how long could an office continue when financial resources became scarce or the political situation unstable? These mundane contingencies also make up Isotype's international character or, at the very least, are a consequence of it. They contain the risks of spreading it internationally while highlighting how much was in fact achieved under the circumstances.

## Notes

- 1 For a fuller exploration of the putative language aspects of Isotype, see Christopher Burke's essay 'The Linguistic Status of Isotype' in this volume, 31–58.
- 2 Isotype = International System Of TYPographic Picture Education. The name/acronym was devised by Marie Reidemeister (later Neurath) around 1935. Otto Neurath, *International picture language* (London: Kegan Paul, Trench, Trubner & Co., 1936).
- 3 For related remarks by Otto Neurath at about this time, see his text 'Visual education', in *Encyclopedia and utopia: the life and work of Otto Neurath (1882–1945)*, edited by Elisabeth Nemeth and Friedrich Stadler (Dordrecht/Boston/London: Kluwer, 1996), especially 264, 292, 333–4.
- 4 'Human life in Africa', first draft, July 1943, Otto and Marie Neurath Isotype Collection, University of Reading (hereinafter 'IC') 1/44. Neurath's proposals were produced for Rotha Films, with which the Isotype Institute was to collaborate. Although the proposal and associated planning documents refer to an undifferentiated Africa, there are indications that the Colonial Office was directing 'Human life in Africa' towards Britain's West African colonies. Plans for the exhibition were eventually abandoned. Neurath continued to pursue the idea, however, through correspondence and exchanges with Sir Hanns Vischer of the International African Institute in London (see IC 1/6 and 1/11). Arrangements were made for Neurath to meet African students at the institute to discuss Isotype and visual education; it is not clear if this meeting ever took place, following Vischer's unexpected death. I am grateful to Christopher Burke for drawing my attention to these documents.
- 5 Wolfgang Foges, Weiner Library (London), item no. 1361/29–85, material relating to Aldus books, including a summary of his firms' output dictated by Foges, 1983; cited in David Lambert, 'Wolfgang Foges and the new illustrated book in Britain: Adprint, Rathbone Books, and Aldus Books', *Modern typography in Britain: graphic design, politics, and society* (London: Hyphen Press, 2009), 113–28. Foges was Adprint's managing director; the 'parts of West Africa' presumably refers to Britain's colonial territories.
- 6 Buffalo Books was set up to undertake projects in the developing world and was a partnership of expertise between Adprint, the Isotype Institute and the printers Purnell & Sons (which owned Adprint); 'Reaching the people', draft text for a Buffalo Books capabilities booklet, c. 1956, IC 3.2/178 (typescript). The Weiner Library material (cited above) also contains notes about Buffalo Books, though

these are faulty in places, as suggested by Wolfgang Foges, who recorded them some 30 years after the events described and without supporting documents. Although Foges was also the managing director of Buffalo Books, day-to-day operations were in the hands of Frame Smith.

- 7 '[*Forward*] was well received by the public, and editions in several local languages were issued by the Gold Coast Vernacular Literature Bureau. The experiment proved, however, that under the conditions of marketing and distribution obtaining at the time, the regular issue of such a periodical, however well suited to its purpose, was not at the moment an economic possibility.' 'Reaching the people', cited above. Related initiatives in the Western Region of Nigeria were likely connected with *Forward*; evidence comes from a colour supplement (printed proof) depicting government structures and activities in the Western Region, together with notes and rough drawings, all of which remain among the *Forward* working materials. The notes outline plans to visualise a series of development issues in the magazine, issues that would comprise much of the Nigeria work subsequently (discussed below). IC 3.2/165.
- 8 That Marie Neurath met Awolowo in 1953 (August) in London cannot be fully confirmed by documents in the Isotype Collection. Their meeting at that time is surmised by Awolowo's presence at the constitutional conference in July and August; and by Marie Neurath's report soon after of a first meeting with an unnamed Nigerian minister; see Obafemi Awolowo, *Awo: the autobiography of Chief Obafemi Awolowo* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1960), 180; and Marie Neurath, letter to Waldemar Kaempffert, 23 September 1953, IC 1/47. As leader of Action Group, Awolowo was, in effect, the Western Region's prime minister; in October 1954 he was formally named Premier.
- 9 'What I remember', unpublished typescript, 94–5, IC, unaccessioned. This text was written in 1980 in German, and translated into English in 1982 by Robin Kinross. It bears some relationship to a shorter text written by Marie Neurath in 1986 which focuses on her visual education work; the latter has now been published as 'Wiener Methode and Isotype: my apprenticeship and partnership with Otto Neurath' in Marie Neurath and Robin Kinross, *The transformer: principles of making Isotype charts* (London: Hyphen Press, 2009); the account of the Nigeria work in the latter is considerably briefer than in 'What I remember'.
- 10 IC 3.2/165. The sketches are grouped together with a minority report issued by Action Group for the 1953 conference. This is probably the text handed to Marie Neurath by Foges; it covers issues similar to those she sketched.
- 11 Marie Neurath, letter to Waldemar Kaempffert, 23 September 1953, IC 1/47.



- 12 This in keeping with earlier Isotype projects, in the Soviet Union and to a lesser extent in the United States, both of which involved Marie Neurath and others in lengthy stays abroad while work was planned and (in the Soviet Union) made locally.
- 13 *Southern Nigerian Defender* (22 July 1954; lead story), *Nigerian Tribune* (22 July 1954), and *Daily Times* (24 July 1954); the articles excerpt or reproduce in full a text apparently supplied by the government's press office. IC 3.2/169 (newspaper cuttings and typescript).
- 14 'What I remember', 95–6, cited above.
- 15 Marie Neurath recorded how the commissioning happened: 'I had a discussion about my work in the house of Awolowo, the prime minister; I first had to design a booklet about schools—general education was just being introduced—together with the minister of Education, Awokoya. During the discussions, the minister of agriculture, Akinloye, said that he wanted to have a book too. The minister of health, Ighodaro, soon introduced himself as well; Chief Akran gave me access every time I needed any help; I probably spoke with him most when I was preparing the more general booklet, "Paying for progress".' 'What I remember', 95, cited above.
- 16 It is notable that new pictograms were devised for the peoples of the Western Region despite the availability of existing pictograms of Africans. The latter, used in a succession of Isotype charts representing the world's human groups and incorporating highly generalized physical features, clothing and headwear, were clearly not relevant to the specificity of the Nigeria work. See, for example, *Gesellschaft und Wirtschaft* (Leipzig: Bibliographisches Institut, 1930), plate 96.
- 17 Here, and throughout the work for the Western Region, graphic arrangements were designed with sufficient space to allow for English texts to be substituted with Yoruba. One might regard this feature—present in nearly all Isotype work (whether it was made use of or not)—as a specifically international one that accommodated language variations.
- 18 For most of the Nigeria projects, design work was done in the Western Region, while print-ready artwork was completed later in London. In this respect, work arrangements were similar to those adopted in the late 1930s, when design work done by Otto Neurath and Marie Reidemeister in the offices of the National Tuberculosis Association in New York was subsequently made print-ready at the International Foundation for Visual Education in The Hague.
- 19 'What I remember', 98, cited above. The notes made by teachers, written on small sheets of paper, were given to Marie Neurath afterwards; IC 3.2/171.

- 20 'What I remember', 98, cited above. It appears that Marie Neurath was not present when *Better farming for better living* was tested on farmers.
- 21 'What I remember', 97, cited above. A precedent for this idea can be found in remarks made by Otto Neurath some years before: 'Sometimes one has to give health instruction or information on agriculture or on citizenship, without having time for preparatory teaching. To influence sub-literates posters and picture sheets combined with the minimum of words may be used with advantage.' Otto Neurath, 'Visual education', 264, cited above.
- 22 It appears that a first booklet, *Voting in the Western Region of Nigeria* (1955), was produced in preparation for regional elections in 1956, and a second booklet, *Registration and voting in the Western Region of Nigeria* (1956), for regional elections in 1957. There is no record of how the booklets were distributed; the posters were apparently used on-site at registration and polling stations.
- 23 'What I remember', 98, cited above; the minister was Rotimi Williams, then Minister of Local Government.
- 24 'Memorandum on training for visual education', typescript, IC 3.2/171. Quotes that follow are from this source.
- 25 IC 3.2/172; the candidate was J. Isi Afiari.
- 26 There were a number of other, mostly minor, projects undertaken in the Western Region that are not discussed here, as well as several publications produced for the Gold Coast (Ghana) and Sierra Leone. Throughout all the work in West Africa, it is broadly accurate to attribute design elements to the Isotype Institute, and production (project management, international liaising and logistics) to Buffalo Books, and Frame Smith in particular.
- 27 'What I remember', 99, cited above.
- 28 Marie Neurath articulated this most fully in 'Isotype', *Instructional science*, vol. 3, no. 2 (July 1974): 147: 'Becoming citizens of the world we gradually recognised that our symbolism was often international for western man only. More than before I recognised this when I had to work out ways of informing the Nigerian people about health, education, agriculture, voting etc., in visual terms. Man, woman, house, plants, markets, trees ... all had to be drawn in a different way to be understandable in that country. Also the approach, the speed of information, the colour scheme, the ways to catch the attention—all had to be different.' Similar remarks occur in her article 'The origin and theory of Isotype', *Year book of education* (1960): 117, where, in reference to the Nigeria work she states: 'Every chart has to represent a familiar visual background—adherence to the method

cannot go so far as imposing an alien background on those unable to share one's experience of it.' These latter remarks occur in a section titled 'The universality of Isotype', though it is notable that here Marie Neurath refrains from describing Isotype as 'universal', preferring 'international' instead; she only goes so far as to describe Isotype as 'an elaboration of the child's approach which is more or less universal ...'. However, in her article 'Otto Neurath and Isotype', *Graphic Design*, 42 (June 1971): 19, she writes: 'The method and the approach are, I think, more universal than the symbols are. I had to discover this when I worked for Africans for some time. I had to make things clear to them, and I could not force our "international symbols" on them. ... When things are equal all over the world the symbols can be the same.'

All images except figures 1 and 4 are taken from material in the Otto and Marie Neurath Isotype Collection, University of Reading.

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