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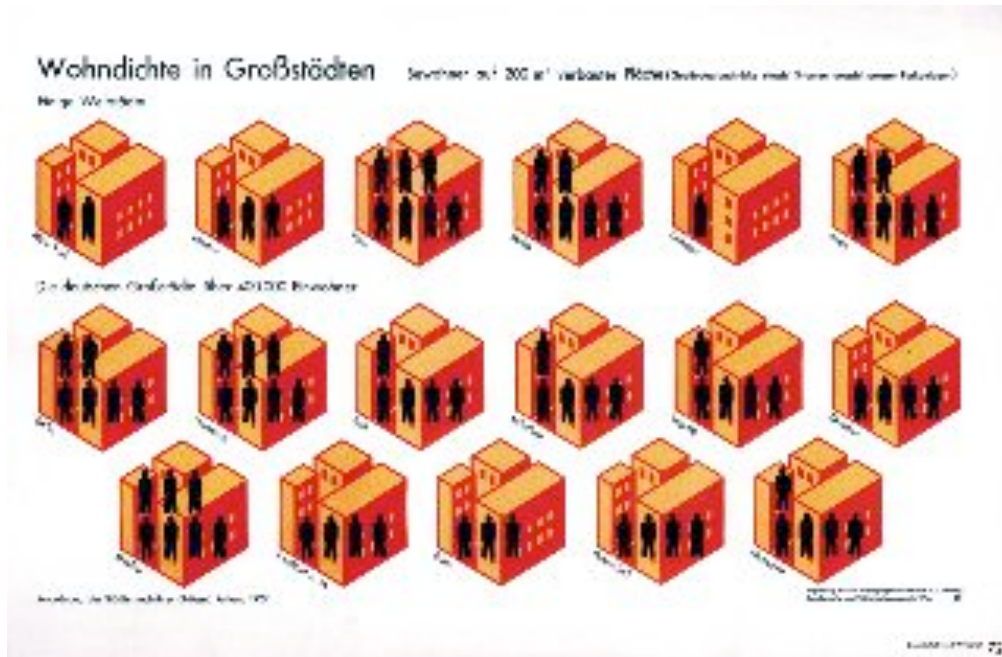
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"Population Density in the Metropolis" graphic chart from "Society and Economy" (1930)

**MAK Center for Art & Architecture Presents
OTTO NEURATH. GYPSY URBANISM
November 4, 2009 – January 31, 2010**

(West Hollywood, September 30, 2009) At a time when contemporary culture is dominated by the mass media and we are all glued to many screens, it is fascinating to contemplate the career of little-known Austrian sociologist, Otto Neurath (1888—1945), a polymath whose intellectual and moral compass — forged in the embers of World War I — led him to predict the dramatic growth of the knowledge economy and to develop tools for a universal pictorial language. Ever in the interest of advancing participatory forms of democratic exchange, Neurath was by turn an academic,

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economic minister, housing administrator, museum director and philosopher of science. He collaborated with the leading planners, designers and artists of his time, — among them Adolf Loos, Josef Frank, Le Corbusier, Laszlo Moholy-Nagy and key New Deal intellectuals — and his work had a profound influence on a range of disciplines, including architecture, philosophy, economics, urbanism and graphic design.

With *Otto Neurath. Gypsy Urbanism*, the MAK Center for Art & Architecture presents the absorbing work of this passionate intellectual in an exhibition guest curated by architectural critic and theorist, Nader Vossoughian. On view at the Schindler House from November 4, 2009 through January 31, 2010, the exhibition is loosely divided into three sections. The scene is set with artifacts and ephemera from Vienna's Settler Movement of the 1920s, when Neurath initiated his public career. The centerpiece of the exhibition re-creates works from Neurath's Museum of Society and Economy, the major work of his life. A kind of "museum without boundaries," this venture engendered Neurath's (and colleagues') development of the Isotype system of pictorial communication, as well as innovative approaches to exhibition design. *Otto Neurath. Gypsy Urbanism* employs many of these innovations at the MAK Center, using 100 folio posters from original archives. Finally, the exhibition explores the impact of Neurath's ideas in England, the USA and beyond.

Otto Neurath. Gypsy Urbanism will open with a free, public reception on Tuesday, November 3 from 7 to 9 p.m. The official opening will be held by Dr. Claudia Schmied, Federal Minister of Education, Arts and Culture of the Republic of Austria. Remarks on the exhibition will be given by Peter Noever, Director MAK Vienna and Kimberli Meyer, Director MAK Center Los Angeles. The evening will include a curatorial walk-through with the guest curator Dr. Nader Vossoughian. The exhibition will also be the focus of the MAK Center's annual free-to-the-public event, MAK Day, on Saturday, November 7, including a panel discussion and other activities.

Otto Neurath

Following World War I and the disintegration of the Austro-Hungarian empire, Vienna was mired in poverty, unemployment and disease. Hyper-inflation and the mass influx of displaced populations made housing an urgent priority. However, Neurath was optimistic about prospects for the new parliamentary democracy. As "gypsy" settlers set up ad hoc housing and gardens on public lands, he saw an opportunity for housing reform based on grassroots organizing and systems of barter. Neurath formed the Settlement and Allotment Garden Association to assist squatters in replanning Vienna "from below." The Association developed several prototypes for expandable garden hut dwellings based on modernist principles of efficiency. These "core houses," including freestanding and row house models, were available by catalogue and were presented to the public in a 1923 exhibition, which was attended by over 200,000 people.

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Ultimately, the Social Democrat government opted to focus on high rise superblocks rather than garden housing, and in 1925 Neurath embarked on his next major venture, the Museum of Society and Economy. Neurath believed in social and cultural education as an engine to empower the working class and foster political change. He advocated utilizing the visual tools of popular culture and entertainment for the most effective communications. As he stated, "Modern man...receives his education...through *optical impressions*... The modern advertisement will show us the way!"

Neurath saw his museum as a tool to promote community, democratize rational thinking and provide a "scientific world conception." In content, it was much like a world atlas of civilization for lay people, offering a statistical and historical representation of the world. Together with graphic design colleagues, he developed a system of pictorial signs and symbols called "Isotypes" that could be treated as language — clear, readily comprehensible and easy to manipulate. Employing Isotypes in charts, diagrams, posters and maps, the museum presented vast quantities of information on topics as varied as land use, insurance statistics, police actions, anatomy — anything that demonstrated social and economic conditions worldwide.

The Museum of Society and Economy began as a series of traveling exhibitions and found a permanent home in Vienna's Neues Rathaus in 1927. Neurath introduced a number of innovations in exhibition design and outreach. Working with architect Josef Frank, he developed systems of display which could be easily moved and assembled anywhere. His exhibition hall was open evenings and weekends, when workers were available, and he set up popular satellite exhibitions in storefronts. His "museum" might be presented in alternate formats, such as books, pamphlets, slide shows or films. Indeed, the Museum of Society and Economy section of the MAK Center exhibit features 100 unbound folio pages from such a volume, seen in plexiglass sheaths that reproduce Neurath's non-site-specific system of display.

Over the next several years, Neurath and the Museum of Society and Economy participated in numerous exhibitions around Europe. Neurath assumed a leading role in the Austrian Werkbund and participated in the founding of the Vienna Circle, a group of prominent intellectuals who promoted the integration of science and daily life. In 1934, reactionary political forces compelled Neurath to flee Vienna for the Netherlands, and the 1940 Nazi invasion forced him to again relocate, to England. During the war years, he made a series of propaganda films for the English Ministry of Information, one of which is featured at the MAK Center. Neurath's work was also influential on the New Deal in the U.S., chiefly through his contributions to Survey Graphic magazine, a key outlet for progressive social issues in the 1930s. In 1933, the New York Times described his pedagogy as "picture Esperanto" and Knopf



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published his *Modern Man in the Making* in 1939. Examples of all of these will be on view at the Schindler House.

Exhibition Information

Nader Vossoughian is a curator, architectural historian, and theorist whose research interests center on the relationship between politics, architecture, and the city. He studied philosophy, cultural studies and German literature at Berkeley, Swarthmore, the Albert-Ludwigs-Universität (Freiburg), and the Humboldt University (Berlin) before receiving his M.Phil. and Ph.D. in the History and Theory of Architecture from Columbia University. His articles have appeared in *Bidoun*, *Metropolis*, *Design Issues*, *Volume*, the *Journal of the Society of Architectural Historians*, the *Architect's Newspaper*, *Hunch*, and *Transnational Associations*. He has recently contributed essays to Boyd Rayward (ed.) *European Modernism and the Information Society*, Elisabeth Nemeth, et. al. (eds.) *Otto Neurath's Economic Writings*, and Iris Meder (ed.) *Josef Frank 1885-1967 – Eine Moderne der Unordnung*. His curatorial credits include "Urban Disobedience: The Work of Santiago Cirugeda," "After Neurath: The Global Polis," and "The Global Polis: Interactive Infrastructures." His first book, *Otto Neurath: The Language of the Global Polis*, was recently released by NAI Publishers (Rotterdam). Currently, he is a researcher at the Jan van Eyck Academie in Maastricht and an assistant professor of architecture at the New York Institute of Technology.

The MAK Center for Art & Architecture is located at the Schindler House, 835 N. Kings Road in West Hollywood. Public hours are Wednesday through Sunday, 11 a.m. to 6 p.m. Regular admission is \$7/\$17 with the guide book, *Schindler By MAK*; students and seniors, \$6/\$16 with book; free for Friends of the Schindler House and on Fridays, 4 to 6 p.m. Parking is available at the public structure at the northeast corner of Kings Road and Santa Monica Boulevard. For further information, the public may contact www.MAKcenter.org or call (323) 651-1510.

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