



ESSAY

The Atlas Project: Updating Arntz and Neurath

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The *ATLAS GESELLSCHAFT UND WRTSCHAFT* (Atlas of Society and Economy) was part of the Vienna Method of Pictorial Statistics that was developed at the *Gesellschafts- und Wirtschaftsmuseum* (Social and Economic Museum of Vienna) from 1925 onward by Otto Neurath and his team, which consisted of Gerd Arntz, Marie Reidemeister and others. In this method, graphical elements provide information on political and economic interrelations; they are presented on panels that can be set up to form entire public spaces. The diagrammatic idiom was also specifically conceived for persons who were illiterate, or barely literate. Workers' education was to take place independently of school education. In 1934—after Neurath and his staff had to flee from Vienna—the method was renamed Isotype, an acronym for International system of typographic picture education.

Since 2004 we have been working on updating this atlas method. What particularly fascinated us with the graphical work of Gerd Arntz, was its 'anti-subjective' representation of social power relations. 'Being a subject' is deliberately schematized as an effect of the system or the revolutionary class. Through the same means, the pictorial argumentation becomes a demand to reverse the conditions. At the time, this was a dedication to revolutions of soviets and their factory and barracks occupations. This schematization is continued in the atlas. Gerd Arntz explains:

. . . tables and curves that are difficult to interpret are replaced by rows of equally large, colored symbols on panels, magnetic boards and in films ... groups of persons are actually represented by groups of persons, and production

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volumes by the relative number of their pictures ... this consistent system of showing figures or fluctuations in volume by simplified signs designed to be presented in rows ... is the beginning of a type of representation that ... can provide all sciences with a basis for making their interrelations comprehensible in pictures. ... what is yet to be examined is the impact of the quantity and volume of an object on the direction of its movement and its force in society at large. Then there is the problem of the extent to which the quantity within the representation can be considered an explanation of facts. furthermore, the extent to which ... the representation of social struggles, in particular, would have a transformative effect on the method itself.¹

The first ten sheets were updated as part of the *ExArgentina*² project with students of the University of Lüneburg. After that, many updates were made and often initially part of other projects. They followed very different needs and agendas, so that over the years the *Atlas project* became for us rather a kind of continuous medium of political contemporaneity – and it still is.

It seems to us that—depending on the political situation, institutional framework and our own sensibility—we also have to cover a historical distance to the particular sheets in different ways, which then expresses itself in the dimensionality, the intensity and often even in the repetition of the answers, sometimes as a poster, as a whole brochure or as a single sheet.

‘Updating’ is not, after all, a process ever completed. For it is already outdated when it is formulated. This lack of being present makes it clear that it is more about the relentlessness of wanting to know at that moment than about ‘numbers and figures.’

We experience again and again how the complexity of political and economic facts is inflated to such an extent that they no longer seem to be representable. We would therefore have to accept them and submit to them. Keeping these facts representable therefore still remains a political demand, “to analyze our present life, to make demands and to give the recognized a pressure for realization.”³

The two updates published here are the brochure *Nature meets itself* (Fig. 1), created in 2013 for the Bergen Assembly (see Appendix), and *The big four*, one sheet on land grabbing in Ukraine (Fig. 2), which were created for the Kiev Biennial, 2015. They answer the atlas sheet 35 *Produktive*

1. Gerd Arntz: *Bewegung in Kunst und Statistik*, in: a bis z, Zeitschrift der Gruppe "Kölner Progressive Künstler," Cologne 1931.

2. *ExArgentina*, Museum Ludwig, Köln 2004, Palais de Glace, Buenos Aires, 2006.

3. Gerd Arntz, *ibid.* See also gerdarntz.org

Flächen der Erde ('Productive areas of the Earth') (Fig. 3) from the *Atlas of 1931*.

Nature meets itself in the stomach of the predators ...

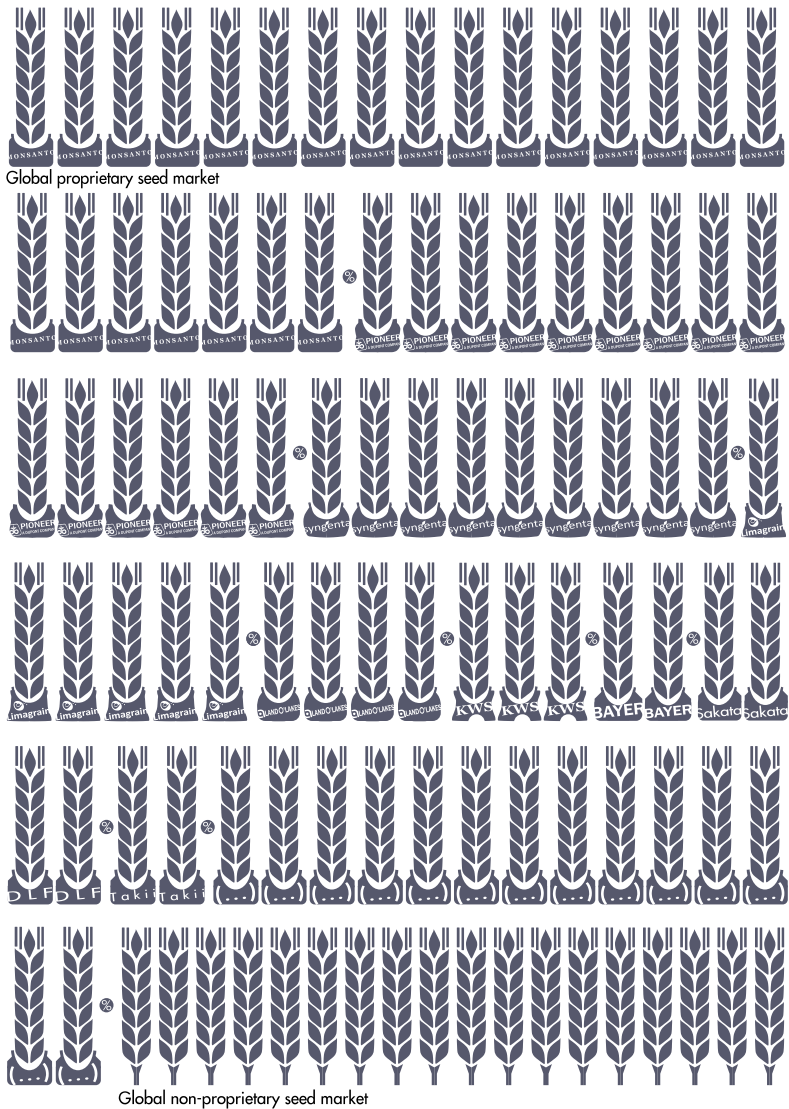


Figure 1. Nature Meets Itself (2013).

Land Grabbing / Ukraine, 24 Beispiele

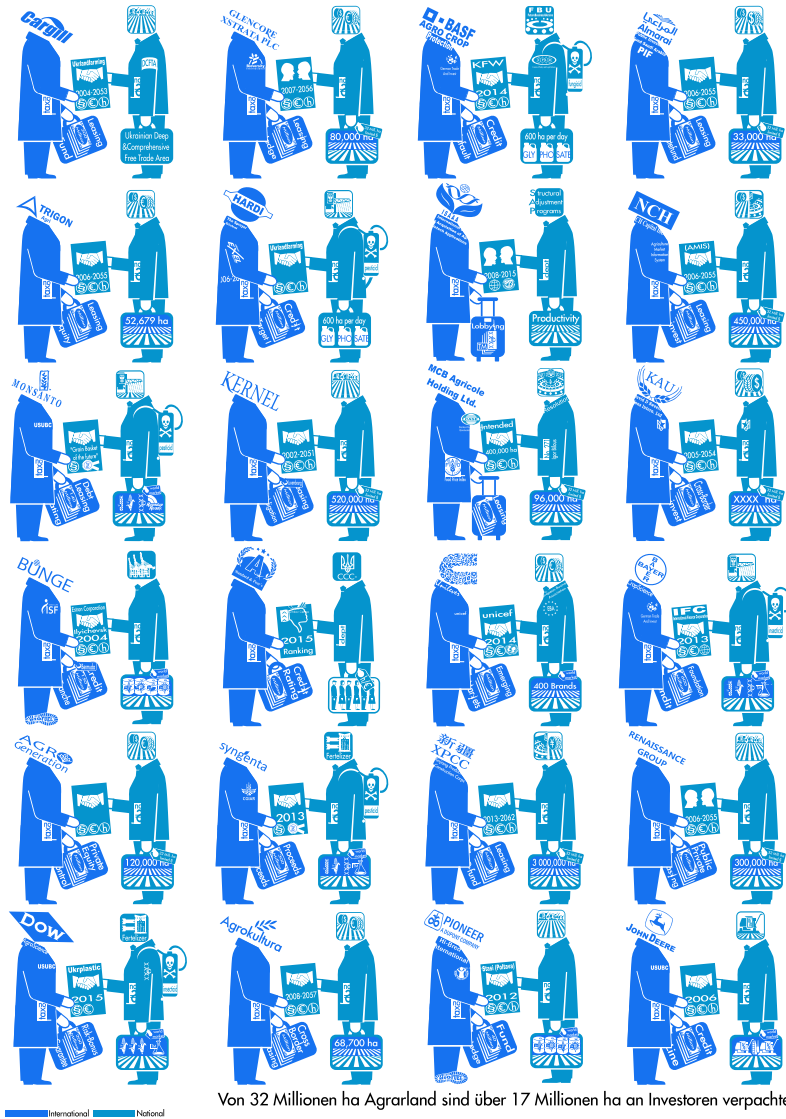


Figure 2. Land Grabbing in Ukraine (2015).

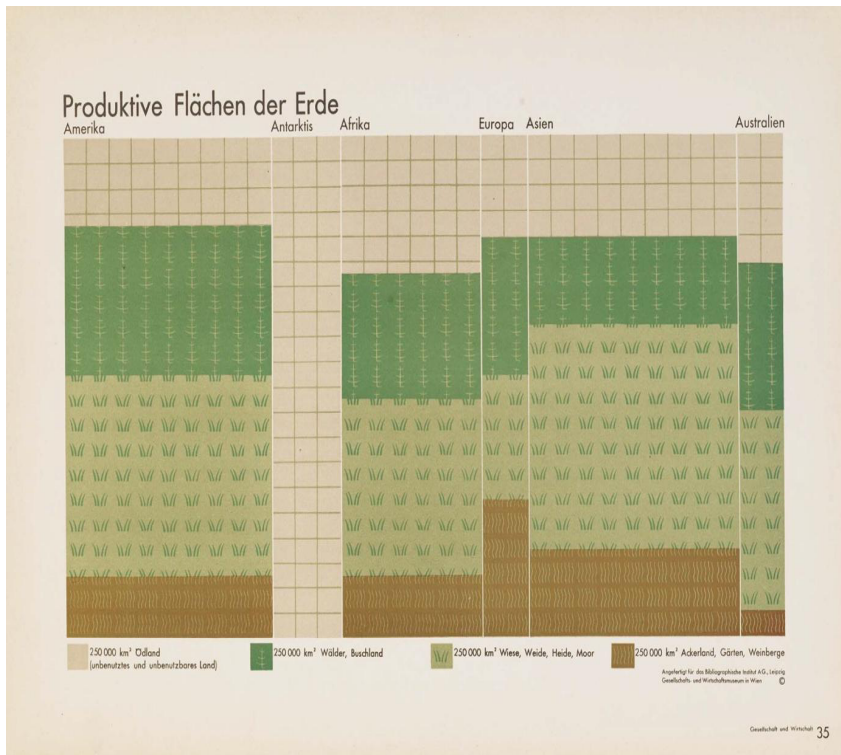


Figure 3. Produktive Flächen der Erde (Productive areas of the Earth) (1931)

REFERENCES

Atlas Gesellschaft und Wirtschaft, ed. by Otto Neurath, art director Gerd Arntz. Leipzig 1930.
[https://files.libcom.org/files/Gesellschaft und Wirtschaft 1931.pdf](https://files.libcom.org/files/Gesellschaft_und_Wirtschaft_1931.pdf)