

Franz Roh as the missing link between Rudolf Carnap and Otto Neurath

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Franz Roh as an interesting footnote to Rudolf Carnap and Otto Neurath

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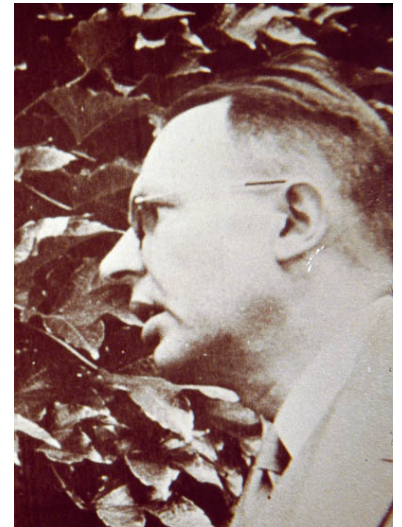


Otto Neurath
1882-1945



Franz Roh
1890-1965

Photograph by Lucia Moholy
The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York



Rudolf Carnap
1891-1970

Biographical sketch of the art-historian Franz Roh (1890-1965)

- Roh was a student of Heinrich Wölfflin and therefore belonged to the Dilthey-school
- In the 1920s he was a major promotor of „Neue Sachlichkeit“ [new objectivity] and Bauhaus modernism
- Roh and Neurath were close friends – Roh hid Neurath after the breakdown of the Munich Räterepublik (and N. was arrested in his house)
- But also Roh and Carnap were close friends – they met already before 1914 in the so-called Sera-circle in Jena
- In the 1920 Roh, Carnap, and a group of famous art historians and artists (Sigfrid Giedion, Laszlo Moholy-Nagy, Lucia Moholy, Carola Giedion-Welcker) met frequently and discussed their modernist visions
- After 1933 Roh stayed in Germany, though he was under pressure by the NS government (he was banned from publication until 1945)
- Roh and Carnap got in touch again after 1945 (esp. Alpbach 1964)

Relevant sources

1. Correspondence between Roh and Neurath as well as Roh and Carnap; Carnap's diaries (were in part already considered by Dahms, Sandner, and others)
2. Roh's published writings, in particular, his manifesto „Nachexpressionismus“ from 1925 and *The unappreciated artist* from 1949 (were in part already considered by Dahms)
3. Roh's unpublished writings on „Neopositivismus“ from the time of his inner emigration in the Nazi period

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3. **Roh's unpublished writings on „Neopositivismus“ from the time of his inner emigration in the Nazi period**

Roh's unpublished writings on Neo-Positivism are ...

- located at the *Deutsches Kunstarchiv Nürnberg*
- from the period between 1936 and 1945
- of a more aphoristic nature
- about 20 texts
- altogether comprise 15.000 – 20.000 words (20-30 pages)
- defend a philosophical conception the author calls „Neopositivismus“ [Neo-Positivism]
- directly based on the logical empiricist conceptions of Carnap and Neurath

In the rest of my talk I will give a rough account of what Roh is talking about in these writings

Die neue Wissenschaft (Neopositivismus)
 Sie kämpft gegen die Metaphysik als Rationalisierung eines bloß empfindbaren, nicht
 denkerisch fixierbaren Letzteinsatzes. ~~So muss man mit Recht die Metaphysik als~~
~~bloßen Rationalismus ablehnen, gerade als Rationalismus, wenn man diesen~~
~~Wortbegriff kann man ja (begrifflich definieren) Anwendung der ratio gegenüber Ge-~~
~~halten, ~~was nicht~~ mit diesen Mitteln ~~gepackt~~ werden können, weil sie ihnen~~
~~nicht sinnvoll zugeordnet werden können.~~
 Genau so kämpft Der Neopositivismus gegen den Positivismus des 19. Jh, welcher sich
 als metaphysikdurchsetzt entpuppt, ~~schon~~, indem er sich mit dem erkenntnistheor.
 Realismus verband

1. Starker Kaffee ändert die Weltanschauung
(1936)
[Strong coffee modifies the world conception]
2. Die neue Wissenschaft (Neopositivismus) (1941)
[The new Science (Neo-Positivism)]
3. Relativismus als Stärke (1945)
[Relativism as a strength]

1. Materialism

- **The ingestion of strong coffee allows me to turn my world conception** (it shifts it from pessimism to optimism); can also be done permanently
- [a] „Our materialist statements are not shameful, unless someone is virtually cramped into the metaphysical [ins Metaphysische geradezu verkrampft]. Those bodily connections will gradually give us a host of instruments at hand to improve the mental attitudes against each other and therefore to make our existence more livable. (Anti-war pills for too brisk politicians would be initially most urgent.)”

- This is a materialist attitude which is embedded in an interesting way into a historicist conception that takes philosophy as a whole to be a „Geisteswissenschaft“
- Exactly the same form of materialism is quite characteristic for Dilthey as well
- The interesting thing is that we face this conception here in a context of „Neopositivism“ that is explicitly committed to the philosophies of Carnap and Neurath

2. Neopositivism

- Neopositivism **rejects both the positivist tradition of the 19th century and the wrong rationalism of metaphysics**
- This dispenses certain forms of absolutism
- [d] However, „relativization of reasoning would be dangerous only if our ultimate values or our most secret motivations [Letzteinsätze und Seinsantriebe] would be relativized“.
- For the neo-positivists, other than for nihilists such as Spengler, values are by no means *arbitrary* and they are definitely not relativists in this respect!

- What Roh calls „Neopositivismus“ is directly based on the logical empiricism of Carnap and Neurath (in particular Carnap is mentioned frequently in Roh’s writings)
- However, Roh describes in an interesting way how this new variety of positivism is opposed to both 19th (French) positivism and the wrong rationalism of the metaphysical tradition
- This is an argumentation that seems to be fully compatible with Carnap and Neurath but it also can be found at various places in the writings of Dilthey!

3. Relativism as a strength

- [g] „Who draws relativist conclusions from this is qualified as threatening. We rather should regard him to be adaptive, as moving and movable, as emergent, not adherent in stiff mere existence. [...] **Relativism then becomes the greatest strength, the deepest power of life altogether.** [...] One should not try to procure for millenia but rather should try to fill the small room of a century in a useful way.”

- This plea for relativism as adaptiveness, as openness to other cultures and new cultural developments is quite characteristic for a certain stance that obviously emerged in the context of the German youthmovement and that also can be found in Carnap and Reichenbach (in particular, in connection with questions of moral values)
- On the other hand, it was also Otto Neurath who developed an interesting form of relativism as holism that rejects all kinds of „pseudo-rational“ fixed points

Conclusions

- Roh's Neopositivism reiterates and elaborates a number of key elements of logical empiricism as developed by Carnap and Neurath
- At the same time, Roh remains to be a defender of empiricism in the Diltheyian tradition at a time where most other members of the Dilthey-school (e.g., Spranger, Misch, Bollnow) long had rejected all kinds of empiricism and committed themselves to a purified and clearly anti-empiricist conception of "Geisteswissenschaften"
- So, we may or may not be willing to see Roh as the missing link between Carnap and Neurath – what we can and should do at any rate is to see him as another important (and somewhat) missing link between logical empiricism and the tradition of the Dilthey school