

workshop colin ross: the film materials

at: österreichisches filmmuseum, 20-21 june, 2016

On June 20 and 21, 2016, the Ludwig Boltzmann Institut für Geschichte und Gesellschaft (LBIGG) in cooperation with the Österreichisches Filmmuseum (ÖFM), both based in Vienna, organize a workshop within the framework of the project 'Exploring the interwar world: the travelogues of Colin Ross (1885-1945)'.¹ ÖFM is the host of this event at: **Augustinerstraße 1, 1010 Vienna** (http://www.filmmuseum.at/kontakt/standorte/buero_bibliothek_und_kino)

During the interwar years Colin Ross was a popular globe-trotter and bestselling author of c. 25 travel accounts, who also wrote an estimated 1,200 newspaper and magazine articles, gave a large but unknown number of (illustrated) lectures at home (i.e. Germany) and abroad; between 1922 and 1940 he made six released, feature-length travel films (including two sound films) to some of his books. A number of excerpted scenes of these films plus fourteen cans of unreleased 35mm footage Ross shot in the USA in the late 1930s have been deposited at ÖFM by Ross's daughter in the late 1980s.

This workshop is devoted to Ross's films, more precisely the artefacts that have been retrieved in film archives. This phrasing implies the wide gap that exists between the catalogue of Ross's films and its archival record. This does not merely pertain to materials missing, but also to variants and versions. Such circumstances put a limit on what we can show during the workshop, as not all the materials retrieved are available or restored, while others are substandard in terms of their carrier. This discrepancy determines to a large extent the content of this event.

¹ See the bilingual website <http://geschichte.lbg.ac.at/forschungsprojekte/welterkundung-zwischen-den-kriegen-reisefilme-des-colin-ross-1885-1945>.

Each of the two workshop days features four presentations in word and image. These presentations will be given by employees of LBIGG and ÖFM as well as by invited speakers from other institutes. After each presentation we have planned ample time for response and discussion. We intend to show full-length screenings of preserved materials after each day's last discussion.

The workshop's presentations have been subdivided into three topics:

- **material aspects of the available film reels**
- **future uses of the restored materials**
- **historical uses of the films during Ross's lifetime**

With regard to **material aspects**:

In contradistinction to bibliographical practice, films are often referenced rather heedlessly, a practice, commonly limited to title/director/country/year, without mentioning the characteristics, history or provenance of the material objects. This, of course, reflects a bias of content-based reflections, skipping the question of what it actually is that we are looking at. In other words, what are the characteristics of materials handed down in terms of gauge, generation, completeness, editing, language, restoration, etc.? In this section of the workshop we focus on two elements of Ross's film records.

- the footage Ross shot in America in 1938-1939, now at ÖFM, with particular attention for the physical state of the nitrate reels, e.g. their cluttered order relative to Ross's itinerary, the many overexposed or blank frames within and between shots. What does the composite and unpolished state of these unreleased reels imply for the institute's preservation strategies?

speaker: Oliver Hanley (ÖFM); respondent: Michael Loebenstein (National Film and Sound Archive, Canberra)

- the Bundesarchiv-Filmarchiv, Berlin, holds a number of prints of Ross's released films, many of which are incomplete and/or exist in variously edited versions (MIT DEM KURBELKASTEN UM DIE ERDE;

DIE ERWACHENDE SPHINX; ALS DREIJÄHRIGER DURCH AFRIKA; ACHTUNG ASIEN! ACHTUNG AUSTRALIEN!). In this presentation we focus on the considerations that went into their restoration and preservation
speaker: Florian Wrobel (Bundesarchiv-Filmarchiv, Berlin); respondent: Patrick Russell (BFI-NFTVA, London)

With regard to **future uses**:

Here, we largely focus on the Ross materials at ÖFM. Given the state in which they were handed down, these film materials will not lend themselves easily to the type of program—regular film screenings—film heritage institutes routinely offer their audiences. The unreleased American footage, as mentioned, is relatively unordered and lacks titles and other identifying clues, while the incomplete, variantly edited versions of Ross’s released travelogues at ÖFM are most likely private reels Ross used for his illustrated lectures.²

- taking into account new audiences, new goals, new venues, and new technologies, what opportunities (and limitations) are there for programming, access, reuse, and other forms of presentation and distribution of the archived materials?

speaker: Adelheid Heftberger (ÖFM, Vienna); respondent: Dan Streible (New York University)

- a preview of a case study, titled ‘American sojourn’, intended for the project’s website. This case study stresses the intermediality of Ross’s work. It maps combinations of his footage shot in the USA in 1938-1939; his books about the country (*Amerikas Schicksalsstunde* [1935]; *Unser Amerika* [1936]; *Die ‘Westliche Hemisphäre’* [1942]); newspaper and magazine articles; and other materials—primary and secondary, text and image, print and digital

speaker: Nico de Klerk (LBIGG); respondent: Marja Roholl (independent scholar, Utrecht)

- a web case study of other ‘irregular’ film materials, ‘The TABU outtakes’, by the Stiftung Deutsche Kinemathek, and the considerations that went into its production

speaker: Karin Herbst-Meßlinger (Stiftung Deutsche Kinemathek, Berlin); respondent: Martin Loiperdinger (Universität Trier)

² We thank Martin Koerber, of the Stiftung Deutsche Kinemathek, Berlin, for this suggestion.

With regard to **historical uses**:

We know that Ross's films were shown in various configurations and forms—regular cinema screenings; serialized, open-admission screenings; screenings with introductions; screenings with lectures; lectures with screenings; compilations—at both theatrical and non-theatrical venues. Here we want to focus on two instances of these constellations: on one hand, combined lectures and moving images, and on the other, compilations made for screenings in German schools, notably *AUSTRALIEN UND NEUSEELAND* (1931) compiled from Ross's 1930 film *ACHTUNG ASIEN! ACHTUNG AUSTRALIEN!*.

- case study of screenings of one or more of Ross's combined lecture and moving image shows at the Urania venue, Vienna, based on ongoing research of the Urania archive, reviews, etc.

speaker: Katalin Teller (LBIGG); respondent: Werner Michael Schwarz (Wien Museum, Vienna)

- contextualization of the contemporary lecture culture, putting Ross's illustrated lecture activities in a wider perspective

speaker: Gábor Palló (Hungarian Academy of Sciences, Budapest); respondent: Katrin Pilz (Université libre de Bruxelles/LBIGG, Vienna)

- an overview of exhibition formats and reception of Ross's films and their variants, based on ongoing research of their reviews, announcements, and advertisements

speaker: Joachim Schätz (LBIGG); respondent: Kay Hoffmann (Haus des Dokumentarfilms, Stuttgart)

- The two workshop days run from 10AM to 5PM, featuring four presentations a day. At the end of each workshop day we will try and present a program of complete films by Colin Ross to give participants a sense of his film work; the DVDs of most other (unpreserved) materials lend themselves better to relatively brief illustrations during the talks rather than to full-length screenings. At this point in time, with preservations and digitizations going on, we cannot be sure how much we will be able to show, but we guarantee a screening of a number of digitized American reels.

- During lunch breaks, food and drinks will be served on site. We will host a dinner on the workshop's first evening.

- The language of the workshop will be English.

Catalogue and prints of Colin Ross's films (titles marked * are identical to a written account of a sojourn)

ZENTRALASIATISCHE REISE V. COLIN ROSS | Germany (Deulig) 1922 | COLIN ROSS'S CENTRAL-ASIAN JOURNEY

unretrieved.³ A shorter variant titled **WEG NACH OSTEN*** | Germany (Deulig) 1923 | THE ROAD TO THE EAST – has not been retrieved either

MIT DEM KURBELKASTEN UM DIE ERDE* | Germany (Ufa) 1925 | WITH THE CRANKING BOX AROUND THE GLOBE

two 35mm, c. 40' safety fragments of this 2,700m film⁴ are held by the Bundesarchiv-Filmarchiv, Berlin, and Gosfilmofond, Moscow

DER ERWACHENDE SPHINX* | Germany (Ufa) 1927 | THE AWAKENING SPHINX

one 35mm nitrate print is held by the Bundesarchiv-Filmarchiv, Berlin; two excerpted yet variantly edited 35mm nitrate reels of sections of the film are held by ÖFM with given titles and including footage that actually belong to the following title

ALS DREIJÄHRIGER DURCH AFRIKA | Germany (Ufa) 1928 | THROUGH AFRICA AT AGE THREE

one 35mm print is held by Bundesarchiv-Filmarchiv; two excerpted 35mm reels are held by ÖFM

ACHTUNG ASIEN! ACHTUNG AUSTRALIEN! DAS DOPPELGESICHT DES OSTENS | Germany (Ufa-Ullstein) 1930 |

ATTENTION ASIA! ATTENTION AUSTRALIA! THE DOUBLE FACE OF THE EAST

two variant 35mm nitrate prints are held by the Bundesarchiv-Filmarchiv, Berlin; one 35mm safety print is held by Gosfilmofond, Moscow; seven excerpted, mostly variantly edited 35mm nitrate reels are held by ÖFM, with given titles based on locations

DAS NEUE ASIEN* | Germany (Tobis-Degeto) 1940 | NEW ASIA

one 35mm incomplete nitrate and a ditto safety print are held by the Imperial War Museum, London; one 35mm safety print is held by Gosfilmofond

US footage: thirteen 35mm nitrate reels, plus a cannister of bits and pieces, of unreleased footage shot during Ross's October 1938 – March 1939 US sojourn, currently analogically preserved and digitized at ÖFM

AUSTRALIEN UND NEUSEELAND | Germany (Kulturfilm-Abteilung der Ufa) 1931

one 35mm print is held by the Bundesarchiv-Filmarchiv; compilation of excerpts from Ross's ACHTUNG ASIEN! ACHTUNG AUSTRALIEN! by Felix Lampe, director of Ufa's Kulturfilm-Abteilung

VÖLKERSCHICKSALE | Germany (Kulturfilm-Abteilung der Ufa) 1931 | PEOPLES' DESTINIES

another, yet unretrieved compilation by Lampe that combined Ross's footage with that from other films

³ In Walther Günther's 1927 edition of *Verzeichnis deutscher Filme I. Lehr- und Kulturfilme* (Berlin: Bildwart-Verlags-Genossenschaft), this film is designated as being "no longer available" (p.30).

⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 1; reviewer Frank Warschauer mentions that the film lasts about two hours; see his: 'Colin-Roß-Film', in: *Die Weltbühne* (June 1, 1925), p. 64.