

Abstracts for the workshop on Colin Ross
Vienna, January 15-16, 2016

The evanescent adventure

Nico de Klerk

My presentation focuses on the proportions of text and image in a small selection of Ross's book publications. In one case, the 1926 book *Mit dem Kurbelkasten um die Erde*, the assemblage of text and illustrations is contextualized in terms of early Weimar publishing trends and strategies. This particular book remained an exceptional case in Ross's output. Not only was it published by another than Ross's regular publisher of his books, Brockhaus of Leipzig. But it was also incompatible with Ross's ambitions as a writer of travel accounts that were always, to a lesser or greater extent, framed by wider political and/or economic concerns.

Two other examples, *Das Meer der Entscheidungen*, published in 1924, and *Die 'Westliche Hemisphäre'*, published 1942, constitute the 'bookends' of a huge and long series of Ross's uniformly designed travel accounts. They exemplify, on one hand, the consistent marketing strategy of Ross's publisher. Yet on the other, they show that this unchanging mold camouflaged a transformation of Ross's writing over the years.

Hello/Beware

Travelogue Form and its Geopolitical Inflections in *Achtung Australien! Achtung Asien!*

Joachim Schätz

Colin Ross's main contribution to travelogue filmmaking in Germany, as perceived by contemporaneous reviewers, was his focus on global political analysis. A number of his films were lauded – in liberal and socialdemocratic as well as right-wing newspapers and journals –, for synthesizing their picturesque impressions and anecdotes into arguments that went beyond colonial revisionism, influenced by the (pseudo-)science of geopolitics (especially his friend Karl Haushofer) and its geographic determination of ethnicity and international relations. Yet, just as in Ross's writings, his editorializing on eternal spatial laws and the rise and fall of populations was but one of a number of modes of presentation he utilized, mingled with – among others – a more inconspicuous travelogue style of loosely strung together sights and episodes, quasi-ethnographic observations of 'exotic' tribes, and jokey scenes from the Ross family's exploits on the trip.

The aim of my presentation is to examine how these modes of presentation both contrast and inflect each other within Ross's first sound feature *Achtung Australien! Achtung Asien!* (1930) which was typically well-received by critics if not by audiences. For instance, the geopolitical opposition of 'Space without People' (Australia, New Zealand) vs. 'People without Space' (China, India) that structures the film is potently mirrored in the changing focus on the Ross family as subjects of travel. Similarly, diverse temporalities – the timeline of the trip within the diegesis, the structuring of Ross's arguments, the 'allochronistic' visit to tribes, the speculation on future population movements, and the presence of Ross as a lecturer in the prologue and running commentary – are sometimes just conglomerated, other times put in expressive relations. As Alison Griffiths has shown, such a heterogeneity is not exclusive to Ross but a more encompassing tendency of the travelogue as a form often situated between popular entertainment, imperial rhetoric, and legitimating gestures of ethnographic exploration. Are Ross's geopolitical interests, lauded by his reviewers, just one more element in the mix, or do they inform the other elements of this travelogue in more thorough ways?

Colin Ross started his journalistic career as a war reporter: he first witnessed the Balkan wars 1912-1913 as a correspondent for the daily newspaper *Münchener Neueste Nachrichten*, and from 1914 on he fought in the Great War. Reports from the frontlines of WW1 appeared 1916 in his book *Wir draußen*, which was one of thousands of similar publications, and in the liberal daily *Vossische Zeitung* (Berlin), in which he regularly published his articles from 1915 till 1933.

My paper will analyse his early reports from the viewpoint of the traditions of the genre itself and will contextualize them, on the one hand, by drawing upon comparable contemporaneous texts and bestsellers and, on the other, by taking into account his Balkan reports and his articles from the early 1920s. Based on this, my aim is to challenge two notions often associated with war reports in relevant analyses. First, the significance of the “tourist gaze” tends to be reduced in Ross's accounts in favour of participatory rhetoric or comprehensive ethnographic and/or political considerations, secondly the moment of adventure is often subdued so as to give room to an antiheroic and somewhat self-mocking representation of the reporter. Thus the conventional elements of travelogues and war reports (such as authentication through eye-witnessing, common images in landscape descriptions by using anthropomorphisms, the construction of the concept of the enemy, etc.) have to be put into perspective: for instance, the moment of adventure with its antibourgeois effects is definitely weakened, or is accompanied by ethnographic and/or political reflections thus shifting the emphasis from the travel *per se* to a political or even ideological self-positioning of the author.