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‘Ein neuer Weg des Films’: Joseph Roth’s Reviews of Documentary Films

Joseph Roth was for many years remembered primarily as a novelist whose talent flowered briefly in the late 1920s and early 1930s, before dissipating in alcohol, melancholy and the misery of exile. Over the last two or three decades, however, he has been rediscovered as a writer whose journalistic output comfortably outweighs his literary, both in terms of volume and, arguably, consistency and quality. Roth may be read as a political journalist, a chronicler of the tensions of life in post-War Vienna and in Berlin at the peak of Weimar modernism, a travel writer, and a practitioner of the crafted *Feuilleton*; he was all of these things. Recently, interest has grown in Roth’s substantial writings on the medium which came into its own during the 1920s and which, one could say, has altered the way in which we perceive the world: film.

Roth produced as many as 80 articles which deal in some way with film. Karl Prümm concludes from this that Roth must have been a passionate cinemagoer and eager film reviewer, in thrall to the power of the medium.¹ This is a somewhat exaggerated claim, perhaps motivated by the desire to counter the prevailing assumption of his luddite hostility to the medium. The fact that Roth, in the early 1920s, attended and reviewed many films is not necessarily a sign, as I think it would be today, of a passionate interest in the medium.² In the major daily newspapers for which Roth worked, including the *Berliner Börsen-Courier* and *Frankfurter Zeitung*, film reviews, unlike literary and theatrical reviews, were not a priority, and had not even been included on a regular basis until the early 1920s. There were few film reviewers known by name.³ Film criticism was, like the medium itself, still in its infancy; critics such as Béla Balázs and Rudolf Arnheim were still arguing the case for film as an art in its own right, rather than the trashy proletarian distraction as which it had frequently been portrayed. The criteria by which a film should be evaluated were still in the process of being established. Roth’s early articles and columns for the Viennese magazine *Die Filmwelt*, as Klaus Westermann has observed, are never strictly speaking reviews; from an early stage he seems to have had more interest in film as a cultural phenomenon than in its artistic potential.⁴ In any case, the work for *Filmwelt* in 1919 almost certainly represented only an opportunistic ‘foot in the door’ for Roth, for it tails off rapidly following his regular employment at *Der Neue Tag*. That he subsequently wrote so frequently about new films, following his move to Berlin in 1920, may be viewed as an indication of his relatively junior status and appetite for work where and when he could find it. As his reputation grew and fees increased we find fewer articles dealing with specific films; thus the vast majority of his film ‘reviews’ were written in the period up to the end of 1924. Nevertheless, it is certainly true that Roth is frequently enthusiastic about films in this period, and seems initially not to have had an intrinsic problem with the medium itself. However, if we examine the terms in which specific films are praised in Roth’s work, in the heyday of Weimar modernist cinema and the UFA studios, it becomes apparent that the theoretical basis for Roth’s rejection of film in his 1934 polemic *Der Antichrist* is discernible at quite an early stage. It is noticeable, for example, that Roth seems to

1. Karl Prümm, ‘Die Stadt der Reporter und Kinogänger bei Roth, Brentano und Kracauer: Das Berlin der zwanziger Jahre im Feuilleton der “Frankfurter Zeitung”’, in Klaus R. Scherpe (ed.), *Die Unwirklichkeit der Städte: Großstadtdarstellungen zwischen Moderne und Postmoderne*, Reinbek, Rowohlt Taschenbuch, 1988, 80-105 (82).

2. Leonardo Quaresima, ‘Der Schatten, die Stimme: Joseph Roth als Filmkritiker’, in Michael Kessler and Fritz Hackert (eds), *Joseph Roth: Interpretation - Kritik - Rezeption*, Tübingen: Stauffenburg, 1990, 245-259 (245).

3. See Sabine Hake, *The Cinema’s Third Machine: Writing on Film in Germany, 1907-1933*, Lincoln, University of Nebraska Press, 1993, 15; see also Hui-Fang Chiao, ‘Eine junge, unglückliche und zukünftige Stadt’: *Das Berlin der zwanziger Jahre in Joseph Roths Werk*, Berlin, Köster, 1994, 91.

4. Klaus Westermann, *Joseph Roth, Journalist: Eine Karriere 1915-1939*, Bonn, Bouvier, 1987, 178.

have been particularly drawn to ‘Kulturfilme’ (what we would now term ‘documentaries’), to film as both a ‘record’ of events and a means of informing and educating. In part this taste for ‘real’ subjects may have arisen as a reaction to what he perceived as the pomposity and vulgarity of ‘nationalistic’ film dramas such as the *Fridericus Rex* films or Fritz Lang’s *Nibelungen*, but, as Leonardo Quaresima accurately observes, his comments regarding early documentaries and newsreels reflect an originality and perceptiveness worthy of closer examination (Quaresima, 249-255).

The first application of the term ‘documentary’ to film, in its now familiar sense, is usually attributed to the pioneering British documentary filmmaker, producer and theorist John Grierson in 1927, although this is not strictly true.⁵ In Germany the term had been applied by those within the early cinema reform movement, such as Hermann Häfker, in favour of educational ‘realist’ film, by which he understood non-narrative films fostering a sense of German nationhood in a manner which the corrupting commercial *Kinodrama* did not (Hake, 33). Nevertheless, it is Grierson’s definition of the ‘documentary’ as the ‘creative treatment of actuality’ which is perhaps most representative of conceptions of such films from the 1920s, at least as they came to be made in the West. The coupling of ‘creativity’, more usually associated with art, with ‘actuality’, is of course problematic. It is certainly questionable whether anything of the ‘actual’ or real, in its unmediated, chaotic, and spontaneous condition, remains after a ‘creative’ treatment. In his early responses to ‘documentary’ film Roth, surprisingly given his hostility to film as a ‘documentary’ medium in 1930, seems unconcerned by such problems. In ‘Der Gast aus dem Norden’ (1924) Roth discusses Robert J. Flaherty’s famous and at the time very popular film *Nanook of the North* (1922), which portrays the hard, traditional life of an Inuit family in northern Canada. This early ‘documentary’ (the first to combine ‘real life’ subject matter with the narrative structure of fiction cinema, and a major influence on Grierson) seems to have appealed to Roth on a number of levels, for he is unstinting in his praise for the film. Firstly, and importantly, he approves, aesthetic considerations aside, of the effect of the film as a levelling cultural event in which social classes are effaced. This is precisely what the bourgeois cinema reformists had so disapproved of, and is related to what inspired Siegfried Kracauer to write of ‘das *homogene Weltstadt-Publikum*, das vom Bankdirektor bis zum Handlungsgehilfen, von der Diva bis zur Stenotypistin eines Sinnes ist’.⁶ The film creates a temporary ‘community’ amongst its audience, though it is worth noting that Roth emphasises the variety in the audience by employing crude and stereotypical epithets, one of his less happy stylistic traits:⁷

Der Dandy vom Kurfürstendamm und das kleine Büromädchen, der Bankdirektor und der Konfektionsfirmeninhaber vom Hausvogteiplatz, der skeptische Literat und der naive Proletarier stehen in einer Kette vor den Abendkassen. Später im Saal gewinnen alle ihre verschiedenen Physiognomien denselben Ausdruck einer religiösen Inbrunst.⁸

This form of community, almost religious in its intensity, is viewed here as a positive experience, a form of release from Berlin’s ‘Sachlichkeit’ and ‘zweckhaftem Rhythmus’ (W, II, 52), not, as Roth later came to view film, as the surrendering of one’s identity to a superficial and ‘false’

5. Brian Winston, *Claiming the Real: The Griersonian Documentary and its Legitimations*, London, British Film Institute, 1995, 6. The honour of the first proper application of ‘documentary’ to film in English falls to Edward Sheriff Curtis, who is best remembered for his photographs of Native Americans, and who in 1914 attributed to his planned film *In the Land of the Headhunters* ‘documentary material’ as ‘thrilling’ as any ‘fake picture’. Full text by Sheriff included in Kevin Macdonald and Mark Cousins (eds), *Imagining Reality: The Faber Book of the Documentary*, London, Faber and Faber, 1996, 21-22.

6. Siegfried Kracauer, ‘Kult der Zerstreung’, in Kracauer, *Das Ornament der Masse: Essays*, Frankfurt am Main, Suhrkamp Taschenbuch, 1977, 311-317 (313).

7. See Prümm’s comments on the article, limited to this aspect; pp. 93-94.

8. Joseph Roth, *Werke*, ed. Fritz Hackert and Klaus Westermann, 6 vols, Cologne, Kiepenheuer & Witsch, 1989-1991, II, 52. Further references to this edition are abbreviated to ‘W’.

phenomenon. This difference in his attitude seems to derive from his acceptance, in the 1924 review, of the film's status as a 'true' document, with the camera as neutral witness, of a 'simple' man's noble existence and struggle with the elements. Indeed, Roth's predilection for icy, barren landscapes inhabited by solitary, simple men was to find expression in the evocations of Siberia in *Die Flucht ohne Ende*, *Der stumme Prophet*, and *Die Kapuzinergruft*, and stock characters such as Baranowicz (Baranovitsch in *Die Kapuzinergruft*), the Polish-Siberian hunter whose lifestyle, as described in the aforementioned novels, is not dissimilar to Nanook's and may indeed be partially based on memories of the film. The 'poetry' of the film is attributed entirely to its subject and his environment, not to the director:

'Nanuk' ist eine große Dichtung; Gott dichtet sie alle Tage, und Nanuk ist einer seiner Millionen Helden, und das Eismeer die große Bühne, auf dem [der] die Dichtung aufgeführt wird, der Sturm und der Schnee sind großartige Regisseure, die gefrorene Schweigsamkeit läßt sich von keinem Applaus unterbrechen. (W, II, 52)

Quaresima interprets Roth's comments uncritically as a reflection of an original theoretical approach to documentary film, in which it is conceived as releasing 'eine schöpferische Dimension, eine autonome Ausdrucksform der Natur' (Quaresima, 250). Yet Flaherty is not even mentioned by name in the article, as though the film were literally the result of 'direction' by 'Sturm' and 'Schnee', and not a product of careful planning, prompting, staging and editing. Admittedly, Flaherty makes comparatively little use of montage and mobile camerawork, often relying upon one long shot which, as detractors of 'expressive' montage techniques such as the French critic André Bazin have observed, helps maintain a unity and continuity of space which montage-editing would disrupt.⁹ Roth's understanding of Flaherty's film might seem to anticipate Bazin's, who in the 1950s attempted to celebrate the 'objective quality' of film; it is, he argued, the perfect medium for capturing the beauty of the real, a view which has now become decidedly unfashionable in its implicit denial of the constructed nature of any 'reality'.¹⁰ Yet Roth emphasises not the 'reality' of the end product but its power and beauty as filmic 'poetry', something he suggests is possible only by letting nature speak on film, rather than imposing a 'plot'. In a later article he muses, prompted in particular by a film incorporating footage shot (by Herbert G. Pointing) during Robert Scott's fatal attempt to reach the South Pole in 1911:

Wieviel wunderbare Filme hätten wir, wenn wir kein "Filmmanuskript" verwenden würden, sondern einfach die Welt, die Tatsachen, die Tiere, die Bäume, die Flüsse und die Wälder. Jeder von uns hätte es leicht, seine eigene Tragödie in den Rohstoff zu komponieren, und wir besäßen in einem einzigen Filme soviel dramatische "Handlungen", wie es Zuschauer gibt. (W, II, 363)

Roth is not suggesting here that by disposing of plots films would become more 'real'; rather he seems aware of the necessity of some sort of dramatic structure. He advocates a personal 'reading' of a film; a subjective imposition of a 'plot' upon what, objectively, has none, is 'natural'. The problem with this, of course, is that it is inconceivable that a director or editor would release a film as 'open' as Roth suggests; a film consisting only of unedited, thoughtlessly thrown together images of trees, animals and rivers would likely be so tedious that no viewer would be interested in creating their own 'plot' for it. Roth and his contemporary viewers would doubtless have been surprised to learn that, in *Nanook of the North*, Flaherty had encouraged Nanook (in fact an Inuit named Allakariallak) to 'perform' for the camera, which he had willingly done, and that a number of the film's most memorable sequences were artificially staged, a practice which became common within the documentary film movement.¹¹ Further, Roth fails (as he must do given that

9. Cited by V. F. Perkins, *Film as Film*, Harmondsworth, Penguin, 1972, 34.

10. See André Bazin, 'The Ontology of the Photographic Image', in Bazin, *What is Cinema*, ed. and trans. Hugh Gray, Berkeley, University of California Press, 1967, 9-16.

11. For example, Nanook's igloo is far larger than is customary or practical, and was left open on one side to allow light inside for filming. Similarly, Nanook's comic amazement at modern technology (a gramophone) is

he does not acknowledge the director's influence) to detect the patronising imperialism underpinning the film's representation of 'primitive' people, as indeed it does all of Flaherty's films set in remote corners of the world's empires. Thus he is able to write with little sense that Nanook is presented as a sentimentalised stereotype, which his article, though admiring, reinforces:

Bei uns gibt es alle Tage etwas Neues und bei Nanuk nur einmal im Jahr. Deshalb ist unsere Vielfältigkeit so klein und seine Einfalt so groß. Nanuk weiß nicht, wie populär er jetzt in Berlin ist. In der Stunde, in der ich über ihn schreibe, ist er vielleicht gerade dabei, mit seinem Elfenbeinmesser Schneeziegel für die Hütte zu schneiden. Um wieviel größer ist seine Arbeit als die meinige! Das Kunstwerk, das er *ist*, wird unsereins niemals schaffen. (W, II, 54)

Sadly, the 'Kunstwerk' Allakariallak had been dead from starvation for over a year at the time Roth was writing. Elsewhere, in 'Lenins Begräbnis im Film' (1924), Roth is similarly fascinated by a piece of 'real' footage, seen perhaps in a newsreel rather than a feature production. Nevertheless, he is again dismissive of the role of director and cameraman, though at least admitting their presence and potential role, emphasising instead that the film's merits derive solely from the quality of the subject being recorded:

Der unbestechlichen Redlichkeit des photographischen Apparates darf man Glauben schenken [...] Dabei nutzt der Operateur nicht einmal sehr geschickt die mannigfaltigsten Gelegenheiten zu guter Bildwirkung aus. Vielmehr rettet seine Ungeschicklichkeit die lyrische Schönheit des russischen Winters und die dramatische der russischen Gesichter.' (W, II, 51)

Or again: in 'Drei Sensationen und zwei Katastrophen' (1924) Roth reviews three films, including the *Nibelungenlied*. He is extremely critical of the latter ('das Tempo einer Leichenbestattung' (W, II, 184)), reserving the most praise once more for a 'documentary' about a failed attempt by a British general called Bryce to climb Mount Everest. He deems the film a genuine 'Sensation', but is again dismissive of the (unnamed) director's input: 'Daran hat allerdings die Filmkunst kein Verdienst, sondern das Objekt' (W, II, 185). Like Bazin, he seems to be implying here that: 'The photographic image is the object itself, the object freed from the conditions of time and space that govern it' (Bazin, 10). Again, he is attracted by the film's inclusion of footage of indigenous people, and, as with *Nanook*, it is hard not to find Roth's sentimentality naive and not a little patronising:

Zwanzig kostspielige Kolossalfilme gäbe ich für das Lächeln eines einsamen Hirten in der Unbarmherzigen Leere seines Weidegebiets, der zum erstenmal Europäer sieht, Kleider, Rucksäcke und einen Apparat. Er sieht wie ein Tier und wie ein Gott aus, und kein mit Seife gewaschener Europäer hat das Recht, über seine Schmutzigkeit zu spotten und über die der tibetanischen Frauen, die sich ein für allemal frisieren [...] (W, II, 186)

He seems unaware that a particular shot of a smiling Tibetan may have been *selected* to invite precisely this reaction, nor is his assumption that the shepherd is seeing Europeans and 'Kleider' (!) for the first time anything more than a cliché. What is clear is that, though amply aware of and fairly hostile to the control exerted by authorial directors like Lang on their expensive work, in 1924 he is less inclined to trust a creative human than the 'Apparat' itself: the 'art', he would like to believe, is 'out there', and the film camera a suitable instrument for recording it. The attribution to film of a near-spiritual ability to 'become' its object found its most eloquent expression in Bazin's writing, but Roth's comments also echo a current in early photographic and film theory. The poet Vachel Lindsay, in his book *The Art of the Moving Picture* (1915), saw film as a form of 'moving sculpture', of 'bronze in action'; as for Roth, the art was, for Lindsay, in the subject, and the filmmaker's mission to capture this living artwork (see Winston, 8). Only the camera is able to immortalise an 'artistic' moment. At face value this does not seem inconsistent with the influential

exaggerated and certainly inaccurate. Winston observes that Flaherty's camera equipment was in fact maintained by Inuit, but that Flaherty 'was never one to allow the truth to obscure a racial stereotype' (Winston, 20).

Soviet documentarist and theorist Dziga Vertov's cultish worship of the camera's 'eye'. Vertov's work, however, and that of advocates of 'pure cinema' in the 1920s, best represented by the numerous attempts at cinematic 'symphonies', was in fact highly stylized and edited. In influential films of this type such as Walter Ruttmann's *Berlin: Die Sinfonie der Großstadt* (1927) we find the attempt to translate the pace and sensual impact of the city onto film. To this end Vertov and Ruttmann are as interested in filming, say, the rhythmic power of machines, factories, or traffic as human beings or landscapes. Vertov's *Man with a Movie Camera* (1929), for example, frequently makes visual play with the similarities between human routines and the pre-set movement of machines, and undercuts all with self-conscious references to the manipulable nature of the medium and the editing process, which, wittily, we actually witness during the film. This is no more what Roth advocates in either film or literature than the type of statistic-laden, 'sachlich' reportage which is the object of criticism in numerous articles and essays. Neither the self-consciously abstract nor the overly concrete leaves room for the 'fromme[r] Schauder, den der einfache Zuschauer vor dem Mount Everest empfindet' (W, II, 186). The unedited open 'spaces' of Flaherty's film, and the deceptively 'simple' contemplation of the human face characteristic of each of the 'documentaries' praised by Roth in the articles considered here, are absent from theoretical 'pure' cinema, just as they are from Ernst Lubitsch's comedies or the elaborately staged nightmares designed by Carl Mayer.

However, this is not to say that Roth is exclusively appreciative of footage shot 'on location' and live. In one 1924 review he admits that some subjects lend themselves to a visual 'retelling' for which the input of a creative and perceptive mind is necessary. His response to the Danish director Benjamin Christensen's 1911 film *Håxan (Witchcraft through the Ages)* is wholly positive. This is interesting on two fronts. Firstly, Roth acknowledges the director's *artistic* decision to 'restage' scenes, historical and imagined, from the history of witchcraft and its persecution: 'Und weil Benjamin Christensen ein Künstler ist, wurde aus seiner pädagogischen Absicht eine reizende Folge künstlerischer Bilder' (W, II, 209). Secondly, he concedes to the medium an enlightening and educative power superior to that of text:

Man sieht einen *neuen* Weg des Films. Er kann ein vorzügliches - er kann das beste Instrument der Aufklärung werden. Er überwindet die geographischen und staatlichen und sprachlichen Grenzen. [...] Man kann, wie Christensen beweist, Dummheit, Verirrung, Fanatismus durch den Film besser bekämpfen als durch zehntausend Broschüren. (W, II, 209-210)

Partly his praise is political, for he clearly responds to Christensen's anti-intolerance message, particularly relevant in the 'haßgeladen' (W, II, 208) atmosphere of mid-1920s Germany. Yet he also considers the imaginative recreation of witches' sabbaths and the like as appropriate for a work of 'Populäre Kulturgeschichte' (the article's title), in so doing recognising the immense persuasive power of the cinema and of the visual as a mass medium. By the time of *Der Antichrist* Roth interprets the cinema's power to manipulate audiences as basically malign, and of course the medium was to be exploited for political ends as never before by the National Socialists. Yet there is a recognition here that, employed carefully and responsibly, and without the effect-laden pretence of 'reality' which is a feature of any straightforward historical drama, the cinema may be a force for good, for tolerance in an age of hatred. This is as close as Roth comes to endorsing explicitly Grierson's (rather too idealistic) conception of documentary film as an aid to social justice, presenting the viewer with 'actuality', yet retaining its status as a creative product. However, whilst presumably retaining an admiration for the intentions of lesser known filmmakers like Christensen, by the end of the decade Roth has become increasingly hostile to the commercialisation and technical sophistication of the cinema or, better, film industry, which of course he associates with Hollywood and American culture generally.

Roth's conception of filmmaking in 1924 may be compared to the process of 'in sich selbst lauschen' which he essays as a component of factual writing in his 1925 travel book *Die weißen Städte*. Michael Bienert, discussing conceptions of the 'Feuilleton' in newspapers in the 1920s, writes the following, which applies to Roth's understanding of his journalistic work, and which sheds light on his *instinctive* fondness for the cinematic documentary: 'Es handelt sich um nicht-fiktionale Texte (die, wie die Reportage, durchaus fiktionale Elemente enthalten können),

aber nicht um Nachrichten, sondern um Darstellungen außerliterarischer Realität mit literarischen Mitteln.¹² By 1930, Roth distinguishes ‘artistic’ reports from merely ‘photographic’ (that is superficial) testimony. In ‘Schluß mit der “Neuen Sachlichkeit”!’, he suggests that artistry, rather than facts, is necessary for a reporter to create a ‘true’, which is to say credible, report. The same reasoning applies to his earlier writing on documentary film, though in two different ways. The desire for ‘artistry’ may, firstly, dictate the choice of subject matter; the sense of pious awe in sight of Everest, for example. Secondly, it may, where appropriate, determine one’s method, as in Christensen’s deliberately artificial recreations as a means of informing a mass audience of history. However, Christensen’s film is in fact fairly unique in cinema history, and the ‘neuer Weg des Films’ Roth hoped it might help define did not emerge, perhaps because it only really lent itself to such a lurid subject as witchcraft.¹³ Similarly, Roth’s conception of the ‘art’ of *Nanook* lying primarily in the subject proved equally limiting in the long term, for it only allows for filming as a passive process, in which a sublime moment may be fortuitously recorded. And of course, if art is in the object, rather than in the manner in which it is recorded, it is more logical to conceive of the end product, the film, not, as Bazin believed, as the object itself or its equivalent, but as a reproduction, a ‘shadow’ of the original. Susan Sontag’s description of the photographic image (of which film is but a series) captures well this disturbing quality, as well as its fascination: it is ‘able to usurp reality because first of all a photograph is not only an image (as a painting is an image), an interpretation of the real; it is also a trace, something directly stenciled off the real, like a footprint or a death mask’.¹⁴ It is in the gradual realisation of this that Roth’s opinion of all types of film became darker and more negative, leading to his distinguishing consciously ‘artificial’ and mediate writing, in which the mechanical plays no part and the creative is everything, from the motion picture’s ‘shadowy’ pretence of ‘veracity’. In ‘Schluß mit der “Neuen Sachlichkeit”!’ we find, then, a more sophisticated attitude to the ‘Dokumentarische’. He is extremely hostile to the media’s unthinking valorisation of supposedly authentic and ‘simple’ attempts to ‘reflect’ reality, stressing that they can only hope to provide a limited and partial *perspective* of an event, never the event itself. Whereas in his earlier review of *Nanook* he is willing to accept the ‘document’ as a ‘slice of life’, his comments in 1930 make clear that his view has shifted. To fail to acknowledge the artificiality (or subjectivity) of a supposed document is to deceive oneself: ‘Sie [die “dokumentarische” Mitteilung], die “das Leben” selbst zu bezeugen scheint, ist weit entfernt, nicht nur von der “inneren” oder “höheren Wahrheit”, sondern auch von der Kraft der Wirklichkeit. Und erst das [self-conscious and admitted] “Kunstwerk” ist “echt wie das Leben”’ (W, III, 156). Ironically, this view of the relationship between truth and the documentary seems directly to parallel that of John Grierson. As Brian Winston puts it in his account of Grierson’s work: ‘Clearly, documentary needed to make a strong claim on the real, but at the same time Grierson did not want it to be a mechanical, automatic claim arising from nothing more than the very nature of the apparatus’ (Winston, 11). Grierson, then, wished to make his films ‘echt wie das Leben’ (my italics), recognising, like Roth, that life itself can never be captured. Admittedly, Grierson achieved limited success; viewed today, the films of Flaherty and the British documentarists seem simply too stilted to be real. Nevertheless, Grierson’s theories and the problems he experienced putting them into practice provide an interesting parallel to Roth’s struggle to find a satisfactory way to manage the relationship between reality, documentary and art. Roth’s own ‘documentary’ of Jewish life, *Juden auf Wanderschaft* (1927), opens with a

12. Michael Bienert, *Die eingebildete Metropole: Berlin im Feuilleton der Weimarer Republik*, Stuttgart, Metzler, 1992, 18.

13. *Haxan* was effectively forgotten for some fifty years, despite its lavish production. It was finally re-released in 1968 complete with a spoken commentary by William Burroughs replacing some of its original intertitles; a contemporary review noted that Burroughs speaks ‘in the orotund and slightly absurd tones used in the days of Fitzpatrick travelogues’ and that he ‘maintains exactly the right distanciation, never allowing the audience to become more involved in these mysteries and manifestations of witchcraft than Christensen is himself’. This seems to me precisely the quality which Roth likes in the original silent version - an almost Brechtian admiration for entertainment combined with educational distance. Tom Milne, ‘*Haxan/Witchcraft through the Ages*’, in Macdonald and Cousins (eds), 71-73 (72).

14. Susan Sontag, *On Photography*, London, Allen Lane, 1978, 350.

defence of his approach which might also be applied to Grierson's or Flaherty's work: 'Dieses Buch ist nicht für Leser geschrieben, die es dem Autor übelnehmen würden, daß er den Gegenstand seiner Darstellung mit Liebe behandelt statt mit "wissenschaftlicher Sachlichkeit", die man auch Langeweile nennt' (W, II, 827). Despite the defiant tone in this defence of his style, he subsequently displays an awareness of its limitations by conceding: 'Dieses Buch wird leider nicht imstande sein, das ostjüdische Problem mit der umfassenden Gründlichkeit zu behandeln, die es erfordert und verdient' (W, II, 828). His understanding of his own work was tempered, ironically, by the frustrating knowledge that the comprehensive wholeness which he denied was achievable in photography and film remained an impossibility even in a crafted written 'Bericht'.