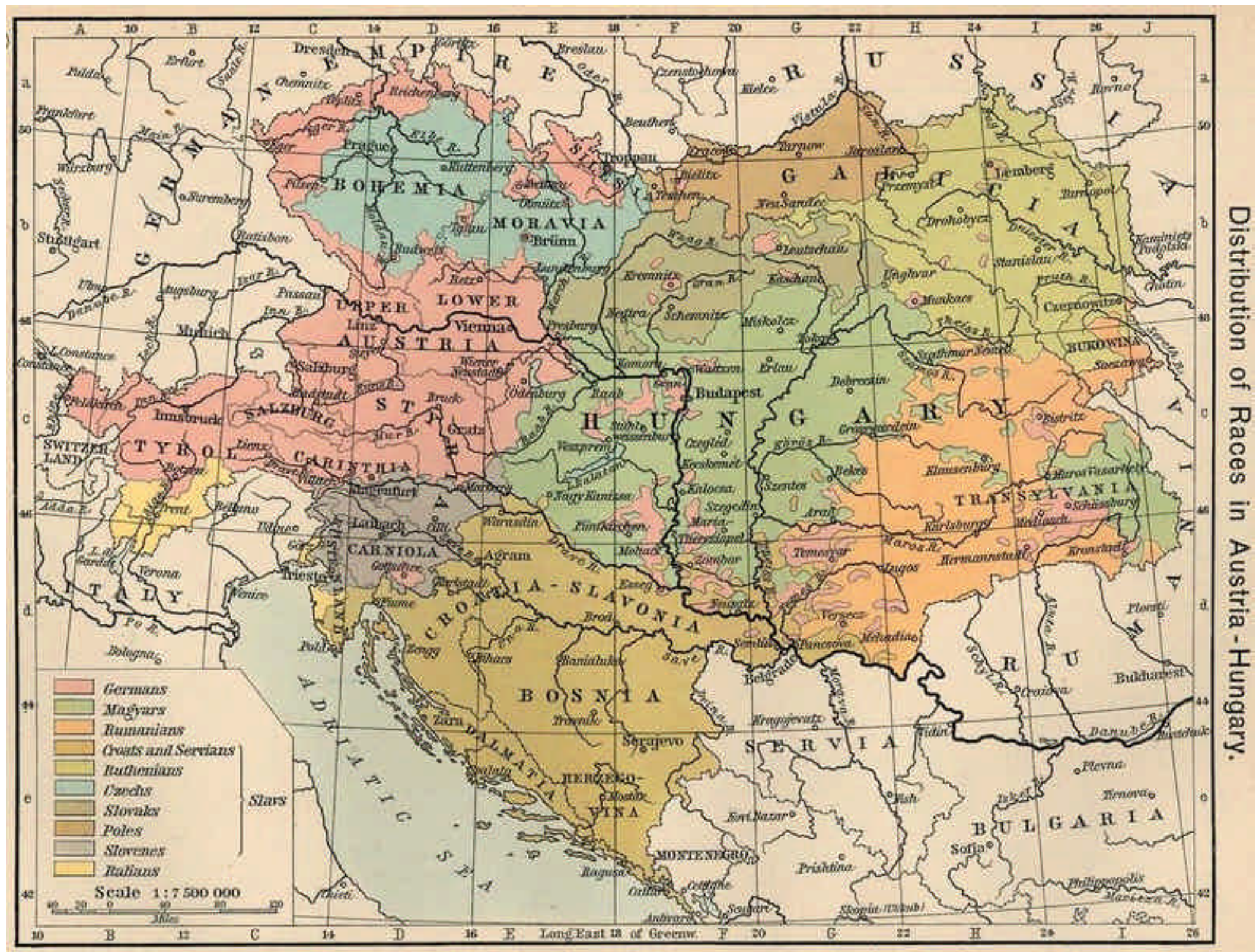


EMPIRE OF THE SENSES : Paul Rosdy's 'New World'

[7/10]

Wednesday, 02 November 2005



Not to be confused with Terrence Malick's upcoming feature of near-identical title, *New World* is a meandering, episodic, laid-back, ultimately somewhat hypnotic travelogue around central and eastern Europe. The itinerary takes us from the Adriatic to Ukraine - around places which were once part of the sprawling Austro-Hungarian Empire (1867-1918). Our journey at times retraces the travels of various Habsburg emperors - as chronicled in contemporary newspaper reports - around various half-forgotten towns, dryly described in contemporary Baedekers and the like.

Vienna-based Rosdy has clearly spent an inordinate amount of time raking through old celluloid archives, and he skilfully blends ancient black-and-white footage with modern-day material shot in near-identical locations. We then meet a wide range of people and obtain a peek into their daily lives: various folk traditions are included; some geese are rather savagely plucked; and there's no shortage of dancing and singing. "The melancholia won't let me go!" warbles one oldster in decidedly joyous fashion.

You certainly don't *need* to know about the complex history of the Habsburgs and their empire before watching *New World*, but it helps. Likewise, Rosdy presumes a certain geographic savvy which not all of his viewers might possess - a map or two might have been useful, if only to work out exactly how modern-day Ukraine overlaps with the Habsburg region of Galicia (*not* to be confused with the same-name Spanish province!)

Then again, Rosdy isn't compiling any sort of academic survey/analysis here: this is an impressionistic collage of people and places, faces and streets, dark-treed forests and trolleybus-crisscrossed cities. His loose ethnographic tour encompasses a surprisingly wide range of cultures and religions. And this Muslim-fringed, Judaism-flecked corner of Europe is emphatically a world away from the "Christian Club" label sometimes applied to the EU: the Jewish heritage of Ukraine, indeed, is what provides the film with its bland-seeming, but in fact fiercely-ironic title.

What we end up with is a journey around something of a 'lost continent' - allusive and elusive, elegaic but ultimately optimistic, without any particular political viewpoint being espoused or illustrated. Because while certain themes recur in this meditative patchwork, the viewer is left to assemble whatever 'narrative' takes his or her fancy - this bald, hands-off, documentary/reportage approach proving a much smoother fit for the subject-matter than the last Austrian entrant into the 'reisefilm' sub-genre. Goran Rebic's Danube-navigating *Donau, Duma, Dunaj, Dunav, Dunarea* (2003) covered very similar geographical ground but did so within a fictional framework that proved as unwieldy as its multilingual mouthful of a title.

New World, on the other hand sticks, sensibly, and straightforwardly, to reality: simple vignettes, observed with a detached, quizzical, ever-hungry camera-eye that takes us on an unexpectedly bizarre and compelling journey through time and space. Seldom, if ever, can a 'doorstep' ever have seemed quite so far away...

[Neil Young](#)
3rd November, 2005

NEW WORLD : [7/10] : Neue Welt : Austria 2005 : Paul ROSDY :100 mins
seen on DVD at home in Sunderland (UK), 31stOctober 2005 [with thanks to Paul Rosdy]. Also shown at [Viennale](#) film festival

