

SYNC EVENT

The Ethnographic Allegory of *Unsere Afrikareise*

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Department of Media Studies
Master's Thesis 30 HE credits
Cinema Studies
Master's Programme in Cinema Studies
Spring 2016
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Stockholms
universitet

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ABSTRACT

The thesis aims at a critical reflexion on *experimental ethnography* with a special focus on the role of sound. A reassessment of its predominant discourse, as conceptualized by Cathrine Russell, is paired with a conceptual approach to film sound and *audio-vision*. By reactivating experimental filmmaker Peter Kubelka's concept *sync event* and its aesthetic realisation in *Unsere Afrikareise* (*Our Trip to Africa*, Peter Kubelka, 1966) the thesis provide a themed reflection on the materiality of film as audiovisual relation. *Sync event* is a concept focused on the separation and meeting of image and sound to create new meanings, or metaphors. By reintroducing the concept and discussing its implication in relation to Michel Chion's *audio-vision*, the thesis theorizes the audiovisual relation in ethnographic/documentary film more broadly. Through examples from the Russian avant-garde and Surrealism the sync event is connected to a historical genealogy of audiovisual experiments. With James Clifford's notion *ethnographic allegory* *Unsere Afrikareise* becomes as a case in point of experimental ethnography at work. The sync event is comprehended as an ethnographic allegory with the audience at its focal point; a colonial critique performed in the active process of audio-viewing film.

KEYWORDS

Experimental Ethnography, Film Sound, *Audio-Vision*, Experimental Cinema, Documentary, Ethnographic Film

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INTRODUCTION

There is one fantastic adventure, which I had in Africa. I came into this Stone Age village, and the people there were just able to make their spear heads, a very old civilisation. They were having a feast, preparing a building for an ecstasy, which would last all night. [...] Then the sun started to set, very fast, you know the closer you come to the equator the faster the sun sets. The more the sun neared the horizon the more the tension grew. Then exactly when the sun reached the horizon the chief made one bang on his drum. I was moved to tears because I saw my own motive right there, as old as mankind. What I wanted to do with sound and light, they did too. This was a fantastic, beautiful sound sync event. Against them I was ridiculous with this thing here. This comparison of their sync event and mine exactly describes the situation of our civilization. Much less sensual substance and beauty, more speed. They had one day. I had every 24th of a second.

Peter Kubelka, "The Theory of Metrical Film"¹

Unsere Afrikareise (*Our Trip to Africa*, Peter Kubelka, 1966) is a film of exceptional tension. In 1961 experimental filmmaker Peter Kubelka followed a group of Austrian compatriots on a hunting trip to southern Sudan. But the film doesn't give us much information about either the people or the location. Instead shots follow each other in a rapid pace that lack any conventional narrative, with disparate images and sounds recorded at different times and in different locations mixed into a dense pattern. The only narrative structures are built on graphic matching and associational causality provoked by the editing, as when a handshake transfers into the shaking leg of a zebra being butchered.

Visual shots are linked up with mismatched, but at the same time precisely synchronised, sound fragments into audiovisual metaphors that Kubelka calls *sync events*. Disturbing pictures; the aiming with rifles, animals convulsing from being shot and intimate body parts of Africans, are contrasted to fragments of location sound and recorded voices; often banal and cynical comments by the participants of the safari. A disturbing laughter resounding over pictures of Africans in pastoral settings stays with me after watching the 16mm film at the Austrian Film Museum in Vienna.²

Travelling from Stockholm to Vienna to watch this twelve and a half minute film, when most films are accessible on digital streaming, brings an aura to the filmic experience and pays homage to Kubelka's modernist avant-garde pretensions. To Kubelka no medium is transferable into another and cinema is closely linked to the physicality of the celluloid filmstrip running through the projector. In the "invisible cinema" he envisioned a "womblike, egg-shaped room" as an ideal cinematic space to experience his films:

¹ Peter Kubelka, "The Theory of Metrical Film," in *The Avant-Garde Film: A Reader of Theory and Criticism*, ed. P. Adams Sitney (New York: New York University Press, 1978), 158.

² Österreichisches Filmmuseum (Austrian Film Museum) was funded by Peter Kubelka and Peter Konechnner in 1964.

Each seat would curve around the head of the spectator shutting off neighbours and heads in front. In this black box even the size and distance from the screen would have indeterminable dimension. For as long as the film were to last, it would be the world. It would be perfect.”³

In this text I want to free the subject of Kubelka’s modernist pretensions by placing the film in an alternative discourse where the metaphor of the *sync event* can be read as *ethnographic allegory*.⁴ In the introduction to *Reverse Angle, Cinema and Anthropology* Andy Davies defines the strength of ethnographic film as coming exactly from its weak spot: “Ethnographic film is the cinema of the Other. Yet the Other, by definition, can never be completely revealed or explained. It is because ethnographic film must assume this contradiction that it has become the paradigmatic cinema of self-consciousness.”⁵ The impossibility to document “the Other” leads into self-reflexion. But a closer look at the filmmakers discussed in the publication reveals that they, rather than being part of the ethnographic film canon, belong to a field that has been labelled *experimental ethnography*.⁶

With her 1999 book *Experimental Ethnography: The Work of Film in the Age of Video* Catherine Russell can be said to have opened up a whole new field in film studies by bringing ethnographic and avant-garde film into close alignment. To bring avant-garde and documentary film together was not a new thing as such. Michael Renov is an important precursor in the scholarly field of documentary film.⁷ What Russell did was to put into print a unified theoretical framework for the relation between the didactic ethnographic film and the experimental avant-garde film.⁸ Two recent books, *Experimental Film and Anthropology* (2014) and *Avant-Doc* (2014), both acknowledge Russell as a pioneer of *experimental ethnography*.⁹

³ P. Adams Sitney, “The Standing Ovation: The Recognition of Peter Kubelka,” unpublished paper in Anthology of Film Archives documentation library, quoted in Catherine Russell, *Experimental Ethnography: The Work of Film in the Age of Video* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1999), 126. A version of the “invisible cinema” was realised at the Anthology Film Archives in New York. P. Adams Sitney, “Introduction,” in *The Essential Cinema: Essays on Films in The Collection of Anthology Film Archives*, ed. P. Adams Sitney (New York: Anthology Film Archives and New York University Press, 1975), vii-viii.

⁴ *Ethnographic allegory* is a concept coined by James Clifford in “On Ethnographic Allegory,” in *Writing Culture: The Poetics and Politics of Ethnography*, ed. James Clifford and George E. Marcus (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1986), 98-121.

⁵ Andy Davies: “Introduction” in *Reverse Angle, Cinema and Anthropology*, ed. Andy Davies and Nuria Rodriguez (Madrid: La Casa Encendida, 2007), 10.

⁶ Besides *Unsere Afrikareise* by Kubelka, films by Luis Buñuel (*Las Hurdes: Tierra sin pan, Land Without Bread*, 1932), Maya Deren, Harun Farocki (*Arbeiter verlassen die Fabrik, Workers Leaving the Factory*, 1995), Trinh T. Minh-ha (*Reassemblage*, 1982), Dennis O’Rourke (*Cannibal Tours*, 1988) and Jean Rouch are discussed in the publication. Andy Davies and Nuria Rodriguez, ed. *Reverse Angle, Cinema and Anthropology* (Madrid: La Casa Encendida, 2007).

⁷ See for example Michael Renov, ed., *Theorizing Documentary* (New York: Routledge, 1993). Already in the 1950s Amos Vogel used documentary and avant-garde film to contextualize each other in dialectically arranged film programs at *Cinema 16* in New York. Scott MacDonald, *Avant-Doc: Intersections of Documentary and Avant-Garde Cinema* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), 7.

⁸ Scott MacDonald, “Review-Essay: *Experimental Ethnography: The Work of Film in the Age of Video*,” *Canadian Journal of Film Studies*, vol. 9, no. 1 (spring 2000), 118.

⁹ MacDonald, *Avant-Doc*, 14; Arnd Schneider and Catherina Pasqualino, ed., *Experimental Film and Anthropology* (London: Bloomsbury Publishers, 2014), 5.

Russell's project is a break with the realism that had dominated the scholarly field of ethnographic film in particular and documentary film in general. She writes: "Experimental ethnography involves, above all, dismantling the universalist impulse of realist aesthetics [...] and it is the avant-garde I believe, more so than 'documentary,' that provides the tools for this operation."¹⁰ But the challenge presented by *experimental ethnography* goes both ways, affecting experimental film as well as ethnographic film: "In the dissolution of disciplinary boundaries, ethnography is a means of renewing the avant-gardism of 'experimental' film, of mobilizing its play with language and form for historical ends."¹¹

This thesis aims at a critical reflexion on *experimental ethnography* with a special focus on the role of sound. A reassessment of its predominant discourse will be paired with a conceptual approach to film sound and *audio-vision*. By reactivating Peter Kubelka's concept *sync event* and its aesthetic realisation in *Unsere Afrikareise* I will provide a themed reflection on the materiality of film as audiovisual relation. I will ask how the audiovisual play of the *sync event* is *achieved*, where it *originates* and how it can be *understood*.

Sync event is a concept focused on the separation and meeting of image and sound to create new meanings, or metaphors as Kubelka would have it. By reintroducing this concept and discussing its implication, I wish to theorize the audiovisual relation in ethnographic/documentary film more broadly. *Experimental Ethnography* was part of opening up new ways to discuss the representation of "reality" and "the Other" in ethnographic film. Since then substantial work has been written on cultural mediation as aesthetic choices in visual representation. Less has been written on the role of sound.¹² The notion *sync event* targets the audiovisual relation. To connect with a broader discussion on sound I will turn to what is probably the most comprehensive theory on the materiality of film as audiovisual relation up to date, Michel Chion's *Audio-Vision: Sound on Screen* (1994).¹³

In the book, Chion starts by pointing out that audiovisual media place the spectator, or rather audio-spectator "in a specific perpetual mode of reception," that he calls *audio-vision*.¹⁴ Sound changes the image, and the image changes the sound. But at the same time the *added value*, that sound brings to the images "is what gives the (eminently incorrect) impression that sound is unnecessary, that sound merely duplicates a meaning which in reality it brings about, either on its own or by

¹⁰ Russell, *Experimental Ethnography*, xvii.

¹¹ Ibid., xii. Russell returns to the concept *experimental ethnography* in Catherine Russell, "Leviathan and the Discourse of Sensory Ethnography: *Spleen et idéal*," *Visual Anthropology Review*, vol. 31, issue 1, 2015, 27-34.

¹² Gunnar Iversen and Jan Ketil Simonsen: "Introduction," in *Beyond the Visual: Sound and Image in Ethnographic and Documentary Film*, ed. Gunnar Iversen and Jan Ketil Simonsen (Højbjerg: Intervention, 2010), 10.

¹³ Michel Chion, *Audio-Vision: Sound on Screen*, trans., Claudia Gorbman (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994). Originally published in 1990 as *L'Audio-Vision*.

¹⁴ Chion, *Audio-Vision*, xxv.

discrepancies between image and sound.”¹⁵ To balance the conflict, and following the separation and recombination of image and sound in the sync event, I will start the audiovisual analysis with, what Chion calls the *masking method*, looking at the image track and listening to the sound track separately.¹⁶ This will help to appreciate the contribution of both the visuals and the auditory in forming the *audio-visual* sync events in *Unsere Afrikareise*.

Experimental Ethnography brings a wide spectrum of films into the same framework, bridging the limitations set by narrow genres, and opening up for new creative readings. By an allegorical interpretation it's possible to read older ethnographic films as documents of their time, as exponents not of native peoples but of colonialism.¹⁷ A problem is that the concept sometimes becomes too wide and that the theoretical perspective overarches the actual films, subjecting them all to the same model of reading, not acknowledging the insights provided by the individual films and the conceptual approaches that inform their aesthetics and mode of address. By grounding my analysis in a close reading of one specific film I want to anchor the theory in the materiality of film as audiovisual relation.

Right before departing on his African journey Kubelka made the flicker film *Arnulf Rainer* (Peter Kubelka, 1960). Consisting of only white and black frames (light/no light), white noise and no noise (sound/no sound) *Arnulf Rainer* can be understood, and certainly is by Kubelka, as the ultimate reduction of film to its central formal elements. It is precisely this urge for reduction that makes Kubelka into an ideal conceptual example for theorizing the material relations of film. Kubelka shares this formal reduction with the structural filmmakers and Russell acknowledges the importance of structuralism in the formation of experimental ethnography as a discourse:

Because structural filmmakers worked so hard to strip film down to its bare essentials, they have in many ways excavated the ‘elements’ with which ethnographers need to know how to work. Going back to these films, in the light of ethnography, searching out the traces of ‘the social’ is to break through the barrier between the avant-gardes, and to link aesthetic innovation to social observation.¹⁸

In *Unsere Afrikareise* the formal reduction clashes with a documentary, ethnographically coded, content that “speaks loudly and strongly on the level of the

¹⁵ Ibid., 14-15.

¹⁶ Ibid., 187-188.

¹⁷ Russell, *Experimental Ethnography*, 58. Russell builds her argument on the critical perspective of “the third eye,” as theorized by Rony Fatimah Tobin Rony in *The Third Eye: Race, Cinema and Ethnographic Spectacle* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1996), and uses it as a form of allegorical interpretation. Ralph A. Litzinger, “*The Third Eye: Race, Cinema, and Ethnographic Spectacle* by Fatimah Tobing Rony; *Experimental Ethnography: The Work of Film in the Age of Video* by Catherine Russell,” *American Anthropologist, New Series*, vol. 102, no. 3 (2000), 608-610. According to me, this allegorical interpretation is one of the great advantages of *Experimental Ethnography*, since it is what makes it possible to read the horrors of colonialism in older films without the constraints of placing moral judgement, as infused in Rony's book.

¹⁸ Russell, *Experimental Ethnography*, 16.

shot alone.”¹⁹ This clash, between form and content, is paralleled in the structure of the film; in the collision of disparate image and sound fragments into sync events.

In her book Russell places *Unsere Afrikareise* in a chapter called “Zoology, Pornography, Ethnography,” where she uses the *gaze theory* – an updated version of the *apparatus theory* – as her main theoretical tool.²⁰ Her focus on the gaze excludes exactly what will be the main focus of this study, the soundtrack, or to be more exact the audiovisual relation.²¹ By using the *gaze theory* Russell wants to read “against the grain” of Kubelka’s film.²² I propose that a re-assessment of *Unsere Afrikareise* through the concept sync event will make it possible to read “with the grain” of the film by applying James Clifford’s allegorical model.

Ethnographic allegory refers to a process where individuals become representatives of general social patterns and cultural practices, or even human principles.²³ According to Clifford all ethnographic writing is allegorical “at the level both of its *content* (what it says about cultures and their histories) and of its *form* (what is implied by its mode of textualisation) [my italics].”²⁴ The introduction of Clifford’s concept ethnographic allegory closes a full circle. Clifford not only coined the concept experimental ethnography as part of his critique of ethnographic writing in the 1980s (together with Michael Taussing, George Marcus and Stephen Taylor), a line of thought that Russell brought to film studies, but the notion ethnographic allegory also seems to be the central *modus operandi* in *Experimental Ethnography*.²⁵

By placing the formalistic concept sync event in a discourse of *representation* I want to open up for an audiovisual critique of colonialism beyond conventional political rhetoric.²⁶ In doing this I suggest that *Unsere Afrikareise* can stand as a model for a critique that forces us to get involved by passing the responsibility to take a stand over to the audience, and in the words of Vivianne Sobchack in her analysis of *Las Hurdes: Tierra Sin Pan (Land Without Bread)*, Luis Buñuel, 1932), leads us “to question our own prejudices that distort and reduce the world at every glance.”²⁷ Sobchack’s text “Synthetic Vision: The Dialectical Imperative of Luis Buñuel’s *Las Hurdes*,” will serve as a model for my analysis of *Unsere Afrikareise* as ethnographic allegory.²⁸ My

¹⁹ Ibid., 126.

²⁰ Ibid., 120-125.

²¹ While Russell correctly acknowledges the sound as being as important as the image to the impact of the film her text is full of analyses of the visual vocabulary but only devotes one single paragraph to the soundtrack. Ibid., 133.

²² Ibid., 135.

²³ Ibid., 5.

²⁴ Clifford, 98-99.

²⁵ Russell, *Experimental Ethnography*, xi.

²⁶ On page 48 I will discuss Trinh Min-ha’s critique of the conventions of political documentary filmmaking.

²⁷ Vivianne Sobchack, “Synthetic Vision: The Dialectical Imperative of Luis Bunuel’s *Las Hurdes*,” in *Documenting the Documentary: Close Readings of Documentary Film and Video*, ed. Barry Keith and Jeannette Sloniowski (Detroit: Wayne State University Press 2014), 62.

²⁸ Ibid., 51-63. The text was originally published in *Millennium Film Journal*, no. 7-9 (1980-1981).

other key reference for this argument is Trinh T. Min-ha, acknowledged by Russell as a catalyst for rethinking documentary practices in the 1980s.²⁹

DEMARCATIION

In an earlier version of her text on *Unsere Afrikareise*, published 1998 as “Dystopian Ethnography,” Russell places the film at the very centre of her project:

Unsere Afrikareise needs to be understood as a central text not only within the history of the avant-garde, but also within ethnographic film and the history of experimentation with anthropological material. Jean Rouch and Maya Deren were also attracted to possession rituals as exemplary sites of ethnographic representation, offering alternative epistemological practices to scientific objectivity. Kubelka’s montage aesthetic anticipates Trinh Minh-ha’s techniques of ethnographic decentering, as well as Chris Marker’s epic travelogue *Sans Soleil*. Within the history of experimental ethnography, *Unsere Afrikareise* stands out, along with Luis Buñuel’s *Las Hurdes*, as an important and instructive incursion of the modernist avant-garde on ethnographic strategies of cinematic representation.³⁰

The quote marks out several alternative paths that my text could have taken. The works by these filmmakers – Rouch, Deren, Marker, Minh-ha and Buñuel – all offer different ways of questioning the “naturalist conception of sound” within “the history of experimentation with anthropological material.”³¹

This thesis could have followed experimental filmmaker Maya Deren’s struggle to compile her image and sound footage from Haiti, a key point of convergence between the avant-garde and ethnographic filmmaking.³² Another path to follow could have been the audiovisual experiments of Jean Rouch’s *shared anthropology*. Rouch, a major influence to both modern cinema and anthropology, elaborated with collective storytelling and shared voice-over narration in films like *Moi, un noir* (*Me, a Black Man*, Jean Rouch, 1958) and *Jaguar* (Jean Rouch, 1967).³³

A third path could have been tracing Chris Marker’s consistent investigation of the relation between voice and documentary image in his filmic essays, questioning the authoritarian voice-over of *textual speech* as well as the authenticity of the

²⁹ Russell, *Experimental Ethnography*, 4.

³⁰ Catherine Russell, “Dystopian Ethnography: Peter Kubelka’s *Unsere Afrikareise* Revisited”, *Canadian Journal of Film Studies*, vol. 7, no. 1 (1998), 14.

³¹ Chion, *Audio-Vision*, 93; Russell, “Dystopian Ethnography,” 14.

³² Moria Sullivan, “Deren’s Ethnographic Representation of Haiti,” in *Maya Deren and the American Avant-Garde*, ed. Bill Nichols (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001), 207-236. Transcripts from a 1963 seminar at Cinema 16 may give a clue of what Deren wanted to do audiovisually with her Haitian footage. “Poetry and the Film: A Symposium with Maya Deren, Arthur Miller, Dylan Thomas, Parker Tylor, Chairman: Willard Maas. Organized by Amos Vogel,” in *Film Culture Reader*, ed. P. Adams Sitney (New York: First Cooper Square Press, 2000), 179.

³³ Russell, *Experimental Ethnography*, 218. For the role of asynchronicity in *Jaguar*, see Jennifer L. Heuson and Kevin T. Allen, “Asynchronicity: Rethinking the Relation of Ear and Eye in Ethnographic Practice” in *Experimental Film and Ethnography* (London: Bloomsbury Publishers, 2014), 116; For a critical discussion on collective storytelling in *Moi, un noir*, see Steve Ungar, “Whose Voice? Whose Film?: Jean Rouch, Oumarou Ganda and *Moi, un noir*,” in *Building Bridges: The Cinema of Jean Rouch*, ed. Joram ten Brink (London: Wallflower, 2007), 111-124.

subjective voice-over of the filmmaker.³⁴ With the premise, “I do not intend to speak about / just speak nearby,” Trinh Minh-ha resonance Marker’s questioning of the authority of voice-over, sparking the anthropological critique of the 1980s that led up to Russell’s project.³⁵ With the rejection of ethnographic convention and outspoken anti-representational intent *Reassemblage* (Trinh-Minh-ha, 1982) indicates precisely the moment “when anthropology went through its most radical ‘crisis of representation’ and when its contribution to cultural critique became mainstream *raison d’être*.”³⁶

Doubtless these filmmakers’ important contributions in disassembling the realist aesthetics by questioning the audiovisual relation, they all, with the exception of Buñuel, fall outside the scope of this thesis, given my focus on the sync event. In many ways the audiovisual sampling in found footage films like *A Movie* (Bruce Conner, 1958), *Myth in the Electric Age* (Alan Berliner, 1981) and *Handsworth Songs* (Black Audio Film Collective, 1985) come closer to the montage technique of *Unsere Afrikareise*.³⁷ A filmmaker on the boundary line of documentary and experimental film, who has been directly inspired by *Unsere Afrikareise*, is Alfred Guzzetti.³⁸

In this thesis I will trace the historical genealogy of the sync event in the early sound film of surrealist cinema (Luis Buñuel) and Russian avant-garde film (Dziga Vertov).

SURVEY OF THE FIELD

When Catharine Russell brought *Unsere Afrikareise* to the field of experimental ethnography the film already had a solid place in the history of avant-garde film. In his 1974 classic *Visionary Film: The American Avant-garde 1943-2000* P. Adams Sitney appoints Kubelka a vital role in the genealogy of, what Sitney named, structural film.³⁹ More important, in the context of this thesis, Sitney distinguish Kubelka as the only filmmaker “who affirms the absolute equality of importance between image and sound

³⁴ For the relation between Rouch’s shared anthropology and Marker’s filmic essay, see Ian Christie, “Disbelieving Documentary: Rouch Viewed through the Binoculars of Marker and Ruiz” in *Building Bridges: The Cinema of Jean Rouch* (London: Wallflower Press, 2007), 271-272; For a critical discussion of word and image in Marker’s films, see Jacques Rancière, “Documentary Fiction: Marker and the Fiction of Memory” in *Film Fables*, trans., Emiliano Battista (New York: Berg, 2006), 168; For *textual speech*, see Chion, *Audio-Vision*, 173-174.

³⁵ Russell, *Experimental Ethnography*, 4.

³⁶ Paul Basu, “Reframing Ethnographic Film” in *Rethinking Documentary, New Perspectives, New Practices*, ed., Thomas Austin and Wilma de Jong (Maidenhead: Open University Press, 2008), 101.

³⁷ Connor’s use of a non-diegetic musical score sets *A Movie* apart from the sync events in *Unsere Afrikareise*. Fred Camper compares *Myth in the Electric Age* to *Unsere Afrikareise* in his infamous attack on the American Avant-garde of the late 1970s and 1980s. Fred Camper, “The End of the Avant-Garde,” *Millennium Film Journal*, no. 16/17/18, “20th Anniversary Special Edition,” Fall/Winter 1986-87, 99-126. For an answer to Camper’s critique see Grahame Weinbren “Post Future Past Perfect,” in *Experimental Film and Video: An Anthology*, ed. Jackie Hatfield (Eastleigh: John Libbey Publisher, 2006), 11-12.

³⁸ MacDonald, *Avant-Doc*, 20. Guzzetti acknowledges Kubelka as an inspiration when making *Air* (Alfred Guzzetti, 1971). Ibid, 113.

³⁹ P. Adams Sitney: *Visionary Film – The American Avant-Garde 1943-2000* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002), 347-370.

in cinema.”⁴⁰ Sitney’s contested role in film history, being the foremost champion for the American avant-garde film, calls for some further elaboration. I will borrow an argument from David E. James in *Allegories of Cinema*, where he writes:

The most comprehensive, nuanced, and lucid of the transportations of the modernist paradigm to film Sitney’s work is able to account for certain projects in cinema, and the importance of his accounts of specific films can hardly be overestimated. But the elaboration of an autonomous, self-regarding, and self producing alternative practice that has been continuous through the modern period and independent of industrial production distorts the historical field of cinema, and, in forcing erroneous inclusions in and exclusions from its categories, it must falsify the practice it attends to.⁴¹

I will use Sitney in the first role, in the specific case of Kubelka’s cinematic project and his accounts of *Unsere Afrikareise*, and I see one of the main benefits of experimental ethnography as a way to open up the type of narrow genre categorisations as criticised by James in the second part of the quote.⁴²

In this thesis Kubelka will not only be understood as a filmmaker but also, given his concept the sync event, as an important theoretical reference. As a non-writing film theorist his theoretical perspective has to be distilled from his talks, talks that often go on for hours, and can be viewed as performances incorporating not just the spoken words, but all senses.⁴³ “A Theory of Metrical Film” is a central text compiled of transcriptions from a series of his lectures at the New York University in the 1970s entitled *The Essence of Cinema*.⁴⁴

Already in 1964 Sitney had written about Kubelka’s, then not yet finished, “African film” (*Unsere Afrikareise*) in an article for *Film Culture* and a few years later, in 1967, Jonas Mekas discusses the film with Kubelka in an interview for the same magazine.⁴⁵ In a 1968 article in the Swedish newspaper *Svenska Dagbladet* Carl Henrik Svenstedt makes *Unsere Afrikareise* (by the Austrian Kubelka!) his prime example of the *New American Cinema*.⁴⁶

In 1985 Fred Camper included *Unsere Afrikareise* in his text on sound in experimental film, “Sound and Silence in Narrative and Nonnarrative Cinema,” as part of the influential anthology *Film Sound: Theory and Practice*.⁴⁷ Ten years later, in

⁴⁰ Ibid., 289.

⁴¹ David E. James: *Allegories of Cinema: American Film in the Sixties* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1989), 21.

⁴² Russell, *Experimental Ethnography*, xi-xiii; Russell, “*Leviathan* and the Discourse of Sensory Ethnography: *Spleen et ideal*,” 27.

⁴³ MacDonald, “Peter Kubelka: On *Unsere Afrikareise* (Our Trip to Africa),” in *A Critical Cinema 4: Interviews with Independent Filmmakers* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005), 168-169.

⁴⁴ Kubelka, “The Theory of Metrical Film,” 139-159. In an introductory note Sitney describes Kubelka’s reluctance to allow transcriptions of the seminars to be printed, because “they lack not only the gestures but the excerpts and loops of his films which illustrate his point.” Ibid., 139.

⁴⁵ P. Adams Sitney, “Kubelka Concrete (Our Trip to Vienna),” *Film Culture*, no. 34 (fall 1964), 48-51; Jonas Mekas, “Interview with Peter Kubelka” in *Film Culture Reader*, ed. P. Adams Sitney (New York: Cooper Square Press, 2000), 285-299. Originally published in *Film Culture*, no. 44 (spring 1967).

⁴⁶ Carl Henrik Svenstedt, “Filmens verklighet och ögats värld,” *Svenska Dagbladet*, January 13, 1968.

⁴⁷ Fred Camper, “Sound and Silence in Narrative and Nonnarrative Cinema,” *Film Sound: Theory and Practice*, ed. Elisabeth Weis and John Belton (New York: Columbia University Press, 1985), 369-381.

1995, Gabriele Jutz and Peter Tshcherkassky, who credits Kubelka as the very origin of Austrian avant-garde film, edited the book *Peter Kubelka*, devoted to the filmmaker.⁴⁸

In 1999, the same year as Russell published her book *Experimental Ethnography*, Scott MacDonald started a series of interviews with Kubelka about *Unsere Afrikareise* for his *A Critical Cinema* book series.⁴⁹ I will let MacDonald exemplify an opposite pole to Russell in the Kubelka literature, representing scholars coming from two different academic traditions, Russell from cultural theory and MacDonald from avant-garde criticism.⁵⁰ This difference can also be formulated as two different ways to do film studies, to listen to the theorists or to listen to the filmmakers. Maybe it is possible to reformulate the difference as a question of distance? If Russell has too much distance, MacDonald has too little. The most recent major contribution to the “listening to Kubelka” discourse is Martina Kudláček’s video portrait *Fragments of Kubelka* from 2012, a four hour long interview where Kubelka takes on the role of an impassioned teacher.⁵¹

I will try to reconstruct a possible argument between Russell and MacDonald. In a 1999 “review-essay” of *Experimental Ethnography* MacDonald criticises Russell’s book for rendering films and videos primarily important as illustrations of theoretical concepts.⁵² Russell, on the other hand, takes MacDonald as example of an “avant-garde criticism that strive to see a critique that is not there.”⁵³ I take this to mean that, according to Russell, MacDonald put too much belief in the good intentions and the political awareness of the filmmaker. A telling example is MacDonald’s defence of Kubelka:

Our African Journey is evidence that Kubelka was aware of the implications of the gaze a decade before Mulvey provided a literary exposition of it, that he was clear about his own inevitable complicity in colonialist patterns embedded within the apparatus of the camera, long before the recent popularization of post-colonialist writing – and that he recognized that, despite this complicity, he might use this cultural apparatus to expose, even transcend, the history that produced it.”⁵⁴

I would be cautious to defend Kubelka’s awareness of colonialist patterns. The introductory quote of this thesis, as well as a disturbing scene from *Fragments of Kubelka*, where Kubelka interacts with a life-size sculpture of an African nude woman, place serious doubts regarding his awareness of the implications of his own

⁴⁸ Peter Tscherkassky, “Ground Survey. An Initial Mapping of an Expanding Territory” in *Film Unframed: A History of Austrian Avant-Garde Cinema*, ed. Peter Tscherkassky (Vienna: Österreichisches Filmmuseum and Society for Film & Media, 2012), 15; Gabriele Jutz and Peter Tshcherkassky, ed., *Peter Kubelka* (Vienna: Österreichisches Filmmuseum, 1995).

⁴⁹ MacDonald, “Peter Kubelka: On *Unsere Afrikareise* (*Our Trip to Africa*),” 158-178.

⁵⁰ Following this division MacDonald, without doubt, holds the most commonly held position, represented by scholars and critics like Sitney, Mekas, Camper and Tshcherkassky.

⁵¹ Martina Kudláček, *Fragments of Kubelka* (2012), 2-disc DVD set (Vienna: Austrian Film Museum, 2014).

⁵² MacDonald, “Review-Essay,” 119-120.

⁵³ Russell, *Experimental Ethnography*, 323, note 26.

⁵⁴ MacDonald, “Review-Essay,” 120.

involvement in colonialist patterns both at the time of filming and today.⁵⁵ Russell's answer to MacDonald would be that also critical filmmakers, like Kubelka, are caught up in paradigms of modernism and colonialism, even when they seek ways to rethink the representation of "the Other," and therefore a critique of the "ethno-avant-garde" is necessary to disperse the colonial logic of subjectivity.⁵⁶

In this thesis I will argue that it's not on part of "the gaze" that *Unsere Afrikareise* speaks critically of colonialist patterns, but that it is the image-sound relations of the sync event that expose (and possibly even transcend) the historical limits of the production of the film. By a thorough examination of the material audiovisual relations of *Unsere Afrikareise*, I hope to build on both these discourses.

Sound has been a neglected field in the history of film studies in general and experimental ethnography is no exception. Regardless Mary Ann Doane's comment, back in 1985, that "[i]t has become a cliché to note that the sound track has received much less theoretical attention and analysis than the image," the auditory side of cinema still calls for theoretical elaboration. As Doane acknowledges in her text, it was a valid statement then, and still is today, at least for the so-called "minor" categories of film.⁵⁷

With the anthology *Film Sound: Theory and Practice* (1985) Elisabeth Weis and John Bolton did a pioneering work by bringing together many important texts on sound in film.⁵⁸ With *Sound Theory, Sound Practice* (1992) Rick Altman set the stage for a new generation of film studies. His call for cinema as event not only challenged the hegemony of the image but also the notion of film as signifying text.⁵⁹

Many of "sound's dark corners," that Altman pointed out as neglected fields in 1992, remain.⁶⁰ With the anthology *Lowering the Boom: Critical Studies in Film Sound* (2008) Jay Beck and Tony Grajeda tried to light up some of these "dark corners" and recently Holly Rogers' *Music and Sound in Documentary Film* (2015) took a grip on the role of music in documentary film.⁶¹ In *Cinesonica* (2010) Andy Birtwistle aims at exploring previously neglected and undertheorized aspects of sound in both film and

⁵⁵ See page 1; Kudláček.

⁵⁶ Russell, *Experimental Ethnography*, 19.

⁵⁷ Mary Ann Doane, "Ideology and the Practice of Sound Editing and Mixing," in *Film Sound: Theory and Practice*, ed. Elisabeth Weis and John Belton (New York: Columbia University Press, 1985), 54-55.

⁵⁸ Elisabeth Weis and John Belton, ed., *Film Sound: Theory and Practice* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1985).

⁵⁹ Rick Altman, "General Introduction: Cinema as Event," in *Sound Theory, Sound Practice*, ed. Rick Altman (New York: Routledge, 1992), 1-14.

⁶⁰ As "dark corners" Altman mentions Third World Cinema, Local and Regional Productions, Documentary, Music in/on film, Animation, Short forms, Media shifts, Silent Cinema, Idiosyncratic Auteurs and Technicians. Rick Altman, "Introduction: Sound's Dark Corners," in *Sound Theory, Sound Practice*, ed. Rick Altman (New York: Routledge, 1992), 171-177.

⁶¹ Jay Beck and Tony Grajeda, ed., *Lowering the Boom: Critical Studies in Film Sound* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2008), 16; Holly Rogers, ed. *Music and Sound in Documentary Film* (Abingdon, Oxon: Routledge, 2015).

video by combining a phenomenological perspective with film as materiality.⁶² My study shares Birtwistle's aim to break away from the narrative to focus on sound's materiality within the audiovisual experience, as well as a political understanding of this materiality.⁶³

Two recent contributions to the more specific topic of this study, sound in experimental film respectively ethnographic film, are *See This Sound* and *Beyond the Visual*. *See This Sound* deals with the connection between image and sound in the present and history of audiovisual expressions by visual artists, filmmakers, composers and performers. It has resulted in an exhibition at Lentos Kunstmuseum, Köln, with the catalogue *See This Sound: Promises in Sound and Vision* (2009) and the anthology *See This Sound: Audiovisuology: A Reader* (2015).⁶⁴ *Beyond the Visual: Sound and Image in Ethnographic and Documentary Film* (2010) combines film theorists and practitioners to fill the lack of texts on sound within the study of ethnographic film.⁶⁵ The book came out of the 2007 "Sound and Image" conference/film festival at the Nordic Anthropological Film Association.

In *Beyond the Visual* Gunnar Iversen makes an exposé over the repression of sound in the history and theory of documentary film and visual anthropology, using Karl Heider's influential book *Ethnographic film* (1976, revised 2006) as his prime example of the neglect of sound in ethnographic film. Iversen quotes Heider arguing that "[t]he primary criterion for a sound track should be that it reinforces the visuals by providing very complementary information or that it at least is neutrally silent and does not work in opposition to the visuals by introducing vastly new information."⁶⁶ Heider's position on sound may not be representative of all theorisation on ethnographic filmmaking, but he holds a conventional and, at least historically, dominant position that is the exact opposite pole of my interest in this text.

Through Kubelka's separation and recombination of image and sound in the sync event I will examine a way for image and sound to be separate and equal parts of the audiovisual information. To analyse the notion of the sync event as audiovision I use Michel Chion's *Audio-Vision: Sound on Screen* (1994) and through James Clifford's text "On Ethnographic Allegory" (1986) I place the sync event of *Unsere Afrikareise*

⁶² Andy Birtwistle, *Cinesonica: Sounding Film and Video* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2010).

⁶³ A reservation I have with *Cinesonica* is that, in his urge to make a political point, Birtwistle sometimes projects the political perspective from the theory being used rather than the actual films being analysed. See for example Yasco Horsman, "Review: Andy Birtwistle, *Cinesonica: Sounding Film and Video*," *Journal of Sonic Studies*, volume 3, nr. 1, October 2012, <http://journal.sonicstudies.org/vol03/nr01/a09>, (accessed January 14, 2016).

⁶⁴ Cosima Rainer et al., ed., *See this Sound: Promises of Sound and Vision* (Köln: Lentos Kunstmuseum, 2009); Dieter Daniels and Sandra Naumann, ed., *See This Sound: Audiovisuology: A Reader* (Köln: Buchhandlung Walther König, 2015).

⁶⁵ Gunnar Iversen and Jan Ketil Simonsen, ed., *Beyond the Visual: Sound and Image in Ethnographic and Documentary Film* (Højbjerg: Intervention, 2010).

⁶⁶ Gunnar Iversen: "Added value: The Role of Sound in Documentary Film Theory and Visual Anthropology" in *Beyond the Visual: Sound and image in ethnographic and documentary film*, ed. Gunnar Iversen and Jan Ketil Simonsen, 71-72.

within a critical ethnographic discourse. I will return to discuss both these sources in part one of the thesis, but before further developing my theoretical perspectives I will give a brief background to locate Kubelka as both filmmaker and theorist.

BACKGROUND

When arriving in New York in 1966 and meeting with Jonas Mekas and the group around the Film-Makers' Cooperative, Kubelka, for the first time, received recognition for his films and, through people like Sitney, earned his place in the history of avant-garde filmmaking. Together with Mekas, Sitney, Jerome Hill and Stan Brakhage, Kubelka founded the Anthology Film Archives (1970), a permanent place for screening classic and avant-garde films, and became part of the selection committee to establish "The Essential Cinema," a permanent collection of "the monuments of cinematic art."⁶⁷ Through lectures Kubelka played an active part in the making of himself into an avant-garde artist, taking a stand against both the film industry and auteur cinema.⁶⁸ Media specificity is key in his modernist theory that no medium can be translated into another: "A film where there is a commentary from the outside and background music can never be a good film, because film has to speak with its own medium, not with the department of literature."⁶⁹

Kubelka defines his earlier films, *Adebar* (Peter Kubelka, 1957), *Schwechater* (Peter Kubelka, 1958) and *Arnulf Rainer*, as metric films. In these films he worked with reducing cinema to its most basic elements, "to give light a dimension in time," editing according to mathematical patterns of individual frames.⁷⁰ Kubelka's montage theory comes close to the *metric montage* of Sergei Eisenstein, but is built on the premise that cinema is a projection of stills, where articulation is between frames and not between shoots as Eisenstein would have it.⁷¹ Kubelka often use musical analogies when describing cinema as a basic rhythm of light impulses repeating twenty-four times a second.⁷² He was especially influenced by the "Second Viennese School" composers Arnold Schoenberg and Anton Weber, who rely on abstract and sometimes mathematical relationships between notes.⁷³

In a critical comment Russell argues that, with the musical analogies, his rigorous practice and requirement that his films have to be viewed over and over again

⁶⁷ David E. James, ed., *To Free The Cinema: Jonas Mekas and the New York Underground* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1992), 12-13.

⁶⁸ Andre Habib et al., "Cinema: 'Food' for Thought, an interview with Peter Kubelka," *Off Screen*, vol. 9, issue 11, November 2005, http://offscreen.com/view/interview_kubelka (accessed January 14, 2016).

⁶⁹ Peter Kubelka, "Metaphoric Cinema," lecture held during 25 FPS International Experimental Film and Video Festival, Zagreb, 2010. Video by Igor Lušić and Daria Blažević, <https://vimeo.com/22048600> (accessed January 14, 2016).

⁷⁰ Kubelka, "The Theory of Metrical Film," 139-140.

⁷¹ Sergei Eisenstein, "Methods of Montage," in *Film Form: Essays in Film Theory*, ed. and trans. Jay Layda (New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, 1977), 72-73; Kubelka, "The Theory of Metrical Film," 141.

⁷² Kubelka, "The Theory of Metrical Film," 140-143.

⁷³ Michael Sicinski, <http://academichack.net/unseretrib.htm> (accessed January 14, 2016).

until their complex patherns are understood, Kubelka “embodies the persona of the great modern artist.”⁷⁴ Within the discourse of experimental ethnography, and given the transition of film to video, it’s possible to read Kubelka’s film theory of “‘pure form,’ media specificity, and cinematic ontology” as an allegory of “cultural essences and purities in ethnography.” Russell writes:

Technologies, like cultures, are constantly evolving into new forms, generating a host of cultural effects in the process. Although I would insist that the relation between film and video is one of hybridity, it can also be construed as an instance of ethnographic Allegory. [...] Unlike the cinematic image, preserved on celluloid, the video image is made anew at every transmission; and digital image processing has opened up the possibility of infinite manipulation. In the light of the TV monitor, the cinema is reinvented as a site of disappearance, loss, and memory.⁷⁵

Russell’s interpretation can help to bridge the gap between Kubelka’s rigid distinction of film and video as two essentially separate mediums and a common perspective, where the digitalisation of celluloid film is solely of a practical nature. It also links cinema and ethnography, as well as colonialism, as parts of the modern project.

If Kubelka personifies the modern artist, what sets his film theory apart is his insistence on sound as an integrated part of the basic rhythm of cinema: “Cinema can use the simple components of light and sound, and for the first time cinema can blend pure sound with light in time. It is possible to handle both carefully and get a result. It is all done by the machine.”⁷⁶ The quote suggests the combination of image (light) and sound as equal parts blended by the film projector. But in reading the transcripts of “The Theory of Metrical Film” Kubelka seems to start with a theory of silent film and only afterwards adding the element of sound.⁷⁷ According to Sitney neither *Adebar* nor *Schwechater* puts the soundtrack on equal footing with the image. Regardless of the metrics for *Adebar* being defined by the 26 frames long sound phases and the sounds of *Schwechater* being used as structural elements, they fail to live up to Kubelka’s rigid aesthetic demands. To Sitney it’s first with the flicker film *Arnulf Rainer* that image and sound are given equal weight. Then comes the punch line, and this is important in the context of this thesis: “However, it is in his first film, *Mosaik im Vertrauen*, and in his most recent, *Unsere Afrikareise*, that his theories of sound montage are most fully developed.”⁷⁸

Mosaik im Vertrauen is, just like *Unsere Afrikareise*, organised around sync events, but regardless of this the film will not play a part in my text. There are two reasons for this: Made while Kubelka was still at film school, *Mosaik im Vertrauen* is in many ways a typical film school product and more importantly concerning this thesis, *Mosaik im Vertrauen*, being an experimental fiction film, lacks the ethnographic content that would qualify it as part of the field of experimental ethnography.

⁷⁴ Russell, *Experimental Ethnography*, 128.

⁷⁵ Ibid., 6-7.

⁷⁶ Kubelka, “The Theory of Metrical Film,” 156.

⁷⁷ Ibid., 139-141.

⁷⁸ Sitney, *Visionary Film*, 289.

It is with *Unsere Afrikareise* that Kubelka's idea of the sync event is most fully realised and the film builds the tension between its avant-garde form and a documentary content. In the metric films Kubelka was – still rooted in a modernistic tradition – working with the methods of film structuralism ten years before structuralism emerged as a movement within the American film avant-garde. Like minimalism within visual arts structural film reacted to a new set of questions and what can be understood as a fulfilment of the modern project is in fact framed in a different discourse.⁷⁹ If minimalism is a reaction to abstract expressionism in the visual arts structural film is a reaction to *lyrical film* within the American avant-garde film.⁸⁰ In this context *Unsere Afrikareise* is a bastard, a transit work, made in a discursive break within the arts/film, but also a discursive break in society at large from colonialism to postcolonialism. *Unsere Afrikareise* can be read as an expression of this discursive conflict, put in terms of a conflict between form and content by Russell, “a struggle between modernist aesthetics and the demands of documentary ‘content.’”⁸¹ The crisis of the Western subject, in the shift from colonialism to postcolonialism, intersects with the breakdown of the modernist suppression of referentiality. It is precisely this tension that caught my interest in the film and that makes the film into a singular case.⁸²

The breakdown of the modernist aesthetics of media specificity is mirrored in Kubelka's own career. Soon after accomplishing *Unsere Afrikareise* he started a process of de-specialisation that, after fifteen years of cinema as his sole medium, led him into lecturing, music, and cooking.⁸³ Kubelka's theoretical work on cooking began in 1967, and in 1980 he expanded his position as professor of Film at the Art Academy (Staedelschule) in Frankfurt to include “Film and Cooking as Forms of Art.” The same year he founded the music ensemble “Spatium Musicum,” with which he performs in his “Nonverbal Lectures.”⁸⁴

Russell describes *Unsere Afrikareise* as “something of an anomaly” within avant-garde filmmaking.⁸⁵ But while the film is an anomaly it's at the same time a logical consequence of Kubelka's film practice. In a typically drastic formulation Kubelka claims to have stolen all his films.⁸⁶ All his films were commissions that he accepted, out of what he calls “outward pressure”, but then he went on to make the

⁷⁹ See “The Crux of Minimalism,” in Hal Foster, *The Return of the Real: The Avant-Garde at the End of the Century* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: The MIT Press, 1996), 35-70.

⁸⁰ For *lyrical film*, see Sitney, *Visionary Film*, 348.

⁸¹ Russell, *Experimental Ethnography*, 126.

⁸² In his recent book *Avant-Doc* (2015) MacDonald observes that today *Unsere Afrikareise* is recognized “as a documentary, as well as a canonical avant-garde work.” MacDonald, *Avant-Doc*, 10.

⁸³ Habib. Kubelka has only made a few short films after *Unsere Afrikareise*: *Pause* (Peter Kubelka, 1977), *Dichtung und Wahrheit* (*Poetry and Truth*, Peter Kubelka, 2003), *Antiphon* (Peter Kubelka, 2012).

⁸⁴ “Peter Kubelka: Film Food and the Other Arts” (The Program in Visual Arts, Lewis Centre for the Arts, Princeton), <http://www.princeton.edu/~visarts/Faculty/PeterKubelka/PeterKubelka.html> (accessed January 14, 2016).

⁸⁵ Russell, *Experimental Ethnography*, 126.

⁸⁶ Habib.

films he “had to make” following his “inner demands.”⁸⁷ *Adebar* was commissioned as a commercial dance film; *Schwechater* as an advertisement for beer; *Arnulf Rainer* as a documentation of the work of painter Arnulf Rainer and *Unsere Afrikareise* as a travelogue for the Austrian hunters.⁸⁸ “When I filmed *Afrikareise* the plan was that I make a travelogue for these people who had taken me on the trip. I had accepted it in order to meet archaic [*sic!*] people,” says Kubelka.⁸⁹ He had already used “pygmy [*sic!*] music” in *Adebar*, in his own words “a very old, very primitive [*sic!*] and ecstatic piece of music,” when he agreed to film the hunting trip of his Austrian compatriots.⁹⁰ Kubelka never completed the travelogue he was commissioned to make, but he didn’t make a film about “archaic people” either. Instead, I argue that *Unsere Afrikareise* is an allegory of the colonial relation itself.

DISPOSITION

The sync event will be conceptualized and applied as an analytical tool in my analysis. I will start by defining sync event as the audiovisual material relation between image and sound, then trace the genealogy of the sync event in the history of avant-garde film, in order to finally analyse the metaphoric function of the sync event.

In the first part I introduce the central notions of the thesis: *sync event*, *audiovision*, and *ethnographic allegory*. In part two I will read the sync event of *Unsere Afrikareise* as audiovision. Michel Chion’s theory informs my analysis of the material relations between image and sound and relates Kubelka’s original definition of the sync event to the broader theoretical framework of film sound. Part three broadens the perspective for the sync event in relation to the history of sound in avant-garde film, focusing on audiovisual theories and experiments within the Russian avant-garde and Surrealism. Part four returns to *Unsere Afrikareise* as my preferred conceptual example with which to discuss the potential interpretation of the sync event as ethnographic allegory. Clifford’s text “On Ethnographic Allegory” will here inspire my reflexion on *Unsere Afrikareise* as a case in point of experimental ethnography at work. In the final discussion I will test the concept of the sync event on some audiovisual examples in contemporary ethnographic film and art installation.

⁸⁷ Kubelka, “The Theory of Metrical Film,” 145 and 149. *Mosaik in Vertrauen* that Kubelka made at film school is the only exception.

⁸⁸ Tscherkassky, 75.

⁸⁹ Kudláček.

⁹⁰ Kubelka, “The Theory of Metrical Film,” 145.

I. DEFINITIONS

1. SYNC EVENT

Sync event is the separation and recombination of image and sound to achieve new meanings. The concept is the structuring principle and subject of investigation of this thesis, but will also be an analytical tool when analysing *Unsere Afrikareise*. I will start by anchoring the sync event as ethnographic discourse and then move on to put the concept in relation to audiovision and ethnographic allegory.

The merging of image and sounds that were not originally recorded together is of course a generalised convention in the postsynchronisation of film. What sets the sync event apart as a film theoretical concept is that the meeting between image and sound is used as *audiovisual counterpoint* to achieve new meanings. Rather than seeking a narrative realism where image and sound are harmonized the sync event creates a conflict that belongs to the historical genealogy of contrapuntal sound.

In “The Theory of Metrical Film” Kubelka develops two interconnected assumptions that go against naturalism in general and the belief in a true photographic representation of reality in specific: The first is that all art that imitates nature is inferior to nature itself and the second is that everybody has his/her subjective perception of nature/reality. This leads Kubelka to conclude that all communication and all art have to depend on the comparing of two things as metaphors.⁹¹ In sound cinema the metaphor is achieved through the sync event. The metaphoric possibilities of film are freed by separating and recombining image and sound into sync events: “The greatness of sound cinema is that you are freed from this law of nature that events come in sync.”⁹²

While the historical genealogy of contrapuntal sound goes back to the very beginning of the history of sound film (Eisenstein, Vertov, Buñuel etc.) I argue that the specific sync event, as Kubelka perceives it, is closely linked to contemporary developments in the field of documentary film. In the 1950s and 1960s the technical evolution of 16mm cameras with synchronous sound provoked new aesthetics that questioned the relationship of the camera to reality and the truth claims in documentary film practice.⁹³ New independent film movements developed: The Free Cinema movement in Britain in the late 1950s was followed by Direct Cinema in the US and Cinéma Vérité in France. While Kubelka is rooted in an avant-garde tradition set apart from these modes of filmmaking I argue that the sync event can be understood as a reaction to and even the inversion of the synchronous sound of Direct Cinema’s “fly on the wall” aesthetics’. In an interview Kubelka describes the sync event as “artificial synchronous sound, [...] practically documentary, completely

⁹¹ Kubelka, “The Theory of Metrical Film,” 141-143.

⁹² Kubelka, “Metaphoric Cinema.”

⁹³ For a discussion on synchronous sound in observational films in the 1960s and 1970s see Jeffrey K. Ruoff, “Conventions of Sound in Documentary in Sound Theory,” in *Sound Theory, Sound Practice*, ed. Rick Altman (New York: Routledge, 1992), 217-234.

synchronous, as Leacock would have done with this permanent, but artificial synchronism.”⁹⁴ Kubelka used a 16mm camera for the first time when filming *Unsere Afrikareise* but he never exploited the possibility of synchronous sound. Instead he used the sound recorded during the trip as an independent and equal part of the imagery.⁹⁵

The objective “fly on the wall” ideals of Direct Cinema coincide with the ideals of the emerging discipline of Visual Anthropology in the 1960s.⁹⁶ (It’s interesting to note that the term “Visual Anthropology” in itself neglects the soundtrack.)⁹⁷ The first 16mm cameras that were silent enough to allow synchronous sound in the field were in fact made for ethnographic filmmaking and the observing handheld camera with synchronous sound soon came to stand for authenticity and truth claims in ethnographic representation.⁹⁸ Heider describes the history of ethnographic filmmaking – from the development of portable cameras with external synchronous sound to instant synchronous sound on video cameras – as a gradual evolution of its technical possibilities.⁹⁹ The sync event can be seen as the reversal of these technical innovations. In a recent lecture Kubelka argues: “Today, one of the greatest filmmaker killer is the new digital system that you always have sound already perfectly there and there you are stuck, because the sync sound isn’t worth anything.”¹⁰⁰

Cinéma Vérité shares Kubelka’s dismissal of an unmediated reality in search of a specific cinematic “truth” (ciné-vérité).¹⁰¹ The term was invented in the making of *Chronique d’un été* (*Chronicles of a Summer*, Jean Rouch and Edgar Morin, 1961). In his constant experimentation with both the cinematic apparatus and the filmic language of Visual Anthropology Jean Rouch is not only the origin of Cinéma Vérité

⁹⁴ Habib. Richard Leacock is one of the leading pioneers of Direct Cinema.

⁹⁵ Sitney, “Kubelka Concrete (Our Trip to Vienna),” 50.

⁹⁶ Eliot Weinberger, “The Camera People,” in *Beyond Document: Essays on Nonfiction Film*, ed. Charles Warren (Hanover: University Press of New England, 1996), 137.

⁹⁷ Peter I. Crawford, “Sounds of Silence. The Aural in Anthropology and Ethnographic Film,” *Beyond the Visual: Sound and Image in Ethnographic and Documentary Film* (Høbjerg: Intervention, 2010), 32.

⁹⁸ Paul Monaco, *History of the American Cinema 8: The Sixties: 1960-1969* (New York: Scribner, 2001), 70. In ethnographic filmmaking synchronous sound is closely linked to the introduction of subtitling in the early 1960s. The transition can be followed in John Marshall’s films on the !Kung San of the Kalahari Desert: from the voice-over narration in *The Hunters* (John Marshall, 1958) to the subtitling in *A Joking Relationship* (John Marshall and Timothy Asch, 1962) a few years later. David and Judith MacDougall would popularise subtitling in their series on herders in Northern Kenya (*To Live with Herds*, David and Judith MacDougall, 1972). Initially seen as a way of making indigenous voices accessible, subtitles was later criticised for becoming a stylistic convention with potential to alienate from the audiovisuality of film. Carrie E. Daniel, “Access or Alienation: Subtitling in Ethnographic Cinema,” *Beyond the Visual: Sound and Image in Ethnographic and Documentary Film* (Høbjerg: Intervention, 2010), 212.

⁹⁹ Karl G. Heider, *Ethnographic Film* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2006), 16.

¹⁰⁰ Kubelka “Metaphoric Cinema.”

¹⁰¹ Regardless of the self-reflexivity of Cinéma Vérité and the transparency of Direct Cinema the terms and are often used interchangeably. William Rothman dismisses the difference between the two as rhetoric. William Rothman, *Documentary Film Classics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), x.

but also a major representative in the field of experimental ethnography.¹⁰² With a mutual influence from both Vertov and surrealism, Rouch draws different conclusions from this heritage, than Kubelka does. In his focus on the filmic event, with long uninterrupted traveling shots and editing in the camera, Rouch contrasts Kubelka, for whom the possibility of cinema is *not* to be “dependent on the natural flow of events.”¹⁰³ Rouch’s will to transgress realism, through the filmic event, is most clearly expressed in his notion *ciné-trance*.¹⁰⁴ In *Tourou et Bitti: Les Tambours d’avant* (*Tourou and Bitti: The Drums of Yore*, Jean Rouch, 1971) the camera enters a village and, according to Rouch’s narration, provokes a burst of trance awaited for several days.¹⁰⁵ If, to Rouch, trance is connected to the natural flow of the filmic event, to Kubelka it is connected to the filmic montage of the sync event:

Now, how will one get ecstasy in the cinema? Well what I can do in the cinema is to make a rhythmic building between light and sound, which is complex, exact, fast and has certain strength. Also, it must have exact measure, harmony and beat. That is one of the possibilities of cinema.¹⁰⁶

Unsere Afrikareise includes no footage of trance. Instead Kubelka brings the combination of image and sound in cinema in alignment with the peak of a ritual in a story from southern Sudan, quoted at the beginning of this thesis, when he draws a parallel between the bang on a drum that “the chief” makes as the sun reaches the horizon, and the filmic sync event.¹⁰⁷ The sync event becomes both a filmic method and an ecstatic possibility. But there is a conflict in this analogy between the filmic sync event and the ritual sync event. On the one hand Kubelka holds the ritualistic sync event, with its “sensual substance and beauty,” to be superior to the speed of the filmic sync event. On the other hand it is the cinematic apparatus that makes the sync events possible. In what seems to be a way to reconcile the two positions Kubelka concludes: “So this establishment of sync events, one of the oldest wishes of mankind, fantastically becomes possible for the first time in cinema [...] All these ancient

¹⁰² Russell, *Experimental Ethnography*, 218.

¹⁰³ Jean Rouch, “The Camera and Man,” in *Ciné-Ethnography*, ed. Steven Field (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2003), 28-46; Kubelka, “The Theory of Metrical Film,” 158. *Les maîtres fous* (*The Mad Masters*, Jean Rouch, 1955) is perhaps that of Rouch’s films that come closest to *Unsere Afrikareise* both thematically and aesthetically. The film follows members of the Hauka cult in Ghana mimicking the French colonial administrators in ecstatic trance. It is, just like *Unsere Afrikareise*, a colonial critique that has disturbed audiences, Europeans and Africans alike. The rapid pace of the editing, due to a limited shooting ratio of 20 seconds, reminds of *Unsere Afrikareise*. What differs is the soundtrack where Rouch’s explanatory narration covers a soundscape of non-synchronized voices, music and environmental sounds. Michael Chanan, “Rouch, Music, Trance,” *Building Bridges: The Cinema of Jean Rouch*, ed. Joram ten Brink (London: Wallflower Press, 2007), 91.

¹⁰⁴ Jean Rouch, “On the Vicissitudes of the Self: The Possessed Dancer, the Magician, the Sorcerer, the Filmmaker, and the Ethnographer,” in *Ciné-Ethnography*, ed. Steven Field (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2003), 87-101.

¹⁰⁵ Chanan, 93. *Tourou et Bitti* was filmed in Niger.

¹⁰⁶ Kubelka, “The Theory of Metrical Film,” 159. The quote most likely refers to Kubelka’s abstract flicker film *Arnulf Rainer*.

¹⁰⁷ See page 1.

attempts at establishing sync events are very clumsy.”¹⁰⁸ Now the speed of the filmic sync event is described as superior and the “ancient attempts” as “clumsy.”

I will have reason to return to Kubelka’s fascination with speed in my final discussion.¹⁰⁹ For now I will sum up his theory of the sync event: The sync event is a recombination of an image and a sound fragment that were not originally recorded together; it is not so much a question of *a*-synchronicity but rather *re*-synchronicity. This re-synchronisation creates metaphors, according to Kubelka the basis behind all human communication. In this text I will use two theories to both further analyse the notion of the sync event and to open up to a wider framework. In doing this I turn to two influential texts within film sound studies respectively critical anthropology.

2. AUDIO-VISION

In his 1990 book *Audio-Vision* (English translation 1994) Chion develops a rich flora of concepts to analyse the audiovisual relations in film:

Audiovisual analysis must rely on words, and so we must take words seriously – whether they are words that already exist, or ones being invented or reinvented to designate objects that begin to take shape as we observe and understand. [...] Using more exact words allows us to confront and compare perceptions and to make progress in pinpointing and defining them.¹¹⁰

Chion’s terminology brings out previously unnoticed or ignored aspects in film by offering a language that conceptualizes sound in a way that makes sense of sound and image simultaneously. In this thesis I will utilize Chion’s concepts as a toolbox, a fine-meshed web to obtain a richer understanding of different aspects and possibilities of the sync event.

While Chion’s focus on feature-length motion pictures differs from mine, my text shares his objective “to demonstrate the reality of audiovisual combination – that one perception influences the other and transforms it.”¹¹¹ What I’m trying to do in the specific case of the sync events in *Unsere Afrikareise* accords with Chion’s more broadly formulated project. On one hand I hope to add to the discourse by bringing Chion’s theories into the field of experimental ethnography – the intersection of avant-garde film and ethnographic film – and on the other hand Chion’s theories will help to open up for a broader understanding of the notion sync event. Chion’s framework acknowledges the fact that instances of the sync event as *audiovisual counterpoint* are part of the generalised semiotics of cinema outside of Kubelka’s avant-gardism. Understood in this way the sync event is not unique to *Unsere Afrikareise* but rather the film functions as a case study that brings out and isolates the method.

Although Chion arguably made his most important contributions in the 1980s and early 1990s his thinking has, rather than increasing, gained in influence in recent

¹⁰⁸ Kubelka, “The Theory of Metrical Film,” 158.

¹⁰⁹ See page 52.

¹¹⁰ Chion, *Audio-Vision*, 186. Chion often derives the terminology from the field of political economy. *Ibid.*, 215, note 1.

¹¹¹ *Ibid.*, xxvi.

years, colonising new fields of film studies.¹¹² While his concepts have proven highly influential his writing has, at the same time, been criticised for being idiosyncratic and short of stringent theoretical anchoring. If the strength is its usability and empirical foundation, the weaknesses are the lack of theoretical explication and stringency, its failure to integrate film theory in general and the lack of references to other works and theories on sound in audiovisual media in specific.¹¹³ For example, while acknowledging the influence of Pierre Schaeffer, Chion fails to mention an obvious theoretical depth to Christian Mertz.¹¹⁴ Perhaps these are the flip side of the same coin? According to Kristi McKim “it is this critical absence of virtually any film theory (and the abundance of film trivia) that figures as both the strength and weakness of [*Audio-Vision*].”¹¹⁵ Instead of a theoretical foundation Chion elaborates the intersections of image and sound that he has worked with and observed practically as a musician, a critic, and a writer of book-length studies on individual filmmakers and films.¹¹⁶

What Chion has managed to do is to create a comprehensive theory, where sound is at equal footing with the image, which is useful in the practical analysis of the material audiovisual relations in film. Here I will briefly define the concepts that are central to my analysis of the sync events in *Unsere Afrikareise*. *Added value* is the expressive and/or information value that a sound enriches a given image, but it also often gives the (incorrect) impression that this value is contained “naturally” within the image itself.¹¹⁷ *Audiovisual contract* is a kind of “symbolic pact” that the audio-viewer agrees to when she/he considers the elements of sound and image to be parts of a single unit, or the same “world.”¹¹⁸ *Synchresis* is the “spontaneous and irresistible” bond between a sound and image that merge independently of “any rational logic” when they occur simultaneously.¹¹⁹ *Acousmètre* is a voice character specific to the cinema: It is heard but not seen and has “a relationship of *possible inclusion*” with the

¹¹² Just a few examples from the field of this thesis: David MacDougall, *The Corporeal Image: Film, Ethnography and the Senses* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2006), 42, 269; Birtwistle, 18; Iversen and Simonsen, 10, 13; Beck and Grajeda, 3-4; Daniels and Naumann.

¹¹³ Kyle Stevens, “Review of *Film, A Sound Art*,” *Film Criticism* at Academia.edu. https://www.academia.edu/1826400/Review_of_FILM_A_SOUND_ART_for_FILM_CRITICISM (accessed, January 31, 2016).

¹¹⁴ Kristi McKim, “Impassioned Aesthetics; Seeing Sound and Hearing Images in Michel Chion’s *Audio-Vision*,” *Film-Philosophy Journal*, Salon, vol. 6, no. 5, March 2002, <http://www.film-philosophy.com/index.php/f-p/article/view/669/582> (accessed, January 31, 2006). On the influence of Schaeffer, see Chion, *Audio-Vision*, 31-32, 71-72; Michel Chion, *The Voice in Cinema*, trans. Claudia Gorbman (New York: Colombia University Press, 1999), 17-18. The book was originally published in 1982 as *La Voix au cinéma*.

¹¹⁵ McKim.

¹¹⁶ Ibid.

¹¹⁷ Chion, *Audio-Vision*, 221.

¹¹⁸ Ibid., 222.

¹¹⁹ Ibid., 63. The term *synchresis* is constructed by combining the two words *synchronism* and *synthesis*. Ibid., 224.

image that distinguishes it from the voice-over commentary of *textual speech*.¹²⁰ The concept was first introduced in Chion's 1982 book *The Voice in Cinema*.¹²¹

3. ETHNOGRAPHIC ALLEGORY

"Ethnographic allegory" is a term derived directly from the field of experimental ethnography. In her book Russell acknowledges Clifford as a processor in experimental forms of written ethnography and a central part in the ethnographic revisionism of the 1980s.¹²² Russell's own allegorical reading, otherwise heavily dependent on Walter Benjamin, takes as its point of departure Clifford's 1986 text "On Ethnographic Allegory."¹²³

At the outset there is a clear congeniality between Kubelka's notion that all communication is based on metaphors and Clifford's insistence that all ethnographic writing is allegorical.¹²⁴ But Clifford's notion is formulated in a context set apart from Kubelka's modernistic avant-gardism, building on a "revival" of rhetoric by a diverse group of literary and cultural theorists (Clifford mentions Roland Barthes, Michael de Certeau and Hayden White, among others) in the 1970s and 1980s, that according to Clifford "has thrown serious doubt on the positivist-romantic-realist consensus."¹²⁵ While Kubelka aims for the essentials of the filmic language, what sets film apart from the other arts, Clifford's aim is a rejection of "monological authority."¹²⁶ Kubelka is reluctant to translate the meaning of his films into words, but when he does the metaphors of *Unsere Afrikareise* are often dwarfed by a narrow and to specific frame of interpretation that risk reducing the sync events to rebuses.¹²⁷ Instead of opening up they close the allegorical interpretation. Clifford's project is to open up new possible interpretations and a broader understanding of representation in ethnographic writing with an "open-ended view of culture and society as a terrain of hybridization, disjuncture, and heteroglossia."¹²⁸ Russell defines his position as "post-colonial anthropological theory."¹²⁹ What Clifford shares with Kubelka is a critique of the reductive realism of positivist thinking.¹³⁰

Clifford's text "On Ethnographic Allegory" was part of the anthology *Writing Culture* (1986), a book labelled "the single most influential anthropology book in recent decades" and "a flagship text for the debates about reflexivity and

¹²⁰ For *textual speech*, see Chion, *Audio-Vision*, 172-176.

¹²¹ Chion, *The Voice in Cinema*, 17-29.

¹²² Russell, *Experimental Ethnography*, xi-xvii.

¹²³ *Ibid.*, 4.

¹²⁴ Clifford defines allegory as a rhetorical strategy of extending a metaphor throughout an entire narrative so that objects, persons, and actions in the text are equated with meanings that lie outside the text. Clifford, "On Ethnographic Allegory," 98.

¹²⁵ *Ibid.*, 100.

¹²⁶ Clifford "Feeling Historical," *Cultural Anthropology*, vol. 27, issue 3, 2012, 423.

¹²⁷ See Mekas, 294; MacDonald, "Peter Kubelka: On *Unsere Afrikareise* (*Our Trip to Africa*)," 164.

¹²⁸ Ori Starn, "Introduction," in *Writing Culture and the Life of Anthropology*, ed. Ori Starn (Durham: Duke University Press, 2015), 3.

¹²⁹ Russell, *Experimental Ethnography*, xi.

¹³⁰ Clifford, "On Ethnographic Allegory," 100; Kubelka, "The Theory of Metrical Film," 141-143.

representation that defined that whole decade in anthropology.”¹³¹ In a 2012 lecture (with the telling title “Feeling Historical”) Clifford seems uncomfortable with the importance ascribed to *Writing Culture* as “gamechanger.” In Clifford’s own words: “Games were changing. But *Writing Culture* was part of the changes, not their cause.”¹³² The anthology occupied a “transitional moment,” between the interests and agendas of the 1960s (the time of Kubelka’s *Unsere Afrikareise*) and the end of the century (the time of Russell’s *Experimental Ethnography*).¹³³ Clifford labels the change “the decentring of the West.”¹³⁴ Minh-ha was a part of the same critical re-evaluation within the field of ethnographic film.

The 1970s had seen the raising influence of Marxist and feminist theory. *Writing Culture* added the new sensibilities of literary, poststructuralist, and postcolonial theory. The critique did not only come from old school positivists for its interest in reflexivity and representation but also from Marxist scholars for a “depoliticized, la-la-land culturalism” and from feminists for failing to acknowledge feminist genealogies of ethnographic experimentation and textual theorization as well as the uneven gender representation of the writers (only one out of nine writers were a woman).¹³⁵ In his 2012 lecture Clifford is well aware of the omissions of *Writing Culture* in terms of race, class, gender and sexuality.¹³⁶

Writing Culture reacted – with insight and blindness – to profound shifts in global culture and society. It is very much a work of its time. Yet it seems to be having a second life in the present conjuncture. Experiments in ethnography abound [...] What new uses are being found for the critical tools in this book from a former world?¹³⁷

To me the discussions provoked by *Writing Culture* are still valid today and this thesis can be seen as one use of “the critical tools in [a] book from a former world.”¹³⁸

At the time *Writing Culture* wanted to highlight, what in retrospect seems as an obvious fact, that anthropologists write and following on this that what they write, namely ethnographies, have to be understood in terms of poetics and politics.¹³⁹ In the text “On Ethnographic Allegory” Clifford argues that all ethnographic writing is allegorical both to its content and to its form and that an acceptance of this fact

¹³¹ Starn, 2-3. See also Ruth Behar and Deborah A. Gordon, “Introduction: Out of Exile,” in *Women Writing Culture*, ed. Ruth Behar and Deborah A. Gordon (Berkeley: University of California Press: 1995), 3.

¹³² Clifford, “Feeling Historical,” 417.

¹³³ Starn, 3.

¹³⁴ Clifford, “Feeling Historical,” 419.

¹³⁵ Starn 3; For the feminist critique, see Ruth Behar and Deborah A. Gordon ed., *Women Writing Culture* (Berkeley: University of California Press: 1995).

¹³⁶ Clifford also mentions the lack of references to film in *Writing Culture*, especially *Territories* (Isaac Julien, 1984), premiered the same year as *Writing Culture* was published. Clifford, “Feeling Historical,” 417.

¹³⁷ Ibid., 423.

¹³⁸ Ibid.

¹³⁹ James Clifford, “Introduction: Partial Truths,” in *Writing Culture: The Poetics and Politics of Ethnography*, ed. James Clifford and George E. Marcus (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1986), 2; Behar and Gordon, “Introduction: Out of Exile,” 3.

changes the ways it can be written and read. He emphasizes that in the process of cultural description even realistic portraits, if they are “convincing” and “rich,” are extended metaphors, connotative patterns that point to theoretical, aesthetic and moral additional meanings. Furthermore, these kind of transcendental meanings are not abstractions or interpretations that are “added” to the original “simple” account but instead they are the very “conditions of its meaningfulness.”¹⁴⁰ Clifford takes the two metaphors of anthropological fieldwork as “scientific ‘laboratory’” and “a personal ‘rite of passage’” as an outset to illustrate the impossible aim of combining objective and subjective practices within the discipline: “Much of our knowledge about other cultures must now be seen as contingent, the problematic outcome of intersubjective dialogue, translation, and projection.”¹⁴¹

As already stated I understand the allegorical reading to be the structuring method of *Experimental Ethnography*, making it possible to read both colonial films and avant-garde films as ethnographic allegories.¹⁴² In my text ethnographic allegory will be a means to open up to the metaphoric possibilities of the sync event in a framework set apart from Kubelka’s modernistic closure of media specificity. Clifford’s allegorical register also helps to expose the political meaning in *Unsere Afrikareise*. In Clifford’s own words: “A recognition of allegory inescapably poses the political and ethical dimensions of ethnographic writing [...] It suggests that these be manifested, not hidden.”¹⁴³

¹⁴⁰ Clifford, “On Ethnographic Allegory,” 98-100.

¹⁴¹ Ibid., 109.

¹⁴² See page 4.

¹⁴³ Clifford, “On Ethnographic Allegory,” 120.

II. THE AUDIO-VISION OF THE SYNC EVENT

I will start the audiovisual analysis with the *masking method*, looking at the images and hearing the sounds of *Unsere Afrikareise* separately. This will help to acknowledge the contribution of both the visuals and the sonic when analysing the sync events in *Unsere Afrikareise* through Chion's *audio-vision* in chapter six.

In film not only images but also sounds are editable. Since they are recorded on strips of film they can be cut, assembled and moved around.¹⁴⁴ In *Unsere Afrikareise* image and sounds were edited simultaneously. Kubelka describes working with the image reel on the right hand side and the sound reel on the left hand side of the editing table, "putting together [his] vocabulary, trying out new possibilities."¹⁴⁵ When turning to the separation of image and sound of the masking method it's important to keep in mind this simultaneity of the audiovisuals of the editing. Still, I see the masking method as a way to avoid the pitfalls of *added value*.¹⁴⁶ Or as Chion phrase it: "I propose that discovering the sonic elements and the visual elements separately, before putting them back together again, will dispose us most favourably to keep our listening and looking fresh, open to the surprises of audiovisual encounters."¹⁴⁷

4. THE IMAGE (MASKING THE SOUND)

Removing the sound and seeing only the image of *Unsere Afrikareise* is like watching a mashed up safari travelogue from the silent film era. In *Experimental Ethnography* Russell connects *Unsere Afrikareise* to this era when she writes that the silent safari film *Simba* (Martin and Osa Johnson, 1928) "might stand in for the film that Peter Kubelka could not or would not do."¹⁴⁸ *Simba* was one of the last safari films of the silent period.¹⁴⁹ Unlike in *Nanook of the North* (Robert Flaherty, 1922) the Johnson's never tried to hide the filmic apparatus or themselves as explorers, making *Simba* into a cinema of attraction on display, with the adventurous Osa Johnson as the star, killing big game and making fun of the Africans in a straightforward depiction of contemporary racism. In Russell's re-reading the film becomes a document not of wildlife and indigenous people but of colonial exploitation:

¹⁴⁴ Chion, *Audio-Vision*, 40.

¹⁴⁵ Michelle Silva, "Heart core: The filmic gospel according to Peter Kubelka," *San Francisco Bay Guardian*, vol. 40, no. 3, 2005, http://www.sfbg.com/40/03/art_core.html (accessed 19 January, 2016).

¹⁴⁶ See page 20.

¹⁴⁷ Chion, *Audio-Vision*, 187-188.

¹⁴⁸ Russell, *Experimental Ethnography*, 140.

¹⁴⁹ In the 1932 release *Congorilla* (Martin and Osa Johnson, 1932) four years later Martin Johnson's voice-over proudly states: "You are going to see and hear the first pictures ever made in natural sound from the jungles of central Africa." With its prejudiced first-person narration, off screen music, ambient sounds and only occasional use of synchronous sound, the film can give a clue of what *Simba* would have sounded like. But the travelogue genre as a whole did not survive the transition to sound in competition with fictional fantasy narratives, a shift that becomes visible in *Grass: A Nation's Battle for Life* (Merian C. Cooper and Ernest B. Schoedsack, 1925) and *King Kong* (Merian C. Cooper and Ernest B. Schoedsack, 1933).

The safari becomes an apparatus and a technology in *Simba*, and it becomes so because of the film camera, which has not yet mastered the tricks of invisibly and humility. [...] the film becomes a documentary not about animals but about the representational system of colonialism that makes itself legible as a sign of its own demise.¹⁵⁰

This reading of *Simba* comes close to Russell's reading of *Unsere Afrikareise*, and I see her inability to properly distinguish between the two films as a telling example of her failure to take the soundtrack into proper account.

Unsere Afrikareise has a total length of twelve and a half minutes. The image track is divided in 184 cuts with an average length of less than four seconds. The individual cuts are like fragments of scenes that reoccur throughout the film. The film lacks any conventional narrative, with disparate shots taken at different times and in different locations mixed into a dense pattern. Footage from Egypt is combined seemingly randomly with the bulk of the footage from southern Sudan. Besides two dramatic scenes – the catching of a giraffe and the killing of a lion – the only elements of narrative structure are built on associational causality and graphical matching provoked by the editing.

With *Unsere Afrikareise* Kubelka had to give up the assumption of film speaking between frames.¹⁵¹ Here articulation is between shots. But perhaps his method of working can give credit to the notion of articulation between frames? Kubelka printed the first and the last frame to catalogue every shot filmed and used these printed frames to create his meticulous pattern of match cuts.¹⁵²

The film opens with an image of a hunter, seen from behind, aiming at an animal within the same frame. Already this first shot identifies the view of the camera with the gun sight of the aiming rifle. A hippopotamus swimming in a river, filmed through dense vegetation, is followed by a sequence of Europeans lazing on a boat. These three elements are then intercut; the Europeans on the boat; the hippopotamus in the water and the hunter aiming, the second time with his rifle resting on the shoulder of an African boy. The editing suggests that the hunter shoots the hippo and a man on the boat watches the wounded hippo through binoculars. The sequence is abruptly interrupted by an image of a hunter shooting an already fallen zebra from a close distance.

In her text Russell dwells on the voyeuristic gaze of the camera establishing a regime of looking, aiming and killing, with the Europeans as intruders in a pastoral setting and the Africans portrayed as their servants or as part of nature, identified with the animals being killed.

The horror of the film is not only the merciless killing of wild game but the intercutting of this imagery with supplemental footage of Africans, many of them bare-breasted women. Match cuts equate, through substitution and metaphor, African bodies with animal targets. Shots of the hunters looking through binoculars and telescopic rifle sights inscribe a

¹⁵⁰ Russell, *Experimental Ethnography*, 148.

¹⁵¹ See page 12.

¹⁵² Silva.

voyeuristic *dispositif* within the film, and a voyeuristic gaze is equally implied in the footage itself, which is consistently marked by a depth of field and frames within frames.¹⁵³

There is a gender aspect as well: The European hunter is a male hunter. Following Bill Nichols, Russell connects the voyeuristic gaze of the ethnographic camera to the pornographic gaze.¹⁵⁴

However, there is also imagery that complicates this reading. In a recurrent shot an African girl is dancing in close-up with her eyes fixed at the camera. She is vulnerable, clearly dancing for the camera, but at the same time she is the only subject who returns the gaze of the camera counterbalancing the othering optics of the ethnographic camera. When she lowers her eyes the image cuts away. The returning of the gaze complicates the visual chain of European male hunters looking at female Africans identified as prey. Other examples that break the chain of the hierarchy of vision is when the Africans hunt and the Europeans are filmed of guard, for example while eating, or especially in a shot of two European men taking a bath. In their almost nudity they are also made vulnerable to the gaze of the camera. Furthermore there is imagery of a female European hunter, reminding of Osa Johnson in *Simba*.

But it's not by image content that *Unsere Afrikareise* differs from a safari travelogue. The difference lies in the way the material is edited. A central formalistic trick is match cuts that imply a causality provoked by the editing. The match cuts are made up by either continuous movements that cause a *fake causality*, or by *graphical matching* of visual similarities in two images following each other. An often referred example of continuous movement is when a European hunter is shaking hands with African men and the shaking of the hand is transferred into the trembling leg of a zebra in a second shot; then, in a third shot, we see the real cause of the zebra's leg trembling in close-up – it is being flawed. This is of course parodical, as so much in the film is, participating in the shock effect of the often-cruel imagery.

There are numerous examples of *graphical matching*. One is a sequence of images containing two figures: a man looking at a grass fire with two branches of a tree “sticking up” from his head; the two branches of the tree are mimicked by two snorkels sticking up from the water in the following shot; then an image of two minarets in a long shot from a city; and finally the shapes of a hunter supporting his rifle on the shoulder of an African boy. The imagery is arbitrary, and the only link between the shots is the two figures in each one of them. A highly rhetoric match cut is when a close-up of a woman's nipple is substituted by a close-up of a dead elephant's eye.

Ultimately, both the continuous movement and graphical matching have to be understood in the wider context of the audiovisual structure of the sync event. They participate in building the meticulous structure of image to image, sound to sound and image to sound relations that is key to the sync events of *Unsere Afrikareise*.

¹⁵³ Russell, *Experimental Ethnography*, 128.

¹⁵⁴ Ibid, 122. See also “The Ethnographer's Tale” in Bill Nichols, *Blurred boundaries: Questions of Meaning in Contemporary Culture* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1994), 63-91.

5. THE SOUND (MASKING THE IMAGE)

Listening to the soundtrack of *Unsere Afrikareise* is like overhearing a conversation, taking place back at the camp at the end of the day when activities have been accomplished. Almost all dialogue is in German, spoken in an indifferent leisurely tone with a thick Austrian accent, with a few exceptions of Sudanese and English. The topics are typically recollections of various hunting experiences during the day, but we are left with only fragments of these hunting stories. More than what is being said the dialogue creates an atmosphere, and it does so together with the continuous repetition of recurring fragments of Frank Sinatra's *Around the world*.¹⁵⁵ If it is possible to talk about a lead motif of *Unsere Afrikareise* it is this song.

Fragments of other musical scores – built up by Yugoslavian folk music, traditional African music, British dance hall music, Egyptian tango and sixties radio pop music – together with gunshots, a vulgar laughter and the cry of animals *punctuate* the atmosphere created by the dialogic and musical fragments.¹⁵⁶ These elements on the soundtrack keep recurring, but also individual words like “so” and “auf” recur, with the meaning of “auf” “changing according to its position in “*Aufstehen*” (“Get up!”) and “*Pass auf*” (“Pay attention”).¹⁵⁷ Ambient sounds of birds singing, the sound of water and the engines of cars and boats participate in building a dense soundscape.

While there are jumps and discontinuities between detached sounds, distinct from one another, most evident in the gunshots and the guffaw, voices are often enmeshed in ambient sounds, sometimes rending the dialogue almost inaudible. The high level of what Chion calls *consistency*, the amount to which different audio elements interact, is a consequence of the recording conditions rather than postproduction mixing of the soundtrack.¹⁵⁸ Kubelka recorded fourteen hours of sound on a tape recorder during the trip and the different layers heard on the soundtrack are a result of the physical environments where they were recorded and not created in the subsequent sound mix.¹⁵⁹ The “cuts” between different auditory elements can often be clearly distinguished in abrupt meetings between music and dialogue or different environmental sounds. All sounds in the film are location sounds (natural sounds). This is true also for the musical score. The music heard in the film was recorded during the trip, in a variety of locations ranging from a marriage in a Yugoslavian village to an Italian pub in South Sudan.¹⁶⁰

¹⁵⁵ *Around the world*, written by Harold Adamson and Victor Young, was originally the theme song from *Around the World in 80 days* (Michael Anderson, 1956). The Frank Sinatra version was recorded in 1958 for his album *Come Fly With Me*.

¹⁵⁶ For the different types of music in *Unsere Afrikareise*, see MacDonald, “Peter Kubelka: On *Unsere Afrikareies* (Our Trip to Africa),” 174; Russell, *Experimental Ethnography*, 130.

¹⁵⁷ Alberte Pagán, “An Architecture of Emotion: Peter Kubelka interviewed,” published 8 January, 2013, <http://albertepagan.eu/a-toupeira/peter-kubelka-interviewed/> (accessed 19 January 2016).

¹⁵⁸ Chion, *Audio-Vision*, 189.

¹⁵⁹ Mekas, 297; MacDonald, “Peter Kubelka: On *Unsere Afrikareies* (Our Trip to Africa),” 174.

¹⁶⁰ *Ibid.*

In *Audio-Vision* Chion starts with the voice: “In stating that sound in the cinema is primarily vococentric, I mean that it almost always privileges the voice, highlighting and setting the later off from other sounds.” At the outset this is true also for *Unsere Afrikareise* as the major part of the soundtrack is made up by human voices. But rather than being “isolated in the sound mix like a solo instrument,” the voices in *Unsere Afrikareise* partake to create an atmosphere.¹⁶¹ Instead of the clearly set apart dialogue of *theatrical speech* I find the notion *emanation speech* to be a productive entry point to understand the function of dialogue in *Unsere Afrikareise*.¹⁶² *Emanation speech* refers to voices that are not necessarily completely heard, understood or directly linked to the narrative action of the film. Chion describes *emanation speech* as the most cinematic, but at the same time most rare, type of speech in cinema.¹⁶³ The notion emanation speech connects to the absence of subtitling in *Unsere Afrikareise*. According to Kubelka, besides ruining the integrity of the image, subtitling fails to acknowledge other accepts of sound than the literary meaning of the words: “[W]hen you record sound, you have incredible information on many levels, not just the meaning of the words said. All this other information is there, even if you *don’t* speak German or Austrian dialect or Sudanese.”¹⁶⁴

Despite the primarily role of voices as emanation speech a few sentences in the film stand out from the rest and calls for critical attention.¹⁶⁵ Goethe is mentioned a couple of times, both in, “think about / the end of Goethe’s Faust,” and in the sentence “Goethe was an asshole,” with another voice responding: “No, no he wasn’t.” It is Kubelka’s voice we hear saying that Goethe was an asshole.¹⁶⁶ At other occasions Kubelka is directly addressed by the other participants of the safari, making it evident that he is part of the soundtrack: “Now I respect the bush, I can tell you that. / Kubelka, you have to respect something, we all respect it.” Another sentence worth noticing is a woman’s voice saying: “Well, it’s really true, you don’t understand that, but I have been educated like a boy.” To an English speaking audience the few sentences in English stand out, especially at the very end of the soundtrack when a male voice, speaking in broken English, says: “I’d like to visit your country. / If I get the chance.”

Sentences are constructed by means of montage. The sentence, “think about / the end of Goethe’s Faust,” is a composite of two different parts with two different persons speaking.¹⁶⁷ Kubelka acknowledges this to the influence of James Joyce, “who has split up language and words,” and compares the splitting up of sentences on the soundtrack with the splitting up of actions on the image track: “I also split up on-

¹⁶¹ Chion, *Audio-Vision*, 5-6.

¹⁶² For *theatrical speech*, see *ibid.*, 171-172.

¹⁶³ *Ibid.*, 177-178.

¹⁶⁴ Sicinski, <http://academichack.net/unseretrib.htm>; MacDonald, “Peter Kubelka: On *Unsere Afrikareise* (*Our Trip to Africa*),” 164.

¹⁶⁵ Translations from German to English are from Pagàn, Kudláček, and MacDonald, “Peter Kubelka: On *Unsere Afrikareies* (*Our Trip to Africa*).”

¹⁶⁶ MacDonald, “Peter Kubelka: On *Unsere Afrikareise* (*Our Trip to Africa*),” 160.

¹⁶⁷ Pagàn.

going actions, like the handshake and turn them into something that's too... You cannot say it with language. This is what film can do."¹⁶⁸

6. THE AUDIO-VISION OF *UNSERE AFRIKAREISE*

In putting the images and the sounds together I will start with Chion's provoking statement that "*there is no soundtrack*."¹⁶⁹ To Chion the masking method was a way to open up our listening and looking to surprises in the audiovisuals, but in reality the sound of a film, taken separately from the image, is not an internally coherent whole on equal terms with the image.¹⁷⁰ Instead, "each audio element enters into *simultaneous vertical relationship*" with the image: "Therefore, there is no image track and no sound track in the cinema, but a *place* of images, plus sounds."¹⁷¹ This is exactly what the sync event emphasizes through the separation and *simultaneous vertical* recombination of image and sound to archive new meanings.

The *added value*, that sound brings, acts on each image throughout the entire film. To demonstrate the role played by added value I will return to two quotes from Russell's book on the imagery of *Simba*, respectively *Unsere Afrikareise*.¹⁷² The first quote omits a reference to an afterwards added soundtrack for *Simba* (by James Makubuya in 1992): "Seen again, *to the tune of African drumming and singing*, [my italics] the film becomes a documentary not about animals but about the representational system of colonialism."¹⁷³ It is the added value of the new soundtrack that makes Russell read the film differently, where the African music offers a "reappropriation" contradicting the explicit colonialism of the image track.¹⁷⁴ In a similar way I argue that it is the added value that sound brings through the sync event that directs the reading of the imagery of *Unsere Afrikareise* in the second quote.¹⁷⁵ But this time both the visuals and the sounds are part of the film's original conceptualization.

According to Chion an outset for the audiovisual analysis is to locate *key points of synchronisation* between image and sound. These are significant moments when a sound event and a visual event meet in synchrony and define the "audiovisual phrasing" of a sequence. The sync events of *Unsere Afrikareise* are a dense pattern of audiovisual key points of synchronisation that replace any conventional narrative structure. But only seldom are these sync points between the original image and sound. Instead they are closely linked to another of Chion's concepts, that of *audiovisual counterpoint*. In cinema the relation is vertical, rather than horizontal, and therefore audiovisual counterpoint depend on the opposition between a given sound

¹⁶⁸ Ibid.

¹⁶⁹ Chion, *Audio-Vision*, 40.

¹⁷⁰ Ibid., 187-188.

¹⁷¹ Ibid., 40.

¹⁷² See page 25-26.

¹⁷³ Russell, *Experimental Ethnography*, 148.

¹⁷⁴ Ibid., 142.

¹⁷⁵ See page 26.

and image on a precise point of meaning.¹⁷⁶ To Kubelka it is related to movement: “The sound becomes the acoustic portrait of the visual action. When nothing changes, when nothing moves, there is no sound. The sound is born only when there is movement, an action, a change in the situation.”¹⁷⁷

Together with the vulgar laughter, resounding over images of Africans in pastoral settings, the conflict between the indifferent dialogue on the soundtrack and the merciless killing on the image track are the most apparent and loud speaking instances of the audiovisual counterpoints of the sync event. The synchronization of everyday sounds to images of the killing of animals, on the one hand, and the synchronization of gunshots on the soundtrack to images of everyday activities, on the other hand, resounds throughout the film. The gunshots function as *interruption of speech* in the “flow of language, where they make a hole.”¹⁷⁸ “The ‘sync events’ are moments of shock, in which the gunshot or the fragment of music is suddenly matched with the image, cutting through time and making it stop,” Russell writes in a rare reference to the soundtrack.¹⁷⁹ Chion calls this *punctuation*.¹⁸⁰ In the opening sequence of the film, with the group of Europeans lazing on a boat, a hat blowing off the head of a passenger is marked by a gunshot on the soundtrack, as if the hat is being shot off his head. The following gunshot is synchronized to the image of an animal being shot in an atypical example of naturalistic synchronous sound. The image of a zebra being shot from a close distance is synchronized to the word “Gema” (“Let’s go”) and the twitching leg of the zebra, in the next close-up, is synchronized to the word “Jetzt” (“Now”). Similarly, another image of a zebra being shot is synchronized to the word “Auf” (in the meaning “Aufstehen!”), as if telling the dying animal to rise up. In an image of two hunters shooting a wounded elephant, already lying on the ground, the rifle going off on the image is synchronized to something that sounds like the harmless sound of fingers tapping on a table.

The audiovisual counterpoints lead to *false causalities*, another facet of the grammatology of the sync event. This is part of *temporalisation*, the fact that the sound can impose a sense of succession.¹⁸¹ Just as the *false causality* of a handshake and a zebra being butchered was provoked by the editing and the construction of the sentence, “Think about / the end of Goethe’s Faust,” was constructed of two sound fragments, the same happens in the combination of image and sound.¹⁸² One, rather provocative, example is when a female hunter aims with her rifle (“I have been educated like a boy,” is heard on the soundtrack); then follows a shot of an African

¹⁷⁶ Chion, *Audio-Vision*, 58. In criticizing the musical analogy of horizontal-contrapuntal dynamics in film Chion attacks “the antisynchronization aesthetic of the 1970s” and especially targets the films by Marguerite Duras. Michel Chion, *Film: A Sound Art*, trans., Claudia Gorbman (New York: Columbia University Press, 2009), 37.

¹⁷⁷ Habib.

¹⁷⁸ Chion, *Audio-Vision*, 23.

¹⁷⁹ Russell, *Experimental Ethnography*, 133.

¹⁸⁰ Chion, *Audio-Vision*, 49.

¹⁸¹ *Ibid.*, 19.

¹⁸² See page 26 and 28.

nude man walking through the image and exactly as his genitals swing a rifle go off on the soundtrack; the gunshot is followed by a lion running towards the camera, as if wounded by the shot; and just as the dying lion looks into the camera in the following image Sinatra sings: “You look at me, and I would see,” followed by a final gunshot, this time in sync, killing the wounded lion.

It is *synchresis* that make the sync event possible.¹⁸³ Chion makes one of his rare references to experimental film when he claims that some experimental films and videos show that synchresis can work out of the thin air, with images and sounds that really has nothing to do with each other. When simultaneous they form “monstrous yet inevitable and irresistible agglomerations in our perception.” But synchresis is not an automatic process and here, perhaps, Chion comes close to describe the editing of sync events in *Unsere Afrikareise*:

Play a stream of random audio and visual events, and you will find that certain ones will come together through synchresis and other combinations not. The sequence takes on its phrasing all on its own, getting caught up in patterns of mutual reinforcement and phenomena of ‘good form’ that do not operate by any simple rules.¹⁸⁴

There are several different logics of how synchresis works. A sound that is louder than the other sounds “coagulates” with the image.¹⁸⁵ The rifles being fired on the soundtrack are the most obvious examples where the sync events in *Unsere Afrikareise* work in this way. Another logic is when a common rhythm secures the synchresis.¹⁸⁶ The movements of the dead lion, being lifted onto a car, are synchronized to the rhythm of a Yugoslavian folk song; the movements of the wounded Hippopotamus in the water is meticulously synchronized to a fragment of dialogue; and the handshake with the butchered zebra is synchronized to the sound of “thunder” (in reality the “thunder” is made up by empty metal pails that are being lowered into a well).¹⁸⁷

Often different sounds are linked to the same imagery, destabilizing the meaning of the image and acting parodically on the visuals. The movements of the dancing girl are synchronised to the words “respektieren die Busch,” Sinatra singing, ambient chanting, a vulgar laughter and finally to the engine of a boat. The image of a European hunter aiming with his rifle on the shoulder of an African boy recur three times during the course of the film: the first time to the synchronous sound of a shot going off on the soundtrack; next to a fragment of Sinatra singing; and the third time to ambient shouting. When an African woman pestles, every strike she makes is synchronized to a seemingly random word in German.

These are examples of sync events that function as ambiguous audiovisual counterpoints without a stereotyped meaning of the sounds.¹⁸⁸ In contrast the

¹⁸³ See page 20.

¹⁸⁴ Ibid., 63.

¹⁸⁵ Ibid.

¹⁸⁶ Ibid., 64.

¹⁸⁷ Pagàn.

¹⁸⁸ Chion, *Audio-Vision*, 38.

laughter placed over Africans working and walking impose a view of the Austrian hunters as scornful towards the Africans. This is perhaps most clearly manifested in a scene with two hunters and a warden in a kaki suit. The laugh track leaves no doubt of the European's intentions of mocking the African warden.¹⁸⁹

The sync event is a conscious play with the *audiovisual contract*.¹⁹⁰ Kubelka exploits our belief in this symbolic agreement that sound and image come from the same entity to create new meanings: "But my position is articulated through this synchronism where I use the availability of the spectator to accept as true an act which is synchronous between the visual and the sound."¹⁹¹ *Unsere Afrikareise* can be understood as constantly breaking the audiovisual contract by synchronizing mismatched images and sounds. In this interpretation the film is deconstructive. But I would argue that, rather than breaking the contract, *Unsere Afrikareise* is a constant renegotiation of the audiovisual contract. If it is true that film rests on an audiovisual contract separated from our everyday experience (what is commonly called "reality") the sync event draws the full consequences of this "symbolic pact" of the semiotics of film.

According to Chion, the perceived "naturalness" of the relation between image and sound is a misconception in the first place. It is *added value* that gives the impression that the sound is unnecessary and that it simply duplicates a meaning, when it in reality brings it about, either by itself or by discrepancies between image and sound.¹⁹² Chion formulates his own project in opposition to what he calls the "naturalist" conception:¹⁹³ "There is really no reason for audiovisual relationships thus transposed to appear the same to us as they are in reality, and especially, for the original sound to ring true."¹⁹⁴ Even though Chion's aim here is to stress something somewhat more conventional to the film industry – the use of post synchronisation by the Foley artist in feature films – the sync events of *Unsere Afrikareise* explores one of the furthest possibilities of this meeting of image and sound.

Unsere Afrikareise never uses neither synchronous dialogue nor non-diegetic voice-over commentary. Instead the *emanation speech* of the soundtrack parallels the imagery.¹⁹⁵ There is a mutual connection between the voices speaking on the soundtrack and the people acting in the imagery (typically the Europeans). The voices stay at the borderline of the visuals, with "*one foot in the image*." They are everywhere and at the same time they share a relation of "*possible inclusion*" with the imagery.¹⁹⁶ This relation between image and sound establishes the *acousmâtre*, a place that the

¹⁸⁹ Kubelka has said: "I was disgusted with the way they behaved. [...] when they said, 'Make this shot with this tall black guy, and we'll make fun of him,' I *wanted* to do this because of what it showed about *them*." MacDonald, "Peter Kubelka: On *Unsere Afrikareise* (*Our Trip to Africa*)", 162-163.

¹⁹⁰ See page 21.

¹⁹¹ Habib.

¹⁹² Cion, *Audio-Vision*, 5.

¹⁹³ Ibid., 93.

¹⁹⁴ Ibid., 96.

¹⁹⁵ See page 28.

¹⁹⁶ Chion, *The Voice in Cinema*, 23-24.

cinema brings into play.¹⁹⁷ Like the audiovisual counterpoint of the sync event the acousmatic voice interacts with the visuals without ever meeting in lip-synchronization. Sitney gives an example of the same effect of the musical score, as both separated from and part of the same audiovisual “world” as the images:

[Kubelka] takes the sounds gathered under the same conditions as the images as a parallel world and edits the two at once. It is clever to cut blood spurting from a crocodile’s head to the music of waltz (as he has done). But it is more than clever when the ear detects that this waltz comes from a radio playing while hunters talk. Film scores are afterthoughts and hang of the images like weak appendix. The music in Kubelka’s film has a new reality because it is heard from the world where the picture is seen.¹⁹⁸

There are a few instances where the voice in *Unsere Afrikareise* almost find a speaking presence within the image. But it is never done in total synchronization and instead reminds of the generous approximation of post-synchronization in the Italian cinematic tradition.¹⁹⁹ This occurs when two men are seen eating and one of them comments on the food and when a man, with a cigarette in the corner of his mouth, argues enthusiastically in an image that unite with a freely post-synchronised German voice.

At one moment in the film the salient match cuts of disparate audiovisual material come to a stop. The scoffing laughter over Africans walking through high yellow grass suddenly stops, and there is silence. “[S]ilence is never a neutral emptiness,” writes Chion. Instead it is a product of contrast to the sounds heard before and after.²⁰⁰ The silence returns at the very end of the film, when a naked African man walks through the image as we hear, “I’d like to visit your country,” in broken English. This shot is followed by an image of a European woman in a pastoral winter landscape in silence. A third shot completes the sequence, as the African man walks out of the picture and the voice returns on the soundtrack: “If I get the chance.”

Ultimately, understanding the sync events of *Unsere Afrikareise* adds up to added value and this has consequences for how the film communicates its message: “The added value that words bring to the image goes far beyond the simple situation of a political opinion slapped onto images; added value engages the very structuring of vision – *by rigorously framing it*. [my italics]”²⁰¹ I will return to the discussion on how *Unsere Afrikareise* communicates a message (and what that message might be) in part four of the thesis, but first I will turn to trace the historical genealogy of the sync event.

¹⁹⁷ See page 22.

¹⁹⁸ Sitney, “Kubelka Concrete (Our Trip to Vienna),” 51.

¹⁹⁹ This is especially evident in films by Federico Fellini. Chion, *Audio-Vision*, 85.

²⁰⁰ Ibid., 58.

²⁰¹ Ibid., 7.

III. THE GENEALOGY OF THE SYNC EVENT

After examining the sync event as audiovision in the material image-sound relations of *Unsere Afrikareise* I will trace the genealogy of the sync event in the early history of avant-garde sound film of the 1930s. There are two movements that have had a decisive role in the history of the avant-garde film: the Russian avant-garde of the early Soviet state and the European surrealist movement.²⁰² While the Russian avant-garde is largely ignored in *Experimental Ethnography* Russell acknowledges “[t]he radical ambiguity of surrealism [as] a crucial point of reference for documentary forms that resist the closures of realist representation.”²⁰³

I will trace the sync event in Dziga Vertov’s experimentation with audiovisual relations in his first sound film *Enthusiasm: Simfoniya Donbassa* (*Enthusiasm: Symphony of the Donbas*, Dziga Vertov, 1931). I will then turn to Luis Buñuel’s first sound film, *L’Age d’Or* (*The Golden Age*, Luis Buñuel, 1930), and surrealist documentary *Las Hurdes*, a film that Russell sees as “an ideal entry point to experimental ethnography in cinema.”²⁰⁴ Sobchack’s text on *Las Hurdes* as asynchronous ethnographic documentary will influence my analysis of *Unsere Afrikareise* as ethnographic allegory in the next part of the thesis.

7. THE RADIO-EYE OF DZIGA VERTOV²⁰⁵

Early Soviet montage theory has been described as a dysfunctional *troika*.²⁰⁶ “In the centre, under the painted harness arch of the duga, is Lev Kulesov; on one side is the romantic-idealist-symbolist Sergei Eisenstein, and on the other is the archmaterialist and modernist Vertov.”²⁰⁷ While it is plausible to see the *Kuleshov effect* as a presumption of the sync event and Kubelka’s montage theory as a revision of Eisenstein’s *metric montage*, it is Vertov that will be foregrounded in this thesis.²⁰⁸ There are two reasons for this: The first is his insistence on a documentary content and the second is his emphasize on image and sound as equal parts in film. Regardless

²⁰² See for example Scott MacDonald, *Avant-Garde film: Motion Studies* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 2-4. The third founding movement of avant-garde film is formal abstraction. In *See this Sound* the cinematic 1920s “eye music” by Hans Richter is taken as a starting point of a genealogy of formal abstraction that Kubelka’s metric films are part of. Rainer et al., 47; Sitney, *Visionary Film*, 270.

²⁰³ Russell, *Experimental Ethnography*, xiii.

²⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, 28.

²⁰⁵ On the term “Radio-Eye,” see Lucy Fischer, “Enthusiasm: From Kino-Eye to Radio-Eye,” in *Film Sound: Theory and Practice*, ed. Elisabeth Weis and John Belton (New York: Columbia University Press, 1985), 260, note 1.

²⁰⁶ A *troika* is a Russian vehicle pulled by three horses abreast. *Oxford Dictionaries* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), <http://www.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/english/troika?q=Troika> (accessed January 27, 2016).

²⁰⁷ Carlos James Chamberlin, “Dziga Vertov: The Idiot,” *Senses of Cinema*, November 2006, Issue 41, <http://sensesofcinema.com/2006/feature-articles/dziga-vertov-enthusiasm/> (accessed January 27, 2016).

²⁰⁸ For the *Kuleshov effect* see Adrienne McLean, “Kuleshov effect,” in *Critical Dictionary of Film and Television Theory*, ed. Roberta Pearson and Philip Simpson (London: Routledge, 2001), 356.

Russell mentioning *Cheloveks Kinoapparatom* (*The Man with a Movie Camera*, Dziga Vertov, 1929) only in the specific context of the “city films” (and *Enthusiasm* not at all) I would argue that Vertov’s insistence on experimental methods and documentary content makes him into an ideal reference within the field of experimental ethnography.²⁰⁹

To extend documentary filmmaking to sound meant, to Vertov, a commitment to record sound on location and to edit together the sounds and images from different times and places in the same manner as he had done with the imagery of *Cheloveks Kinoapparatom*.²¹⁰ To Eisenstein the goal in film was to neutralise an object by cutting it off from all surrounding reality and use it in the montage.²¹¹ Synchronous sound threatened this process and therefore Eisenstein, in a manifesto written together with Podovkin and Alexandrov in 1928, launched an early critique of the conventions of synchronized sound in cinema.²¹² Ultimately, Eisenstein’s view on sound is formulated in negative terms, where asynchronous sound becomes a way of neutralizing the image.²¹³ Vertov, on the other hand, wanted to treat the sound and visual elements in film as equal, not limited to neither Eisenstein’s contrapuntal method or the synchronization position advocated by Russian documentarists at the time: “[T]he question of audio-visual montage is resolved not according to the simplest coincidence of sound with image, and not according to the simplest opposition of sound with image, but according to the complex interaction of sound with image.”²¹⁴

There is no evidence to prove that Kubelka was directly influenced by *Enthusiasm* when making *Unsere Afrikareise*. In “Restoring *Enthusiasm*” he tells Lucy Ficher that he saw the film for the first time in 1965 or 1966.²¹⁵ What is clear is that in 1972 he worked on a restoration of Vertov’s film.²¹⁶ Kubelka claims that, when viewing *Enthusiasm* for the first time, he immediately felt that image and sound had come out of sync in comparison to what must have been Vertov’s original intentions. It’s of course impossible to know exactly how Vertov had envisioned the relation between image and sound in the film and instead the two versions give a blueprint to

²⁰⁹ Russell, *Experimental Ethnography*, 27.

²¹⁰ Ibid., 81.

²¹¹ Elisabeth Weis and John Belton, “Classical Sound Theory,” in *Film Sound: Theory and Practice*, ed. Elisabeth Weis and John Belton (New York: Columbia University Press, 1985), 76.

²¹² Sergei Eisenstein, Vsevolod Podovkin and Grigori Alexandrov, “A Statement,” in *Film Sound: Theory and Practice*, ed. Elisabeth Weis and John Belton (New York: Columbia University Press, 1985), 83–85.

²¹³ In a text from 1929 Pudovkin, Eisenstein’s co-signer of the manifesto, holds a different view regarding sound, as “a means of enriching rather than neutralizing the image.” Weis and Belton, 76; Vsevolod Podovkin, “Asynchronism as a Principle of Sound Film,” in *Film Sound: Theory and Practice*, ed. Elisabeth Weis and John Belton (New York: Columbia University Press, 1985), 86–91.

²¹⁴ Vertov quoted in Hicks, 79.

²¹⁵ Lucy Fisher, “Restoring *Enthusiasm*: Excerpts from an Interview with Peter Kubelka,” in *Film Sound: Theory and Practice*, ed. Elisabeth Weis and John Belton (New York: Columbia University Press, 1985), 262.

²¹⁶ *Dziga Vertov: Enthusiasm (Simfonija Donbassa) Restored by Peter Kubelka* (Vienna: Österreichisches Filmmuseum, 2010).

Kubelka's sync event.²¹⁷ Since *Enthusiasm* exists in one "original" version and one version restored by Kubelka according to his principles, the film makes a privileged test case for genealogical inquiries of the sync event. Comparing the two versions makes it obvious just how important synchronization is to the sync event: "In fact this is not a restoration. It is nothing else than a re-synchronization. [...] It was only an attempt to find the original synchronism between image and sound."²¹⁸

Before coming into film Vertov had started out with sound experiments in his 1916 *Laboratory of Hearing*. According to Lucy Fisher he was ready to make *Enthusiasm* already in the 1920s, even though the film technique was not ready for him. Later Vertov would refer to *Enthusiasm* as "a symphony of noises" and Fischer points to the fact that the filmmaker known for the *ciné-eye* in reality was first concerned with the *ciné-ear*.²¹⁹ *Enthusiasm* is realized in three parts: Beginning with an overture on the elimination of the old obstacles of a socialist society (particularly religion and alcoholism); the film moves into a middle section, following different stages of heavy industrial production; and culminates in a final section, where the industrial products return back to the Soviet state.²²⁰

The film shares a similar use of location sounds with *Unsere Afrikareise*, but neither film use these sounds for plain synchronization. *Enthusiasm* starts with images of Russia in the grips of hypnosis by Tsarism and religion: the Tsarist monogram, church bells, statues of Christ, genuflecting worshippers and crucifixes are intercut with images of staggering drunks. Counterpointed to these images are sounds of liturgical choirs singing, people intoning the mass, sacred music, cuckoos, and ticking clocks. False causalities are provoked when religious hymns are placed over images of drunkards in audiovisual dissonance. With a strike of the bell the sounds of the drunkards are transposed to images of the churchgoers. Most sound-image relations fall under the category of asynchrony, with the exception of the church bells. They are key points of synchronization that are simultaneously seen and heard, punctuations that anchor the floating blocks of asynchrony.

In the next sequence the act of coming out of the political-religious trance is accomplished, symbolically, through the destruction of a church and its conversion into a public social club. In a spectacular sequence multiple prismatic images of the church spire bounce around on the screen followed by a split-screen image of a crucifix with each cross bending toward the other as if falling. Other images of crucifixes vibrate and go round in circle. The flow of the visuals are underscored and accentuated by the added value of the soundtrack that temporalizes the imagery with

²¹⁷ Kubelka makes a good case for his version in an interview accompanying the 2005 DVD release of *Enthusiasm*. Peter Kubelka, "Peter Kubelka: Restoring *Entuziazm*," in *Dziga Vertov: Entuziazm (Simfonija Donbassa) Restored by Peter Kubelka* (Vienna: Österreichisches Filmmuseum, 2010).

²¹⁸ Kubelka, "Peter Kubelka: Restoring *Entuziazm*."

²¹⁹ In 1929 Vertov conceived *Enthusiasm* almost exclusively in terms of sound and only the following year (1930) he wrote a treatment for the visual shots. Fischer, "Enthusiasm: From Kino-Eye to Radio-Eye," 248-249.

²²⁰ John MacKay, "Enthusiasm: Vertov's Breakthrough to Sound," in *Dziga Vertov: Entuziazm (Simfonija Donbassa), restored by Peter Kubelka* (Vienna: Österreichisches Filmmuseum, 2010).

drum rolls carefully matched to the rhythm of the images. The castrated church spire falls to the ground to a large crash on the sound track (a key point of synchronisation) that is repeated several times in a dramatic climax of the sequence. Finally, in a series of reverse shots accompanied by band music, the socialist flags are mounted onto the front of the church as the inverse religious conversion is accomplished.

The first section of the film reveals something else as well, that sets it apart from Kubelka's filmic gospel. The very first visual shot is an image of a young woman, who puts on headphones and sits in front of a switchboard. This is a self-reflexive gimmick, typical of Vertov's filmmaking: "Just like in *Man with the Movie Camera* we are made aware of the Cinema-Eye, so in *Enthusiasm* (or, "Woman with the Earphone") we are forced to be conscious of the Cinema-Ear."²²¹ At one point, as the woman puts on her earphones, a voice is shouting: "Attention! Attention! Leningrad speaking ... RV3...at a wavelength of 1000 meters. We now broadcast the march, 'The Final Sunday' from the film *Symphony of the Donbas*."²²² This announcement is followed by the image of a conductor leading an orchestra that is presumably playing the very music that she is listening to.

Kubelka's restoration of *Enthusiasm* transforms the audiovisual relations of the film from an ambient soundscape (especially in the second part) to a pattern of exactly matched key points of synchronization. To Kubelka the restored version exposes the sync event: "When I restored the film I found that these sequences had real articulations which come out only by the sync event."²²³ An explicit example is when a huge hammer, not synchronized to any particular sound in the earlier version, becomes synchronized first naturalistically to the bang of a hammer on the soundtrack, a key point of synchronization that punctuates the ambient factory noise, and then in the next sequence to the word "heroes" in various political slogans. This is Vertov's politicised use of the sync event "to hammer in the message."²²⁴

Kubelka distances himself from Vertov's political agitation in *Enthusiasm* when arguing that the message of the film is "the music of the events."²²⁵ In relation to his own restoration Kubelka express a common understanding as filmmakers: "I did it without any written or other references. I did it only on the basis that I was a filmmaker who understood Vertov's way of composing."²²⁶ Kubelka's restoration of Vertov's *Enthusiasm*, connecting two instances in time separated by 40 years, becomes a way to understand the sync event as a continuous historical movement, not limited to *Unsere Afrikareise* or Kubelka, but as an alternative history for sound in documentary/ethnographic film:

Films from Vertov's *Enthusiasm* to Kubelka's *Unsere Afrikareise* [...] do much of their work with the difference created between sound and image. It often seems a well-concealed fact of

²²¹ Fischer, "Enthusiasm: From Kino-Eye to Radio-Eye," 253.

²²² *Simfoniya Donbassa* (*Symphony of the Donbas*) is the alternative title of *Enthusiasm*.

²²³ Kubelka in Fischer, "Restoring *Enthusiasm*: Exerpts from an Interview with Peter Kubelka," 262.

²²⁴ Kubelka in "Peter Kubelka: Restoring *Enthusiasm*."

²²⁵ Ibid.

²²⁶ Fischer, "Enthusiasm: From Kino-Eye to Radio-Eye," 263.

film history that numerous filmmakers have used sound-on film for other than the sync effect and that these usage, by helping to redefine the limits of possibility for sound, have redrawn the limits of cinema itself.²²⁷

But Vertov is not the only origin in this genealogy of the sync event. There is reason to acknowledge two films by Luis Buñuel, made one year prior to, respectively one year after, *Enthuziazm*.

8. THE ETHNOGRAPHIC SURREALISM OF LUIS BUÑUEL

In 1932 surrealist filmmaker Luis Buñuel was invited to join Marcel Griaule's Dakar-Djibouti Mission, the first large-scale French anthropological field expedition to Africa, that would collect more than 3.500 artefacts for the new Musée de l'Homme.²²⁸ Buñuel declined the offer and, with a 20.000 pesetas lottery win of his anarchist friend Ramón Acín, went to a remote part of Spain to film *Las Hurdes*. In turning down the grand expedition to Africa *Las Hurdes* is an alternative travelogue of sorts.²²⁹

Russell traces the conjunction of ethnography and surrealism to the journal *Documents* (1929-1930).²³⁰ In reproducing a perspective launched by Clifford in his 1988 book *The Predicament of Culture* Russell writes:

Ethnographic surrealism was a short-lived moment, out of which ethnography, art, and surrealism 'emerged as fully distinct positions.' And yet their blurring constitutes a crucial historical conjunction. Its disruptive potential is both a reorientation of the avant-garde towards everyday life and a reorientation of ethnography toward cultural pluralism and hybridity.²³¹

Without contradicting the importance of the interaction, Kristoffer Noheden calls the description of the convergence as short-lived into question. Instead of ending the interaction with ethnography the following post-war developments in the surrealist movement saw a qualitative change in the relation.²³²

Buñuel had experimented with sound already two years prior to *Las Hurdes* in *L'Age d'Or*. Being a fictional feature film, *L'Age d'Or* falls outside the field of experimental ethnography, but since the film shares common audiovisual strategies with *Unsere Afrikareise*, and even more with *Enthuziazm*, it will function as a bridge to my discussion of *Las Hurdes*. Made a year after *Un Chien Andalou* (*An Andalusian Dog*, Luis Buñuel and Salvador Dalí, 1929) *L'Age d'Or* was not only Buñuel's first sound film but also, according to Linda Williams, the first innovative use of sound in French

²²⁷ Fred Camper, "Sound and Silence," 371-372.

²²⁸ James Clifford, *The Predicament of Culture: Twentieth-Century Ethnography, Literature, and Art* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1988), 55-56.

²²⁹ Instead of Buñuel surrealist writer Michel Leiris joined the Dakar-Djibouti Mission, publishing the book *L'Afrique Fantôme* from the trip, another important convergence of surrealism and ethnography. For a discussion on Leiris' book see *Ibid.*, 165-174.

²³⁰ Russell, *Experimental Ethnography*, 27.

²³¹ *Ibid.*, 28.

²³² Kristoffer Noheden, "Haloed Objects on Mental Parade: Myth and Magic in Post-War Surrealist Cinema" (Ph.D. Diss., Stockholm University, 2015), 114.

film.²³³ The film provoked a break between Buñuel and Dali that reverberates in the surrealist movement as a whole, where *L'Age d'Or* can be seen as representing a new more political phase. This new socially oriented Surrealism continues in *Las Hurdes*. But Williams warns us to overestimate the difference, blaming it on a false opposition between form and content: "Thus, although *L'Age d'Or* has been correctly read by most critics as indicative of a new social dimension in Surrealism in general, these themes do not account for much that is truly revolutionary in the film – for its dreamlike associations of condensation and displacement."²³⁴

I argue that the "condensation and displacement" of *L'Age d'Or* to a large extent depends on the audiovisual relation. In the film the tension between silent film and sound film is kept alive, as Buñuel almost seems to be toying around with the audiovisual contract, in staging different ways of using the audiovisual possibilities of the film medium. Points of synchronization and audiovisual counterpoints break up a *pit musical* score (non-diegetic music).²³⁵ The limited use of ambient sounds often creates a soundscape of the silent film era. Buñuel makes the shift from silent film (intertitles and pit music) to sound film audiovisible in numerous transitions, but arguably most clearly in a scene where pit music shifts to *screen music* (diegetic music)²³⁶ played by an orchestra in the actual scene, and then back to pit music again, very much like Vertov lets a conductor in *Enthusiasm* introduce the musical score of the film.²³⁷

The main story in *L'Age d'Or*, a mythic founding of "Imperial Rome" paralleled by a constantly obstructed love story, is framed by a quasi-scientific sequence about scorpions at the beginning, and a provoking mix-up of Duc de Blangis and Jesus Christ at the end of the movie. I will focus on one scene where Buñuel's use of the audiovisual possibilities of audiovisual counterpoint comes to the fore. While there are other both creative and unconventional uses of audiovisual combinations this is the scene that most clearly demonstrates Buñuel's use of a multi-layered audiovisual structure.

In the scene the principal characters, two separated lovers that motivate the progression of the (melo)drama, are found in a contemporary city (after the so called mythical founding of "Imperial Rome"). The scene is cross cut between the man walking down a street, handcuffed to two guards, and the woman in a bourgeois apartment. When the woman enters a room, with a cow lying on a bed (!), she tries to shoo the cow away. The only sound heard is from the bell hanging around the neck of the cow, a punctuation of the otherwise silent scene. As the cow leaves the room the bell continues ringing. The woman sits down and starts polishing her nails as the sound of the bell intensifies in synchronization with her movements, temporalizing

²³³ Linda Williams, *Figures of Desire: A Theory and Analysis of Surrealist Film* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992), 107.

²³⁴ *Ibid.*, 109.

²³⁵ Chion, *Audio-Vision*, 80.

²³⁶ *Ibid.*

²³⁷ See page 37.

the image.²³⁸ The cowbell becomes an audiovisual counterpoint when the image shifts to the man in the street. In the next shot the woman is in close up (the cowbell still ringing) and at the same time a dog is barking, an audiovisual counterpoint that transfers into a key point of synchronization, when the man in the street meets the barking dog. A wind starts blowing on the soundtrack, mixing with the cowbell and the barking dog. The wind supposedly comes from an open window, or mirror, that the woman is facing in the following shoot.²³⁹ Throughout the scene the bell, the barking dog and the wind continue, until the sounds suddenly disappear and the woman looks into the camera. In the next cut a synchronous dialogue starts with the man in the street yelling at his two guards.

In line with the re-synchronized *Enthuziazm*, rather than the meticulously synchronized audiovisual counterpoints of perpetual movements in *Unsere Afrikareise*, the sync events of *L'Age d'Or* are blocks of asynchronous image and sound that are freed from each other to create parallel perceptions, occasionally anchored by key points of synchronization. The different sounds (cowbell, barking dog, wind) become “concurrent musical voices” in what Chion would call a *dissonant harmony*: “[they] point to a momentary discord between the image’s and sound’s figural natures.” And here I believe that Chion captures a central aspect of the sync events in *L'Age d'Or*: “[F]ilms characterized by a sort of horizontal freedom [...] also exhibit a vigorous perpetual solidarity, marked by points of synchronization that occur throughout. These sync points [...] provide the harmonic framework of the audiovisual system.”²⁴⁰

With *Las Hurdes* Buñuel would continue to develop an innovative asynchronous soundtrack, but this time on an ethnographically coded material. Recorded without sound, due to lack of funds and the difficult travel conditions, the film was originally presented with a live narration by Buñuel himself.²⁴¹ In “The Early History of Travel Films” Rick Altman makes a strong case for live performed lectures with moving pictures as the origin of the documentary travelogue film in the early 20th century.²⁴² When *Las Hurdes* was first screened in Madrid 1933 Buñuel read the accompanying text (written by himself and Pierre Unik) in an objective and indifferent tone of voice.²⁴³ Buñuel was using the already out-dated role of the lecturer for his own purposes to criticise the very authority that documentary relied (and still relies) on.

Voice and image in *Las Hurdes* was originally both mechanically and emotionally disengaged. The *dissonant harmony* created by the different “tracks” of the film can be understood as representing different registers of discourse where the

²³⁸ Chion, *Audio-Vision*, 13.

²³⁹ Williams clearly understands it as a mirror. Williams, 118-120.

²⁴⁰ Chion, *Audio-Vision*, 36-37.

²⁴¹ Barry Mauer, “Asynchronous Documentary: Buñuel’s *Land Without Bread*,” in *Lowering the Boom: Critical Studies in Film and Sound*, ed. by Jay Beck and Tony Grajeda (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2008), 141.

²⁴² Rick Altman, “From Lecturer’s Prop to Industrial Product: The Early History of Travel Films,” in *Virtual Voyages: Cinema and Travel*, ed. Jeffrey Ruoff (Durham: Duke University Press), 61-76.

²⁴³ Sobchack, 57-58.

audiovisual contract is constantly put into question. The film has been read as a trial of “the essential imperialism and colonialism” of documentary film.²⁴⁴ If the imperialism and colonialism is located in the voice-over narration of the authoritarian *textual speech* it is constantly unmasked by the discrepancy to the visuals. Chion articulates the audiovisual conflict of *textual speech*:

Textual speech is inseparable from an archaic power: the pure and original pleasure of transforming the world through language, and ruling over one’s creation by naming it. [...] This power is countered by another: no sooner is something evoked visually and aurally by the word that gives birth to it than immediately we see how that which arises escapes from the abstraction of language because it’s concrete, fortified with details. The image creates sensations that words could never evoke, no matter how much they tried. [...] A sort of mutual challenge arises here. The text seems to create images as it wishes, but the image retorts, ‘you’re incapable of telling me all.’”²⁴⁵

Chion narrates film as a battlefield between the voice-over of *textual speech* and the subversive potential of the image. Tom Conely illustrates this process at work in *Las Hurdes*: “When the voice reflects the view of a focused, ‘Western’ or industrial view of continuity, history, culture, humankind, or missionary reason, the visuals provide a rich flow of images exceeding – in pleasure, disgust, wonder, Eros, marvel – what the voice [...] cannot express about them.”²⁴⁶ Ultimately, *Las Hurdes* exposes the inherent possibility of all narration to manipulate the audience.

By opposing image and narration *Las Hurdes* reveals the manipulation that is involved in the construction of film and “educates” the audience in adopting a critical attitude to what image and voice communicates.²⁴⁷ The film stays on a fine line between documentary and mockumentary, balancing on the edge of the audiovisual contract. This has led to confusion among audiences and critics alike. An early review of the English version of the film presumes that someone besides Buñuel himself had “ruined” the film by adding the “wearisome American commentary” and the Brahms symphony to the soundtrack.²⁴⁸ It’s easy to guess that this was just the kind of confusion Buñuel was after.²⁴⁹ *Las Hurdes* both continues the “surrealist shock” from Buñuel’s earlier films and at the same time explicates the social concern.²⁵⁰

I will follow Viviane Sobchack’s text “Synthetic Vision: The Dielectical Imperative of Luis Buñuel’s *Las Hurdes*” in some detail as the text will be a model for my reading of *Unsere Afrikareise* as ethnographic allegory in the next part of the thesis.

²⁴⁴ Mauer., 142.

²⁴⁵ Chion, *Audio-Vision*, 173-174.

²⁴⁶ Tom Conely, “Documentary Surrealism: On *Land Without Bread*,” in *Dada and Surrealist Film*, ed. Rudolf E. Kuenzli (New York: Willis Locker and Owens, 1987), 179.

²⁴⁷ Mauer, 143-144.

²⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 146.

²⁴⁹ Williams offers a key to understand Buñuel’s method of communication with his audience: “[M]uch to Bunuel and Dali’s amazement, *Un Chien Andalou* was praised by the same audiences that applauded the avant-garde essays of Gance, Epstein, and l’Herbier. Bunuel’s preference to the published scenario of the film complains bitterly of just this phenomenon. He lamented, ‘What can I do with audiences who find beautiful or poetic what is really a desperate and passionate call to murder.’” Williams, 111.

²⁵⁰ Mauer., 146.

Sobchack describes *Las Hurdes* as a film of “undeniable power,” and asks why, given the strong impact of the film, so little has been written about its structure and its methods. This question sets the stage for her analysis of the film.

In a formulation that reminds of Chion’s insistence on the “*simultaneous vertical relationship*” of the audiovisuals, Sobchack criticises earlier accounts of *Las Hurdes* for being too focused on the horizontal and missing the vertical contradictions in the film.²⁵¹ According to Sobchack the contradictions in the film are rooted in and structured by Hegelian dialectics and principles of surrealist compilation. Then follows what I take to be a key sentence: “Both in and across shots, sequences, and the film in its entirety, the viewer is presented simultaneously with *thesis* and *antithesis* that can only find their resolution as a *synthesis* achieved in the *active* process of viewing the film.”²⁵² Sobchack locates the thesis of “mimetic and indexical reality” in the film’s separate and contradictory imagery and, important in the context of the sync event, she locates the antithesis in the soundtracks’ simultaneous and contradictory combination of music, storytelling and semantic content. She translates the contradiction between Word and Image metaphorically to that between Culture (the narrator) and Nature (the Hurdanos) and locates four different layers of contradictions at work in the film.²⁵³

(1) *Between the two opposing film modes of surrealism and documentary reportage.* The conventional socially engaged documentary would connect the “primitive” and oppressed people to an irrelevant religion and indifferent Spanish Government. In its documentation of how the film construction makes the Hurdanos into objects of film *Las Hurdes* does more than this. The film is neither a “horrific travelogue” nor a “liberal documentary exposé” and the narrator has to be rejected as a surrogate for he, like the Hurdanos, is alien, they are both trapped in their cultures and in their limited respective view of the world.²⁵⁴

(2) *Between the travelogue footage and the romantic quality of Brahms’s Fourth Symphony.* Given the dialectic distance between the romantic music and realistic and raw images the audience is encouraged to begin deconstructing what is seen and heard and to achieve a reconstructive and synthetic understanding.²⁵⁵ The “conspicuous indifference” of the musical score is a demonstration of what Chion calls *anempathetic music*: “What does anempathetic music do if not to unveil this reality of cinema, its robotic face? Anempathetic music conjures up the mechanical texture of this tapestry of the emotion and senses.”²⁵⁶

(3) *Between the image and its presentation.* The most obvious example is when the narrator states that, “One eats goat meat only when one of the animals is killed accidentally,” and a puff of smoke from a gun in the right corner of the image gives the

²⁵¹ See page 31.

²⁵² Sobchack, 53.

²⁵³ Ibid.

²⁵⁴ Ibid., 54.

²⁵⁵ Ibid., 55.

²⁵⁶ Chion, *Audio-Vision*, 8-9.

manipulation away as the goat falls off the cliff. Sobshack emphasizes that the manipulation is done for the sake of the film and exposed to the viewer to place doubt in the “reality” of the images we see.²⁵⁷

(4) *Between the narrator and the imagery.* To Sobshack both the visual elements and the narration are in need of a thorough deconstruction and analysis. First, there are the audiovisual oppositions between the terrifying images of human poverty and illness and the narrator’s unaffected voice. Second, it’s within the narrator’s commentary itself, where thoughts and sentences are connected by inappropriate linkage and with a concern for objects rather than subjects. Finally, there is the “dialectical tension” between the narrator’s different and varying positions; in the middle of the distant matter of fact commentary the narrator at times shows a more humanistic side that acknowledges his role as social being.²⁵⁸

In Sobchack’s reading the disturbing role(s) played by the narrator paradoxically earns a certain freedom to the Hurdanos, even if formulated in negative terms. They are at least acknowledged as unknowable from the data of the culture-laden anthropologist.²⁵⁹ The same negative freedom is true for the audience of the film as well. Here, Sobchack formulates what comes close to one of Chion’s main objectives of the masking method: To break free from the prejudices that guard our perception.²⁶⁰ The lack of identification in *Las Hurdes* leads the audio-viewer to a position where she/he has to learn to see for herself/himself and to question her/his prejudices:

We can see neither as an Hurdano nor as the narrator – nor even as our once unselfconscious selves. Rather, we are led to question our own prejudices that distort and reduce the world at every glance. [...] Our liberty to see is confirmed as we recognize the very impossibility of freedom and clear vision. Indeed, it is this process of questioning freedom and vision that *Las Hurdes* sets in motion through its dialectical structure and method.²⁶¹

The audiovisual counterpoints of *Las Hurdes* may seem further removed from the sync events of *Unsere Afrikareise*, then both *Enthusiasm* and *L’Age d’Or*. But if understood as answering to different modes of filmmaking, and thus to different audiovisual contracts, I would argue that the two films have the closest affinity. If *Las Hurdes* is the answer to, and critique of, the lecturer’s voice of the travelogue *Unsere Afrikareise* is the answer to the observational realism of Direct Cinema.²⁶² While *Las Hurdes* puts the almighty voice-over of the *expository mode* into question *Unsere Afrikareise* questions the “fly on the wall” aesthetics and synchronous sound of the *observational mode*.²⁶³ I will bring this parallel between the two films with me as I

²⁵⁷ Sobchack, 55.

²⁵⁸ Ibid., 58-61.

²⁵⁹ Ibid., 62.

²⁶⁰ Chion, *Audio-Vision*, 186.

²⁶¹ Sobchack, 62-63.

²⁶² See page 16-17.

²⁶³ For a characterisation of the *expository mode* and the *observational mode*, see Nichols, 105-115.

move to the next level of my analysis, the sync events of *Unsere Afrikareise* as ethnographic allegory.

IV. THE SYNC EVENT AS ETHNOGRAPHIC ALLEGORY

After analysing the audiovisuality of the sync event and tracing the historical genealogy of its mode of working, I will reactivate a central concept within the discourse of experimental ethnography to use it on the material image-sound relations of *Unsere Afrikareise*. Building on Clifford's text "On Ethnographic Allegory" and with Sobchack's analysis of *Las Hurdes* as a model I will suggest a potential interpretation of the sync events in *Unsere Afrikareise* as ethnographic allegory.

9. THE ALLEGORICAL REGISTERS IN *UNSERE AFRIKAREISE*

A prominent allegorical register in Clifford's text is the *ethnographic pastoral*, in which a "primitive society" needs to be "salvaged" from disappearance. To Clifford this is the privileged allegory in the tradition of Western anthropology.²⁶⁴ Michael Sicinski criticizes Russell for linking *Unsere Afrikareise* to this kind of logic:

Russell's difficulty with *Unsere Afrikareise* has to do with an assumption that Kubelka is looking for an untainted, authentic culture, which can bear the load of modernist signification of purity. If this were so, to choose one example, why would Kubelka include images of Africans killing animals (sometimes alongside the German [*sic!*] tourists, sometimes independently of them), with no further explanation?²⁶⁵

As much as Kubelka does to complicate the "modernist signification of purity" by including Africans in the killing and the Austrian hunters vulnerable in their leisure activities, there is still a nostalgic longing "for an untainted, authentic culture" in numerous shots of semi-naked Africans in pastoral settings. Perhaps this nostalgic idealisation is most notable in the imagery of the dancing girl, who, at the same time, is the subject that returns the gaze of the camera. On the other hand *Unsere Afrikareise* does not show any "authentic culture" untouched by the colonial intrusion. Instead of dismissing the "ethnographic pastoral" – Kubelka did after all go to Africa to meet with "archaic people" – I find it more productive to acknowledge several competing allegorical registers in the film.

Clifford traces three different allegorical registers in Marjorie Shostak's *Nisa* – a Harvard based research of a !Kung San hunter-gather woman – that is the preferred example in his text.²⁶⁶ To trace the allegorical registers at work in *Unsere Afrikareise* I find it more rewarding to turn to Sobchack's analysis of *Las Hurdes* as summarised in the previous chapter. At first sight *Unsere Afrikareise*, just like *Las Hurdes*, builds on a central contradiction between "culture" and "nature" where the Austrian hunters are set against the African wildlife. In following Sobchack I will trace four allegorical registers that are exposed as different layers of contradiction in *Unsere Afrikareise*:

²⁶⁴ Clifford, "On Ethnographic Allegory," 110-113.

²⁶⁵ Michael Sicinski, <http://academichack.net/russell.htm> (accessed, Mars 8, 2016).

²⁶⁶ Clifford, "On Ethnographic Allegory," 103.

1) *Between the two opposing film modes of Avant-garde film and ethnographic/documentary film.* While the individual imagery and sounds of the film in themselves are full of ethnographic information the audience get no contextualisation to locate, or guidance how to read the audiovisual material. *Unsere Afrikareise* not only lacks the conventional voice-over narration (or subtitling) of ethnographic film but it lacks any sort of realistic narrative at all. At the same time the imagery and the sounds refer naturalistically on part of the individual shot alone, most loudly in the indexical realism of documented death. I argue that this contradiction is exposed metaphorically through the collisions of disparate image and sound fragments in the sync event. The ethnographic imagery is contrasted with a form that points right back at the filmic techniques of voyeuristic mastery. In lack of a narrative structure to hold on to, or a protagonist to identify with, the sync events (as collisions of image and sound) attacks the viewer and puts her/him in the middle of conflicting layers of impression. Freed from the realistic narrative of the documentary film and the scientific knowledge production of the ethnographic discipline the allegorical interpretation is laid bare.

2) *Between the travelogue footage and the musical score.* The contradiction of the musical score is express in numerous fragments of *unempathetic music* that conflicts the imagery: The struggle of a dying crocodile is contrasted to a waltz and the dead lion being lifted onto a car to a Yugoslavian folk song.²⁶⁷ The conflict is perhaps most legible in the contradiction between the sentimental musical score of Frank Sinatra singing *Around the World* pitted against the violent and often obscene imagery. By referring to the movie soundtrack from *Around the World in 80 Days* (Michael Anderson, 1956) the song creates another layer, allegorizing a sentimental feeling of separated lovers in a distant land, far from home. But it only does so ironically, in a perverted turn, where the dying lion looks into the camera before it is executed, just as Sinatra sings: “You look at me...” This is sentimentality set against the brutality of slaughtered animals.

3) *Between the image and its presentation.* The sync events of *Unsere Afrikareise* involve a constant renegotiation of the audiovisual contract. Through metaphorical substitution a handshake becomes the flaying of a butchered zebra; a hat blowing off the head is “shot” of the head; and in a more ideologically disturbing sequence a female hunter “shoots” the genitals of an African man and “kills” a lion.²⁶⁸ In *Unsere Afrikareise* there is no narrative realism to break with. The only “realism” in the film is the evidentiary nature of the individual image and sound fragments expressed in the indexicality of documented death. Nothing is what it seems to be and the constant renegotiation of the audiovisual contract is exposed in every image-to-image, sound-to-sound and image-to-sound combination. In the sync event every single image and sound becomes a possible metaphor.

²⁶⁷ See page 31 and 33.

²⁶⁸ See page 32.

4) *Between the sound and the imagery*. The sync events construct a complex tapestry of image and sound contradictions throughout the film. The fabric of audiovisual counterpoints is complex: they can be both ambiguous, without a stereotyped meaning, and highly rhetorical.²⁶⁹ The most conspicuous of the image and sound conflicts are between the shooting on the soundtrack to everyday imagery and the indifferent dialogue to the killing of animals. The aiming and killing, together with images of slaughtered wildlife, intercut with imagery of indigenous Africans, to the added value of vulgar laughter and gunshots, framing the vision, suggests the Europeans' aggression toward their surroundings. The sync event often implies that a European has "shot" an African, or the forest itself. Through substitution and metaphorical connections, in the editing, the gazes, gun-pointing and shooting of guns by the European hunters' and are linked to imagery of African women, in a way that suggests the European intrusion as an allegorical rape on both nature and indigenous culture. Not even the female hunter, although complicating the gender register, go free from this violation. But reducing *Unsere Afrikareise* to one set of allegorical interpretation would be a precipitate conclusion. Just like the ethnographic pastoral, the allegory of colonial intrusion is just one of the possible allegorical registers at work in the film. In the very last image-sound combinations the film opens up for a reverse movement when the African male subject says: "I'd like to visit your country," followed by an image of a European woman in a pastoral landscape.

Rather than the ambiguous character of the individual image and sound fragments it is the total combination of the connections that resist any simple interpretation. The thematic result of specific articulations is just one of the many aspects of *Unsere Afrikareise*. What is most telling in the film is not the specific connections of the individual sync events, but rather the system that the entire network of connections form. The sync events are an expression of many different and often conflicting opportunities: "The viewer is ultimately led out of time, to contemplate these connections in memory, and to regard the film as if it were a monument erected as a record of civilization, not as a statement on it but as a kind of totem for it."²⁷⁰

10. THE ALLEGORY OF THE AUDIO-VIEWER

According to Clifford, allegory is at work on two different levels, both on the level of the content and on the form. If *Unsere Afrikareise* is to be understood as an ethnographic allegory it is not as a signifying text, with a narrative story to decipher (as in a classical allegory like *The Pilgrim's Progress*), but in the material relations of image and sound in the sync event.²⁷¹ It is the "irresistible weld" of synchresis that brings out the metaphoric connections that builds the allegorical register of *Unsere*

²⁶⁹ Ibid.

²⁷⁰ Fred Camper, "Unsere Afrikareise – Film (Movie) Plot and Review," *Film Reference*, <http://www.filmreference.com/Films-Tw-Vi/Unsere-Afrikareise.html> (accessed February 16, 2016).

²⁷¹ For a critique of film as signifying text, see Altman, "General Introduction: Cinema as Event," 1-4.

Afrikareise.²⁷² The sync events are built by audiovisual counterpoints where the European hunters, as well as the African natives, are abstracted into general social patterns and where the individual subjects become representatives of colonialist exploitation.

Russell quotes Kubelka saying that the aim of *Unsere Afrikareise* was to reduce emotions to mechanisms, “to tear the emotions loose from the people, so that they can gain distance to their emotions, to their feelings.”²⁷³ She interprets this as a commitment to pure form set against content. I will instead suggest a reading where, through Clifford’s allegorical interpretation, the aim of the film is understood as an ethnographic allegory with the audience at its focal point. Like the anempathetic music of *Las Hurdes* “conjures up the mechanical texture” of emotions that weave the cinematic tapestry, the sync event uses the synchresis of the audiovisual contract as a “mechanism” to trigger conflicting feelings in the audience.²⁷⁴ “So with the African film, I do a lot of this, I trigger a lot of those mechanisms at the same time and create a lot of – at the same time – comic feelings, sad feelings.”²⁷⁵ I argue that the added value of the sync event is not primarily used for formal abstraction, but as a way to force us “to question our own prejudices.”²⁷⁶ It’s not the individuals in the film, the hunters on the African journey (or the native Africans) that are targeted; instead they stand as representatives not just of the colonial situation, but ultimately for us as audio-viewers.

Our trip to Africa includes the filmmaker as well. In “The Totalizing Quest of Meaning” Trinh T. Min-ha criticises the role of the (political) filmmaker as redeemer and “almighty voice-giver” of the oppressed, for preserving the very status quo, which it set out to challenge.²⁷⁷

With the status quo of the making/consuming subject preserved, the aim is to correct ‘errors’ (the false) and to construct an alternative view (offered as a this-is-the-true or mine-is-truer version of reality). It is, in other words, to replace one source of unacknowledged authority by another, but not to challenge the very constitution of authority.²⁷⁸

²⁷² Chion, *Audio-Vision*, 63.

²⁷³ Russell, *Experimental Ethnography*, 126.

²⁷⁴ Chion, *Audio-Vision*, 9; see page 45.

²⁷⁵ Kubelka in Mekas, 286–287.

²⁷⁶ Sobchack, 62; see page 45.

²⁷⁷ Minh-ha, 96–97.

²⁷⁸ Ibid., 100. To hand the camera over to a native filmmaker, as Jay Ruby has suggested, is not a solution to the conflict of ethnographic filmmaking since there are differences in specific cultures and societies as surely as there are between different cultural identities. While Rachel More calls it “savage empiricism” Faye Ginsburg suggests a more modest (and reasonable) role for “indigenous ethnography” as a “parallax effect” opening up multiple perspectives in Visual Anthropology. Jay Ruby, “The Moral Burden of Authorship in Ethnographic Film,” *Visual Anthropology Review*, vol. 11, issue 2 (Sept 1995), 77–82; Rachel Moore, “Marketing Alterity,” in Lucien Taylor, *Visualizing Theory: Selected Essays from V.A.R., 1990–1994* (New York: Routledge, 1994), 137; Faye Ginsburg, “The Parallax Effect: The Impact of Aboriginal Media on Ethnographic Film,” *Visual Anthropology Review*, vol. 11, no. 2 (fall 1995), 64–76.

Without an explanatory voice-over or realistic narrative structure *Unsere Afrikareise* offers no ideological place “offered as a this-is-the-true or mine-is-truer version of reality” for the filmmaker. The colonial critique targets Kubelka as well who, by entering the ethnographic field from a modernist avant-garde position, (dis)locates himself within his own subject position (as European, white, male).²⁷⁹

Instead of correcting “errors” *Unsere Afrikareise* puts the audio-viewer in relation to the conflicting audiovisual materiality of the sync event. The added value that sound brings to images is far from an explicit political opinion placed on top of the images. Instead it structures the vision “by rigorously framing it.”²⁸⁰ *Unsere Afrikareise* is not the Vertovian politics of exposing a truth (cinematic or not).²⁸¹ Instead it reactivates Buñuel’s satirical and often cynical questioning of our perception of the world. Key to *Unsere Afrikareise* is the simultaneous playful character and brutal satire of its sync events. If the sync event is not understood as (only) a formal device it can instead be understood as the very condition of the meaningfulness of the film.²⁸² Perhaps more clearly than any other filmmaker Min-ha has articulated the meaning of aesthetics in documentary film:

To compose is not always synonymous with ordering-so-as-to-persuade, and to give the filmed document another sense, another meaning, is not necessarily to distort it. [...] In its demand to *mean* at any rate, the ‘documentary’ often forgets how it comes about and how aesthetics and politics remain inseparable in its constitution; for, when not equated with mere techniques of beautifying, aesthetics allows one to experience life differently or, as some would say, to give it ‘another sense,’ remaining in tune with its drifts and shifts.²⁸³

By separating and recombining image and sound in a complex, but highly rhetorical, way the sync event is a means to destabilize meaning and letting us “experience life differently” by critically re-evaluating the audiovisual contract. In the sync event of *Unsere Afrikareise* aesthetics and politics are inseparable.

Times have changed since Min-ha wrote her text. Already in 1999, the same year as *Experimental Ethnography* was published, Michael Renov observed that the sites for radical political inquiry had shifted and expanded, adjusting to “late capitalism’s chameleon success.” According to Renov both documentary film, as a practice, and documentary film studies had learnt the lesson that parochialism was dead. But this change provoked a new question: “In moving on, have we simply replaced one master narrative (the documentary film as the hammer of social change) for another (documentary media as the open-sesame for cultural reinvention)?”²⁸⁴ Russell’s project was no doubt part of the change.

²⁷⁹ This is not only implied by the title *Unsere Afrikareise* (*Our Trip to Africa*), but Kubelka is also directly referred to in the soundtrack. See page 30.

²⁸⁰ Chion, *Audio-Vision*, 7.

²⁸¹ Vertov’s term for cinema was *Kinoprada* (film-truth). Nichols, 143.

²⁸² Compare to Clifford, “On Ethnographic Allegory,” 99; see page 23.

²⁸³ Minh-ha, 99-100.

²⁸⁴ Michael Renov, “Documentary Horizons: An Afterword,” in *Collecting Visible Evidence*, ed., Jane M. Gaines and Michael Renov (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press: 1999), 323.

Renov's question reactivates another influential critique of the 1990s: Hal Foster's critique of the "ethnographic turn" in the visual arts.²⁸⁵ With Foster Min-ha's critique returns in a different form and I strongly believe that these questions are no less important in the polarized debate climate of today, where we in many ways (politically and artistically) live in the aftermath of the "global world" that Min-ha and Clifford were part of articulating.²⁸⁶

In his 1995 book *The Return of the Real* Foster argues that artists had begun to work *horizontally*, moving from one social issue to the next and from one political debate to the next, more than *vertically*, in an engagement with the disciplinary forms of a given genre or medium. Foster sees this as a transition from "medium-specific" to "discourse-specific" practices, expressed in the change from the formalist notion "quality" to the neo-avant-garde notion "interest."²⁸⁷ Ultimately, Foster's criticism can be understood as directed against a decreasing of aesthetic value in the context of identity politics. The potential trap is not so much that of "speaking for others" but one of locating the space of politics outside the realm of aesthetics in an "elsewhere" which is loosely called the social or the cultural.²⁸⁸

In the 1960s neo-avant-garde, according to Foster, the horizontal, spatial axis and the vertical, temporal axis, still intersected: "The two axes were in tension, but it was a productive tension."²⁸⁹ Translating this "productive tension" to *Unsere Afrikareise* means returning to the conflict between "external pressure" and "inner demands" as a central mode of working, as well as the conflict between form and content (so evident in Russell's analysis of *Unsere Afrikareise*).²⁹⁰ Understood in this way *Unsere Afrikareise* stands out as an historical example of the balancing – or rather a productive clashing – of the horizontal and the vertical relations, expressed metaphorically in the sync event.

²⁸⁵ Foster, 202.

²⁸⁶ Frans Josef Peterson, "Den historiska biennalen," *Kunstkritikk*, May 19, 2015, <http://www.kunstkritikk.se/kritikk/den-historiska-biennalen/> (accessed February 3, 2015).

²⁸⁷ Foster, 199.

²⁸⁸ Russell, *Experimental Ethnography*, 22.

²⁸⁹ Foster, 202.

²⁹⁰ See page 15.

V. FINAL DISCUSSION

One of my main objectives in this thesis has been to reactivate the discourse of experimental ethnography as Catherine Russell conceptualizes it in her 1999 book *Experimental Ethnography*. The discourse theorizes the relation between reflexivity/representation and aesthetic/formal questions in ethnographic film, by questioning the genre divisions set between avant-garde and ethnographic filmmaking. This text adds with a special attention to sound and the materiality of the audiovisual relation. I have returned to Peter Kubelka's notion *sync event* to point to the audiovisual relation as part of, not just the formal aspects and aesthetics of film, but as a central role in what constitutes the very condition of the meaningfulness of a film.

In building on Russell's re-reading of *Unsere Afrikareise* as experimental ethnography my text adds to the discourse with a special focus on sound that exposes a more general neglect of sound in documentary film studies in general and ethnographic film studies in specific. In the thesis I have shown how *Unsere Afrikareise* communicates its message through audiovision, the material relation between image and sound. My analysis offers an alternative view that frees "the disciplinary restraints of ethnography," not by looking for a hidden message of "another postcolonial language" but instead by reading the audiovisual relation between sound and image in the sync event.²⁹¹ In doing this I have looked at how the sync event is *achieved*, where it *originates*, and how it can be *understood*.

By applying Chion's *audio-vision* the thesis comprehends the sync event as a conscious exploitation of our belief in the *audiovisual contract*, where the *added value* that sounds bring to the images directs the understanding of the visuals by meticulously framing it. I have showed how *Unsere Afrikareise* exposes this possibility of *synchresis* in practically each and every image and sound combination throughout the entire film and does so to expose its colonial critique.

I have argued that Kubelka's sync event has to be understood both in relation to a genealogy of contrapuntal sound and to the emerging synchronous sound of the 1960s. As a documentary/ethnographic film discourse the sync event is a reaction to specific new technical possibilities of synchronous sound and new modes of filmmaking in the 1950s and the 1960s. At the same time the sync event is part of an on-going historical questioning of the naturalistic use of sound within audiovisual representation. By bringing out examples from the early 1930s surrealism (*L'Age d'Or*, *Las Hurdes*) and Russian avant-garde (*Enthusiasm*) the thesis place the sync event as part of a film historical genealogy of audiovisual counterpoint.

With Clifford's concept ethnographic allegory I have showed how the audiovisual analysis of the sync event can produce new insights in the reading of film within the discourse of experimental ethnography. Audiovisuality redirects focus from

²⁹¹ Russell, *Experimental Ethnography*, 135.

film as signifying text to film as material audiovisual relation and thereby it suggests another model to understand audiovisual media. To read the critical potential and political message of *Unsere Afrikareise* doesn't mean reading "against the grain," as Russell have suggested.²⁹² Instead, my analysis exposes the possibility of reading "with the grain" of the film's conceptualization in the sync event.

If it is true that ethnographic films, just like texts, "are inescapably allegorical [and] a serious acceptance of this fact changes the ways they can be [filmed and audio-viewed]," this text suggests that *Unsere Afrikareise* stands out as a historical example of an ethnographic allegory with the audio-viewer at its focal point.²⁹³ What is at stake is not new ethnographic knowledge production. As Sven Lindquist points out in *Exterminate all the Brutes* (1992), his fierce indictment with the European colonial exploitation of Africa: "You already know enough. So do I. It is not knowledge we lack. What is missing is the courage to understand what we know and to draw conclusions."²⁹⁴

In a 2005 interview Kubelka describes his work as an unfinished project. In referring specifically to *Unsere Afrikareise* he says: "I am astonished that *Unsere Afrikareise* did not have more success. For me, *Afrikareise* is, in its own genre, the most intense sound film that exists."²⁹⁵ I would agree with Kubelka if intensity could be translated into density – and ultimately to speed. Few if any, documentary/ethnographic films show such high degree of density in each match-cut of image-to-image, sound-to-sound and sound-to-image combination. The sync events as perpetual movements sets *Unsere Afrikareise* apart, but it can also be seen as one of the main problems of the film's ability to communicate its message.²⁹⁶ Here I will sketch a few lines for further reflexion, that can open up to a more general conceptualizing of the sync event and possible applications of the concept in contemporary audiovisual media. In doing this I will turn to some recent developments in Visual Anthropology and to the visual arts.

In 2015 Russell returned to her concept experimental ethnography. In a text on *Leviathan* (Lucien Castaing-Taylor and Véréna Paravel, 2012) she acknowledges the Sensory Ethnography Lab (SEL) at Harvard as exemplary of experimental ethnography of today. Contrary to the desire for transparency in dominant forms of ethnographic film practice, Russell sees SEL as designed to produce something more experimental, embodied, and aesthetic and in doing this exploding the categories and genres of film practice.²⁹⁷ From the outset the aesthetics of Casting-Taylor and Véréna Paravel are the direct opposite of the sync events of *Unsere Afrikareise*. It tends

²⁹² See page 5.

²⁹³ Clifford, "On Ethnographic Allegory," 99.

²⁹⁴ Sven Lindqvist, *Exterminate all the Brutes*, trans., Joan Tate (New York: The New York Press cop., 1996), 2.

²⁹⁵ Habib.

²⁹⁶ Interestingly, Mekas raised the same concern already in his 1967 interview with Kubelka. Mekas, 288.

²⁹⁷ Russell, "*Leviathan* and the Discourse of Sensory Ethnography: *Spleen et idéal*," 27.

toward “long takes, synchronous speech, and a tempo faithful to the rhythms of real life.”²⁹⁸ But placing them in a simple opposition would be a precipitate conclusion.

Leviathan narrates the fishing industry in New Bedford, Massachusetts, but just as *Unsere Afrikareise* the film doesn’t give us much information about either the people or the location. Filmed solely on board the ship, typically with goo-pro cameras, that are left to the mercy of the rough sea, accompanied by a soundscape of ambient noise, *Leviathan* generates its own distinctive audiovisual landscape. In her text Russell writes: “The rhythm of men’s labour [...] is synchronized to the sounds of the ship’s engines and the amplified cracking of shellfish.”²⁹⁹ In the same publication Ohad Landesman describes how *Leviathan* uses the digital technology for new ways of audiovisuality that “emphasizes the sonic indeterminacy that often characterizes observational films by *separating sound from their origin and context* [my italics].”³⁰⁰

It is in *Sweetgrass* (Casting-Taylor and Ilisa Barbash, 2009), made a few years prior of *Leviathan*, that what can be understood as audiovisual sync events come to the fore. The film follows a year in the life of sheepherders in Montana (in reality the film was recorded between 2001 and 2007). Like in *Leviathan* the digital technique plays a crucial role. The physicality of the filmstrip and the small audio recorder of Kubelka have been replaced by digital DV tapes, with their seemingly unlimited time of recording, and by several audio receivers displaying lavalier microphones not only to the herders but to the sheep as well.³⁰¹ Dialogic fragments in *Sweetgrass* are often, just like in *Unsere Afrikareise*, best categorised as *emanation speech*, but unlike *Unsere Afrikareise*, *Sweetgrass* is almost totally in sync.

What can be understood within the discourse of the sync event is in *Sweetgrass* a matter of distance. The preference for distant shots in the visuals and the closeness of the sound, recorded with lavalier microphones, becomes an audiovisual counterpoint that detach the synchronous sound from the image and creates a displacement that is productive to read within the discourse of the sync event. In documentary conventions of naturalism the acoustical and optical perspectives are generally made to appear to be one and the same. If the image is wide the sound is distant, and if the image is in close up it is accompanied with an intimate sound. *Sweetgrass* pushes the discrepancy between image and sound as far as possible in the opposite direction.³⁰² If Kubelka occasionally uses synchronous sound in *Unsere Afrikareise* to make the viewer believe in the sync event, *Sweetgrass* instead pushes the viewer into disbelief in the synchronous sound, by distancing sound and image from each other.³⁰³ In a wide, distant shot, where one of the herders rides across the

²⁹⁸ Ohad Landesman, “Here, There, and Everywhere: *Leviathan* and the Digital Future of Observational Ethnography,” in *Visual Anthropology Review*, vol. 31, issue 1 (2015), 13.

²⁹⁹ Russell, “*Leviathan* and the Discourse of Sensory Ethnography: *Spleen et idéal*,” 29.

³⁰⁰ Landesman, 12-13.

³⁰¹ MacDonald, *Avant-Doc*, 388.

³⁰² Ibid., 389.

³⁰³ Kubelka has said: “Sometimes I do things in sync just to make the believe that everything is in sync stronger.” Pagàn.

horizon at sunset (a typically mythologized Western image) the intimate singing of fragments of a Western song is heard in close-up on the soundtrack. Halfway across the horizon the rider breaks from his song and shouts: “Get back, Becky.” As the hound responds a key point of synchronisation anchor the sound and the image in a way that come close to the audiovision of *Enthuziazm*.³⁰⁴ In *Avant-Doc* MacDonald makes *Sweetgrass*’ implicit debt to the sync event of *Unsere Afrikareise* explicit:

All in all, the sound experimentation in *Sweetgrass* recalls Peter Kubelka’s experiments with dialectic sound and image in *Unsere Afrikareise* (*Our Trip to Africa*, 1966), though often in *Sweetgrass*, Barbash, Casting-Taylor, and Karel are working dialectically with *synchronized* sound.³⁰⁵

If Sensory Ethnography, as Russell suggest, “can be said to have the aura of art,” I will now turn to the field to visual arts to find an alternative contemporary audiovisual expression that relates to the sync event.³⁰⁶ In “Reframing Ethnographic Film” Paul Basu is concerned with the problem that despite the widespread use of digital video by anthropologists no ethnographic films since the 1980s have generated the same amount of critical interest as films from earlier periods.³⁰⁷ Basu sees two reasons for this: The absence of formal innovation and the lack of a definition of what counts as ethnographic film. In judging the academic field of Visual Anthropology as “a peripheral genre in search of an audience,” he looks to the “ethnographic turn” in contemporary video art installation to seek the future of ethnographic film. Basu exemplifies with two open-ended “archival” multiscreen video installations (typical of the turn of the 21st century): Ann-Sofi Sidén’s *Warte Mal! Prostitution After the Velvet Revolution* (1999) and Kutluğ Ataman’s *Küba* (2004).³⁰⁸ In the context of this text I will turn to a recent video installation that belongs to a historical genealogy that can be traced back to films such as *Territories* (Isaac Julien, 1984) and *Handsworth Songs* (Black Audio Film Collective, 1985).

Asher (Steve McQueen, 2014) seems to have been conceived spontaneously by chance. The film footage was shot 2001 in Grenada (the birthplace of McQueen’s father) when McQueen was filming for the installation diptych *Caribs’ Leap* and *Western Deep* (Steve McQueen, 2002). McQueen has said that to him the footage has a quality of a found object.³⁰⁹ The film was originally showed as a single channel video loop, transferred from 8mm film, at Thomas Dane Gallery in London. The image displays a young man on a boat, showing off to the camera, laughing. Behind him are the sea and the blue sky. On the soundtrack the waves that rock the boat are heard.

³⁰⁴ See page 36-37.

³⁰⁵ Scott MacDonald, *American Ethnographic Film and Personal Documentary: The Cambridge Turn* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2013), 321.

³⁰⁶ Russell, “Leviathan and the Discourse of Sensory Ethnography: *Spleen et idéal*,” 29.

³⁰⁷ Basu, 97. The text was published a year before *Sweetgrass* was premiered and in many ways Casting-Taylor seeks to answer the same question. MacDonald, *Avant-Doc*, 374.

³⁰⁸ Basu, 97-105.

³⁰⁹ Peter Aspdén, “Interview: Steve McQueen on telling the truth in Hollywood,” *Financial Times Magazine*, October 3, 2014, www.ft.com/intl/cms/s/2/5a07b594-49bb-11e4-80fb-00144feab7de.html (accessed February 18, 2016).

But with a careful listening there is something that disturbs the audiovisual contract. The waves are breaking against the shore while the boat is far out on the sea. Over the sound of the waves two men, in a thick Caribbean accent, recount the memory of their friend, a fisherman named Ashes, who was killed because he had hidden some drugs that he found on the beach. “The juxtaposition of spoken word and image, pulling and pushing at different emotions in the spectator, is typical McQueen, complicating and subverting a seemingly straightforward narrative,” writes Peter Aspen.³¹⁰

I saw *Asher* in a double-screen version at the 56th Venice Biennale 2015. What interests me here is exactly the difference between the two versions. In the Biennale version McQueen had added another scene, filmed on 16mm and also transferred to video, following the making of a grave for Asher in close detail. Instead of presenting the two scenes conventionally next to each other as a diptych, they were projected on opposite sides of a screen hanging in the middle of the room. The different soundtracks connected the scenes by physically interfering with the other scene in the open room. The waves from the sea breaking at the shore were heard as the masons carefully prepared the grave and, if located on the other side of the screen, the knocking of the masons hammer was heard, when watching the young man on the boat. I couldn’t help to put the sounds together with the imagery; the synchresis of the sync event played out as a consequence of the physicality of the gallery room.

At the end of this thesis I will build on this experience to suggest an alternative space for experiencing *Unsere Afrikareise* to the “invisible cinema” of Kubelka. The sync event elucidates the material audiovisual relation of film. This materiality can be understood in two ways: the materiality of the celluloid filmstrip running through the projector (screen, loudspeakers, light, flicker, projector-noise) and the materiality of cinema as event (physical space and duration in time).³¹¹ While Kubelka’s films are historically linked to the first material conception they are, at the same time, part of a constant social interaction. Kubelka has been described as a filmmaker “whose work certainly insists on the unique material character of things, but for whom ‘cinema’ is an ever-expanding network, ultimately related to everything and everyone.”³¹² In lacking a conventional narrative and given the speed of the perpetual movements of the sync event, making the film hard to grasp without repeated viewings, I would argue that *Unsere Afrikareise* is best experienced as a film loop in a gallery space. To make myself clear, what I propose is a *film* installation with an actual 16mm projector in the room (as opposed to the convention of transferring celluloid film to a digital format in video installations).³¹³ Instead of Kubelka’s

³¹⁰ Ibid.

³¹¹ Cinema as event also includes the disturbing indirect noises in the room where the film is screened.

³¹² Michael Sicinski, “The Big Ones: Fragments of Kubelka,” in *Keyframe*, Fandor magazine, April 13, 2013, <https://www.fandor.com/keyframe/the-big-ones-fragments-of-kubelka> (accessed, Mars 7, 2016).

³¹³ While digitalisation makes cinema more accessible the transferring of film to digital formats is reductive, just as the displaying of the celluloid filmstrip on the wall in an art gallery is reductive (as

disembodied “invisible cinema” I propose a cinematic experience that is a socio-corporeal event with the audio-viewers as physical bodies in the room, interacting with other physical bodies and with the material presence of the projector as a three dimensional object in the room (the celluloid 16mm filmstrip running through) to the audible backdrop of the sound of cinema’s basic rhythm (light impulses repeated twenty-four times a second) merging with the soundtrack.

Kubelka has done with *Arnulf Rainer*). Both are excluding different aspect of the material side of film; in fact, each one excludes exactly what the other one includes.

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