3. Mobilising Sound for the Nation at War

The specific contribution of sound to cultural expressions of modern national identity has been emphasised in recent scholarship (see Revill 2000; Connell and Gibson 2003; Biddle and Knights 2007). This interest in how the nation is performed through sound and music has underscored how such practices are produced spatially. The intersections of (national) identity and cultural geographies can even reflect an “aural border” that delimits acoustic identities in a particular geopolitical area (Kun 2000). In the case of Germany, its nationalism since the nineteenth century had been particularly dependent on such a process. As George Mosse argues, “ritual, songs, and national symbols were used to shape the crowd into a disciplined mass in order to give it direction and maintain control” (1975: 2). Building on such narratives, the previous two chapters concentrated primarily on the role of sound in the reworking of identity patterns and the production of space under National Socialism, with a particular stress on the first five years of the regime. I also emphasised the efforts to produce conducive modes of attentive listening in both urban public space and domestic radio reception. In what follows, I will account for the intensified use of radio for nationally-syndicated programming and the conception of broadcasting as a “cultural front” following the outbreak of war in September 1939. As such, this chapter is particularly concerned with the attempts to produce and maintain an ideal of the “imagined community” (Anderson 1991), as harnessed through the timing of radio broadcast announcements and pursued in the spatial organisation of the urban home front with alarm systems and acoustic forms of surveillance.

The first important aspect in this investigation of the wartime soundscape concerns the use of radio to manipulate listening attention, interrupt usual radio routines and stage a mediated experience of national celebration. In order to sketch out the imaginative space promoted for radio, I will examine the case of an irregular, yet much-anticipated radio event in Germany during World War II. Special announcements (known as Sondermeldungen) were surprise interruptions to the normal broadcast schedule, ranging between twenty seconds and twenty minutes in length, which were used to deliver important announcements from the German military between 1939 and 1945. Despite the large amount of research about radio propaganda during the Nazi period, no serious attention has been given to these Sondermeldungen. I will closely examine the links between traditional, World War I and newer campaign theme songs in the Sondermeldungen, which symbolically posited Hitler’s resemblance to great German leaders of the past and his “God-given” mandate to lead Germany. I will draw on personal accounts, memoirs, official Nazi sources and archived radio material
for my analysis of Sondermeldungen as facilitating experiences of the nation as an “imagined listening community” and performing Germany’s unity and military power by means of musical song and symbolic sounds. This analysis will concentrate in particular on the temporal organisation of radio programming for emphasising liveness and the co-participation of listeners “as earwitnesses” to large-scale events.

The second major interest is how wartime alarm systems and safety routines were employed as a template for establishing a controlled experience of urban space. In addressing the specific socio-geographical conditions under which (radio) listening occurred, I am particularly interested in how wartime conditions affected the listening experience and sensory perception of the city: How did listeners use sound to negotiate the space of the darkened and threatened city? The analysis will concentrate on official air-protection (Luftschutz) measures, with the spatial distribution of sirens (as acoustic signals) as an example of the stress on safety precautions and disciplined behaviour. The heightened awareness of urban populations to sound as a means of survival during aerial attacks raises issues regarding how listeners develop rationales for decoding the acoustic signals around them, whether these sounds were official alarms or the sounds produced by aerial attacks. My focus on a heightened auditory and spatial awareness in this period will take note of the development of new listening skills and modes of interpretation. However, it necessarily reflects on the ongoing tension between sound as a disciplinary practice of control (official measures) and sound as an unpredictable disruption to everyday life (air attacks and their aftermath). I will also suggest that the symbolic currency and performative impact of Sondermeldungen were reduced during the course of the war due to the worsening conditions in urban environments.

Against this background, the final section will examine how sound and listening emerged as a source of fear or suspicion, given propaganda and official discourses that produced a concept of sound as a potential source of anxiety. Here I will concentrate on how listeners were influenced by propaganda posters about eavesdropping and espionage, as well as the intensification of terror and surveillance practices. My analysis will also address the ways that the “ether” re-emerged as a mysterious and dangerous realm, particularly following the ban on listening to foreign radio stations and with heavy sentences for those charged as “enemy listeners” (Feindhörer) and for “illegal listening” (Schwarzhören). I will analyse the growing scepticism and misgivings about the sounds produced by the regime, mainly due to exaggerated radio reports, the near-disappearance of Sondermeldungen (following 1943) and their eventual function as defeat announcements. The growing scepticism of dwindling urban populations, I will contend, only increased due to a lack of reliability in alarm systems and the permanent displacement of radio listening to air shelters and public bunkers. In this section, therefore, I will stress the eventual crisis in German radio broadcasting and its reception as central to the eventual collapse of the officially-endorsed model of the nation as an “imagined listening community.”

I will begin by outlining the concept of “imagined community” and its relationship to the modern nation as theorised by Benedict Anderson (1991). I draw
on several critiques of Anderson’s conceptualisation in order to specify its importance for my analysis of radio’s place for twentieth-century German nationalism and its dominant concepts of national identity based on musical tradition. By reading Anderson somewhat against the grain, I will specify not only the success of sonically producing an imagined community, but also the moments when the production of a cultural imaginary proves difficult (such as during a prolonged period of war).

**Imagining National Community**

There are two theoretical accounts concerned with the constitution of community in the modern era that are highly relevant to this case study. In Benedict Anderson’s work, a crucial matter is the contribution of print culture to the emergence of concepts of nation and nationalism in the late 1700s, and how medial representations offered a (temporal) structural framework for imagining the community of a nation (1991). In *Discipline and Punish* (1977), Michel Foucault is primarily concerned with the spatial organisation of urban communities, with a particular focus on power relations, discipline and the body. The latter’s account, too, involves a periodisation concerned with the emergence of modern institutions of public health, and law and order from the 1700s onwards. Both theoretical trajectories are preoccupied with the socio-political dynamic between inclusion and exclusion in the modern era, but from distinct vantage points: on the one hand, of nation-building and its specific concept of community and time, and on the other hand, of power and its realisation in urban spatial practices and discourses.

Although much has been written on the nation (and nationalism), Anderson points out that there is little consensus on basic conceptual definitions or a fully-fledged philosophy of the phenomenon (1991: 3). Since the nation is one of the most pervasive political concepts of the modern era, Anderson coined the term “imagined community” in order to address the historical specificity of nationalism and its “profound emotional legitimacy” (4). Even though it is impossible to actually have “face-to-face” encounters with all the other members of a nation, many citizens harbour an affective attachment and commitment to the nation based on an image of community. Anderson’s reflections mainly involve former colonial contexts in Asia and Africa, in relation to which he draws attention to the emergence of language and ethnicity as definitive categories of belonging in post-colonial nationalisms. According to this conception, the imagined community is a “cultural artefact” and a conceptual tool for understanding why people are willing to make such huge sacrifices, including their own lives, for the nation.

Anderson specifies the imagined political community as defined by several inherent components. Firstly, Anderson notes, they are *limited*. Modern nations are delimited by some form of (physical) boundary, whether geographically defined or marked by the existence of other nations. Second, they are *sovereign*, since the emergence of modern nations occurred in the wake of the Enlightenment and the demise of the “divinely-ordained, hierarchical dynastic realm” (7). Despite the
diversity of national movements, the image of community is commonly based on an idea of “deep, horizontal comradeship” (7). Anderson defines the imagined community as less inherent to specific political movements or ideological values than to familial membership or spiritual ties (5). The strong (although not always acknowledged) identification with national community involves a sense of collectively inhabiting the present. Nationalism, too, tends to be projected onto events and people from the past, and extends beyond the present to provide its populace with the vision of sharing a common future. Moreover, it is common for nationalist movements to proclaim a new era, despite being highly dependent on the historical past for self-legitimation. In appropriating the historical past for contemporary purposes, certain events are collectively forgotten (198-201).

One of Anderson’s primary concerns with nation-building and the production of a national consciousness is the role played by the media, print culture and education (113-4). A constitutive factor in making the imagined community of a nation possible is what Anderson terms “print-capitalism.” The emergence of the printing press in the fifteenth century provided an important precedent for the possibility of creating a national public sphere via the circulation of printed forms with a shared vernacular, such as newspapers and the novel. Importantly, the structure of these cultural forms presupposed a reading public in a shared time and language, which created a historical continuity between past, present and future (44-5). There is a common sense of temporality, Anderson suggests, since the “ceremony [that the reader] performs is being replicated simultaneously by thousands (or millions) of others” (35). In other words, imagined community is not only created on the basis of common bonds of ethnicity, language or shared territory, but involves a structure based on sharing the same temporality (24).

While Anderson does not fully extend his analysis to radio and the twentieth century, he stresses the importance of song for enabling a simultaneous performance of and participation in community. The ability for language to produce a sense of bond between members of a nation is particularly expressed in singing anthems and national songs since there is in singing an experience of simultaneity. At precisely such moments, people wholly unknown to each other utter the same verses to the same melody. The image: unisonance. [...] If we are aware that others are singing these songs precisely when and as we are, we have no idea who they may be, or even where, out of earshot, they are singing. Nothing connects us all but imagined sound. (1991: 145, my emphasis)

In other words, Anderson argues that the co-participation of individual subjects in singing can facilitate a shared sense of community. Whereas everyday language is usually predicated on dialogue and negotiation, singing provides a codified expression of being unified in sound. This example of anthems is perhaps even more emphatically performed in the case of radio: even if listeners do not actively join in the singing, they can share in the simultaneous moment of imagining oneself hearing the same sounds as other listeners. Moreover, in the case of Germany, the main national anthem predated National Socialism and thus provided a more ac-
cessible mode of identification with their nationalist project, as I have suggested in my earlier discussion of “affirmative resonance.”

Anderson’s analysis implicitly situates oral cultural forms, such as poems and songs, as providing the emotional scaffolding for interpellating the individual’s attachment to the nation. Among the various criticisms levelled at Anderson’s influential analysis is the view that this position maintains an implicit binary between oral culture (as emotional) and literate culture (as cognitive). Peter Wogan, for instance, argues that the depiction of the nineteenth-century reader as silent does not sufficiently address the ongoing existence of oral practices like reading-aloud and thereby reinforces Eurocentric “linguistic ideologies” (2001: 412-4). This critique therefore provides a reminder to be cautious of reinforcing theories of the “great divide” between orality and literacy, and instead consider the interactions between listening, seeing and reading activity.5

Literature scholar Jonathan Culler (1999) praises Anderson’s work as spearheading an important re-evaluation of the nation’s hold over the collective imaginary. However, Culler urges that there has been a misconception of Anderson’s argument since the contribution of the novel and newspaper to national consciousness cannot be generalised on the basis of their content:

Few newspapers in the period of nation-building are sufficiently dominant to constitute in themselves a national voice or their readers as a national community, and few are genuinely national in their readership. (26)

In other words, the structural components of a reading public can be used as an analogy, but it is difficult to make a convincing causal argument on this basis. Culler argues that Anderson’s claim of imagined community is most convincing as a structural comparison, whereby “the community of readers of a novel or newspaper is the model for the imagined community of the nation” (26).

While Culler redresses the misperception that the novel actually led to the rise of nationalism, he emphasises that it offered the chance for imagining something similar to the nation:

For imagining a community that could be opposed to another, as friend to foe. [...] [T]he novel can be a condition of possibility of imagining communities that may become nations because it addresses readers in a distinctively open way. Offering the possibility of adhering to a community, as an insider, without laying down particular criteria that have to be met. (37)

Thus, while novels can allow for the “space of the community” or provide national narratives, they do not proscribe its actual social formation or societal structure. Nonetheless, they can contribute to public discourses and a nationalist language, particularly in the positioning of the imagined community in opposition to its enemies or those deemed as outside its scope.

It is at this point – on the theme of inclusion and exclusion – that I turn to Michel Foucault’s theory of power and the spatial organisation of community in modern European societies, as principally outlined in Discipline and Punish
The most vivid example offered in Foucault's account of how power is exerted on the body through spatial strategies is Jeremy Bentham's 1791 blueprint for the modern prison as “Panopticon.” This model of prison architecture was based on a principle of solitary confinement and extensive surveillance, which was facilitated by the building’s circular structure. The Panopticon, in Foucault’s reading, constitutes a model based on both surveillance and disciplinary strategies. The act of subjecting the prison inmate to these conditions was intended to habituate a self-monitoring or auto-surveillance, since they could not tell if and when they were being observed by guards (1977: 200–1).

In recent interpretations, there have been calls to rethink Foucault’s theory of power, social space and the body not only in terms of the prison model, but also in terms of social health and policing. There are two main models of power identified by Foucault in the medical organisation of urban societies, related to leprosy and the plague respectively (1959). In both cases, these diseases pose a form of threat to a community and its well-being. Foucault theorises the response to leprosy as a mode of exclusion, since those afflicted were banished from the community. This response to lepers – along with the insane, destitute or criminal – represents an older, religious vision of maintaining “pure community” (198). By contrast, the plague affects the entire community and even the city itself and thus calls for a model of inclusion-organisation. According to Foucault, the latter approach reflects the emergence of the militarist model of the disciplined society, which relies on controlled organisation and self-monitoring.

The example of the Panopticon prison emerges as a combination of these two models, where the “leper” is excluded to the margins of society and the society is subjected to the organisational discipline of the plague town (199). The Panopticon, as Stuart Elden argues, reflected a broader project than is usually acknowledged, since Bentham originally foresaw its principles as having relevance for other modern institutions, such as schools, mental asylums, hospitals and the workplace (2003: 247). Indeed, Foucault’s account of public health strategies reveals a broader pattern of how alterity, abnormality, medical illness or that which is deemed threatening is excluded and contained in modern urban society.

The two theoretical accounts I have outlined here address socio-political organisation, and respectively its imaginative and disciplinary components. While Anderson is primarily interested in the origins and diffusion of the nation as a political and cultural concept, Foucault’s analysis of modern social institutions focuses on spatial practices of power and control. Both accounts point to the ways that religious authority was challenged in the wake of the Enlightenment thinking and social upheaval. This shift is suggested as crucial for allowing modern societies to take advantage of a symbolic vacuum and the power of sovereignty formerly determined by church or monarchy. However, neither of these theorists extends their analyses beyond the nineteenth century. In Foucault’s case, as I will later elaborate, he conceded that much of his thinking about the nineteenth century had been directly influenced by his personal experience of the German military occupation of France during World War II. Anderson’s work, as I have suggested, provides a useful account of how poetry and song play a role in producing emotional attachment and even “self-sacrificing love” for the nation (1991: 141).
In what follows, my examination of radio points to the contribution of mediated sound for performing national community. Musical song, as I will argue, is not only appropriated in special radio announcements for inviting identification, but also reasserts the German nation’s military power in opposition to its enemies. Even though Anderson suggests that it is “truly rare” to find nationalist products that explicitly express hatred or fear, in this case I will examine how various songs can be appropriated to name and oppose an other or enemy nation. In the subsequent two sections, I will return to Foucault’s notion of power relations (between exclusion and inclusion) within urban communities under threat. This concerns, firstly, the sonic organisation of the German home front, and secondly, modes of (acoustic) surveillance and disciplining under National Socialism.

Radio Sounds as National Celebration

The notion of a national public sphere was considerably influenced by the development of sound technologies, and radio was particularly instrumental in using sound and music to offer audiences a sense of simultaneity and “the immediate experience of collective identity” (Frith 1996: 273). The symbolic power provided by national broadcasting should not be underestimated, as David Morley points out, since it helped to create a sense of unity – and of corresponding boundaries around the nation; it can link the peripheral to the centre; turn previously exclusive social events into mass experiences; and, above all, it penetrates the domestic sphere, linking the national public into the private lives of its citizens, through the creation of both sacred and quotidian moments of national communion. (2000: 107)

Indeed, in the previous two chapters, I stressed how regional radio recast local events within a nationalist framework and symbolism during the 1930s. Radio was designated as a “medium of presence” and credited with the ability to achieve a live and simultaneous gathering of national community. In this vein, Joseph Goebbels asserted that “what the newspaper was to the nineteenth century, so will radio be for the twentieth century.” However, it was only after 1939 that nationally-syndicated broadcasts were employed on a large scale. It is this shift, against the background of the further centralisation of wartime radio, which compels me to consider the significant investments in radio as creating an “imagined listening community.”

Anderson’s work on imagined community appears to provide a good precedent for considering “the limits and possibilities of radio as a structuring production for the nation state” (Smulyan 2007: 63). However, radio is not a straightforward object for national listening audiences, since broadcasts were not always nationally syndicated and, in addition, radio transmission often extended beyond national boundaries. The boundaries of radio, moreover, are more porous than
the claims of governments or national radio histories would suggest. In the German case, for instance, audiences freely listened to international radio broadcasts prior to 1939.\textsuperscript{12} Even though government regulation and censorship was extensive, it is thus important to displace the common assumption that German cultural forms existed in a complete vacuum during National Socialism.

Nonetheless, the public domain did not by any means resemble the Habermasian ideal of a public sphere based on free speech and communication.\textsuperscript{13} Radio allowed for the state to enter the private space of citizens’ homes and address a diffused German listening public on the basis of shared ethnicity and language, and – in the case of war – a common enemy. Indeed, Culler’s notion of a community imagined in terms of the “other” also constituted one of the core aims of Nazi propaganda during World War II: namely, to rally Germans together in opposition to their wartime enemies. Wartime radio programming aimed to assert Germany’s national unity, virtuousness and superiority in direct opposition to Allied countries, in particular Britain, whose World War I propaganda was deemed by Hitler as superior to that of Germany (1933/1969: 161-9). To my mind, it is fruitful to follow Culler’s argumentation and ask how German listeners, like Anderson’s reading public, were able to identify with radio’s nationalist project without necessarily adhering to all aspects of Nazi ideology. I want to emphasise that Nazi broadcasters were appealing to a fragmented audience, whose members had individual listening patterns, interests and attitudes towards radio. Precisely for this reason, I am interested in the ways Nazi propaganda insisted on a normative conception of a national listening community and compliant, attentive modes of radio listening.

Underpinning the notion of a German “listening community” was a restricted definition of community belonging. In the late nineteenth century, Ferdinand Tönnies developed an influential thesis about the distinction between the meaning of society as Gemeinschaft (community and family life) or Gesellschaft (public opinion and legislation) (1887/1970). National Socialism sought to merge these two concepts of the public sphere under the bannerhead of Volksgemeinschaft. This concept of community promoted a pan-German identity based on “Aryan” ethnicity and shared language.\textsuperscript{14} Following the 1933 takeover, the Nazi Party moved quickly to promote radio as the definitive medium for uniting “the people.” High-profile campaigns and advertising, particularly at the annual Berlin radio exhibition, encouraged citizens to buy government-subsidised radio sets (Volksempfänger). The Volksempfänger (literally: “people’s radio receiver”) was consistently linked with a mythology of providing radio reception for all, although ownership remained disproportionately urban and middle class (Krausse 1984; König 2003). In other words, radio was accessible for those who could afford it, and its imagined community was based on racial criteria, since Jews were banned from radio ownership in 1939.\textsuperscript{15} The imagined “space” of radio was thus designated as exclusively for those who met the official criteria as “Aryan.”

The notion of the mediated public sphere was not only intensely racialised, but also gendered. To take an example of communal listening practices in the family home:
We would sit together in front of the radio and listen to the programme. [...] Particularly when Hitler spoke on the radio, we’d have to sit quietly and listen. And my father would lean forward and turn his ear towards the radio.¹⁶

This reminiscence reflects the normative ideal of the family unit gathered around the radio set: in close proximity, with their bodies (and ears) directed towards the speaker, listening silently and attentively. Nevertheless, the father’s positioning also suggests his principal relationship to this technological device within the organisation of the home. The proximity of the father to the radio set is not surprising given the masculinist public sphere of German radio organisation with its history of an implied (male) listening subject.¹⁷ By contrast, female announcers were rarely heard on the radio, except for Frauenfunk programmes for women, which established an “intimate authoritarian voice” for listeners and stressed a strongly ideologically view of women’s societal role as housewives.¹⁸ This “imagined” audience for women’s programmes, however, excluded women who worked, and those who disagreed with or were rejected by Nazi ideology.

Despite the inherent restrictions implicit in the “imagined listening community,” the general concept of radio as a conduit between Hitler and all German listeners persisted in official propaganda and discourse. For some, the expressive staging of Hitler’s speeches gave the impression of an imagined visibility, as if his eyes “could look at every listener, even in the farthest away places, even

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FIG. 11: “Ganz Deutschland hört den Führer mit dem Volksempfänger” [All of Germany listens to the Führer with the People’s Radio Receiver], poster [ca. 1934].

Courtesy of BPK, Berlin.
when only his voice sounded through a loudspeaker” (Dovifat 1937: 144). This fantasy of individual access to Hitler through listening experience was already popularised by the 1934 visual poster Ganz Deutschland hört den Führer mit dem Volksempfänger (All of Germany listens to the Führer with the People’s Radio Receiver) (See Figure 11). This poster places an enlarged radio set centre stage, with an undifferentiated scene of a massive outdoor crowd filling the background. Hitler’s vocal presence is imagined as materialised through sound waves emanating from the black box, associatively linking Hitler’s radio voice with visual power. This Volksempfänger depiction not only posits the “mouthpiece” of the state within the home, but also proposes the act of listening as allowing the participation in national events.¹⁹

The 1934 poster also inscribes a communal context for listening to Hitler’s voice. Indeed, as I noted in earlier chapters, Hitler gave all his radio speeches from public meetings, rallies and large events, rather than from an enclosed studio environment. In this way, the adoption of a public mode of address appealed to Germans simultaneously as a collective of listeners rather than as the anonymous, individual subjects they, in fact, usually were. Nonetheless, ongoing anxieties about the conditions of reception and individual listening habits led to increased efforts to provide communal listening contexts for special occasions, with radio sets installed in schools, factories and urban outdoor areas, as well as in cafes and restaurants (Pohle 1955: 268-72). Such efforts confirm the labour involved in trying to establish modes of radio reception that supported propaganda claims of a unified and attentive listening community.²⁰

The success of a normative notion of radio listening is open to debate, even though the mediated public sphere constantly credited radio as enabling the collective assembly of the German Volksgemeinschaft. Official radio broadcasts during National Socialism were consistently linked with the image of German listeners participating as one united nation. By 1938 Germans had taken out eight million radio licences, which was double the number of licences issued in 1933 (Pohle 1955: 333). By the outbreak of World War II, this figure had almost doubled again, which meant that a large majority of German citizens had access to a radio set (Schaefer 1939: 372). Although some individuals and families refused to buy a radio altogether, they were undoubtedly affected by its role as a key social forum for discussion, entertainment and information dissemination.

During wartime, radio announcements were constructed as experiences of the nation that performed Germany’s unity and military power by means of musical song and symbolic sounds. In particular, I am interested here in how the temporal organisation of radio programming was employed to emphasise liveness and encourage the co-participation of listeners in large-scale events. Indeed, one of the most significant fields of national symbolism within German radio was the use of a national repertoire of music. From the late nineteenth century onwards, music was central to the expression of national community as both “a metaphor for the nation” and “a cultural form through which they could participate actively, regularly and intensively in the nation” (Applegate 1992: 29-30). Indeed, following the outbreak of hostilities with Poland in August 1939, the Propaganda Ministry immediately arranged for the song “Marsch der Deutschen in Polen” (March of
the Germans in Poland) to follow all news bulletins, in order to stress a thematic link to the campaign in Poland. Similarly, the two German national anthems, “Deutschland über alles” and the “Horst-Wessel-Lied (Die Fahne hoch!)”, were played at the end of each broadcasting day. The choice of these two anthems for the end of the broadcasting schedule is comparable to the end-credits of a serialised radio play, as it suggested the conclusion of another day’s action and that it would soon be followed by more historically decisive events.21

The sense of a shared temporality and of witnessing historical events had a profound impact on the attitudes of listeners to radio broadcasts. During an interview I conducted in Düsseldorf, one man recalled that his family’s radio set was kept on as much as possible during the first year of the war, as “it was always important to know what was expected in the coming hours.”22 It was not only a heightened sense of radio liveness imparted to listeners, but also the impression given by Nazi propagandists that radio’s imagined acoustic space could collapse the divisions between the home front and the war. As another interviewee remarked:

You really felt like you were part of something with everyone else. When radio programmes had soldier requests for songs from different regions, it was like everyone’s father was fighting in the war: that you were all the same.23

In other words, by bridging the gap between the home and war fronts, radio programming provided audiences with the possibility to feel “culturally mobile” from the vantage of their domestic listening contexts. Some programmes, such as the request concert (Wunschkonzert), staged a form of national assembly by allowing soldiers to send song requests, which were read out and performed in a broadcast concert setting.24 For special occasions like Christmas, link-up broadcasts (Ringsendungen) from occupied territories across Europe allowed listeners to imaginatively visit and “directly experience” all geographical locations where the war was being fought (Diller 2003; Schrage 2005).

It was in the first war months that the ritual of Sondermeldungen was established as a key radio event and a deliberate interruption to the structured “dailyness” of usual radio programming.25 Male radio announcers would alert listeners to expect an announcement with the declaration: “We shall now have total air silence” (Kris and Speier 1944: 59).26 These Sondermeldungen followed a formula, beginning with the interruption of all radio transmissions with fanfare, the reading out of a victory announcement, followed by the most recent campaign song.27 Depending on the importance of the news, the segment might also include the German national anthems, traditional religious hymns or World War I songs. Propaganda Ministry official Hans Fritzsche confirmed the role of special announcements in harnessing the German radio audience as an “imagined listening community.” In 1940, Fritzsche asserted that the German national radio

has managed to unite at certain hours, and for certain moments, Germans from all over the world, welding them into one single listening community with one common purpose. A Führer speech, relayed by the German wire-
less, unites Germans all over the world into a community. Not one of us will ever forget how millions and millions of Germans [...] were all warned in one and the same second when the trumpets announced a new deed of glory by the German army. And when before did a nation so vividly participate in the conclusion of a great struggle period, as the German people, when it shared in the events of the beginning of the armistice with France?28

For Fritzsche, the significance of radio broadcasting was that it facilitated a mediated space for communicating national victory to the entire populace. Fritzsche not only stresses the simultaneity of informing listeners “in one and the same second,” but also that it was a musical cue that alerted them to this news. This propaganda assertion is, to some degree, reflected in a photograph of a Berlin street scene on 17 June 1940 (Figure 12), given that urban crowds gathered to listen to a Sondermeldung, including those on bike.

Musical song performed a central role in dramatising news reports about the war. Radio broadcasts repeatedly emphasised a shared repertoire of recognisable musical motifs and songs, such as traditional marching music and Volkslieder (folk songs). One of the most frequent sounds heard in radio broadcasts was a short sound clip between programmes (Pausenzeichen) from Mozart’s melody “Üb’ immer Treu und Redlichkeit” (Always practise loyalty and honesty), which had strong associations with Prussian nationalism and the 1870 unification of Germany. In the frequent news bulletins, political commentaries and front reports, which were broadcast up to ten times per day in the early phase of the war, some of the additional sound effects included the sighs of wounded soldiers,
the noise of hammering machine guns, and the footsteps of the army marching forward (Shirer 1999: 272). In doing so, radio broadcasts positioned listeners as experiencing live action and participating in momentous German history.

The campaign song for the offensive in France during 1940 is a good example of how Nazi propagandists appropriated traditional songs to form a symbolic bridge between past and present. The “Frankreichlied” comprised a new version of the traditional anti-French song “Wacht am Rhein” (Watch on the Rhine), which asserted to listeners: “They wanted to ruin us and take a stranglehold on the Western wall/We come and smash their old and corrupt world to bits.”29 While the original text refers to French occupations of the Rhineland of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, the revised text makes a reference to the “Western wall” front of World War I and the subsequent French occupation of the Rhineland in the 1920s. The assertion that “the Rhine will remain German! [...] Our flags fly high in the wind/On the Rhine, on the German Rhine” works to re-emphasise that antipathy towards France as both historical and necessary to Germany’s present-day nationalist struggle.30

In late 1939, another campaign song was released, which is sometimes referred to as the “Englandlied.” This marine song, officially titled “Wir fahren gegen England” (We Sail against England), called for revenge on England and encouraged noble sacrifice for the “Fatherland.”31 The song can be seen as reinforcing the present day “imagined listening community” with reference to Germany’s historical opposition to England, most notably in World War I. One of the striking parallels between the older “Wacht am Rhein” song and the newly-created “Englandlied” is the invocation of the flag as a symbol of German power: “Our flag flies on the mast/It heralds our strength.”32 Perhaps one of the main differences is that, unlike the solemn “Wacht am Rhein,” the “Englandlied” popularised militarism with its lighter melody and eager stance towards going into battle: “We sail against England/Ahoy!”33 Moreover, it was a very popular song during 1940, and was described as a “very catchy tune, the sentiment is popular, and everybody’s singing it” (Shirer 1999: 190). The England theme song, in other words, relied on a “Schlager” principle to employ and circulate wartime jingoism in the form of a hit song.34

To fully understand the symbolic significance performed by Sondermeldung broadcasts it is perhaps useful to note how Hitler was represented as an “artist-dictator” embodying both the spiritual sovereign and the military sovereign (Michaud 2004: 15-6). As I noted earlier, many secular nationalisms have drawn on the symbolic power base and sovereignty inhabited earlier by religion. In the case of National Socialism, art was elevated to the spiritual-religious level and linked to the Volksgeist (the spirit of the people). Moreover, Propaganda Minister Joseph Goebbels’ insistence on radio as the “spiritual apparatus of the nation” reinforced a link between voice and the collective spirit during wartime.35

A Sondermeldung announcing the near-completion of the campaign in France on 4 June 1940 demonstrates the attempt to merge Germany’s historical, religious and present-day justifications for war. This special announcement about German victory in Dunkirk began with fifteen minutes of fanfare, marching songs and a religious-like ceremony involving the “Old Dutch Prayer of Thanks,” the two na-
national anthems and a three-minute silence for reflection. In this special announcement Hitler ordered the ringing of all bells for three days, thereby appropriating the religious associations of Christian churches to celebrate a national occasion. Following the reading of the announcement, “Die Himmel rühmen des Ewigen Ehre,” the “Frankreichlied,” the “Fallschirmjägermarsch,” “O Deutschland hoch in Ehren,” the “Englandlied” and “Feierlichen Praeludiums” were broadcast in succession.

The appropriation of religious hymns to confirm Hitler’s status as an infallible leader pre-ordained by God is reinforced by these songs’ lyrics. In this context, the “Old Dutch Prayer of Thanks” emphasises that Germany’s position in the war was vindicated by divine forces: “So from the beginning/The fight we were winning/Thou, Lord, were at our side/All glory be Thine! Lord, make us free!”

Similarly, the lyrics of “Die Himmel rühmen des Ewigen Ehre” impart the words of God: “I am your creator/I am wisdom and goodness.” Moreover, a direct line with Germany’s glorious past is made with “O Deutschland hoch in Ehren,” a popular soldier’s song in World War I: “Think of your forefathers! /Think of the great epochs/When German knights won every battle.” These examples demonstrate how military victories were imbued with a religious symbolism connecting contemporary events with past German nationalism and historical military successes, in the effort to establish and appeal to the “imagined listening community.” Moreover, the efforts to provide a tight narrative structure for the performance of national victory relied on an undue stress on the lyrics of the songs employed.

The combination of religious and historical justifications for Germany’s invasion of France culminated in an elaborate ritual on 22 June 1940 in Compiegne, the location for the signing of the armistice in 1918. To mark the end of fighting in France, Hitler arranged for the train carriage used in the World War I armistice negotiations to be placed in the same location, to perform a celebration symbolising Germany’s triumph over the misfortunes brought by military defeat and the Versailles Treaty. These celebrations were still continuing two days later, when a Sondermeldung was introduced with the “Pariser Einzugsmarsch,” a marching song from 1814 that operated as both a link to Prussian nationalism and the recent occupation of Paris (Track 5). The reading of the announcement was followed by the song “Nun danket alle Gott,” a religious hymn that insists: “Now we all thank our God/With heart and hands and voices/Who hath done wondrous things.” The two national anthems followed, and the Sondermeldung concluded with the “Badenweilermarsch.” This last song, used to introduce Hitler at all of his public appearances, refers to the storming of the French town Badonviller in 1914. The lyrics highlight both Germany’s shared cultural past and Hitler’s position as rescuer of Germany’s national pride:

Sounding out and clear from the south to the north
German song again and German words
The ringing of bells announces the Reich’s honour
[...]
The swastika illuminates from the mountains to the sea
Brothers in arms, true to the Führer!
The Sondermeldung begins with twenty seconds of fanfare, which is a fairly standard sound effect of trumpets and drum rolls, stressing the importance of the upcoming announcement. The announcer addresses the German people as a whole, stressing the nation as an “imagined listening community,” and reads out a message from Adolf Hitler. In this message, Hitler insists that the defeat of France was heroic and claims that it “will go down in history as the most significant victory of all time.” After thanking God for “prevailing over this victory,” Hitler’s message gave the order to ring all church bells across Germany for a week and the Sondermeldung concludes with “Nun danket alle Gott.”42 This is a good example of the propagandistic use of religious hymns to proclaim Hitler’s resemblance to great German leaders of the past and his supposed God-given mission to lead Germany. Moreover, it is indicative of how propagandists borrowed religious symbols in order to appropriate the symbolic power of the church for their own purposes, while simultaneously repressing organised religion in Germany (May 1991; Wilhelm 2004).

Shortly after the German victory celebrations in France, Goebbels requested that the Sondermeldungen be timed more carefully to keep the listening public attentive and engaged with the war effort. During his daily meeting with the Propaganda Ministry in June 1940, Goebbels decided that for the upcoming campaign against England there would be “no more than two (or at most three) of the maximal victory announcements with drum rolls and hymns to prevent the effect from wearing off” (Boelcke 1966: 382).43 By January 1941, Goebbels warned against too much dramatisation of the war on England, making a comparison with the “psychological mistake” during the invasion of Norway in 1940, when frequent special announcements caused the population to be “continually alarmed and in a permanent state of suspense” (Boelcke 1966: 602). As a result, according to Goebbels, when the final victory results were announced, they had already been long anticipated by the average listener. For the time being, there would be no Englandlied or fanfare, Goebbels ordered, and soon listeners would readjust and “know how to judge [Sondermeldungen] correctly” (609).

These changes provide important insights into the ways in which the German Propaganda Ministry tried to avoid disenfranchising listeners, and thereby lose control over their “imagined listening community.” In the campaign against Russia in 1941, news was frequently withheld from listeners for several days, to prevent the events from sounding disappointing in comparison to the Blitzkrieg in France the previous year. Memoirist Margot Füsser Blewett describes how listeners were still given the impression of spectacular military successes as “day after day Sondermeldungen talked of Russian cities falling under the pressure of the Wehrmacht” (2001: 87). Many of the first Sondermeldungen about Russia included fanfare and the “Russlandlied” campaign song, titled “Von Finnland bis zum Schwarzen Meer” (From Finland to the Black Sea).44 This new song contained important references to the geographical expansion of the Third Reich, whereby Germany’s “imagined community” of listeners included soldiers on fronts from Scandinavia down to northern Africa, and from France to the Balkans and parts of Russia.45 Campaign songs like the “Russlandlied” and “Englandlied” were also circulated in the context of youth organisations and school
music lessons, with teachers requiring students to handwrite new song lyrics in their songbooks, and then rote-learn and perform the songs individually.

What is most noticeable about Sondermeldungen from early 1942 onwards is that fanfare and songs take up most of these announcements, which contained very little text and few details about German victories. Moreover, unlike the frequent victory announcements during the campaigns in western Europe, longer periods of time were passing between announcements from Russia. Throughout 1942, the special announcements were characterised by an almost exclusive focus on other fronts. This shows how propagandists were acting on the defensive, forced to make promises and give explanations in order to satisfy the expectations of the “imagined listening community.” This situation worsened following the announced loss of lives in Stalingrad in early 1943 – itself celebrated as a victory – with only a handful of Sondermeldung each year until 1945 (Track 6). Such announcements were usually short in length and only included a short statement about a new development in the war.

In sum, the strategic combination of symbolic music and sounds invited radio listeners to identify with the regime’s mandate to restore the national honour and military power stripped from Germany in the aftermath of World War I. As a result, Sondermeldungen in this period conveyed the victory in France as a sign of the invincibility of Germany under Hitler’s leadership, rather than making specific reference to the Nazis’ broader ideological programme. Radio, too, was posited as a “spiritual apparatus” (as per Goebbels) for performing the religious, military and historical justifications for Germany’s role in the war. Thus, unlike the forging of new, “imagined” communities in the nineteenth century, as described by Anderson, National Socialism used music to symbolically revive what was perceived as a pre-existing German “spirit.” Indeed, while the majority of songs featured in Sondermeldung were neither new nor pointed to a specific enemy, as Anderson has discussed, they were appropriated in the context of wartime assertions against military opponents. The use of pre-existing music in announcements, moreover, was consistent with Hitler’s desire to revive the “former sovereign emblems and symbols of the Reich” (1933/1969: 471).

The claims of propagandists might give the impression that the creation of an “imagined listening community” was a straightforward process. However, this case has revealed the elaborate efforts required for the Nazi Party to appeal to all listeners. The heterogeneous nature of the (listening) public, moreover, is indicated by the wide range of symbolic music and sounds included in Sondermeldungen and the various coercive strategies for ensuring listenership. The ultimate fragility of a collective consciousness based on radio listening is indicated by the compromises made by the Propaganda Ministry to avoid disenfranchising listeners, which ultimately led to a loss of control over their “imagined community.” As Anderson’s observation of the national anthem suggests, musical expressions of nationalism like the Sondermeldung rely on repetition and collective involvement for their success. While he does not develop this insight further, I have sought to highlight the potential in using radio for the performative enactment of national community, but also the difficulties posed by a fragmented audience with divergent listening patterns.
The inclusive discourse of Sondermeldungen and national listening community at the beginning of World War II discussed here needs to be contextualised within the broader cultural framework of the concepts and uses of sound under National Socialism. For this reason, the following sections will reflect on the practices of urban control that employed sound for air safety measures before establishing the intensification of fear and suspicion associated with sound more generally during the war.

**Alarm Sounds as Acoustic Signals**

Sirens, plane engines and bomb explosions are among the most common references in accounts about the urban experience of air attacks during World War II. Despite their pervasiveness in such descriptions, these intense sound events remained ephemeral. The inability of these sounds to be captured by photography led to their absence in what has been termed the “visual iconography” of warfare (Paul 2005). Indeed, while the intensely loud resonances and physical vibrations of air attacks on German cities permeated the wider (acoustic) landscape, the overwhelming sensory experience for civilians has left few material traces, let alone recordings. My interest here is not to recuperate the exact nature of these sounds or their spatial markers. Instead, I will begin by considering how the initial wartime organisation of German cities involved acoustic strategies for establishing controlled social behaviour and “air safety” (Luftschutz). In particular, the principle of “inclusion-organisation” described by Foucault requires further elaboration for these purposes, along with the state discourses concerning its provision of “care” for citizens. My initial focus is thus primarily on how sound participated in expanding spatial practices of control during National Socialism.

Several aspects of Foucault’s account of urban strategies of inclusion-organisation also ring true for the case of wartime air safety. Similar to the case of the town infected with the plague I mentioned earlier, the Nazi regime had long anticipated a “threat” to urban cities in the form of aerial warfare. The emphasis on sufficient organisation also called on citizens to make preparations for their self-protection (Selbstschutz). Urban residents were required to clean out attic rooms of any unnecessary belongings or flammable items, to prepare basement rooms as air shelters, and, when necessary, to create emergency break-through walls to adjoining houses. Basement shelters were prepared with various precautionary items, including seating, temporary beds and gas masks. Such precautions were checked and approved by the “air safety warden” (Luftschutzwart), a male representative appointed to each apartment building or small neighbourhood by the national air safety organisation (Reichsluftschutzbund or RLB). Air wardens thus shared some of the authority of the syndic during a plague, who ensured the containment of all individuals, made roll calls and reported back on behaviour through a chain of command to the military and judiciary. As Foucault points out, the organisation of cities in such exceptional situations involved a “penetration of regulation into even the smallest details of everyday life through the mediation of complete hierarchy that assured the capillary function of pow-
er” (1977: 198). The temporary incursions warranted by the plague, moreover, underscored a utopian vision of containing urban space and the movements of all individuals within it.

The medieval plague was combatted by local authorities through the technologies of the gaze, space and writing. The Panopticon, too, in Foucault’s reading, created the architectural separation of prison inmates, whose behaviour was monitored on a principle of perfect visibility enabled by bright, “full lighting” (1977: 201). I will return to the implications of the Panopticon prison model for Nazi surveillance in the following section, but for now, I begin with a contrast to Foucault’s insistence on visibility and bright lighting for the success of creating disciplined behaviour. The case I examine here involved various efforts to produce disciplined behaviour in conditions of reduced visibility. For World War II air attacks, which usually took place after dark, blackout regulations were introduced to camouflage cities and avoid detection by enemy aeroplanes. Air wardens monitored urban dwellings to ensure sufficient black covering over windows, and some shops installed systems to automatically switch off lights when the front door was opened.49 Evening curfews were introduced to reduce the nocturnal movements of civilians, although there was still street activity and vehicle traffic that required dimmed light sources after dark. In the darkened context of the wartime city, the most effective way of warning all those in a particular area to the risk of air attack was with acoustic sirens. For this reason, I will now consider how German authorities established sound systems and (attentive) listening as essential mechanisms for establishing a disciplined home front and ensuring its protection against aerial attacks.

The main procedure established for air safety meant that once an attack was confirmed for a particular area then an “alarm” (Vollalarm) would be rung for two minutes, consisting of a rising and falling sound. Once the threat had passed, a long even tone would be given to signal the “all clear” (Entwarnung). While quite straightforward, this system reflected the establishment of an alternative source of acoustic power to the sounds and presence of enemy aircraft. The regulated “sonic” signals provided by alarms would mask and overrule other sounds, thus emphasising the role of the state in intercepting attacks and alerting its civilians. This procedure also implicitly involved a spatial notion of control since the alarm sounds could reassure the public that the entire territory of the city was being monitored. In addition to reports from watchtowers and border areas, anti-aircraft artillery (FLAK) and fighter planes would protect the edges of the city.50 Reports would be sent to the central control centres, which gathered all the information and decided on the distribution of alarms.51 Once it was certain that respective neighbourhoods were unaffected, the “all clear” could be given in these districts. This discourse of defending the city territory was perhaps not so necessary in the first year of the war, when the German army had considerable military successes. However, it set up a precedent for the symbolic associations with aircraft protection and alarms as an extension of state protection. The appointment of a state-endorsed “air warden” (Luftschutzwart) in every household or neighbourhood was the most literal embodiment of the state’s “care” and control over the protection of city dwellers.
Foucault’s example of the plague town depended on total control and the reduction of mobility by locking people up in their homes. Like the plague, a war situation is also exceptional and permits more extensive controls over the populace. While German authorities could not force people to stay and defend their homes, they did use alarm timing in such a way as to encourage a quick return home. Rather than allow alarms to continue through a whole evening, a moment would be chosen to give the “all-clear” for half an hour so that the majority would return to their dwellings (Hampe 1963: 306). This example emphatically illustrates how alarm sounds could be employed to manipulate the behaviour of civilians, while maintaining the claim that air protection systems were acting in their best interest.

The need to instil confidence in the state’s acoustic control and organisation of the city is suggested by a November 1939 article in the air safety magazine Die Sirene. This feature included an interview with an air force engineer in charge of air safety regulation, who had worked on creating a mechanised city map with small lights representing the location of all alarms. The interviewer suggests that the distances between the lights look strange and irregular to the eye, but then explains that this placement was measured exactly according to the “range of audibility” (Hörweite) at around five hundred metres, so that the sounds are distributed evenly across the entire city: “even in the most distant corners of the city, they can be heard at an equal level (gleichmäßig).”

The explanation for this “acoustic blanket” or envelopment of the city was that it was organised according to acoustic principles, rather than geometric or aesthetic ones. Indeed, unlike the organisation of cities with architectural design, lighting systems or street signs, these sirens were not planned geometrically. Yet, the concept of the grid was still evident in the decision to divide up cities into five main blocks for siren systems and communications posts (Warnstellen). The efforts to keep a constant flow of communications between those sending and those receiving reports were enabled by various telephone and wireless systems (Hampe 1963: 298-300). For instance, a watchtower observer might hear or see a plane and report it by cable communications to the central air safety office. The central command would give a secret “pre-alarm” (Voralarm) to government organisations (including schools and hospitals) and large businesses. The official timing of a “full” alarm was meant to be ten minutes before the anticipated arrival of enemy planes. Once all reports had confirmed that the danger had passed, an “all clear” could be given. This explanation of the procedure was not only designed to reassure the large readership of Die Sirene, but to show that the sounds were being centrally organised and administered according to a logical and even scientific method. The acoustic blanket, moreover, not only implied a muffling of bomb sounds, but also offers a metaphor for the discourses of “care” underpinning disciplinary forms of control outlined by Foucault.

Despite the effort to stress the high levels of planning involved in the organisation of air safety, it appears that there were ongoing confusions about this process. Die Sirene received such a high volume of letters from readers that it requested for queries to be directed to local RLB offices. The procedures and the interpretation of official regulations (and the authority of air wardens) were fre-
quenty questioned. One reader asked whether immobile elderly people could be left in bed during alarms. Another was unsure whether it was necessary to go to the cellar during alarms when no anti-aircraft fire or spotlights were used. Yet another asked whether it were permissible to reject strangers from a shelter that was already full. Such questions reflected a certain anxiety about the grey areas of new regulations and the appropriate behaviour for the demands of wartime preparations (See “Wir wissen Rat!” 1939: 698-9).

Above all, the air safety authorities were concerned with avoiding situations of “mass panic” or careless behaviour. This shares a similarity with the impulse for plague organisation, as outlined by Foucault, which sought strict organisation as the only alternative to possible rebellion and insurgency in the exceptional conditions of the medieval plague. The need to insist (if not coerce) civilians into appropriate behaviour patterns took on a more popularised form in Die Sirene. Cartoons or short comic pieces explained, for instance, that air safety activities should be “fast and effective” (kurz und einprägsam) (“Immer daran” 1939). In this case, a list of instructive reminders to readers emphasised the importance of attentive listening and swift action, whether driving at night, hearing anti-aircraft fire, or waiting for a train in a darkened station. Civilians should be alert and careful, but most of all, they should know that “self-discipline is everything” (“Immer daran” 1939). This insistence on the individual’s role implied that individual acts of self-restraint were essential to the wider war effort. The normative image of wartime community depended on what Anderson describes as a sense of collective destiny, but also on the attempt to extend the presence of state representatives to the private space of individual households. Moreover, such examples also suggest how control is practised under the rubric of “safety.”

Before turning to listener experiences and interpretations of the changed urban soundscape, I would like to reflect on how authorities were required to fine-tune and adjust the spatially distributed sonic organisation of the city. Local control offices were dependent on reports from anti-aircraft (FLAK) stations, whose gunfire could be heard by civilians as a sign of protection, and whose visual presence was marked by their spotlights scanning the sky at night. Control offices were also reliant on observers stationed at high points around the city, who gave so-called “hearing” and “seeing” reports. The capacity of these observers to detect new waves of planes following an initial attack, however, was severely reduced by smoke clouds. Reports from observation towers contributed to “false alarms” during 1940, when too many sirens were let off when British planes flew overhead to other regions. The increasing ratio of alarms to actual attacks was seen as a significant trial for city dwellers and the cause of traffic disturbances and production loss (Hampe 1963: 305).

In October 1940, new regulations were introduced by Aviation Minister Hermann Göring, which led to the alarm length being reduced from two minutes to one minute. It was only deemed necessary to go to the cellar or air raid shelter if anti-aircraft fire could be heard, and there would be no alarms for single planes (Shirer 1999: 341, 383). Nonetheless, these policies reflected a fundamental tension in the organisation of air protection. On the one hand, official discourses emphasised the need for caution and alert behaviour. The importance of sirens
was perceived as so great that alarm control officers were often tried in court if they made mistakes (Hampe 1963: 305). On the other hand, they simultaneously insisted that everyday life, work production and commercial activity should not be disrupted. In order to keep the city alert, but not discontinue commercial and industrial activity, a new alarm signal was introduced in August 1942. This was also a response to the British introduction of fast, small planes (Mosquitoes), which often operated bombing missions alone or in small formations. The new signal, which warned of possible “public air danger” (Öffentliche Luftwarnung) involved three repetitions of a fifteen second lengthy tone rising and falling (Hampe 1963: 308).

Despite efforts to the contrary, it is not possible to generalise listening experience. Civilian listening competencies and interpretations not only changed over time, but differed according to individual situations. Nonetheless, when the first bombs fell on Düsseldorf in May 1940, the alarms were initially a novelty, leading to a kind of “bomb tourism” with many people from the surrounding countryside travelling into the city to sit with their relatives in the cellar and hear the Fliegeralarm sounds. Urban residents, too, were keen to watch anti-aircraft battles with enemy aircraft, and crowds thronged to bombed areas to look at the damage. More than anyone else, children found it initially exciting, “almost like fireworks” or “an evening show,” and following bomb attacks children collected the coloured shrapnel pieces scattered on the ground.

The distribution of sirens around the city also marked a shift in certain everyday features of the soundscape. Sirens were traditionally associated with the end of the factory working day, marking industrial work time and even – as I indicated in the previous chapters – as an acoustic background to national radio events. Rather than operating as the substitute for the factory clock, sirens were now used to mark unexpected emergency situations. It was not only the “masking” capacity of loud wartime sirens that made them so prominent, but also that they replaced other quotidian sounds in German cities, such as church bells and mechanical clocks. Church bells, as I noted in my discussion of Sondermeldungen, were a prominent feature in victory celebrations in 1940. During the course of the war, however, some ninety thousand bells were either destroyed by bombing or melted down for armament production (Koshar 1998: 192). This growing absence in the soundscape produced a certain disorientation as the earlier ringing of bells every fifteen minutes had provided a prominent temporal marker in cities.

It is the alarms themselves that are most frequently mentioned in general accounts and recollections. While the total duration and number of alarms far exceeded that of bomb attacks themselves, it is likely that there has also been some amplification in recollection (Birdsall 2009). For those in the city, sirens were usually heard when at home, in the workplace, at school or while out in the city. For most, the predominant experience of sirens was marked by the need to move swiftly: the hurried activity of waking and dressing (if sleeping), taking a suitcase and supplies to the cellar or running outside to a public shelter. A common experience was also that of waiting and listening in anticipation to determine whether an attack would occur. The sirens not only masked and even replaced other sounds in the urban environment, but were often accompanied by a silence due
to the cessation of usual daily sounds. This, no doubt, heightened the ominous associations with bombs, since they were the single predominant outdoor sound. Many of the air raids also occurred after dark, and if the power went out, then these sounds were often heard in pitch darkness. For some, the experience of sitting in the dark caused high levels of anxiety during Allied air raids: “The cellar walls shook when a bomb fell nearby. The worst was when the lights suddenly went out and we couldn’t see anything. It was an oppressive feeling, the women, in particular, cried.”

In an interview I held in 2004, one respondent recalled the distinct sounds associated with the temporal order of attacks:

> It was unnerving to sit there in the cellar. First it would get really quiet. Then you would hear a very light, even humming sound. Then it was dead silent, before the bombs started hammering down. That was, that was horrible. We would kneel on the floor and pray. My mother always prayed the loudest. One had the feeling that the cellar floors were raising up.

These accounts emphasise the anxiety created by the loss of control and intense sensory impressions, particularly the feeling that the walls and floors were moving. The high volume of alarm systems and their repetitive occurrence also provided a source of psychological anguish. In one description, the falling bombs have been described as even providing a kind of relief, since their arrival disrupted the painful ringing of the sirens. Pre alarm, full alarm, all clear, pre alarm, full alarm, all clear, came one after another, so that many lost their orientation, became crazy, and wanted to leave the cellar during full alarm, and enter the cellar when the all clear sounded.

The loss of orientation, according to this account, was in part due to the confusion caused by the intensity of alarm sounds and the new system of time they created, which disrupted the usual distinctions between daytime and nighttime. The disturbing potential of alarms and bombs was not only due to the pressure placed on individual thresholds of hearing, but also the loss of control associated with their predicament in wartime. The individual experience of acoustic pain and noise, after all, is often linked to whether the subject has the agency to choose the volume levels.

By contrast, in the initial stages of the war, before the escalation of air raids in the summer of 1940, civilians were not always sufficiently alert or used to the blackouts. Indeed, the general experience of visual deprivation in the city took some readjustment. During 1939 and 1940, American CBS radio correspondent William Shirer noted that he had difficulties following the first blackout on 1 September 1939:

> It’s a little strange at first and takes some getting used to. You grope around the pitch-black streets and pretty soon your eyes get used to it, and you can make out the whitewashed curbstones – and there’s a blue light here and there to guide you – and somehow you get along. (1999: 69).
Only two weeks later, Shirer noted that he had repeatedly stumbled into a lamp-post and injured himself. After deciding to use a small torch to avoid this, he was immediately stopped by the police and almost arrested for breaking the blackout regulations. Even after only several months of the blackout policy, Shirer marvelled at the city lights during a visit to Amsterdam in January 1940, with his colleague Ed Murrow agreeing that it was a “shock, it seems almost indecent to have all this light around.” These observations thus emphasise the relief experienced by a break from the wartime conditions of reduced visibility and a context requiring a heightened use of proprioception and attention to sonic markers.

In this early period of the war, the surprise caused by unexpected alarms sometimes meant that people left restaurants or cafés without remembering to pay their bill (Hampe 1963: 588). While some people acted thoughtlessly or were caught off guard, others still initially seemed oblivious to the war:

The restaurant and café proprietors are complaining here that their clients don’t seem to listen properly to the news broadcasts from the German stations. The complaint is they go on chatting and thus prevent those who do want to hear the news from getting it. It’s therefore suggested that signs be put up in all cafés and restaurants asking the customers to observe silence when the German news bulletins are being read. (Shirer 1999: 178)

This observation reinforces the difficulties faced by Nazi propagandists for the task of dictating attentive listening. Moreover, although people were still gradually adjusting to the blackout and its new restrictions, Shirer suggested as late as June 1940 that Berlin seemed almost unaffected by the war and “fundamentally unchanged” (309). With the onset of more regular air attacks, appeals were made to civilians to show more discipline, and to learn to get off the streets immediately upon hearing siren wails (377, 414).

Despite the emphasis on discipline and order, nighttime alarms often meant a hurried sprint to a public bunker, with up to hundreds of other people also running for safety (Steinacker 2003: 16). The frequency of the alarms meant that people often went to bed with the knowledge they would be woken up by alarms, or they would wake up surprised when no alarm had sounded. Yet there were still occasions when no one heard the alarms or anti-aircraft shooting nearby. For example, Hans-Georg Vogt (b. 1926) woke up to find himself being rescued from the rubble to discover that he had lost his mother and three siblings (Steinacker 2003: 13). However, once air attacks became more frequent, many people developed a heightened awareness, to the point where they learned to judge the distance of the planes and could recognise the type of plane (Steinacker 2003: 16). The development of acoustic recognition skills was also important for recognising the level of danger. As one person recollected, there was usually a spotter plane (Aufklärer) plane that would arrive first, nicknamed “Der eiserne Gustav,” which one could recognise by its engine sounds: “Then we knew that the bombs would follow soon after” (Steinacker 2003: 16).

Everyday listening experience was mostly confined to cellars and public bun-
kers after 1943. As a listening environment, underground private basements were often damp, cold and echoing. This acoustic space was markedly different from the earlier predominance of the living room for radio listening. It was not only a contrast to muted, absorbent domestic spaces with household interiors, but also uncomfortable listening in at times crowded cellars without sufficient air. On some occasions, therefore, it was an uneasy, often nervous listening that was also often quite attentive (in the case of an attack). At other times, there was a “tuning out” when sirens were precautionary and left to sound for longer periods of time. On the whole, though, the bomb attacks were experienced as overwhelming and frightening, heightened by sonic extremities and the danger posed by an enemy that was heard and felt, but rarely seen. These conditions highlight a contrast to Foucault’s account of the plague city, which depended on a strict segmentation of the people, but maintained its exceptional conditions for a limited period of time. While urban space was partitioned and even rendered immobile in the lead up to an air attack, the time frame of air protection was protracted across more than five years, and the wellbeing and safety of civilians also changed dramatically over this period.

The increasingly extended periods of time spent in cellars also produced an augmented sense of temporality as the day was stretched out. From summer 1942 onwards, the Allied bombing attacks worsened, and from 1943, during both the day and night. Air raid sirens began to occur so frequently that citizens often moved back and forth between their bedrooms and the cellar for one- to two-hour intervals during the night. One woman recalled that her father kept a tally of the number of time they had gone to the cellar, which by 1943 had occurred in Düsseldorf on five hundred occasions. This act of keeping a tally and recording one’s experience, moreover, implies a textual strategy for regaining some control over one’s situation.

The need to provide civilians with more air information than sirens could provide led to some access to local communications lines for each city, usually known as “wired radio” (Drabtfunk). For instance, when planes went over Roermond in the Netherlands, these listeners came to know that one of the western border cities would be hit (Steinacker 2003: 10). The formula for these warnings was: “Attention, attention, enemy bomber formations are passing over….” The location information given enabled listeners to approximate the distance and likelihood of an attack. This additional acoustic information source also required listeners to partially decipher the messages, since code words were often used out of fear for Allied tapping (Hampe 1963: 316). In some cases, listeners were able to plot other codes on an anti-aircraft map (Flakkarte). The code given for southern Düsseldorf was “Marta-Otto,” while “Ludwig-Otto” referred to the northern parts of the city (Steinacker 2003: 28). Since Hannelore H.’s father worked at the Beyer company in Leverkusen, he had access to such a map (Figure 13):

As you can see, the coded information [for us] was “Marta Otto Neun.” At first we couldn’t show [the map] to the other people in the cellar. However, it became a safeguard for us, because we had quite a long walk to the public bunker. Later it became easier to get one of these maps, to the point where it wasn’t a secret anymore.
As this observation indicates, these maps were initially designed for the use of FLAK and other war-related organisations, but were also used by civilians to decode messages, providing them with a sense of being able to better predict whether they were at risk. Furthermore, it demonstrates how civilians made use of textual forms to make sense of and exercise a greater degree of control over their personal safety, and did not only rely on the signals provided by siren warnings.

The success of alarm systems depended on an intricate chain of command between different party organisations and military units. Once the volume of air attacks was almost daily and sirens frequently needed repair, these control offices were less able to manage their task of warning civilians with sonic signals (Hampe 1963: 309–16). In the later years of the war, there was also an increased need for alternative siren sources when the official system was not working. Air safety wardens were encouraged to use hand-held sirens that were operated with a rotating handle. If the sirens were completely out of order, then vans with loudspeakers attached (Lautsprecherwagen) sometimes took on this task, which was often hindered by the large amounts of rubble on city streets. In other words, the inability of alarm control offices to deal with the high frequency of alarms and provide accurate alarms led to the breakdown of sirens as part of a disciplinary system.

FIG. 13: Coded grid map, used to decipher Drahtfunk information during World War II. Personal collection of the author.
In addition to providing siren warnings, *Lautsprecherwagen* were also sent through the streets to give local information on emergency shelter, medical treatment and food supplies (Steinacker 2003: 22). On one occasion, there was a district in Düsseldorf dominated by rubble, smells, water streaming out of broken pipes, injured people and terrible scenes following an attack. The response of a *Lautsprecherwagen* driving through the area was to play an uplifting aria from Mozart’s *The Magic Flute*. What a bystander remembered most clearly about this absurd contrast to his own situation was the lyric “This image is enchantingly lovely.” This attempt to literally cover the reality of destruction with the German music tradition is indicative of the ever-widening gap between the experience of urban civilians and the propaganda agenda towards the end of the war.

Another example of the stark contrast between the staging of war sounds in propaganda and listening experience in everyday life can be found in the cinematic portrayal of sirens. During the premiere of *Die Grosse Liebe* (1942) at the Düsseldorf Apollo cinema, the film was stopped twice due to air alarms. Coincidentally, the film itself included a scene with an air alarm, which was no doubt a strategy for the popularisation and normalisation of war conditions. In this case, the sirens and bomb attacks created a recurring acoustic interruption that ultimately undermined the idealistic depiction of the war effort in *Die Grosse Liebe*.

It seems impossible to speak of a public life in the last two years of the war. From October 1944, schools, businesses and most public venues in Düsseldorf were closed (Zimmermann 1995: 28-9). Low-flying Allied planes (*Tiefflieger*) frequently shot at civilians, who now often lived in public bunkers or their own cellars. These conditions reduced large parts of the population, mostly consisting of women, children and the elderly, to obtaining the bare essentials of life by going through the ruins in search of food and clothing. By 1943, the Düsseldorf school administration was forced to acknowledge that unsupervised children were wandering around the streets on the days that school classes were cancelled due to air attacks (Jakobs 2003: 16, 88). In general, the increasing failure of alarm warnings contributed to the knowledge that bomb attacks could be unexpected and might take place at any time (Steinacker 2003: 16). This situation suggests that, despite earlier assurances, the state could not sufficiently protect civilians from attack. Rather than providing a sign of the state’s protection and safety, the alarm systems were thus transformed into a reminder of civilians’ vulnerability and the breakdown of any substantial form of social life.

Following one of the heaviest attacks on Düsseldorf in June 1943, a local resident sent a letter to his soldier son. The letter notes that three weeks after the attack, life was slowly getting back to normal, but there was destruction in almost every street. Indeed, in this period, most tram services had stopped, there was little traffic and people could only move through the city by bike or by walking in the middle of the street. Several weeks later, the father wrote that the city was still “desolate” (*verödet*). When businesses closed in the evening, one could only see five or six people when walking across the whole city. The city, in his words, had become a “dark, deserted hole” (*einem dunklen, gemiedenen Loch*).

Indeed, in this last two-year period, those who remained in the city were almost permanently relocated to cellars or left the city altogether; food and water...
were scarce; communications systems were often down; and families were separated or their whereabouts unknown. Communication between city dwellers was often reduced to chalk writing on house ruins to inform others as to their safety and new location. An official report from 1945 described Düsseldorf as:

a city where thousands of people lived in bunkers and cellars, a city where no trams could drive, [...] a city dominated by hunger and need, [...] a city where even the most primitive standards of hygiene could not be maintained, where the most necessary utilities were cut off, and where no coffins were available for the dead anymore.

The basic hygiene problems and contamination described here are reminiscent of the potential risk that authorities sought to contain in the case of plague, yet these conditions reiterate that the destroyed city, with its scattered population, was beyond any organised system of discipline.

The decline of the city meant that even those urban residents still remaining were more like “catacomb dwellers,” due to their makeshift, underground living conditions (Fehrenbach 1995: 1). This sense of absence and decay in the city emerges as the predominant theme in descriptions of urban environments at the end of World War II. Dieter Forte’s semi-autobiographical account of wartime Düsseldorf poignantly describes the sensory dimensions to this absence:

In this landscape there were no trees and no gardens, no lakes and no parks, so that you couldn’t hear the rustle of leaves, shrubs or grass, just a monotone, rising and falling howl of the wind, connected with the rumbling thuds of walls collapsing, the hollow rattling of radiators on burnt walls, the flapping of curtains in empty windows. [...] Clouds of dust dried the inside of your mouth, shut with a wordless and deathly silence, in which no bird calls could be heard, no flapping of wings; there were no birds anymore, just like there were no dogs or cats, whose barks and sounds were long forgotten, lying dead between the grave mounds of grey stone, charred timber, broken bricks and rusted beams. (1998: 1-2)

This account of the city at the end of the war stresses the strange impressions in multiple sensory registers: the glass splinters and rubble, the strong smell of dead bodies and ash, the absence of the natural environment and its usual sounds.

While descriptions of the end of the war emphasise silence and absence, the wartime soundscape was profoundly dominated by the three main sounds of sirens, planes and bomb attacks. Indeed, various combinations of these loud wartime sounds – interspersed with intervals of silence – emerged as the daily soundscape in urban centres like Düsseldorf. These sounds predominated over almost all other features of city soundscapes, although it remains uncertain as to how easily these unexpected sounds (and their “life or death” implications) could be entirely normalised and relegated to the background of listener attention. Alarm sirens were similar to Sondermeldungen in that they provided a mediated, sonic framework for the interpretation of the success and eventual breakdown of the
German urban defence systems and overall war effort. This attempt at discipline, ironically born out of a loss of control due to aerial attacks, eventually failed just as that of the national listening community of official radio. While Sondermeldungen all but disappeared from radio’s public sphere, sirens and the overwhelming sounds of bombs remained pervasive features of urban soundscapes. As the war progressed, the meaning attributed to alarms shifted as they were no longer precise or a form of reassurance for civilians, let alone capable of asserting the regime’s presence and control over the domestic situation. This failure ultimately undermined the air safety discourse, which insisted that authorities could extend protection (or “care”) to civilians based on an acoustic organisation of the city, as a controlled immersion in sound.

Here I have shifted Foucault’s stress on how visuality is implicated in modern institutions of power. By contrast, I have shown how a disciplinary mechanism can function in an urban context of reduced visibility with a sonic alarm system. While Foucault suggests the success of modern disciplinary systems in achieving all-encompassing, generative mechanisms of power, I have also tried to highlight the shortcomings of Nazi urban sonic control, operating as it did from a defensive position and amidst the protracted conditions of war. Nonetheless, Foucault’s account of the plague remains a useful comparison since it accentuates civilian participation (as inclusion-organisation) and the response of authorities as both a militarist model of maintaining order and a public-health project of combating disease. In the following, I will return to Foucault’s account, which provides a comparison for the increasingly rigid definition of community used to police civilian behaviour during World War II. This policing, I will argue, also revealed a strong correlation between sound and surveillance, along with new categories of social outsiders based on radio listening and behaviour classified as abnormal or non-normative.

Suspicious Sounds

In this chapter, I have established some of the striking similarities between the World War II home front organisation and Foucault’s notion of organised discipline in the plague city. The medical response to the figure of the “leper” also provides a useful precedent for considering the rituals of exclusion underpinning the ambition to maintain a “pure community” during National Socialism. Not only did Nazi thinking combine a vision of collective historical destiny (Schicksal) with a racialised concept of community, but the policing and exclusion of otherness took on a more radicalised form during the war. Against this background, with acts of listening and speaking generating increasingly fearful associations, this section tries to conceive of how the auditory figured in (wartime) surveillance.

Foucault’s account of the Panopticon, as I have noted, places undue emphasis on the role of visuality in modern institutions and surveillance. More recent interpretations of Western modernity, however, have highlighted the interplay of vision and hearing. Historian Mark Smith, for instance, counters the visualist discourse emphasised by Foucault and other scholars of modernity:
The print revolution, the Renaissance, the Enlightenment, all enthusiastically promoted the power of the eye, but hearing seemed to hold its own, with no discernable dilution of its social and intellectual importance. (2007: 58)

In other words, Foucault may have underestimated the contribution of sound to the modern project. His essay on the Panopticon, however, does hint at the sonic implications of solitary confinement, causing inmates to be unable to communicate with each other or form “a crowd”; a similar compartmentalisation in the school room meant “no noise, no chatter” (201). Ultimately, the overall effect of modern surveillance is a sense of being continually monitored, whether visually or acoustically, whereby subjects are conditioned to practise *autosurveillance.*

Although Foucault himself commented very rarely on National Socialism, he conceded that his work was influenced by his own experience of growing up in German-occupied Vichy France between 1940 and 1945. Nazism, as Foucault noted elsewhere, is the “culminating point of the development of the new mechanisms of power set in place since the 18th century […] disciplinary power, biopower; all that traverse and sustain every aspect of Nazi society.” Indeed, one of the most common tropes in post-war scholarship has been to reiterate the perception that the Nazi regime was not only all-seeing, but also all-hearing. This view, most often found in accounts of the regime as “totalitarian,” implies that there was no room for the individual to move, no free spaces. This claim, as a form of exculpation, was also taken up by both West and East German governments in the immediate post-war era, as well as by left-wing movements in order to account for the ineffectiveness of their own resistance during National Socialism.

In this chapter, I have taken issue with Foucault’s scopocentric emphasis and argued that the application of control was sometimes more difficult and chaotic than was purported in Nazi discourses, particularly in the context of wartime. A similar argument can be made about official forms of surveillance. While for many civilians the regime appeared monolithic and efficient from the outside, the secret service (*Gestapo*) did not actually have the resources to conduct extensive surveillance of citizens. Instead, for their investigations, they relied heavily on information volunteered by civilians and informants. Despite this reality, the perception of many civilians was that the regime had far-reaching surveillance capacities, a notion that was enhanced by the proliferation of rumour, propaganda discourses, heavy sentences and the intensification of regime organisation for those remaining in cities during the war.

In trying to address how sound emerged as a field of fear or suspicion, I will begin by exploring predominant propaganda discourses about listening and speech. One of the major themes in World War I was a concern with the development of espionage as a mode of warfare. Between 1914 and 1918, posters had warned Germans to be cautious about what they said in public, as visualised, for instance, by a padlock over a soldier’s mouth (Fleischer 1994: 18-21, 261). In the aftermath of Germany’s defeat, conservative commentators such as Hans Henning Freiherr Grote returned to the wartime slogan “Careful! The enemy is listening!” (*Vorsicht! Feind hört mit!*). In Grote’s eponymous book (1930), espionage is presented as a major cause for Germany’s military defeat in 1918,
in keeping with the “stab in the back” myth (Dolchstoßlegende), which asserted that the German war effort had been undermined by a lack of discipline on the home front. Among the various espionage strategies explored, including carrier pigeons, miniature cameras and cryptograms, Grote offers everyday speech and the telephone as two significant hazards causing the dissemination of military secrets (1930: 8-12). The specific concern about telephone conversations was emphasised in another poster that visualises the oversized ear of a Frenchman as being privy to information passing through telephone cables.

With the onset of World War II, a number of posters developed several visual variations on this earlier propaganda theme, usually featuring the dark shadow of a man cast over illustrations of Germans engaged in various everyday activities such as working, travelling, chatting or speaking on the telephone (Figures 14 and 15). This looming shadow was either accompanied with the text “The enemy is listening” or the whispered shush to be silent (Psst!). Such instructions for civilians to be quiet or silent (Schweig!) in posters constructed an authoritative discourse around avoiding careless or unnecessary speech when in public. Andreas Fleischer notes that, despite several examples of posters specifically warning against “spies” (Spione), the broader notion of the “enemy” (Feind) listener was more predominant and perhaps better suited to the increasingly rigid definitions of otherness in wartime Germany (1994: 73). The supposed omnipresence
of the mysterious, unknown enemy, moreover, was supposed to stimulate the German Volk into a “preparedness to defend” (Abwehrbereitschaft) (Schneider 2000: 155).

In addition to such visual posters, the German film industry was quick to capitalise on the popular sensation provoked by the fear of espionage. The film Achtung! Feind hört mit! (1940) sets up a narrative of intrigue at a large factory near the French border in 1938, due to spies who are interested in listening in (mithorchen) on “German armament secrets” (Herzberg 1940). The narrative revolves around an English spy and his attractive German accomplice, Lily, who both begin relationships with two young factory employees. The opening titles of the film impressed upon German viewers the importance of this theme:

Espionage is a form of total war! It affects all of us. The issue is not just the secrets of laboratories and weapons manufacturers. It is also about loyalty, discretion, emotional steadfastness. The weakness of a few can allow for enemy espionage. For those involved, it means enduring a life in constant fear, and to end up in unhappiness and disgrace. For the nation, however, it can be worse than a lost battle! For this reason: Careful! The enemy is listening!^{89}
These titles argue that everyday speech and behaviour need policing, given the conditions of “total war,” whereby individual actions could have national repercussions.90 While the film’s title might suggest the sonic dimensions to espionage, the telephone features as a minor narrative device for revealing the English spy’s activities.91 Espionage is depicted as primarily based on photographic images and printed documentation, with the character of Lily reinforcing the suspicion of attractive women as unreliable and potential traitors during wartime (Chickerling 2007: 316). The dramatic ending of the film involves the English spy trying to unsuccesssfully escape from the factory by plane, which leads to anti-aircraft fire and air raid sirens being let off. A propaganda poster is subsequently shown, which reveals that two other employees have been charged with treacherous behaviour and will be hung as a punishment. In this final scene, a man tells a group of employees that these events could happen anywhere: he points at the poster and warns that this should be a lesson to all workers, as “every colleague [...] can be a spy.”92

The use of the word “mithören” in these cultural artefacts does not only translate to mean listening, but also has the implication of a suspicious or deceptive listening: eavesdropping. As Ann Gaylin explains, the modern understanding of eavesdropping suggests

a particular sense of space: one that indicates boundaries of public and private areas, and transgressions of the former into the latter. [...] This border state presupposes the trespass of another individual’s sense of private space. (2002: 2)

While Gaylin explores this theme as a narrative device in nineteenth-century literature, I will consider how this fear of the enemy eavesdropping did not only concern one’s outdoor public behaviour. Indeed, the fear of eavesdropping within the private sphere has a wider relevance given the extensive incursions on the home under the pretext of wartime discipline and organisation.

The domestic environment is the locus of Foucault’s plague model, since it is observed, inspected, and, eventually, purified. Despite Nazism’s ideology of the home as an idealised sanctuary, it has been shown that aerial warfare exposed the vulnerability of the urban home. In the case of World War II, moreover, the home was established as a vital site of war preparation due to fears of air attacks, along with the notion of the “home front” (Heimatfront) as representing the contribution of a feminised private sphere. With the outbreak of war, there was a renewed emphasis on community and co-operation with others, yet it took some coercion to ensure the participation of the Kriegsgemeinschaft in the war effort. Correct air safety participation was induced by threats of heavy sentences for theft or incorrect conduct during the evening blackout, with numerous public announcements of death penalties used to set an example to civilians. The home in wartime was not only constructed as under threat (as a site of military defence), but was also criminalised as the potential location for illegal (listening) activity or selfish behaviour, such as hoarding coal (Kohlenklau).

On the whole, there was a heightened sense that the activities and sounds
made within the home could carry beyond its walls and expose its inhabitants to further potential scrutiny. In general, tight-knit Catholic or worker communities were sometimes able to resist certain intrusions of the regime, whereas those in the city were often more privy to observation by neighbours or informants. Given that National Socialism led many people to retreat into the domestic sphere, the predominant context of individualised radio listening was no doubt conducive to what Detlev Peukert terms the “atomisation” of everyday life in the 1930s (1987/1993: 78). Nonetheless, following the ban on listening to foreign radio stations in September 1939, placards were designed to attach to domestic radio dials, which stated that it was strictly forbidden in the interests of “national security” and that the Führer had given orders to the authorities to give harsh prison sentences to those who broke the ban. While the regime initially eased the prosecutions following the military successes of 1940, around 250 death sentences were issued for foreign radio listening during the entire war period (Hensle 2003: 89, 134-6). Such harsh penalties were usually not premised as much on the act of listening to foreign radio stations as on being caught sharing this information with other people.

The fear associated with clandestine acts of radio listening is noted in many personal accounts, with the strategy sometimes mentioned of covering the receiver in order to muffle its sounds from potential eavesdroppers. Indeed, this practice of listening to foreign radio can also be likened to an experience of eavesdropping, since radio listeners were privy to illicit knowledge (Gaylin 2002: 25). Moreover, being caught for foreign radio listening also implied a certain loss of control over the domestic listener: the informant required a certain spatial proximity for detecting foreign radio sounds, yet from inside the home it was not necessarily possible to ascertain whether one had been overheard and, if so, by whom. Goebbels also capitalised on this anxiety by spreading the rumour that police and postal workers could trace foreign radio listening activity (Hensle 2003: 147). While there are no exact figures for foreign radio listening, it appears that many loyal followers of the regime were among those who listened out of curiosity or a desire for news (332, 338). The various foreign stations, interruption signals and pirate radio stations may have also provided a certain fascination for listeners, heightened by the discursive investment in the radio “ether” as a somewhat mysterious and dangerous realm during wartime.

The criminalisation of listening brought with it new societal categories of the “foreign listener” (Feindhörer) and “illegal listener” (Schwarzhörer). This was part of a moral discourse perpetuated by propagandists, which insisted that the ban on foreign radio was to protect the people from enemy lies. This claim was in keeping with the portrayal of the British as “war mongers” and “aggressors,” which enabled Hitler to claim the moral high ground that Germany was a victim who entered the war reluctantly (Kris and Speier 1944: 34). While the regime claimed to extend its “care” for the people, it required the people to participate and show their commitment to the nation as a “wartime Volk community” (Kriegsvolksgemeinschaft). This is suggestive of how normative concepts of community were rearticulated in the context of war, instilling a sense of collective destiny, a “community of fate” (Schicksalsgemeinschaft). Such a process requires,
in line with Anderson, that personal sacrifices be subsumed in a narrative about the whole nation making collective sacrifice. Put in terms of the “national listening community,” the criteria for acceptable membership required attentive listening to Sondermeldungen and speeches, refraining from tuning into foreign stations, and accepting related wartime discourses of obedience and sacrifice. This broader model of community belonging based on (listening) habits became more exclusive, revealing the hardening divisions between members of the community (Volksgemeinschaft) and “community aliens” (Gemeinschaftsfremde).

One of the key sites for the close interaction of civilians (with the potential for sonic surveillance) was the public bunker or shelter. First of all, besides work environments, food queues and some limited leisure activities, the bunker was one of the last sites of sociability. The bunker also reflected a restricted definition of community that emerged in a period of policing “Volk” behaviour and ensuring that there was no contact with forced foreign workers (and the few remaining Jews). These exclusions were reflected in admission to public bunkers, which often had signs indicating that Jews were not allowed.97 Foreign forced labourers, who made up around ten per cent of the remaining population in Düsseldorf, were prevented from having adequate protection during air attacks and were forced to continue working despite alarm sirens (Zimmermann 1995: 22).

During my oral history interviews, Wilhelm M. (b. 1927) recalled clearly that towards the end of the war in Düsseldorf there were prisoners who had to clean the streets and collect rubble along the tracklines on Friedrichstrasse from Graf Adolf Platz to Aachener Platz. Renate S. (b. 1928) noted that one was alerted to the presence of these “Fremdarbeiter” because they wore wooden clogs, which meant “you heard them when they were coming.”98

The bunker was thus marked as an exclusively “Aryan” space, although those considered as belonging to the Volksgemeinschaft were also scrutinised on the basis of their behaviour and speech. “Block” leaders and air wardens (Luftschutzwarte) were the lowest-ranking party functionaries, yet they had the authority to make sure residents followed correct safety procedures within shelters (Steinacker 2003: 13). Their inspection of resident behaviour sometimes extended to surveillance and denunciations, particularly on the basis of black-out measures and radio usage. In most cases, these party representatives conducted reports (Haushaltskartei) on individual household members and documented their participation in, for instance, WHW coin collections or hanging out the party flag (Gellately 1993: 91-2).

Public bunkers were usually large and may have offered some shelter from the individual scrutiny and eavesdropping of household representatives of the party. Indeed, household shelters were more likely to have a fairly consistent group of domestic residents, and the protracted nature of the air war made these spaces a potential source of community tension, disputes and denunciation (Zimmermann 1995: 30). The societal friction produced by long periods in bunkers and cellars reflects a more general tension between solitude and community in the city. As Fran Tönkiss has argued, the modern urban subject often desires anonymity, the ability to blend in and feel like “no one is looking, nobody is listening” (2003: 300). The usual attempt to preserve some physical distance or privacy was under-
mined by war conditions, which restricted mobility and placed civilians in close proximity to others. While much has been made of the oppositional nature of “whispered jokes” (Flüsterwitze) and a solidarity amongst the populace, the radicalised conditions of war meant that all accusations were likely to have serious ramifications. As Richard Sennett has observed, when “everyone has each other under surveillance, sociability decreases, silence being the only form of protection” (1978: 15). In other words, the common knowledge of cases involving the denunciation of spouses, parents, siblings and within friendship circles heightened a general sense of monitoring one’s own behaviour and speech, particularly for those already targeted as outsiders (like Jews) and at risk of discrimination and surveillance (Johnson and Reuband 2005: 293-300).

The July 1944 assassination attempt on Hitler’s life, with a subsequent policy of “no tolerance,” led to an intensification of terror practices against civilians. From late 1944, civilians in Düsseldorf could hear battles with the Allied forces in the area near Aachen, yet official sources continued to make appeals to “hold out” (Durchhalteappelle) (Tapken 1990: 402). With ongoing restrictions on public information, many civilians were eager to ascertain what was happening, usually by actively seeking to decipher various news sources and scraps of information they had heard. A classified secret service (SD) report from 22 January 1943 already acknowledged the limits to official propaganda in this period:

The notion of a disciplined home front, in other words, was perceived as being threatened by the individual interpretations made on the basis of rumours. In response, “word of mouth” campaigns (Mundpropaganda-Aktionen) were established by the regime in October 1944. Uniformed soldiers were enlisted to conspicuously promote certain standpoints in large cities, since the populace were supposedly more receptive to accepting what they heard from uniformed men on leave (Echternkamp 2004: 19-20).

This final period of the war, defined by rumour, terror tactics and noisy air attacks, is suggestive of the state of affairs that the medieval plague organisation was precisely trying to avoid, as Foucault notes: “rebellions, crimes, vagabondage, desertions, people who appear and disappear, live and die in disorder” (1977: 198). Moreover, since earlier control systems like alarms were no longer fully operational, loudspeaker vans were given a function similar to the medieval “town crier,” whose public messages resounded in the streets and were passed on by word of mouth. In the German case, civilians had increasingly limited access to print information, with perhaps the exception of propaganda flyers (Flugblät-
The most prominent sonic cue in Düsseldorf during spring of 1945 was a six-week period of artillery fire by American troops stationed on the left bank of the Rhine River. The almost unceasing fire on the city signalled to most remaining civilians the futility of their situation, yet the party administration refused to concede defeat, calling for an absolute defence of the city. These chaotic circumstances shared a certain similarity to Marshall McLuhan’s description of how (indiscriminate) violence in medieval cities is linked to their noisy soundscapes. Terror, he argues, “is the normal state of any oral society, for in it everything affects everything all the time” (1962: 44). Indeed, in the last weeks before the city’s surrender on 17 April 1945, local leaders intensified the terror measures, with units sent out to conduct house searches for deserters and Jews, and punish civilians suspected of defeatist behaviour, such as hanging out white flags. With the city itself as a battleground, rife with arbitrary violence and gunfire, all the sounds in the city had become suspicious.

Conclusion

My analysis of sounds and wartime organisation has acknowledged that the initial war effort was effective in concealing profound social changes, particularly in the use of radio events and popular song as mechanisms for creating a sense of national listening community. My elaboration of Benedict Anderson’s term “imagined community” has extended his focus on printed media to radio sound without reinforcing theories of a “great divide” or notions of listening as a passive activity. The initial enthusiasm for an “imagined listening community,” as I outlined, was eventually undermined by the sensory experience of war. This produced in many civilians an enormous sense of frustration and powerlessness, caused by experiences such as the sounds of bombs in overwhelming the self, the loss of belongings or loved ones, or the various incursions of party functionaries and instruments of surveillance. Consequently, the notion of an imagined (listening) community came under considerable pressure towards the end of the war. The affective bonds with the nation were fading fast and the nation could not produce a replacement for lost social ties, or for the home:

The Nazis, with their terror apparatus, did succeed in breaking up the complex jigsaw of society into its smallest component parts, and changing much of its traditional coherence almost beyond recognition. By the end of the Third Reich, and of the world war the Reich had staged, the vision of a “national community” had dissolved. (Peukert 1987/1993: 241)

The societal tensions produced by the worsening conditions of war also led to a reassertion of local and regional identities. The particular, located experience of the air war is suggested in the frustration expressed towards Berlin as blame
was cast on the capital city and its politicians for imposing these conditions on the industrial western regions. This serves as a case in point for the increasing challenge to identifications based on national community. Moreover, those in affected cities were aware that other German cities were under attack, yet their experience (and suffering) could be interpreted as disproportionate to the relative safety of rural and regional areas. Such divergences in experience thus posed a challenge to the repeated claims of unified national experience.

In particular, I have drawn on Foucault’s theory of modern power to analyse the role played by sound in the construction of German cities as part of a militarised home front with civilian-soldiers. The efforts of Nazi authorities to control the home front shared traits with Foucault’s two key principles of inclusion-organisation (the plague) and exclusion (the leper). While Foucault suggests that modern institutions of power operated on a generalisable visual-spatial mechanism, I have sought to illustrate the specifically sonic dimensions to discipline and surveillance. Foucault’s notion of autosurveillance, in particular, has been delineated during wartime as having sonic consequences in everyday practices involving speech and radio listening. Indeed, my analysis has argued that the notion of a disciplined Volksgemeinschaft in wartime Germany was predicated on: 1) attentive radio listening; 2) a disciplinary system of air raid sirens and protection; and 3) discursive emphasis on sound as a source of fear or anxiety.

The efforts of the Nazi Party to “sound out the city” and achieve spatial and auditory omnipresence was undermined by the context of World War II. In the following chapter, I will pursue my interest in these efforts to use sound to fill space by examining the specific context of film exhibition. In this case, I am not only interested in concrete cinema practices and spectatorship (in reference to Wagner’s Gesamtkunstwerk ideal), but also the discursive conceptualisation of the cinema as facilitating national community and reworking identity on the basis of its sonic spectacle and “rhythmic harmony.”