4. Cinema as a Gesamtkunstwerk?

In 1876, the much-anticipated Bayreuth music festival opened with the first complete performance of the Ring des Nibelungen cycle, directed by its founder, German composer Richard Wagner. This inaugural festival enjoyed critical success, and has since been considered as a major breakthrough in the history of modern (operatic) performance (Shaw-Miller 2002). From the late 1840s, Wagner had preoccupied himself with a new concept of music-drama, which he discussed in theoretical writings and pursued in his own compositions. According to Wagner, music-drama would involve a total fusion of the traditional arts, with a balance between music and poetry (Wagner 1849/2001: 4-9).

Even if the ideal of a total work of art (Gesamtkunstwerk) was not necessarily achieved, media scholar Friedrich Kittler (1993) locates Wagner’s music-theatre in the 1840s to 1870s as a predecessor of the modern PA sound system. Kittler’s definition of Wagnerian music-drama as a “mass media” invention emphasises the orchestra’s function as a kind of amplifier, creating feedbacks and reverberations that cannot be shut out by the ears. It is precisely the overwhelming of the audience’s senses through the “all pervasive power of sound” that Kittler sees as constituting a significant precursor to modern mass media (222). This new theory and practice of acoustics depended on the staging of echoes and breathing with the aid of an orchestra placed out of the audience’s sight. Kittler conceives this development in terms of an interconnected network:

The text is fed into the throat of a singer; the output of this throat is fed into an amplifier named orchestra, the output of this orchestra is fed into a light show, and the whole thing, finally, is fed into the nervous system of the audience. (233)

In other words, Wagner’s acoustics is posited as a media invention that employed a large, yet hidden orchestra to produce “acoustic hallucinations” and immerse the audience in reverberant sound.¹ This account thus determines a “total world” of hearing in the vocal and musical content of Wagnerian music-drama. Moreover, Kittler argues, its sensory overwhelming created an aesthetic experience that we may now see as a “prehistory” for present-day cinema.

This chapter takes Kittler’s enthusiastic reading of Wagner’s medial breakthrough Gesamtkunstwerk as a departure point. While Kittler highlights the role of Wagner’s operas as performing an acoustics that anticipated modern sound technologies and cinema, I will argue that a normative use of Wagner for the cinema often misread the concept of Gesamtkunstwerk in terms of an equal syn-
thesis of sound and image. I will start by delineating the appeal and pliability of this concept for early-twentieth-century film critics, who rarely acknowledged Wagner’s argument for an increased role for music over other elements. During National Socialism, in particular, the unity and synthesis associated with the *Gesamtkunstwerk* offered ideological currency as a metaphor for national community. I will thereby emphasise the concept of *Gesamtkunstwerk* in terms of its hierarchy of elements, the attempts to conceal its own mediality, and its controversial legacy for National Socialism.

Against this background, in this chapter I will investigate how, in the early twentieth century, cinema was conceived through specific metaphors of sound, such as *symphony*, *rhythm* and *harmony*. I will begin by noting the reaction against Wagnerian musical technique and *parallelism* as principles for sound in cinema during the 1920s. The concept of the “symphony” will be introduced as a means for examining the resulting avant-garde experiments in audio-visual *counterpoint*. For these purposes, I take the work of German filmmaker Walther Ruttmann as an illustrative case, with a particular focus on his pluralised, rhythmic portrayal of urban modernity in *Berlin: Symphony of a Great City* (1927). The “symphonic,” as I will argue, did not only involve counterpoint between audio and visual rhythms, but also a heightened medium awareness, as exemplified by the premiere of Ruttmann’s 1927 film. Ruttmann, who was also a prominent critic of the transition to film sound, provides a useful case for considering how (urban) sound was imagined across the silent and sound periods. Rhythm, in my account, is employed as a heuristic tool for pinpointing how Ruttmann’s avant-garde aesthetic increasingly integrated themes of urban control and a subdued soundscape following the Nazi takeover. My analysis shows that while Ruttmann sought to reclaim the symphonic, his earlier experiments with rhythmic counterpoint were replaced by a “postcard” aesthetic in his 1930s city films. In Ruttmann’s later films like *Kleiner Film einer großen Stadt … der Stadt Düsseldorf am Rhein* (1935), audio-visual rhythms were contained and harmonised. This predominantly visualist approach, as I will show, was defined by smooth transitions and musical illustrations that ultimately concealed the medium, in keeping with the synthesis ideal of the *Gesamtkunstwerk*.

Following this film analysis, I will concentrate on how a concept of rhythm was extended to cinema-going and the public space of exhibition during National Socialism, with the *Gesamtkunstwerk* ideal as a model for “rhythmic harmony” in the cinema. Cinema programming in the 1930s, as I will indicate, also drew on a multitude of sound media and advertising practices, which were understood as necessary for conditioning the cinema space and the spectator’s attention patterns. The rhetorics of (rhythmic) control I identify in Ruttmann’s later work are extended here to the stress on the projectionist for ensuring the smooth operation of live and multimedial elements in the cinema space, now designated in terms of festive gatherings of the German *Volksgemeinschaft* (national-racial community). My analysis will emphasise how sound was imbued with significant potential, but also posed a risk of rupture within both film production and exhibition, a condition that was exacerbated in the last years of World War II.

In the final section I will re-examine the claims to a *Gesamtkunstwerk* pur-
sued in Nazi cinema exhibition with the aid of a contemporary film, which challenges the ideology of synthesis or “synchronisation” as a metaphor for totalitarian control. This documentary film, titled *Hitler’s Hit Parade* (2003) adopts a structural principal of sonic continuity, with twenty-five hit songs played in full. In this case, I will draw on the notion of the “jukebox” for conceptualising the narrative organisation of these songs. The film’s jukebox structure, as I will show, is innovative in allowing for gramophone “noise” and, with it, historical contingency to be foregrounded. It also allows for the mobilisation of both parallelism and counterpoint, in order to achieve a “perceptual dissonance” that operates to re-sensitise audiences to audiovisual representations of the past. The film thereby transcends the opposition between Wagnerian parallelism and avant-garde counterpoint and with it, the traditional hierarchy between sound and image. The critical use of rhythm and (musical) sound in this film will be explored as a challenge to myths of media transparency as well as the perpetuation of visual representations of Nazism itself as totalitarian *Gesamtkunstwerk*.

**The Gesamtkunstwerk in Cinema**

According to the common understanding of the concept of *Gesamtkunstwerk*, Richard Wagner imagined a synthesis of the arts in music-drama. Indeed, the vagueness of the concept itself has led to divergent appropriations in both scholarly accounts and early commercial film practice. Its circulation since the nineteenth century could be described in terms of what theorist Mieke Bal (2002) has termed a “traveling concept.” Bal notes that the meanings of concepts are not static:

> They travel – between disciplines, between individual scholars, between historical periods, and between geographically dispersed academic communities. [...] These processes of differing need to be assessed before, during, and after each “trip.” (24)

This chapter will not trace the many twentieth-century projects that have used and adapted the idea of the *Gesamtkunstwerk*, a comparison that has almost become cliché (Flinn 1992: 48). Rather, I will begin by emphasising its general appeal for film critics and practitioners, before specifying its ideological currency in Germany from 1933 onwards.

Film scholar Scott D. Paulin contends that the status of music shifted in Wagner’s artistic work and theoretical writings. By 1870, Wagner argued that “the union of Music and Poetry must […] always end in […] a subordination of the latter” (quoted in Paulin 2000: 61). Over a period of time, therefore, Wagner gradually produced a privileged understanding of music’s place within his music-drama ideal. From 1900 onwards, theorists of silent film took a specific concept of the *Gesamtkunstwerk* to appeal to a general idea of synthesis, one which was initially based on the relationship of (visual) cinematic techniques and narrative. This position overlooked Wagner’s gradually increased role for music, by sug-
gesting that film sound be subservient and “fit” the image (Paulin 2000: 64). In fact, most claims made for early film sound as having an inherent relationship to the image never extended beyond a fuzzy notion of “appropriateness.” Among the possible explanations for the concept’s appeal, Paulin suggests that Wagner’s name offered a recognisable myth of origin for the cinema, which would associate the new medium with a pre-existing, high art form (68). This position thus aligned it with Wagner’s notion of a self-contained work produced by a single artist and simultaneously neglected the mass-produced nature of film as an assemblage of media forms. Paulin does not dispute Wagner’s influence, but attempts to displace his self-evident place in the history and theorisation of cinema, whether “silent” or with synchronised sound (72-76).

The Gesamtkunstwerk continued to grow in popularity from the late 1920s, with critics suggesting that sound films offered further possibilities for unifying image and sound. However, in the case of American cinema, the ideal of Gesamtkunstwerk was less an aesthetic aspiration than an attempt to attribute cultural distinction to the medium and harness profits. Claudia Gorbman (1987), for instance, has argued that film music is of a different order than music-drama because it mostly involves instrumental and non-texted composition. Within classical uses of film, music, even as leitmotiv, is not only relegated to the background, so to speak, but is most effective when unnoticed (1987: 73-80). The subordinated status of sound in cinema has led Michel Chion to polemically argue that “there is no soundtrack,” since the acoustic elements are usually broken up and reassembled on the image track (1999: 1-4). As a general rule, Chion asserts, film sound is used to provide “added value” when experiencing the images but has no independent status. Thus, while a theorist like Kittler is quick to accentuate the similarities between Wagnerian music-drama and cinema, the predominant historical understanding of sound within film discourse has focused on the contribution of composed scores and musical song as accompanying the visuals. Kittler reminds us, however, that the cinematic image-sound hierarchy was not inherent, but rather a historically contingent development within its technological and industrial history.⁵

Not only did Wagner’s aesthetic agenda shift with regard to the place of music in the Gesamtkunstwerk, but his own political allegiances and aspirations also altered during his career. Cultural historian Hannu Salmi (1999) has specified the diversity in Wagner’s thinking, despite the influential understanding of Wagner as a state supporter with “proto-fascist” politics.⁶ While Wagner took part in an anarchical uprising in 1849, Salmi notes, it was only in subsequent decades that his nationalist convictions were confirmed:

The idea of Gesamtkunstwerk emerged during Wagner’s anarchist period, but later he adapted his theory of art better to match the new political situation. A belief in art focusing on man’s inner regeneration, closely linked with a religious vision of art’s function, would be in harmony with the principle of monarchy. (79)
Even if his desire for state patronage proved unsuccessful, Wagner’s “national utopia,” as Salmi dubs it, maintained a vision of the possible fusion of arts and politics. This symbiotic understanding conceived art as moulding national culture, infusing it with myth and ceremony. The nation, in turn, would be channelled into the work of the artist. The fusion of the aesthetic and the political, consequently, would facilitate the German people’s spirit (Völksgeist) and provide the basis for national community.

Wagner’s views have thus not only been placed within a tradition of German romanticism, but also as part of a pernicious strand of German nationalism. His writings on the need for German culture, which have led to considerable scholarly debate, established a number of binary oppositions, most notably between the “German” and the “un-German,” a category that included foreigners and Jews (Large and Weber 1984; Rose 1992; Weiner 1995). Salmi emphasises that a distinction should be made between Wagner’s utopian project and Nazi doctrine, which conceived art as a mere tool of the state. It was long after Wagner’s death, for instance, that his legacy and the Bayreuth Festspielhaus were remoulded by his relatives, and established under National Socialism as an aesthetic justification for their aggressive model of German nationalism (Salmi 1988: 61, 178, 184-8). While Wagner’s writings should not be read as synonymous with the Nazi project, his romanticist conceptions of revolution, the German spirit, national culture and the importance of the artist for the state were easily realigned under a nationalist model. In other words, Wagner’s Gesamtkunstwerk ideal provided a useful metaphor for creating a new society that was supposedly unified and under “total” control.

Synchronised sound film, too, in unifying sound and image, was appropriated after 1933 as a prime example of the Wagnerian synaesthetic model for German nationalism. State control of the film industry was understood to be a constituent element for ensuring national unity, a trend which shows strong parallels to the progressive centralisation and nationalisation I discussed with regard to organised carnival celebrations in Chapter Two. The appeal to Wagner, however, was perhaps necessary for the establishment of cinema, which simultaneously drew on both popular and high art (musical) traditions (see Schulte-Sasse 1996; Petro 1998). The ambition to establish cinema as a palpable, synaesthetic spectacle also drew on Wagner’s belief that the Gesamtkunstwerk could restore the divide between the mind and the body. Sound and movement (comprising emotion) would be fused with language (rationality) (Salmi 1999: 77). This imagined unification of “hearts and minds” was thus transferred to cinema-going, as an event that would create shared sensory experience and thus a national public.

The persistent insistence on Wagner’s legacy for German sound cinema extended until the end of the Nazi era. Written during the early 1940s, Gottfried Müller’s Dramaturgie des Theaters und des Films preserves the nineteenth-century concept of the Gesamtkunstwerk as intrinsic to Germany’s cultural inheritance:

Like drama, which deals with plot and language, the sound film also has to achieve a picture effect and musical mood. The music’s contribution to the
film is as an indispensable creator of atmosphere. The sound film is a total work of art [Gesamtkunstwerk], just like Wagner’s music-drama, which connected language and music, gesture and rhythm in a unified way. With this total work of art, [...] Wagner conquered all people from all societal levels and all nations of the world.7

Müller mainly deals with the relationship between stage drama and sound film, taken from the perspective of dramaturgy.8 However, his contentions about the Gesamtkunstwerk are also transferred to the social level. Wagner’s writings are refashioned to address issues of social cohesion, with sound film offered as a cultural levelling agent and thus overriding societal or class divisions during National Socialism.

Wagner’s universalism, which originally positioned German art as a cultural benefactor, is reinterpreted here in terms of conquest, against the background of Germany’s imperialist war programme in this period.9 Music-drama, according to Müller’s reading, contributes to national culture by investing it with myth:

While the music drama is a festive art, as the embodiment of the national myth for important holidays, film is the stuff of everyday life, as a popular form of the music drama. [...] Only a total work of art [Gesamtkunstwerk] can be a true art of the people [Volkskunst]. It is directed towards all senses, is intelligible for everyone and requires no education. It is directed at the heart and not at the intellect. For a spoken performance, one needs a literary training, for a symphony you need musical training. [...] In this way the music drama is the folk art of the festival. Sound films are the folk art of everyday life, because they satisfy the eyes, the ears, the heart and the senses. The earlier low-entertainment forms of silent film, Tingel-Tangels and annual fairs offered too little authentic internal experience [inneres Erlebnis] in order to become true folk art forms. It was only with the technological possibility to seamlessly unite language-based drama, opera, ballet and symphonic music, in one art form, that film demonstrated itself as the heir to the theatre.10

In this account, cinema’s status as a mass art is not denied. Instead, emphasis is placed on the popular nature of cinema, which depends on unified sensory experience to contribute to the culture of the people (as Volkskunst). Cinema is thus presented as a cultural form accessible to all Germans, reflecting a rhetoric of social homogenisation and an idea of the festivalisation of the everyday as I outlined in Chapter Two. The main difference, however, is that while carnival is presented as an outward expression in public space, cinema is stressed as working on the level of “internal” or subjective experience. Indeed, Walter Benjamin observed during the 1930s that Erlebnis, as a singular event or experience, had usurped the earlier place of Erfahrung, where experience had involved a process with critical potential (1936/1999a: 83-107).11 In addition, Müller’s account implies that cinema’s success depended on concealing the medium and, as in Wagner’s vision for music-drama, ensuring that the audience member “forgets the confines of the auditorium” (Wagner 1849: 6). Thus, this idea of the Gesa-
cinema as a gesamtkunstwerk? is not only infused with myth and experience, but also underscores the potential for overwhelming cinema audiences in the dark, resounding auditorium, as suggested by Kittler.

Even though Müller affirms the notion of an equal unity of the various art forms, his argument also maintains a certain hierarchy: the early period of cinema was inhibited in its ability to appeal to the national spirit due to the absence of synchronised sound and its low-cultural status. Music, here, is given emphasis as a dominant element for cinema during the Third Reich, largely due to the guiding principal of rhythm:

Film drama is the most perfect fusion of image, language and music. Its script is the score of the total work of art [Gesamtkunstwerk] in which the action is conspicuously adjusted to the musical principles of timing and the logical mood created by the rhythm of the melody. [...] Just like the music, which is steered by its accompanying film image, the language and visuals achieve an urgent and convincing metaphysical significance through the accompanying music. The intentions of music drama were completely achieved with the creation of a moving and sounding film image. The total work of art is just as much in its higher form (as music-drama) as in its lower form (film) a product of the spirit of music.¹²

Sound film, in Müller’s account, represents a pinnacle in cultural achievement that effectively fulfilled Wagner’s ideal of the Gesamtkunstwerk with music as a dominant factor. As I noted earlier, the predominant use of Wagner for theorising cinema frequently misrepresents the subjugated status of sound in most cinema practice. In the case of Nazi cinema production, however, music was often given undue emphasis, particularly with the proliferation of musical and operetta genres (Koepnick 2002: 40-6; Wedel 2007). In this case, melodic timing is presented as the structuring principle for the other filmic elements. Although the concept of German music remains vague here, it is presented as integral to the sensory address to the audiences of both music-drama and the cinema. Film, therefore, is not only accessible and understood by all, but also lends itself to a concept of collective national audience.

While Wagner affirmed the role of the single genius artist in creating art for the nation, Müller adjusts its original contours to satisfy Nazi doctrine by presenting cinema as a collective project, where the artist belongs to an operation involving other artisans and workers (1942: 207). While, in some respects, the Nazi appropriation of the Gesamtkunstwerk idea for cinema does reflect Wagner’s increased role for music, his concept was thus adjusted to complement official ideological positions during the 1930s. In the following section, I will consider how music-influenced concepts like rhythm were configured across German silent and sound cinema. Through a reading of films by Walther Ruttmann, I seek to pinpoint some of the ways that these concepts were reoriented following the Nazi takeover in 1933.
Acoustic Metaphors: From Symphony to Postcard

There was an abundance of acoustic metaphors in German cinema during the 1920s and 1930s, in particular the notions of *symphony*, *melody* and *rhythm*. A *symphony* is a composition for a full orchestra in four main movements, while a *melody* refers to a less complex musical form, as a catchy sequence of notes that are pleasing to listen to. *Rhythm*, meanwhile, usually concerns the repetition of a (musical) pattern or sequence. This involves the division of musical events into regular pulsations, but such repetition can also vary or be pluralised.¹³

As Kurt London observed in *Film Music* (1936), European “silent” films in the 1920s increasingly adopted a symphonic structure, with the dramatic action usually following the sequence: Introduction – Main and subsidiary theme – Development – Recapitulation – Coda.¹⁴ The idea of rhythm, moreover, gained further momentum, particularly under the influence of Soviet montage techniques championed by Sergei Eisenstein. The rhythm of a film, as London wrote in 1936, was derived from the various elements in its dramatic composition, and the rhythm again is based on the articulation of the style as a whole. [...] If there was no rhythm at all in the film, the illustrator had it as his plain duty to trace and focus it by his music – to give the film, so to speak, a backbone by means of musical rhythm. (73)

London concedes that the rhythm of a film, while important to the dramatic action and style, had often been ignored in commercial film production. He cites Eisenstein’s *Potemkin* (1925) as an exceptional case where the musical score by Edmund Meisel made a successful contribution to the overall filmic rhythm and “achieved an overwhelming hold on the audience” (1936: 74). In other words, the notions of the symphony and rhythm are presented as aesthetic organising principles with the purpose of maintaining audience attention.

In Germany, the symphony and rhythm metaphors also proved popular for the avant-garde during the 1920s. In order to consider the contribution of acoustic metaphors across the silent and sound periods, I will examine the work of German filmmaker Walther Ruttmann. While Ruttmann was and still is best-known for his development of rhythmic montage in *Berlin: Die Sinfonie der Großstadt* (1927), his other work also explored acoustic metaphors for aesthetic and narrative effect. Ruttmann was by no means the only active member of the German avant-garde to explore rhythm and symphony motifs, yet he was one of the few to work in the German film industry for the majority of the Nazi period.¹⁵ My primary interest here is how Ruttmann foregrounded the intersection between rhythm, sound and urban space across the 1920s and 1930s. By focusing on *Kleiner Film einer großen Stadt … der Stadt Düsseldorf am Rhein* (1935), I will establish how Ruttmann’s earlier interest in sound aesthetics and rhythmic plurality was reoriented according to new political imperatives. In this film we can observe a clear shift in emphasis on the level of the soundtrack, from a counterpunctal to an illustrative score within the span of a few years. The portrayal of the
urban, moreover, is not only crucial in terms of the status of sound in Nazi cinema, but also underlines the attempts to tame the supposedly chaotic space of the modern metropolis, symbolised by its noisy sounds and unpredictable rhythms.

Writing in 1928, Ruttmann stressed that sound film could stage an interaction between listening and viewing experience in the cinema, with “optical-acoustic counterpoint, by playing visible and audible movements against each other” (Ruttmann 1929). This interest in the creative potential of synchronised film sound signals an attempt to dispense with a Wagnerian-inspired parallelism or a seamless fusion of sound and image. Perhaps the most emblematic use of counterpoint and acoustic metaphors in Ruttmann’s oeuvre can be found in his first two feature films, Berlin: Die Sinfonie der Großstadt (1927) and Melodie der Welt (1929). Both these films use acoustic metaphors in their titles as a frame for the narrative organisation of both visual and auditory rhythms.

Here, I will concentrate on Sinfonie der Großstadt, a silent film that depicts the urban metropolis from early morning until late evening. Its “symphonic” structure conforms to London’s outline by organising the day into five main temporal rhythms. Each of these five acts indicates the relationship of social activity to the space around it. These multiple rhythms, involving both cyclical routines and asynchronous events, are placed in relation to the linearity of industrial work time, as symbolised by the clock (see Thompson 1967). The various rhythms of the work day reflect Ruttmann’s conviction that modernity is a break with the past and speeds up temporality, most notably with communications media and the dissemination of information. This “oppressive overloading of sensations” results in heightened activity for the eye, which is increasingly forced to register temporal events (Ruttmann 1919-1920). The modern metropolis is thus constructed in the film as an unfolding series of present moments, which coincide but are not in opposition to various cyclical patterns (such as work and times of the day). These cyclical elements, as Derek Hillard indicates, are evidence of the ambivalent position Ruttmann takes with regard to modernity (2004: 91-2).

Sinfonie der Großstadt placed emphasis on rhythmic polyphony rather than trying to resolve or subdue rhythm into a regulated harmonic scheme. Edmund Meisel’s score established a film-specific composition for a full orchestra with sound-effect machines. Since Meisel’s main priority was to address “the city dweller and their environment,” he listened to the noisy sounds of the city and tried to feed this experience into the musical score. Meisel’s composition for Sinfonie der Großstadt thus attempted to find some continuum between the audience’s prior knowledge of the urban soundscape and the aesthetic reinterpretation of its sounds in the cinema. The use of recognisable sound effects and patterns was designed to prompt the audience’s acoustic recognition of their own urban experience (Uricchio 1989: 59). In fact, Meisel emphasised that these sounds be heightened during screenings: “In the moments when a total impression is absolutely necessary, parts of the orchestra will be positioned around the auditorium.” This use of surround sound in the cinema precisely suggests the staging of the multidirectional urban soundscape. While this “total” strategy may provoke associations with Wagner’s attempts at immersive acoustics, there are also some key differences. Meisel’s notion of creating a total experience foregrounds the
orchestra musicians, who were scattered around the auditorium in full view. Not only did Wagner try to conceal the workings of his music-theatre performance with a hidden orchestra, but his narratives have also been criticised for staging pastoral idylls untouched by modernity (Adorno 2005). Meisel’s concept, moreover, contributed to Ruttmann’s creative rendering of daily life in the city, rather than appealing to the mythical or melodramatic as in Wagner’s music-theatre.

Another important difference is that Meisel had collaborated with key proponents of montage and counterpoint, such as Eisenstein. The tradition of counterpoint, as Caryl Flinn has remarked,

upholds that music should be used in contrast to the image and should try to dispel any illusion of unity. In so doing, music would then expose – and exploit – cinema’s basic heterogeneity, not conceal or deny it as under parallelism. The disunified text, proponents contend, makes film consumption more active, and the “critical distance” it allegedly promotes is valued more highly than the passivity and immersion they believe characterize the auditor-text relations under parallelism. (1992: 46-7)

Despite their opposition to Wagnerian leitmotiv illustration, advocates of counterpoint, such as Eisenstein and composer Hanns Eisler, still endorsed a concept of cinematic rhythm based on certain correspondences between the visuals and the composed score (Flinn 1992: 47). Eisler opposed film music that was “a mere duplication, ineffective and uneconomical,” yet he did concede that image and sound “however indirectly or even antithetically, must correspond to each other” (Adorno and Eisler 1994: 3, 47). Correspondingly, Meisel’s score for Sinfonie der Großstadt was not completely counterpunctal since he also operated on the principle that the melody should be motivated by the film’s narrative content (van Domburg 1956: 52). Although the musical score does not play a completely independent role, it still represented an important contribution to the intensification of movement and rhythm, and his attempt to evoke the atmosphere of the urban soundscape.

The principle of creating a “symphony” or “melody” implies a process of aestheticisation and narrative organisation whereby musical sound (and sense) is created out of noise. Ruttmann’s symphony claims continued after 1933, but I will show that this involved a shift from its earlier, polyphonic definition. Working within the institutional framework of the Ufa cultural and advertising section, Ruttmann’s 1930s films offer insights into how earlier acoustic metaphors and aspects of avant-garde film aesthetics were reworked into non-fiction film production under National Socialism. Derek Hillard, for instance, notes that Ruttmann appropriated scenes from Sinfonie der Großstadt for his later film Blut und Boden (1933). A sequence from the earlier film about the theme of money displays the anxieties that persist in an urban setting without visually resolving them. Blut und Boden uses this very same footage to construct modernity and the big city as a space of decadence, economic ruin, and the potential threat that unchecked urbanity and racial downfall pose for the German people. (2004: 92)
In other words, Ruttmann’s film – made at the outset of the Third Reich – reorients an earlier ambivalence about the modern metropolis towards anti-urban discourse. By 1935, when Ruttmann began a series of city films about Stuttgart and Düsseldorf, there was a general trend of reinvesting in the city under National Socialism as a unified, conflict-free space. If the films of the Weimar period created a mode of address concerned with individual subjectivity and sensory experience, there is clearly an increased emphasis on the formation of community and reducing the shocks of the modern under National Socialism (Carter 2004). I will pay particular attention to attempts to reclaim the “symphony” metaphor during Nazism, alongside the suggestion that Ruttmann’s city films express a “postcard-like” notion of the city. My claim will be that this “postcard” aesthetic pushed sound to the margins and contributed to the ideology of organic wholeness that – in keeping with the Gesamtkunstwerk ideal – reflects an attempt to conceal these films’ mediated status.

When interviewed by a magazine in August 1935, Ruttmann gave a detailed account of his upcoming film Kleiner Film einer großen Stadt. Emphasising the importance of the genre of the short Kulturfilm (cultural film), Ruttmann described this project as a “symphonic impression of Düsseldorf” (“Kleiner Film” 1935). Ruttmann reinforces his own role in mediating the essence of the city, noting that:

For me Düsseldorf is a special concept: a concept that I have viewed, palpably sensed, compiled, experienced. I have [created] a special urban perspective of this city. [...] In this film, Düsseldorf speaks for itself.25

Even though Ruttmann goes on to describe the rhythmic composition of the film narrative, this statement implies that the visual and auditory composition will synthesise various aspects of Düsseldorf into a “total” rhythmic concept. Firstly, the influence of the general Wagnerian ideal of synthesis is reinforced in Ruttmann’s subsequent listing of the entire succession of shots in his fifteen-minute film. His superlative-laden descriptions of the film’s symphonic narrative are marked by his repeated reference to “blending” or cross-fading techniques. Secondly, the artist as a creative individual – prefigured in Wagner’s writings – is realigned in the context of National Socialism, with a parallel drawn to the worker’s physical labour. The interviewer stresses Ruttmann as a creative artist, with particular reference to his hands (“that are always creating”) and eyes (“that want to register everything optically”). Ruttmann, moreover, is portrayed as a kind of camera machine, a restless artist whose roaming documentary eye is likened to that of “an explorer or treasure hunter.”26 Thus, even though Ruttmann invokes the symphony metaphor here, his work is primarily situated in terms of the visual track. Ruttmann is praised for his “eye” and suggested to be visually mediating the rhythm and experience of the city for the audience.27

The reorientation of acoustic metaphors in favour of claims about direct experience based on the visual are, in part, due to the truth claims of the Kulturfilm genre. The Kulturfilm was an educational genre, usually used to impart information about natural science and society with an instructive voice-over.28 Even
though Ruttmann is positioned as the agent mediating the city, he stressed that it was Düsseldorf that would “speak” for itself by way of an integrated rhythm of sound and image. In this account, Düsseldorf is almost personified as a living organism with various energies and events channelled through it. While its status as city advertisement film suggests a straightforward form of tourism promotion, Ruttmann asserts that *Kleiner Film einer großen Stadt* is different since it is “not a picture postcard album, [there is] no voice of God offering an ‘explanation’” (“Kleiner Film” 1935). However, the rejection of the “postcard” moniker deserves some consideration, since it has a bearing on how Ruttmann’s film is situated as achieving direct experience for its audience due to its appeal to multiple senses. The postcard album suggests a series of disconnected photographs of city locations: images that would not be dynamic enough to “speak” to the audience, let alone imply a direct access to the city’s essence or flavour. Moreover, the postcard appears here as a synecdoche for crass commercial culture, whereas tourist activity under National Socialism needed to be imbued with positive associations, and even constructed as an act of national duty (Rieger 2005: 158–92).

The dismissal of the postcard album notion and claims about his films as unified, harmonious wholes raises the question of how the various rhythms of Düsseldorf are organised within Ruttmann’s film. *Kleiner Film einer großen Stadt* still shares certain trademarks of Ruttmann’s earlier style in that it alludes to the micro and macro rhythms constituted by everyday life and major events in the city. Each vignette presents a different path of movement or theme of activity in the city, and the film interweaves various temporal and spatial planes. The film is temporally framed by events across a whole year: it begins with the carnival season opening around January and spans to St Martin’s Day in November. These traditional customs, repeated each year, suggest both a cyclical rhythm and a sense of permanence under Nazism. There are no asynchronous rhythms to disrupt this portrayal of Düsseldorf, such as the strikes, street disturbances and social divides alluded to in *Sinfonie der Großstadt*. The linear temporal scheme that emerges in *Kleiner Film einer großen Stadt* is predicated on creating a connection with the historical past, which ensures a basis for the meaning derived from the present. The linear relation to the past is included in the chronological depiction of “great men” from Düsseldorf’s history, ending with Albert Leo Schlageter in the twentieth century. The film confirms this temporal axis with historical locations such as the medieval ruins in Kaiserswerth and Benrath Castle. The geographical features of the city are also established with depictions of both older and modern architecture, monuments and the Rhine River.

The city itself is portrayed as innocuous and under control, with its cyclical, temporal and spatial coordinates in place. The stress on cyclical patterns and historical “tradition” reflects the effort to naturalise social changes following 1933, which also led to a calendar filled with new and appropriated events, whether celebratory or commemorative, and the attempted festivalisation of the everyday. Moreover, this depiction of the Nazi present as an unchanging, stabilised realm was possibly an attempt to allay concerns about the political disruptions produced by the 1933 takeover and the violent power struggles within the party during 1934. This effort to soften the impact of National Socialism resulted in
an absence of explicit symbols or uniformed members of the Nazi movement, which I will discuss shortly.

Given Ruttmann’s active interest in the possibilities of sound montage and counterpoint in the 1920s, his symphony principle was partially revised under Nazism. While the use of acoustic metaphors in Ruttmann’s previous work sometimes tended towards an aestheticised urbanity, he nonetheless made a concerted effort to incorporate a range of tonalities derived from the city soundscape and the everyday. By contrast, Kleiner Film einer großen Stadt only employs two short sequences with diegetic sound for its opening scene (carnival) and its closing scene (St Martin’s Day). To take the first instance, the opening sequence, the diegetic voice of a carnival washtub speaker proclaims that the crowds should be merry.31 The viewer is then placed in the crowd, amongst the Düsseldorfers, situated within a ritual expression of community. However, we do not hear the noisy cheers of the crowd, calling out “Helau.” Instead, these newsreel-style sequences are only accompanied by light instrumental music. Despite the absence of diegetic sound in these first scenes, the film immediately recovers any sense of alienation in the city, by emphasising it as communal space. A sense of eventfulness is created by the rapid cross-cutting, with footage of confetti, streamers, costumed carnivalists, crowds swaying, cartwheels and the street parade.32 At the same time, the status of the carnival event is endowed with tradition and an assertion of the city space as a familiar Heimat, even at night time.33 Indeed, the final scene of the film also employs diegetic sound and creates a sentimental understanding of the city as Heimat. This scene depicts groups of children in a nighttime St Martin’s parade with paper lanterns. Their almost inaudible voices can be heard singing, before candies are thrown to them by Düsseldorf Lord Mayor Hans Wagenführer, who is situated as a benevolent authority figure and representative guardian of the city. A sense of organic wholeness is produced by the narrative span of the film from day to evening, and across a whole year of events.

In contrast to the contrapunctal effects of Sinfonie der Großstadt, Ruttmann’s film about Düsseldorf primarily deploys instrumental music as “Untermalung” or illustration. In other words, music takes on a supportive or “connective” (verbindend) function, as one reviewer described Werner Schütze’s score (“Weltauflührung” 1935). This use implies the idea that the music should not complicate or interfere with the visual narrative organisation, thus allowing for the image track to assert a direct experience of the city. In this case, then, the soundtrack comes to reflect what Chion has dubbed “added value”:  

Added value is what gives the (eminently incorrect) impression that sound is unnecessary, that sound merely duplicates a meaning which in reality it brings about, either all on its own or by discrepancies between it and the image. (1994: 5)

This principle marks a contrast to the use of music and sound in Sinfonie der Großstadt to foreground the modern experience of fragmentation, distraction and sensorial stimulation. The technique of counterpoint was offered as a method for highlighting the cinematic medium and dispensing aspirations associated
with the Gesamtkunstwerk. Kleiner Film einer großen Stadt marks a subduing of the urban soundscape and its people, and excludes any asynchronous rhythms.

This context requires further investigation of the claim that Kleiner Film einer großen Stadt would not be like a postcard album. While Ruttmann insists that the symphony structure and use of fade-outs in editing create a sense of narrative unity, I contend that the notion of the “picture postcard album” mentioned earlier may, in fact, be apt for the Düsseldorf film. While the subject matter of Düsseldorf offers a unifying thematic for the various image sequences, the picture postcard aesthetic could be said to apply to the filming of the tourist sights presented in the film. In one of the first sequences, the camera pans revolving bust heads of “great men” of Düsseldorf’s history, before casting its gaze above the Albert Leo Schlageter cross, an image that itself featured on countless postcard reproductions during the 1920s and 1930s.34 The close-up of Schlageter’s name and the subsequent pan up the monument are suggestive of how the eyes might scan a still image or postcard. This picture postcard theme is also established by a mode of positioning audience members as potential tourists as they enter the city by train. Filmed from the perspective of a passenger, passing images of tulips and fields are shown, and tea is served in the train carriage, followed by a dramatic flourish for the appearance of the Rhine. While some critics have theorised the earlier opening train scene in Sinfonie der Großstadt in terms of the shock of modern urban experience and migration (Kaes 1998), train travel is reconceived here as part of a sanitised everyday, narrating the “panoramic” experience of tourists entering the city via the comfort of passenger trains (Schivelbusch 1979: 57-71).

The presentation of the city for the consumption of tourists is further suggested by a subsequent scene that runs through the leisure activities and sights (Sehenswürdigkeiten) on offer in Düsseldorf. The camera introduces the viewer to panoramic views of various architectural icons in Düsseldorf: from the medieval “Castle Tower” (Schlossturm) over the old houses of the old city and its laneways, past the Bismarck monument at the “Hindenburgwall,” on to the new central train station, the Wilhelm Marx office tower, and the city music hall (Tonhalle). The unified depiction of these sites as quintessential to Düsseldorf bears a certain similarity to the 1934 carnival poster discussed in Chapter Two, which presented these same iconic buildings as being “under one hat.”35 Moreover, these short sequences impressionistically fuse the subjective point of view of someone on the street or in a tram with an aerial or bird’s eye view over the city that is presumed to be objective. This perspective infers control through an omnipotent perspective, offering the viewing audience a sense of freedom of movement as well as a panoptic gaze over the inner city (Foucault 1977: 195-230).

The stress on narrative congruity implies that there should be no ambiguity in the presentation of the city. The reluctance to reveal ambivalence or anxiety about the city is reflected in the fact that Sinfonie der Großstadt was rarely shown after 1933. Film critics in the 1940s noted that Ruttmann’s 1927 film about Berlin had “no plot” (keine Spielhandlung).36 While this same phrase had been employed as a positive attribute in the film’s promotional material in 1927, the supposed lack of a clear plot or intertitles was a cause for criticism during
the Nazi era (“Berlin” 1927: 2). *Kleiner Film einer großen Stadt*, as I have suggested, created postcard-like compositions, yet Ruttmann continued to draw on his earlier symphony concept, which foregrounded audiovisual rhythm. The resulting tension that emerges in Ruttmann’s Düsseldorf film is one between visual movement and stasis. The status of *Kleiner Film einer großen Stadt* as (tourist) promotion required the camera to linger long enough to allow the city’s architectural, historical and cultural icons to be visually registered: hence the postcard aesthetic. However, Ruttmann’s own film aesthetic encouraged movement and a rhythmic organisation of the visual composition and its musical accompaniment.

We can gain some further insight into the need for “risk minimisation” in Ruttmann’s filmic representation of the city as tourist destination. Following the 1935 premiere of *Kleiner Film einer großen Stadt*, a reviewer praised Ruttmann’s editing and smooth transitions as making voice-over or diegetic speech unnecessary, since all viewers can easily follow the narrative chain of events. While the review praises the film as achieving effective transitions with fade-outs, an awkward scene change is noted between the first scene with carnival masks to that of death masks of Düsseldorf’s historical figures. The rupture in narrative rhythm noted by the reviewer was, in fact, due to the censoring of the film by the Berlin Film-Prüfstelle several days before the premiere.

Ruttmann’s earlier films had typically sought similarities in structural form as a mode of transition between scenes. In this case, however, the fade-out from a carnival mask to death masks was censored as inappropriate. While only three metres of film were removed, the resulting lack of continuity was subsequently perceived to be somewhat jarring and abrupt, despite Ruttmann’s rhetoric about producing a symphonic experience of unmediated access to the city.

The “postcard” aesthetic outlined above reflects the attempt to bring diffuse aspects of the city together in a unified manner: not only to promote Düsseldorf as a centre of arts, culture and industrial production, but to assert its national ideological significance (as symbolised by the Schlageter monument). The aestheticisation of modernity in Nazi filmmaking is also a strategy to defuse earlier anxieties about the urban metropolis. Since the Düsseldorf film was a product of (local) government-sponsored advertising, it tried to cast its net wide and offer something for everyone, particularly for potential tourists. For this reason, it should be kept in mind that some of the generic aspects of the city advertising and tourism film also predated National Socialism. Nonetheless, the Düsseldorf film was clearly in line with Third Reich “lifestyle propaganda” that provided audiences with the visually pleasurable experience of an aestheticised rendering of the city. In other words, although some aspects of *Kleiner Film einer großen Stadt* may have been deemed risky or inappropriate, the overall emphasis of the film is a coherent synthesis of the city’s rhythm or essence, based on historical continuity, spatial control and a unified community (*Volk*).

*Kleiner Film einer großen Stadt* marks a contrast to the material discussed in my earlier chapters, which elaborated on how the radio broadcasts of cultural events like carnival or the Schlageter commemoration included the sounds of large gatherings in both urban and indoor settings. In contrast to these radio broadcasts and mass events, Ruttmann’s film significantly reduced the audibility...
of the soundscape and diegetic voice in favour of an orchestral score underscoring an image-based representation of the city. Ruttmann’s use of music as illustration reflects a prevailing aesthetic of the score as light-hearted accompaniment that reduces musical complexity. The status of sound as “added value,” in this case, is underpinned by the idea that neither music nor voice-over should complicate or interfere with the visual narrative organisation. While voice-over was usually used in Kulturfilm production to provide narrative information, in Kleiner Film einer großen Stadt it was deemed unnecessary due to the accessible narrative provided by the visuals. The notion during National Socialism that language and visuals only required the musical score to lend “metaphysical significance” (Müller 1941) is contrary to Ruttmann’s earlier insistence on the necessity of counterpoint, which precluded a doubling up or repetition of meaning by acoustic and visual elements.

My discussion has drawn on Ruttmann to suggest how experimental uses of sound and acoustic metaphors for meditations on the modern metropolis were reoriented in line with ideological projections onto the city as a site of historical tradition and social harmoniousness. In what follows, this textual analysis of acoustic metaphors will be extended, as I seek to ground my understanding of film sound within the space of cinema exhibition. Here, I will take particular note of how the notion of “rhythmic harmony” in Nazi film texts was extended to the reorganisation of cinema spaces and exhibition practices in the mid-1930s. The ongoing potential of sound as a form of disruption or attentional distraction, however, will be offered as a counter-example to Nazi claims about the cinema as achieving a seamless Gesamtkunstwerk.

Rhythmic Harmony: Sound as a Controlled Event

In the beginning of this chapter, I drew on Friedrich Kittler’s interpretation of the Wagnerian Gesamtkunstwerk as offering a prehistory to amplification and, ultimately, to the sound film. According to this account, the darkened space of the cinema, with its concealment of sound and projection equipment created a medium that could potentially overwhelm the senses of the audience. The predominant use of the concept of Gesamtkunstwerk during National Socialism, as I suggested, followed the version whereby music had an amplified role in producing sonic affect, particularly with orchestral score and popular “hit” songs. According to film scholar Lutz Koepnick, the frequent attempts to overwhelm the audience by way of a “cinema of sonic attractions” were successful in reorienting cinematic desire and pleasure according to German culture and identity (2002: 47). Moreover, the Gesamtkunstwerk lent aesthetic and political justification to the diverse sounds and musical traditions included under the rubric of “national cinema” under National Socialism (Hake: 2001). However, unlike Wagner’s Bayreuth festival – in a single venue and presided over by the composer himself – cinema concerned an industrial enterprise involving multiple authors and media, economic factors and varied reception sites (Paulin 2000: 72, 76; Koepnick 2002: 47).
In what follows, I will focus on the specific space of the cinema and its sound-related exhibition practices of the 1930s and 1940s. The ongoing influence of Wagner, as I will indicate, concerns the conception of the cinema in terms of the controlled event. While this compound might seem like a contradiction – since the event is often unpredictable and difficult to control – cinema practices were regulated through increasing standardisation. The cinema context, I argue, was not only invested with the ideal of the unified Gesamtkunstwerk, to imply a unified national (musical) culture and people; it sought to also achieve this through rhythmic harmony. Rhythmic harmony, as Erica Carter coins the term, concerns the temporal and spatial reordering of cinema experience following 1933 (2004: 84-107). Carter points out that Nazi film critics also drew on the earlier explorations of filmic rhythm in the 1920s. In this earlier understanding, film could represent the urban experience of modernity in terms of counterpoint, a frenetic pace and irregular rhythms. Where rhythm, in the past, had been used to emphasise the shock of the modern and its impact on the individual subject, it was now reformulated as an intrinsic organic element for achieving identification and the experience of belonging to a unified Volk community. The reconceptualisation of cinema spectatorship under National Socialism was thus conceived in terms of a cinema of experience that would entertain and dazzle, but also employ a controlled rhythmic pace.

The designation of the cinema as a harmonious, communal experience for the German Volk was offered to configure a break from an idea of Weimar cinema as divisive and controversial. However, the notion of a national cinema was not new, and had gained currency in Germany during debates about national markets and import quotas in the 1920s. The cinema space had already developed as a collective experience during this period, particularly with the construction of large cinemas with between one and five thousand seats. The cinema’s increasing popularity was, for a large part, based on the bourgeois respectability and cultural distinction attained with plush interiors, comfortable seating and (orchestral) musical performance. The wiring of cinemas with standardised sound equipment during 1930 and 1931, moreover, led to another wave of cinema upgrades. The Apollo Theatre in Düsseldorf, for instance, underwent a full-scale renovation involving sound equipment and acoustic insulation, but also a coloured light installation, and a “modern” streamlined facade and interior.

Indeed, such cinemas were presented to audiences as spaces for experiencing modern technology, design and luxury for a small fee. During the 1930s, then, cinemas were “not just places to show films; they were celebrated as spectacles of consumption in themselves.” In other words, it was often large-scale cinemas and their technological novelties that were advertised as much as the films screened. The foregrounding of cinema technology and interiors implies a medium awareness that (to some degree) departs from Wagner’s efforts to conceal his uses of technology. In other respects, however, the effort during National Socialism to establish a “correct” time-space staging in cinema programming is highly indebted to the Gesamtkunstwerk ideal. This ideal implied a coordinated and smooth transition between elements, and consequently, an orchestration of spectator emotion. Sound, as I will try to demonstrate now, was identified as a...
key factor in maintaining audience attention patterns, but also posed potential risk in terms of an oversaturation or rupture in cinematic experience.

One of the attempts to introduce a principle of controlled “eventness” into the cinema can be found soon after the Nazi takeover, with special screenings and premieres held for a raft of film releases with heroic themes, such as *Blutendes Deutschland* (1932) or *Morgenrot* (1933). These films were in production before January 1933, but were framed during exhibition in terms of national revolution. The exhibition of such films emphasised the cinema as a location for experiencing and simultaneously participating in current affairs, with an interplay between live and mediated programming, as well as between contemporary events and the historical past. For example, prior to a screening of a historical martyr film, *Der Rebell* (1932), SA and SS groups had marched through the streets of Düsseldorf to the Apollo Theatre (Genandt n.d.). After a party member’s prologue praising “national revolution,” a newsreel prior to the screening showed a torchlight procession through Düsseldorf for the commemoration of war dead in March 1933.49 Following the programme, the same units marched out of the cinema and around the inner city of Düsseldorf in formation. Such examples indicate how a continuum was established between political events in the outside world and those screened in the cinema during the first months of 1933, in a similar fashion to the feedback relation between radio and broadcast soundscape discussed in Chapter One. Singing, marching, brass band music and banners, in particular, were thus common features in reinforcing the activities of the party onscreen, inside the cinema, and in the urban space outside it.50 Nonetheless, after the initial impulse of the so-called “Kampfzeit” (struggle era) films, the Nazi Party leadership became more cautious about endorsing explicit political features.51 This trend indicated the emergence of a discourse of restraint with regard to the receptivity of cinema audiences to propaganda.

The need for a time-space harmonisation of the cinema under National Socialism was sought in terms of establishing standardised exhibition practices, particularly given the ongoing potential for sound problems in the first years after the sound-on-film transition. There was a strong sense that sound aesthetics were still being developed in 1933, and commentators focused on the importance of getting the sound right. Some of the production problems included the sound of wind in outdoor recordings, post-synchronisation discrepancies, and volume or sound mixing (Lichtveld 1933: 30-5).52 One complaint was that there was no auditory equivalent of the visual close-up, as it usually involved the cutting out of all other ambient sound from a scene. Indeed, as the author of a 1933 book on sound film advised, audiences were adept at picking up such sound problems, since they could detect synchronisation differences as little as one-twentieth of a second, particularly with the projection of speech and singing.53 These sound recording problems notwithstanding, a number of reforms were enforced in order to organise the temporal-spatial coordinates of cinema spectatorship and boost attendance figures.54

One of the main interventions in the temporal ordering of the programme was based on keeping the strict order of the newsreel, *Kulturfilm* and main feature. In keeping with the Wagnerian notion of structural unity, there was a determined ef-
fort for film sound to help create a sense of an organic whole in cinema programming, rather than a piecemeal sequence of various cinematic events. In the case of newsreel production, Joseph Goebbels reinforced the discourse of restraint, insisting that this genre should not be employed to “always beat the drums. [...] [Then] the public will slowly get used to sound and then fail to hear it” (quoted in Hoffmann 1996: 193). The success of the newsreel is conceived here in terms of the audience’s limited listening attention for repetitive sounds. While the newsreel after 1933 remained primarily a vehicle for showcasing the sound and images of the state, this observation does indicate a concern with restraint in its narrative composition.

Hans Weidemann, vice president of the Reich Film Chamber, also conceded in late 1935 that there were new efforts to change the tone of the German newsreel. In the past, Weidemann claimed, newsreels were characterised by long titles, repetitive texts, wordy commentary and sedate music. Now, rather than give unnecessary explanation, the images of “an event somewhere, such as a celebration or in an old city” would be accompanied by a single, enthusiastic statement: “That is the beauty of Germany!” (So schön ist Deutschland!) (“Die Erneuerung” 1935). An overloading of cinema audiences could be avoided, as Weidemann suggests, as long as voice-over and text did not repeat what was already conveyed by the newsreel images. The article not only puts forward a caution about maintaining listener attention, but also indicates the necessity for the perception of structural unity between the various filmic elements.

The argument about sonic restraint and correct temporal pacing can also be found in Kulturfilm productions that experimented with new sonic elements. A 1935 film made by the National Socialist welfare organisation NSV tried to reintroduce the Greek chorus (Sprechchor) in order to offer effective narrative commentary in mass scenes. This attempt to re-establish dramatic elements within the film diegesis reflects the more general organisation of the cinema according to a “dramaturgical” concept (Hake 2001: 71; Carter 2004: 89). According to this understanding, the organisation of the cinema programme would be similar to the experience of the mass rally, which gradually built up suspense over the course of several hours. In other words, the notion of the controlled event within large gatherings or theatre performance was extended to the cinema space.

The role of sound in the cinema was not only considered within the film soundtrack itself, but also as a tool for setting a favourable mood and maintaining audience attention within the cinema space. I will stress that the perceived need to condition the cinema with sound demonstrates an overlap between ideological and commercial impulses to present the cinema as a controlled space as well as a spectacle of consumption. Put another way, the cinema space itself was not only subject to government ordinances and coercion, but was also motivated by commercial profit-making. For this reason, I am interested in how a discourse of restraint about film sound had its counterpart in cinema advertising and sonic marketing strategies.

One of the main ways identified for bridging potential gaps between the different parts of the programme was to play gramophone records or even radio broadcasts over the cinema speaker system. A 1935 article in Film-Kurier em-
phased the importance in using sound to condition the space of the theatre for
the audience. The critic suggested that music be played in the intermission or at
the start of the programme (while the lights were still on). Slides without their
own speech record were described as “dead” advertising images, since the audi-
ence had grown to perceive sound as an “essential part” of the cinema experience
(“Schallplatte” 1935: n. pag.). The gramophone record is, consequently, cited as
an important part of the programme. The projectionist or theatre owner can play
film music from upcoming features with image slides or can make microphone an-
nouncements as preview advertising (Vorpropaganda) for the cinema schedule. The
actions of the cinema employee are described as follows:

He places the record, so to say, as a musical flea in the ear of the audience. [...] The
effect is remarkable: once they have heard the music from a new film on
one or more times, and know the main melody, it will appeal to them more
easily – by immediately jumping from the film into the ear, it will now be
recognised more consciously [by the audience].

This description puts forward a parasitic concept of how hit songs can circulate
and promote new films, not unlike that of the “ear worm” (Ohrwurm). The
ear worm usually refers to a melody that has a catchy or memorable quality
(Sacks, 2007; Goodman 2008). Whether this catchy tune is consciously listened
to or not, songs from upcoming features could be used to favourably condition
the cinema space before and between the main programme elements. The use of
gramophone records under National Socialism comprised an “indirect” market-
ing method, since almost all commercial advertising was banned from the cinema
in 1934 and from radio in 1936. Yet, this example indicates how acoustic mar-
keting strategies in this period reflect a significant overlap between commercial
concerns and ideological discourses about a spectatorship based on the cinema
as controlled event.

In keeping with the ideal of Gesamtkunstwerk, the use of records in the cin-
ema is described in the Film-Kurier article as essential for the smooth transition
between programme elements. The projectionist is also encouraged to install a
switch in the booth, so that the records can be easily announced to the audience
by microphone. The projectionist should be attuned to sound quality and realise
that the same stack of records can not be played repeatedly, as

scratched, old, worn-out records will have the opposite effect than one in-
tends: they will quickly drive the audience out of the cinema. There has to
be variety, with something new always being offered. (“Schallplatte” 1935)

In other words, the role of gramophone records in the cinema is central to its
functioning and should not be perceived as a “superfluous additional element”
(unwesentliches Nebenbei). The ultimate effect of presenting mediated music and
voice over the microphone is that it enhances the liveness and thus the eventness
of the cinema space. This is also suggested by the critic’s final comment that the
end result of gramophone playing is more like that of a musical “concert,” which
would give the public an incentive to come early to the cinema.
This issue not only reflects on the use of sound technologies for marketing and conditioning the space of the cinema. It also highlights the designation of the projectionist as a key figure in ensuring easy transitions between elements and ultimately, “rhythmic harmony.” The projectionist was thereby cast as an important agent in achieving a coherent, harmonious programme for cinema audiences during National Socialism. A 1941 instruction handbook for film professionals also emphasises the role of the projectionist in the success of the film programme. According to the handbook, the projectionist should be mindful of volume control and use a double gramophone turntable for the correct fading in and out of records, microphone voice and radio (Rutenberg and Strödecke 1941). Once again, the projectionist is urged to show restraint by choosing “appropriate” (sinngemäß) records for the programme and to avoid the overstimulation of the audience (135). One of the skills that this beginner’s handbook tries to impart to projectionists is the ability to hear the cause of technical problems, thus emphasising the importance of listening skills for detecting problems quickly.

The stress on the importance of the film projectionist does not only suggest empty rhetoric or a justification of a relatively new profession. These examples also establish the projectionist as a figure of control within the organisation of the cinema. The projectionist is offered here as a masculine figure, not unlike the discourses surrounding the sound engineer (Tonmeister) and the theatre manager in the same period. The predominant understanding of the projectionist as a multi-tasker helped to sustain the idea that the cinema programme could be staged like a synaesthetic Gesamtkunstwerk. According to this understanding, an experience of rhythmic harmony in the cinema could be established through the projectionist’s careful staging of acoustic and visual elements. Indeed, the concept of the projectionist as all-hearing and managing the smooth progression of the cinema programme is, again, underpinned by a Wagnerian concept of the unified theatrical space.

The investment in the cinema space in terms of Gesamtkunstwerk discourses and the gathering of national Volk community were given new impetus with the outbreak of World War II in 1939. The earlier fears of audience overstimulation were overruled as the theme of military victory dominated newsreel programming and a new raft of political films. The newsreel doubled in length, but remained as silent film footage with commentary and music added in postproduction. Bombastic sounds were played throughout the newsreel, including the campaign theme songs from Sondermeldungen that I introduced in Chapter Three. The heightened emphasis on sonic events in the cinema is also suggested by the attempt to merge the respective public spheres of radio and cinema. The transmission of radio broadcasts in the cinema had occurred occasionally in the 1930s, as a way to situate the cinema as participating in a live event of national congregation. This national concept of the cinema space, moreover, was further politicised as “Aryan” during the 1930s, particularly following the banning of Jews from cinema screenings from 1938 onwards.

The resurgence in Gesamtkunstwerk discourses during World War II can also be traced to the commercial uses of colour film in German cinema. Between 1941 and 1944, in a period when most major German cities were subject to air
raid campaigns, a number of films reinvoked the “symphony principle” I discussed earlier with regard to Ruttmann. These films returned to the possibility of harmonising the city as in the pre-war period, as represented in the cinematic interplay of sound and image. The motif of the rhythm and melody of the city is variously approached in *Zwei in einer grossen Stadt* (1942), *Die Goldene Stadt* (1942), *Großstadtmelodie* (1943), along with the post-war release *Symphonie einer Weltstadt* (1943/53). Even though the reality of bombed-out cities offered a stark contrast, these films primarily depicted the urban environment of the pre-war years, when the city was still unharmed. They reinstated the postcard aesthetic I discussed earlier, with a visually controlled presentation of the citiescape and a prominent use of panorama shots.

The notion of the symphonic or melodic was extended to sound more generally for a 1944 cultural film titled *Wunder des Klanges*. This title refers to the “magic” of sound and the listening experience. A reviewer noted that the film offers a particular achievement in liberating film sound from the image, as the composition was written before the filming took place. Sound, in this film, is not dictating the image, but rather the two interact as equal agents: “the image supports the music and lends it visual life” (“Musik” 1944). The film, in other words, tries to invest sound and its visible effects with positive associations. The necessity for recuperating sound as a positive category in the cinema can be attributed to its disruptive potential during war, when (outdoor) sounds were difficult to manipulate in accordance with an ideal of the controlled event. In the case of urban cinemas, unexpected or disruptive sounds included special (*Sondermeldungen*) or emergency (*Drahtfunk*) broadcasts, air raid sirens and bomb attacks. There may also have been a shift in attitude towards the darkened space of the cinema, which had been conceived as a site conducive to national fantasy. As I suggested in Chapter Three, the experience of being in the dark, now compulsory due to the “blackout” policy and air raids, had gained negative associations. The usually-darkened cinema, now interrupted by alarm sounds, was also a violable and potentially unsafe place.

The status of sound as a form of disruption or attentional distraction during World War II would thus suggest a counter-example to continued Nazi claims about the cinema as Gesamtkunstwerk. Even though cinema attendance levels remained high throughout 1942 and 1943, various accounts suggest a growing reluctance to seeing war-related footage in the cinema. In response to audiences avoiding the newsreels, a “locked-door” policy was introduced in order to ensure that audiences remained inside for the entire programme. Following the release of newsreels about Stalingrad in February 1943, the newsreel became an “object of ridicule” (Hoffmann 1996: 232). In other words, even if the films of these last war years created colourful synaesthetic spectacles, the exhibition conditions reflected a less than ideal environment for this reception. In addition to increased work hours and reduced leisure time, wartime conditions also obstructed the mass consumption that much German filmmaking had appealed to during the 1930s. Cinema may have still involved the consumption of spectacle and desire, but war sounds also disrupted attention patterns and the cinema as a unified space. In cities like Düsseldorf, the cinema did not even really exist as a public
space after 1943, and most (although not all) cinemas were subject to closures in the last war years (Schäfer 1982: 38). Thus, even though the city films of the early 1940s reinvoked the symphony principle, this representation was nothing less than virtual when set against the intrusive sounds of the wartime soundscape.

In other words, the cinema space was initially conceived as a site for rhythmic harmony and the congregation of the German Volksgemeinschaft, aided by sound practices that could create smooth transitions and modulate audience attention. Sound, as I have argued, created the risk of disruption, particularly when set against the sonic background of air attacks and sirens in World War II. The rupturing of the illusion that sound and image are unified, a process termed “synchronisation” by Chion, implies an increased medium sensitivity (1994: 63-71). It is this relation of sounds to the audience’s heightened awareness of the cinematic medium that I will continue to explore in the next section, from the perspective of contemporary documentaries about National Socialism. While 1930s films like Kleiner Film einer großen Stadt subjugated the soundtrack as a supportive element, I will investigate how audiovisual rhythm and a film soundtrack without voice-over can be mobilised to critique Nazi aesthetics and Wagnerian notions of audience absorption.

**Synchronising the Nazi Era?**

So far, I have stressed that the claims made during National Socialism about the cinema as a Gesamtkunstwerk were not unambiguously achieved, particularly when set against the practicalities of the exhibition context. Indeed, as Lutz Koepnick has emphasised, Nazi film culture “was far less unified than its ideologies wanted” (2002: 47). Nonetheless, a totalising notion of Nazi film aesthetics has continued to the present day, with a tendency to take such claims at face value, particularly those from party leaders and propagandists. In this section, I will reflect on the audiovisual legacy of the Nazi era for the present by analysing a contemporary documentary film. I seek to understand how cinema can construct a critique of the ongoing use of “synchronisation” as a metaphor for totalitarianism, and of the established formulas used for recycling audiovisual footage in the post-war era. The case for these reflections is the German film Hitler’s Hit Parade (2003), directed by Oliver Axer, which is structured around twenty-five songs from the Nazi period.

The opening credits of Hitler’s Hit Parade show a revolving copper bust of Adolf Hitler before the title appears overlaid on the images. Hitler is thus positioned as the responsible party or agent of this song selection and, by association, the protagonist of this compilation film. The songs are the driving force of the film and are played out consecutively for their full length, which creates, as I will later discuss, a jukebox-like playlist. Each song has its own accompanying visual sequence and stylised on-screen title, which are separated by short interludes. The visual material is initially engaged to suit the theme of each song sequence, giving the twenty-five parts an episodic structure not unlike a television series. The images also alternate between colour and black-and-white footage, and between
amateur, propaganda and feature film material. These transitions, along with movement between close-ups and long shots, produce both a changing depth of focus and point of view. The various compilations of sound and image shift in intensity from frantically upbeat sequences to those that wind down to an almost tedious, slow pace.

Given the amplified role of the soundtrack in *Hitler’s Hit Parade*, my specific interest here concerns the agency of sound as a (rhythmic) medium within the cinema. I will begin by considering how this film questions sound and image relations in the cinema, with a particular focus on its construction around a principle of sonic continuity. This will raise a second, related consideration of how the film posits the relationship between listening and viewing. In this respect, I will contend that the film’s effectiveness depends on this foregrounding of audiovisual perception in terms of perceptual dissonances and a shifting continuum of attention. Where Walther Ruttmann used the “symphony” as a structural device, in this case it is the jukebox selection: as a “hit parade” of twenty-five songs that draw attention to musical sound and rhythm as critical frameworks for the compilation of archival audio or visual material. Finally, I will consider how the broader attempt to reveal the materiality of recorded sound and image not only foregrounds its medial qualities but might also offer film sound as a critical historiographic frame.

*Hitler’s Hit Parade* immediately sets up a principle of musical continuity that is very rare for either feature or documentary films. According to other existing scholarship, the fragmented soundtrack serves an ideological function, since it conceals the context of music production and confines the role of music to illustration and thematic support (Adorno and Eisler 1994; Kassabian 2001: 15-41). As Claudia Gorbman suggests, film music usually adheres to the following conventions of classical Hollywood cinema: music must be subordinated to narrative form; music must be subordinated to voice; music must not enter at certain points, such as at the same time as the entrance of a voice; and music’s mood must be appropriate to the scene (1987: 73-80; Reay 2004: 33-4). These protocols reveal an established hierarchy in the classical cinema soundtrack. In line with this hierarchy, Gorbman emphasises that film music is by definition successful when it is unnoticed or “inaudible.” This image-sound hierarchy also influences the production process, where film soundtrack is an afterthought for many directors and only developed during post-production editing.

The soundtrack in *Hitler’s Hit Parade* is not a form of accompaniment but rather a foundational element that provides the basis (or bass line) for the film’s structure. This is also a departure from typical documentary soundtracks. Television-style documentaries in particular have maintained conventions such as voice-overs, “talking head” interviews, standardised sound effects and incidental musical themes (Ruoff 1993; Corner 2002: 357). As John Corner argues, when documentaries employ long shots and dispense with voice-overs, music is “providing us with the time to look properly, giving us a framework in which to gaze and think” (365). This observation is made in reference to experimental documentaries, but it maintains the position that sound remains an additional rather than intrinsic filmic element. By contrast, *Hitler’s Hit Parade* challenges
these established conceptions of documentary sound, since the twenty-five hit songs are neither fully contained within the logic of Wagnerian leitmotiv nor rendered secondary to dialogue or image. There is no voice-over in the entire film, although brief snippets of dialogue can be heard in the short interludes between song sequences. In place of a “voice of God” narration, the on-screen titles for each song indicate a thematic topic around which the image sequences are clustered.78

In fact, music’s usual “supporting” role in smoothing over visual discontinuities is taken to the opposite extreme in the first thirty minutes of Hitler’s Hit Parade. Since the images are cut to the sonic rhythms, there is a cartoon-like stylisation in which all of the movements of characters and objects are in perfect synchronisation to the music. This synchronisation is suggestive of Nazi Germany as an efficient well-oiled machine, and it alludes to the policy of Gleichschaltung (social organisation). In fact, the German word for sound synchronisation (Gleichlauf) bears a linguistic similarity to that of Gleichschaltung. Moreover, the “Mickey-mousing” effect of synchronisation ridicules the aspirations of Nazi film aesthetics for a Gesamtkunstwerk principle of unity, with music as a redemptive and climactic emotional force.79 I have precisely stressed the fragility of this ideal in the previous sections. Hitler’s Hit Parade also satirises the contemporary genre of historical documentary more generally, which tends to reduce human actors to puppet-like characterisations. The broader tendency of such documentaries is to sketch out the “big picture” with a limited number of historical actors and a reliance on the image as the repository of historical reality. In most cases, therefore, the metaphors of orchestration and synchronisation are offered as synonymous with the social organisation of the masses during Nazism.

For the first ten song sequences, the escapist idealism underpinning the Nazi worldview can be found in the frenetic optimism of the songs, visual composition and title texts. For “A Country in Bloom,” colour footage of young people working in the fields, children playing and girls’ synchronised dancing is coordinated to the rhythm of the upbeat musical song “Music, Music, Music!” Iconic hit songs like this one, sung by musical star Marika Rökk, alternate with vocal and instrumental songs, not all of which would be necessarily known to a contemporary audience. Two other early sequences, “Fast and Modern” and “New Life,” depict modern design and consumer goods with footage of blimps, racing cars, radios, household appliances, photography, champagne bottles, smiling couples and babies.80 These visual compositions are in tune with the sentimental hit songs they accompany, “Darling, What Will Become of Us?” and “It’s Only Love.”

Intermittent sound effects, which borrow from vaudeville or cartoon conventions, also work to ridicule or exaggerate the on-screen action. In the fifth song sequence, “Fine Führer,” footage of Adolf Hitler appears for the first time on screen. He is shown joking with other uniformed party officials, greeting people and signing autographs. In this sequence, sound effects are used for the first time in the film, creating added comic effect when Hitler is shown ripping red tape at an opening or kissing women at a holiday house. Adding to these slapstick scenes are multiple repetitions of Hitler smoothing his hair with one hand, walking with dogs or trying to fetch a child who runs away from him. Shortly after
this sequence, Hitler is depicted as a father figure and benevolent leader in a sequence titled “We Belong to You.” This scene is intercut with footage of diligent Hitler Youth members combing their hair, making their beds and embarking on adventure missions accompanied by the song “You Are In All My Dreams.” In other words, the “star” status attributed here to Hitler cleverly alludes to Nazi portrayals of Hitler as an “artist” and “architect” of the nation, as well as a political leader (Michaud 2004; Kershaw 1987). This star-like status is not only a reference to Hitler’s popularity during Nazism, but also suggests his ubiquitous presence in the post-war genre of (television) historical documentaries.

The overall ethos established in the first ten sequences of songs is that of German nation-building and a determined optimism for a new era. Against the framework of sonic continuity, the short interludes offset the smooth synchronised flow of the song sequences. Since there are songs of around three minutes separating each interlude, they heighten the audience’s awareness for what is briefly said or shown. These offbeat interludes include two women discussing German culture and a sequence glorifying trees as the symbol of the “eternal nation.” In contrast to the initial representations of light entertainment and an idealised worldview, these interludes become increasingly disturbing as the film progresses. In a later interlude, a Nazi doctor measures the dimensions of a child’s head, and in another a giggly woman threatens to report a man to the secret police because her brother is “in the party.”

The apparent unity of text, sound and image in the first part of Hitler’s Hit Parade is thus disrupted by an increasing number of interludes and sequences with explicit references to Nazi persecution and racist ideology. In a sequence titled “The People’s Entertainment,” the audience first sees a series of clips from circus grounds, theme parks, picnics and a dance. A short soundbite is heard: “This is great! This is fun!” These first scenes appear unassuming when set against the hit song “As Beautiful as Today” until a scene of public humiliation unfolds. A young couple is paraded through a town with a brass band playing, while onlookers stare, point and laugh. The boy and girl are being punished for the so-called crime of Rassenschande (racial disgrace). In this public spectacle, their hair is shaved off and they are forced to wear placards around their necks. This puzzling scene is then abruptly succeeded by footage of fairground games, one of which involves throwing quoits on a map of Europe. In placing an act of violence amidst leisure scenes, a kind of slippage takes place. The overall effect is a critique of a Nazi concept of “fun” entertainment that profits from the suffering and humiliation of others, and the disparity between forms of escapist entertainment and repression in social life is emphasised by the contrast between sound and image. This strategy thus confronts the aporias of cultural practices like carnival, whereby, as I have emphasised in Chapter Two, rites of humiliation started to resemble those of the carnival festival.

The quoits game also provides a visual cue for the mobilisation of Germany for war and the imminent occupation of western Europe. A short black-and-white interlude appears where a woman tells a friend about her new boyfriend and how well he can dance. This exchange, which is taken from a feature film, is intercut with amateur colour footage of a high-ranking uniformed soldier waving to the
camera from his open-roofed automobile. This sequence is given the on-screen title “...And Tomorrow the Entire World,” which accompanies the 1941 song “This Will Be an Everlasting Spring.” The mixture of amateur and propaganda footage depicts German soldiers parachuting into France, riding on tanks and in trains, eating grapes, drinking wine, relaxing and smoking cigars. The invasion of France in 1940 is thus portrayed as a holiday where soldiers could enjoy the spoils of occupation. This sentiment turns sour when the song sequence draws to a close with depictions of soldiers stealing a pig and a gypsy woman dancing half naked. The abrupt ending to the “everlasting spring” is stark colour footage of the bloodied faces of unidentified dead soldiers, closing with a close-up of a wedding ring on a man’s hand.

The frequent disjunctions between sound and image are not only unsettling, but this particular song sequence encourages the audience to engage in a questioning process made more acute by the act of listening without a voice-over narration. The ambiguity of its content thus invites reflection on the origin of this footage, the conditions of its production and its intended audience. Not surprisingly, this amateur colour footage was not seen by the German public as it may have compromised enthusiasm for the invasion of France, which was glorified in campaign “documentary” films like *Westwall* (1939). There is also a strong element of intertextuality in this sequence, as the same scenes of German soldiers eating grapes and smoking were used in the BBC television documentary *The Second World War in Colour* (1999). In this BBC version of an earlier German television documentary, the images perform a wholly different function. The English voice-over maintains a tight chronology of events, creating a certain distance from these images, while the musical score is predominantly used for melodramatic effect.

With this comparison, it becomes clearer how the sonic framework driving *Hitler’s Hit Parade* departs from and highlights the predominant classical narrative logic found in such made-for-television history documentaries. Moreover, the sonic continuity of *Hitler’s Hit Parade* highlights the temporality of the three-minute songs it employs and the inability of these popular songs to substitute or stand in for historical time. The innovation of the film and its soundtrack is thus based on the use of songs as a continuous formal principle and the noticeable absence of spoken commentary on these sounds and images. I will now shift my analysis from a concern with sound-image relations to audiovisual perception, by employing a concept of embodied cinematic experience to address the significance of audiovisual disjunctions and changes in *Hitler’s Hit Parade*. These disjunctions not only highlight the heterogeneity of the visual footage, but they also configure the listening experience as an essential tool for critiquing Nazi cultural production. In doing so, the comic effects generated in the first half of the film are increasingly confronted with the tragic reality of Nazism.

*Hitler’s Hit Parade* encourages radical shifts in audiovisual address and emotional response that remind its audience of their own conditions of listening and viewing. According to Vivian Sobchack (1999), such perceptual oscillations foreground the embodied spectator’s experience of the cinematic object. In her conception, home movie, documentary and fictional material are not only reflected in
the content, but rather in the subjective attentional modes and the intersubjective attitude developed between viewer and film. The viewer’s extra-textual knowledge can thus promote “documentary consciousness,” even during a fictional film. It is in this sense, Sobchack argues, that films are “always modified by our personal and cultural knowledge of an object’s existential position as it relates to our own” (1999: 242). Sobchack’s phenomenological perspective thus highlights the role of a continuum of attention in acts of spectatorship, although she focuses mainly in this context on visual perception.

In the case of Hitler’s Hit Parade, the invitation to adopt various attentional modalities provides the basis on which the experience of perceptual dissonance occurs. As the film progresses, it self-consciously accentuates the discontinuities of experience by picking up on the seemingly innocuous titles of hit songs, which often form part of the on-screen titles. These sequences are framed by interludes, such as an anti-Semitic cartoon animation for German children, which points to the circulation of Nazi ideology within popular culture. One significant example appears halfway through the film, when an uncomfortable contrast is made between the treatment of film “stars” and those forced to wear Jewish “stars” on their clothing. Willy Berking’s 1944 hit song “A Star Has Fallen from Heaven” is given the on-screen title “The Stars Are Shining.” This sequence shows propaganda films and racial profiling of Jews along with amateur footage of Jewish men and women staring back at a fixed camera recording an urban street setting.

The result of such editing is a perceptual disjunction between the visual images as well as between these images and the soundtrack. These uncomfortable parallels recur during the subsequent sequences. In the sequence “Entertaining Weekend,” the upbeat tempo of a Peter Kreuder swing hit accompanies scenes of Germans on holiday waiting at train stations and a sign saying that the train is “comfortable and fast.” These scenes are immediately contrasted with propaganda footage of Theresienstadt, which portrays Jews supposedly enjoying leisure activities such as reading, playing soccer and performing classical music. The audience’s awareness that Theresienstadt was, in fact, a concentration camp heightens the sense of suffering for those depicted on screen. This scene is immediately followed by an interlude derived from a feature film, where an actress claims that she can’t live without her fur coats.

The increasing gap between popular culture or propaganda representations and the broader social reality of National Socialism continues to dominate the remainder of the film, with the loose chronology indicating wartime Germany. The final Durchhalteappelle (appeals to hold out) propaganda are suggested by on-screen titles like “Everything Will Be Okay,” although such reassurances are perceptually interrupted by sound effects of sirens and images of blackouts, fires, bombed cities, homeless and dead civilians on the street. Similarly, the male singer of the 1941 song “When the Lights Shine Again” optimistically opines that soon they will go out dancing again (once the war is over), a sentiment undermined by the devastation shown on screen. These sequences offer a striking resemblance to the sonic interruptions to the cinema that I discussed in the previous section, since cultural forms such as popular cinema maintained that the social sphere, in particular the urban city, was still a safe and ordered realm.
The internal contradictions foregrounded in the second half of Hitler’s *Hit Parade* encourage critical reflection on the basis of audiovisual counterpoint, the avant-garde strategy I introduced earlier. During an interlude set in a concert hall, the voice of Joseph Goebbels is heard praising Germans as a “people of music” (*das Musikvolk der Welt*). This interlude leads into a sequence titled “What Moves Your Heart?,” which is attributed to the slow orchestral song “If the Weekend Were to End on Sunday.” The on-screen audience is shown with wistful, sentimental expressions while listening to the slow music. These scenes are followed by footage of Jews forced to leave their homes, empty their belongings and wait on station platforms. The sequence is immediately followed by another, titled “Millions Travel with ‘German Rail.’” This overwhelmingly positive propaganda slogan appears distasteful when contrasted with the forced train journeys of Jews. Most interestingly, however, this sequence repeats the previous song in the upbeat tempo of a dance song, with images of wheels turning, a coal room and advertising footage glorifying new train design. The symbolic sound of a train whistle, a commonly-used convention for Nazi train deportations and the Holocaust, is accompanied by its visual equivalent of train tracks leading into the distance.

When the first sequence asks the pointed question “What Moves Your Heart?,” a sentimentality for music and the glorification of modern technology is set against the Nazi acts of violence and exclusions of otherness. This question is directed at the theatre audience depicted on-screen and is simultaneously posed to the contemporary audience, which is invited to consider its usual narrative expectations and rehearsed emotional responses to images of Nazi horror.

Once the sound effect of a whistle is heard and a train is visualised, the audience expects to be shown further footage of where the Jews are taken. However, the upbeat jazzy re-versioning of the song is accompanied by images of trains passing through rolling hills and over bridges, with German passengers enjoying a comfortable journey and looking out the window. Such a visual representation creates a radical disconnect in the audience’s imagination of the forced transport of Jews to eastern Europe. The ultimate effect of such perceptual dissonances, using two versions of the same song, is to confound and challenge audience expectations.

By alerting audiences to their usual responses to documentary conventions, these scenes contribute to a growing sense of disquiet. Indeed, *Hitler’s Hit Parade* highlights its own mediality and tries to displace some of the aspirations of much 1930s cinema to a seamless *Gesamtkunstwerk* by way of smooth transitions and reduced ambiguity. The film depends on eliciting contradictory reactions for unsettling its audience. This is the ambiguity inherent in the film, since its comic juxtapositions often induce laughter, but are contrasted by jolting reminders of the historical context of Nazism. Popular song is important for these perceptual dissonances and emotional counterpoint, since it facilitates the rise and fall in attention patterns. The resulting sense of mood control with “light” popular music, similar to the contemporary genre of Muzak, provides the sonic framework for a shifting continuum of attention in the film. The shifts in attention occur in various ways, such as when popular music slips between its off-screen and on-screen
functions and is sometimes fully synchronised with the images, as in the case of songs by Marika Rökk and Zarah Leander. These shifts are enhanced by changes in visual attention between colour and black-and-white footage or in the shifts between home movies, documentary and fiction films. It is in these ways that *Hitler’s Hit Parade* mounts its critique on the level of embodied perception, and transgresses the boundary between counterpoint and parallelism.

As *Hitler’s Hit Parade* draws to a close, it is ostensibly the end of World War II in 1945. Using the early Nazi propaganda slogan and film title, “Germany Awake!” as an on-screen title, it alludes to the idea of Germans awakening out of fascism or even how popular song helped to put a population into a musical trance. After being forcibly taken to see a concentration camp, German people are shown crying and running outside, with Allied soldiers in the background. The sequence includes footage of emaciated prisoners and ends with a small boy crying and staring back at the camera, wearing a label designating him as a Polish prisoner. The sound of a gramophone needle finishing and running off the record is heard, accompanied by a black screen for ten seconds. These crackling sounds figure like the noise or interference of acoustic recording and playback, which encourages the audience to attend to the materiality of sound reproduction. The story has ended and, it would seem, the Nazi song machine has stopped. After this sort interlude, however, yet another hit song begins as the credits begin. This suggests that these songs cannot be contained in the past, not least due to the ongoing circulation of certain songs in the present day.

The ending of the film only confirms that the selection of these twenty-five songs is somewhat like a jukebox. While the twenty-five songs are ostensibly from the same period, they do not follow a strict chronological sequence. As for jukeboxes, they have a limited number of songs that can be selected, yet their sequence is open to change. The songs can be cued up, played out in full and selected to play again. The jukebox almost always involves an act of selection by one listener – who is usually also a paying customer – but it can also be set on random play. Both the possibility of a random selection and the implied allusions to historical contingency mark a difference from the postcard album aesthetic in Ruttmann’s later films. *Kleiner Film einer großen Stadt*, as I have shown, kept its historical chronology and cyclical rhythms firmly in place. The symphony metaphor, too, while influential for the counterpunctal rhythms of *Die Sinfonie der Großstadt*, was later invoked for films dominated by a score as supportive musical illustration.

In this case, the presentation of a “hit parade” might be understood as belonging to Adolf Hitler between 1933 and 1945. It is in this sense that the jukebox structure alludes to the notion of Nazi cultural production as a song machine, which is mechanically programmed to follow a sequence of song selections. The function of the jukebox as a sound technology for staging a “hit parade” not only reminds the audience of its own construction and acts of selection, but it also insists on the limits of revealing the past when using visual and audio material. In alerting the audience to their participation in the production of “prosthetic” media memories, the documentary truth claims associated with archival material are put under scrutiny.
Conclusion

The broader attempt to reveal the materiality of recorded sound in *Hitler’s Hit Parade* implicates popular music and “hit parades” as agents of mood control, but it also foregrounds the act of recontextualising archival material in the digital era. This historical awareness is prompted by the perceptual dissonances and shifts in audiovisual response during the twenty-five song sequences. Moreover, the highly-charged references prompted by the film highlight the act of creating fixed historical chronologies and causalities with regard to National Socialism. Popular song offers the temporal framework and facilitates the audiovisual experience of rhythm as a means for reactivating an engagement with questions of historical representation and cultural memory. An engagement with the past in this way fully reinstates film sound as a “meaning-making practice” and highlights musical sound as partaking in social relations (Kassabian 2001: 54). As such, the film contributes to the deconstruction of cinema as a historical source and social practice. *Hitler’s Hit Parade* silences the diegetic sounds of the visual track, with the exceptions of the interludes and two musical film scenes. However, this is not a simple silencing: this strategy has the function of redirecting the audience’s attention to the songs and their lyrics, with the occasional use of sound effect as a kind of acoustic “punctum” disrupting the overall sonic continuity. Moreover, by resisting the truth claims of documentary, there is also a confrontation with myths of media transparency. This marks an important departure from documentaries that employ a seamless rendering of footage that stabilises a divide between the Nazi past and the present, and implicitly draw on Wagnerian notions that presupposed cinema as enabling the audience’s unmediated access to a unified, total work of art.

In this chapter, I have endeavoured to show how Richard Wagner’s nineteenth-century notion of music-theatre as a *Gesamtkunstwerk* was reconceived and appropriated for silent and sound film in Germany. The idea of a total, synaesthetic experience – as my analysis of film examples, discourses and exhibition practice has outlined – gained particular momentum during Nazism. The broad use of the term *Gesamtkunstwerk*, moreover, affirms Lutz Koepnick’s observation that it was a catch-all term, serving as a “compromise between high art and popular taste, romanticism and twentieth-century modernism, autonomous art and the popular” (2002: 10). I have indicated the ongoing tension between such cultural concepts during Nazism through Walther Ruttmann’s use of rhythm and acoustic metaphors during the 1920s and 1930s, which I have traced in terms of a general shift from a “symphonic” to “postcard” aesthetics. Indeed, Ruttmann’s earlier work expressed both a fascination with the sensory dimensions to the modern city and a certain ambivalence about its technical mechanisation and sensory overstimulation. The subsequent understanding of the city and its sounds after 1933, however, reflected a different aesthetic and ideological tension: namely, the aestheticisation of modernity during Nazism as both a recourse to the city as a site of technological progress as well as sentiments of *Heimat* and *Volk* community. This tension was inflected in the cinema space itself, which was similarly invested as a site of modern technological advancement and attractions, as well as for community integration and leisure.
“Rhythmic harmony,” as represented by both film narratives and cinema exhibition practices, therefore, constituted a significant cultural mode that continued to take its cues about technological innovation and national utopia from Wagner’s Gesamtkunstwerk. This ideal, which depends on a self-contained, purpose-built theatrical space, could not be maintained under the conditions of war. Even though cinemas took measures to further condition the cinema as spectacle with (louder) sound and colour film, the supposed medial neutrality and audience attention was broken by the uncontrollable sound of war outside. Put differently, while Kittler establishes Wagner’s resonant sonic effects as precursors for the sensorial overwhelming of audiences in the darkened space of the cinema, I have argued that this medium transparency was rarely sustained during Nazism.