

Uta C. Schmidt

University of Duisburg-Essen (UDE), Netzwerk Frauen- und  
Geschlechterforschung NRW

## Roaring war and silent peace? Initial reflections on the soundscape in the Ruhr between area bombing and reconstruction

**Abstract:** In this chapter, I explore how the Ruhr area of North Rhine-Westphalia (Germany) sounded around 1945, from the battle sounds of the Allied carpet bombing, through the atmospheres of vanished cities and the soundscape of bunker life, to the hot jazz bands that symbolised a new era of humanity, tolerance, freedom and democracy after the Nazi dictatorship. I thematise the traumas endured by people at that time, who woke up every night screaming, with the wartime experiences still hammering in their heads, and recall the sounds of reconstruction. In relating the dreadful sounds of the Allied squadrons, West German citizens emphasised the stunning evidence of crimes committed not by the Germans against others, but by others against Germany. The thesis presented here is that their auditory experiences of night-time bombing in the West nourished an identity as victims – here as victims of the Allied bombing campaign. This is a corresponding story, which derives its own persuasive power particularly from the remembered sounds of the reconstructed industries, which indicated: “We’re back!” It becomes clear that an orientation towards a fixed polarisation between “loud war” and “quiet peace” does not work. In this chapter, I argue for simultaneous thinking about the non-simultaneous, for overlapping soundscapes and for case studies of examples, situations, details and fragments, aware of anthropological and technical, as well as spatial, references.

**Keywords:** Ruhr, carpet bombing, reconstruction, hot jazz, epistemological question

On 1 September 1939, Nazi Germany invaded Poland. This aggression resulted in the outbreak of the Second World War. On 10 September 1940, Nazi Germany invaded France and Belgium. Dorothea Günther, hiking with her friend on the day of the western raid, remembered:

This year, there were an incredible number of cockchafers. Frozen by the cold night, they lay on the road. We couldn't avoid them at all. When we stepped on the beetles, their bursting chitinous exoskeleton made a terrible noise. For me, the beginning of the Battle



of France was always associated with this noise, even more so when the war reports on the radio euphorically spoke of “cracking the tanks”.<sup>1</sup>

German has the onomatopoeic word “knacken”, and you “knack”, or crack, tanks. Dorothea Günther remembered the beginning of the Western campaign through a dense acoustic metaphor. In her short account, she addressed five acoustic dimensions. They all touch in their own way on the epistemic challenges of historical sound studies:

- 1) There is the acoustic event of the bursting chitinous outer wings, where sound is a question of physics or deformation technology.
- 2) In extreme situations, when human perception is particularly acute, sound is a question of cognition.
- 3) For literary studies, the acoustic experience becomes a metaphor in the narrative of the Western campaign.
- 4) Media studies should be interested in the correspondence between individual acoustic experiences and amplification by media-transmitted sounds, such as the onomatopoeic “Panzer knacken” (“to crack tanks”), which serve as mnemonic triggers to initiate meanings associated with what has happened. Sounds that we detect in a particular situation are anchored. We link them to meanings in our lives. Sounds can preserve such moments.
- 5) In the cultural memory of the Germans, “cockchafers” and “war” are profoundly linked. The children’s song “Maikäfer flieg” [Cockchafer fly], handed down since the early modern era, articulates childish fears of loneliness. It transmits the horrors of war to subsequent generations.<sup>2</sup>

---

1 “Es war ein an Maikäfern sehr reiches Jahr; durch die Nachtkälte erstarrt lagen sie auf dem Weg. Nicht allen konnten wir ausweichen, wir traten hin und wieder darauf und der berstende Chitinpanzer verursachte ein entsetzliches Geräusch. Für mich blieb der Beginn des Westfeldzuges immer mit diesem Geräusch verbunden, um so mehr, wenn in den Kriegsberichten von Panzer knacken die Rede war”. Dorothea Günther, in <http://www.dhm.de/lemo/zeitzeugen/dorothea-günther-der-krieg-193940>, accessed 29 March 2017.

2 “Maikäfer flieg, Vater ist im Krieg, Mutter ist in Pommernland, Pommernland ist abgebrannt, Maikäfer flieg”; “May bug fly, father’s at war, mother’s in Pomerania; Pomerania’s burned, may bug fly”. See Wieden, “Maikäfer, flieg!”. The melody of the song corresponds to that of the lullaby “Schlaf Kindlein, schlaf” [Sleep my child, sleep]. In 1974, Anselm Kiefer, an internationally renowned artist, produced a painting titled *Maikäfer flieg!* [May Bug, fly!], oil on burlap, 220 cm x 300 cm. In 1991, he reprised the topic and the title in the lead work *Maikäfer flieg!* [May Bug, fly!], emulsion, ash and

So historical sound studies concern both the objective and the subjective dimension of sound, its physical and cultural amplitudes. They address issues relating to the French historian Roger Chartier's concept of "representation".<sup>3</sup> They prompt numerous questions. How can we reconstruct the relationship between immediacy and mediacy? How can we describe acoustic "atmospheres" as the relations between our surroundings and our existential outlook? They benefit from a threefold focus: the linguistic, the spatial and the material.

To be clear, this article by no means advocates giving up all the visual in favour of regaining the acoustic. It follows the German philosopher Gernot Böhme's argument that we should study urban history through more senses and attach greater value to them.<sup>4</sup> Michael Bull and Les Back argued: "Thinking with our ears – a translation of Theodor W. Adorno's phrase 'mit den Ohren denken' – offers an opportunity to augment our critical imagination, to comprehend our world and our encounters with it according to multiple registers of feeling".<sup>5</sup>

How did the Ruhr sound around 1945? This question, concerning the sounds during the period of area bombing, liberation and post-war Germany, is posed here for the first time. Approaching the issue from the perspective of the history of everyday life and the regional history of the Ruhr area, this article focuses on the aural phenomena inherent to and imposed on this region, especially on Dortmund.

The Ruhr is an agglomeration of 4,434 km<sup>2</sup> in North Rhine-Westphalia. It is a complex of industries and transport systems built during the industrial era, with high population density in urban areas. Its specific sound space was defined by heavy industries, traffic and daily life. Recent urban studies describe the Ruhr area as an outstanding conurbation. It was well known as the "Armory of the German Reich". Its final elimination by Allied air strikes led to the end of the war in Europe.

My approach to its soundscape is epistemologically orientated towards interpretative cultural anthropology, which has long benefited from Clifford Geertz's "thick description".<sup>6</sup> The French historian Alain Corbin defined sound history – or the history of the aural – as a story of social conflicts.<sup>7</sup> Before that, however, Murray Schafer had sensitised historians to the social functions of sounds. Even though he

lead on canvas, 330 x 560 cm; see exhibition catalogue, Schneider and Kiefer, *Anselm Kiefer*, 88. I am grateful for this information to Renata Tańczuk of Wrocław.

3 Chartier, "Kulturgeschichte"; Chartier, "Die unvollendete Vergangenheit".

4 Böhme, *Anmutungen*; Böhme, *Atmosphäre*; see also Feiereisen and Hill (eds), *Germany in the Loud Twentieth Century*, 6.

5 Bull and Back (eds), *The Auditory Culture Reader*, 2.

6 Geertz, "Thick description".

7 Corbin, *Les cloches*.

is now critically debated,<sup>8</sup> his book *The Tuning of the World*, published in German in 1988 as *Klang und Krach*, paved the way for sound studies in Germany.<sup>9</sup>

### Roaring war

After the armistice with France was signed, on 22 June 1940, all the bells rang for one week at lunchtime, for a quarter of an hour. The political system instrumentalised church bells and their symbolic capital for stirring the country into a national frenzy.

There is one thing we must be clear about here: only a few hours after the German raid on France of 10 May 1940, British and US-American bombers began air attacks on the region between the Rhine and the Ruhr. So their air strikes pre-dated the German “Blitzkrieg” and the Battle of Britain.

Figure 1: Leaflet dropped over Essen after a British air raid in May 1943, entitled “Fortress Europe has no roof”, Imperial War Museum, London

1940	1941	1942	1943
London 250t	Münster 100t	Kiel 250t	Bah 100t
	London 450t		Köln 1500t
			Auf London nicht mehr als 6 t
			Ein- zigster Angriff von 500t
			Dortmund 2000t

**Die schwersten Luftangriffe von 1940 bis Mai 1943**

## Die Festung Europa hat kein Dach

**I**M April 1943 warf die R.A.F. mehr als 10 Millionen Kilogramm Bomben auf deutsche Industrieziele.  
Im Mai 1943 wurden über 12 Millionen Kilogramm Bomben abgeworfen.  
In einer einzigen Woche im Mai fielen 750 000 Kilogramm Bomben allein auf das Ruhrgebiet.  
Bis 1. Juni 1943 haben englische Flugzeuge über 100 Millionen Kilogramm Bomben auf Deutschland abgeworfen.  
Die Royal Air Force ist heute stärker als die deutsche und italienische Luftwaffe zusammen.  
In Amerika wurden allein im April 1943 7 000 Flugzeuge fertiggestellt.  
Die amerikanische Flugzeugindustrie hat am 31. Mai das 100 000 Flugzeug für diesen Krieg geliefert.  
Amerika produziert heute mehr Flugzeuge als Deutschland, Italien und Japan zusammen.  
Das sind die Tatsachen. Was folgt daraus? Man könnte sagen: Was die Engländer auszuhalten haben, können die Deutschen auch aushalten.  
Aber der Vergleich hinkt. Die englisch-amerikanische Luftoffensive gegen Deutschland ist bereits jetzt weit schwerer als die deutsche Luftoffensive gegen England je war. In ihrem schwersten Angriff auf eine englische Stadt (London, 10. Mai 1941) warf die Luftwaffe 450 000 Kilogramm Bomben in einer Nacht.  
In ihrem bisher schwersten Angriff auf eine deutsche Stadt (Dortmund, 23. Mai 1943) warf die R.A.F. 2 000 000 Kilogramm Bomben in einer Nacht. Mehr als viermal soviel — und das ist erst der Anfang.  
Die Engländer konnten standhalten, weil sie wussten: Wenn sie standhalten, müsste es besser werden. Sie hatten kaum angefangen zu rüsten. Sie kamen erst in Gang. Sie wussten, dass ihre eigene Luftmacht und Luftverteidigung von Tag zu Tag wuchs.  
Sie sahen amerikanisches Kriegsmaterial in Massen ankommen und sie konnten hoffen, dass Amerika eines Tages als Verbündeter an ihrer Seite stehen würde.  
Was haben heute die Deutschen zu hoffen, wenn sie sich standhaft weiter bomben lassen?  
Neue Verbündete gibt es nicht mehr. Deutschlands eigene Kampfkraft lässt nach. Die englisch-amerikanische wächst von Tag zu Tag. Deutschlands Fabriken werden bombardiert. Seine Produktion ist um 20% gesunken. Amerikas Produktion ist „bombenreicher“.  
Deutschlands geschwächte Luftwaffe muss an drei Fronten kämpfen. Überall ist sie in der Defensive. Die R.A.F. und die amerikanische Heeresfliegerei haben, trotz Atlantik-Wall, eine Front im Herzen Deutschlands geschaffen. Die „Festung Europa“ hat kein Dach.  
Daran ist nichts mehr zu ändern. Die deutschen Arbeiter und Ingenieure, die in den Fabriken aushalten, können den Gang des Krieges nicht mehr wenden. Sie können den Krieg nur verlängern. Das heißt: Sie können dafür sorgen, dass noch mehr Bomben auf Deutschland fallen.  
Es werden immer mehr werden von Monat zu Monat.  
Wie lange soll das noch so weiter gehen?

8 Morat, “Sound Studies–Sound Histories”, 5; Missfelder, “Period Ear”, 37.  
9 Schafer, *The Tuning of the World*.

People in the Ruhr began to live with an air raid alarm system, which indicated different levels of threat: “Public air warning”, “Pre-warning”, “Air raid alarm”, “Before All Clear” and “All-Clear”. The system became so complex that it had to be continuously explained to the population through the mass media. The signals were triggered increasingly often until the alarm system imploded: companies categorically protested against the proliferation of the air raid alerts, as they disrupted production. During the war, the alarm system was adapted over and over. From September 1944 on, the signal “Acute air threat” was introduced to indicate the highest level alert strictly and unambiguously.<sup>10</sup>

“Suddenly, as in the morning, the sirens indicated ‘Acute air threat’, again without pre-warning”.<sup>11</sup> People learned to find their bearings in space and time thanks to the signals: continuous tones, increasing and decreasing, high-low, sinusoidal oscillation between pitches of about 200 Herz and 400 Herz, interrupted by pauses.<sup>12</sup>

From mid October 1944, both the British Bomber Command and the USAAF 8<sup>th</sup> Air Force revisited the Ruhr with squadrons of well over 1,000 aircrafts. Towns and cities that had already been substantially damaged again suffered carpet bombing.

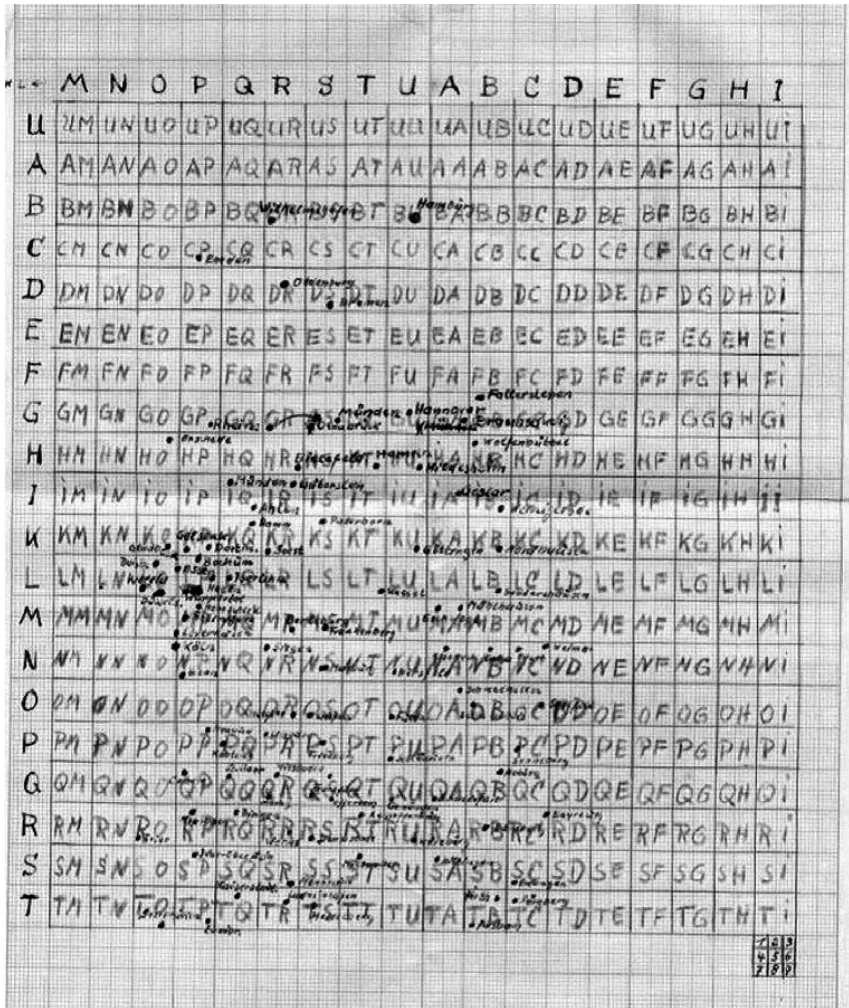
---

10 Blank, “Kriegsendphase”, 413.

11 A recollection of Helga Pflugstedt, in Grontzki et al. (eds), *Feuersturm und Hungerwinter*, 88.

12 See Dietrich Jansen, <http://bunkermuseum.de/akute-luftgefahr-fuer-erden-und-meldungen-des-drahtfunks/>, accessed 29 March 2015.

Figure 2: Map of grid squares for air raid warnings, source: Bunkermuseum Emden



The war became condensed to the acoustic cipher “Konrad Paula 8”: “Konrad Paula 8 – those coordinates became the key sound for the flight path of the Royal Air Force to Herne, announced by radio”, Christel S. told me.<sup>13</sup> All the participants

13 Schmidt, “Radioaneignung”, 350

in present-day witness projects talk about this sounding cipher given by radio – interestingly, without being asked about it.<sup>14</sup> They also recall the sound of the message: “Wir geben eine Luftlagemeldung” (“We’re giving an air position report”), or “Achtung, Achtung! Fliegerverbände nähern sich dem Ruhrgebiet!” (“Attention attention! Air formations at the approach to the Ruhr”).

Children creatively turned the messages into counting-out rhymes: “Achtung, Achtung, Ende, Ende/über’m Kuhstall stehn Verbände/über’m Schweinestall die Jäger/Achtung, Achtung, Schornsteinfeger” (“Attention, attention, Roger, Roger/ in the sky over the cowshed there are fighter squadrons/in the sky over the pigsty there are interception planes/Attention, attention, chimney sweep”).<sup>15</sup> People learned to listen closely, assessing the risks and listening to the sounds of the German anti-aircraft guns (Flaks), distinguished from the battle sounds of the Allies. They learned to decode all sounds to differentiate between safety and extreme danger and the hostile situation of the bombardments.

Joseph P. Krause was twelve years old at the time, living in Schalke, a district of central Gelsenkirchen. At 13.47, the broadcast announced:

“Attention! Attention! Strong enemy bomber formations at the approach to Gelsenkirchen”. Even as this message was being broadcast, all hell broke loose. We fled from the carpet bombing, with the public sirens of “acute air threat” heard in the open [...]. Through the hail of bombs and between flying debris and flak shrapnel, we made it to the public air raid shelter [...]. Tens of thousands of explosive and incendiary bombs rained down on Schalke. All supply lines were immediately interrupted. No water. No power. No radio signals or warnings. [...] The bombs were fitted with rattling and whistling air screws to increase the horror effect among the civilian population. Thanks to the perfidious acoustics of the bombs, we sensed in advance when a bomb would hit our neighborhood and how heavy it would be, and we instinctively ducked and crouched on the floor [...]. Animal screams of agony came from everywhere. Children and women were crying hysterically, cursing and praying loudly, throwing themselves on the ground, whimpering, pleading in vain for mercy to the invisible God. We were prisoners in hell. Smoke. Heat. Then an infernal roar and crackle. The building on us had collapsed.

This was Dante’s “Inferno” pure and simple. There was weeping and gnashing of teeth. The battered people roared and sobbed in despair and fear of death. [...] Even today,

---

14 In the mid 1990s, I explored the field of oral history to gain insight into broadcasting, everyday life and war. See Schmidt, “Radioaneignung”, 243–360. In 2013, with my colleague Susanne Abeck, I began researching historical consciousness in the Ruhr. We are collecting experiences, memories and personal stories. On tour with our book *Stulle mit Margarine und Zucker* [Bread with margarine and sugar], people come to us, telling their stories. Most of them are directly related to wartime childhood.

15 Recollection of Jürgen Weber, in Abeck and Schmidt (eds), *Stulle*, 61.

after more than 60 years, I weep like an old man when the calendar indicates the 6<sup>th</sup> of November. We were driven by burning, unconstrained horror and terror. We had survived the eruption of hell, volcanoes of phosphorus, attacks of fire accelerants, the mighty blasts of air mines, the roar of a thousand fires.<sup>16</sup>

Karlheinz Urmersbach, born in 1928, remembered 6 November 1944 in Gelsenkirchen:

The four-engine British bombers arrived. It was horrible: the hum of the squadrons, flying very low one behind the other. The hum of the engines set our teeth right on edge. We knew from experience that the sinister roaring and whistling would start immediately. But before we ran into the shelter, we were surprised about our Flak, which didn't fire with the 10.5 and 8.8 cm shrapnel [...]. Then the bombing began, with rattling and crashing [...]. Everyone began to pray in fear [...].<sup>17</sup>

In all bunker stories from the Ruhr, the first thing one notices is the praying, remembered as a prominent part of the soundscape. Here we can find spontaneous, not ritualised, religious patterns in social practices, not found in other circumstances.

Above all, I keep in my ears the terrifying noise that caused the bombing, although I was still such a small girl. Yelling, whistling and rumbling, the dull bombings that shook the thick walls, mingled with the cries of children and the quiet weeping and praying of the adults.<sup>18</sup>

Women and children were screaming, prayers were said.<sup>19</sup>

We felt the violent impact like a rolling, thunderous wave. Those were the bombs [...]. People wept and prayed to God [...].<sup>20</sup>

Sometimes the memories have a more literary-style narrative: "Squatting and crouching, they sat on the uncomfortable wooden benches listening to the sound that penetrated the thick walls from outside. Were there bombs falling anywhere? Are the strikes far away or nearby? Here you have to learn praying again! Aunt Martha, however, didn't go down into the air raid shelter. She had an unshakeable faith in God. 'Nothing will happen, the Blessed Virgin Mary will stand by me,' she said. Oh, yesterday she dedicated a candlelight to her, didn't she?"<sup>21</sup>

---

16 Joseph P. Krause, <http://ww2today.com/6-november-1944-black-monday-for-gelsenkirchen-as-raf-bombers-return>, accessed 29 March 2015.

17 Sixty-five years after the bombing of Gelsenkirchen, Karlheinz Urmersbach (b. 1928) spoke of his experiences on 6 November 1944, [http://www.gelsenzentrum.de/bombenangriff\\_1944.htm](http://www.gelsenzentrum.de/bombenangriff_1944.htm), accessed 29 March 2017.

18 Gerda Pedack, in Abeck and Schmidt (eds), *Stulle*, 69.

19 Herbert Pemp, in *ibid.*, 70.

20 Paul Kruck, in *ibid.*, 73.

21 Brigitte Wiers, in *ibid.*, 71.



*Figure 3: Kampstraße in Dortmund, with the destroyed Petrikirche, in the background the Union Brewery, photo: Dortmund municipal archives*



The remaining population, including many thousands of slave labourers and prisoners of war, suffered the final throes of the Second World War as carpet bombing. However, “The danger came not only from the squadrons, but also from single low-flying aircrafts with their guns shooting”, recalled Christel S.<sup>22</sup>

The Italian military chaplain Guiseppa Barbero lived in the POW (Prisoner-of-war) camp Stalag VI D. No shelters were provided for prisoners of war and

---

22 Interview with Christel S., at Herne, 10 September 2016.

forced labourers. They were not allowed to use the air raid shelters, which were reserved for the indigenous population. On 12 March 1945, Barbero barely escaped with his life: “The hellish four-engine bombers come close [...]. We were no longer in a hailstorm of cluster bombs, but of bombs of an unheard-of calibre. Bombs right, bombs left, 5 or 10 meters away from us, the hissing bombs fell in thick clusters and exploded with an unconceivable roar that we had never heard before [...].”<sup>23</sup> On 13 April 1945, at 4:30 p.m., the Second World War ended in Dortmund. The Dortmund War Chronicle reported: “The day of the occupation and the bombing has stopped.”<sup>24</sup>

Figure 4: *The city of Dortmund, 10 May 1945, photo: German Federal Archives*



To help imagine the Dortmund soundscape on 12 March 1945, consider the following numbers: more than 1,000 mostly four-engine machines, Lancasters, Halifaxes and Mosquitos, dropped 5,000 tons of mines and explosive bombs. The

23 Giuseppe Barbero, in Blank, “Kriegsende”, 9.

24 Luise von Winterfeld, *Kriegschronik 1939–1945*, Stadtarchiv Dortmund lfd. Nr. 169, “Dortmunder Chronik des Jahres 1945”, *Heimat Dortmund*, 1 (2015), 65.

attack lasted forty minutes. First the residents could hear the German Air defence command (“Flak”), which was stationed at Dortmund-Wellinghofen. But after fifteen minutes, the Flak ceased.<sup>25</sup>

Interpreting the aerial view of the destroyed city taken by the Allies as a source for urban sounds, many questions arise. How does an area of rubble, a landscape of ruins sound? How does a landscape sound when there are no longer any rattling trams, rows of houses, pulsating traffic, children’s voices in schoolyards, pavements echoing to hasty steps, bell towers showing the time, factory sirens, steel hammers and cargo transports? How to reconstruct the acoustic relations between environment and existential outlook when the atmosphere of a city has vanished, when private and public spaces no longer exist? These issues concern theory as well as practice: museums and history projects increasingly ask for sound installations that convey this atmosphere of ruins to generations with no wartime experiences.

### **Master narratives**

People recalling their childhood memories at the end of their life remember the sounds of warning like “Konrad Paula 8”, “acute air threat” signals, squadrons, rattling and whistling air screws, bombs, crying and praying, but they do not remember any sounds of the new city of Dortmund. The soundscape of the city undergoing reconstruction changed imperceptibly. This corresponds to Murray Schafer’s categorisation of keynote sounds, signals, soundmarks and archetypal sounds,<sup>26</sup> and it also tallies with the thesis that sounds only catch the ear when they change, arise or disappear radically.<sup>27</sup>

However, they did remember the optimistic sounds of restarted coal, steel and iron production, familiar sounds that indicate a return to industrial power, symbolised by factory sirens, mine shaft signals and the rhythm of steel hammers. In the collective memory of the Ruhr, these sounds indicated: “We’re on the way back!”

---

25 Blank, “Kriegsende”, 8.

26 Schafer, *The Tuning of the World*, 9–10.

27 Missfelder, “Period Ear”, 37.

*Figure 5: Pits and plants as symbols of the economic miracle, here pit “Minister Stein” in Dortmund-Ewing, photo: Kultur- und Geschichtsverein Minister Stein*



The bunker population was united by the fear of death, which was expressed by metaphors of sounds in the testimonies. In telling bunker stories of bombing, crying and praying, West Germans emphasised “the stunning evidence of crimes committed not by the Germans against others, but by others against Germany”,<sup>28</sup> as Robert G. Moeller recalled when speaking of the end of the war in the East. The sound experiences of the bombing nights in the West also created an “imagined community”. They nourished an identity as victims – here as victims of the Allied bombing campaign. This is a corresponding story, which derives its own persuasive power particularly from the sounds of the reconstructed industries.

During the reconstruction phase after the Second World War, the Ruhr was the motor of the western German economic revival. The mining, iron and steel industries helped the country to repair the wartime damage. The significance of the soundscape of reconstruction, linked with the soundscape of the victims, brilliantly realises the German national master narrative of the “Wirtschaftswunder” – the

---

<sup>28</sup> Moeller, “Remembering the War”, 84.

economic miracle. In fact, the rhythm of the endless Ruhr coal wagons became the soundtrack of the economic miracle, a master narrative determining the identity of the Ruhr up to the present day.

## The new Dortmund

*Figure 6: Old and new city layout, source: Dortmund municipal archives*



The planning policy of Dortmund took less account of historic structure. The city's design focused on wide, straight avenues. Only the churches kept their place in the new city, linking it to its mediaeval history. Such far-reaching interventions in the city's layout had been seen in neither the Wilhelmine era nor in 1920. The top priority of a car-friendly city initiated a massive reformatting of the urban soundscape.<sup>29</sup>

---

<sup>29</sup> Heine-Hippler, "Will Schwaz", 62.

*Figure 7: New perspectives for cars; only the churches kept their place in the new concept, photo: Gerhard Fleitmann*



The massive devastation and the influx of displaced people, refugees and expellees looking for jobs in the Ruhr presented the local authorities with immense problems of urban development. Five years after the war, 500,000 people were living in Dortmund again.

Figure 8: New sounds through new building materials in the new consumer city centre, photo: Gerhard Fleitmann



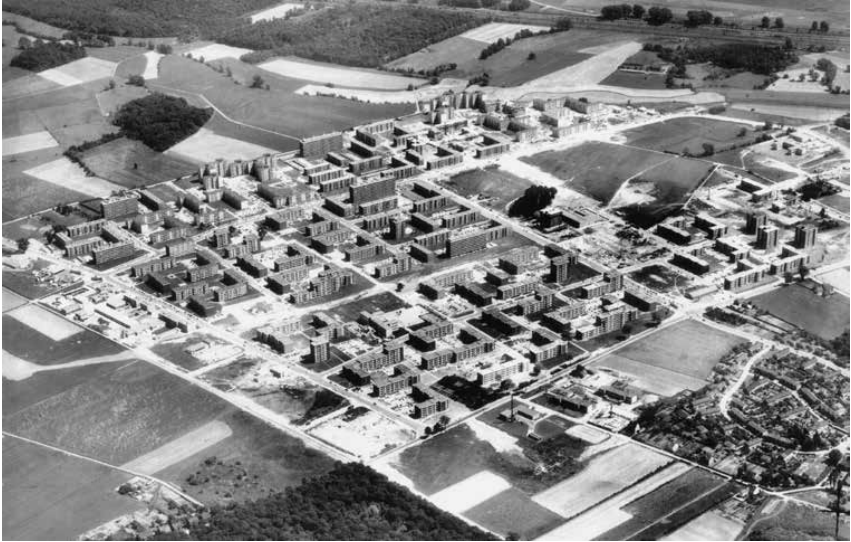
In 1953, the city had as many inhabitants as ever, but the pre-war housing stock had not yet been reached.<sup>30</sup> There was an urgent need for housing. Large-scale terraced housing estates were built around the industrial spaces, the model espoused being that of the “gegliederte und aufgelockerte Stadt” (“dispersed and structured city”).<sup>31</sup> There arose a new soundscape, which is charmingly documented in the 1952 educational film *The Slagheap Playground*. At the end of

30 Heine-Hippler and Trocka-Hülsken, “Wohnungsbau”.

31 See illustrations in Framke, *Das neue Dortmund*, 90–94; see also Fürst, Himmelbach and Potz, *Leitbilder*, 42–45.

the film, the young protagonist, a football player, moves to a new suburban settlement.<sup>32</sup>

*Figure 9: Dortmund-Scharnhorst large-scale housing estate, following the German urban planning model of the “gegliederte und aufgelockerte Stadt” (“dispersed and structured city”), photo: Walter Moog, DOGEWO*



In 1945, the time of the air raid sirens was not yet over. The British authorities used them to announce a dusk-till-dawn curfew. In May 1945, it lasted from 9 p.m. to 5 a.m. The sirens sounded for one minute, fifteen minutes before and at the beginning of the curfews.<sup>33</sup> The Federal Republic of Germany’s civil defence continued to make use of it to prepare the population for a nuclear first strike. Thus it became also one of the acoustic signatures of the Cold War.

The Dortmund war chronicle of 1945 noted the following about the British information policy: “Every Thursday at 1 p.m., official messages were spread through speakers on Hansa Square, in Hörde and in Aplerbeck”.<sup>34</sup> For 25 May 1945, the chronicle writes about the resumption of some train connections. From

32 Westfälisches Landesmedienzentrum, *Der Platz an der Halde. Ein Film von Frank Leberecht und Herbert Fischer 1952/53*, 35 mm, 52 Min.

33 See document in *Heimat Dortmund*, 1 (2015), 69.

34 *Ibid.*, 68.



15 June, the tram re-linked the Hörde suburb to the little town of Schwerte on the River Ruhr.<sup>35</sup> The British authorities announced the opening of cinemas for Monday, 30 July. One hour before the curfew started, the cinemas had to close, so that the audience could find their way home.<sup>36</sup>

Figure 10: Announcement: “The cinemas will open again. Blockbusters first”, Ruhr Zeitung, 27 July 1945, Dortmund municipal archives

**Ruhr Zeitung**  
HERAUSGEBER: DIE BRITISCHE BESATZUNGSBEHÖRDE

No. 12      Freitag, den 27. Juli 1945      Preis 20 Pf.

# Montag eröffnen die Kinos

## Erst kommen Spielfilme zur Aufführung

**I**n der nördlichen Rheinprovinz und in Westfalen ist die Eröffnung von 490 Lichtspielkammern für die nächsten beiden Wochen vorgesehen. 129 Kinos in der nördlichen Rheinprovinz und etwa die gleiche Anzahl in Westfalen beginnen bereits am Montag, dem 30. Juli, mit ihren Vorstellungen.

In dem ersten Zeit wird in jedem Kino nur ein Film gezeigt werden, und zwar ein Spielfilm. Die Militärregierung wird durch die Anzahl und Zeiten der Vorstellungen festsetzen. Überall werden die Lichtspielhäuser eine Stunde vor Eintritt des Ausgangsverbotes geschlossen, so daß das Publikum genügend Zeit findet, nach Hause zu gehen.

**Britische und amerikanische später**

Zunächst werden nur deutsche Filme vorgeführt werden, es ist aber zu erwarten, daß binnen kurzem britische und amerikanische Filme beschafft werden können.

Die Veranlassung der Wiedereröffnung der Lichtspielhäuser, die seit langem vom Publikum erwartet wurde, ist demnach zurückzuführen, daß die Wiedererrichtungsbauarbeiten in einem Colosse, das so viel Kriegsschäden davongetragen hat wie das Schauspiel und Varietäten, eine besonders schwierige Aufgabe darstellen.

**Ausgangsbeschränkung**  
30. Juli — 11. August  
von 21.45 bis 05.15

Ab 1. August werden die Zeiten des Ausgangsverbotes in allen Städten und Dörfern, die über Flugpläne verfügen, täglich durch die Sirenen angekündigt.

15 Minuten vor Beginn der Ausgangsverbote wird Flugalarm gegeben.

Der Beginn des Ausgangsverbotes wird das Signal „Geld zu wechseln“ gegeben.

In September 1945, there came a sound event of outstanding importance, marking the start of the industrial reconstruction: “On 26 September 1945, at Hörder Hüttenverein [steel plant], the first tapping of pig iron since the Second World War”, notes the annalist Luise von Winterfeld.<sup>37</sup> On 11 November 1945, the military government decreed a two-minute silence to commemorate the fallen soldiers of the two world wars. Von Winterfeld laconically notes: “two minutes of silence, halted traffic, etc. at 12 p.m. In Dortmund, you didn’t notice anything at all”<sup>38</sup>

35 Ibid., 68.

36 Ruhr Zeitung, 27 July 1945; see document in *Heimat Dortmund*, 1 (2015), 69

37 *Heimat Dortmund*, 1 (2015), 70.

38 Ibid., 72.

## The world is waiting for the sunrise

While most inhabitants of the Ruhr were proudly listening to the sound of the reconstruction, dangerous new sounds came from pubs, music halls, restaurants and cinemas. During the post-war period, up to the Währungsreform (currency reform), the restaurant “Zur Postkutsche” in the Aplerbeck district became an extraordinary music venue. The Marktplatz Aplerbeck tram stop had more passengers than ever before. On Saturdays and Sundays, the trams offered extra tours to Aplerbeck. They transported amusement seekers, who loved to dance with jazz bands like Walter Hanke, Karl Scheel, Charly Little or Joe Wick.<sup>39</sup>

*Figure 11: Hall of the “Postkutsche” in Dortmund-Aplerbeck, photo: private collection*



These bands played the hottest jazz ever. In the audience, as well as on stage, there were young guys who had just been exposed to jazz during the Nazi era. Many of them had their first contact with authentic jazz in the Nazi military. Pit Buschmann, a talented jazz guitarist, heard his first authentic jazz record at the Flak in Dortmund-Wellinghofen. For him, jazz symbolised a new era. This was the music of the liberators, a music signifying humanity, tolerance, freedom and democracy. For most Germans, however, it was the music of the occupiers: “American” mass culture. For German bourgeois critics, jazz – as music as well

---

39 Schmidt, Müller and Ortman, *Jazz in Dortmund*, 54

as a lifestyle – signalled the collapse of the established order, the mixing of races and the dissolution of gender roles in dance and entertainment.

Dortmund musicians who started their career as jazz musicians at that time remembered tunes of key significance to them. “Bonny” Schüten (today nobody knows his real name!<sup>40</sup>), founder and banjo player of the Dortmund band Dark Town Stompers, listened to his first jazz tune on Radio Munich, broadcast by the American military government. It was “The World is Waiting for the Sunrise” by Benny Goodman. Other musicians cited Goodman’s “Moonglow” as their crucial experience: “This music is my music, this music I want to play!”<sup>41</sup>

Few artists could have articulated the dawn of the new age so poignantly as Benny Goodman. Again and again, the Nazi propaganda had shown his hands on the clarinet flaps for its racist defamation, titled “Verbrecherhände” (“hands of a criminal”).<sup>42</sup> “Glen” Buschmann – later director of the Dortmund municipal music school – got a job in Joe Wick’s band, one nucleus of the developing big band scene in West Germany. Thanks to the financial support of the British Army Welfare Service, Joe Wick’s orchestra became the leading West German big band. Jazz lovers praised it as the best band the German jazz scene had to offer at that time. As Joachim Ernst Behrend, known as the “German Jazz Pope”, emphasised: “Hearing the first Brunswick records of Joe Wick, I was sure this had to be an American band, with black musicians. It was inconceivable that in 1947 a German band could play such authentic jazz music.”<sup>43</sup>

---

40 Young jazz musicians chose an American first name like “Glen”, “Pit” or “Bonny” for their new identity.

41 Schmidt, Müller and Ortman, *Jazz in Dortmund*, 57.

42 See headline and article in *Illustrierter Beobachter, Folge*, 1944/26.

43 Schmidt, Müller and Ortman, *Jazz in Dortmund*, 59.

Figure 12: *The Joe Wick Orchestra, June 1948; photo: Archiv Horst Lange*



Yet most contemporaries listened to something different. The narratives of concert reviews illustrate how strongly the racist ideology of the middle-class national conservatives and the Nazis still held people in thrall: “Joe Wick is for drugs”, the *Westdeutsche Allgemeine Zeitung* headlined after a concert in Dortmund.<sup>44</sup> And the *Westfälisches Tageblatt* wrote: “Players and audiences are mesmerised by syncopation! The bassist hits his bass to the point of ecstasy. The trumpet player blows a double high C with rolling eyes. The massed audience beats the time. Are they betraying Bach?”<sup>45</sup>

Interestingly, in contemporary concert reviews of the post-war era, the trumpeter is always playing a “C” with “rolling eyes”, a racist image of the childlike, primitive “Nigger”. You can find this image in films and pictures, even repeated by the trumpeter Louis Armstrong himself. It refers to the Blackface Minstrelsy, a form of entertainment in the US that was developed in the early nineteenth century. The show lampooned black people as dim-witted, happy-go-lucky children. Associated with ecstatic bodies, percussion instruments and a high tempo, this narrative evokes the primitive energy of jazz music. It highlights the perils of the “abendländische Kultur”, the corroding of white maleness by the “cultural

44 Ibid., 59.

45 Ibid., 60.

feminism” of American mass culture – a favourite bourgeois German discourse disdaining mass culture since the Wilhelmine era.

Indeed, in the main, newspapers did not inform people about the music of the Joe Wick Orchestra, but pointed out fears about national identity within the context of German capitulation and American consumer culture. This thesis is confirmed by concert reviews in newspapers from southern Germany, which sound almost identical to western ones from the Ruhr. Joe Wick, born in 1916 in the Rhineland as Josef Wick, clearly participated in this discussion with his music performances. It can be read between the lines of a concert review published in the *Westfälische Rundschau*, a major newspaper in the Ruhr at that time. Joe Wick’s band had played in the newly reopened “Assauer Lichtspiele” in the north of Dortmund. The newspaper wrote: “A little later, during the ‘Chattanooga Choo-Choo’, the seventeen musicians of the rhythm section, one after the other, packed their instruments and left the stage. In front of the stage, Joe shouldered his violin. He couldn’t stop the band dissonantly playing ‘Old Comrades’ as jazz, while absurdly performing a kind of parade”.<sup>46</sup>

The military march “Old Comrades” [Alte Kameraden] represented (and still represents!) German militarism at its best: its commando structures, marching order, goose steps and strong white German maleness. Today, this sophisticated review reflects a critical anti-military music performance and an explicit political message, staged by the Joe Wick Orchestra: should Germany at last be on the path to coolness, casualness and a democratic attitude – after all the devastating militarism, nationalism, masculinism and racism?

How did the post-war period sound to contemporaries? Every night, people woke up screaming, wartime experiences still hammering in their heads. Wolfgang Borchert, writer of famous short stories like “The Man Outside”, implies: “For us, our sleep is filled with battle. Our night is filled with battle noise in its dream-death [...]. Who will write new laws of harmony for us? We no longer need well-tempered pianos. We ourselves are too dissonant. [...] We no longer need any still-lives. Our life is loud”.<sup>47</sup>

---

46 *Westdeutsche Allgemeine Zeitung*, 23 October 1948, *Westdeutsches Tageblatt*, 16/23 October 1948; quoted in Schmidt, Müller and Ortmann, *Jazz in Dortmund*, 60.

47 “Wer schreibt für uns eine neue Harmonielehre? Wir brauchen keine wohltemperierten Klaviere mehr. Wir selbst sind zuviel Dissonanz. [...] Wir brauchen keine Stilleben mehr. Unser Leben ist laut”. Borchert, “Das ist unser Manifest”, 113.

## Conclusion

People learned to gain their bearings in space and time thanks to battle sounds, signals and sirens. But in 1945, the time of the sirens was not yet over. The Federal Republic of Germany continued using air raid sirens. For many, nights and dreams were still filled with the noises of war. So they became also acoustic signatures of the Cold War. Epistemologically, the opposition between “roaring war” and “silent peace” does not work. That fixed polarisation does not apply to reconstructing the urban soundscapes of “1945”, with the public and private dimensions, inner and outer sounds. We need simultaneous thinking about the non-simultaneous, about overlapping soundscapes. We need case studies of examples, situations, details and fragments. We need case studies that are aware of anthropological and technical, as well as spatial, references.

## Bibliography

- Abeck, Susanne, and Schmidt, Uta C. (eds), *Stulle mit Margarine und Zucker. Heimat Ruhrgebiet* (Essen: Klartext, 2015).
- Blank, Ralf, “Kriegsende in Dortmund – die zerstörte Stadt”, *Heimat Dortmund*, 1 (2015), 3–12.
- “Kriegsendphase und ‘Heimatfront’ in Westfalen”, *Westfälische Forschungen*, 5 (2005), 361–421.
- Böhme, Gernot, *Anmutungen. Über das Ästhetische* (Ostfildern: Ed Tertium 1998).
- *Atmosphäre. Essays zur neuen Ästhetik* (Berlin: Suhrkamp 2013).
- Borchert, Wolfgang, “Das ist unser Manifest”, in *Draußen vor der Tür* (Reinbek bei Hamburg: Rowohlt 1973).
- Bull Michael, and Back, Les (eds), *The Auditory Culture Reader* (Oxford: Berg, 2003).
- Chartier, Roger, “Kulturgeschichte zwischen Repräsentationen und Praktiken. Einleitung”, in *Die unvollendete Vergangenheit. Geschichte und die Macht der Weltauslegung* (Berlin: Wagenbach 1989), 7–20.
- “Die unvollendete Vergangenheit. Beziehungen zwischen Philosophie und Geschichte”, in *Die unvollendete Vergangenheit. Geschichte und die Macht der Weltauslegung* (Berlin: Wagenbach 1989), 21–36, first published in *Philosophie et histoire: actes du séminaire tenu à Paris, au Centre Georges-Pompidou, les 23, 24 et 25 avril 1986, organisé par l’Espace de séminaire du Centre Georges-Pompidou et l’Espace international de recherche philosophique et interdisciplinaire* (Paris: Centre Georges-Pompidou, 1987), 115–135.

- Corbin, Alain, *Les cloches de la terre: paysage sonore et culture sensible dans les campagnes au XIX<sup>e</sup> siècle* (Paris: Michel, 1994).
- Feiereisen, Florence, and Hill, Alexandra Merly (eds), *Germany in the Loud Twentieth Century* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2012).
- Fürst, Franz, Himmelbach, Ursus, and Potz, Petra, *Leitbilder der räumlichen Stadtentwicklung im 20. Jahrhundert – Wege zur Nachhaltigkeit?*, Berichte aus dem Institut für Raumplanung, 41 (Dortmund: Institut für Raumplanung, 1999).
- Geertz, Clifford, “Thick description: toward an interpretive theory of culture”, in *The Interpretation of Cultures: Selected Essays* (New York: Basic Books, 2000), 3–30.
- Grontzki, Nina, Niewerth, Gerd, Norbistrath, Gudrun, and Potthoff, Rolf (eds), *Feuersturm und Hungerwinter. Zeitzeugen erinnern sich an Krieg und Wiederaufbau* (Essen: Klartext 2007).
- Günther, Dorothea, <http://www.dhm.de/lemo/zeitzeugen/dorothea-guenter-der-krieg-193940>, accessed 29 March 2017.
- Heine-Hippler, Bettina, “Will Schwarz und die Dortmunder Gespräche”, in Gisela Framke (ed.), *Das neue Dortmund. Planen, Bauen, Wohnen in den fünfziger Jahren* (Dortmund: Kettler, 2002), 57–67.
- , and Trocka-Hülksen, Ingrid, “Wohnungsbau in der Nachkriegszeit”, in Gisela Framke (ed.), *Das neue Dortmund. Planen, Bauen, Wohnen in den fünfziger Jahren* (Dortmund: Kettler, 2002), 80–94.
- Krause, Joseph P., <http://ww2today.com/6-november-1944-black-monday-for-gelsenkirchen-as-raf-bombers-return>, accessed 29 March 2015.
- Leberecht, Frank, and Fischer, Herbert (directors), *Der Platz an der Halde* (film), 1952/53, Westfälisches Landesmedienzentrum, 35 mm, 52 Min.
- Missfelder, Jan-Friedrich, “Period Ear. Perspektiven einer Klanggeschichte”, *Geschichte und Gesellschaft*, 38 (2012), 21–47.
- Moeller, Robert G., “Remembering the war in a nation of victims. West German pasts in the 1950s”, in Hanna Schissler (ed.), *The Miracle Years. A Cultural History of West Germany 1949–1968* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2001), 83–109.
- Morat, Daniel, “Sound Studies – Sound Histories. Zur Frage nach dem Klang in der Geschichtswissenschaft und der Geschichte in der Klangwissenschaft”, *kunsttexte.de/Auditive Perspektiven*, 4 (2010), 1–7, <http://www.kunsttexte.de/index.php?id=711&idartikel=37458&ausgabe=37455&zu=907&L=0>, accessed 29 March 2017.
- Schafer, Murray R., *The Tuning of the World* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1977).

- Schmidt, Uta C., "Radioaneignung", in Inge Marßolek and Adelheid von Saldern (eds), *Zuhören und Gehörtwerden I: Radio im Nationalsozialismus. Zwischen Lenkung und Ablenkung* (Tübingen: Discord, 1998), 243–355.
- , Müller, Andreas, and Ortmann, Richard, *Jazz in Dortmund. Hot-Modern-Free-New* (Essen: Klartext 2004).
- Schneider, Angela, and Kiefer, Anselm, *Anselm Kiefer* (Berlin: Nicolaische Verlagsbuchhandlung Beuermann, 1991).
- Urmersbach, Karlheinz, [http://www.gelsenzentrum.de/bombenangriff\\_1944.htm](http://www.gelsenzentrum.de/bombenangriff_1944.htm), accessed 29 March 2017.
- Weinauge, Willy (ed.), *Von der toten zur lebendigen Stadt. Fünf Jahre Wiederaufbau in Dortmund* (Dortmund: Dortmunder Zeitschrift, Schinker, 1951).
- Wieden, Lotta, "Maikäfer, flieg! Die meisten von uns kennen es noch: das Maikäfer-Lied. Aber warum eigentlich? Warum ist diese alte Kinderweise noch nicht in Vergessenheit geraten? Unsere Autorin hat sich auf eine Spurensuche quer durch Deutschland gemacht", *Frankfurter Allgemeine Sonntagszeitung*, 5 April 2015, 43–44, <http://www.faz.net/aktuell/gesellschaft/alters-kinderlied-maikaefer-flieg-13522509.html?printPagedArticle=true>, accessed 29 March 2017.



# DuEPublico

Duisburg-Essen Publications online

UNIVERSITÄT  
DUISBURG  
ESSEN

Offen im Denken

ub

universitäts  
bibliothek

This text is made available via DuEPublico, the institutional repository of the University of Duisburg-Essen. This version may eventually differ from another version distributed by a commercial publisher.

**DOI:** 10.17185/duepublico/76169

**URN:** urn:nbn:de:hbz:465-20220701-143830-8

Schmidt, Uta C.: Roaring war and silent peace? Initial reflections on the soundscape in the Ruhr between area bombing and reconstruction. In: *Sounds of War and Peace: Soundscapes of European Cities in 1945* / Tańczuk, Renata; Wieczorek, Sławomir (Hrsg.). - Bern: Peter Lang, 2018, pp. 31-54. The book is available online at: <https://doi.org/10.3726/b13870>



This work may be used under a Creative Commons Attribution - NonCommercial - NoDerivatives 4.0 License (CC BY-NC-ND 4.0).