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PROJECT MUSE

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Music, Noise, and Nature: Energetic Ambiguities in Benedikt Erlingsson's *Woman at War*

HEIDI HART AND BEATE SCHIRRMACHER

Abstract. Unlike most films dealing with the challenges of climate change or globalization, Benedikt Erlingsson's film *Woman at War* (2018) is full of energetic humor and contradictions. The protagonist's conflicting roles as choir director, eco-warrior, and future adoptive mother undermine expected binaries, as do onscreen musicians in this communication of complexity. In our intermedial and ecocritical analysis, we demonstrate how the film's sound design exploits ambiguities of diegesis, nature and culture, music and noise, and order and revolt to generate a more empowering than merely entertaining plot.

Introduction

In the Icelandic countryside, an eco-warrior cuts power lines, evading police helicopters as she digs herself into the earth. When she is not scaling pylons or hiding among a distant relative's sheep at a police checkpoint, Halla is a community choir director, buoyantly conducting Icelandic hymns and conspiring with a local municipal leader under the noise of the copy machine. She is also, after a fortuitous phone call, the future adoptive mother of an orphan in East Ukraine. Amid these three apparently contradictory vocations, Halla finds herself accompanied by various musicians appearing, seemingly out of nowhere, on a hillside or in her city flat: a small brass band and a Ukrainian women's trio. This chorus of sorts (in the Greek sense) adds a level of strangeness to an already unconventional ecological tale. Benedikt Erlingsson's film *Woman at War* (2018) is an example of how to respond to a crisis, in this case human-caused global warming, through the language of contradiction. The film asks what is most important—the grand gestures or the little everyday steps? Radical actions or care for others?

At the narrative level, this is a story full of humor, with elements of an ecological thriller. At the audiovisual level, it is even more complex. A closer look (and listen!) reveals the film to be carefully composed as a repetition of motifs, inverting, mirroring, and repeating images and sounds that contrast *and* connect different aspects of what it means to be a woman, an activist, a mother, and an artist in a time of multiple global crises. One aspect of this complexity is music. In the film's sensory ecosystem, music jumps into every scene, not only heard but visually present as well, as the musicians appear on an Icelandic mountain, in the protagonist's flat, or beside an airport runway. Not only does music pop up unexpectedly, but it also collides with and amplifies the protagonist's already noisy acts of sabotage, leading to questions about her vocation in the narrative. It is significant that Halla is a choir leader and not, for example, a schoolteacher or a civil servant, professions that would sufficiently contrast with her activist alter ego. Together with the ambiguous presence of film music onscreen, Halla's profession already points toward the key roles of music and sound.

In the following, we explore music in *Woman at War* as a narrative agent in a context of noise, violence, and activism.

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Sonic ambiguities do not primarily lead to aesthetic distance but convey energetic affect and involvement. The force of rhythmic, percussive music adds to the film's narrative drive, sometimes blurring distinctions between music and noise, or between sonic order and destruction. While Lisa Coulthard highlights the ways in which music and sound in violent scenes lead to an immersive experience of such scenes,[1] we explore a use of music that both resists immersion *and* creates complex involvements.

In order to analyze this apparent paradox, we apply an intermedial perspective that explores how material, sensorial, spatiotemporal, and semiotic aspects contribute to processes of meaning-making.[2] Intermedial analysis focuses in particular on interactions that challenge conventional media boundaries and explores how differences on one level are bridged by similarities on another level.[3] We explore such a relation in *Woman at War* when we focus on sensorial ambiguities that challenge conventional understandings of how narrative and music relate. Drawing on Zygmunt Bauman's concept of the undecidable, we demonstrate how sound and music are used in a way that destabilizes a whole set of conceptual binaries such as music/noise, nature/culture, and order/revolt. Ambiguity in this sense functions as an exemplar for facing entanglements of ecological, economic, and political crisis. Ultimately, we argue that *Woman at War* negotiates complexity in a material, kinetic way, refusing easy answers and leaving audiences with a sense of embodied engagement in the face of difficult personal and planetary obligations.

Music and Environmental Protest

Woman at War brings random images and sounds together: choirs singing and musicians appearing on hillsides, powerlines exploding to the sound of a grand piano, a Spanish tourist biking through the Icelandic lava fields. This clashing of apparently unrelated elements is a common technique of comedy. However, while the film's plot, taken for itself, may come across as humorous, it also connects to contemporary environmental protest in Iceland. As Halla cuts the power lines of an unspecified aluminum smelter, her actions recall environmental protests in the early 2000s against the controversial Kárahnjúkar dam. The construction of this dam flooded large areas in one of Europe's largest former wilderness areas to provide electricity for the Fjarðaál aluminum smelter.

With this history in the film's background, Halla's role as a choir leader and activist mirrors recent musical forms of protest in Iceland. A 2007 music documentary, *Heima* (*At Home*, directed by Dean DeBois), shows the post-rock band Sigur Rós performing pop-up concerts throughout Iceland, including one in which they play unannounced and unplugged on a rugged hillside. The sudden outdoor appearances of the band in *Woman at War* may remind viewers of Sigur Rós pop-up concerts like this one. Not only has music occurred in odd places as part of these protests, but documentaries about them exploit visual and auditory ambiguity. *Heima*'s aesthetic includes glitch-style visual editing; another documentary on the Kárahnjúkar protests, *Draumalandið* (*Dreamland*, 2009, directed by Þorfinnur Guðnason, and Andri Snær Magnason) includes a "glitched-up" version of the folksong "Grýlukvæði."[4] In Valgeir Sigurðsson's digitally distorted, slightly stuttering version of a song that is usually associated with Christmastime, "something is *off* and it's hard to pinpoint exactly what."[5]

Likewise, *Woman at War* draws on the ambiguous sound and irruptive sound works in the context of environmental protest and as a way to perform rather than to smooth gaps. Halla's double identity connects to the spirit of Icelandic music-protest efforts that

take the form of "carnivalesque direct action."[6] The film not only recalls these protests but also draws attention to related socio-economic problems. When Halla discovers that her actions lack support among people who are afraid of losing their jobs, the film foregrounds conflicts between economic interests and ecological concerns, and between social and ecological sustainability. As Halla attacks the aluminum smelter by cutting power lines, her action also highlights the ambivalent fact that not all electrically-gained renewable water power is friendly to its environment.

Ambiguity as Destabilization of Binaries

The plot of *Woman at War* is about more than environmental protest. As Halla has to decide whether to continue her activism or to provide shelter for an orphaned Ukrainian girl, her individual and moral conflict illustrates competing demands among ecological, economic, and political crises. The film enacts this complexity on several material levels.

To understand the role of aesthetic ambiguity in the film, we need to pay attention to the effects of perceptual ambiguity on ordering binaries. As Zygmunt Bauman has stressed in his work on ambiguity in modernity, binaries are a way to bring order and clarity into the intrinsic ambiguity of the world. We use ordering binaries like good/bad, friend/enemy, or right/wrong for orientation and decision-making in a complex world. Ambiguity, however, resists these ordering binaries and remains "undecidable,"[7] as it not only questions the stability of a specific phenomenon but also draws attention to the constructedness of a binary order itself. Thus, *perceptual* ambiguities, as in the auditory and visual oscillations in *Woman at War*, have the potential to destabilize a whole set of *conceptual* binaries as well.

In clearly defined contexts, the destabilization of order is enjoyable as aesthetic or carnivalistic experience. However, when ambiguity arises in the context of decision-making and is perceived concurrently with the need to take action, it takes on disruptive potential. Then ambiguity triggers a reactive attempt to create coherence. If this ambiguity continues to resist and thus prevents our use of binary patterns for decision-making, we experience ambivalence as the "existence of positive and negative evaluations of an attitude object"[8] or the "possibility of assigning an object of an event to more than one category."[9] Unresolved ambiguities can thus provoke ambivalence and, when resisted, cognitive dissonance.

The effect of unresolved ambiguity on binary orders offers valuable entry points when approaching *Woman at War*. The film's auditory and visual ambiguities create less cognitive dissonance than energetic engagement, exploiting affective involvement in the sense of *energeia* or the rhetorical concept of vivid expression. In *Woman at War*, contrasting audiovisual elements do not follow predictable trajectories of ironic illustration but rather, as Danijela Kulezic-Wilson describes it in her approach to sound design, "create a space where ambiguity is accepted and narrative strategies encourage both emotional and intellectual engagement."[10] This use of ambiguous sound to create involvement, and the affective response to ambiguity as a way to communicate the complexity of global challenges, is yet another aspect of the performative roles of music and sound that Lisa Coulthard has described in the context of screen violence.[11]

In our analysis, we begin by exploring how the use of film music, and especially the *position* of film music, both creates and questions the frail binary of diegetic/nondiegetic and how this ambiguity also applies to the conventional boundary between music and noise. The constant blurring of distinctions

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on one level and the clash of unrelated elements on other levels draws attention to and subverts additional binary orders of nature/culture and order/revolt, as well as related visual ambiguities.

Diegesis/Nondiegesis and Itinerant Music

Film music as undecidable in relation to diegesis acts as a frame to deal with complex entanglements without trying to enforce unambiguity, a forcing that usually leads to cognitive dissonance. In *Woman at War*, musicians onscreen create a space of ambiguity in a more energetic than dissonant way. The itinerant musicians who sooner or later appear whenever music is heard enliven the difference between Michel Chion's "screen" and "pit" music.[12] Though additional terms seek to clarify the relation between film music and the story world, the binary of diegetic/nondiegetic (or "meta-," "extra-," or even "intradiegetic") music[13] remains fraught. As Anahid Kassabian has pointed out, film music often seems to occur in an in-between position that the diegetic/nondiegetic binary does not easily grasp, because it relates in multiple ways to the narrative events.[14]

In *Woman at War*, the instrumental band and the Ukrainian singers appear on the screen and at the same time seem to intrude on it. If considered as figments of Halla's imagination, they would seem to fit with Claudia Gorbman's term "meta-diegetic" music,[15] or music limited to a character's subjective experience, but this term does not explain a Spanish tourist's apparent perception of the band as well. The roving presence of musicians could, alternatively, be framed as "oneiric" cinema, with shifting and even absurd levels of reality.[16] Oneiric film augments everyday life onscreen with a "dreamlike alternative reality" that can serve as commentary.[17] The fact that terms like "meta-diegetic" and "oneiric" come close to explaining the musicians' role on the edges of the onscreen narrative but do not quite apply (the musicians are more workaday and comic than dreamlike) shows how effective the film is in raising viewers' attention through ambiguity. They also serve a deeper purpose than the surprise revealing of acousmatic musical sources[18] to comic effect in Mel Brooks's *Blazing Saddles* (1974), for instance.

Play with diegetic and nondiegetic music is certainly not new, and theorizing the "act of crossing" as a "destabilizing" move in Robynn Stilwell's sense[19] has led to additional nuance, as in Jeff Smith's response to Stilwell's work, moving beyond her theatrical model to show how music occurs as part of the film's sensory material in the creation of, not separation from, the storyworld.[20] Even with these overlapping frameworks in mind, the position of the musicians in *Woman at War* remains undecidable. In one sense, they appear in what Stilwell has termed the "fantastical gap" between music inside or outside the film's storyworld.[21] At the same time, even by being placed in this gap, the musicians highlight their role as part of the sensory cinematic material (in Smith's sense) of an audiovisually narrated storyworld in which, as Signe Kjær Jensen points out, "all music (and sound) will be understood and interpreted according to a narrative world, while at the same time being part of creating this world."[22] As a consequence, the wandering musicians belong to a fictional world that they help to shape, even as they disrupt it.

In a broader sense, the ambiguous diegesis in *Woman at War* also exposes the mechanism of production in a Brechtian sense: this film is fiction, after all, one of many difficult attempts to convey the urgency of the climate crisis. The band's brass-and-percussion sound evokes the music of Hanns Eisler and its related Brechtian aesthetics as well, isolating music as artifice in an activist setting, but

in a more playful than didactic way. With this aspect in mind, the director's own word works as a helpful cue: Benedikt Erlingsson thinks of the pop-up musicians as a "playful" way to bring the Greek chorus into cinema: "You can do it, if you make an agreement with the viewer early on that this is a film with a band of musicians commenting on the story."[23] To follow this thread all the way back to Plato's treatment of the theatre,[24] "itinerant choirs" function as disrupters of official business. When a choir "begins to wander," showing up at random, it becomes dangerous to the status quo.[25]

The musicians' unpredictable presence in *Woman at War* prevents conventionalized interpretation too. Their itinerant, trickster interference in the narrative world does create comic effects but also involves agency. When Halla contemplates potential motherhood, a band member appears in Halla's flat, playing the slow movement from Mozart's 23rd piano concerto. What would otherwise look and sound like an ordinary scene of domestic music-making becomes strange. At first Mozart might seem to express Halla's contemplative state of mind or the film's larger, affective atmosphere, as she watches people fleeing from floods on the TV. As the camera moves from Halla's close-up to the room in which she stands, the audience *sees* the music played with improvisational hesitation. This move unsettles the whole fabric of diegesis, but something more happens as well. As Chion has pointed out, "revealing the source" of acousmatic music is not new.[26] In this case, when its source appears, the music turns from spiritual and private emotions to public commentary. Mozart enters the flat with images of people rescued from floodings; their appearance, after a news story about the aluminum smelter, raises awareness of what is out of balance ecologically. The contingency of art music and ecological and humanitarian crisis undermines the idea of music as "elevating" in both spiritual and class senses, an idea preserved from the late eighteenth century and now contested in economic and racial terms, but it also connects art music to action and change.

Likewise, the presence of the Ukrainian trio works as more than an entertaining intrusion into the narrative. If the film included an offscreen Ukrainian leitmotif instead, this might simply signal Halla's longing to adopt the child waiting for her in the orphanage. The unexpected presence of the Ukranian singers creates a distancing but not alienating effect that, like the pianist in Halla's flat, implies agency and the potential for change. The singers' position in between (both present and intruding, playful and serious) mediates between crises and dreams, Ukraine and Iceland, individual activism and the wish to provide shelter for others. Any *Verfremdungseffekt* occurs within the film's energizing dynamic of contrasting realities.

This ambiguous closeness raises the question of how a serious topic like climate crisis can be treated with humor, and whether this de-escalates the "terrorist" acts portrayed onscreen. Like Daniel Dencik's 2013 almost-mockumentary *Expedition to the End of the World*, in which a ragtag group of scientists and artists tries to grasp Greenland's melting ice, humor and interruptive music raise attention through active rather than passive audience engagement.[27] Rather than providing a rhapsodic or elegiac portrayal of an endangered planet, both films destabilize this expectation and keep viewers wondering what the role of humans, and of human-made art, is as the climate warms beyond repair.

Ultimately, the wandering musicians in *Woman at War* reflect Halla's equally dangerous interventions, in a "gesture" or "trajectory" across the diegetic border[28] as she seems to become more and more aware of them. Seen this way, their comedic closeness to acts of sabotage makes more sense, though

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not in terms of an easy explanation. Despite the director's sense of an "agreement" with the audience on how to read the film's diegetic gap, the actual experience of the film is not so easy to pin down. The gap is not smoothed over but makes itself notable, as an oscillating, in-between position that destabilizes and questions the status quo. Just as audiences cannot agree on whether or not Halla is a "terrorist,"[29] they are likely to take different positions on whether the musicians are part of the characters' own storyworld or exist only as marginal commentary. Perhaps the wandering band performs its own kind of sabotage, too, questioning Halla's role and drawing attention to film as fiction. These ambiguities unsettle what would otherwise be a heavy-handed ecological storyline.

Ambiguous Sounds between Music and Noise

Sound in *Woman at War* not only works ambiguously in relation to diegesis but also undermines the binary of music and noise. Like many contemporary films, this one relies on a soundscape beyond illustrative music and convincing foley work. In its sparse scoring and heightening of ordinary sounds, the film "foregrounds the sensuous aspects for the medium itself,"[30] leading audiences "into active engagement with the soundscape being represented."[31] As Liz Greene has noted, even terms like "music" and "film sound" contain their own ambiguities, and parsing "noise" as a sonic category poses difficulties.[32] From R. Murray Schafer's description of noise as "sounds we have learned to ignore"[33] to Michel Chion's conflation of noise and sound effects,[34] the territory is already complicated. Jacques Attali's approach, which holds that defining noise depends on the system around it, is useful because it takes audience response into account: sound design that "sounds like noise but acts like music" can bring viewer-listeners into closer engagement with the film if they do not feel manipulated.[35]

In several instances, noise takes on more than a foley function in terms of creating a "naturalistic" scene. Viewers have likely already become more sensitized to sound after the film's first scenes and begin to hear the film as a complex texture, like the sonically rich films of Andrei Tarkovsky. In this case, however, sound does not play a meditative role, inviting audiences to slip more deeply into its sensory world, as Tarkovsky's signature dripping water does, but rather keeps them on edge. When Halla interrupts a choir rehearsal, for example, to confer with her ministry ally in the copy room, they hide their cellphones in the freezer while the machine shuffles away, sounding almost like a snare drum. In this and in similar scenes, the film's rhythmic texture takes on a kinetic, even haptic palpability, of the kind that Laura Marks has noted in her work on the sensory experiences of cinema beyond the audiovisual, as when onscreen rustling can "mingle with the sound of . . . breathing" or when "booming music may inhabit [the] chest cavity."[36]

In *Woman at War*, the physiological similarity of music to destructive noise is not only physically palpable but also forms a cognitive, attentive contradiction that cannot easily be dissolved. To revisit the opening scene, percussion overlapping with power plant explosions disturbs Hollywood-conditioned expectations, so that when emergency vehicles start arriving, their sirens sound more like music than they might otherwise. This ambiguity asks audiences to listen more closely, to find similarities in what is usually considered different. Like the environmental sound art of Jana Winderen, who includes industrial noise along with hydrophone recordings of melting Arctic ice, this film is not meant to convey natural beauty or ecological pathos but to place the listener "in close encounter with strange sounds"[37] that give

voice to "dynamic" environmental and political borders.[38]

In a key scene in *Woman at War*, Halla drums her gloved fingers on newspapers she is clipping to send an anonymous manifesto, frustrated at how long this takes. From somewhere on the edge of the film-world, actual drumsticks imitate her beat; when the camera backs up, there is the band's percussionist, or at least his hands, behind her in the shadows. The *click click* rhythm overlaps into the next scene, in which we see Halla's fingers pecking at a typewriter. The band has apparently joined her in an antique store, where they riff on the two-beat meter as she tests out more typewriters, clocks tick in chaotic counterpoint, and she eventually sets alarm clocks to go off one after the other as she breezes out the door (with a typewriter stashed in her tote bag). The band responds to this comic emergency sounding with syncopated meter that follows Halla out to the street, where she scowls at a surveillance camera repairman and the band's reflections appear in the store window. This "musicalization of sound effects through their repetition" recalls rhythmic scoring in films such as Joe Wright's *Atonement* (2007),[39] and Alejandro Iñárritu's *Birdman* (2014), but in this case its off-beat playfulness both unsettles and invigorates the earnestness of environmental activism, pressing the narrative forward. Halla returns home to type her manifesto with gloved hands.

In another key scene, Halla is at the airport, ready to fly to Ukraine to meet her new adopted child. She has made the most difficult decision of her life, only to find uniformed officials at the gate, swabbing passengers for DNA in case one of them might be the "terrorist" Mountain Woman. The band's percussionist, unseen for the moment, clicks a nervous pulse. Halla opens her hand, seeing the cut that has left genetic traces at her last scene of destruction. The beat speeds up. The camera cuts to the grass near the runway, where the drummer plays with his usual, impassive expression. Inside the terminal, a passenger calls out that the Mountain Woman ("some yoga teacher") has been arrested; a TV-screen shows Halla's twin being taken by police. Halla flees to the sound of rolling polyrhythm, passing the percussionist, who picks up the clicking of her trolley suitcase. All of this rhythmic buildup, becoming faster and more complex as the scene unfolds, serves not as mere accompaniment but once again moves the narrative forward, as Halla escapes from the airport. As in many of the film's scenes, music and noise mix in a way that blurs even their expected limits. This ambiguity works like the well-known duck-rabbit: you can only focus on one, but you are aware of both.

In addition to rhythmic noise, sonic interruption is one of the elements that drives the film's narrative in a material way. One example of this is the transition in Halla's flat, when the band member plays Mozart on her piano. The music is still audible as Halla moves downstairs into a cellar. When Halla cuts open a vacuum-packed bag of children's clothing that she has kept stored away, its burst of air interrupts the pianist playing Mozart mid-phrase. If we think of noise as a kind of "psychological circuit breaking," we can better imagine audience responses by applying a biological metaphor for noisy irruptions as "vacuoles that re-route and break-up the pathways of control."[40] This form of "imbalance"[41] is actually important to animal and plant life, as breaking up expected patterns keeps organisms moving; it also serves as a metaphor for the function of noise in films like *Woman at War*. Paradoxically, the destabilization of the noise/music border, of diegesis, and of a woman's efforts to keep her various social roles intact, is what keeps the narrative moving forward.

The energy created in these contrasts involves the audience, not in directly taking sides with or against an eco-warrior, but

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in caring about the cluster of problems she cares about. If "true listening is always political," to cite Stefan Östersjö's provocative statement,[42] this results from what is given to our ears, whose voices and which sounds are edited in or drowned out. This film works not by using *musique concrète* (folding existing sounds into a scored composition) but through oscillating and overlapping music and noise. The soundscape gives equal weight to piano and typewriter keys, saws and drones and drums, forcing active listening without easy answers.

Nature/Culture

In addition to demonstrating ambiguities of diegesis and music/noise, *Woman at War* undermines the Anthropocentric binary of nature/culture. In her dual role as eco-warrior/choir leader, Halla embodies this ambiguity, plunging into vocal warm-ups with the same earnest enthusiasm that she brings to her battle with the power supply to the aluminum smelter, and interacting with her environment as both predator and prey. Even her pseudonym, "Fjallkonan" or "Mountain Woman," refers to the national personification of Iceland showing the collision and entanglement of "nature" and "nation."[43]

As Halla cuts the power lines in the film's opening sequence, percussion heard offscreen, evoking a military drumroll, is further punctuated by the sound of exploding power lines. How much is music, how much is electricity, how much is human monkey wrenching?[44] This scene, bringing music and destruction (and music and noise) into collision, also creates sensory ambiguity in what would otherwise look like an idyllic outdoor setting. While tourist images of Iceland promote its vast open spaces, images of environmentally damaging pylons and power lines disturb received ideas of landscapes still seen through Romantic ideas of "untamed" or "exotic" wilderness.[45] The film further complicates idealized travel marketing with the figure of the Spanish tourist as a victim of xenophobic scapegoating for Halla's activism. The tourist's ability to perceive the quasi-diegetic musicians may exoticize him to some extent, adding another troubling layer to his role in the film. Unlike the 2011 sci-fi movie *Bokeh* (directed by Geoffrey Orthwein and Andrew Sullivan), which provides a post-apocalyptic annihilation of Iceland's population so that two attractive American tourists can pose for selfies in idyllic settings, *Woman at War* shows what happens when a darker-skinned visitor finds himself entangled in a country where the established White culture decides who is welcome, or not, in the outdoors.

Halla's outdoor entanglements are more privileged and connote refuge in nature, for all her dangerous direct actions. In *Woman at War*, geography is not mere backdrop but is "woven into patterns of behavior, action and perspective" of the human protagonist[46] and vice versa. When Halla embeds herself in the mossy soil, she does so to feel close to the earth she is fighting for. Four times in the film, close-ups show Halla pressing her face or her body into the moss, grass, and soil. At other times, she blends into nature to avoid detection. She is a courageous woman with a rucksack full of tools, but she also moves with the fight-or-flight rush of a prey animal hiding from a predator, particularly when she wedges herself into a truck full of sheep. Evading a police helicopter behind a rock cairn, she digs herself under a berm in the soil, blending in with her surroundings in an earth-colored sweater. Later, when she believes that she will have to give up her prospects as an adoptive mother, she hides the photo of the Ukrainian orphan girl under moss, a protective gesture that in fact is materially destructive to the photograph. Even naming confuses "human" and "animal" in the film; Halla's first encounter with the sheep farmer who may be her cousin begins

with her hearing him call out, rather rudely, "Kona!" ("Woman!"). It turns out he is not referring to her but to his dog.

Even the musicians with their ambiguous diegetic status undermine the nature/culture divide. When Halla buries the photograph in moss, the Ukrainian trio of women singers stands silently in the treeless landscape, watching her. The brass and percussion band strikes up a somber, even funereal rhythm. As occurs more and more as the film progresses, Halla's gaze seems to take in these strange "itinerant choirs."[47] In one sense, the musicians reveal ambiguity between human culture and natural phenomena, though gendered tropes (male instrumentalists and female singers) remain. When the musicians appear outdoors, the band members and trio almost seem to have risen out of the ground, perhaps not so unlikely in a country that values mythic presences[48] and where folksong-choirs have appeared in wild landscapes in other films, such as *Heima*. Sigur Rós, the featured band in that film, unsettles received boundaries between "nature" and "technology," as they allow outdoor sounds to invade pauses in their music, and as a harmonium drone and electric guitar destabilize boundaries between "sounds we recognize as organically produced" and those that imply "mechanization."[49] Sigur Rós has also used instruments made of rock and rhubarb; well-known Icelandic singer Björk has based her album *Biophilia* on software encoding "viruses, lightning, DNA, dark matter, the moon and tides."[50]

Likewise, the materiality of voices and musical instruments in *Woman at War* (nonelectric, wooden piano, brass band instruments) manifests as a kind of natural outcropping or even as a cluster of bizarre plants growing out of the moss, in a landscape notably bereft of trees, partly due to exploitation and erosion. These instruments are human-made but seem ready to pop up outside it or on its edges at any moment, as materials that "were once alive and growing in the forest" and "continue to breathe, expand, and contract—vibrating as their environments change."[51] When they appear indoors, for instance, playing Mozart on Halla's piano, the scene recalls bourgeois *Hausmusik*, or an intimate gathering of friends around the piano, a European art-music tradition that Icelandic classical musicians have both imitated and resisted,[52] which invites questioning of what human culture means amid the flotsam of human violence, birth, parenthood, and environmental destruction.

The musical irruptions in *Woman at War* do not conflate human body and nonhuman nature, however, as in Björk's performative identification with the ocean and fertile landscapes.[53] They are more in line with the surrealist streak in Icelandic popular music that favors "interruptions" and "ghosts" amid contemporary technology.[54] They also maintain an aesthetic of surprise rather than immersion, as the sousaphone retains its comedic potential (repeating syncopated octaves, broken-record style, for example) and as musical genres and associations collide. Film composer Davíð Þór Jónsson's mock-military drumrolls and off-kilter, Eislerian brass snatches, along with *a capella*, irregularly metered Ukrainian folk tunes (adapted by Benedikt Erlingsson in collaboration with ethnomusicologist Irina Klymenko)[55] contrast with lyrical piano music, choral hymns, and the church-like sound of the organ. At times, the organ invades the brass music, creating unexpected closeness between "march" and "church" music, though the metallic materiality of the instruments is similar, thus deepening the film's associative ambiguities. As occurs often in the film, march sounds signal Halla's fight against the system but at the same time, in their metric irregularities, undermine associations with established military-industrial systems that encourage marches in regular, 4/4 time. These musical moments are further unsettled

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as they escape their usual contexts and land in windswept landscapes or near the airport, deepening the film's ambiguities between "nature" and "culture" and between everyday noise and music.

Order/Revolt

Throughout the film, Halla's attentiveness to sound highlights the ambiguity between organized sound (as music) and the surrounding noise. Together with Halla's double life as eco-warrior and choir leader, the ambiguity of sound also blurs the border between musical performance and destruction—especially in her most spectacular act of sabotage, blasting the high-voltage mast. While Halla deposits the explosive agents and cuts the string wires with a circular saw, the band's pianist is seated at a baby grand next to the mast, playing a Mozartean arrangement of the Icelandic hymn "Hver á sér fegra föðurland?" ("Who has a more beautiful motherland?"). At the associative level, audiences from Iceland would feel tension between the hymn's patriotic connotations and Halla's violent action, done both for and against her country. Halla's sabotage is meant to save and defend Iceland's wild geography, which the hymn celebrates; at the same time, she is not complying with the hymn's ideal image of the Icelandic people as peaceful, and politicians and the news media depict her as a terrorist.

This audiovisual contrast between art music and destruction may be less disruptive than in film scenes that involve extensive bodily harm, if violence is defined only in that sense. Still, this appearance of the art music and screen violence trope, in a context of multiple destabilized binaries, highlights how audiovisual contrast relates not only to empathy and anempathy[56] but also to aesthetic distance, on the one hand, and immersion, on the other. In many contemporary Hollywood soundtracks, scored music and sound effects intended to convey the emotions of a victim employ immersive volume[57] that makes sound spatially palpable.[58] This oversaturating experience can make audiences too comfortable in "passive spectatorship"[59] to experience "the displeasure of ambiguity."[60] Audiovisual contrast between aesthetically pleasing and culturally valued art music with screen violence certainly works against the immersive grain. Since Eisler and Adorno valorized cinematic counterpoint in the 1940s,[61] however, its ironic use, as in an eerie drone underlying a placid family scene, has also become a trope. As Lisa Coulthard has stressed, the binary between aesthetic distance/immersion is not sufficient to describe the possibilities of audiovisual contrast in the context of screen violence. This audiovisual contrast can be used to create more affect than immersion and to communicate "an experience of violence that stresses affectively immersive effects of disorientation."[62]

In *Woman at War*, aesthetic destabilization of the order/destruction binary not only communicates complexity but may also raise audiences' awareness of ambiguity in their own attitudes. The film both exploits and undermines received alignments of music and violence with the binary of civilization and barbarity, showing how music and violence, aesthetic beauty and domination, activism and harm are deeply entangled. When Halla blasts the high-voltage mast, musical and destructive sounds merge. The graceful piano chorale is mixed with the ravaging sound of Halla's circular saw cutting metal wires, rendering each other ambiguous. As a consequence, the explosion sounds almost like a closing chord, but without completely blending into the music.

If these sonic layers were to be wholly synchronized into the same rhythm, then the music would tell us that Halla is doing the right thing. In the iconic musical scene

in Francis Ford Coppola's *Apocalypse Now* (1979), for example, the attack of the US helicopters and Wagner's "Ride of the Valkyries" are perfectly synchronized, but the synchronization stops as soon as the helicopters have landed and pushes soldiers and audience alike out of the convenient, coherent distance.[63] In *Woman at War*, Halla's violent sawing of electrical wires overlaps but does not fully merge with the piano chords. Thus, the piercing sound of the saw evokes the violin, and the snapping, high-tension wires suggest the heavily pressured wires inside the piano's body. This off-kilter overlapping of musical sound and violent noise creates a striking attitudinal ambivalence; our interpretative frames start to falter.

The ambiguity of musical sound and destructive noise is not only an aesthetically pleasing auditory puzzle, but it also contributes to the unsettling of binaries already discussed here—between culture and nature, and between music and noise—as well as between aesthetic order and the threat of chaos. It performatively demonstrates the perceptual closeness between what are conceived as opposites in human gestures, such as destruction and creativity, right and wrong, chaos and significance. This destabilization of auditory habits works against the security of either aesthetic distance or immersion. Thus, such overlaps of destructive noise and musical sound are part of many scenes with audiovisual contrast in the context of screen violence. A familiar Rossini overture that plays during a gang fight, as in Kubrick's *A Clockwork Orange* (1971), might at first be perceived as providing aesthetic, ironic or even comic distance to violence, and even the gang fight has elements of slapstick. Still, as audiovisual contrast is paired with an ambiguous blurring of noise and sound, between breaking of furniture and percussion, breaking glass and cymbals, hovering violins and police sirens.[64] As aesthetically pleasing music and violent disruptive noise easily blend, they disrupt the way we usually think about them. Different sets of values collide between aesthetic pleasure and violent destruction.

At the same time, the destabilizing of perceived binaries of music/violence, or art/barbarism, actually highlights what they have in common: music—like violence—does touch or hit us physically.[65] Even Halla's attentive reaction to all sound undermines the binary of noise and the organized sound of music. In Halla's sensual response to sounds and haptic sensations, music is not only the result of aesthetic refinement but is foregrounded as a deeply sensory embodied perception that is as much part of human evolutionary history "as are endothermy and bipedalism."[66] The somatic impact of sound indicates why music is a suitable medium for domination[67] and for the ambiguity of domination and pleasure that marks much contemporary opera production as well.[68] The same invasive features by which music connects us with others can also become intrusive when we lack control over how loud and how long we listen to music and what kind of music we hear. In conflict, music is not only a tool to create coherence or to exclude, but it can also be used to torture physically and at the same time humiliate symbolically.[69]

The audiovisual contrast between art music and screen violence in *Woman at War* does not simply convey an aestheticized experience of violence and destruction. Together with auditory ambiguity, the film's audiovisual contrasts illustrate the difficulty of decision-making when different frames or crises collide with different needs. Instead of providing a clear answer, the film confronts—and energizes—audiences with the sensory ambiguity of elements usually thought to be different. The friction of unresolved sensory binaries demonstrates how these entanglements cannot be solved but must be faced.

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Visual Ambiguities

The auditory ambiguities we have analyzed to this point convey the difficulties of making decisions like Halla's, when solving one problem means neglecting the other. Together, in intermedial crossover, ambiguities of sound and sight work as more than an aesthetic "it's complicated" comment in response to colliding crises in the narrative world. While most of us would like uncertainties to be resolved, especially in contexts of decision-making, *Woman at War* integrates ambiguities, confusions, and mirrorings even on the visual level, manifesting as a surprising plot solution.

As the overlap of art music and destructive noise foregrounds the ambiguity between order and violence[70] and Halla's contested role as activist/terrorist, visual ambiguity also highlights the difficulties of moral and ethical judgments. Hiding in the Icelandic mountains, wearing a traditional wool sweater and a hood, Halla appears as a heroic figure against the sky, perhaps reminding viewers of outlawed heroes in the Icelandic sagas. Then again, she is not only hiding in nature; she hides her face behind a Nelson Mandela mask. In her flat, photographs of Mandela and Gandhi on the wall serve as uncomfortable reminders of nonviolent resistance against domination. This uneasiness builds as Halla shoots an arrow toward a surveillance drone, forcing it to the ground. Shot from the drone, this scene forces the audience to see from its perspective, veering closer and closer to a person with a smiling mask, made even more uncanny when this smiling Nelson Mandela violently smashes the drone. Thus, auditory and visual ambiguity illustrates how right and wrong start to oscillate when ethical and moral frames collide, and when what is legally wrong may be felt to be ethically right.

To Halla, the balancing act between eco-activist and choir leader works as long as she is alone. But sooner or later she must face how her acts affect others, when her eco-activism puts her neighbors' jobs in danger and sends an innocent tourist to jail. Halla herself has to decide whether she wants to save nature or save a child from war. Confusions of identity also occur throughout the plot, as when Halla's cousin calls for his dog Kona ("woman"), as noted above, or when the police repeatedly suspect the Spanish tourist as responsible for Halla's attacks. These confusions draw our attention toward preconceptions that often lead to the wrong conclusions. In the film's dramaturgy, the repeated arrest of the Spanish tourist is a kind of a running gag, but it creates discomfort as well, as it exposes the binary of "us/them," leading us to identify the stranger as intruder.[71] When the tourist is arrested for the second time instead of Halla, armed forces close in on a tent in the wilderness; we see Halla inside a tent listening attentively. By convention, we presume that we are shown the inside of the tent the forces are approaching. But when the police confront the Spanish tourist (again), we realize that we have been fooled by our own cinematic assumptions that create coherence.

More central to the plot is the doubleness of Halla and her twin. At first, the audience may confuse Halla with her sister Ása, as we see Ása before the film reveals that Halla has a twin; thus we see her as Halla until Halla herself arrives. Although they look alike (both played by Halldóra Geirharðsdóttir) and are equally dedicated to their respective visions, Halla's twin Ása is her very opposite. She is not a fighter and activist but a yoga teacher who wants to retreat and develop her spirituality in an Indian ashram. Thus, the relation between Halla and Ása involves both likeness and contrast. The sisters provide the opportunity for numerous visual mirrorings in the film. When the twin sisters meet in a municipal swimming pool, the water's surface mirrors them into four. Like the twin

sisters, a reflection in the mirror may look the same as but is really the exact opposite (reversed) of what it reflects. But even in relation to the twins, what looks similar appears to be different.[72]

Like the persistent presence of music popping up, such surprising likenesses add to the energizing ambiguity of the film and to Halla's solution at the plot level. By looking similar but being different, Ása can solve Halla's conundrum, as she becomes Halla's replacement. Because she wanted to retreat for meditation anyway, she swaps the Indian ashram for an Icelandic prison and changes places with Halla, who can now travel to Ukraine to fetch her adopted daughter. In many narratives, the likeness of a double is disturbing and even threatening, as it is both familiar and unfamiliar, self and other, as Freud explains in his essay "Das Unheimliche."[73] In many *doppelgänger* stories, the double, or the shadow, appears as a part of the self that has become independent; when it interferes, the double gets into conflict that ultimately leads to the death of the protagonists: when you try to kill your double, you also kill yourself.[74] In *Woman at War*, however, we meet twins in the context of already oscillating binaries. Here the outward similarity between the two sisters is one of the easier ambiguities to handle. In this context, the double is not threatening but merely acknowledges the world's ambiguity—and adds an element of hope. In the end, Ása helps Halla to come to a "third way" decision.[75] After the initial quarrel between the twins about what is the right thing to do, meditation or activism, the discussion shifts. There is no single correct answer, but from its outset, the film's oscillations (visual patterns mirroring the film's rhythmic, explicitly percussive syncopations) have been creating energy, not despair.

While the plot of *Woman at War* suggests a happy ending, its final audiovisual mirrorings add a new layer of ambiguity. As Halla enters the orphanage, she wades through a flooded corridor where the pianist has somehow appeared, playing gentle chords on an upright keyboard. On their bus ride from the orphanage in Ukraine, Halla and her adopted daughter Nika are stopped. After continuous raining, the river has flooded the street. Halla's narrow escape, the old bus, and the continuous rain also allows for anticipating a final catastrophe. Instead, the bus is stuck, and the passengers are asked to leave to cross the flooded part of the street. When the final scene shows the passengers of the Ukrainian bus wading through the rising waters, though nothing catastrophic happens to them, the image uncannily mirrors news images we have seen earlier on Halla's television, of flooding due to rising sea levels resulting from global warming.

Conclusion

In *Woman at War*, audiovisual ambiguities create a multilayered, energetic narrative that resists both immersion and distancing. These ambiguities constantly draw attention to the lack of an easy solution to the complicated pressures that a woman activist faces. By highlighting the position of in-between, both visually with the diegetically unstable, itinerant musicians and aurally in sounds between music and noise, the film exploits the intrinsic ambiguity of film music as a guide for dealing with complexity of entangled social challenges. By intruding on every scene, by interrupting and disturbing expectations of illustrative film music, and by highlighting the connective elements of noise and sound, this *not fitting in* works as a glitch in a productive sense, by admitting difficulty, multifacetedness, and complexity.

The film affects the audience's perception of binaries such as nature/culture and order/destruction as well. With the visual ambiguity introduced by the twin sisters and its contribution to the plot's solution, the film stresses that ambiguity, and that simultaneity

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of both similarity and difference, can be dealt with when not perceived as a threat but as part of reality. While the plot has come to a happy ending, it reminds the audience that the real issue, climate change, remains unresolved. Once again, the film performs complexity, making different points at the same time. For audiences, bearing with this complexity and finding energy within it, not despite it, is a skill needed to tackle the entanglement of conflicting global crises and personal demands.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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NOTES

1. Lisa Coulthard, "Acoustic Disgust: Sound, Affect, and Cinematic Violence," in *The Palgrave Handbook of Sound Design and Music in Screen Media*, ed. Liz Greene and Danijela Kulezic-Wilson (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016), 183–93.

2. See Lars Elleström, "The Modalities of Media II: An Expanded Model for Understanding Intermedial Relations," in *Beyond Media Borders*, vol. 1 (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2021), 3–91.

3. Elleström, "The Modalities of Media II," 5.

4. Tony Mitchell, "Music and Landscape in Iceland," in *The Oxford Handbook of Popular Music in the Nordic Countries*, ed. Fabian Holt and Antti-Ville Kärjä (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017), 151.

5. See the liner notes for Andri Snær Magnason, *Draumalandið*, Bedroom Community, 2009, compact disc. Grýla is a man-eating female ogre who descends from the mountains at Christmastime to catch and eat misbehaving children. In Valgeir Sigurðsson's use of the folksong "Grýlukvaeði," the man-eating ogre appears to represent the aluminum corporation. See Tore Størvold, "Music and the Kárahnjúkar Hydropower Plant: Style, Aesthetics, and Environmental Politics in Iceland," *Popular Music and Society* 42, no. 4 (2019): 399, https://doi.org/10.1080/03007766.2018.1469390.

6. Nicola Dibbon, "Music and Environmentalism in Iceland," in Holt and Kärjä, *Oxford Handbook of Popular Music in the Nordic Countries*, 168.

7. Zygmunt Bauman, *Modernity and Ambivalence* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2007), 55–56.

8. See Mars Conner and Paul Sparks, "Ambivalence and Attitudes," *European Review of Social Psychology* 1, no. 12 (2002): 39, https://doi.org/10.1080/14792772143000012; and Ian McGregor, Ian R. Newby-Clark, and Mark P. Zanna, "Thinking and Caring About Cognitive Inconsistency: When and for Whom Does Attitudinal Ambivalence Feel Uncomfortable," *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 82, no. 2 (2002): 157–266.

9. Bauman, *Modernity and Ambivalence*, 1.

10. Danijela Kulezic-Wilson, *Sound Design is the New Score: Theory, Aesthetics, and Erotics of the Integrated Soundtrack* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2020), 68.

11. Coulthard, "Acoustic Disgust," 51.

12. Michel Chion, *Film: A Sound Art,* trans. Claudia Gorbman (New York: Columbia University Press, 2009), 412.

13. See Ben Winters, "The Non-diegetic Fallacy: Film, Music, and Narrative Space," *Music and Letters* 91, no. 2 (2010): 237–38.

14. Anahid Kassabian, *Hearing Film: Tracking Identifications in Contemporary Hollywood Film Music* (New York: Routledge, 2001), 47.

15. See Claudia Gorbman's film sound taxonomy in "Teaching the Soundtrack," *Quarterly Review of Film Studies* 1, no. 4 (1976): 446–52.

16. See Vlada Petric, "Oneiric Cinema: The Isomorphism of Film and Dreams," handout for the course Oneiric Cinema, Harvard University, Spring 1995, 1–2, cited in Mladen Milicevic, "Film Sound Beyond Reality: Subjective Sound in Narrative Cinema," FilmSound.org, accessed December 30, 2020, http://filmsound.org/articles/beyond.htm. Polish director Wojciech Marczewski has played with diegesis in similar ways, in his 1990 *Escape from the "Liberty" Cinema* (itself a tribute of sorts to Woody Allen's *Purple Rose of Cairo*), in which ordinary citizens suddenly sing fragments of Mozart's *Requiem*, in the context of the Cold War's end. Also see Marek Haltof, *Polish Cinema: A History* (New York: Berghahn Books, 2018), 284.

17. John Richardson, *An Eye for Music: Popular Music and the Audiovisual Surreal* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 35.

18. Michel Chion, *Audio-Vision: Sound on Screen*, trans. Claudia Gorbman (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994), 72.

19. See Robynn J. Stilwell, "The Fantastical Gap between Diegetic and Nondiegetic," in *Beyond the Soundtrack: Representing Music in Cinema*, ed. Daniel Goldmark, Lawrence Kramer, and Richard Leppert (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2007), 184–85.

20. Jeff Smith, "Bridging the Gap: Reconsidering the Border between Diegetic and Nondiegetic Music," *Music and the Moving Imag*e 2, no. 1 (2009): 2–3. Smith uses the Russian neoformalist terms *fabula* and *syuzhet* (sensory cinematic material) to delineate overlapping elements on the diegetic spectrum.

21. Stilwell, "Fantastical Gap," 2007.

22. Signe Kjær Jensen, "Music in Sound Film," lecture in the master's level course Intermediality in the Department of Film and Literature, Linnaeus University, Spring 2020.

23. Elena Lazic, "'We Are at War with Ourselves: Benedikt Erlingsson Discusses *Woman at War*," Seventh Row, September 1, 2018, https://seventh-row.com/2018/09/01/benedikt-erlingsson-woman-at-war/.

24. Samuel Weber, *Theatricality as Medium* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2004), 33–34.

25. See Plato, *The Laws*, trans. A. E. Taylor, in Plato, *The Collected Dialogues*, ed. Edith Hamilton and Huntington Cairns (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1973), 1372, and Weber, *Theatricality as Medium*, 37.

26. Chion, *Audio-Vision*, 72.

27. See Heidi Hart, "Mozart on Ice: . . . End of the World," *Ekfrase: Nordic Journal for Visual Culture* 6 (2017): 38–48.

28. Stilwell, "Fantastical Gap," 185.

29. See Heidi Hart, "Prof. Anne Gjelsvik: One Topic That's Really Important to Someone Can Lead to Extremism," European Center for Populism Studies, June 23, 2021, https://www.populismstudies.org/prof-anne-gjelsvik-one-topic-thats-really-important-to-someone-can-lead-to-extremism/.

30. Kulezic-Wilson, *Sound Design*, 9.

31. Randolph Jordan, "The Ecology of Listening while Looking in the Cinema: Reflective Audioviewing in Gus Van Sant's *Elephant*," *Organized Sound* 17 no. 3 (2012): 248–56, cited in Kulezic-Wilson, *Sound Design*, 120.

32. Liz Greene, "From Noise: Blurring the Boundaries of the Soundtrack," in Greene and Kulezic-Wilson, *Palgrave Handbook of Sound Design*, 20–21.

33. R. Murray Schafer, *The Soundscape: The Tuning of the World* (New York: Knopf, 1977), 4.

34. Michel Chion, *David Lynch*, trans. Robert Julian (London: BFI, 2006), 84.

35. Jacques Attali, *Noise: The Political Economy of Music* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1985), 26–27.

36. Laura U. Marks, *The Skin of the Film: Intercultural Cinema, Embodiment, and the Senses* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2000), 183. Marks's approach leans heavily on the combination of sight and sound to explore haptic qualities in film, while more recent treatments of immersive qualities in films such as *Interstellar* (2014, directed by Christopher Nolan) and *Arrival* (2016, directed by Denis Villeneuve) take a more multisensory approach that would also apply to Dennis Villeneuve's 2021 remake of *Dune* (score by Hans Zimmer et al.). See John Richardson, Anna-Elena Pääkkölä, and Sanna Qvick, "Sensing Time and Space through the Soundtracks of *Interstellar* and *Arrival*," *Oxford Handbook of Cinematic Listening*, ed. Carlo Cenciarelli (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2021), 385–406.

37. Anette Vandsø, "The Sonic Aftermath: The Anthropocene and Interdisciplinarity after the Apocalypse," in *The Bloomsbury Handbook of Sound Art*, ed. Sanne Krogh Groth and Holger Schulze (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2020), 31.

38. See liner notes to Jana Winderen, *Spring Bloom in the Marginal Zone*, Touch, 2018, compact disc.

39. Kulezic-Wilson, *Sound Design*, 48–49.

40. Joseph Nechvatal, *Immersion into Noise* (Ann Arbor, MI: Open Humanities Press, 2011), 12–15. A vacuole is a liminal cellular sac, "maintaining an *imbalance* between biogenesis (production) and *degradation* (or turnover) of many substances and cell structures" (15).

41. Nechvatal, *Immersion into Noise*.

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42. Stefan Östersjö, *Listening to the Other* (Ghent: Orpheus Institute/Leuven University Press, 2020), 9.

43. Inga Dóra Björnsdóttir, "The Mountain Woman and the Presidency," in *Images of Contemporary Iceland: Everyday Lives and Global Contexts*, ed. E. Paul Durrenberger and Gísli Pálsson (Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 2014), 109.

44. The term "monkey wrenching" is a term for ecological sabotage made famous in Edward Abbey, *The Monkey Wrench Gang* (Philadelphia, PA: Lippincott, 1975).

45. See Kristinn Schram, "Borealism: Folklorist Perspectives on Transnational Performances and the Exoticism of the North" (PhD diss., University of Edinburgh, 2011).

46. Adam O'Brien, *Film and the Natural Environment: Elements and Atmospheres* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2018), 39.

47. The musicians may also have links to the traditional *rímur* or epic-verse singing practice in Iceland, in which some singers "wandered from farm to farm" performing both music and manual work, or simply to the wide-ranging musical cultures in contemporary Iceland, where "everyone seems to be in a band" and where "*ad hoc* collectives" are common. See Ragnheiður Ólafsdóttir and Nicola Dibben, "Rímur: From National Heritage to Folk Music," in *Sounds Icelandic: Essays on Icelandic Music in the 20th and 21st Centuries*, ed. Þorbjörg Daphne Hall et al. (Sheffield, UK: Equinox, 2019), 40; and Oliver Wainwright, "In Iceland, 'Respect the Elves—or Else,'" *Guardian*, March 25, 2015, https://www.theguardian.com/artanddesign/2015/mar/25/iceland-construction-respect-elves-or-else.

48. Wainwright, "In Iceland."

49. Richardson, *An Eye for Music*, 277.

50. Nicola Dibben, "Music and Environmentalism in Iceland," in Holt and Kärjä, *Oxford Handbook of Popular Music in the Nordic Countries*, 173.

51. Kevin Dawe, "Materials Matter: Towards a Political Ecology of Musical Instrument Making," in *Current Directions in Ecomusicology: Music, Nature, Culture*, ed. Aaron S. Allen and Kevin Dawe (New York: Routledge, 2016), 118.

52. Kimberly Cannady and Kristín Loftsdóttir, "'A Nation Without Music?' Symphonic Music and Nation-Building," in Hall et al., *Sounds Icelandic*, 24.

53. Sarah Boak, "'Imagine What My Body Would Sound Like': Embodiment, Nature and Sound in the Work of Björk Guðmundsdóttir," in Hall et al., *Sounds Icelandic*, 196.

54. John Richardson, "Surrealism in Icelandic Popular Music," in Hall et al., *Sounds Icelandic*, 173.

55. "Projects: Cannes 2018," Film Industry Association of Ukraine newsletter, May 2018, https://en.fiau.com.ua/cannes-2018/.

56. See Coulthard, "Acoustic Disgust," 50–60.

57. Anahid Kassabian describes this phenomenon as an "evaporating segregation of sound, noise, and music," in *Ubiquitous Listening: Affect, Attention, and Distributed Subjectivity* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2013), 64.

58. See Miguel Mera, "Towards 3-D Sound: Spatial Presence and the Spatial Vacuum," in Greene and Kulezic-Wilson, *Palgrave Handbook of Sound Design*, 91.

59. Kulezic-Wilson, *Sound Design*, 61.

60. Claudia Gorbman, *Unheard Melodies: Narrative Film Music* (London: BFI Publishing, 1987), 58.

61. See Theodor Adorno and Hanns Eisler, *Composing for the Films* (New York: Continuum, 2010), 7, 47. While Adorno and Eisler promoted such anti-mimetic techniques as contrasting sharp, percussive music with a scene of poverty that might otherwise incite "sentimental sympathy," as in the 1931 Brecht-Eisler film *Kuhle Wampe* (17) or interruption with "seemingly accidental elements" (19), more in line with the musicians' surprise appearances in *Woman at War*, they held that even music "diametrically opposed" to the action onscreen must still support the scene's "structural unity" (47).

62. Coulthard, "Acoustic Disgust," 54.

63. Signe Kjær Jensen and Beate Schirrmacher, "Wagner Attacks: 'The Ride of the Valkyries' in War and Propaganda," paper presented at *Sounds of Mass Media: Music in Journalism and Propaganda*, Eleventh meeting of the International Musicological Society (IMS) Study Group Music and Media (MaM), Linnaeus University, Växjö, June 7–9, 2019.

64. Beate Schirrmacher, "The Transmediation of Ambivalence: Violence and Music in Anthony Burgess's *A Clockwork Orange*," *Ekphrasis* 22, no. 2 (2019): 26–40.

65. Schirrmacher, "Transmediation of Ambivalence."

66. John Durham Peters, *The Marvelous Clouds: Toward a Philosophy of Elemental Media* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2015), 51.

67. See Steve Goodman, *Sonic Warfare: Sound, Affect, and the Ecology of Fear* (Boston: MIT Press, 2010).

68. See Axel Englund, *Deviant Opera: Sex, Power, and Perversion on Stage* (Oakland: University of California Press, 2020).

69. Bruce Johnson and Martin Cloonan, *Dark Side of the Tune: Popular Music and Violence* (New York: Routledge, 2009), 22.

70. See, for example, Hannah Arendt, *On Violence* (New York: Harcourt, 1970); and Slavoj Žižek, *Violence: Six Sideways Reflections* (London: Profile, 2009).

71. See Bauman, *Modernity and Ambivalence*, 53–61.

72. The visual ambiguity in *Woman at War* also points out the opposite tendency, that simplifications and stereotypes make it easy to conflate what is different, for example when a tour guide at the national park Thingvellir, site of the foundation of Icelandic parliament in 930, explains the history of Iceland with stereotypes and references to popular culture such as *Lord of the Rings*. This valley, a stage for political conflict, is also the place where the two Eurasian and American continental plates meet and drift apart, different spheres not only brought together but also conflicting and separating.

73. See Sigmund Freud, "Das Unheimliche," in *Studienausgabe. Psychologische Schriften*, vol. 4, ed. Alexander Mitscherlich et al. (Frankfurt: Fischer, 1994), 241–74.

74. This is the case for instance in E. T. A. Hoffmann's *The Sandman* (1816), or in early silent Films like *The Student of Prag* (1913, directed by Stellan Rye). This pattern still applies to double stories in films like *Single White Female* (1992, directed by Barbet Schroeder) *Black Swan* (2010, directed by Darren Aronofsky).

75. Doubles in *Woman at War* also function differently from those in the Icelandic quasi-zombie series *Katla* (Netflix, premiered 2021), in which doubles are "extra" selves come back from the dead, often with qualities that undermine their originals' lives. Perhaps literal twins can offer life-giving rather than destructive power in a *doppelgänger* narrative.