

# SoundEffects



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*Iben Have*

## **The Musicalized Soundtracks of *Armadillo***

**Emotional Realism and Real Emotions**

Iben Have  
Associate Professor of Media Studies  
Institute of Aesthetics and Communication  
Aarhus University  
Denmark  
[ibenhave@imv.au.dk](mailto:ibenhave@imv.au.dk)

[www.soundeffects.dk](http://www.soundeffects.dk)



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## Abstract

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*“To you it’s film, to them it’s reality” is the translated poster headline of the Danish war documentary **Armadillo** (Janus Metz, May 2010), a much-debated Cannes award-winning film that follows Danish soldiers stationed in Afghanistan. The article uses this headline as a framework for analyzing, comparing and discussing the film’s “musicalized” soundtracks on various media platforms (cinema, YouTube, television, DVD), and it argues that these soundtracks contribute to the viewer’s experience of emotional realism, as well as to an experience of the emotional reality – the soldiers’ or the viewer’s own.*

*The political, journalistic and in particular aesthetic ambitions of producers and directors have contributed to developing Danish documentary films into a successful brand within the last decade. Using examples from the public reception of and debate on **Armadillo**, the article discusses how this development may have led to an increased emphasis on the emotional impact of musicalized soundtracks and a new premise for documentary reception.*

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## Introduction

“To you it’s film, to them it’s reality” is the translated poster headline of the hotly debated, award-winning Danish war documentary *Armadillo* (2010),<sup>1</sup> which portrays a group of Danish soldiers based at a camp named *Armadillo* in the Helmand province in Afghanistan, where they are fighting against the Taliban. *Armadillo* is a “journey into the soldiers’ minds”, as the press material tells us ([www.armadillothemovie.com](http://www.armadillothemovie.com)), and was intended to be character driven and emotionally charged (interview with Janus Metz, *Armadillo* DVD). This article uses the poster headline as a framework for analyzing and discussing *Armadillo*’s soundtrack, which contributes to an aesthetic experience as well as to an experience of the emotional reality of the soldiers. This will be done from the premise that music and musicalized sound structures in general have a privileged ability to communicate emotional aspects of the soldiers’ minds (Have 2008).

It is difficult to draw a line between music and sound effects and between real and artificial sounds in *Armadillo*. The entire soundtrack is experienced as a unified composition of sound developed and structured in time. I will therefore use the term “musicalized soundtrack”, rather than the terms “musical score” or “musical soundtrack”, to indicate my inclusion of non-diegetically composed sound effects in my analysis and discussion of *Armadillo*’s soundtrack. Though I refer to other parts of the soundtrack which can be musicalized as well – for example, diegetic or

foleyed real sounds like gunshots, breathing or dialogue – these are not included in the primary case on which this article is based, since the interest focus is limited to “emotional realism” and therefore does not include “perceptual realism” in general as described by Langkjær 2010. This case is, on the other hand, extended to include the cross-medial representation and development of *Armadillo*’s musicalized soundtracks on various media platforms (Internet, cinema, television, DVD). Revolving around the concept of emotional realism, the article will combine analytical observations about the role of the musicalized soundtrack and discussion of epistemological and ethical issues in relation to *Armadillo* as a documentary film for both cinema and television.

### ***Armadillo* as a cross-media phenomenon**

*Armadillo* was the first Danish documentary to develop as a cross-media phenomenon, being promoted quite heavily on the Internet, on TV and DVD, and in the cinemas within the short period of time of eight months. Other documentaries have been promoted across these platforms as well, but not as equally or as forcefully and successfully, since usually either the cinema version or the TV version has been the primary product. The history of the promotion of *Armadillo* is relevant for understanding not only the development of the soundtrack but also the public reception and debate, a topic which I will return to at the end of the article.

*Armadillo* first caught the public’s attention when it was nominated for the *Cannes Film Festival* in 2010, where it won *The Critics’ Week Grand Prize* on 20 May. Up until the promotion in Cannes, the film caused debate in Denmark, where the public had access to the two-and-a-half-minute official trailer on youtube.com and on the official film website. At this early stage, in the first part of May 2010, the debate over *Armadillo* stemmed just as much from people’s and journalists’ experience of the film’s trailer as from the film itself, to which very few had access. The debate also developed on Facebook, where an *Armadillo* site was created around mid-May. After Cannes, the public was so eager to see the film that it was rushed into cinemas, premiering on 27 May, one and a half months prior to the announced release date, and before the soundtrack was finished (ibyen.dk, 2010). During the summer of 2010, the production team worked on what they call the *International version* (Helmersson 2010), in which parts of the musical score are played by the Czech National Symphony Orchestra from Prague. Also, the general sound design was further edited under the supervision of sound designer Rasmus Winther, and a Foley artist was engaged to make the real sounds (e.g. footsteps, movements and breathing) more clear (Winther 2011). The *International version* was released on DVD on 30 November 2010. In Denmark, producers, movie rental stores, the Danish Film Institute and the cinemas have agreed that films may be not released on DVD until six months

after the cinema premiere. The producers of *Armadillo* tried to get an exemption from this agreement, but without success (krigeren.dk 2010). Finally, *Armadillo* was broadcast in a shortened version (59 minutes) on Danish national television (TV 2) on the 6 January 2011. An entire primetime evening, from 8 to 10 p.m., was devoted to *Armadillo* and the questions it raises: on being at war as a soldier, a relative and as a nation. After a short introduction from a live studio, the TV version of the film was broadcast and followed by a live studio debate with participation of the soldiers from the film, parents who lost a son in the war, and a panel of politicians, among others. An open debate took place simultaneously on Facebook. The *Armadillo* evening ended with the 10 o'clock news, which further debated the film and war-related questions.

*Armadillo* thus has four official audiovisual versions produced by the Danish film company *Fridthjof Film* that operate on four different media platforms: the official trailer, the Cannes Version, the International version (DVD), and the television version. These *primary texts*, to borrow John Fiske's terms (Fiske 1987), generate a large number of *secondary texts*, such as other promotion material, interviews and debates in newspapers and on the Internet.<sup>2</sup> Besides, countless *tertiary texts* have been generated, including people's talk about the production at work or text productions about the film on Facebook. Since my interest is in the musicalized soundtracks, I will concentrate on the audiovisual primary texts in this article. Instead of selecting one of the primary media texts for analysis, I decided to listen to all of them and make comparative observations about the soundtracks. To begin with, I will introduce the concept of emotional realism in relation to the soundtracks.

## Emotional realism or real emotions?

As the poster line and the press material indicate, the film places itself in the grey zone between documentary realism and staged fiction film. It is in this zone that I find the concept of *emotional realism* interesting. Emotional realism is usually related to fiction film, and its use in the documentary genre may raise some ethical and epistemological questions. I will return to this issue in the last section of this article.

Back in the '80s, the Australian professor in cultural studies Ien Ang developed the concept of emotional realism in connection with a reception study of the TV series *Dallas*:

Emotional realism exists at the connotative rather than denotative (content) level. This offers less concrete, more symbolic representations of more general living experiences, which viewers find recognizably 'true to life' (even if at the denotative level the treatment seems 'unrealistic'). In such a case, what is recognized as real is not knowledge of the world, but a subjective experience of the world: a 'structure of feeling' (Ien Ang 1985, p. 45).

Though Ang's research on *Dallas* has been heavily criticized through the years, the isolated concept of emotional realism fits very well with newer cognitive approaches to the role of music in audiovisual narratives (Cohen 2001, Langkjær 2010, Have 2008).<sup>3</sup> In line with Ang's idea of the experience of emotional realism in audiovisual narratives, the cognitive psychologist Annabel J. Cohen has worked on the role of the soundtrack in the experience of realism. Within a framework illustrating the mental bottom-up and top-down processing of audiovisual stimuli (the Cognitive Associationist Framework), Cohen shows how the musical input relates to the narrative (Cohen 2001, p. 259). The music undergoes a kind of bottom-up mental "reality test" before it is understood in relation to the narrative, which is primarily visual, according to Cohen. Only the stimuli which match the viewer's expectations of an authentic experience pass the reality test and help generate the experience of emotional realism. The emotional and affective effects of the music can usually pass such a test because visual information in real life, especially involving human beings, is associated with emotions and structures of feelings. Even if the emotional experience derives from non-diegetic music, we experience these emotions as authentic because in the real world we would also (expect to) feel similar feelings in similar situations. For example, when the structures of the musical soundtrack express the emotional experience of a soldier's relief at narrowly surviving close combat with the Taliban, or help express the experience of intense fear when one of the soldiers realizes that he just caused an innocent little girl's death. In these cases the musical soundtrack passes the mental reality test and triggers the experience of emotional realism because these feelings seem authentic in these specific situations. Had the musical expression been cheerful instead, the music would have seemed artificial and inauthentic, causing the viewers to pay conscious attention to it and probably not meeting their emotional expectations; it would therefore not pass the reality test or contribute to the experience of emotional realism.<sup>4</sup>

I have elsewhere developed a cognitively based theory that explains how the musical sound structures of, for example, tensions and reliefs, hesitation and insistence immediately connect with an emotional experience of the viewer, generating a structure of feeling that we know from real life and lending greater authenticity to the audiovisual experience (Have 2008). I have used the concepts of *background feelings* (Damasio 2000) and *vitality feelings* (Stern 1999) to explain how underscore music triggers an emotional response to audiovisual narratives, and I will argue that these concepts can be used to further qualify what Ang and Cohen, on a more general level, refer to as a "structure of feelings".

Emotional realism is related (but not identical) to *perceptual realism* as defined by Stephen Prince:

Perceptual realism designates a relationship between the image or the film and the spectator, and it can encompass both unreal images and those which are referen-

tially realistic. Because of this, unreal images may be referentially fictional but perceptually realistic (Prince 1996, side 32, quoted from Langkjær 2010).

Both the concept of emotional realism and that of perceptual realism thus refer to a perceptual reality rather than an ontological reality – a distinction that often stays blurred in the discussions of the role of music in documentary and causes epistemological confusions. This is evident in, for example, the following three guidelines on how to use music to communicate feelings in documentaries, given by “undoubtedly the most widely-used production manual” (J. Corner, 2005, p. 243), M. Rabiger’s, *Directing the Documentary* from 1998: 1) Music should not inject false emotion. 2) Choice of music should give access to the inner life of a character or the subject. 3) Music can signal the emotional level at which the audience should investigate what is being shown (Corner 2005, p. 243, referring to Rabiger 1998, p. 310). I will argue that the first and second pieces of advice subscribe to an ontological perspective of *real emotions*, and the third to a perceptual perspective of *emotional realism*. The first is definitely debatable, for how can we ever judge the falseness of an emotion? But also the second one raises some interesting questions, because what kind of tools will the director use to get to know the inner life of the subjects? And, if that is possible in the first case, how can this inner life be translated into musicalized sound structures? If a soundtrack can generate some kind of emotional realism by representing the inner life of the soldiers – and I believe it can – we still remain with the question of the ontological realness of these feelings: is that how they really felt in the specific situation? Emotional realism is attached to the imaginative world of the viewer rather than the ontological world, and this is why this concept may be useful in describing the experience of music but causes some problems in the classical dilemma of the kind of reality a documentary should refer to. Should it be the physical one we see and hear (but do not smell, taste or touch in the audiovisual representation) or the one we feel and imagine?

In the next section I will argue that the musicalized soundtrack of *Armadillo* primarily seems to provide support for emotional realism by communicating an interiority which cannot itself be visualized or spoken: the inner life of the soldiers. The section also paves the way for a more general emotional evaluation of the film on a more conscious level of perception. Though I acknowledged that the musical differences are not crucial in the four *Armadillo* versions, the emotional appeal may change according to the medium and the reception context. Thus, the third and most reasonable piece of advice given by Rabiger will serve as an analytical guideline in what follows.

## ***Armadillo's* musicalized soundtracks**

In this section I will briefly describe the process I followed in conducting my empirical research and proceed to analyze the soundtrack on the basis of a phenomenological and deep-listening approach.

I began my study by seeing the *Armadillo* trailer on the Internet and noticing the elements of the musicalized soundtrack. On 8 June I went to the cinema and listened to the Cannes version, meticulously taking notes throughout the film (11 handwritten sheets). When the film was broadcast on Danish national television more than half a year later, I watched it with my family in a natural reception situation. Finally, I obtained a copy of the TV version and the International version on DVD with its 50 minutes of extra material. I listened to and took notes on these two versions, comparing these notes to my notes from the cinema. During this whole period I also studied the debate over *Armadillo* in the media.

The trailer differs from the other three versions by not only functioning as a work in its own right, but also as a promotion for the film version (cf. comment in note 2). The primary role of the short trailer on the Internet is to attract attention and excite curiosity. It does so visually – for example, by using bodies (dead people and naked woman) – verbally by causing indignation over the soldiers' utterances (demonstrating their apparent indifference to a little girl's death and euphorically describing the greatness of killing), and acoustically by using an up-tempo, noisy soundtrack. The music serves less as emotional realism related to the narrative and more as an attention-grabber related to the viewers' own world. The pulse is high in this action- and information-packed format, mostly experienced on a fleeting *pull* medium with a small screen and bad loudspeakers. There are obvious aesthetic, intertextual references to war films, such as *Apocalypse now*, and symbolic references, such as to the myth of the Fall of Man and to the washing of hands. The director mentions most of these references himself in the interview on the DVD's extra material (see also the interview on filmz.dk, May 27<sup>th</sup>, 2010, and Christensen 2010, p. 6).

The trailer is structured in three parts, and the different kinds of musical stylization shift along with them: The first part introduces the soldiers' introductory thoughts in voice over, while we see and hear combat scenes from the film. We also watch their farewell to family and friends in the airport. This part is accompanied by a piano theme of arpeggios mixed with symphonic string pads. The "viscous" strings culminate in a climax with a military helicopter landing in dusty Afghanistan (almost an audiovisual stereotype of war films). The second part of the trailer is about the soldiers' loss of innocence. With their portable helmet cameras and microphones, they allow us to follow them in battle and we witness the euphoric adrenaline rush and emotional consequences that follow. In this second part we hear a woman's voice singing a slow pentatonic Arabic song. The song stands in con-



trast to the real, frenzied sounds of shots and shouts. The third part of the trailer is about fear and frustration, and doubt about the usefulness of war. The only words spoken in this part of the film come from one of the soldiers talking about the mission: “It’s not to help; I don’t think it helps at all”. These words are accompanied by a very moving, foregrounded cello theme; we can hear the bow’s friction against the strings, which generates a grainy roughness in the dark timbre. The theme is accompanied by high-pitched sound effects and shootings, counterpointing the slowness and calmness of the cello.

In this short format there is no time for empathy or for immersion in the soldiers’ minds, so the sound in the trailer serves other communicative functions: a reference to other war films with the stereotypical helicopter sound and symphonic score, a reference to Afghanistan (or the Middle East) with the woman’s song (a theme which is only used in the trailer), and an emotion-grabbing cello theme, which in this context enforces the feeling of the uselessness of war. Throughout the trailer, noisy drones and sound effects communicate dynamics and action.

In the one-hour-and-forty-minute *Cannes version* shown in the Danish cinemas, and seen by more than 120000 people as of November 2010 (information.dk 2010), the music is used differently, and the soundtrack may seem quite boring if one expects it to fulfil the dynamic and aggressive promises of the trailer. In the film, the minds of the soldiers become the main theme, also when these minds seem to be quite stagnant in the long wait between the activities outside the camp. Unlike my experience of the trailer, I perceived this version sitting on a soft seat in a dark room of the cinema, and on the morning I saw it, only a few other people were present to disturb my concentration in the film. The distant involvement in the trailer changes to immersion in the narrative, and of course that is conducive for a higher degree of empathy and emotional involvement with the soldiers.

The *Armadillo* film uses a full-bodied, ambient, dynamic, but discrete musicalized soundtrack dominated by long and trembling tones, sound effects, and drones: from deep, booming, rumbling bass-tones to high-pitched, metallic sounds, creating a composite soundtrack in which discrete changes in pitch and timbre bring a vitality to the sound flow. This sound grows and fades in an almost constant flow, offering the listener a “structure of feelings” and a feeling of “emotional realism” experienced in relation to the young men and their actions and mental situations, including their impatience and restlessness during the long waits in the camps between the squads, euphoric relief and agitation after close combat, insecurity, and uneasiness toward the local Afghans. These are feelings that would not have been communicated as precisely and realistically without the musicalized sound structures.

Throughout the film, more recognizable musical elements distinctly stand out against the anonymous sound flow, the most distinct of which I will describe here. The main, most widely used, musical theme of the film is the moving and captivating



cello theme from the trailer. It is characterized by an opening minor third, which brings a minor mood to the entire film. The tones are long, languid and mostly without any harmonic direction. But sometimes the cello is accompanied by symphonic string arpeggios that stabilize the sound composition rhythmically and harmonically but maintain the stagnant and transient expression. The theme is used in fragments during the film, often accompanied by ambient sounds, sound effects and real sounds, but at the end of the film, and during the credits, it is heard at greater length and without other sounds. The music's intense insistence seems intrusive in this last scene, when we are presented with the young soldiers' wishes for the future (most expressed the desire to go back to war again). In the cinema, this music grabbed and held me in an immediate emotional engagement causing reflection and thought. This feeling and my thoughts were present in my body and mind a long time after I left the cinema, seeming to force me to take a stance towards the war and the Danish nation's participation in it. When I try to imagine this last scene without the music, I am quite sure the film would not leave the same persistent effect on me.

Another musical theme stands out clearly, though it is only used at length once towards the end of the film. It is a high pitched, slow string melody with a harmonic accompaniment. It is very light and beautiful and appears in an emotionally complex but relieved situation where the boys are playing with motorbikes after the loss of innocence in a close combat situation with the Taliban – a combat resulting in five dead Taliban soldiers and two barely wounded Danish soldiers. This motorbike theme suppresses the real sounds (like the cello theme at the end of the film) and establishes a kind of divine expression encouraging thought and reflection. In an interview, the director, who joined the soldiers in Afghanistan (also on the battlefields), describes his and the soldiers' experience of almost getting "high" on the war (in Christensen 2010, p. 2). They became almost addicted to the adrenalin rush they felt in close combat. The film leaves this as part of the explanation for why most of the soldiers want to go back to the war zone after returning to Denmark. This motorbike scene, with the divine musical theme and golden colors of the desert sunset, illustrates this point very well. It is not just a cathartic sense of relief we experience here, but maintenance of a light and easy, trance-like emotional state which suppresses the dark side of the war for a moment.

The third musical theme is heard twice at the beginning of the film, while the soldiers are still in Denmark. It is aggressive, instrumental heavy rock, played by a former Danish heavy rock band called *Mugshot*, and it stands out from the rest of the symphonic musical themes. The theme is first used when we see the soldiers romping around like children on the ground, and then at a goodbye party with a dancing stripper. It is significant that this aggressive tone and beat accompany the boys' playful innocence *before* they leave and not the really aggressive reality of the combat in Afghanistan. In the real and most intense combat scenes, which are the

narrative climaxes of the film, there is no music at all, only the sounds of shooting, shouting and heavy breathing.<sup>5</sup>

The International version is very similar to the Cannes version. I expected it to be more acoustic and warmer in timbre due to the symphony orchestra, but in effect it is very difficult to hear any difference from the “midi-mockups” used by the composer Uno Helmersson in the Cannes version. They consisted of music which he himself played (on synthesizers and acoustic instruments) and recorded, or which was taken from different kinds of music libraries (Helmersson, 2010). The musical themes are the same in the two film versions, and they are used in almost the same places. The general design of the sound effects has not changed notably either, but seems more distinct, comprehensive and rhythmically detailed in the International version than the Cannes version. I did recognize that the cello theme has been removed from some of the scenes, and so have some of the sound effects – for example, in the scene in which the platoon commander is being interviewed in a Danish hospital. He has been wounded by a roadside bomb, and he talks about this fearful experience and how he cannot wait to get back. In the Cannes version, the soundtrack for this scene communicates a biting, rumbling and tense fear, but I hear no such sound effects in connection with this scene in the International version. According to sound designer Rasmus Winther, the major changes in the soundtracks from the Cannes to the International version are 1) the recordings with the Czech National Symphony Orchestra (in fact, the production team decided to keep most of Helmersson’s mask music as it was, which explains why I did not notice perceptible changes from the Cannes version) and 2) the involvement of a Swedish foley artist, whom they used to improve the sounds of movement (footsteps, jumps, the friction of clothes etc.). In general, Winther conveyed the privilege of having the possibility to improve an already solid soundtrack that had even been credited in Cannes (Winther 2011).

Some extra material has been added to the DVD: interviews with the director and with soldiers from the film, some more combat scenes, and the story of a young soldier’s demobilization following his loss of nerve after accidentally killing a little girl. This extra material is not “musicalized”, but at the main menu of the DVD we hear a loop of the motorbike theme, and at the menu for the extra material we hear the cello theme, confirming the status of these themes as the main musical themes of the film. This menu-music immediately evokes some of the emotional and thought-provoking aspects of the film – unless, of course, the viewer is watching the film for the first time.

The TV version is a shortened version of the International version, and the soundtrack seems not to have been further edited. But some of the scenes are shortened or edited out. The scenes that are edited out are, for example, the most stagnant scenes, where the soldiers are bored, some interview-like scenes where they

retrospectively tell about their experiences, a scene showing the soldiers visiting a wounded comrade at the camp hospital, and some provocative remarks about how great war is. The dialogue appears more distinct in the TV version, but many of the sound effects are difficult to differentiate. In general, immersion in the narrative and sympathetic insight into the soldiers' world is not as easily promoted in a disturbed reception situation at home with smaller loudspeakers and the family, compared to the cinema-reception.

To summarize, we have two categories that together constitute the musicalized soundtrack, as defined in this article: *ambient sound structures* (drones, tones, noise effects, rhythms) growing and fading in an almost constant flow, and *musical themes* (heavy metal, motorbike and cello theme), which sometimes are part of the constant flow and sometimes stand out as recognizable foreground. From these categories, three levels of emotional investigation can be pointed out (to refer to Rabiger's third piece of advice). In general, the soundtracks of the film and TV versions help to investigate *the inner lives of the soldiers*, just as the general premise of the film prescribed. When the musical structures communicate emotional structures such as impatience, restlessness, release, agitation, easiness, uneasiness, stability and imbalance, as described in the analytical examples above, the musicalized soundtrack expresses the emotional conditions of the soldiers. These background feelings fit authentically into the narrative and thereby pass the mental reality test. This implies immersion in the narrative and the experience of emotional realism. Secondly, the music generates an *emotional evaluation of the war* in general. The object of investigation here is the emotional reality of the viewer, not the soldiers. For example the music may pave the way for the viewers to investigate their own emotional reality and their thoughts about the war in the scenes where the cello or motorbike theme supersedes the real sounds and plays for such a long time that evaluative thoughts and emotions have time to grow in the viewer's mind. Finally, the music serves as an *emotion grabber* when the cello theme affects the viewer emotionally, when the loud, heavy rock music is used, and when the mixture of sound effects is high tempo and noisy, which is most clearly expressed in the trailer. These last two levels of emotional investigations do not necessarily pass the perceptual reality test (cf. Cohen's Cognitive Associationist Framework) according to which the musicalized soundtrack is perceived without conscious attention.

## Epistemological considerations.

### Towards a new premise for documentary reception?

According to Rabiger's first piece of advice, music should not inject false emotion. Reality is always constructed in audiovisual documentary, and since it cannot be represented 1:1 anyway, and since emotions are ambiguous and highly subjective in

character, it is not possible to judge whether the musically generated emotions are real or false at an ontological level. I find it more interesting to study how people negotiate the realness of a documentary (e.g., in the public media), what role the music plays, and what kinds of categories, norms and values are at stake in that negotiation.

Two epistemological paradoxes appear when studying the role of musical stylization in the public debate over the audiovisual documentary genre in general: On the one hand, documentary is obligated to reality and non-manipulated actions from the pre-filmic world, but on the other hand a documentary has to go through some kind of editing when transforming and reducing that reality to an audiovisual product. On the one hand, a musicalized soundtrack is a non-realistic, fictionalizing device, but on the other hand it is a way of representing (real) background feelings that cannot be captured by the camera or microphones alone.

The public reception of *Armadillo* in the secondary media texts has remarkably refrained from making accusations of fictionalising, emotionalising and aestheticising reality, unlike the reception of similar recent documentaries, such as *The Secret War* (Guldbrandsen 2006), which critics accused of manipulating sound and pictures to hide its poor documentation.<sup>6</sup> An impartial investigation was, in fact, put in motion, but the report of the committee cleared *The Secret War* of any manipulation (Albeck et al. 2007). Possibly because of this incident, *Armadillo*'s strategy has been different, explicitly pointing out the fact-fiction dichotomy from the beginning – for example, in the poster headline. Unlike *The Secret War*, *Armadillo* describes the minds of the young soldiers from the inside – for example, by using music – rather than taking an explicit and verbally controlled critical approach to the war. The critical aspect of *Armadillo* is much more implicit and dependent of the viewer's emotional investigations.

Instead of leading to accusations of manipulation, the emphasis placed on aesthetic staging and solid journalistic research has even been identified as a distinguishing mark – or brand – of successful Danish documentaries. This idea is supported by, among others, the chief editor of the film magazine *EKKO*:

Ten years ago, we experienced the golden age of Danish fiction film with the wave of dogme films [referring to a Danish film movement represented by Lars von Trier and Thomas Vinterberg, among others]. Now it is the documentary's turn. Danish documentary is characterised by beautiful art works, carried by thorough research and by elegantly used devices from the fiction film, such as the dramaturgy. Universal narratives with a political sting are made. It is film that appeals to both the brain and the heart (Christensen, politiken.dk, 22 May, 2010. My translation).

It may be argued that instead of critically discussing the inescapable paradoxes of documentary, people like Christensen are making a virtue out of them. The greater

tolerance towards the aesthetic stylization of reality can also be a result of the viewers' general acceptance of a premise held by many directors (including Metz): that the emotional side of reality is most truly represented not only through dialogue and images alone but also through music (Have 2009 and 2010). Political, journalistic and in particular aesthetic ambitions among producers and directors have helped develop Danish documentary films into a successful brand within the last decade, and I believe that this prioritisation of the musical soundtrack will create a more tolerant attitude towards the aesthetic staging of reality – among critics as well as ordinary viewers. Perhaps the public reception of *Armadillo* signals a new premise for documentary reception in Denmark.

That *Armadillo* was not criticized to the same degree as *The Secret War* could also be a result of their different promotion histories. Shortly after the cinema premiere of *The Secret War* on 4 December 2006 (no journalists were able to see the film in advance), the film was broadcast on national television (on 7, 11, 12 and 18 December on the channels DR 2 and DR 1). The very critical and political debate was thus first and foremost based on the TV reception, since the documentary was not a cinema success. Unlike TV documentary, film documentary is not subject to strict requirements regarding journalistic documentation, and viewers typically accept a higher degree of aesthetic stylization in relation to film. The main argument behind the committee's clearing of *The Secret War* was that it was financially supported by the *Danish Film Institute* as well as a TV company and therefore should also be seen as a film and not just a journalistic documentary. Therefore, the use of, for example, underscore music was acceptable. Learning from this, the makers of *Armadillo* prepared the viewers from the very beginning to expect a cinematic rather than journalistic experience with the headline "To you it's film, to them it's reality" posted on all the promotional material. The film was a Cannes award-winning war film before it was a TV documentary.

But the question is whether the representation of the inner life of the soldiers through music is so harmless if we shift the perspective from the here-and-now reception of emotional realism to the potential social and interpersonal consequences of a film like *Armadillo* – to the "real emotions", so to speak, that constitute people's ideas and opinions towards the war, guiding them in their social actions afterwards.

Recently, cognitive research in haptic sensation has shown that our experiences of texture, form, weight and temperature influence our social attitudes, decisions and interpersonal relations. These studies have indicated that people are more generous and caring towards other people after holding a warm cup of coffee as opposed to a cold one (Williams & Bargh 2008), and that people who have touched puzzle pieces with rough surfaces evaluate interpersonal interactions as being more hostile than do those who have touched smooth-surfaced pieces (Ackerman, Nocera

& Bargh 2010). The conclusion drawn from these studies is that people's immediate sensory perception is connected with emotional, cognitive as well as social meaning.

Could the same case be made for the musical soundtrack of *Armadillo*? Could the musical structures (tensions, instability, roughness, tenderness etc.) of *Armadillo* influence our attitude towards the soldiers and the war? If so, the analysis of the soundtrack in this article shows that this potential influence is not unequivocal when it is studied outside the controlled environments of a laboratory, but depends on the narrative as well as the audiovisual and reception context in general. The musical soundtrack of *Armadillo* is sometimes unpleasant, communicating dissonance, darkness, roughness, and the like, and sometimes pleasant and beautiful, with its "divine" string music and moving cello theme. The musicalized soundtrack may influence the behaviour of the recipient in a multiple ways, and it supports the general ambiguity in the film, which makes it difficult to criticize as manipulation. The inner lives of the soldiers are experienced musically as both terrifying and satisfying, which leaves the message open for a variety of readings and for attitudes towards being a soldier and nation at war. Corresponding to this ambiguity, politicians from both the left and the right wing have been able to use *Armadillo* to their own advantage: The left wing says, "The film confirms to me that we have sent our soldiers on a totally meaningless mission", whereas the right wing says, "the film is a monument to the Danish soldiers' heroic effort in Afghanistan" (<http://www.ekkofilm.dk>, 2010. My translations). These are some of the real reactions that the experience of *Armadillo* can give rise to. "To you it's film ..." – but a film that somehow affects our reality when emotional realism leads to real emotions.

## Notes

1. On the English posters the line has been changed to "War gets under your skin".
2. Fiske would probably call the trailer a secondary rather than a primary text. I include it as a primary text here because of its status as such at the beginning of *Armadillo*'s promotion history.
3. Ien Ang draws on Raymond Williams for the concept "structure of feeling". Henry Jenkins further developed the concept in *Textual Poachers* (1992) in relation to gender and fandom.
4. This can be used as an aesthetic strategy in artistic or experimental films.
5. The production team knew that these combat scenes would cause legal consequences and public debate and therefore they decided to leave them as unedited as possible (Christensen, 2010, 6).
6. I have used the database *Infomedia A/S*, which covers a wide range of Danish print, broadcast and online media. I ran a search on the words "Armadillo", "Metz", and "documentary" in the period 6/4 2010 to 6/4 2011, resulting in 263 hits of articles, which I have browsed through.



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