

# The Sonically Evoked Spaces of Post Rock in an Era of Climate Reality

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Reflections on the instrumental genre of post-rock often seek to characterise it as a sonic mode of cartography, a musical fashioning of space via vast panoramic song passages that variously curve, plateau and ascend creating soundscapes that veer between the sparse and delicate, intense and engulfing. The music of post-rock band Sigur Rós (1994-present), in particular, is often interpreted as an auditory reflection of the vast natural beauty of their remote homeland - Iceland. Thoren notes how “physical location in Iceland is an essential aspect of cultural identity”<sup>1</sup>, for Icelanders inhabit a “topographical phenomenon shaped and crafted by the most powerful natural forces on earth”<sup>2</sup>. Its landscape comprises vast eroding glaciers (Vatnajökull Ice Cap), volcanoes and lava fields (Bárðarbunga and Torfajökull volcanic systems), vapour emitting fumaroles, rhyolite mountains (Ljósártungur) and basalt cliffs (Gerðuberg). The construction of a poetic landscape, or mapping of nature and landscape into culture in Iceland, reflects how “landscape and people are merged subjectively over time”<sup>3</sup> and has been evident from the Landnámabók (The Book of Settlement) first authored in the twelfth century<sup>4</sup>. While the transmediality of the early Icelandic literature is palpable in contemporary Icelandic art and music, this chapter highlights how the resultant vast, textured landforms of Iceland are not only mirrored within the praxis of Sigur Rós’ post-rock but also in its sonic sentiments of isolation (paired with exterior threats, instability and change) representative of a culture bounded by water.

Iceland, and its surrounding seas (Greenland, Norwegian and Atlantic Ocean), has been subject to both anthropogenic and natural change. Firstly, Iceland was one of the last land masses to be colonized by humans and has remained sparsely populated and open

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<sup>1</sup> Roxi, J. Thoren, ‘The Deep Grain of the Inquiry: Landscape and Identity in Icelandic Art’, *Journal of Landscape Architecture* 5, no. 1 (2010): 40.

<sup>2</sup> Feodor Pitcairn (photography), with text by Ari Trausti Guðmundsson, *Primordial Landscapes* (Brooklyn, NY: Powerhouse Books, 2015).

<sup>3</sup> Anthony Smith, *Chosen Peoples* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), 136.

<sup>4</sup> Verena Höfig, ‘The Legendary Topography of the Viking Settlement of Iceland’, *Landscapes: The Journal of the International Centre for Landscape and Language* 8, no. 1 (2018).

to contestation throughout its history. Secondly, it has undergone immense environmental change as a result of human settlement. As Hennig outlines:

[Both] large-scale deforestation, [and] the grazing pressure exerted through the farmers' livestock ... destabilized not only the existing vegetation, but also the soil, causing considerable erosion as early as the Viking age (Dugmore et al. 2005, 30) and resulting in the abandonment of several farms during the Middle ages (Dugmore et al. 2006). Today, less than 2 percent of Iceland is covered with trees, while almost the entire land surface is affected by various forms of soil erosion, making this the country's most visible form of environmental degradation (Olafur Arnalds et al. 2001, 43–4; Arnór Snorrason and Bjarki Kjartansson 2017)<sup>5</sup>

Today, rapid 'ocean acidification' due to increases in carbon dioxide in the atmosphere and the ocean as a result of human actions is predicted to have a profound impact on the surrounding marine ecosystem. Since the beginning of the industrial era, the ocean has absorbed around "525 billion tons of CO<sub>2</sub> from the atmosphere, presently around 22 million tons per day"<sup>6</sup>. Marine Biologist Hrönn Egilsdóttir has warned that 95% of sea creatures died 250 million years ago due to 'ocean acidification'<sup>7</sup> Additionally, receding glaciers, as a result of climate change, pose a significant change to Iceland's waters with glaciers set to disappear in the next 100-200 years<sup>8</sup>. In addition to the impact of human-intervention the island is beset by the power of nature – North Atlantic sea storms and coastal waters pound the land, the arrival of sea ice on the East-Greenland current covers fishing grounds northwest of Iceland and has caused the "long dreaded 'hafis' which meant very cold winters and harsh living in earlier centuries"<sup>9</sup>. Its location lying on the active geologic border between North America and Europe see volcanic eruptions cause 'glacial outburst floods' (jökulhlaups) when "freshly erupted

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<sup>5</sup> Reinhard Hennig, 'Memory of Environmental and Climatic Change in the Sagas of Icelanders', *Scandinavian Studies* 91, no. 3 (2019): 325.

<sup>6</sup> Jennifer Bennett, 'Ocean Acidification', *Ocean: Find Your Blue*, last modified April, 2018, <https://ocean.si.edu/ocean-life/invertebrates/ocean-acidification>.

<sup>7</sup> Hrönn Egilsdóttir, 'Iceland: The Quiet Threat of Ocean Acidification', *Aurora: Universities Network*, last modified 22, June, 2018, <https://aurora-network.global/iceland-the-quiet-threat-of-ocean-acidification/>.

<sup>8</sup> G. Aðalgeirsdóttir et al., 'Response of Hofsjökull and Southern Vatnajökull, Iceland, to Climate Change', *Journal of Geophysical Research* 111, no. 3 (September 2006).

<sup>9</sup> Icelandic Met Office, 'Sea Ice Around Iceland', last modified unknown, <https://en.vedur.is/sea-ice/>.

lava, tephra or hot gases [interact] with glacier ice and snow on the slopes of volcanoes”<sup>10</sup>.

Described as a collective self-portrait, *Weather Reports You* comprises a collection of personal accounts of the weather by Icelanders gathered by visual artist Roni Horn. In her introduction she articulates how weather contributes to Icelandic identity:

Iceland more than most places is a country that has forcibly been made to recognize the weather as the dominant, essentially unpredictable presence that influences the outcome of all things on the island. The history of Iceland is in great measure a history dominated by events of weather and geology.<sup>11</sup>

The relationship between identity and climate is now being recognised as “a critical knowledge frontier”<sup>12</sup>, as it is likely to influence climate change adaptation. For a nation like Iceland weather consciousness has likely always been essential in the process of securing and maintaining in-group continuity.

### **Land as Identity within Contemporary Art Practices**

Sigur Rós’ ambient, haunting and affective compositions exists in the context of a broader artistic construction of ‘landscape as nation’<sup>13</sup> in post-colonial Iceland. That is, the inclination for Icelandic cultural production to draw on the distinctive and natural features of the landscape – as a “land of fire and ice [ominous volcanos and stunning glaciers], cascading waterfalls, black sand beaches and vast, volcanic plains”<sup>14</sup>. A fusing of foreign influences with local heritage occurs in indigenous appropriation and application of contemporary art practices that have evolved outside Iceland. As Sarah Shug observes in her compendium of Iceland contemporary art, *Isle of Art*: “globalisation, digitalisation, and the explosion of international travel have caused the island’s once rather closed-off art scene to become bigger, more professional, and more

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<sup>10</sup> Emmanuel Pagneux et al., *Volcanogenic Floods in Iceland: An Assessment of Hazards and Risks at Öraefajökull and on the Markarfljót Outwash Plain* (Reykjavík: IMO, IES-UI, NCIP-DCPEM, 2015), 7.

<sup>11</sup> Roni Horn, ‘Introduction’, *Weather Reports You* (London and Göttingen: Artangel/Steidl, 2007).

<sup>12</sup> Jon Barnett et al., ‘Three Ways Social Identity Shapes Climate Change Adaptation’, *Environmental Research Letters* 16, no. 12 (2021).

<sup>13</sup> Nicola Dibben, ‘Nature and Nation: National Identity and Environmentalism in Icelandic Popular Music Video and Music Documentary’, *Ethnomusicology Forum* 18, no. 1 (June 2009).

<sup>14</sup> Anna Mackenzie, ‘Uncovering the Arts Scene Across Iceland’s Most Remote Regions’, last modified 23 May, 2019, <https://www.sleek-mag.com/article/isle-of-art/>.

diverse”<sup>15</sup>. In doing so, Iceland has witnessed the expansion of traditional knowledge practices via contemporary art practices. Artistic and creative practices contribute to the multiple perceptions and conceptions of living on land bounded by the sea by giving expression to living with nature, whilst also acknowledging that which is “invisible, insidious and urgent”<sup>16</sup> – namely the expected widespread disruption of climate change.

Water as the ‘vetturale di natura’ (or vehicle of nature) features prominently in Icelandic cultural production. As a geothermally active sub-arctic island, water is present in all three states of matter (solid, liquid & gas). As Thoren highlights:

In a single day, in any season, one can see ice, water and steam. Glaciers and snow-capped volcanoes create clouds that hide their peaks. Rivers course over waterfalls into fjords, and lakes and wet-lands host migratory birds. Hot pots bubble and geysers erupt. And on the coast, waves and tides mark time<sup>17</sup>

In contemporary music the presence and influence of water is apparent as a common “visual, lyrical and sonic trope”<sup>18</sup> among Icelandic artists, woven into songs of love and longing (e.g. on ‘Water’ by The Sugarcubes), or celebrated as the source of life. Björk’s ‘Oceania,’ for example, is a song written entirely from the ocean’s perspective, offering appreciation for continuous bodies of water that “surrounds all the land and watches over the humans to see how they are doing after millions of years of evolution”<sup>19</sup>. While on ‘Vespertine’ Björk ponders on the materiality and beauty of her homeland reflecting on the changing appearance and visual splendour of its glaciers (“Aurora, Goddess sparkle, a mountain shade, suggests your shape”). In 2021, Icelandic citizen and resident Damon Albarn (Blur, Gorillaz) released *The Nearer the Fountain, More Pure the Stream Flows*, a whole album inspired by the panorama viewable from his living room. Located on the outskirts of Reykjavík harbour, Albarn’s home looks out on an expanse of slate-grey water, black sand beaches and Mount Esja (a volcanic mountain

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<sup>15</sup> Sarah Shug, *Isle of Art: A Journey through Iceland’s Art Scene* (Brussels, Belgium: Self-Published, 2019).

<sup>16</sup> Lucy Wood, ‘Climate Change is Invisible, Insidious and Urgent. Can the Arts Help us See it?’, *The Guardian*, 28 October 2016, accessed 14 April 2022 <https://www.theguardian.com/science/political-science/2016/oct/28/climate-change-is-invisible-insidious-and-urgent-can-the-arts-help-us-see-it>.

<sup>17</sup> Thoren, ‘The Deep Grain of the Inquiry’, 41

<sup>18</sup> Dibben, ‘Nature and Nation’, 136

<sup>19</sup> Björk in Adam Bychawski, ‘Björk Kicks Off Olympics’, *New Musical Express*, 16 August 2004, accessed 14 April 2022 <https://www.nme.com/news/music/bjork-150-1358652>.

range, composed of basalt and tuff rock). Albarn has described the process of composing music in response to the vista as a challenge of:

how far can you take an ensemble into nature without literally abandoning your instruments and just being in it?’ It was about getting people to be really sensitive to the way the water changed, the clouds came in, the light, the rain... almost horizontal rain, then very gentle rain, almost mist. Or moments where a storm would come in, and the temperature would drop really dramatically and the rain would turn to snow<sup>20</sup>

The result is an album entirely driven by the ‘dynamics of the environment’ but specifically ‘water-bound’ “always connected to the tides, and the atmospherics you experience when you’re by the sea.” Albarn’s connection to the sea is articulated as both an attentiveness to its volatility and also the message that it sends on its currents. To this effect, Albarn’s delicate and brooding 2021 solo album is a second attempt to address environmental concerns following his 2010 Gorillaz album *Plastic Beach*. Albarn described the Gorillaz album on BBC Radio 4’s ‘Today’ as “the beginning of a meditation on the state of our oceans.” The visual concept driving that album was “vast, matted plastic semi-islands”<sup>21</sup> floating in the seas, signifying how our oceans have become a “repository for some 1.8 trillion pieces of plastic weighing nearly 90,000 tonnes”<sup>22</sup>. Returning to the inspiring qualities Birgir Þórarinsson from Icelandic landscape, film and acting collective turned electronic band GusGus, attribute the artists creative response to the way in which:

The space is an unpainted canvas because it is so open, so it infuses in the mentality. As an artist you are not directly thinking about nature, but as an

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<sup>20</sup> Albarn in Simon Ingram, “‘I Sing About My Fears. It’s Cathartic:’ Damon Albarn on Turning the Atmospheres of Iceland and Devon into Music – In the Shadow of the Pandemic’, *Environment and Conservation: National Geographic*, 23 August 2021, accessed 14 April 2022 <https://www.nationalgeographic.co.uk/environment-and-conservation/2021/08/i-sing-about-my-fears-its-cathartic-damon-albarn-on-turning-the-atmospheres-of-iceland-and-devon-into-music-in-the-shadow-of-the-pandemic>.

<sup>21</sup> Albarn, ‘I Sing About My Fears’

<sup>22</sup> Mary Ann Potts, ‘This is What it’s Like to Swim Through the Great Pacific Garbage Patch’, *Environment and Conservation: National Geographic*, 22 August, 2019, accessed 14 April 2022, <https://cms-uk.ngeo.com/environment-and-conservation/2019/08/what-its-swim-through-great-pacific-garbage-patch>.

Icelandic people surrounded by so much space, we are imprinted with an open possibility<sup>23</sup>

Þórarinnsson's comments reflect the notion that the "landscape is untreated and unprocessed," "an original space"<sup>24</sup>. Both Albarn and Þórarinnsson appear to express a particularly Icelandic concept of 'nature'. As Árnason states, the Icelandic variant, náttúrusýn contains sýn, a polysemic that can mean:

- (1) 'a view' (i.e. what you actually see),
- (2) 'a vista' (a selected field of vision),
- (3) 'a vision' (an ideal, insight or dream), or
- (4) 'an illusion' (a mirage, fata morgana)<sup>25</sup>

Relationship to place, in the context of environmental concern, has however also seen artists use the physical material of Iceland as both medium and subject<sup>26</sup>. For example, through a process of defamiliarization Roni Horn's 2007 exhibition *Vatnasafn* or *Library of Water* alters individual relationships with water. As described by the exhibition website, *Vatnasafn* features a "constellation of 24 glass columns containing water collected from ice from some of the major glaciers around Iceland." Interpreted in the context of this chapter, the exhibition reflects an artistic act of containment (water is housed in acrylic columns), an archival perpetuation of water that was once the physical material of the glaciers. Furthermore, as a permanent exhibition housed in a former library in Stykkisholmur, water replaces literature as a expressive of Icelandic culture. As Horn recognizes: "in some sense [the works exhibited reflect] an end-game, since many of these sources will no longer exist in a matter of years"<sup>27</sup>. As Thoren notes, in this instance, water functions as "proxies for global warming"<sup>28</sup>. Furthermore, it signifies, as Horn has noted that Iceland is no longer an island "economically, chemically, climatically, or even psychologically speaking"<sup>29</sup>. Acknowledgement of

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<sup>23</sup> Birgir Þórarinnsson in Alex Leonard, 'Icelandic musicians GusGus talk about Climate Change', *Earmilk*, 7 December 2016, accessed 14 April 2022 <https://earmilk.com/opinion/gusgus-speak-about-intimacy-with-instruments-musical-universality-and-climate-change-exclusive-interview>.

<sup>24</sup> Tina Majonen, *Iceland: Imagined and Experienced Landscapes* (Masters diss., Uppsala University, 2018). 35.

<sup>25</sup> Þorvarður Árnason, *Views of Nature and Environmental Concern in Iceland* (Masters diss, Linköpings Universitet, 2005). 12.

<sup>26</sup> Thoren, 'The Deep Grain of the Inquiry'.

<sup>27</sup> Horn in Gordon Burn, 'To the Lighthouse', *The Guardian*, 2 Jun 2007, accessed 14 April 2022 <https://www.theguardian.com/books/2007/jun/02/art.architecture>.

<sup>28</sup> Thoren, 'The Deep Grain of the Inquiry', 39.

<sup>29</sup> Horn in Gordon Burn, 'To the Lighthouse.'

the climate crisis inevitably alters cultural relationships with the environment, in its prediction of an “alternate futures and alternate relationships”<sup>30</sup>.

The impact that the Icelandic climate has on the imagination, “as a comprehensive force with which one is constantly in dialogue”<sup>31</sup>, has been noted by a number of artists, curators and critics. Indeed, Gregory Volk has described the Icelandic consciousness as a “homeland on the mind” – referring to work “born of an engagement with a very particular country, culture, history, and natural environment”<sup>32</sup>. Included among these works is an exhibition and solo album inspired by eruption of the Fagradalsfjall volcano by Sigur Rós’ lead guitarist and singer Jónsi (Jón Þór Birgisson), titled *Obsidian* (2021). For the exhibition Jónsi presented a series of sculptural works, sound installations, and “earthy, atmospheric fragrances”<sup>33</sup>. Spread across multiple floors of the Tanya Bonakdar Gallery (NY) audiences experienced soundscapes of “gritty rocks and searing lava” coupled with “smoky, tar-like aromas of fossilized amber” and sculptural works composed of resin and obsidian glass accompanied by “crackling sounds” and the aroma of “burnt birch trees”<sup>34</sup>. Together they signal how “destructive volcanic forces that ultimately have a generative end”<sup>35</sup>. The sonic dimension of Jónsi’s artistic work can also be found in other artistic contemplations on changes to the Icelandic climate. For example, in 2007 artist Katie Paterson invited the public to phone the Vatnajökull glacier (the largest and most voluminous ice cap in Iceland) and “listen to its death throes, live, through a microphone submerged deep in the bitterly cold [Jökulsárlón] lagoon”<sup>36</sup>. Danish-Icelandic installation artist Olafur Eliasson’s collaboration with geologist Minik Rosing for *Ice Watch* (2014-18) also sought to expediate climate awareness and create a direct and tangible experience of climate change. This was achieved by placing blocks of glacier ice, fished from the sea around Greenland, at City Hall Square Copenhagen (2014), Place du Panthéon Paris (2015),

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<sup>30</sup> Thoren, ‘The Deep Grain of the Inquiry’, 39.

<sup>31</sup> Gregory Volk, ‘Art on Ice’, *Art in America* 88, no. 9 (2000): 40.

<sup>32</sup> Gregory Volk, ‘A Group Exhibition in Iceland Trades Local Character for International Appeal’, *Hyperallergic*, 7 October 2021, accessed 14 April 2022 <https://hyperallergic.com/682555/a-group-exhibition-in-iceland-trades-local-character-for-international-appeal/>.

<sup>33</sup> Tanya Bonakdar Gallery, *Jónsi: Obsidian*, accessed 14 April 2022 <https://www.tanyabonakdargallery.com/exhibitions/614-jonsi-obsidian-tanya-bonakdar-gallery-new-york/>.

<sup>34</sup> Bonakdar Gallery, *Jónsi: Obsidian*

<sup>35</sup> Bonakdar Gallery, *Jónsi: Obsidian*

<sup>36</sup> Maev Kennedy, ‘Callers Take Part in Art’, *The Guardian*, 8 June 2007, accessed 14 April 2022 <https://www.theguardian.com/uk/2007/jun/08/artnews.art>.

Bloomberg International Headquarters (London 2018) and the South Bank outside the Tate Modern (London 2018). The 2018 version of the installation was designed to coincide with the meeting of world leaders at the COP24 Climate Change conference in Katowice, Poland. For those in attendance the installations not only aroused somatosensory systems, but also engaged auditory perception, as Eliasson commented:

I think it matters for people to actually put their ear to the ice and suddenly realise that it has a very subtle cracking, hopping, crisp noise because the melting releases pressure bubbles that have been stuck in the ice for 10,000 years<sup>37</sup>

Furthermore, as the ice melts, air pockets or bubbles within the ice presented an opportunity to smell air from 10,000 years ago – air from a period that had “30 per cent less carbon dioxide in the atmosphere”<sup>38</sup> (Eliasson in Yalcinkaya 2018).

The musical project *Minningar* provides a useful bridge to a discussion of post-rock as a mode of landscape art and a further example of the relevance of sonic representation in the climate crisis. The 2021 release *From the Ocean/To the Ocean (Memories of Snæfellsjökull)* is an album comprising two compositions and four field recordings. The field recordings (by Magnus Bergsson) were taken of the Snæfellsjökull glacier and the region around the glacier (Snæfellsnes), including the track *Sjávarbakki* (Seashore). *Minningar* founder Daniele Girolamo has stated that the motivation for their documentation of a crucial moment in glacial time was due to its rapid diminution but also its cultural significance. In the case of the latter, Girolamo describes Snæfellsnes as “a magic place that you can even read about in the Eddas [literary works from the 13th and 14th centuries that incorporate memories preserved orally from preliterate times; Sigurðsson, 2020] such as with Bárður the giant who slept in Sönghellir, the singing cave”<sup>39</sup>. Whereas, for the former, Eyrún Engilbertsdóttir notes: “That’s the sad part. There’s a goodbye feeling in [this album] as well”<sup>40</sup> which the album captures

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<sup>37</sup> Günseli Yalcinkaya, ‘Olafur Eliasson Installs Giant Blocks of Glacial Ice Across London’, *Dezeen*, 12 December 2018, accessed 14 April 2022 <https://www.dezeen.com/2018/12/12/ice-watch-olafur-eliasson-installation/>.

<sup>38</sup> Yalcinkaya, ‘Olafur Eliasson Installs Giant Blocks of Glacial Ice’

<sup>39</sup> Hannah Jane Cohen, ‘Documenting A Delicate Present: *Minningar* Showcases Climate Change Through The Sounds Of The Glaciers’, *Reykjavik Grapevine*, 5 July 2021, accessed 14 April 2022 <https://grapevine.is/icelandic-culture/music/2021/05/07/documenting-a-delicate-present-minningar-showcases-climate-change-through-the-sounds-of-the-glaciers/>.

<sup>40</sup> Cohen, ‘Documenting A Delicate Present’



through its documentation of field recordings. While the disappearance or future absence of these natural marvels (the Okjökull glacier represents the first to disappear) is lamented in the cultural production of this work, the project was fatefully aided by the global pandemic, as it was possible to capture field recordings without the acoustic interruptions of tourists or human visitors also paying a visit to these meaningful sites. Indeed, the reality of melting icebergs also featured in Edinburgh born contemporary artist David Cass' photographic collection to *The Sea From Here*, in which he invited 'sea people' from all around the world to submit images of their view of the sea from their Covid locked down vantage points. Alessa Brossmer and Jochen Orso submitted an aerial image of an iceberg on the Jökulsárlón lagoon in Iceland, where they were recording melting bergs.

### **Post-rock as Mode of Landscape Art**

Thoren observes that to “engage with the material site is to observe”<sup>41</sup>, noting form, colour, texture, and the grain of the landscape. As a musical sub-genre of contemporary rock music, post-rock has been described as an “evocation of spaciousness” (Størvold 2018, 382). Typically instrumental music, post-rock compositions are richly textured, built upon atmospheric layers, in which conventional popular music song structures are rejected in favour of lengthy (often strophic), dynamic (“deliberate uneventfulness, with long spaces in-between gestures”<sup>42</sup> is counterpoised with epic gestures) and expansive arrangements. Sigur Rós are one of the few post-rock bands to include a lead singer, yet Jónsi's ‘angelic’ or ‘keening’ falsetto<sup>43</sup> is considered an instrument distinguishable from the voice used as a vehicle for catchy, anthemic or profound lyrics. Newstead attributes its instrumental quality to “not having any idea what Sigur Rós are singing about”<sup>44</sup> as Jónsi sings either in Icelandic, or the made-up language of Vonlenska (Anglicized to Hopelandic). Former Sigur Rós drummer and keyboardist Orri Páll Dýrason (2005) has commented that: “Maybe it's when people don't

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<sup>41</sup> Thoren, ‘The Deep Grain of the Inquiry’, 39.

<sup>42</sup> Tore Størvold, ‘Sigur Rós: Reception, Borealism, and Musical Style’, *Popular Music* 37, no. 3 (2018): 382.

<sup>43</sup> Anwyn Crawford, ‘The Evolution of the Male Falsetto’, *Frieze* Issue 133, 1 September 2010, accessed 14 April 2022 <https://www.frieze.com/article/evolution-male-falsetto>.

<sup>44</sup> Al Newstead, ‘How Sigur Rós’ Music Expresses what Language Cannot’, *ABC*, 6 June, 2019, accessed 14 April 2022 <https://www.abc.net.au/doublej/music-reads/features/sigur-ros-j-files-feature/11182438>.

understand the lyrics, they think about something personal”<sup>45</sup>. Schott and Barbour also note the way the quality of Jónsi’s falsetto voice is “ethereal and mournful, occupying attention not for its message but its spirit, both tangible and elusive in equal measure, giving focus to the band’s often minimal and largo compositions”<sup>46</sup> Indeed, on *Svefn-g-englar* (from second album *Ágætis Byrjun*) Jónsi’s refrain of ‘tjú’ signifies the traditional sound made in Icelandic to comfort babies – returning listeners to the unconscious phonemic awareness at the commencement of human personhood. Furthermore, the mournful or fragile nature of the voice is also linked to the impermanence of the boyhood falsetto as “a voice that cannot last”<sup>47</sup>.

The categorisation post-rock is generally attributed to British music journalist Simon Reynolds who developed the meaning of the term through his observation and analysis of an increasing convergence of ambient and rock music by underground bands such as Stereolab, Seefeel, Papa Sprain and Bark Psychosis. Many sources claim that the first use of the term by Reynolds was in a review of Bark Psychosis’ album *Hex* in music magazine Mojo, but Reynolds himself has stated that his first use of the label was in 1993 in an interview with 4AD band Insides. In that piece he describes their sound as belonging in that “lo-fi but non-Luddite zone of post-rock/post-techno experimentalism that encompasses Disco Inferno, Seefeel, Aphex et al”<sup>48</sup> He also went on to state that “Insides’ music is built up through layers rather than jamming: it’s a ‘musaic’ of sequenced motifs, over which [vocalist] Kirsty [Yates] whispers her unsettling lyrics”<sup>49</sup> – an observation that identifies what became a key characteristic of the genre. In 1994 he began to employ the term in a more prophetic manner in consideration of ‘Music in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century’ in *The Wire* (May 1994). Reynolds began to craft a clear concept of a genre that employed “rock instrumentation for non-rock purposes, using guitars as facilitators of timbre and textures rather than riffs and power chords”<sup>50</sup>. Turning to the

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<sup>45</sup> Dýrason in William Weir, ‘A Brief History of Singing in Invented Languages’, *Slate*, 29 November 2011, accessed 14 April 2022

[http://www.slate.com/blogs/browbeat/2011/11/29/invented\\_languages\\_in\\_music\\_a\\_brief\\_history.html](http://www.slate.com/blogs/browbeat/2011/11/29/invented_languages_in_music_a_brief_history.html).

<sup>46</sup> Gareth Schott, and Karen Barbour, ‘Filmic Resonance and Dispersed Authorship in Sigur Rós’ Transmedial Valtari Mystery Film Experiment’, in *Transmedia Directors: Artistry, Industry and New Audiovisual Aesthetics*, eds Carol Vernallis et al. (New York: Bloomsbury, 2020), 227.

<sup>47</sup> Crawford, ‘Male Falsetto’

<sup>48</sup> Simon Reynolds, ‘Insides Interview’, *Melody Maker*, 1993, accessed 14 April 2022 <http://reynoldsretro.blogspot.com/2007/07/insides-interview-melody-maker-late.html>

<sup>49</sup> Reynolds, ‘Insides Interview’

<sup>50</sup> Simon Reynolds, ‘The Ambient Pool’, *The Wire*, Issue 123, (May, 1996): 28.

1993 interview with Kirsty Yates from *Insider*, in describing the band's non-rock methodology, she stated that: "There's nothing intrinsically wrong with guitars ... it's guitar players that are the problem"<sup>51</sup>. A genre began to materialize defined by its movement away from naturalistic recording (i.e. attempts to capture the prowess of a live performance) and toward crafted illusions of spatial dimension as an anti-rock gesture.

Not constrained to the use of standard rock instrumentation, the texture of post-rock emanates from its use of additional ghostly, vaporous and otherworldly sounds that creates an atmosphere of uncertainty, mystery, inexpressible fears, and unsatisfied longing. In Sigur Rós' music, musical signifiers of nature are frequently employed in association, for example, between ice and the 'twinkly' high frequency percussive sounds of the music box<sup>52</sup>. In doing so, Sigur Rós draw on hauntology and aesthetics of the past to conjure a historicised present. Composer and sound artist Pierre-Luc Senécal states, music boxes represent: "fragility, the nostalgia, even the memories of childhood, but also the rest, and the calm that invite contemplation"<sup>53</sup> Such sounds are not reproduced with high fidelity but often arrive as a veiled resonance - warped, perished or altered. Not only are they submerged under the co-presence of the song's others layers, but they are purposely degraded and weathered to render the ethereal presence of discarded sounds from the past. Størvold's analysis of *Svefn-g-englar* describes the song's "ambient wash of noise, a low-frequency rumble muffled as if heard underwater. A sonar ping (pitched at E) reinforces the experience of submerged listening"<sup>54</sup>. Sigur Rós' compositions therefore create a nexus of interconnections between memory, subjective experience, nostalgia, induced social emotion from "remembering or re-experiencing media content and technologies from the past"<sup>55</sup> or the shifting nature of landscape as a repository of past lives or living.

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<sup>51</sup> Reynolds, 'Insides Interview'

<sup>52</sup> Dibben, 'Nature and Nation'

<sup>53</sup> Pierre-Luc Senécal, 'Residency Sound Window/Music Box', *Sporobole*, accessed 14 April 2022  
<https://sporobole.org/en/programming/pierre-luc-senecal-2/>

<sup>54</sup> Størvold, 'Reception, Borealism, and Musical Style', 379

<sup>55</sup> Tim Wulf et al., 'Blissed by the Past: Theorizing Media-induced Nostalgia as an Audience Response Factor for Entertainment and Well-being', *Poetics* 69, (2018): 70.

A sense of space is also achieved through the use of modulated reverb. As a musical effect, reverb not only produces depth and dimension, it also envelops the sound ultimately decaying it. We live in a world filled with sound reflections. Reverb serves to communicate and evoke a sense of space, gesturing material surroundings, dimension and distance. It personifies what humans have come to consider ‘natural’ when sensing their world. In the designed world, and construction of architectural spaces, sound is actively harnessed and directed in order to suppress and stimulate emotions. The splendour of highly reverberant spaces (such as concert halls) are noted for their ability to elevate the impact of music and voice to create transcendental, spiritual and affecting experiences for audiences. On the other hand, the effect of reverberation on speech can cause it to sound distant and ghostly, significantly reducing its clarity and intelligibility.

The application of reverb to field recordings and instrumentation offers post-rock the capacity to produce a drenched tone that escapes the confines not only of pure or clean sounds, but obscures the presence and agency of the performer. Instead an epicene approach to music making has been crafted, achieving a powerful sound in response to minimal input of sound energy. Paynes describes post-rock precursors The Cocteau Twins music as “beautiful, shimmering, swirling ... stuff. There are guitars in there somewhere, but they’re textural, oblivious, environmental; they’ve shed their leadership qualities and become communal”<sup>56</sup>. As an early precursor and sub-genre of post-rock, the shoegaze genre was directly described by its praxis, the detached stage presence of musicians who looked down at their feet working guitar foot-pedal effects. In doing so, rock performativity was abandoned in favour of enclosing audiences within a sonorous envelope<sup>57</sup> of ambience. The traditional links with physical sound making was purposely dissociated<sup>58</sup>. As a response to the dominance of grunge (late 80s to early 90s) or mainstream rock (more generally), post-rock’s association with the concept of space functioned to articulate how the genre both thematically and methodologically fully adopted the notion of space as an area set apart – it constituted a freeing up of imagination, liberty from the structures of conventional rock music and its choice of

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<sup>56</sup> Steph Paynes, ‘Robin Guthrie’, *Guitar Player*, February 1991, 25.

<sup>57</sup> David Schwartz, *Listening Subjects: Music, Psychoanalysis, Culture* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1997).

<sup>58</sup> Denis Smalley, ‘Spectromorphology: Explaining Sound-shapes,’ *Organised Sound* 2, Issue 2 (1997).

tools. Indeed, the description of My Bloody Valentine's Kevin Shields playing on *Loveless* as 'liquid lava'<sup>59</sup>, echoes Richard Wright's use of the phrase in his 1934 poem 'Everywhere Burning Waters Rise' in which liquid lava signifies an incineration of the old order, and the establishment of a new place. Following its predecessors, Sigur Rós typically evade the spectacle, performativity, and showmanship of a rock band performance instead creating an occasion to turn live concerts into "a post-modern exhibition space, projecting vector art animation of soaring birds and insidious storm clouds swirling around the stage"<sup>60</sup>.

Post-rock seeks to provide an embodied experience of music that 'moves' listeners affectively through a musical landscape comprising of otherworldly resonance and dislocated sounds that construct a new relationship between sound and space (both real and implied). The use of reverb as 'sonic space-making devices'<sup>61</sup> make it possible to produce the effect of aural depth that is responsible for transporting listeners to imagined spaces and vistas. The listener is placed *in* the music, as they travel "over the path that defines a particular musical piece"<sup>62</sup>. Arguably, the sense of breadth associated with Sigur Rós' compositions is achieved from the length of the tracks that allows the use of slow tempos to create "unhurried, slow-burning approach to music is as typical of the band as it is untypical of paradigmatic rock style"<sup>63</sup>. As Costa notes, with reference to Canadian post-rock band God Speed You! Black Emperor, within a single track it is possible for their music to "quiver on a faultline between control and chaos, so that for each passage that is restrained, elegant or playful, there's another that surges and spirals, angry and bleak"<sup>64</sup>. Similarly, Peter Elsdon examines expressive trajectory of the Sigur Rós song Glósóli (from the 2005 album *Takk*), in which he observes that the embodied meanings afforded by the music is "premised on the idea that a change in musical state – usually a change in texture and sometimes harmony as well – can be

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<sup>59</sup> S. Fletcher, 'Five Great Ways to Use a Reverb Pedal', *Tone Report*, February Issue 2014.

<sup>60</sup> Paste Photo, 'Live Photos: We're Still Reeling From Sigur Ros' Concert at Kings Theatre', *Paste Magazine*, 20 October 2016, accessed 14 April 2022 <https://www.pastemagazine.com/music/sigur-ros/live-photos-were-still-reeling-from-sigur-ros-conc/>.

<sup>61</sup> Peter Doyle, 'From "My Blue Heaven" to "Race with the Devil": Echo, Reverb and (Dis)ordered Space in Early Popular Music Recording,' *Popular Music* 23, no. 1 (2004).

<sup>62</sup> Mark Johnson, and Steve Larson, "'Something in the Way She Moves": Metaphors in Musical Motion,' *Metaphor and Symbol* 18, no. 2 (2003): 72.

<sup>63</sup> Størvold, 'Reception, Borealism, and Musical Style', 379

<sup>64</sup> Maddy Costa, 'GY!BE: Interview', *The Guardian*, 11 October 2012, accessed 14 April 2022 <https://www.theguardian.com/music/2012/oct/11/godspeed-black-emperor-interview-full-transcript>.

experienced as a change in physical state”<sup>65</sup>. As Fletcher notes too, post-rock “embellish the traditional rock set-up to symphonic proportions” to “thicken songs into dense, dramatically unfolding soundscapes”<sup>66</sup>.

Working with the critical distinction that exists between space and place, Harrison and Dourish advance a principle that the former constitutes an ‘opportunity’ while the latter reflects ‘understood reality’<sup>67</sup>. To this effect, a sense of space is constructed. In Doyle’s seminal work on reverb, he notes that reflected sound became aestheticized during fabrication of geographic spatialisation within cowboy and Hawaiian music of the 1930’s and 40’s. He chronicles how recordings were “no longer simple analogues of real physical events that take place in the studio”<sup>68</sup>. Rather, ‘sonic space-making devices’ made it possible to produce the effect of aural depth that is responsible for transporting listeners to imagined spaces and vistas<sup>69</sup>.

Post rock artists use reverb to similar effect, creating spatial representation. Consider the song ‘Ég anda’ from the Sigur Rós album *Valtari* (2012). The track opens with the sound of a person slowly breathing and the breath is treated with minimal reverb with a moderately fast decay and minimal reflections. This positions the sound very close to the listener, placing them inside an intimate listening environment. After the opening breath, high-pitched ethereal tones, saturated with a high-density reverb with a long decay, enter the space and immediately elongate the sonic environment. As the song progresses through the opening 60 seconds, further ethereal tones populate the sonic space, each treated with an expansive reverb that gradually occupies the full width of the stereo field. The large size and long decay of the reverb contrasts with the intimate breathing that continues throughout the intro and is accompanied by the dry sound of stones gently clacking together. The varieties of reverb within the space create both a sense of closeness and openness simultaneously. The effect of this is that the listener

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<sup>65</sup> Peter Elsdon, ‘Embodied Listening and the Music of Sigur Rós’, *Popular Musicology*, Issue 2 (2015), accessed 14 April 2022, <http://www.popular-musicology-online.com/issues/02/elsdon.html>

<sup>66</sup> Lawson Fletcher, ‘The Sound of Ruins: Sigur Rós’ Heima and the Post-rock Elegy for Place’, *Interference: A Journal of Audio Culture* 2 (2012): 10.

<sup>67</sup> Steve Harrison and Paul Dourish, ‘Re-Place-ing Space: The Roles of Place and Space in Collaborative Systems’, *Proceedings of Computer Supported Cooperative Work* (1996).

<sup>68</sup> Peter Doyle, *Echo and Reverb: Fabricating Space in Popular Music Recording 1900-1960* (Connecticut: Wesleyan University Press, 2005), 149.

<sup>69</sup> Doyle, ‘Echo, Reverb and (Dis)ordered Space’

appears to be transported to a wide-open outdoor environment, perhaps standing with a companion next to a stream amidst an expansive mountain range.

At 1:55, however, the landscape suddenly and dramatically changes. The ethereal sounds are replaced with metallic, percussive gestures and the reverb is considerably shorter and smaller, placing the listener at a medium distance from the sound source. While still in stereo, the reverb also occupies a much narrower bandwidth of the stereo field. Percussive bells also decorate the sonic space, and the listening environment, while still highly evocative, no longer connotes an expansive outdoor setting. Rather, the listener appears to be transported to an abandoned church or some other open but enclosed environment. While it is the change of instrumentation and texture that is initially responsible for the abrupt juxtaposition, it is the change of artificial space that transports the listener to a new musical landscape. As the track progresses, ethereal guitar tones saturated with expansive reverb gradually populate the space, and the sonic environment begins to grow incrementally larger. When the entire ensemble finally enters at 3:15, the listener is again ensconced in a wash of swirling reverb reflections, filling the three-dimensional space, and is relocated to a sprawling exterior panorama. The increased rhythmic activity helps to ‘push’ the listener through the dense sonic landscape until they are finally deposited into a tightly enclosed space, possibly underground, next to an unknown dark, mechanical sound during the track’s closing.

While there are numerous musical changes that create the discursive quality of *Ég anda*, it is the manipulation of reverb to create differing artificial spaces that constructs a linear narrative, evoking numerous spatial environments as the listener is carried through a constructed reality. Beyond their music releases, Sigur Rós incorporate places into their live performances, as seen in their 2007 tour documentary film *Heima* in which they introduce audiences to Iceland via a range of free and unannounced concerts beyond the main capital Reykjavík. Venues ranged from abandoned industrial fishing complexes, selected for its haunting qualities and sonic resonance, to a small coffee shop in Borg and a massive outdoor protest concert in Snæfellsskála in an attempt to prevent the flooding of a valley with the planned construction of the Kárahnjúkar dam. The performances captured by the film highlight the relationship between the fleeting or transitory impact of human presence but their lasting anthropogenic impact on the land. Sigur Rós music and performances remind us to be aware of the “multiple

perceptions and conceptions of a piece of land, some quantifiable, others not”<sup>70</sup>. Many of the sonic textures produced by post-rock bands create atmospheres that obliquely connect with familiar sentiments and spaces. These are received by listener in dream-like states, through buckled, twisted, distorted sounds such as backwards bass swells (Sigur Rós’ *Rembihnútur*), reversed rhythm tracks (My Bloody Valentine’s *Loveless*) or field-recordings (GY!BE’s *Blaise Bailey Finnegan III*), that re-arrange, re-configure and collate disconnected fragments of our otherwise familiar world. As a result, ambience and texture transfers post-rock music into a post-representational space that is neither stable nor fixed.

### **Receptivity to the Sensuous Experience of Place**

As writer and critic Zadie Smith wrote in the *New York Review*: “There is the scientific and ideological language for what is happening to the weather, but there are hardly any intimate words”<sup>71</sup>. Philosopher Glenn Albrecht sought to capture the “relationship between ecosystem distress and human distress”<sup>72</sup> with the term ‘solastalgia.’ It refers to:

pain experienced when there is recognition that the place where one resides and that one loves is under immediate assault (physical desolation). It is manifest in an attack on one’s sense of place, in the erosion of the sense of belonging (identity) to a particular place and a feeling of distress (psychological desolation) about its transformation<sup>73</sup>

Tore Størvold has been critical of discussions that emphasize the relationship between Sigur Rós and nature<sup>74</sup>, labelling it musical form of borealism<sup>75</sup>. That is, a mode of ‘orientalism’<sup>76</sup>, describing the exotic and romanticised stereotypes of the North as people living in an “authentic, harmonious relationship with nature ... from whom the

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<sup>70</sup> Thoren, ‘The Deep Grain of the Inquiry’, 35.

<sup>71</sup> Zadie Smith, ‘Elegy for a Country’s Seasons’, *The New York Review*, 3 April 2014, accessed 14 April 2022 <https://www.nybooks.com/articles/2014/04/03/elegy-countrys-seasons/>.

<sup>72</sup> Albrecht in Zoë Schlanger, ‘A Philosopher Invented a Word for the Psychic Pain of Climate Change’, *Quartz*, 13 October 2018, accessed 14 April 2022 <https://qz.com/1423202/a-philosopher-invented-a-word-for-the-psychic-pain-of-climate-change/>.

<sup>73</sup> Albrecht in Schlanger, ‘Psychic Pain of Climate Change’

<sup>74</sup> Størvold, ‘Reception, Borealism, and Musical Style’

<sup>75</sup> Philip Bohlman, ‘Musical Borealism: Nordic Music and European History The Oxford Handbook of Popular Music in the Nordic Countries’, in *The Oxford Handbook of Popular Music in the Nordic Countries*, eds. Fabian Holt and Antti-Ville Kärjä (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017).

<sup>76</sup> Edward W. Said, *Orientalism* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1978)



modern people should learn as they stand at the brink of various ecocatastrophes”<sup>77</sup>. Since the publication of Størvold’s critique, in 2020 Sigur Rós made a decision to release their 2004 concert at La Grande Halle de la Villette in Paris in which they performed an eight-part operatic work - *Odin’s Raven Magic* (2020). The work that represents a musical response to Hrafnagaldur Óðins, a chapter from the Poetic Edda transcribed in the 13<sup>th</sup> Century. It was arranged by Sigur Rós’ Kjartan Sveinsson (1998-2013; 2022-present) together with Maria Huld Markan Sigfúsdóttir from Icelandic neo-classical band (and Sigur Rós string section) Amiina and electronica pioneer Hilmar Örn Hilmarsson. It is an active engagement with Norse mythology in a way that can be transposed onto modern ecological concerns. Hrafnagaldur Óðins, presents Odin (deity of war and death) as the end of the world approaches. He joins his fellow gods for a banquet while his “trusty ravens, Huginn and Muninn, traverse barren fields, gathering the world’s wisdom while the gods feast and watch for omens”<sup>78</sup>. Reviewing the release for *New Musical Express*, El Hunt described the work as “propelled by a wing-beating sense of urgency, and melancholy undertones that reverberate like muffled voices echoing around a stony cavern”<sup>79</sup>. Indeed, the work also features a lithophone (or stone marimba) built by Páll Guðmundsson that uses Icelandic stones in place of wood, “swapping an earthy tone for an icy one” to provide a “delicate, pulsating rhythm that provides an exigent backdrop, subtle yet omnipresent, like a ticking doomsday clock”<sup>80</sup>.

The term *post-rock* holds a concern with the ‘future’ of music beyond traditional rock instrumentation and structures. To this effect, Sigur Rós has sought to expand the value and use of recorded music to offset the economic and environmental cost of producing music. Kyle Devine has stated that carbon emissions of recorded music formats (between 1977-2016) in the US-alone rose by 45 per cent reaching 200,000 tonnes a year<sup>81</sup>. Physical media such as vinyl, cassettes and CDs are all oil products that have

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<sup>77</sup> Sanna Lehtonen, ‘Touring the Magical North – Borealism and the Indigenous Sámi in Contemporary English-language Children’s Fantasy Literature’, *European Journal of Cultural Studies* 22, no. 3 (2019): 327.

<sup>78</sup> Vanessa Ague, ‘Odin’s Raven Magic’, *Pitchfork*, 7 December 2020, accessed 14 April 2022 <https://pitchfork.com/reviews/albums/sigur-ros-odins-raven-magic/>.

<sup>79</sup> El Hunt, ‘Odin’s Raven Magic review: Icelandic Post-rockers Narrate the Apocalypse’, *New Musical Express*, 3 December 2020, accessed 14 April 2022 [https://www.nme.com/en\\_au/reviews/sigur-ros-odins-raven-magic-review-2831361](https://www.nme.com/en_au/reviews/sigur-ros-odins-raven-magic-review-2831361)

<sup>80</sup> Ague, ‘Odin’s Raven Magic’

<sup>81</sup> Kyle Devine, *Decomposed: The Political Ecology of Music* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2019).

been “made and destroyed by the billion since the mid-20th century”<sup>82</sup>. In the case of vinyl, production methods have remained largely unchanged requiring “toxic acids, huge amounts of energy including steaming and cooling”<sup>83</sup>. George and McKay state that vinyl records contain:

135g of PVC material with a carbon footprint of 0.5kg of CO<sub>2</sub> (based on 3.4kg of CO<sub>2</sub> per 1kg of PVC). Sales of 4.1m records would produce 1.9 thousand tonnes of CO<sub>2</sub> – not taking transport and packaging into account. That is the entire footprint of almost 400 people per year<sup>84</sup>.

Furthermore, streaming music carries a different set of concerns, as Pierson-Hagger and Swindells have argued:

Every stage of music streaming requires energy. Server farms, located all over the world, contain rows and rows of hard drives that store data, such as text messages, photos and the contents of music streaming platforms like Spotify and Apple Music. These hard drives require huge amounts of energy to power and to keep cool<sup>85</sup>.

Interviewed during promotion for Sigur Rós’ fifth album *Med Sud I Eyrum Vid Spilum Endalaust*, Kjartan Sveinsson admitted that the touring economy generates a far bigger problem and carbon footprint of the music industry receiving little support from promoters. Nevertheless, beyond the linear process of releasing infrangible finished creations, Sigur Rós have sought to create an ongoing body of work, titled Liminal. As their website explains:

liminal sees sigur rós as an eco-system. it identifies the connections and blurs the boundaries between work done and work to come; between new music and ideas barely yet born; between songs written 20 years ago and collaborations

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<sup>82</sup> Kyle Devine, ‘Nightmares On Wax: The Environmental Impact of the Vinyl Revival’, *The Guardian*, 28 January 2020, accessed 14 April 2022 <https://www.theguardian.com/music/2020/jan/28/vinyl-record-revival-environmental-impact-music-industry-streaming>

<sup>83</sup> Kate Connolly, ‘Vinyl Revival: Is there an Environmental Cost to Record Sales?’, *The Guardian*, 11 May 2019, accessed 14 April 2022 <https://www.theguardian.com/music/2019/may/11/vinyl-revival-is-there-an-environmental-cost-to-record-sales>.

<sup>84</sup> Sharon George, and Deirdre McKay, ‘How Streaming Music Could be Harming the Planet’, *BBC Future*, 18 February 2019, accessed 14 April 2022 <https://www.bbc.com/future/article/20190207-why-streaming-music-may-be-bad-for-climate-change>.

<sup>85</sup> Ellen Peirson-Hagger, and Katharine Swindells, ‘How Environmentally Damaging is Music Streaming?’, *The New Statesman*, 5 November 2021, accessed 14 April 2022 <https://www.newstatesman.com/environment/2021/11/how-environmentally-damaging-is-music-streaming>.

to be made tomorrow. in bringing together these collaborations and commissions – for choreographers, visual artists and new technologies – with solo work and remixes, film score and generative music, as well as friends in the wider sigur rós ‘family’, liminal aims to take the listener to a place neither here nor there, a “liminal” space. liminal will live as an ‘endless’ mixtape, always growing but never done ... [*lowercase as it appears on the website* <https://liminal.la/>]

In doing so, their work is recycled and reused, offsetting the cost of the recording process. Examples, include Sigur Rós presenting a new mix of their 2005 single Hoppípolla (from the album *Takk*) for the BBC documentary series *Planet Earth II*. The band’s message accompanying the re-release read:

In Iceland we are blessed with a seemingly inexhaustible supply of wild and untamed places. But even here, in the very furthest flung corners of Europe’s largest wilderness, the scars of human industry are visible, the plans for future encroachments, by dam and smelter, legion. If lost the Icelandic highlands are not recoverable.

Around the world the story is the same; the traffic, literally, going in one direction. Sigur Rós are proud to be associated with Planet Earth 2 and its all-important mission to hold us rapt in understanding of, and respect for, this endlessly fascinating, utterly surprising and ultimately fragile place we are lucky enough to call home for a short while.

Sigur Rós also provided music for the Iceland Dance Company for their performance at the World Cultures Festival in Hong Kong, featuring indigenous performing artists seeking to increase receptivity to what “indigenous people have to say about the world”<sup>86</sup> and their respect for nature as the realities of climate change become clear. Sigur Rós bassist Georg Holm commented: “We had no idea what [artistic directors] Erna Ómarsdóttir and Valdimar Jóhannsson were going to do, but we trusted them to do something surprising and stimulating, and they did”<sup>87</sup>. Following the intent and spirit of Liminal, Jóhannsson “made the music himself from released and unreleased recordings”<sup>88</sup>. Lastly, in 2016 Sigur Rós presented a 24-hour journey around their

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<sup>86</sup> Lahti in Helen Dalley, ‘How Much of a Disaster is Climate Change? Let Nordic Indigenous Peoples Tell You, says Finnish actor-director’, *South China Morning Post*, 19 September 2019, accessed 14 April 2022 <https://www.scmp.com/native/lifestyle/arts-culture/topics/nordic-stage/article/3028050/how-much-disaster-climate-change>.

<sup>87</sup> Holm in Dalley, ‘How Much of a Disaster’

<sup>88</sup> Dalley, ‘How Much of a Disaster’

country ring road, Route 1 (1,332 kilometres). For this, the band live streamed the entire journey on YouTube accompanied by a soundtrack that used generative software fashioned from the stems (individual tracks) from their song Óveður.

In conclusion, Hibbett's notion that "post-rock assumes a loftiness associated with high art; through a complex of signifiers, [through which] it dissociates itself from the mundane and the trivial, securing instead a cultural value"<sup>89</sup> is upheld. By focusing on Sigur Rós' practices, their panoramic music and its application in support of climate change awareness the "conflation of nation with nature"<sup>90</sup> is evident. As Sveinsson, from the group has stated, "it is always important to emphasize nature and preserve nature, especially here in Iceland, because .. the face of Iceland is the nature." According to UN spokesperson Arni Snaevarr, both Björk and Sigur Rós "are now F.U.N. ... Friends of the United Nations. We believe that we have to act locally and think globally and that is exactly what our Icelandic friends are doing"<sup>91</sup>. This proclamation was prompted after both acts played at the Náttúra concert in Reykjavik that was attended by 30,000 people (a tenth of the Icelandic population). The concert was organised to protest against the Icelandic government's programme of dam-building in the South-West of the country. While dams generate hydro-electricity they are then used to fuel environmentally damaging aluminium smelters owned by foreign corporations<sup>92</sup>. The climate awareness demonstrated by Sigur Rós is heightened and accentuated by "the supposed cultural otherness of [Iceland] described as 'otherworldly'"<sup>93</sup> as it faces a set of unique issues, such as the rising of the land (rather than the sea) as a result of melting glaciers, rendering harbours inoperative and bringing a future of increasing volcano eruptions (with no glaciers to cool them).

The practices of post-rock discussed in this chapter produces a panoramic soundscape that evades 'technological listening'<sup>94</sup>, in which the listener is attuned to the performance of musical instruments or technique driving the music. In post-rock the

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<sup>89</sup> Ryan Hibbett, 'What Is Indie Rock?', *Popular Music and Society* 28, no. 1 (2005): 65.

<sup>90</sup> Dibben, 'Nature and Nation'

<sup>91</sup> Henry Barnes, 'Björk and Sigur Rós named "Friends of the United Nations"', *The Guardian*, 2 July 2008, accessed 14 April 2022 <https://www.theguardian.com/music/2008/jul/02/news.culture3>

<sup>92</sup> Andri Snær Magnason, *Dreamland: A Self-Help Manual for a Frightened Nation* (London: Citizen Press, 2006).

<sup>93</sup> Størvold, 'Reception, Borealism, and Musical Style'

<sup>94</sup> Denis Smalley, 'Spectromorphology: Explaining Sound-shapes', *Organised Sound* 2, Issue 2 (1997)

strength of gesture required to produce sound is lessened as the sound is stretched out in time through reverb, thus divorcing itself further from human physicality of playing. The music occupies its own space, not subjugated by the performer, enabling it to exhort its extra-musical referents or conceptual meaning more freely. Furthermore, the role of reverberated sound as an effect is acknowledged as essential as it takes post-rock beyond any encoding of the musical ideas as notation. In post-rock, diffusion of sound is not a contradiction to a the musician's intention but its continuation.

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