

Nordic Music Videos

Edited by Anna-Elena Pääkkölä, Mathias Bonde Korsgaard, and John Richardson

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Chapter 1

Sigur Rós, *Valtari* #14, and Audiovisual Stirrings of Icelandicness

Birgit Abels

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1 Sigur Rós, *Valtari* #14, and Audiovisual Stirrings of Icelandiness

Birgit Abels

[*Valtari* #14, *Opening Scene*]

Rough terrain. Cold wind blowing. Industrial noises, nature sounds, shuffling feet – or perhaps it’s hoarse voices? There’s no telling where the music ends and where ambient sounds begin: one seems to be releasing itself from the other. Color-washed footage, suffused with vaguely blue lighting. A lone person walking quietly towards an abandoned site, possibly a deserted factory. She’s dressed in a white hoodie, wind tearing at her clothes.

Inside, a dancer, dressed in black pants and an unbuttoned shirt, oblivious of his surroundings and immersed in the sensation of his body seemingly defying gravity as he loses himself in his own movement. His dance seems to be one of existential intensity.

She enters the decaying building, her hands chipping off crumbly, old paint from the wall. Surely, no one has been here in a very long time (Figure 1.1).

As she enters the vast space where he is dancing – an old machinery hall perhaps – neither of them aware of the other, Jónsi’s ethereal voice enters. Across the hall, she sees him first. Seconds later, he freezes in movement as he spots her. Could this be? His bridge-like posture makes him see her upside down (Figure 1.2).

Their gazes interlock. She takes off her hood. Slowly, she begins to move, responding to the poetry of his dancing. Bodily motion intertwines across the void of the abandoned machinery hall between them, creating an invisible bond between two wandering souls who didn’t expect to find solace from their loneliness here (Figure 1.3). This is a carnal, sensual encounter: warmth and connection creating a place in a cold and forlorn space.

Introduction

The Icelandic post-rock band Sigur Rós released their sixth studio album, *Valtari*, in 2012. Prior to the release, Sigur Rós launched the *Valtari Mystery Film Experiment*, a project inviting filmmakers to create short films in response to one of the tracks of the forthcoming album. The band’s aim with this project was to trigger emotional responses to *Valtari* across the breadth of artistic possibilities



Figure 1.1 Scene from *Valtari #14*.



Figure 1.2 Scene from *Valtari #14*.



Figure 1.3 Scene from *Valtari #14*.

without imposing any creative or aesthetic expectations, requirements, or frameworks. They received over 800 entries, from which they selected 16 to be released on DVD. One of the 16 winners was Swedish music video director Christian Larson's submission, produced in collaboration with Belgian choreographer Sidi Larbi Cherkaoui: *Valtari #14*.¹ The highly acclaimed 10:47 film, the opening scene of which I describe at the outset of this chapter, tells a short story of the felt-bodily intensity² of a human encounter in the deserted ruins of an abandoned Icelandic military site. Unlike the physical body, the "felt body feels what happens in the surrounding area without drawing on the five senses,"³ thus exploring both the body and its capacity to feel beyond their materiality. The felt body is key to understanding the affectivity of atmospheres. If, as I argue in this chapter, *Valtari #14* brings about a distinctly Icelandic atmosphere, then the dancers' felt-bodily involvement both with the situation and with one another is central to the emergence of the short film's Icelandicness; their interaction goes beyond the creation and conduction of affect: it embraces the complexity of lived experience, and it comes about in that intensity.⁴ Icelandicness has been described as comprising "contesting narratives of both international perspectives and local experiences,"⁵ with key themes being language,⁶ landscape in its intertwinement with social memory, and a conflated sense of authenticity and antiquity.⁷ It is particularly the latter that distinguishes Icelandicness from the "shared Nordic past"⁸ of Northern European countries: Icelandicness is inseparably embedded in local landscape and history.⁹ But, in the lived experience, it is felt-bodily experience that makes Icelandicness operable in a different register: felt-bodily experience facilitates an intensity that allows for a synesthetic envelopment of the felt body which, in its entanglement with narrative Icelandicness, manifests as *atmospheric* Icelandicness. *Valtari #14* literally has "no object other than the situation's own intensity."¹⁰ The choreography and visuals of the short film, together with the elegiac soundtrack, explore the fragile aesthetics of this intensity through movement and music: an intensely intimate and poetic *pas de deux* both between dancers James O'Hara and Nicola Leahey, on the one hand, and the choreography and the music, on the other. "The dancers copy each other's movements and flow into one another,"¹¹ is Cherkaoui's description of the fluid choreography of the film. "There was an interesting contrast with this very harsh environment," adds director Larson, a trained dancer himself; "I wanted to try and make a dialogue through movement, without anyone saying anything."¹²

Larson's reference to the apparent contrast between the "harshness" of the surroundings and the intimacy of the choreography reflects a major trope in the extant literature on both Nordic music generally and Sigur Rós specifically: the idea that Sigur Rós's music is imbued with a distinctively Nordic aesthetic closely related to Iceland's natural environment.¹³ Tony Mitchell, for instance, has suggested that Sigur Rós's music can be said to "embody, express or evoke sonically both the remote isolation of their Icelandic location and induce a feeling of hermetic isolation on the cartographic recomposition of the music by the listener through the climactic and melodic intensity of their sound."¹⁴ Accordingly, scholars have often looked at Sigur Rós's work in terms of Icelandic place-making practices,¹⁵ finding that the band's "music reflects Icelandic nature" or that their audiovisual

practices even “reveal [...] a counter-geography of Iceland [...] which] emerges as a melancholic mourning for spatial pasts.”¹⁶ It is no coincidence that isolation and loneliness, as well as intimacy and attraction, are key motifs both in choreographer Cherkaoui’s personal comments on *Valtari #14* and in video director Larson’s visual aesthetics. Accounting for Sigur Rós’s work in terms of place-making practices makes room for the imaginative engagement with which Sigur Rós creatively interacts with the layered notion of Iceland. It is also an approach which shows that Iceland and its physical geography coproduce Sigur Rós just as much as Sigur Rós coproduces Iceland and Icelandic nature. This perspective resonates well with the burgeoning scholarship on place during the past three decades.¹⁷ After all, Sigur Rós’s work shows how, inherently, “a place is more an event than a thing”¹⁸ and how places “not only *are*, they *happen*.”¹⁹ If Sigur Rós’s Iceland is to be understood as a complex and ephemeral hybrid arising through the engagement of humans with the social and natural configurations through which they move, then an analysis exploring these relational dynamics begs for an ontological reorientation that moves away from the familiar binary in which humans are categorically separate from nature. Such a shift redirects attention to a more ecological understanding that looks at the dynamic interlacing of processes, events, and material configurations as the core condition for affectivity to emerge, for instance, through creative audiovisual practices. How do creative audiovisual practices engage with the energetic forces circulating within and transforming a given relational network, allowing for a place like Iceland to emerge in the work of Sigur Rós and for Sigur Rós to emerge, once again, as a distinctly Icelandic band?²⁰

Turning to *Valtari #14* in pursuit of initial answers to this question, in the following I will explore the sonic and visual dynamics of the energetic forces that bring about *Valtari #14*’s atmospheric intensity. Inquiring into the motional interlacing of sound and visuals, on the one hand, and notions of Iceland, on the other, I look for sonic and visual suggestions of movement: the subtleties of the short film’s felt-bodily rhythmicity, swirls of sonic intensities, and cinematographic nuances create motional-energetic climaxes. I will explore *Valtari #14* and its relationship to Icelandicness less in terms of its discursiveness and representational mechanics and more in terms of felt-bodily affectivity. As two dancers felt-bodily commune in sound and motion, I will argue, the audiovisual stirrings of felt-bodily connection cocreate an Iceland that is Icelandic not so much as a place but as an imaginary. I will start by introducing the band, the choreographer, and the video director, which will lead me to briefly introduce analytical concepts from recent scholarship that I find useful for an atmospheric approach to the film. Exploring selected scenes from *Valtari #14* in some detail, I will then continue to explore the energetic flows of the film, looking for sonic and visual motional intensities. The tracing of these culminations of intensities will give me atmospheric clues to the motional dynamics between people, their natural environment, and the possibility of their interaction. Thinking through *Valtari #14* in terms of motion and what it creates, the emergence of a place of utmost warmth and connection from a seemingly cold and detached space – an old, abandoned military site – will appear to be much less of a contradiction.

Sigur Rós, Sidi Larbi Cherkaoui, Christian Larson, and Aisthesis

Choreographer Cherkaoui has, on several occasions, emphasized the existential quality movement has for him. “Thinking,” he says, “not only involves the brain. Every single cell in the body has a memory; they can think. Time and again, dancers demonstrate this type of thinking with the feet and the legs, the hands and the arms through [motional] interlacing and interaction, connection and close bodily contact.”²¹ In keeping with this idea that bodily motion is a modality of human cogitation and experience not only in its own right, but also with its medium-specific affordances, Cherkaoui often feels thrown back not *to* but *in* the phenomenon motion itself in his work. He thinks of motion as a “form of energy and necessity [...] This is the magic of dance and music, sometimes you just have to feel. You don’t have to translate this, you cannot. It’s a very intuitive connection.”²² The only thing Cherkaoui “believes in,” then, is motion.²³

Cherkaoui’s position resonates well with a number of ideas currently circulating in modern dance. They also echo what philosopher Gernot Böhme (1937–2022) called “aisthesis,” sense perception: a holistic way of being *with* one’s surroundings and affectively involved with what one perceives. For Böhme,

perception qua aisthesis is more than determining data and situations. Perception is a state of stimulation, an *energeia*, as a state of actually being: through perception we become aware of ourselves as being present in an environment. Perception is a shared actuality. It is common to the subject and the object, to the perceiving one and the one perceived. The perceiving subject is actual in participating in the presence of things, the perceived object is actual in the perceiving presence of the subject.²⁴

Böhme’s aisthesis is imaginative, in the sense that aisthesis always perceives the diffuseness of atmospheres *before* it extrapolates single entities and things from the stream of sensual perception: it engages processually with that energetic flow to which living beings are exposed in their felt-bodily affectivity, and which connects them with their surroundings both materially and simultaneously. Aisthesis, then, is synesthetic in the neo-phenomenological, not the cognitivist sense: it unfolds in the “holistic character of atmospheric perception that is upstream from the singling out of particular sensory impressions. It is a prior *Gestalt* that transcends seeing, hearing, smelling, and the like.”²⁵ The question here, then, becomes how the holistic *Gestalten* that give *Valtari #14* its intensity emerge from the musical and visual narrative of the film.

Thinking against the grain of classic thing ontologies and the subject/object divide, Böhme sketches stages of objectiveness that emerge from our immersion in the continual stream of perception in which we find ourselves: we recognize things only after we have perceived the quasi-objective qualities inherent in what we perceive, those that are “neither subject nor object – yet not nothing.”²⁶ Accordingly, atmospheres are one of the most powerful forces in aesthetic perception: those “tuned spaces” that are impossible to locate, enveloped in nature and inseparable from our felt-bodily experiencing them.²⁷ Atmospheres are the first thing we

realize about a space; more importantly regarding *Valtari #14*, they are also what, aesthetically, we recognize *in* a place to begin with. A key force in the emergence and experience of atmospheres are suggestions of motion;^{28,29} they constitute not only the dynamics bracketing everyone and everything contained in the space they fill but also their individual and collective frames as well as “more conventional elements,” including signs and symbols.³⁰ They are atmospheric traits of an entity, ecstatically extending beyond the physical boundaries of things into their surroundings and felt-bodily affecting those that share that space. They are motion themselves, but, at the same time, they also invite movement.³¹ Their ecstatic suggestions of motion “provide a feeling for the ways in which one may embrace and handle it; the lines of a mountain range invite the eyes to follow them. Thus, the thing ecstatically reaches, through its forms and character, into a space of potential movements.”³² Suggestions of motion establish temporary felt-bodily connections; they are the reason the human bodies dancing in *Valtari #1*, like anything endowed with material qualities, “almost essentially step outside of themselves.”³³

Larson’s visual language – “a rhythmic, visual style”³⁴ – is, then, ecstatic in Böhme’s sense. More importantly, however, it intently builds a visual imagery that bundles and intensifies suggestions of motion into sheer energy. In *Valtari #14*, it “build[s] a narrative in choreography where the dancers copy each other’s movements and move seamlessly with one another. Set against images of urban decay, the dancers illuminate a powerful story of their own, creating ‘a dialogue through movement’”³⁵ in which the intimacy of the carnal, ecstatic connection between the dancers appears even more intense in a space atmospherically exuding industrial decay and the emotional coldness of an abandoned functional space. The dancing bodies increasingly “become pure motion and shape” as the film progresses.³⁶ They carry on a visual narrative of “profound human connection and animal attraction”³⁷ not in spite, but *because*, of the seemingly inhospitable environment of the abandoned military site; simultaneously, “choreographed by Sidi Larbi Cherkaoui, the dancers’ bodies take on a fluidity that goes well with the orchestral thrum of the music. The languid 10-minute-long tune finally increases in intensity once the two dancers synchronize their moves and perform side by side, and kind of get it on.”³⁸ As the visual language, the choreography, and the music cocreate a multimodal web of suggestions of motion, all responding to one another, they create the aesthetic poetization of a narrative of human encounter that has “no object other than the situation’s own intensity”:³⁹ a playful immersion of existential intensity with the energetic flow that affectively connects human beings with their surroundings.

Valtari #14: The Energetic Force of Audiovisuality

I will now single out passages and scenes from the film to explore Cherkaoui’s “magic of dance and music” as well as *Valtari #14* vis-à-vis imaginations of the North. With this, I will look at Larson and Cherkaoui’s piece of work not so much in terms of audiovisual parameters and choreographic details but as atmosphere. I will specifically identify suggestions of motion, synesthetic occurrences, and atmospheric ecstasy. My aim is to show how, beyond popular narrative and scholarly

tropes, an atmosphere of Icelandicness emerges in *Valtari #14* – an Icelandicness that not only interacts with but also goes way beyond kinesemiotics,⁴⁰ symbolism, and representational techniques of imagining the North. In this sense, I contribute to a key argument that has been made across disciplines and repeatedly over the past decades, namely, that “moving images work by engaging the materiality of affect, perception, and sensation as much as they do by presenting particular narratives of scripts.”⁴¹ I propose we expand our analytical possibilities to include the affectivity of atmospheres as a cinematographic core force.

Suggestions of Motion

Suggestions of motion, following Hermann Schmitz, are a kinetic type of atmospheric energy that affects living beings felt-bodily. They are not physical motion itself, but the kinetic potentiality from which physical motion emerges. They occur in what Schmitz calls the pre-dimensional, while both sound and bodily motion occupy dimensional space. The body belongs in dimensional space for Schmitz; the felt body (*Leib*), by contrast, belongs in surfaceless space, in other words that same space where suggestions of motion unfold and affect what- and whoever they encounter. This also means that the human felt body and suggestions of movement are potentially “becoming with” one another: they are mutually constitutive processes.⁴² The material body, dwelling in dimensional space, perceives sound and physical motion as actualized movement. Specific musical and motional parameters, such as dance gestures, timbre, and pitch, are not themselves suggestions of motion; they are enactments of suggestions of motion, and they contain new suggestions of motion. This means that suggestions of motion are prior to any material manifestation of sound and movement in dimensional space. Only when suggestions of movement actualize into dance gestures and sonic events does sound become prehensible. As physical movement and sound waves actualize, crossing over from surfaceless to dimensional space, they blur the threshold between the felt body’s pre-dimensional space and the material body’s dimensional space. In Schmitzian terminology, people “encorporate” (*einleiben*) suggestions of motion; however, suggestions of motion also seize the felt bodies that encorporate them. The moment they seize several felt bodies, they establish a relationship between them, a process Schmitz refers to as “solidary encorporation.” In a dance performance, the result is a specifically musical and kinesthetic form of solidary encorporation, one which is prior to the strategies of identification, affiliation, and discrimination that are often taken to be central to musicological narratives of musical meaning. Dance also mediates the connectivity of felt bodies as experiential fields (*Erlebnisfeld*). This is, not least, a precondition for the phenomenon of musical and kinesthetic intimacy: only through such mediation can effects such as affective proximity come about. The immediacy of this involvement accounts for its considerable and, simultaneously, fragile atmospheric potential.

Take 2:11 to 2:40 of the *Valtari #14* clip. The male dancer, so far oblivious of the presence of the woman who has entered the building, is engrossed in the “circular body movements akin to calligraphy”⁴³ of his own dancing. As, unexpectedly, he

spots her in the middle of a movement, his motional energy slows down and directs him in a bridge-like posture that allows him to look at her across what seems to be a machinery hall (see the second image at the beginning of this chapter). This is the moment where the two felt-bodily attune to one another for the very first time; it is also the moment where she takes off her hood and starts responding to his dance movement, thus, both joining him in his dance and becoming a dancer herself. Her eyeliner smudged from tears, she bends over backwards from her waist, assuming a bridge-like posture that corresponds to that of the male dancer (see third image at the beginning of this chapter). Both dancers hold still for a brief, but intense, moment, their gazes interlocking; quick cuts seem to expose the energy of sensual encounter travelling back and forth between them. Meanwhile, Jónsi's bowed electric guitar is softly but steadily assuming more presence within the thick musical texture, thus, emphasizing the sense of motion the cinematography implies. We see one of the male dancer's feet shuffling over the floor as he pulls his legs inwards towards his body and, in the soundtrack, hear something vaguely resembling the sound such a movement would make on an old factory floor. This is the only quasi-environmental sound we get to hear, and it is uncoupled from the acoustic space we see. If this were the actual sound of shuffling feet, given the camera angle, we'd hear it as coming from further away; in *Valtari #14*, we hear it as if it were a close-by sonic event. This gives the movement both a powerful immediacy and an intense presence: the dancer seems to be pulling himself together, bundling the intensity of the moment in his body. This kind of uncoupling of the sounds and the moving images goes against what Michel Chion called the "audiovisual contract," following which, in modern cinema, sound is only added value to the moving images, an extra layer emphasizing something already contained in the visual.⁴⁴ The scene is a fine example of how, in post-cinematic media, by contrast to the conventions of modern cinema, "visual images tend rather to approach the condition of sound."⁴⁵ While it can have a source, sound may not have a location; while it may come from a particular place, it fills the entire space in which it is heard.⁴⁶ The sound of the shuffling feet releases the moving "images from the demands of linear, narrative temporality,"⁴⁷ thus creating an intense moment of what neo-phenomenologist Hermann Schmitz calls "primitive presence." Schmitz's primitive presence is a particularly intense kind of temporal experience in which we felt-bodily conceive of ourselves in an exceptionally drastic way as bounded and separate from our spatial environment, for instance when we hold our breath for several minutes.⁴⁸ Primitive presence affords such an intense self-realization because it is the root of individuation and the "simplest form of self-awareness."⁴⁹ This is how the, in the literal sense, poetic beauty of primitive presence moves the viewer "in a manner that relies on but seems to transcend its technological mediation."⁵⁰ It also marks a choreographic key moment, namely, the transition between the two dancers' initial encounter and their ensuing *pas de deux*, in the course of which the male dancer is about to release the tension his body holds: individuation followed by encounter. This is the moment when both dancers have fully embraced their affective synchrony,⁵¹ which results in a shared feeling state that emerges when people entrain their physical movements with one another; now, they relish their

felt-bodily attunement to one another and the atmospheric affectivity of the felt-bodily communication and introspect intimacy about to unfold.

Synesthetic Characters

Valtari #14 has been described as “Christian Larson’s industrial seduction for the Icelandic outfit.”⁵² This phrasing proposes that the short film’s audiovisual suggestions of motion, in their multimodality, create a heightened sense of intimacy; but that, at the same time, there is a lingering yet dominant sense of Icelandicness to the film. This Icelandicness is not so much a matter of symbolism and representational convention; it is atmospherically a matter of the synesthetic characters that tie the film’s audiovisual suggestions of motion and intimacy to Iceland both as a site and an imagination of the North.⁵³

Following Hermann Schmitz, synesthetic characters are one-of-a-kind experiences: they are characters of felt-bodily sensing. It is important to note here that, for Schmidt, synesthetic characters are not about sensory *qualia*, those ““raw feels’ of consciousness.”⁵⁴ Instead, they are fundamentally felt-bodily experiences. In perceptual psychology, synesthesia describes phenomena in which the stimulation of one sensory register causes involuntary responses in another. An example would be a specific type of sound that spontaneously evokes the experience of a specific color, shape, or movement. By contrast, synesthetic characters in Schmitzian neophenomenology are nonreflexive phenomena provoked by sensory stimulation. They are felt-bodily communication at its most basic, in that they interconnect an existential type of felt-bodily sensing with the sensory information provided by one’s surroundings;⁵⁵ they are felt-bodily sensing “invested” into external sensory qualities. This means that they cannot be reduced to either felt-bodily sensing or an atmosphere alone.⁵⁶ They are phenomena of felt-bodily engagement with atmospheres. They are neither metaphorical nor symbolic; they are the effect of a process of “resonant bundling, intertwining different strands of lived experience.”⁵⁷

Right at the beginning (0:00), *Valtari #14* opens with the studio-produced sonic imagery of wind: a hissing noise that blurs the boundaries between diegetic and non-diegetic sound worlds. Together with the moving images of the hood of the female dancer fluttering in the wind as she audibly walks towards the old abandoned industrial-style site, they evoke a felt-bodily sense of the cold harshness of Icelandic weather. Following a hard cut, a change of scene – we are now inside the building. The sonic presence of the wind, which in the preceding scene evoked the felt-bodily sensation of exposure to inhospitable and cold weather, persists. But the visual cut is accompanied by an acoustic, equally hard cut: the hissing is now muted, clearly an outside noise all of a sudden: we have entered an acoustic bubble. We hear the echo of water dripping somewhere. The acoustics of this sound confirm that we are now in a closed space. In this way, the unfamiliar, eerie building feels like a shelter, a potentially warm and hospitable place compared to the outside world. The scene opens with a quiet camera shot – it could be parts of someone’s body we are seeing – while the water drips on. As he begins to move, confirming it’s a human being we are encountering in this unlikely location, the

first discernible musical line emerges from the sonic texture at 0:35: a melodic theme electronically produced and soon to be joined by Jónsi's signature sound, the bowed electric guitar. The dancer continues his introspective body movement. He seems to be lost in his dancing with gravity, drawing out the movement, potentializing between his body and the abandoned, lonely place through which he is moving. Another hard visual cut (0:54) tells us that the female dancer is moving, probably unknowingly shifting closer to the male dancer. We see her chipping off the old, cracking plaster from the wall as she walks by; again, the studio-produced sonic imagery of the plaster coming off and falling to the ground intensifies the viewer's sensation of her movement through the old building.

These are some of the synesthetic occurrences which, in the first minute of *Valtari #14*, not only further intensify the connection of a random, old building to our felt-bodily sensing. What is more important, they also situate the viewer's connectedness to the place and what is about to happen there within a larger environment. The harsh weather conditions and muted light of the world outside the building may tie in with the representational conventions of Iceland, but they attain their atmospheric efficacy only in concurrence with the sonic, musical, visual, and kinetic suggestions of motion of the audiovisual narrative of the film. Only as these suggestions of motion synthesize into sensations of relationality does Icelandicness emerge as a powerful felt-bodily experience.

Atmospheric Ecstasy

"[T]he affects and rhythms of music videos begin to participate in the modulation of the sensibility through which thinking takes place," writes Derek P. McCormack in his reflections about a video art installation he saw in 2007.⁵⁸ In the light of the preceding ruminations on the role of suggestions of motion and synesthetic occurrences within *Valtari #14*, this is an idea that brings back to mind choreographer Cherkaoui's idea of bodily motion as an untranslatable mode of thinking in its own right and intensity – that intuitive "magic of dance and music" that, sometimes, one just has to feel (see the quote above). Dancing, in this train of thought, becomes a creative technique of shaping and modulating one's thrownness into a particular situation. Regarding the cast of *Valtari #14*, the situation is one of potential human connection in an environment which, at the surface level, does not seem to invite warmth and encounter. This seeming contradiction, however, only heightens the possibility of connection. It is obvious here how the material participation of affect and sensation is key to the production of our lived experience of a place, and how "this participation enfolds the rhythmic relations of bodies, generating in the process opportunities for sensing difference in the making."⁵⁹ As *Valtari #14* unfolds, the film's atmospheric intensity gradually climaxes in the sensual correspondences between the two dancers' bodily movement. The kinetic communion of two bodies' suggestions of motion, as well as actual physical motion, together with the thickening musical texture of the music, fuels an audiovisual poetics of felt-bodily connection. The physical body movement of the two dancers seems to insinuate an intense sexual encounter; at the same time, both dancers seem attuned to the

same suggestions of motion, thus corresponding energetically with one another on a felt-bodily level. This is how an overwhelming sense of intimacy straddling the line between sexuality and sensuality comes about. As the last scene of *Valtari #14* begins (9'30''), the final camera perspective shows the female dancer right behind the male dancer, both standing still as one after the intensity of their choreographic communion. It is this atmospheric ecstasy that gives artistic shape to the intimacy, facilitated by suggestions of motion, that is part and parcel of narrative Icelandicness, bundled through synesthetic occurrences. Music and dance, in this sense, are, indeed, a mode of thinking in their own right, as choreographer Cherkaoui suggests: choreographic and musical agency are aesthetic techniques of channeling and forming that kinetic core energy that precedes all reflective reasoning and decision-making. There is a type of deep knowledge distinct to kinesthetic action that emerges from its threshold materiality.

Conclusion

To neo-phenomenologist Hermann Schmitz, dance is, by nature, a progressive unfolding of the *Gestalt* underlying the actual movement.⁶⁰ To dance, in this perspective, is a cultural practice that makes experienceable and, indeed, relishes the transformation of bodiless *Gestalt* to bodily movement. The dance movement emerges from “the felt body’s knowing about the looming physical movement.”⁶¹ This also implies that dance is a motional phenomenon that is situated in close proximity to any sensory perception of our surroundings: a felt-bodily interaction with both the temporo-spaciousness surrounding us⁶² and the holistic meaningfulness⁶³ we encounter atmospherically. To dance is to provoke material-body-world encounters⁶⁴ that inquire into their surroundings regarding their specific potentialities; in the same process, they co-constitute bodies, lifeworlds, and positionalities. Schmitzian suggestions of motion – especially those that are themselves motion, such as dance movements – are a type of kinetic-atmospheric energy that impacts on people in a holistic manner; more than that, suggestions of motion make one’s vitality intensely tangible. When dancing, we transform kinetic-atmospheric energy into dance movement.⁶⁵ As a *Gestalt* transitions from atmospheric bodilessness to dancing corporality, “it changes the medium. [One is surprised by] one’s own execution [...]. And yet, one finds something familiar in it because the executed line of the Gestalt, through its unfolding, resembles that which we have felt felt-bodily”;⁶⁶ had it been a visual fantasy prior to its execution, there would be no place for surprise of any kind.⁶⁷ Neo-phenomenologically speaking, therefore, this is exactly where the efficacy of dance is rooted: in the “taking shape” of suggestions of motion. Cherkaoui’s “magic” of dance emerges where synesthetic occurrences transform this efficacy, allowing suggestions of motion to bundle diverging frameworks of the human experience.

Current global dance studies tend to focus on a different issue: against the backdrop of postmodern and poststructuralist theories of the body, the dancing body is often seen as a representational medium for political agendas.⁶⁸ As such, the dancing body does not speak to motion-related affordances of the felt-bodily

negotiation of such agendas in motional practices because it is reduced to the texts inscribed in it. One way to reach beyond this reductionist understanding of the dancing body, I suggest, is to explore dancing as a threshold practice; to ask how it a) links felt-bodily sensing to the cultural conventions surrounding structured kinesthetic systems, and b) relates diffuse meaningfulness to cultural qualification and narratives. Returning to this chapter's central question, namely, how "Iceland" can possibly emerge from *Valtari #14* and how *Valtari #14* can be (perceived as) so decidedly Icelandic, the brief exploration of the short film above suggests the following: the kinesthetic and sonic suggestions of motion that emerge from the visual and musical layers of the short film create a sense of intimacy that seizes viewers felt-bodily. Synesthetic occurrences tie this intimacy to imaginations of the North. As the film unfolds, the curated modulation of the atmospheric intensity emerging from the interlacing of musical and visual parameters allows Iceland-as-a-felt-bodily-sensation, not Iceland-as-a-place, to cross the threshold. Initially, it may have been an audiovisual stirring of Icelandicness, diffuse and uncertain; but, as the film proceeds, Iceland emerges with an atmospheric certainty only an overwhelming felt-bodily experience brings about.

Notes

- 1 "Sigur Rós: Valtari," *Nowness.com*, November 12, 2012, <https://www.nowness.com/story/sigur-ros-valtari>, last accessed December 12, 2022.
- 2 Tonino Griffiero, "Felt-Bodily Resonances," *Yearbook for Eastern and Western Philosophy* 2 (2017). <https://doi.org/10.1515/yewph-2017-0013>.
- 3 Griffiero, "Felt-Bodily Resonances."
- 4 Birgit Abels, *Music Worlding in Palau: Chanting, Atmospheres, and Meaningfulness* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2022), 25. <https://doi.org/10.5117/9789048550517>.
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