

THE MEDIATED LANDSCAPE

ICELAND'S WILDERNESS IN CINEMA, TRAVEL, AND TRANSITION

by

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Abstract

Natural environments have acted as formative inspirations for cultural traditions and location-based national identities of people worldwide. Iceland's landscapes became prominent in contemporary visual culture due to the cinematic appeal of their scenery and natural phenomena. Recent growth in tourism and media communications have transformed Iceland into a coveted travel destination over the span of the past decade. Media and travel practices frame and reframe the geological uniqueness of this sub-Arctic, mid-Atlantic island through countless narratives and visuals. While marketed to travelers as a place of pristine wilderness, Icelandic landscapes have been variously represented in cinematography as a primordial earth, a post-apocalyptic planet, or - in domestic productions - a familiar home with both mundane and complex issues. The space of Iceland's nature are contested grounds with fragile ecosystems caught between preservation and industrialization. Through a series of maps and drawings that borrow elements of 'sequence' and 'duration' from cinematography, this project aims to construct a mediation with the idiosyncratic landscape. Repositioning the notion of 'landscape' from a primarily visual entity to a layered catalyst for culture, this thesis proposes a network of installations in support of Iceland's ecology through travel.

Fig. 1 [fragment] *Interstellar* (Christopher Nolan, 2014), "Ice planet" film stills sequence

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Contents

<i>iii</i>	<i>Abstract</i>
<i>v</i>	<i>Acknowledgements</i>
<i>vii</i>	<i>Table of Contents</i>
<i>viii</i>	<i>List of Figures</i>
<i>xiii</i>	<i>Preface</i>
1	One An Island of Wilderness
	1.1 Relating Icelandic Identity: Nature and Land
	1.2 Foreign Imaginaries: What Remains of Wilderness?
	1.3 Mapping Terrain-truths: Visualizing the Context
11	Two Cinematic Travel and Landscape in the Cinema
	2.1 Remote Engagement with Nature
	2.2 A Newfound Draw to the Arctic
17	Three A Mediated Landscape: Reframing Icelandic Nature
	3.1 Media-laden Modes of Experience
	3.2 Cinematic Iceland: Domestic and Foreign Perspectives
	3.3 Domestic Landscape as Contested Territory
29	Four Site Visit: Volunteering for Iceland with SEEDS
	4.1 Travel Impressions
	4.2 Experiential Travel Timeline
	4.3 Projected Duration: Cinematic Drawing
39	Five Projection: Enacting the Ecological Space
	5.1 Echoing the Volunteer Workcamp: Mediating Ecology
	5.2 Introducing the Northern Condition
55	A Reflection on Timeframes
	i The Scale of Time
	ii The Multiplicity of Duration
57	Bibliography

List of Figures

Figure 1: [fragment] *Interstellar* (Christopher Nolan, 2014) “Ice planet” film stills sequence. Images retrieved from <https://screencrush.com/interstellar-drmann/> and <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ijVxnqSFGsw>.

Figure 2: **Myrdalsjokull Glacial Tongue, South Iceland.** Author’s photograph, DSLR camera, Jan. 2020.

Figure 3: **Iceland’s Geology Diagram: Ground Types.** Volcanic System of Iceland Map, 2010, https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Volcanic_system_of_Iceland-Map-en.svg. Topographic map of Iceland: National Land Survey of Iceland, <https://www.lmi.is/en/okeypis-kort/>.

Figure 4: **Active Volcano Index.** Eruption information: <https://www.icelandontheweb.com/articles-on-iceland/nature/volcanoes/hekla>. Topographic map of Iceland: National Land Survey of Iceland, <https://www.lmi.is/en/okeypis-kort/>. Ash cloud extent: Icelandic Lessons: Industrial Landscape. Edited by Harry Gugger. Zürich: Park Books (2015). p. 50-51.

Figure 5: **Iceland’s Designated Wilderness Diagram.** Composite image based on “Icelandic wilderness areas” map by R. Olafsdottir and M. C. Runnstrom in *How wild is Iceland? Wilderness quality with respect to Nature-Based Tourism* Protected areas: <https://ust.is/english/protected-areas/map/>.

Figure 6: **Iceland’s Light Pollution Diagram.** Adapted from Light Pollution Map data retrieved from: <https://www.lightpollutionmap.info/>.

Figure 7: **Sectional-timeline of Historic Human-Land Relationship in Iceland.**

Figure 8: **Mapping of the Circumpolar Connections in the Arctic Region.** Composite image base: *Arctic DEM Circumpolar Satellite*, retrieved from: <https://www.pgc.umn.edu/data/arcticdem/>.

Figure 9: **Cultural Events Timeline across the Nordic Region.** Composite image base - Arctic DEM Circumpolar Satellite - composite image: <https://www.pgc.umn.edu/data/arcticdem/> Festivals in Iceland: <https://guidetoiceland.is/best-of-iceland/the-top-10-festivals-in-iceland>. Greenland Eyes Film Festival: <http://greenlandeyes.com/> Faroe Islands Music Festivals: <https://old.visitfaroeislands.com/en/what-to-do/music-festivals/>.

Figure 10: **Mapping the Territory and Connectivity of Iceland.** Topographic map of Iceland adapted from: National Land Survey of Iceland, <https://www.lmi.is/en/stafraen-gogn/is-50v-nytt/> Iceland Tourist Board: <https://www.ferdamalastofa.is/is/um-ferdamalastofu/frettir/category/1/23-milljonir-fartheaga-2018> Ports in Iceland: <http://www.worldportsource.com/ports/ISL.php>.

List of Figures

Figure 11: **Nam June Paik, TV Garden, (1974-7), 2002 Installation.** Kunstsammlung Nordrhein-Westfalen (Düsseldorf, Germany). © Estate of Nam June Paik Photo: Tate (Roger Sinek). Retrieved from <https://gogirifarm.org/all-stories/?idx=2936733&bmode=view>.

Figures 12-13: **Bill Viola, Moving Stillness: Mt. Rainier, 1979.** Color videotape playback with rear projection reflected off water surface of a pool in a large, dark room; aquarium aerator with timing circuit; amplified stereo sound; continuously running. James Cohan, Artists. <https://www.jamescohan.com/artists/bill-viola>.

Figure 14: **Bill Viola, installation view of ‘The Veiling’,** Guggenheim Museum, Bilbao, 2017. James Cohan, Artists. <https://www.jamescohan.com/artists/bill-viola?view=slider#4>.

Figure 15: **Northern Iceland - filmic and landscape impressions collage.** Composite image. Star Trek scene: <https://www.truenorth.is/showcase/hpe-star-trek/Westfjords>: <https://iceland.for91days.com/a-week-in-the-westfjords/>. Blondulon reservoir lake. https://www.mbl.is/frettir/innlent/2018/08/02/midlunarlon_vid_thad_ad_fyllast/. Route 1 “Ring Road” outline: <https://mmillericeland.wordpress.com/category/iceland-overview/mapping-iceland/>.

Figure 16: **Children of Nature (1991) Landscape Narrative Collage.** (Icelandic: Börn Náttúrunnar). Film stills retrieved from: IMDB (<http://www.imdb.com>) and Icelandic Film Centre (<https://www.icelandicfilms.info/films-list/gm/genre/movie>).

Figure 17: **Comparative Timeline of Landscape Sequences in Film.** Composite image:
Noah (Darren Aronofsky, 2014) - Collage studying landscape as an atmospheric plot device stills retrieved from: <https://film-grab.com/2014/08/05/noah/>;
Children of Nature (Friðrik Þór Friðriksson, 1991);
Stormy Weather (Sólveig Anspach, 2003);
The Secret Life of Walter Mitty (Ben Stiller, 2013);
Woman at War (Benedikt Erlingsson, 2018);
Interstellar (Christopher Nolan, 2014) - Svínafellsjökull, Southern Region - <https://www.legendarytrips.com/trip/interstellar-filming-locations-iceland-2014/>; and
Prometheus (Ridley Scott, 2012).
Film stills retrieved from: IMDB (<http://www.imdb.com>), Film Grab (<https://film-grab.com/>), and Icelandic Film Centre (<https://www.icelandicfilms.info/films-list/gm/genre/movie>).

Figure 18: **Noah - Collage of Landscape in Film [Fragment].**

Figure 19: **Prometheus - Opening Sequence Analysis [Fragment].**

Figure 20: **Woman at War (2018) Landscape Narrative Collage.** (Icelandic: Kona fer í Stríð) <https://scfs.ca/woman-at-war/> and <http://www.magpictures.com>.

List of Figures

Figure 21: **Roadviews Collage.** Author's photographs, phone camera, Jan. 2020.

Figure 22: **Excursion Day Trip Collage.** Author's photographs, DSLR, Jan. 2020.

Figure 23: **Skogafoss Waterfall Sequence.** Author's photographs, phone camera, Jan. 2020.

Figure 24: **Reynisfjara Shoreline Sequence.** Author's photographs, DSLR camera, Jan. 2020.

Figure 25: **Neil Beloufa, Installation view of "Home is Wherever I'm With You," Banff Centre, 2014.** Retrieved from: <https://www.banffcentre.ca/counting-people>.

Figure 26: **Petra Cortright, Installation view of "borderline aurora borealis,"** Team Gallery, New York City, 2020.

Figure 27: **Brian McGrath, Cinematic Drawing Technique,** in "Cinematics: A Sensori-motor Archive for Design." Retrieved from: <http://aodr.org/xml/03545/03545.pdf>

Figure 28: **Diagram of Visiting Gullfoss Waterfall in Iceland.** Photographic collage and plan-view overlay. Photographs by author, DSLR, Jan. 2020.

Figure 29: **Proposed Workcamp Experience Continuum and Field-School Framework.** Collage of author's images, DSLR camera, Jan. 2020.

Figure 30: **Field-School Framework.** Collage from author's images, DSLR camera, Jan. 2020.

Figure 31: **Eyjafjörður Fjord in Northern Iceland with the location of Akureyri.** Arcgis Satellite Map <https://www.arcgis.com/home/webmap/viewer>.

Figure 32: **Speculative Terrain Transects of Eyjafjörður.** Watercolour on mineral paper, drawn and scanned by author, Nov. 2019.

List of Figures

Figure 33: **Mapping the Town of Akureyri.**

Akureyri topographical map: http://elevation.maplogs.com/poi/akureyri_iceland.168874.html

Akureyri Art Museum <https://www.pinterest.ca/camiloandrescer/>

Hof Conference Centre <http://www.visitakureyri.is/en/things-to-do/culture/hof-cultural-and-conference-center>

Downtown Akureyri <https://www.flickr.com/photos/16910512@N02/43672800814>

Nyja Bio Cinema <https://www.alltravels.com/iceland/all-regions/akureyri/photos/current-photo-11761010>

Cinema Akureyri <https://www.flickr.com/photos/eetu-immonen/3889757495>

Botanical Garden <https://www.apennyfarther.com/akureyri-iceland-what-to-see-and-do/>

Akureyri Airport <https://www.isavia.is/en/corporate/business/akureyri-airport/advertising>

Port of Akureyri <https://port.is/index.php?pid=74>

Akureyri Hotel <https://www.booking.com/hotel/is/akureyri.en>.

Figure 34: **Unfolded Building Section and Annual Daylight Timeline of the Site** - drawing in progress. Seasonal daylight hours data retrieved from: <https://weatherspark.com/y/31514/Average-Weather-in-Akureyri-Iceland-Year-Round>. **Downtown Akureyri, Hafnaerstraeti St.** Streetview images retrieved from Google Maps: <https://www.google.com/maps/place>.

Figure 35: **"Storytelling - waterfall stations" Proposal.** Collage image from author's images, DSLR camera, Jan. 2020.

Figure 36: **"Tracing Change - glacial markers" Proposal.** Collage from author's images, DSLR camera, Jan. 2020.

Figure 37: **Top View of Skógafoss Waterfall.** Author's photograph, DSLR camera, Jan. 2020.



Fig. 2 Myrdalsjökull Glacial Tongue

Preface

At the outset of this thesis in the Fall of 2019, unprecedented growth of globalized travel over the past decades generated a new description for contemporary tourism: *overtourism*. Iceland, a remote island made more reachable than ever before by air- and waterways, became an example of a destination prospering from - and adjusting to - an unprecedented influx of travelers. Over the 2010's, a yearly growth in visitor numbers filled several parts of the Nordic country with crowds in search of a wondrous wilderness and the 'perfect shot' of the view. My first visit to Iceland a few years ago was facilitated by a local non-profit organization known as SEEDS (See beyond borderS). The trip acquainted me with Iceland's lava fields, black sand shores, the largest glacier in Europe, and local traditions such as the annual sheep round-up.

This winter, I returned to Iceland via SEEDS to join a group of international participants for a workshop focusing on themes of environmental awareness and photography. In parallel to the thesis, the trip reflected a duality in our relationship with landscape: an entity to gaze upon in-situ or on screen, and an ecosystem that people influence, exploit, or help preserve. As the group members returned home to Canada, Ireland, Mexico, Slovakia, South Korea, Spain, Sweden, Taiwan, and the US, the world was spiraling into unpredictable change and coping with a global viral pandemic. The familiar ease of air and sea travel halted and changes course to repatriation flights, quarantine in international waters, and an uncertain future. Tourism industries and practices are facing a turning point as global connectivity is changing under an unfolding health emergency with unprecedented financial consequences. For the time being, the digital interfaces of media and communications have become the primary bridges among nations, workplaces, and people.

An Island of Wilderness

1.1 *Relating Icelandic Identity: Nature and Land*

This thesis follows an inquiry into the relationship between people and land as it evolved in Iceland, looking at domestic and foreign tenets of engagement with natural landscapes. According to geographer Kenneth Olwig, "...the Northern European concept of landscape...[carries] a range of meaning that goes beyond natural scenery."¹ The etymology of the words 'nature' and 'landscape' reflect the perception of these notions as constructive elements of a communal identity. The cultural, political, and economical significance of land and location to people is reflected in Iceland's historical narrative. Icelandic identity - individual and national - was formed out of reliance on and survival of land and wilderness. In the essay "Toward a Philosophy of Nature", Robert P. Harrison posits that "...the religion, art, ideas, institutions, and science through which a culture expresses itself are ultimately reflections of the ways it relates to nature."² The specificity of experience dwelling in a particular place is what binds a group of people and forms their point of reference as a group or a nation. In the case of Iceland, the volcanic island has formed traditions and ways of life and continues to influence Icelandic culture today.

Since the early settlement of Iceland in the 9th century, the perimeter shorelines of the island proved the most inhabitable due to the presence of arable land and proximity to maritime trade routes. In geological terms, Iceland is a young terrain. The ocean floor in the surrounding region and particularly the terrain of Iceland have been shaped and shifted as a result of a highly active tectonic underlay. The land that has been formed by volcanic activity remains volatile today. Situated upon the seams of the mid-Atlantic ridge, the island is punctuated with a string of volcanic fissures and at least 32 active volcanoes [fig. 3-4].³ As a result, the island has an abundance of geothermal capacity. At the same time, frequent volcanic eruptions throughout the central area of the island - known as the Highlands - have been causing extraordinary weather events, some of which have historically affected inhabitation on the island. The consequences of eruptions were often lethal for people and devastating for agriculture. The historic Mt. Laki's eruption in 1783 allegedly added smoke to the fire of the French Revolution as volcanic ash reached mainland Europe,⁴ while eruptions in 1870's caused a widespread famine and an exodus from the island.⁵

Given its remote location, Iceland remained fairly unknown outside of the immediate region of Scandinavia for centuries. Following the Vikings' demise, Iceland was subjected to Denmark's rule as a colony for a period of about five centuries until claiming national independence in 1944.⁶ This step was taken in the midst of a significant process of change as the 20th century became a period of propelling economic modernization. Gradually, Reykjavik grew into a metropolitan centre. The growth of settlement was prompted by the establishment of infrastructure that maximized domestic ability to harvest geothermal energy and eased the provision of hot water and electricity to the capital region. Industrialization which entered the fishing, farming, and livestock enterprises, started a longstanding schism between the rural and the urban counterparts of Iceland.⁷

The global rise of air travel in the 20th century turned Iceland into a convenient stopover between Europe and North America. An American military base established after World War II operated in Keflavik until as late as 2006. Arguably, post-war Iceland became governed by its international relations with economic power houses such as the United States. Lured by the plenty of natural resources, foreign energy, metal, and - most recently - cryptocurrency business enterprises base their factories in Iceland.⁸ Agriculture, fishing, and the extraction of energy from natural resources have traditionally been the dominant sustaining industries in Iceland. However, in the past decade, the tourism sector has grown exponentially. In part, this phenomenon was enabled due to Iceland's growing public exposure in the media following its infamous 2008 national bankruptcy, the 2010 eruption of Eyjafjallajökull that shut down European air space, and travel marketing.⁹ Following the economic crises, a restructuring of political and financial frameworks were enacted, with the space of nature being actively put in the spotlight to encourage tourism and support the travel industry.

1.2 *Foreign Imaginaries: What Remains of Wilderness?*

The notion of 'wilderness' in our epoch has retreated into just that: an idea. It has been established that the space of nature untouched by human presence, intervention, or consequences of thereof is virtually nonexistent. Even the most remote corners of the earth have been reached and affected by human activity. Nevertheless, Iceland is one of many travel destinations that are coveted and marketed primarily for pristine settings of natural, ecological, and geological features. Iceland's highlands, highlighted in red in the geology diagram [fig. 4], have turned Iceland's remaining quasi-wilderness into a contested ground that is caught between industrial land use and ecological conservation.¹⁰ Although Iceland's Environmental Act designates a status of 'preserved' and 'protected' on selected natural features and areas [fig. 5], opinions diverge on what constitutes "'true' Icelandic nature". Icelandic nature protectionists are split between a 'dark' and 'green' camp which hold differing views as to the degree of Iceland's inland highlands' rehabilitation.¹¹

GEOLOGY DIAGRAM / GROUND TYPES

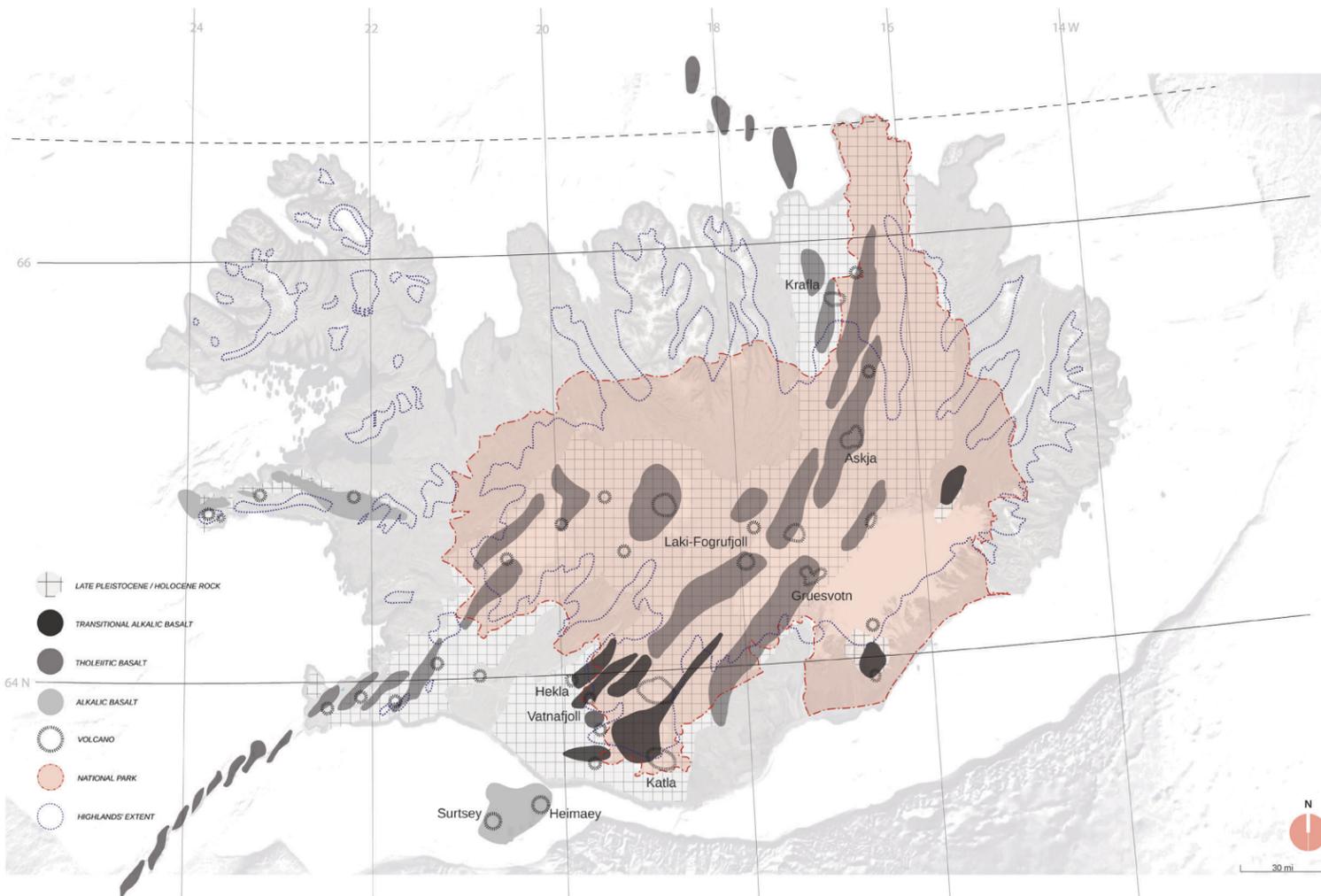


Fig. 3 Iceland's Geology Diagram: Ground Types

ACTIVE VOLCANO INDEX / ERUPTION FREQUENCY TIMELINE

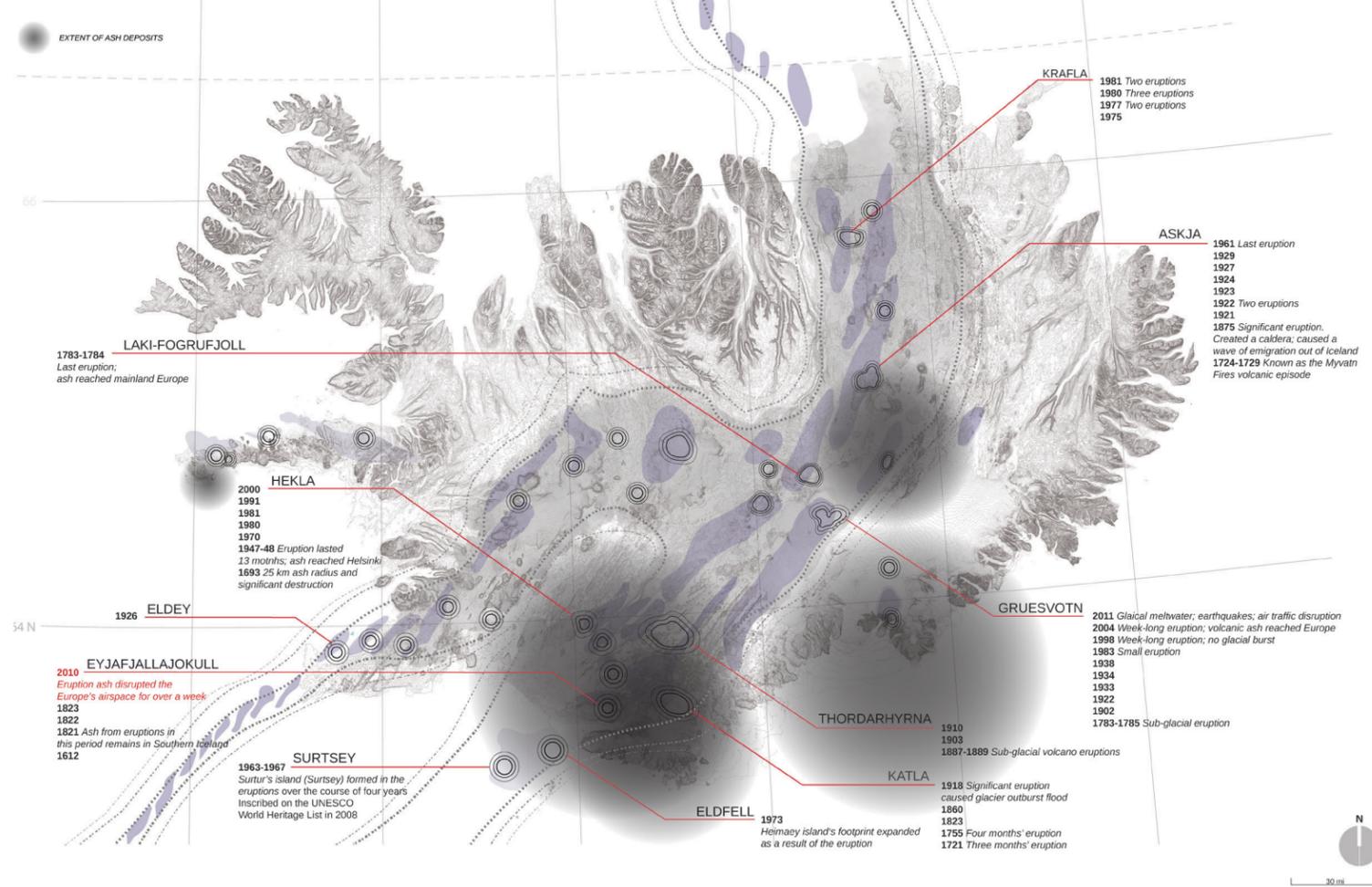


Fig. 4 Active Volcano Index

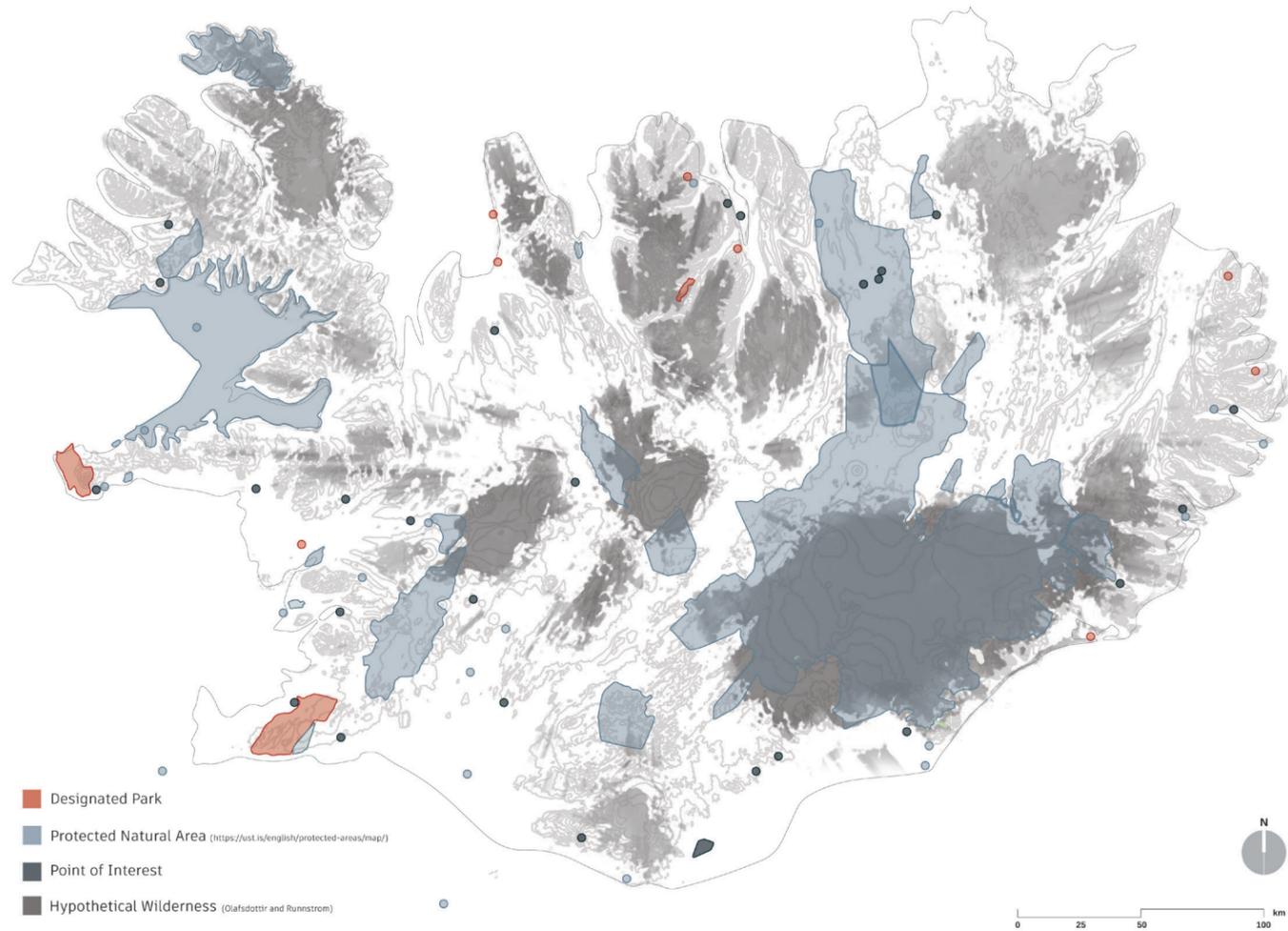


Fig. 5 Iceland's Designated Wilderness Diagram

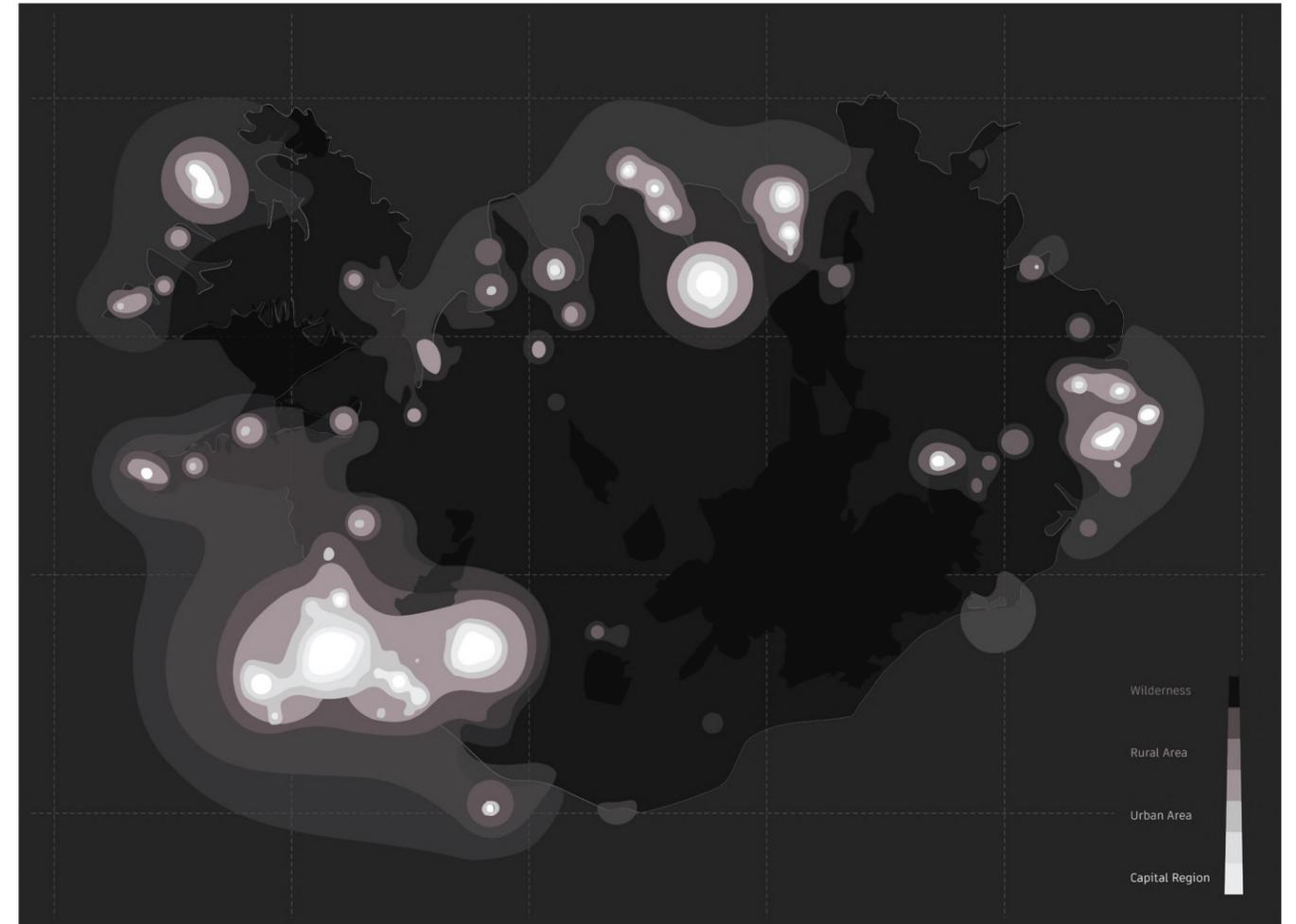


Fig. 6 Diagram of Iceland's Light Pollution Reflects a Correlation between "Wilderness" and Darkness

Industrialization and energy extraction have been shaping the relationship with landscape through the establishment of dams, power plants and hydro lines. The small scale of farm or family power plants were the first incarnations of geothermal energy use. Over the course of the 20th century hot water supply and geothermal energy transitioned into more centralized forms serving larger communities, until reaching monumental scopes of operation and environmental impact in recent decades [fig. 7]. The Kárahnjúkar hydropower station in east Iceland and Hellisheiði geothermal plant and visitor centre in the southwest are the largest examples of their kind.¹² Along with energy and metal industries, a significant growth in tourist numbers exerts new stresses that bring change to delicate ecosystems in Iceland, most notably, the Highlands.

1.3 Mapping Terrain-truths: Visualizing the Context

The process of building knowledge of a place and a gradual familiarity with it is generated from conscious and subconscious interactions with diverse forms of information about it. In order to learn about the geological, geographic, and political context a series of maps was developed. According to landscape architect James Corner, the act of mapping produces a layering of temporal knowledge. Increasingly, maps move away from representing routes borders to constructing 'inventories of geographical knowledge'. A series of mapping studies were developed as a means of visualizing the context for the thesis inquiry. The methodology of diagramming the island through a thematic mappings was followed by composing maps about these contexts at the regional scale.

Mapping graphically collapses diverging datasets in order to compose tangible interpretations of intangible networks of relationships within a place. Constructing an understanding of a place through mapping places found fragments of information - geological, cultural, logistical - into analytical compositions. Mapping comes to reflect the distribution of activity and stressors throughout the studied area. As tourism focuses largely on immersion in settings showcasing unique nature, it concentrates around preserved "wilderness" spaces and "natural monuments". These notions are defined and curated by the public's representatives based on cultural, financial, and other considerations. The decision what to preserve dictates where the "untouched landscape" is delineated. Mapping light pollution across Iceland [fig. 6] helps demonstrate the quality of pristiness: nightly darkness due to lack of artificial lighting lends a perceived 'remoteness' to natural space.

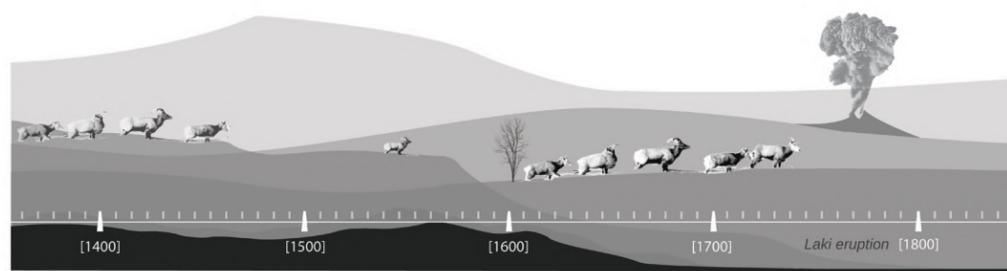
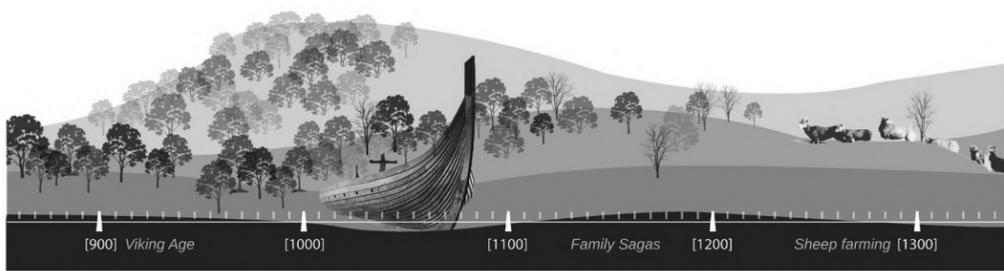
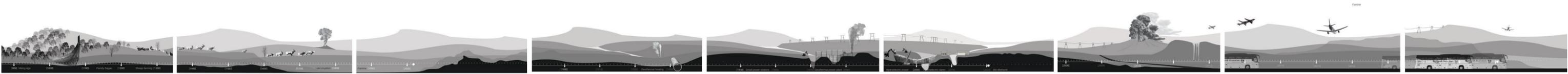
Being able to relate to the environment via our physical presence in a given place is an experience that gets interpreted and curated in various means of expression: art, communications, writing. More than representing grounded conditions of a place - which are inherently given to a degree of fluctuation throughout time regardless of their mapped notation - mapping challenges perceived notions and constructs interpretations

of complex realities. The theory underlying landscape architecture operations acknowledges that ecosystems of land exist throughout processes of change and regeneration. According to Corner, "land surfaces can be understood to be phenomena in time."¹³ By reiterating the importance of 'time' in both analysis and projective planning, he emphasizes temporality as a parameter to be considered and incorporated into the act of mapping.¹⁴ The next page presents a sectional-timeline [fig. 7] of a representative Icelandic landscape to illustrate the evolution of human and land interaction described in this chapter.

Endnotes

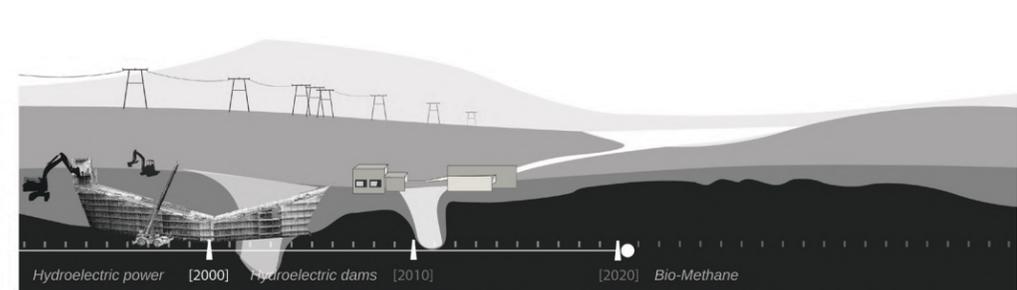
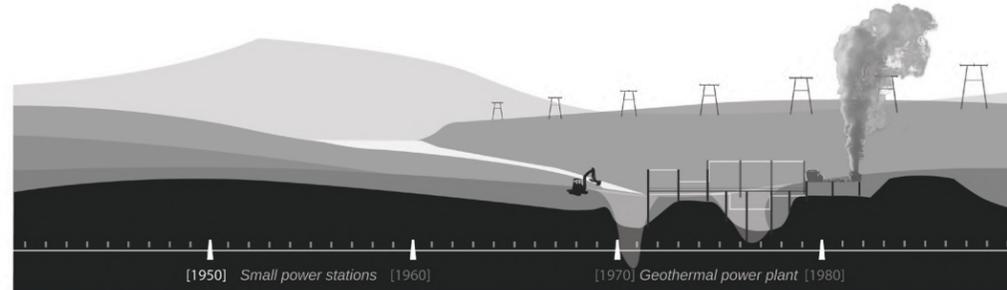
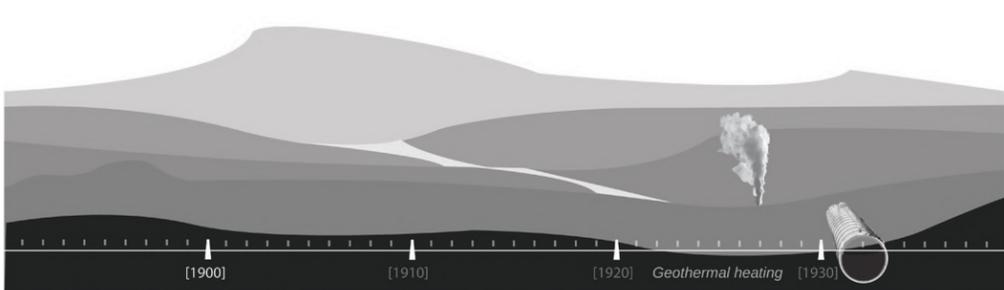
- 1 Kenneth R. Olwig, "Recovering the Substantive Nature of Landscape," 631.
- 2 Robert P. Harrison, "Toward a Philosophy of Nature," in *Uncommon Ground*, ed. William Cronon, 426.
- 3 Jill Lawless, The Associated Press, Nov. 26, 2016, <https://www.thestar.com/business/2016/11/26/as-tourism-booms-iceland-waits-for-its-next-volcanic-eruption.html>.
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- 13 James Corner, *A Discourse on Theory II*, 129.
- 14 Ibid.

Fig. 7 Sectional-timeline of Historic Human-Land Relationship in Iceland



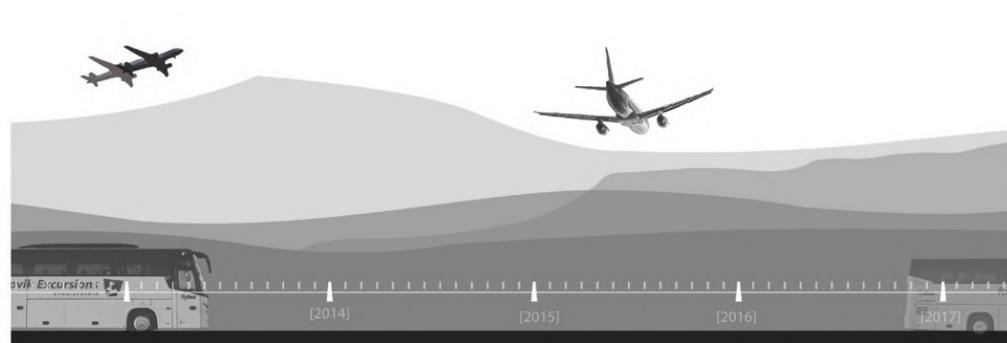
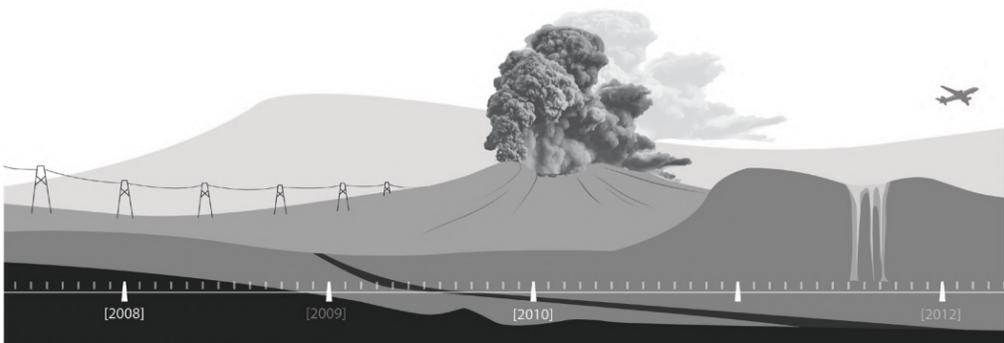
SOIL EROSION

Since the earliest settlement on the volcanic island dwelling and farming practices contributed to deforestation and soil erosion



ENERGY EXTRACTION

Construction of large scale dams and power plants throughout Iceland brought a state of vulnerability and flux to the the Highlands region



NATURE TOURISM

Unprecedented growth of tourist industry and travel activity are a recent stressor on the Highlands area and other natural ecosystems in Iceland

Cinematic Travel and Landscape in the Cinema

2.1 Remote Engagement with Nature

“...human beings, unlike other living species, live not in nature but in their relation to it.”¹

The unique geological conditions that shaped a distinct landscape - notable features in close proximity - make Iceland a desirable destination not only for travellers but also photographers, videographers and filmmakers. To examine the range of perception of these highly photographed and televised landscapes, this exploration focuses on a comparison between the realm of tourism and the medium of cinema: the moving picture. In his essay titled *Cinematic Landscapes*, Chris Lukinbeal notes that oftentimes, landscape becomes the primary device for creating spatial and temporal settings on screen as it “...gives meaning to cinematic events and positions narratives within a particular scale and historical context.”² Traveling, viewing films and producing cinematography tend to be thought of as primarily visual modes of experience that facilitate spectatorship. Giuliana Bruno grounds the similarity between a film viewer’s experience and that of a traveller in their practice of “viewing space”. According to Bruno, the duration of a film or a trip unfolds a “path” of movement, whether through a sequence of frames representing places from particular points of view in the former, or a sequence of physical movement through an itinerary in the latter.³

Reinforcing this comparison, Rodanthi Tzanelli quotes E. Strain who notes “Cinematic technologies and the ‘travel mystique’ share ‘the illusion of demediating mediation’ meaning that certain types of experience have the power to erase the mediation of reality altogether.”⁴ Both cinema and travel have the potential of transporting our experience and perception away from ordinary or familiar settings. Carlo Cubero and Enrico Barone discuss the temporality and variability of both film and the landscapes depicted in them. “Cinema is a time-based and mobile methodology (Tarkovsky 1986). It directs our attention to the continuous unfolding process of the landscape.”⁵ Natural landscapes in films not only situate the viewer but are filmed so as to create a sense of passage of time and perception of proximity and distance within time-based cinematic space. Transcending the limits of temporal progression, still and moving imagery of landscape create opportunities for fictitious understanding and engagement with natural settings.

2.2 A Newfound Draw to the Arctic

The Arctic and Nordic regions [fig. 8-9] are prominent examples of places that have been garnering the fascination of travellers as places of difference and wonder. Over the past decade, tourism board planning strategies combined with the use of media communications have contributed to Iceland’s transformation from an unfamiliar place at the edge of Europe to a popular tourist destination: its primary draw of natural landscapes often perceived as pristine wilderness with cinematic, otherworldly qualities. The temporality of travel provides an opportunity to experience sights and encounters outside of what is ordinary. However, preconceived ideas of places abound in a time of hyperconnectivity. The public and the traveler often come to know foreign places through constructed ontologies disseminated in a variety of media formats. Visual communications - social media, advertising, film - all curate a mediated ‘spectacle’ of images for consumption by multiple audiences. Places in Iceland get photographed endlessly by high numbers of people - filming crews and the traveling public - and become well-known, coveted, and draw large crowds.

Cultivating the image of a “pristine wilderness”, Iceland’s natural settings are associated with ‘remoteness’ and ‘solitude’, qualities that have all but disappeared in the increasingly interconnected realms of the West. William Cronon calls our attention to a growing pursuit of ‘wilderness’ in contemporary tourism with ‘nature’ at large turned into a controlled and curated entity upheld by economic purpose.⁶ Nikolaos Vagionis and Maria Loumioti identify patterns of ‘destination marketing’, wherein natural features and distinctive landscape views are framed as the brand of a place. The authors further suggest there are distinct categories of tourism of this kind: “As regards the role of popular culture in shaping of a “destination image” in the framework of tourism, Urry (2002) claims that one of the basic reasons that motivate tourists to visit a location, are the expectations that these people may live different experiences from what they would live in their home location. ...Cinema systematically functions as a means of escape from the everyday routine and this characteristic is in common with tourism.”⁷ The proliferation of place-specific imagery on screen - instagram feed, television series, or film - constructs expectations about a place to an audience of potential travellers.

Cinematic worlds turn spectators into travellers transported to locations of sceneries iconically portrayed by cinematographers. A high-profile precedent of the phenomenon emerged in environmental tourism to New Zealand, where visitors flocked to the natural settings of Tolkien’s Middle Earth made prominent by Peter Jackson’s “*Lord of the Rings*” trilogy between 2001-2003. As cinema and other means of visual media theatrically frame landscape in the eyes of viewers worldwide, a duality is created between the ‘real’ landscape and its image, the ‘reel’.⁸

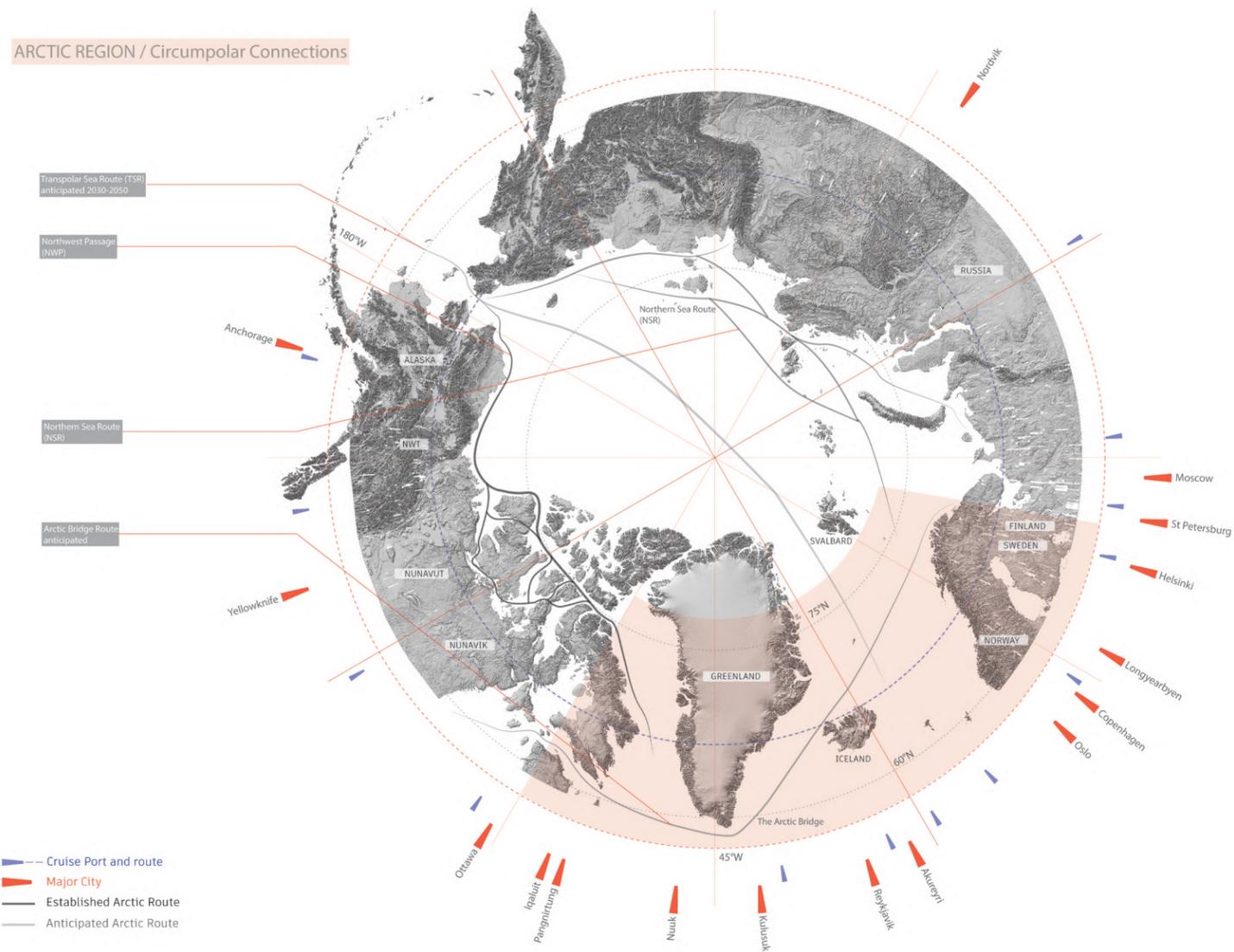


Fig. 8 Mapping of the Circumpolar Connections in the Arctic Region

Outside of the cinema, travellers' engagement with 'landscape' has become increasingly mediated: through the lens, the screen, and the image. A sought-after destination is thus crafted through digital mediums, while the landscape at hand is contested and found in a state of flux. As a response, the thesis seeks a form of mediation between domestic and foreign interactions within Iceland's idiosyncratic landscape. In addition to being a fertile ground for eco-tourism and cinematic travel, the Nordic Region is the stage of cultural events showcasing locally produced cinema, music, and performance art. The mapping of the Nordic region on the following page [fig. 10] draws a representative annual timeline of film and music festival events which form part of a regional network of cultural production and exchange.

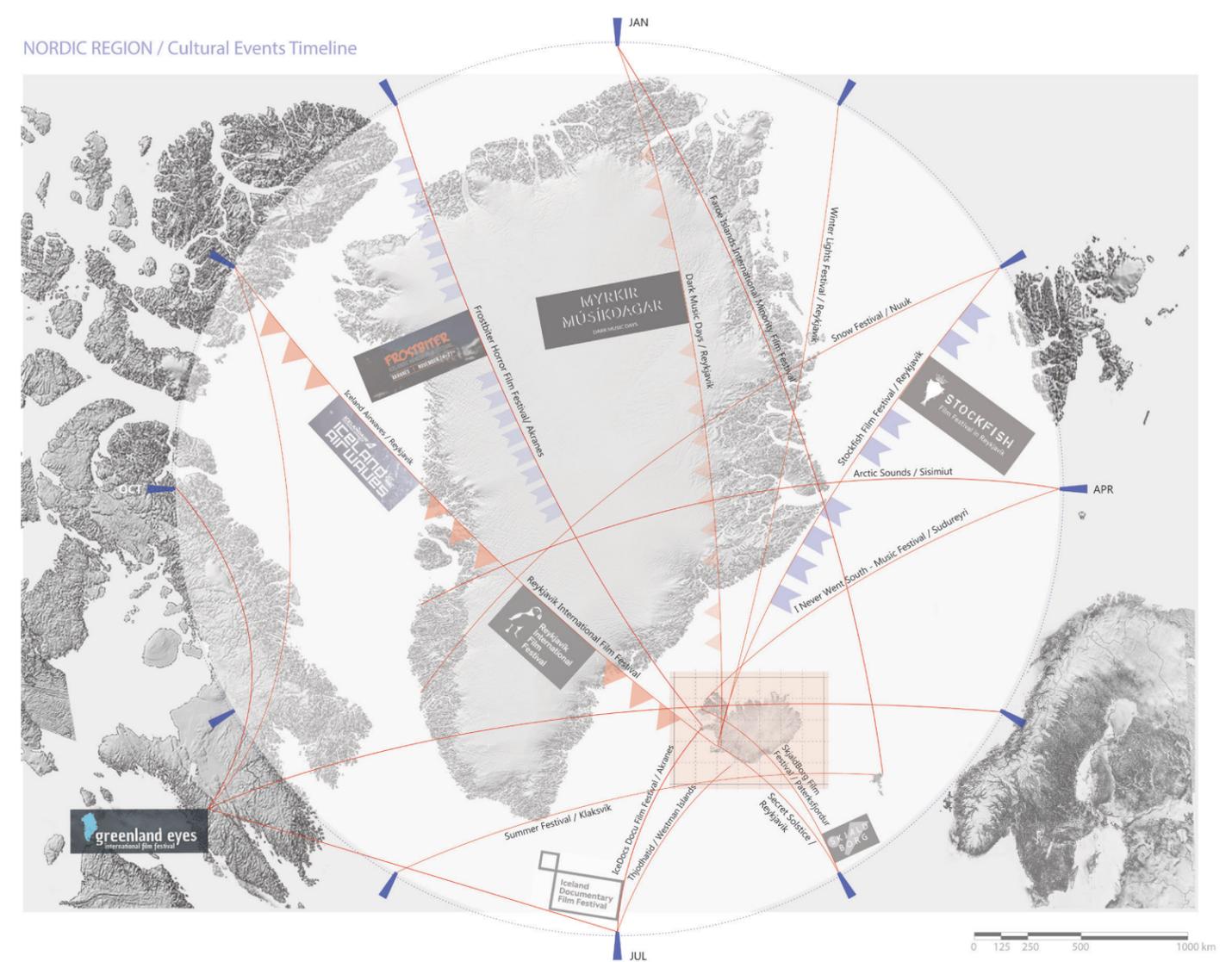


Fig. 9 Cultural Events Timeline across the Nordic Region

Endnotes

- 1 Robert P. Harrison "Toward a Philosophy of Nature" in *Uncommon Ground*, 426.
- 2 Chris Lukinbeal, "Cinematic Landscapes," 3.
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- 4 Carlo Cubero and Enrico Barone, "Cinema and landscape: Reflections from a film programme."
- 5 Giuliana Bruno, "A Geography of the Moving Image" in *Atlas of Emotion*, 62.
- 6 William Cronon, *Uncommon Ground: Rethinking the Human Place in Nature*, 70.
- 7 Nikolaos Vagionis and Maria Loumioti, "Movies as a Tool of Modern Tourist Marketing," 357.
- 8 Lukinbeal, "Cinematic Landscapes," 4.

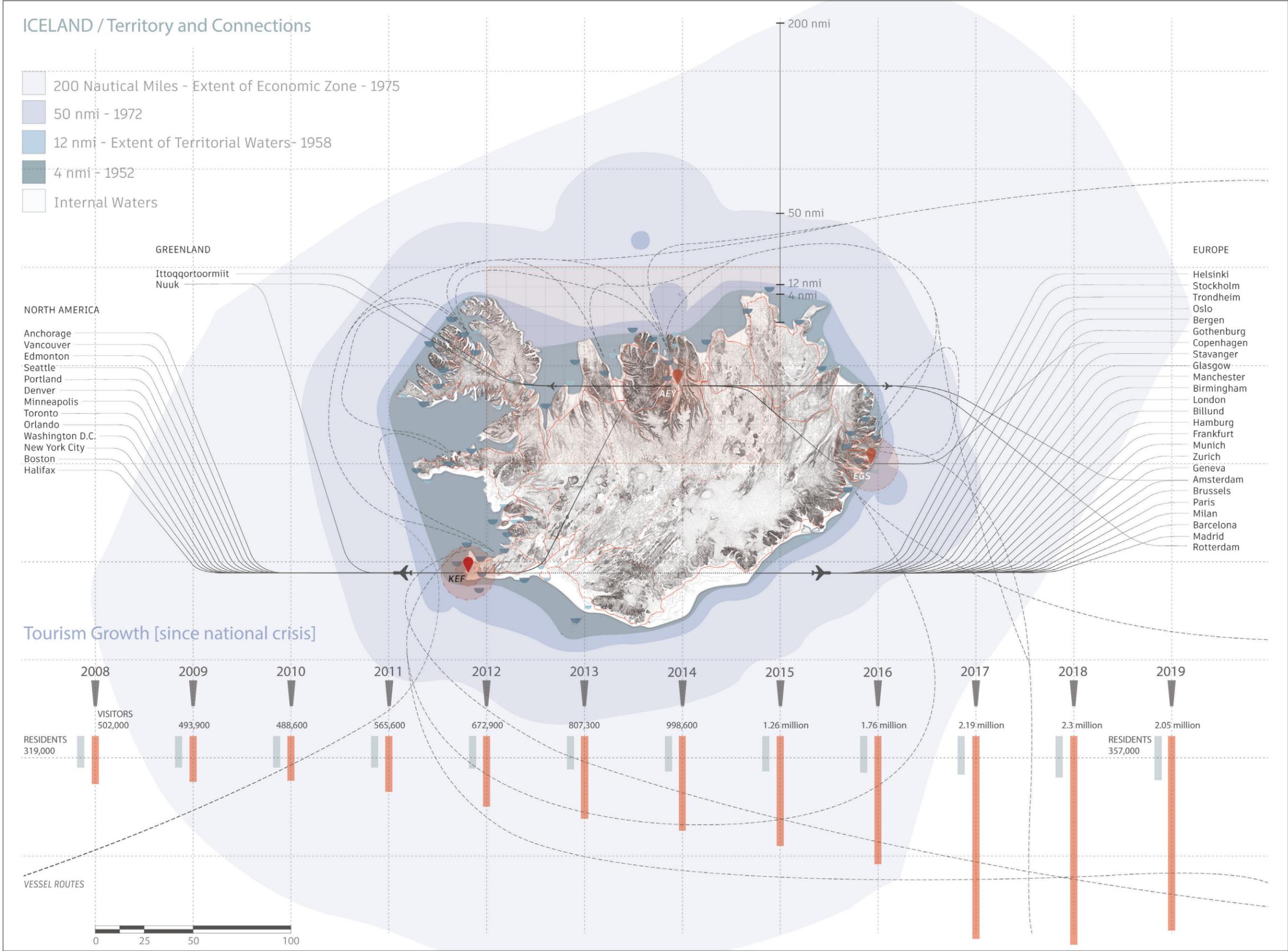


Fig. 10 Mapping the Territory and Connectivity of Iceland

A Mediated Landscape: Reframing Icelandic Nature

3.1 Media-laden Modes of Experience

By harnessing the visual qualities of Iceland's landscapes, media productions weave narrative, duration, and sensation onto the canvases and the screens of cinemas, artworks, billboards, and personal devices. Contemporary discourse established the notion of 'New Media' at large to digital forms of communication and expression. The following key artworks illustrate the rise of new media as an intrinsic part of our cultures and daily lives. In the 1960's, at a time when Marshall McLuhan was studying the influence of mass media on information exchange and perception,¹ artist Nam June Paik started introducing emergent media technologies such as television not only as a theme to be explored in art, but also as a medium [fig 11]. Known for his contribution to video art, Paik's work delved into the immediacy of data transmission enabled by technology as a growing characteristic of contemporary experience.²

Our engagement with lived experience, and particularly travel, has become "mediated", wherein the direct experience is inseparable from reproduction and communication through visual recording. Over half a century ago, Guy Debord expressed a critical observation of modern life in the film *Society of the Spectacle* that "...the spectacle is the present model of socially dominant life."³ Urry and Larsen argue that digitization and "internetization" took over tourist modes of engagement; the immediacy of viewing and sharing found in the use of social media has transcended into contemporary modalities of travel.⁴ In the modern period, sightseeing became an inherent mode of travel. Nowadays, the traveller's camera evolved from the ubiquitous still photography to videography with the help of mobile phones, drones, and editing software. While travel is experienced through multiple sensory faculties, oftentimes vision becomes the dominant sense through the prioritization of looking and capturing. The visitors' camera acts as an extension of the heavily visual culture of tourism. It is also the way in which travel experiences are most shared: digital platforms only technically replacing projected slideshows or printed photographs. The immediacy and speed of 'sharing' the experience of travel contributes to a multiplicity of interpretations of a place. Existing places, such as unique natural scapes, receive an alternative, digital presence with a new aura of meaning.

Simultaneously, change is an underlying component of landscape by virtue of its being an ecosystem. In Iceland, glaciers may hold the most noticeable signs of change, yet other aspects of the environment such as soil, flora, and fauna are affected by people's use of land both locally and globally. Bill Viola's installation *Moving Stillness: Mount Rainier* first exhibited in 1979 communicates commentary on the changeability of nature that often goes unnoticed by human eyes. The artwork [fig. 12-13] featured a single screen projected with an image of the national park's landscape set atop a reflective water surface which periodically gets disrupted affecting the clarity of the projected image.⁵ People's perception of landscapes as static entities akin to pictures disregards the complexity and vulnerability of landscapes as ecosystems that undergo processes of change on different timescales. In another installation titled "The Veiling" [fig. 14] Viola projected a moving picture on a series of screens.⁶ Both installations represent reciprocities: human to human in "The Veiling", and human to nature in "Moving Stillness". In both works screens to grant materiality to the point of encounter - or mediation - of the [dis]connect. The screen in these artworks captures and registers a curated distortion of the communicated imagery.

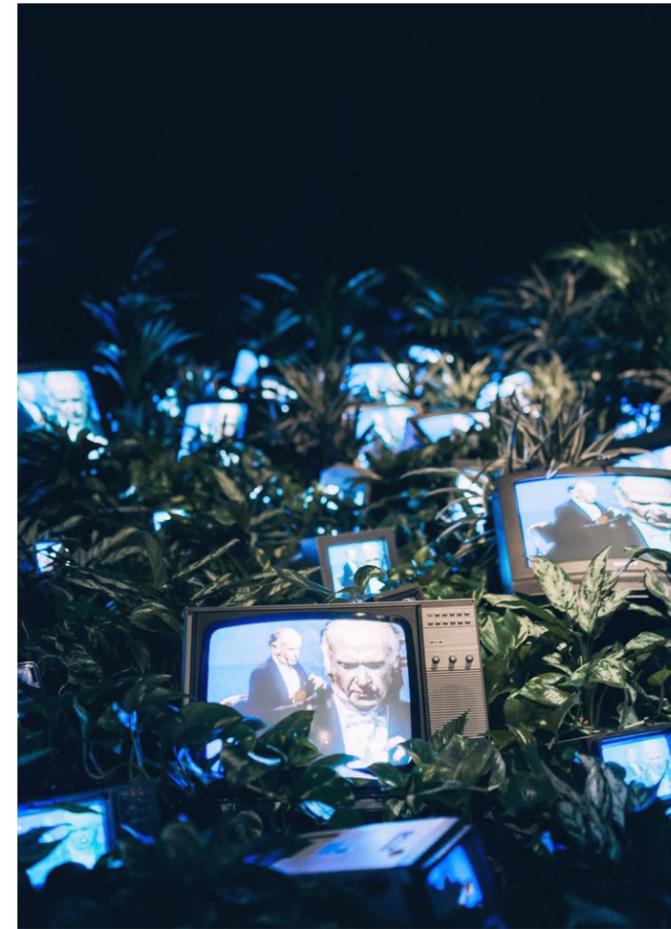
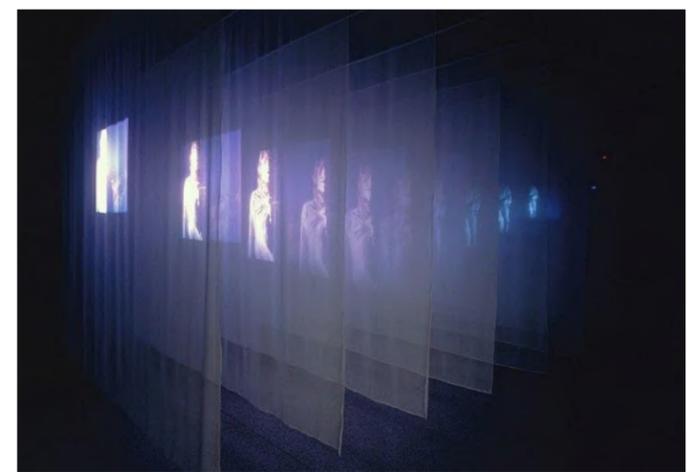
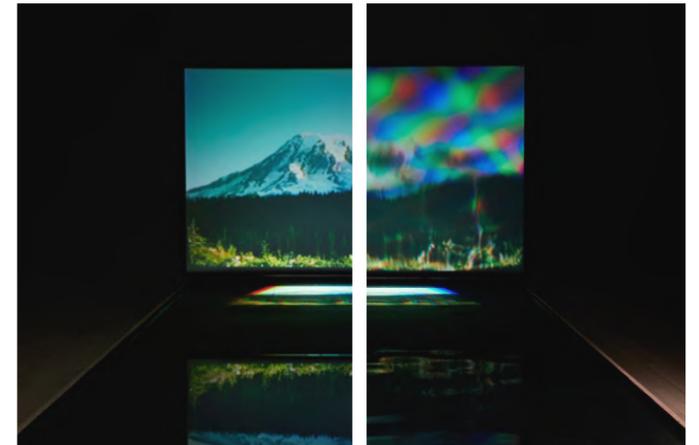


Fig. 11 Nam June Paik, *TV Garden* (1974-7), 2002 Installation



top **Fig. 12-13** Bill Viola, *Moving Stillness: Mount Rainier* (1979), 2020 Installation
bottom **Fig. 14** Bill Viola, *The Veiling* (1995), 2017 Installation

With media's widespread presence and influence both reflecting and curating contemporary culture, the trajectory of the thesis inquiry follows a methodology akin with visual anthropology. The case study examining Iceland as a travel destination is highly present across media forms. Music videos, commercials, television and film productions predominantly feature settings in Iceland [fig. 15]. The medium of film lends a focused examination of curated representations of Iceland's landscapes due to the concentrated narrative and visual production offered by cinematography. "Film has the power to manufacture a version of authenticity"⁷, thus elucidating cultural points of view for a remote audience. An overview of domestic film productions by Icelandic creators brought out contrasts with the themes and nuances of movies filmed in Iceland by international creators.

3.2 Cinematic Iceland: Domestic and Foreign Perspectives

A selection of films, referred to as domestic and foreign, examines a range of representations with focus on filmic interpretations of Iceland's landscape [fig. 17]. The film sequence collages are arranged in a timeline on the next page. At the tail-ends of the timeframe are two foreign films that were released in 2014: *Noah*, directed by Darren Aronofsky⁸, and *Interstellar*, directed by Christopher Nolan⁹. Although one is set in the distant past of the Great Deluge story that is shared among several ancient civilizations, and the other in the later half of the 21st century, both are staged on the face of an altered Earth and offer post-apocalyptic scenarios. The storyline in *Noah* is more linear as it follows the biblical narrative. The collage concentrates the representation of the landscape into three parts: an aerial overview of the land accompanies the introduction into the story, the lived condition on primeval earth is filmed closer to the terrain as the characters interact with it. The disaster of the flood is marked by a change in the natural settings. In contrast with greenery and sunlight the settings showcase a dark-hued landscape with striking features set in obscure weather conditions. Throughout *The Secret life of Walter Mitty*¹⁰ Iceland is shown not only as itself, but also as a stand-in for Greenland and the Himalayas. While production may have had constraints on filming locations, the diversity of Iceland's vistas enabled the geographic masquerade.

Two earlier domestic productions, *Children of Nature* (Börn Náttúrunnar, 1991)¹¹ and *Stormy Weather* (Stormviðri, 2003)¹² depict personal drama, the urban and rural divide of the country, and the connection to land within cultural and mundane experiences. Filmed on location, "Children of Nature" tells the story of an elderly man having to leave his countryside home. As an interpretation of the film, a sequence of stills weaves the story of intimate relationship to landscape as a home which resonates with the history of generations of Icelandic audiences [fig. 16]. A more recent domestic film sampled in collage form is 'Woman at War' (2018) [fig. 20], directed by Benedikt Erlingsson¹³. The film takes on a radical contemporary angle on the country's relationship with Iceland's natural resources. The protagonist leads a double life as an environmental warrior who is secretly

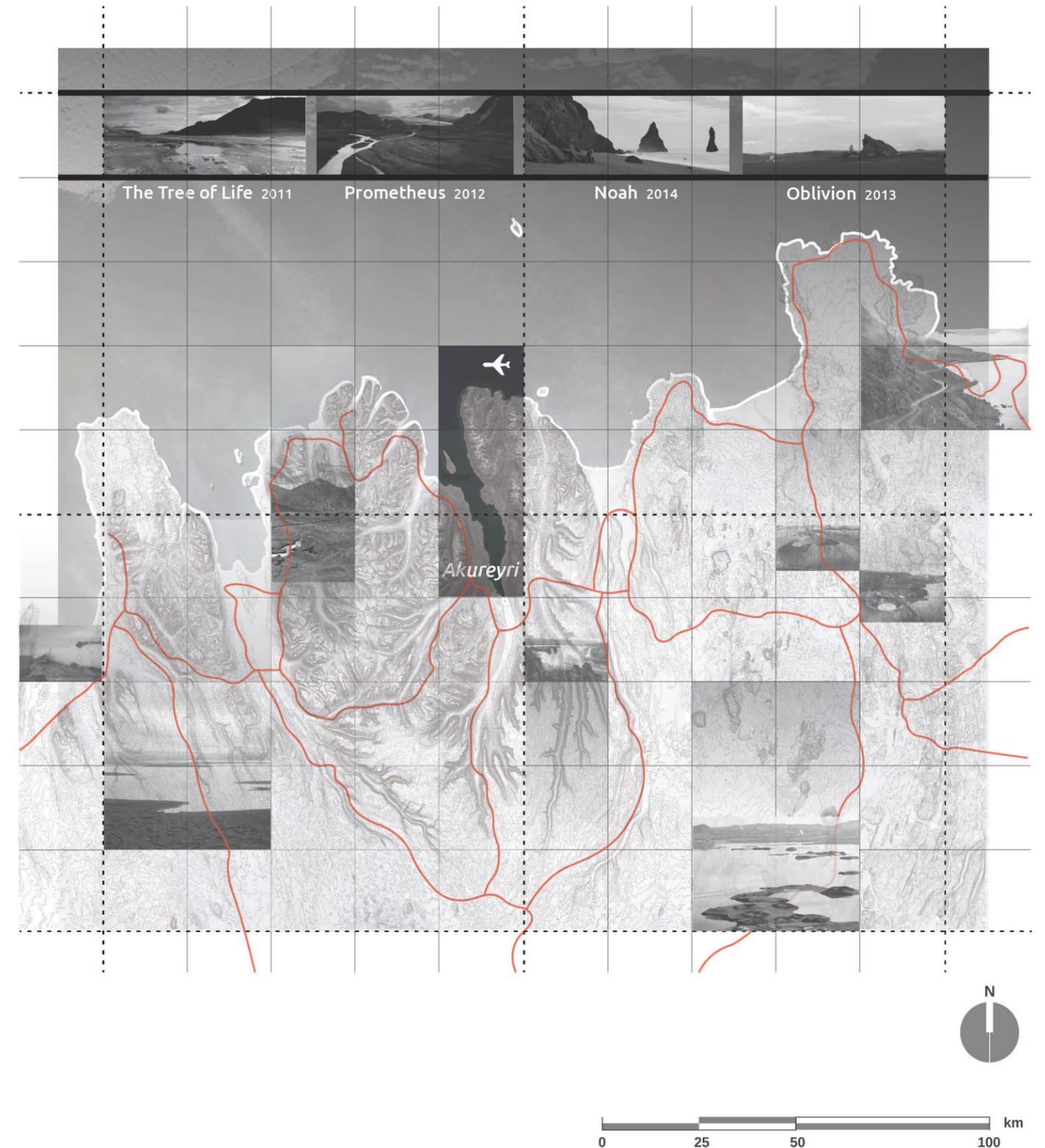


Fig. 15 Northern Iceland - collage of filmic and landscape impressions

sabotaging hydro lines in the Highlands, the central ecosystem of Iceland. Throwing the authorities off her trail in comedic chase scenes through the landscape, she is committed to protecting Iceland's essence: its nature, which she feels connected to and responsible for. The film introduces an unfavourable public view of the disruptive activism, seen as a threat to the country's financial prosperity promised by foreign industries. 'Woman at War' gives a stage to local voices of protest calling to reconsider industrial land use.

The international film productions set in Iceland predominantly turned to the realm of myth, removing the narrative from the present moment via the use of the abstracted, otherworldly landscape found in Iceland - yet commenting on human experience. Noah's variation on the creation myth, and a mythological climate disaster were communicated visually through landscapes found across Iceland [fig. 18]. International productions tend to position Icelandic landscapes in distant dimensions of time and place, reflecting the perception of the landscape as "otherworldly" by those not familiar with it. The narratives are predominantly futuristic, post-disaster, and mythical, and the land is viewed from a distance, flying through, or hovering above canyons and waterfalls. At the other side of the spectrum, the storylines of Children of Nature, Stormy Weather, and Woman at War are all situated in the cultural context and time period of production. The perspective of the camera is set at human eye level more often than at bird's eye view, depicting the landscape in its lived form.

3.3 Domestic Landscape as Contested Territory

"Woman at War" sheds light on a significant manner in which land in Iceland has been reframed in connection to its economic value. In 1970, a Nobel Prize-winning writer Halldór Laxness wrote "The War Against the Land," an essay cautioning the Icelandic public of the government's intentions to give up natural areas in favour of hydroelectric development.¹⁴ With the decline of fishing and agriculture industries due to mechanization and automatization, and with rising corporate interest in Iceland's low-cost naturally sourced energy, the terrain of the Highlands was divided between conservation areas and building grounds reserved for energy extraction. The construction of dams, hydroelectric stations, and geothermal plants is occupying significant portions of previously 'untouched' land. These interventions hold ramifications to the ecosystem as they alter the preexisting ground, flora, and fauna. Iceland's government passed a Law on Nature Protection as late as 2013, and the ruling was met with opposition.¹⁵ As illustrated by the narrative of Erlingsson's "Woman at War" film, the natural environment is a contested entity for the country, oscillating between being regarded as valuable by itself, and an industrial asset. Dedicating expanses of land to protect environmental quality may arguably be maintained by the presence of nature-centric tourism activities.¹⁶ In 2011 the establishment of the Tourist Site Protection Fund¹⁷, hosted at and serviced by the Icelandic service board, has led to substantial funding increases for improvements in popular tourist attractions and national parks.

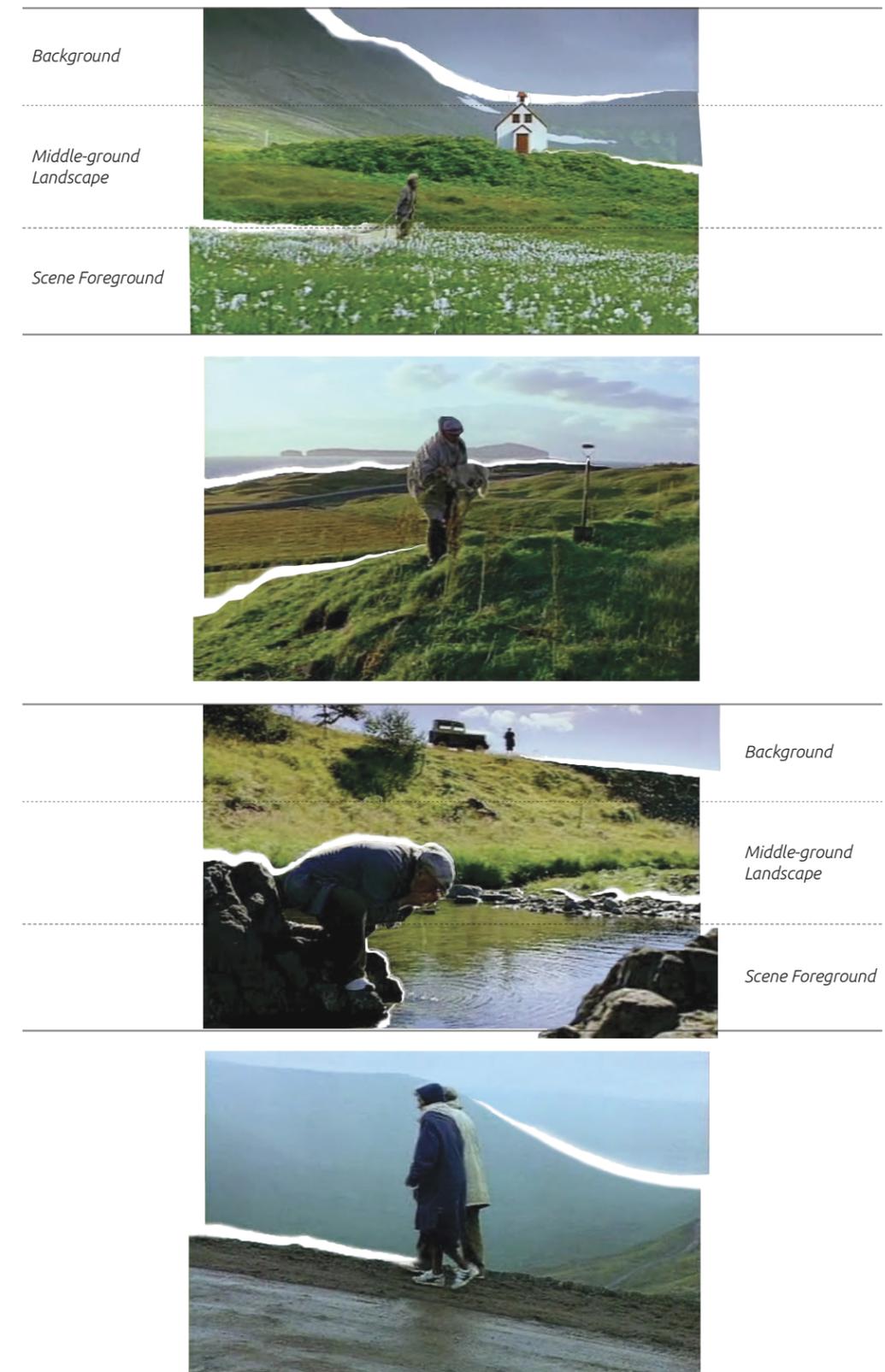


Fig. 16 Children of Nature (1991) Landscape Narrative Collage

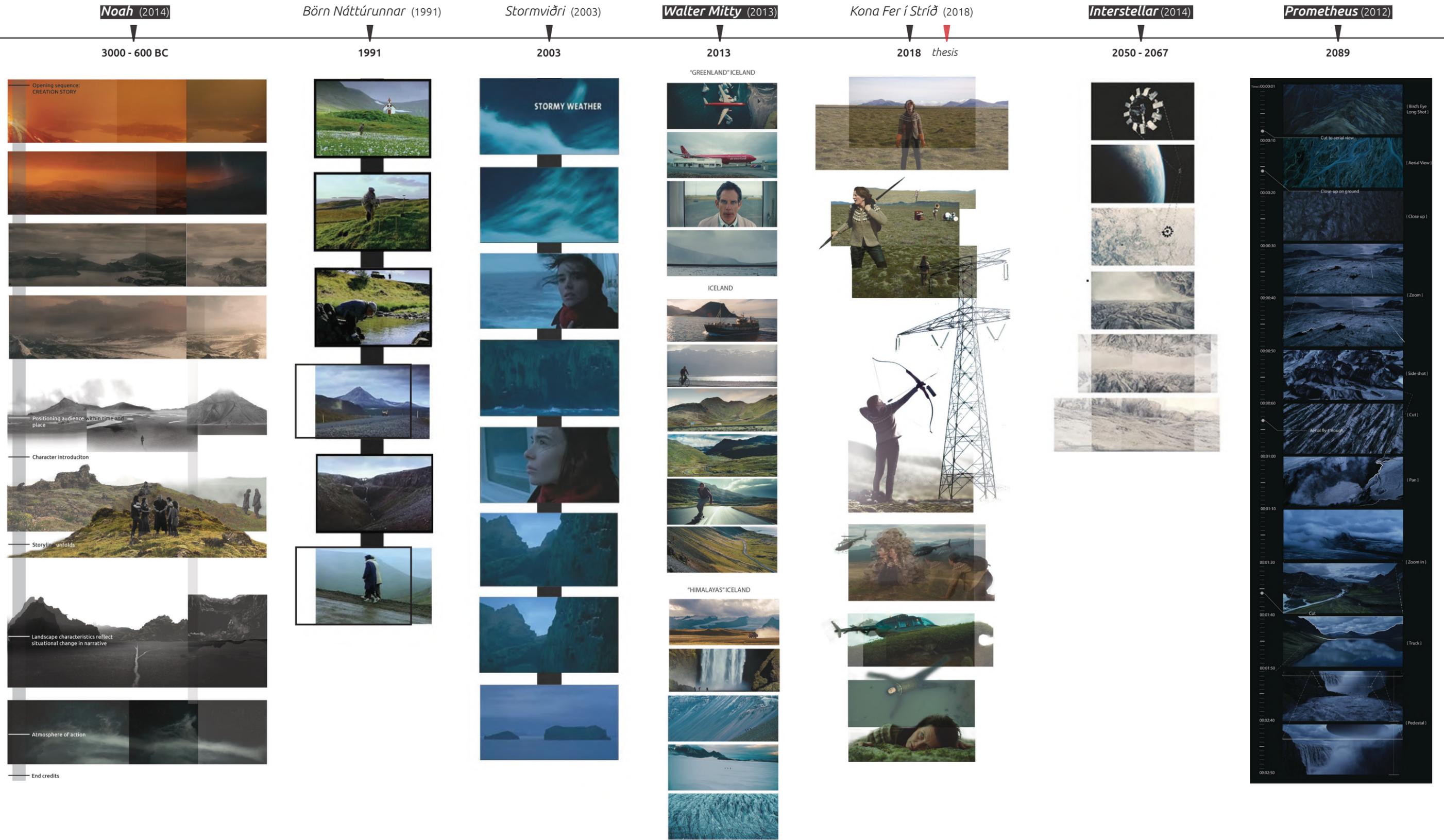


Fig. 17 Comparative Timeline of Landscape Sequences in Film





page 25 **Fig. 18** *Noah* (2014) Landscape Narrative [fragment]
 page 26 **Fig. 19** *Prometheus* (2012) Landscape Sequence [fragment]

left **Fig. 20** *Woman at War* (2018) Landscape Narrative Sequence

Endnotes

- 1 "Marshal McLuhan", *The Canadian Encyclopedia*, <https://www.thecanadianencyclopedia.ca/en/article/herbert-marshall-mcluhan>.
- 2 Guy Debord, *Society of Spectacle*, 64.
- 3 Nam June Paik Biography, theartstory.org/artist/paik-nam-june/.
- 4 Urry and Larsen, *The Tourist Gaze 3.0*, 180.
- 5 Emily Cocco, "A Reflection on Bill Viola's Moving Stillness," *Art Zealous*, March 1, 2018, <https://artzealous.com/a-reflection-on-bill-violas-moving-stillness/>.
- 6 Darragh O'Brien, "Site Writings: The Veiling (1995)", *Evidence Based Design journal*, <http://ebdjournal.com/blog/general-design/site-writings-the-veiling-1995>.
- 7 Rodanthi Tzanelli, "The Cinematic Tourist: Explorations in Globalization, Culture, and Resistance," 5.
- 8 *Noah* (2014), IMDB, <https://www.imdb.com/title/tt1959490/>.
- 9 *Interstellar* (2014), IMDB, https://www.imdb.com/title/tt0816692/?ref_=nv_sr_srsq_0.
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- 15 Althingi, Law on nature protection (Lög um náttúruvernd), http://www.Althingi.is/pdf/Althing2011_enska.pdf
- 16 Ralf C. Buckley, "Tourism in the Most Fragile Environments".
- 17 Icelandic Tourist Board, <https://www.ferdamalastofa.is/en/quality-and-environment/the-tourist-site-protection-fund>.

Site Visit: Volunteering for Iceland with SEEDS

4.1 *Travel Impressions*

In January 2020 I participated in a volunteer workshop in Reykjavik, Iceland. The program is operated by SEEDS (“SEE beyond borders”), an Icelandic non-governmental, non-profit organization that promotes environmentally conscious travel and intercultural exchange. As part of SEEDS’ mandate “...volunteers focus on current environmental and sustainability issues through a selection of workshops, discussions, and visits facilitated by SEEDS coordinators. [Volunteers] may also get the chance to visit local projects focused on environment and conservation.”¹ The visit provided the opportunity to gauge the scale and scope of environmental operations in Iceland today, and created chances to experience the landmarks of nature and geology coveted by Icelanders and visitors in-situ.

The volunteering work-camp began by gathering participants and their luggage in the NGO’s office located downtown Reykjavik. We were introduced and taken to our accommodations in the organizations’ vans bearing license plates SEEDS1 and SEEDS2. My group of ten participants included two camp leaders who are long-term volunteers with the organization. A home-cooked dinner in the house by the Botanical Garden marked the start of 12 days of excursions, photography sessions, and environmental workshops. SEEDS works with multiple local organizations, ranging from environmental conservation to farmers and small businesses. SEEDS’ work-camps in the Winter may have limited activities due to weather, daylight, and cost constraints. While in the summer months volunteers can be placed in remote locations and work on environmental assignments such as tree planting or path restoration, access to such areas in the winter is often limited with dangerous ground cover conditions, short days, and required workload. However, the long hours of darkness during the winter in the sub-arctic parallels of Iceland offer opportunities for witnessing the Northern Lights, late sunrises and early sunsets with soft and low golden winter light, and seeing the unique landscape accented with snow.

Following the influx of foreign visitors over the past decade and the need to both highlight and protect sites of interest, travelling in Iceland today became a highly curated experience, with spots of interest carefully mapped out and marked. Access to the site of a waterfall, a volcano crater, or a glacial tongue is orchestrated through a particular series of roads, designated parking lots, footpaths, amenity booths, and carefully fenced-off

zones. Veering off designated paths of movement is often dangerous and illegal. As Icelandic rescue teams are called to help travellers left stranded in remote natural settings, getting the help of local guides who are familiar with the land is invaluable.

4.2 *Experiential Travel Timeline*

Travelling in the wintertime makes the presence of the ocean around the island especially poignant, with the heightened frequency of winds, storms, and weather fluctuations. The fast paced variation of weather and light conditions makes the experience of touring winter Iceland one formed out of serendipity. The magnificent waterfalls, craters, and shorelines offer vistas and viewpoints that are constantly different from one day to the next, one season to another. Highly visited natural sites made almost familiar to foreigners by advertisement, cinema, and the music industry will appear differently to the beholder from one visit to the next. The air of unexpected superposition of nature, weather, and views is perhaps best demonstrated by the phenomena of northern lights. Visitors travel from far away hoping to witness the colourful atmospheric Aurora Borealis, their anticipation left at the mercy of the phenomenon to appear, and the North Atlantic winds and clouds to leave it visible when it does. The following collages construct an experiential timeline of traveling to and within landmark sites of Icelandic landscape [fig. 21-24].

ROAD 1 - window view en-route

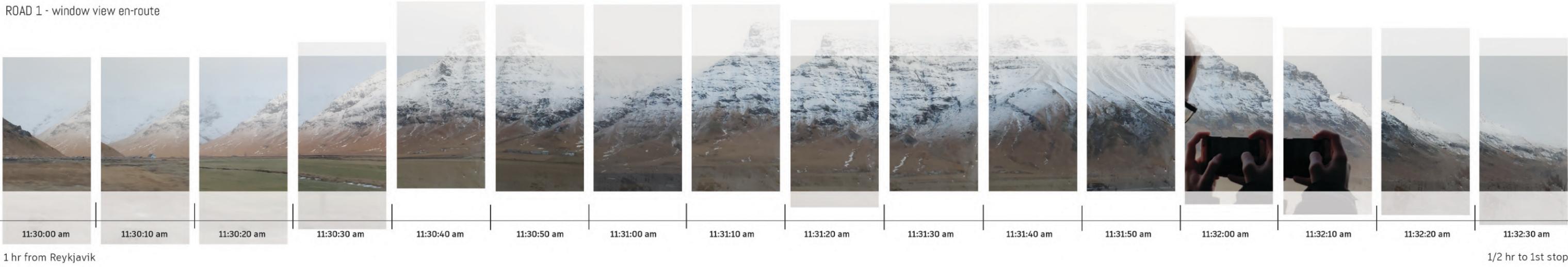


Fig. 21 Roadviews Collage

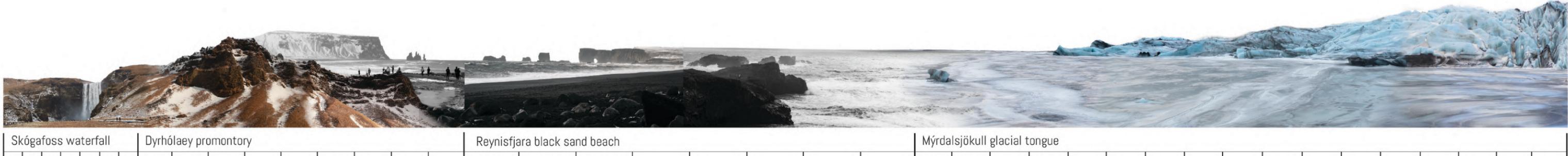


Fig. 22 Natural Landmarks Collage



Fig. 23 Skogafoss Waterfall Sequence



Fig. 24 Reynisfjara Shoreline Sequence

4.3 A Mediated Duration: Sequential Drawing

A commentary on a widespread human misconception towards nature as a static entity is vividly expressed in Bill Viola's installation "Mount Rainier," as mentioned previously in part three. Within the contemporary media laden socio-cultural realm, the screens of monitors and devices register, replicate, and disseminate a constant stream of images. In his work, artist and filmmaker Neil Beloufa often comments on the growing power of social media as a paradigm of communication and connection. Beloufa's art installations [fig. 25] construct spaces of fragmented projections and create overlapping experiences to portray the dominating presence of the digital realm within contemporary experience. For instance, in "Home is Wherever I'm With You" (2014) Beloufa visualizes the heightened multiplicity of daily life due to the layering of planned and impromptu stimuli in screens and devices.³

While the thesis looks at a response to the phenomena of media-driven travel interest in a natural landscape with Iceland as a case study, the design development process turned to the process of filmmaking as guidance. The authors of *Cinematics: Architectural Drawing Today*⁴ illustrated a mode of design development and representation in the digital age that turns to filming techniques of frame types and sequencing. The element of time is manifested in a sequential and durational manner both in film and architectural space. The evocation of space can be likened to an embodied sequence of time- and view-based experience captured in drawing.



Fig. 25 Neil Beloufa, Installation view of "Home is Wherever I'm With You," from *Counting on People* exhibition, Banff Centre, 2014



Fig. 26 Petra Cortright, Installation view of "borderline aurora borealis," Team Gallery, New York City, 2020

'New media' artist Petra Cortright's recent exhibit "Borderline Aurora Borealis" [fig. 26] assembles an installation of a digitally produced, layered landscape painting. It conveys "the distinctly digital navigation of an endlessly evolving visual terrain resistant to a singular final state or form," according to Team Gallery curators.⁵ Similar to the works of Viola and Beloufa, Cortright's installation piece speaks to the multiplicity and fragmentation of visual information that gets generated and made digitally available. These precedents underpin the paradigm in which the thesis operates: our engagement with nature has become highly mediated, whether through media content, drone footage, or personal instagram photography. New media infiltrates our relationship to and understanding of landscape, our perception of nature, and ecological change.

Applying the filmic drawing technique [fig. 27] tested by Brian McGrath and Jean Gardner in *Cinematic* to visualize a travel visit to a waterfall in Iceland turns from a time-based sequence of documentation in Part 4.2 [fig. 21-24] to a space-based one [fig. 28]. The drawing assemblage describes the layout site of Gullfoss, a highly visited waterfall in the South-West of Iceland. It highlights the curated path of viewpoints arranged for visitors by emulating the level of traveller immersion with the site along particular parts of the path. The experience of visiting the waterfall along a designated path of views is reminiscent of a film scene constructed from camera movement and selected frames.

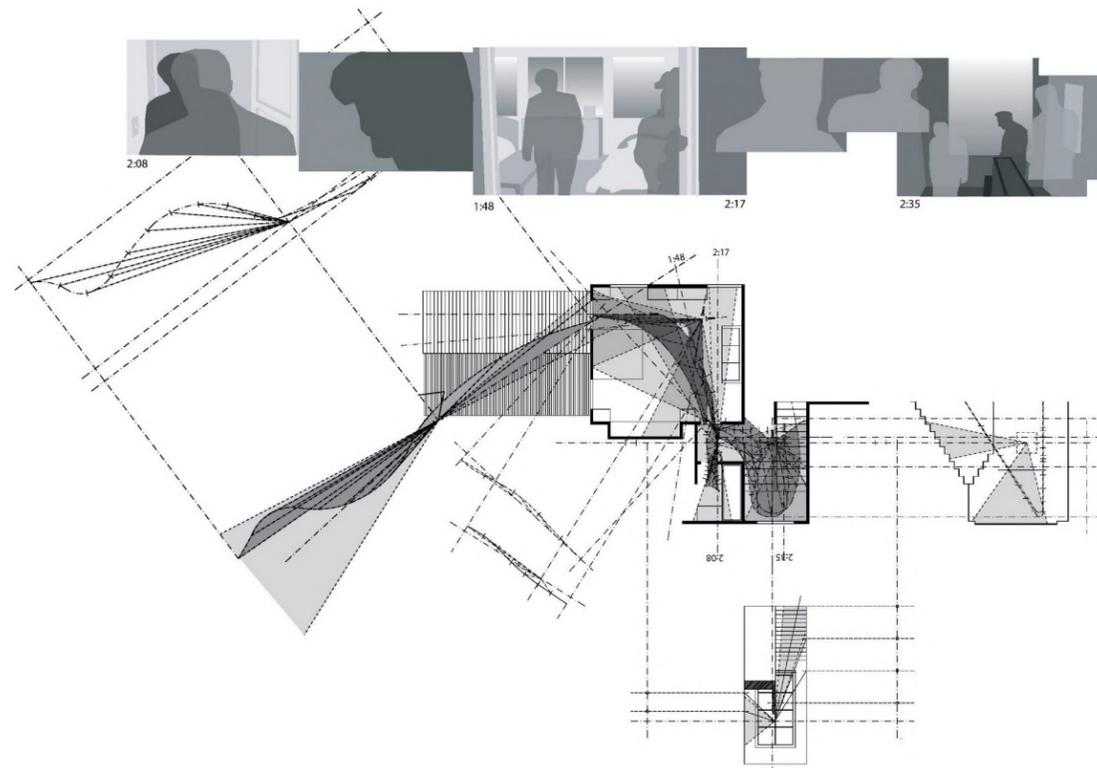


Fig. 27 Brian McGrath, *Example of Cinematic Drawing Technique*

Endnotes

- 1 SEEDS - Volunteering for Iceland, <https://www.seeds.is/seeds-objectives>.
- 2 Part Three of current document, 3.1 *Media-laden Modes of Experience*, page 18.
- 3 Neil Beloufa, in *Wall Street International Magazine*, 12 August 2014. <https://wsimag.com/art/10661-neil-beloufa>.
- 4 McGrath, Brian., and Jean. Gardner. *Cinematics: Architectural Drawing Today*. Chichester, England: Wiley-Academy, 2007.
- 5 Team Gallery, http://www.teamgal.com/exhibitions/425/borderline_aurora_borealis.

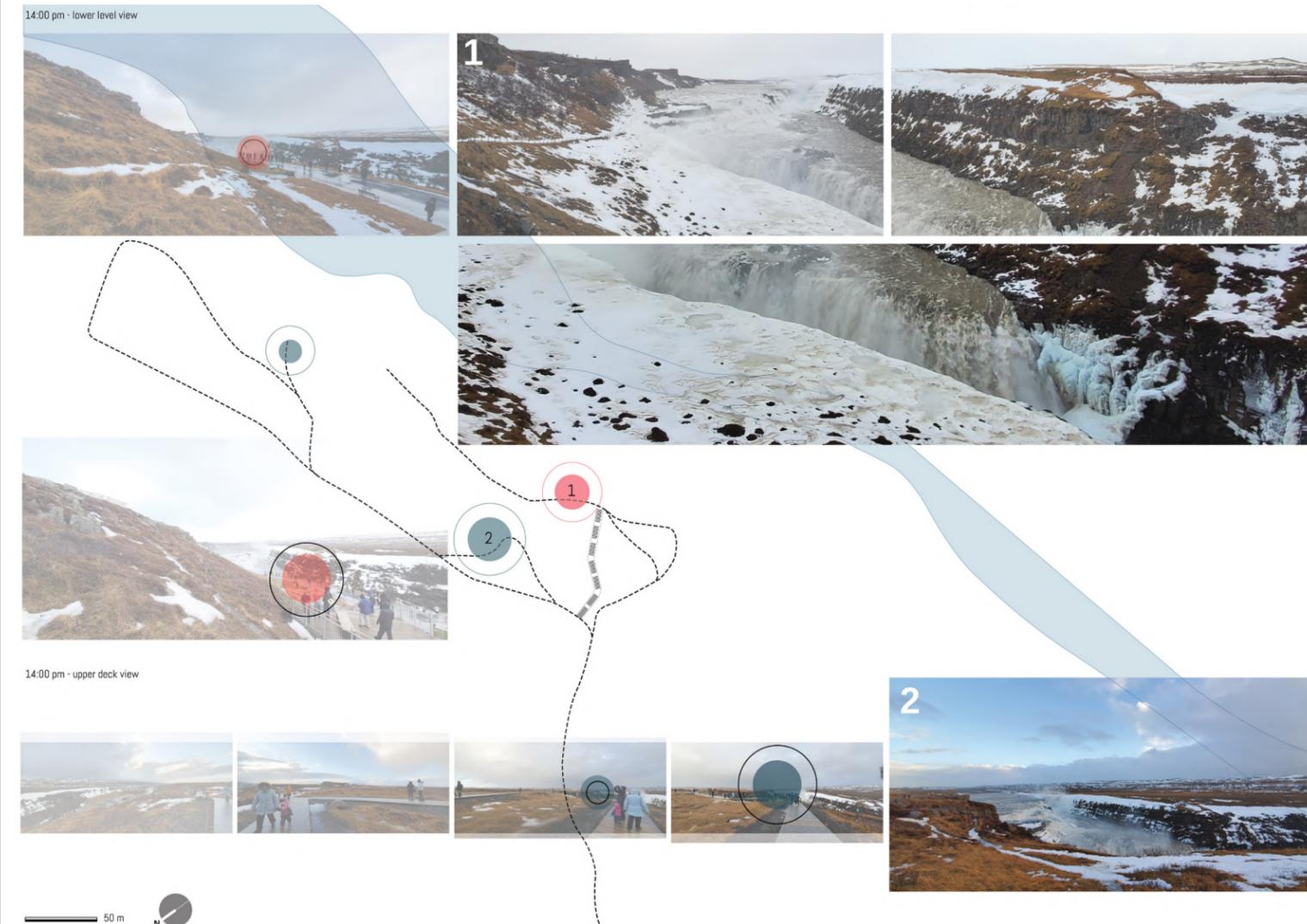


Fig. 28 *Diagram of Visiting Gullfoss Waterfall*. Photographic collage and plan-view overlay.

Projection: Enacting the Ecological Space

5.1 *Echoing the Volunteer Workcamp: Mediating Ecology*

In response to the growing enthusiasm for nature-focused travel and our increasingly digitized experience of 'natural wilderness', this thesis proposes a time-based learning and travel continuum for a *SEEDS volunteer workcamp*. The proposal outlines four main themes supported by designated spaces and installations:

- (1) "Geothermal Grounding" - introduction to Iceland's natural qualities and resources;
- (2) "Waterfall Stations" - spaces for storytelling at selected excursion sites;
- (3) "Glacial Markers" - installations marking the ongoing melting of glacial tongues;
- (4) "Future Forest" - field schools to learn about revegetation techniques and benefit; and
- (5) anticipated reflection and independent action following the conclusion of a workcamp program [pg. 41-44].

The first two types of sites and stations provide an overview of past conditions and practices with regards to nature. The "Glacial Marker" observation points focus on the visibility of climate change, while "Future Forest" learning experiences offer an ecological response to it.

The workshop echoes SEEDS' ethos of sharing local and international knowledge while experiencing unique local landscapes, and actively contributing to the protection of fragile ecosystems. In part, the proposal seeks to construct a space of reaction to the contested approaches to the highlands and natural areas, and to imagine a stage for encounter and exchange between local and transient perspectives on the landscape. A workshop setting for collaboration on travel photography and videography creates places to reflect on experiences out in the landscape, environmental changes, and action for the future. With emphasis on learning about environmental issues, opportunities, and practical ways of enacting positive impact, the volunteer workcamps operate in the modality of field schools. The proposed "field school stations" would mediate between the timescale of changes in the landscape and the volunteers' learning process during the camp. Volunteers would be the upkeepers of the installations in order to render the interaction with the sites through these stations available to the general public.

5.2 *Introducing the Northern Condition*

Tourism growth is changing urban and rural economies as tourism in Iceland has expanded away from the urban centre of Reykjavik to the rural settings of other regions. Balancing the influx of visitor numbers in the Capital and South regions of Iceland, many of SEEDS' volunteer camps take place in remote settings in the West Fjords, Eastern, and Northern regions of the island. Acting as a point of assembly and departure for workcamps, the proposed introductory stations will be learning spaces that focus on the Iceland's unique geological, natural, and energy conditions. Starting points in the Northern city of Akureyri would be added to the existing volunteer base-houses in Reykjavik, the capital city.

Despite the title of the second largest city in the country, Akureyri is significantly smaller than Reykjavik, with a population size ten times smaller. Akureyri has flourished on fishing since the 9th century, and is still surrounded by fishing towns, villages and farms today, with some operating museums on local heritage. Points of interest in Akureyri include the Botanical Gardens showcasing arctic flora, cultural establishments including themed cultural museums, art galleries, and a distinct central church. The urban fabric is similar to that of the capital city Reykjavik, albeit on a smaller scale. Akureyri's proximity to many areas of interest and tourist attractions in nature such as natural parks and historic sites makes it a "gateway" for visitors to the Northern region.¹

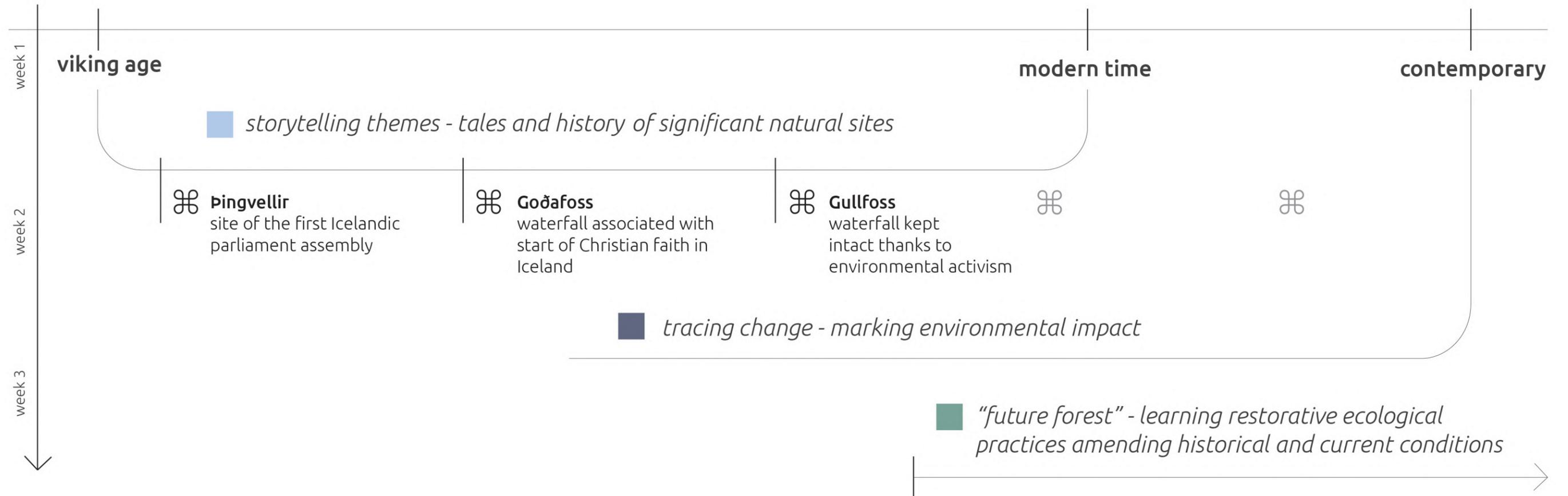
Nestled within the largest fjord in Northern Iceland, Eyjafjörður [fig. 31], Akureyri is reachable by various modes of transportation: vehicular, water, and air travel. Most recently, Iceland opened the Arctic Coast Way road along the Northern shorelines of the country to facilitate and encourage travel to historic, cultural, and natural landmarks.² Route 1, known as the Ring Road, circumvents the entire country and strategically runs through the centre of Akureyri as well. Located in the vicinity of ecological projects of conservation, reforestation, and revegetation in the remote region, Akureyri offers a strategic base point for workcamps.

Endnotes

- 1 "Visit Akureyri", <https://www.visitakureyri.is/en>
- 2 *Arctic Coast Way*, "North Iceland" Tourism, <https://www.northiceland.is/en/what-to-see-do/towns/akureyri>

PROPOSED WORKCAMP EXPERIENCE CONTINUUM

■ introduction to Iceland - volcanic activity and geothermal energy



PROPOSED FIELD-SCHOOL FRAMEWORK

Installations placed on-site in the vicinity of highly visited landscape sites in Iceland will act as field schools for grassroots organizations and partners working to protect and enhance the natural environment.



INTRO

GEOTHERMAL GROUNDING: Introduction to Iceland

Camp participants are introduced to Iceland in gathering points at Reykjavik and Akureyri. Familiarization will begin with learning about natural geothermal sites and the production of energy. One of the activities SEEDS volunteer camps partake in is trail maintenance in National Parks. While fixing paths and stairs, participants visit geothermal pools, streams, and scenic hikes.

PAST

WATERFALL STATIONS: Stories of Place

Storytelling stations positioned in the vicinity of Iceland's iconic waterfalls will focus on the unique story behind the etymology of each locale. Serving as meeting points to dry-off after a visit, these installations will be inscribed with information while maintaining viewpoints to the site.

CURRENT

GLACIAL DISAPPEARANCE MARKERS: Tracing Change

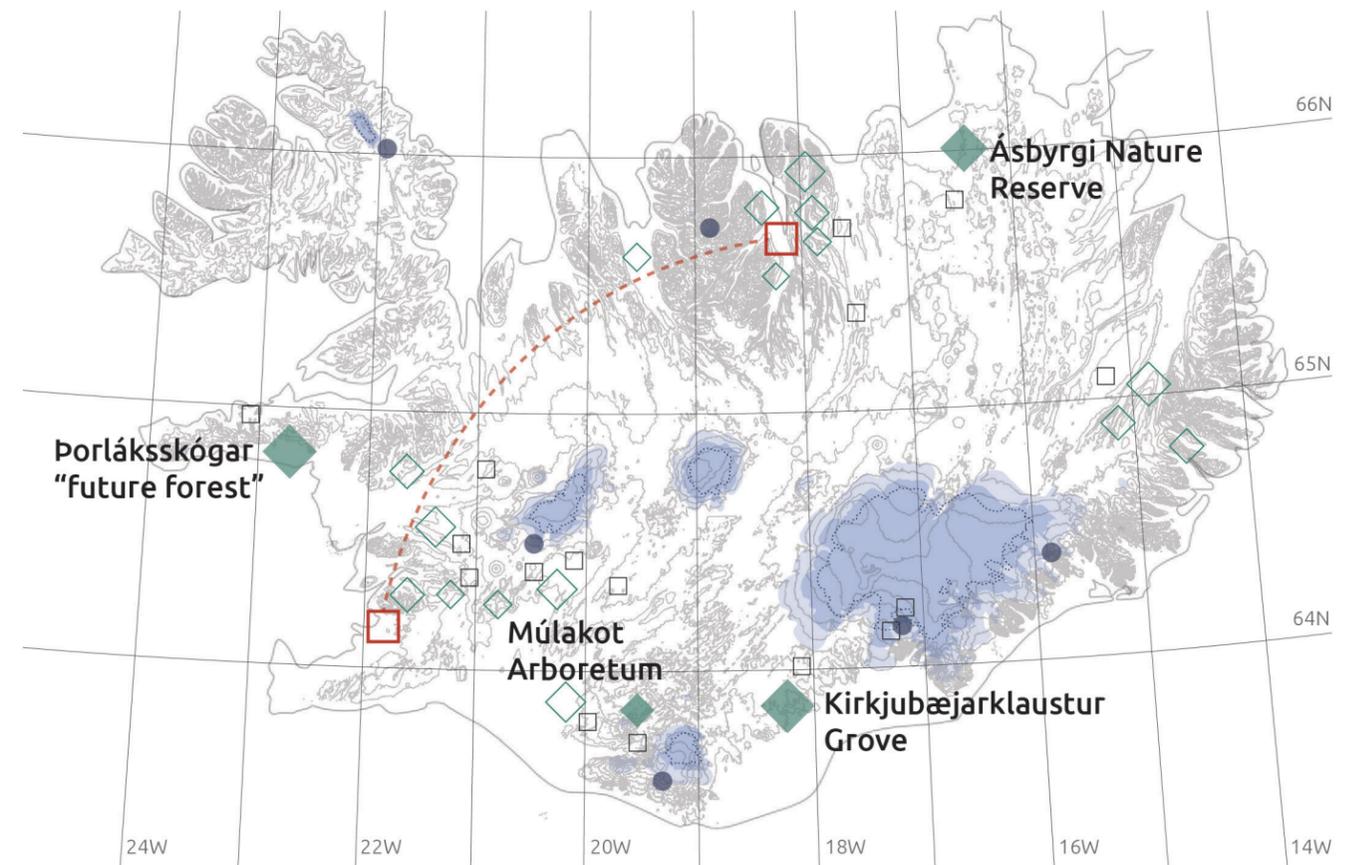
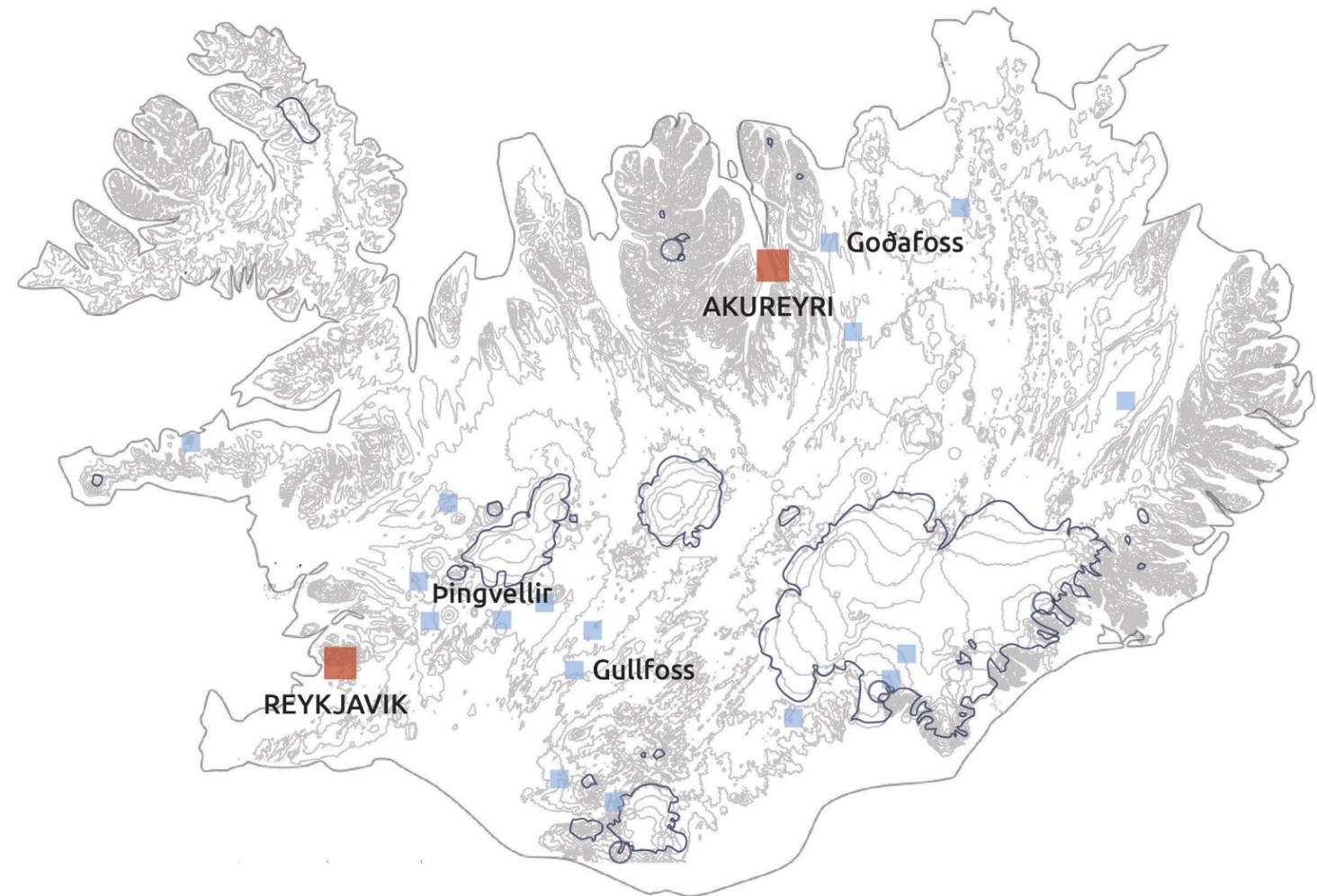
Interventions positioned to mark the receding glacial coverage would communicate visitors one of the more perceptible signs of climate change in the arctic. The physical markers will echo the vanishing dimensions of glacial tongues, thus translating the annual melting of ice into the immediacy of a traveler's visit.

FUTURE

FUTURE FOREST: Reforestation Field Schools

"Future Forest" stations would act as field-classrooms for ecological studies. Land restoration to counter erosion and enhance environmental quality and biodiversity through afforestation are ongoing in Iceland. SEEDS' volunteers workcamps take part in collaboration with local organizations such as the Icelandic Forest Service. The activities are learning opportunities for European and international volunteers about evolving efforts of ecological restoration and counteracting climate change.

POST-WORKCAMP REFLECTION, LEARNING, AND ACTION



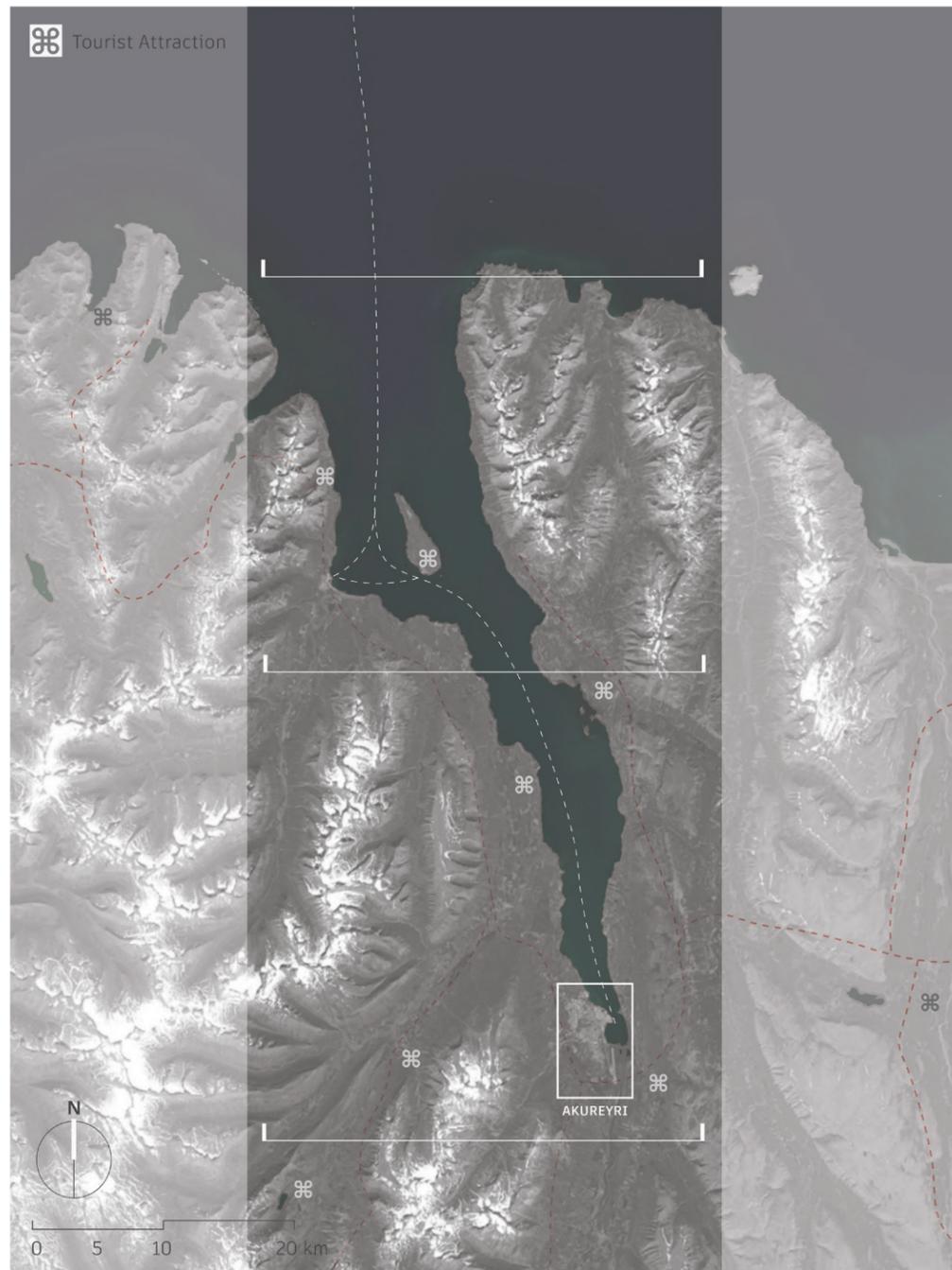


Fig. 31 Akureyri within Eyjafjörður Fjord in Northern Iceland

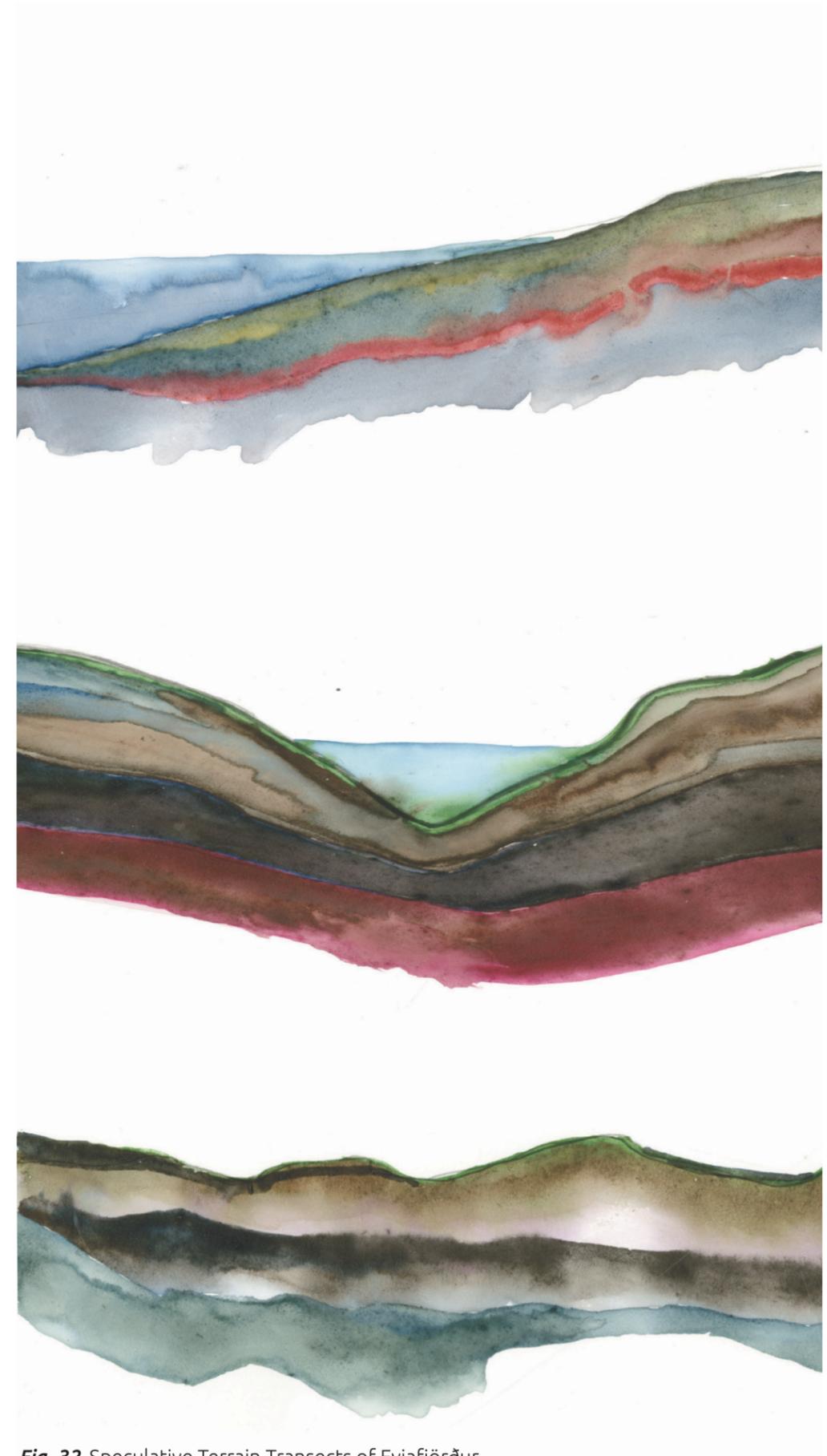


Fig. 32 Speculative Terrain Transects of Eyjafjörður

Site / AKUREYRI

CULTURE



Akureyrarkirkja [Church]



Akureyri Art Museum



Hof Cultural Centre

COMMERCE



Town Centre



Nyja Bíó [Cinema]



Borgar Bíó [Cinema]

GREEN SPACE



Botanical Garden



Kjarnaskógur Park

TRAVEL



Airport



Port of Akureyri



Hotel Akureyri



Fig. 33 Mapping the Town of Akureyri

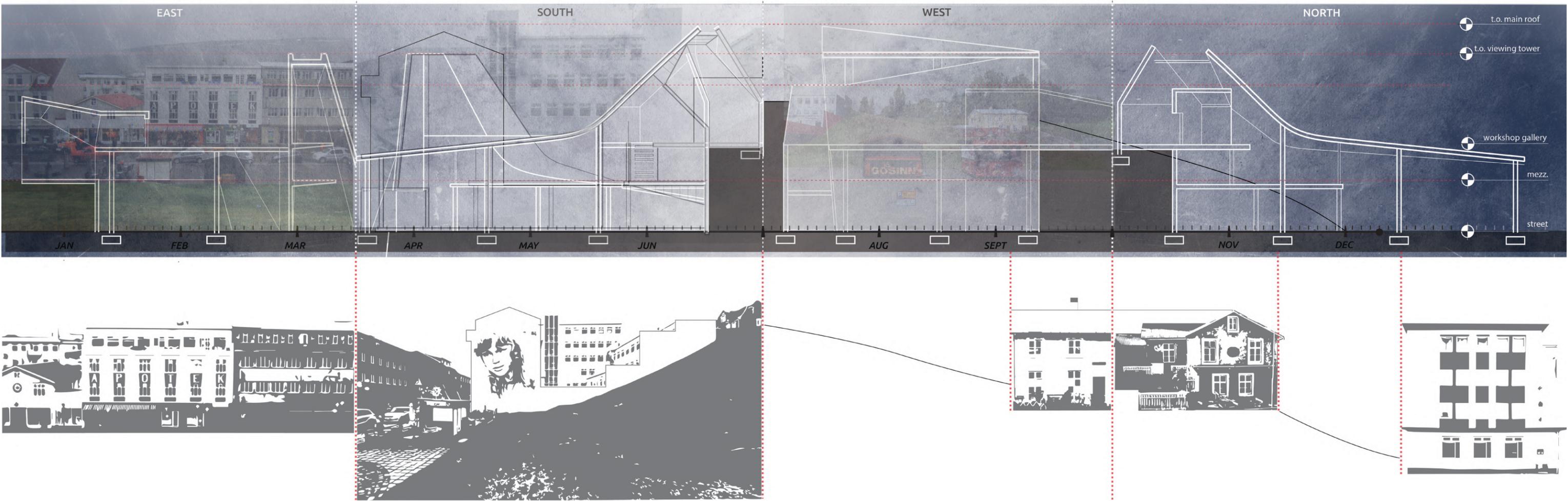
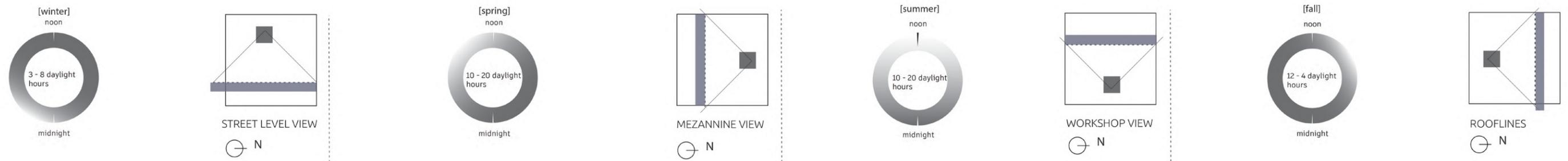
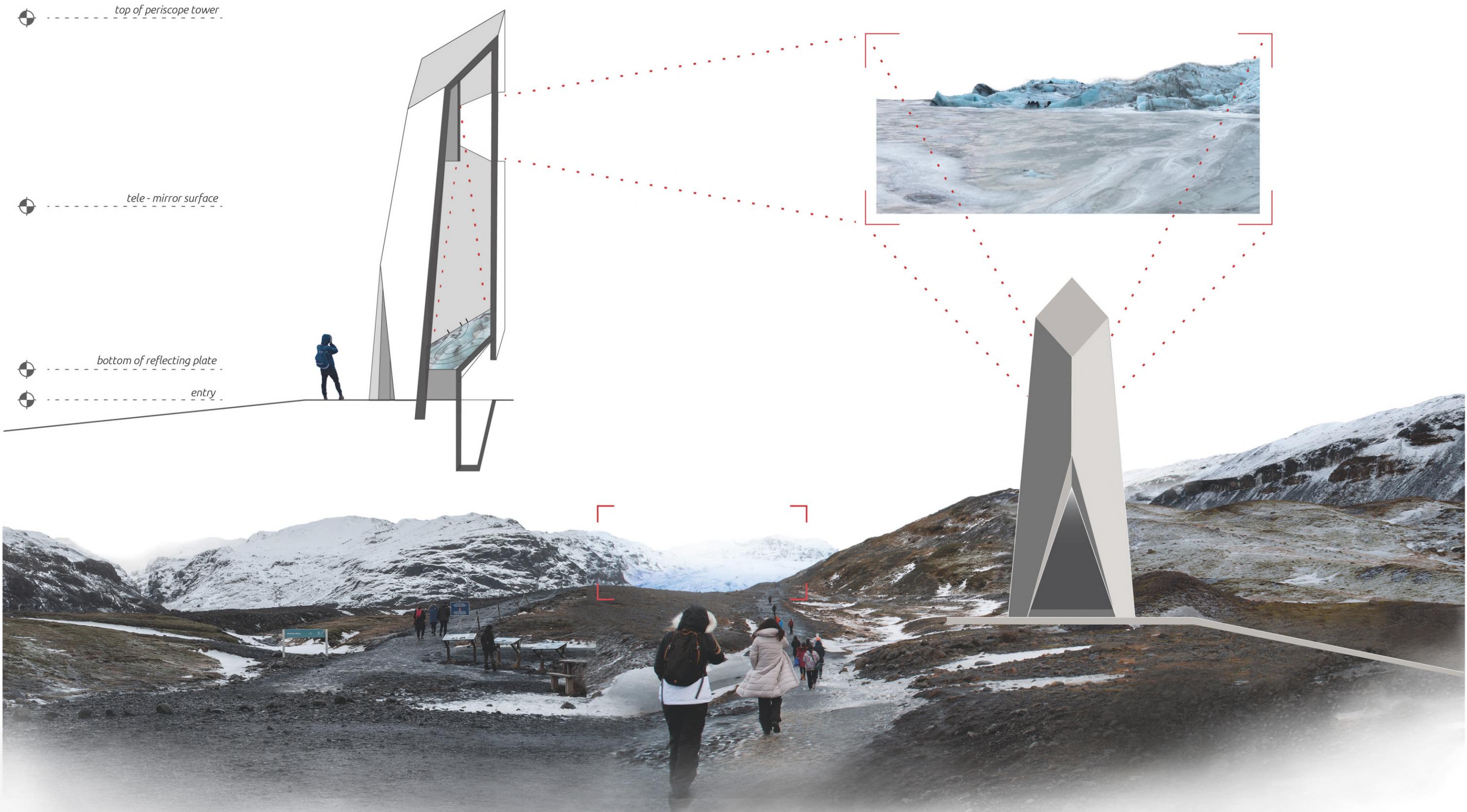


Fig. 34 Unfolded Building Section and Annual Daylight Timeline in Akureyri Centre



STORYTELLING - "Waterfall Stations"



TRACING CHANGE - "Glacial Markers"

A Reflection on Timeframes

i *The Scale of Time*

While started within the cultural and environmental specificity of Iceland's context, the thesis followed an inquiry into the visceral and virtual modes of our perception through an interpretation of landscape as a subject of interest. Following the correlations drawn between remote cinematic experiences to those of travel, the thesis methodology incorporated notions of time, sequence, and duration into the act of drawing and representation. In the landscape transect sequences, time intervals of centuries, decades, and years illustrate the human impact on land. The maps of the island embed geological, historical, and geographic timeframes: from the type of soil cover to the present legal extents of territory and land use. The array of foreign and domestic films surveyed for depiction of Icelandic landscapes were rooted in the respective time of production and the time period they are meant to evoke. The proposed programme evolved in response to current modes of ecological learning through travel. Sequential drawings pose time and its passage as a design-thinking tool. Over the course of research, several drawings have transformed into timelines arraying the duration of months, fractions of days, film scenes and elevations into graphically communicable sequences.

Throughout the thesis, drawings and collage imagery that uphold the stages of analysis, documentation, and projection are tied to various progressions of time. In this manner, the process of design hinges on the anticipation of change, similarly to drawings and projects in the field of landscape architecture which often engages processes of change at multiple timeframes. By visually incorporating the scale of temporality in the architectural process, drawings take note and direction from the passage of time in its various increments - spanning diurnal, seasonal, and longer processes. When investigating contexts and constructing drawings at different scales - including the scale of time - the space of a drawing then starts to capture physical movement and experiential procession through curated space.

ii *The Multiplicity of Duration*

The reality, experience, and notion of *passing time* are not singular parameters. *Duration* occurs through a multiplicity of conditions, including and not limited to, individual and collective spans of 'time', cyclical times of days and seasons, and the intangible temporalities of past memory and future projection. Within the timeframe of travel our attention to experience is heightened due to qualities of novelty and difference that are intrinsic to traveling. For travellers, the fleeting experience on-location remains imprinted within the limits of recorded material: photographs, videos, and mementos. In cinematography, selected fields of vision are captured and edited to communicate a fictional narrative, its sensorial atmosphere, and an illusion of temporal duration. With time, our recollection of a journey to, a motion picture set in, or any other experience of engagement with a place morphs into fragmented notions that create a sense of familiarity with a foreign place through personal perception. The visceral duration of exposure to the said place shifts into the realm of memory and imagination. At the scale of landscapes as physical systems, durations lie in processes of change of various length and scope: from the geologic layers, and ecosystemic cycles through to industrial human disruptions. The multitude of experience and perspectives of people engaging with land - by living within or passing through - occurs within durations with varying timeframes, and is part of the layered multiplicity of place, nature, and presumed "wilderness".

While overtourism - the overcrowding of the travel experience - is increasingly characterizing travel, sensory oversaturation is predominantly becoming part of contemporary experience perpetuated by the digital realm. Orthography has been accepted as a convention of architectural language. Time and change, within which architecture and experience operate, are not orthographic entities, and digital modalities are an opportunity to render architectural drawing less static and more akin to the multiplicity of lived experience. What does the immediacy and multiplicity of experience entail for the process of proposing and making places, events, and architecture? Perhaps in architectural production reconciling multiple points of view may be facilitated with new tools and strategies of representation and communication, and importantly, with time.

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Takk fyrir

Thank you

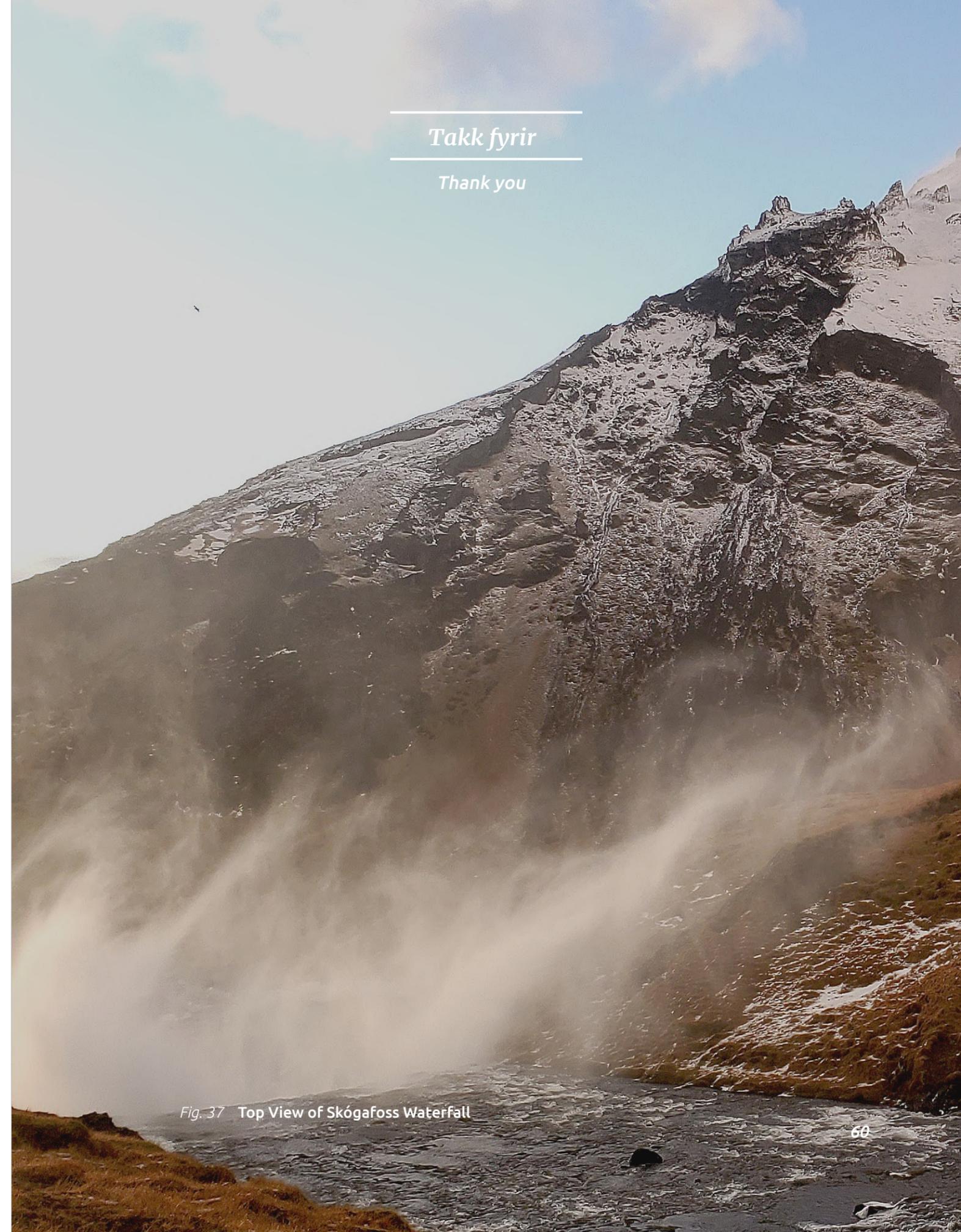


Fig. 37 Top View of Skógafoss Waterfall