



Identifying Compositional Techniques of Post-Rock Artists Through Sonic Dissection

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Introduction

The purpose of this research is to try and identify some of the most common compositional techniques used in post-rock, to formulate a list that could be used to guide the creation of music in the genre. The analysis carried out for this inquiry involved listening to and determining many compositional choices made by the artists for each track. These were track length, tempo, time signature, key/tonality, instrumentation, effects, structure and dynamics. All data except for the dynamics have been collated into the tables in appendix 2. To illustrate the dynamics, waveforms of each track have been included in appendix 3. The bullet point lists in chapters 2-5 are summarisations of the data collected in the tables relevant to that album.

With regard to selecting four albums to be dissected for this research, it was important to ensure that the choices were not purely subjective, especially with a genre so divisive as post-rock. To achieve this, an internet search was carried out for “top-10” type lists of the best post-rock albums. The top eight search results of these were collated into a table (see Appendix 1). While these lists are all independently subjective there were some patterns that indicated consensus about artists which could be considered typically post-rock, which made a solid basis for the choices. Across these eight top 10 lists, Godspeed you! Black Emperor appeared nine times, Sigur Rós seven times, Slint, Mogwai and Tortoise each appeared six times, with Bark Psychosis and Talk Talk appearing five times.

Bark Psychosis’ *Hex* was an obvious choice for this inquiry because it was the catalyst that caused the term post-rock to become a label.

Godspeed You! Black Emperor’s *Lift Yr. Skinny Fists Like Antennas to Heaven*, was chosen because it is widely considered to be the epitome of Post-Rock.

Having one album from 1994 when the term Post-Rock entered the popular vocabulary (*Hex*) and one from 2000 when it had established itself as a genre (*Lift Yr. Skinny Fists Like Antennas to Heaven*), two further albums from the intervening period were selected to see if they would offer any insight into the development of the genre. These are Mogwai’s 1997 album *Young Team* and Sigur Rós’ *Agaetis Byrjun* from 1999

Chapter 1: What is Post-Rock?

A musical genre can be broadly defined as a label applied to any musical work, based on its stylistic elements and in some cases, socio-historical context. Typically, music belonging to a specific genre will share stylistic elements such as instrumentation, harmonic and melodic content, and rhythm with other music from that genre. Music genre definitions are also subjective, in so much as different people may frame the same piece of music differently, based on their personal experiences. It should also be noted that boundaries between musical genres are not clearly defined; one piece of music may fairly be considered part of two or more different genres. The difficulty in defining musical genre should be acknowledged prior to answering the question: “What is Post-Rock?”. Playing a random sample of albums that are widely considered to be “Post-Rock” from the 30-year period the genre has existed, may leave the listener wondering whether these albums could be considered part of the same genre. Certainly, Slint’s debut *Spiderland* – which retrospectively, is widely regarded as being one of the earliest Post-Rock albums - shares more in common with the post-hardcore bands of the same era than it does with Post-Rock mainstays Godspeed You! Black Emperor or Sigur Rós.

As the name “Post-Rock” suggests, the genre is something that follows on from “rock”, not only chronologically but as an evolution of rock and a reaction to what many artists felt were tired clichés in the song-writing style. While it features many identifiable elements of rock music in respect of instrumentation, such as guitars, bass, drums and keyboards, there are also fundamental differences between the two genres. For instance, rather than catchy riffs and grooves in 4/4, all wrapped up in neat three to four minute songs, the Post-Rock listener can expect drones and long, slow crescendos or angular atonal patterns in constantly shifting time signatures, creating visceral textures over sprawling soundscapes, many of which will have play times in to double digits. Simon Reynolds, a music journalist, is credited with coining the term “Post-Rock” in a 1994 review of Bark Psychosis’ *Hex*. In that same review he describes the bands working in and around the emerging scene:

“Call them Avant-rock or art-pop, but they're all children of Eno, in that they use the studio to create a "fictional acoustic space", rather than simulate the experience of a live band. Increasingly, their music is based not around riffs and choruses, but layers and loops (these days, executed with samplers and sequencers as opposed to tape and scissors); this 'rock' is always on the verge of deliquescing into pure ambience.”

(Reynolds 1994)

The term ‘post-rock’ seems to exist primarily as a convenient label for music journalists and fans to refer to and discuss music within the genre. Interestingly, post-rock artists tend to reject the ‘post-rock’ label. This could be because post-rock music came about from a desire to do something different that does not fit within conventional rock genre boundaries. Chuter refers to this in *Storm, Static, Sleep: A pathway through post-rock* when he suggests that post-rock artists are seeking to transcend “some strict dimensional limits imposed upon the soundscape of rock” (2015, p.141)

The fact that post-rock musicians sought to subvert music that had come before led to an incredibly wide variety of music that now comes under the ‘post-rock’ umbrella. The diversity of sound resulting from this deliberate subversion makes it difficult to define the boundaries of the post-rock genre. However, all the albums discussed below are considered to be Post-rock, and so by analyzing the compositional techniques used we should be able to identify the common factors that unite these very different albums.

Chapter 2: Bark Psychosis – *Hex*

In 1994 the word “rock” meant different things to different people. Having started life as rock and roll and undertaken many variations over the years since, it had lost most of its meaning. Judging by the charts of the time, its most popular form in 1994 was soft rock, with artists like Bryan Adams, Bon Jovi, And Wet Wet Wet, all ranking highly in the charts. 1994 was the year that Wet Wet Wet’s cover of *Love is all around* spent 15 weeks at number one in the UK. Of course, outside of the mainstream charts other forms of rock were hugely popular too. The grunge movement had reached a climactic peak with Kurt Cobain of Nirvana’s death and more traditional rock bands like Guns n Roses were still enjoying success. In the UK, bands like Blur and Oasis were ushering in a new era for British rock groups, as brit-pop was set to dominate the rest of the decade.

But all the artists mentioned above, while having many different sounds that earned them places in different sub-genres, all used the tried and tested rock blueprint. They were bands with guitars, bass, drums, vocals and keyboards. They focused on recordings that could be played live as easily as they could be played in the studio and they all used the accepted AB (or Verse/Chorus) or ABC (verse/chorus/bridge) song structure; and there’s a good chance they featured a guitar solo in there too. The post-rock movement would seek to break that mold, and *Hex* was no exception.

The key features of *Hex* identified during data collection (see appendix 2.1) are as follows:

- The album has 7 tracks
- Track lengths range from 5 minutes to almost 10 minutes
- Album’s total running time: 51 minutes
- Average track length: 7 minutes
- Almost all the tracks are of a moderate tempo ranging from 73 to 110 bpm, with one fast one at 135bpm
- While a most of the tracks are 4/4, there are instances of time signatures changing during a song and there are also several instances of polymeter being used.
- All songs have a standard minor or major tonality, with minor being the most prevalent.
- Instrumentation: vocals, drums, percussion, piano, guitar, bass, synthesizers, melodica, trumpet, flute, violin, viola, cello, vibraphone, glockenspiel.
- Effects used: reverb, tremolo, delay, overdrive, distortion and chorus
- All but one track has a sung vocal part
- Song form is used predominantly, with some through composition

The average length of track on this album is over 7 minutes, whereas conventional track length in the rock genre is usually somewhere between the 2 and 4-minute mark. As a result of this longer track length, *Hex* has fewer tracks than you would expect from a typical rock album, which would

have between 10 and 15 tracks. Despite only having 7 tracks the albums total running time is over 50 minutes which is longer than many rock albums. The exception to this in the overall rock genre would be prog rock, which is just as likely to have longer individual tracks and fewer tracks in total.

All the songs on *Hex* have a slow to moderate tempo; while this is not unusual in the rock genre, moderate to fast tempos are more common. In the post-rock albums analysed during inquiry, slow to moderate tempos appear to be typical as opposed to an exception. In rock music, the use of 4/4 is commonplace, with occasional use of 6/8 or 3/4. *Bark Psychosis* take a more experimental approach to their use of time signatures, often playing with counterpoint, polyrhythm and polymeter. This confuses the ear, making it harder to identify a definite time signature. An example of this can be seen in 'Absent friend'.

The tracks on *Hex* make use of traditional song form but not in a conventional way. Some of the tracks on the album are through composed; they have a fluidity to them, never going back to a section for the sake of repetition. This often has the effect of causing the listener to lose track of the song as a whole, encouraging greater appreciation for the sounds they are hearing at any one time. This contrasts with conventional rock music which always follows verse/chorus/bridge song form.

A noticeable way in which this album differs from conventional rock music is the fact that it lacks any instrumental solos, such as guitar solos. Instead, the focus always remains on the arrangement as a whole. Another key observation that sets *Hex* apart from other rock albums of its time would be the inclusion of other stylistic elements, such as jazz, ambient and dub. Some parts also bear some resemblance to trip-hop, another genre that was developing at the time; this can be seen in "Big Shot".

As you would expect, *Hex* has some features which help to identify it as a form of rock music. The instrumentation – for example – is typical of what you would expect from rock. All but one of the tracks on the album have sung lyrics, which is also a common feature of rock. This feature is something less commonly observed in later post-rock albums, as the sub-genre evolves and moves further away from its rock roots.

'Fingerspit' is a track on this album which is strongly indicative of what post-rock will become. It has a big sense of space, seemingly disparate music phrases, large and sudden dynamic jumps and crescendos. In parts, this track has so much disparity between the instruments, in every respect, that it hardly manages to maintain a sense of coherency at all.

A key feature of post-rock is that it often creates a sense of being in a particular space, an effect that is achieved through various techniques. In the case of *Hex*, the use of natural spatial reverb creates this effect, as the whole album was recorded in a church rather than a studio.

In the present day, Post-Rock is a widely accepted genre that people have their own preconceptions about. From this viewpoint, it might be hard to see how *Hex* fits into that. In contrast to what we now expect from post-rock, there are no drones or regular, obvious dynamic shifts; plus, there are vocals that provide a focal point. However, we must keep in mind that current views on what 'post-rock is' are based on a retrospective view of the genre as a whole. In listening to *Hex*, one can develop a better understanding of post-rock's origins. When this album was released, post-rock was not a genre but rather a way for others to describe the musician's approach to songwriting. It would be a couple of years later with the release of Mogwai's *Young Team*, that we start to see some of the accepted traits of Post-rock emerge.

Chapter 3: Mogwai – *Young Team*

By 1997, the landscape of the British music industry had changed considerably, with Brit Pop nearing its peak in terms of popularity. In releasing *Young Team*, Mogwai appeared to be purposely doing something different to what other bands were doing at the time; they rejected the popular sound of the Brit Pop era, instead creating music more akin to the American post-hardcore bands of the late 80s and early 90s, such as Slint and Fugazi. In fact, Mogwai's sound has been said to sit somewhere between that of Slint, My Bloody Valentine and The God Machine (Chuter, 2015. p127).

The key features of *Young Team* identified during data collection (see appendix 2.2) are as follows:

- The album has 10 tracks
- Track lengths range from 1.5 minutes to over 17 minutes
- Album's total running time: 1 hour 4 minutes
- Average track length: 6.5 minutes
- Almost all the tracks are of a moderate tempo, from around 70 to 110 bpm, with a couple of fast ones at 130bpm
- All but one of the tracks are 4/4, with the exception being in 6/8
- All songs have a standard minor or major tonality, roughly an equal split. One track suggests altered Dorian mode
- Instrumentation: vocals, drums, guitar, bass, piano, synthesizers, glockenspiel, flute
- Effects used: reverb, tremolo, delay and distortion.
- Nearly all instrumental. One track with spoken word and one track with part spoken word, part sung lyrics.
- Various structural conventions used

In *Young Team*, we see the development of post-rock as largely instrumental music that focuses on the interplay between the instrumentation, with building crescendos which are apparent right from the first track 'Yes! I am a long way from home'.

The number of tracks on *Young Team* is closer to what you might expect from the rock genre, when compared to *Hex*. Whereas on *Hex* we see tracks ranging from 5 to 10 minutes long, here we see greater extremes in track length, with the shortest being less than 2 minutes and the longest being 17 minutes. The music on this album is in a far more standard 4/4 time signature, with just one exception which is in 6/8 – but that itself is not unusual within the rock genre. While they have followed common practices here, Mogwai have chosen to work outside rock genre conventions in other ways. For example, they worked with extreme dynamic range in *Young Team*, ranging from very quiet passages to very loud. This was sometimes done with a gradual crescendo such as in 'Tracy' (see Appendix 3.2.5) and at other times jumping from one to the other, as in 'Like Herod' (see Appendix 3.2.2).

“Their sound had a real affinity with the loud/quiet model put forward by Slint (in fact, the working title of ‘Like Herod’ was simply ‘Slint’), but looked to stretch it further and make the dynamic contrast more severe.” (Chuter 2015, p127)

Some tracks start off noticeably understated, such as ‘Like Herod’. This creates a sense of tension and anticipation that builds as the track develops. This then fades out to just guitars, as if it is going to falter, before everything comes back in at full volume.

This use of dynamics went on to become a key compositional technique in most post-rock music.

Young Team also differs from most British Music at the time, and indeed from *Hex*, in that most of the album is almost exclusively instrumental. ‘R U still into it’ is the one track on the album which is an exception to this, as it features Arab Strap’s Aiden Moffat on lead vocals. Aiden Moffat was a good choice of guest vocalist as his vocal style sits somewhere between singing and spoken word, which further sets the music aside from conventional rock.

Of all the albums considered during this inquiry, *Young Team* uses the smallest range of instruments, which are exactly what you would expect to hear from a four-piece rock band (i.e. guitars, bass, drums, piano). Despite working within these instrumental boundaries, Mogwai focused on using texture and dynamics to create interest within their music.

While we see the use of traditional song form with some through composition on *Hex*, *Young Team* moves further away from conventional song form. As shown on Appendix 2.2, they also made use of binary, monothematic and strophic forms, which would become common elements in later post-rock albums.

In ‘Katrien’, spoken word is used in a way that it is almost impossible to understand what is being said; it merely acts as a distraction, a murmuring which pulls the listeners ears away from the music. As the music swells in volume the words get consumed and integrated into the cacophony. This is another good example of the way that post-rock artists use homogeny to prevent any part of the arrangement becoming a focal point. Another example can be found in ‘Mogwai Fear Satan’, which has all the instruments playing as closely together as possible. This creates the effect of stripping away any individuality of the voices, to make a unified wall of sound which builds, crescendo-like, over the opening 3 minutes. When the band drop the volume down again, a delicate flute floats through and mingles with guitar feedback over the murmuring rhythm of the band. Rather than repeat the crescendo, the second change in dynamics is a colossal jump up into barely restrained, distorted guitars swirling around each other. This fades through a long decrescendo and the flute comes back though, sounding like it may well have been there the whole time.

The gentle piano in ‘With Portfolio’, if played by itself, would be nothing out of the ordinary. However, the focus of the track is rapidly drawn away from the piano to the cyclonic noise swirling away in the background, which starts off sounding like a race car zooming round a track, panning from left speaker to right, and back again. As it grows in intensity it starts to include other noises, each addition making it harder to identify any of the individual elements. Eventually, the piano gets drowned out entirely. This noise grows to an extreme level that has howling feedback and the panning gives it a dizzying effect. Then suddenly it stops, and the guitar riff from the next track starts up, without a moment to breathe. This is typical of the abstract listening experience that is common in post-rock music.

‘A Cheery Wave from Stranded Youngsters’ feels like an interlude, in that it is very minimalistic in terms of dynamics and movement. Piano and drums roll through a repetitive piece which feels like a short throwaway thing between the lengthy tracks either side of it. Though ‘A cheery wave...’ feels

short in comparison to other songs on the album, at 2 minutes and 18 seconds, it is close to the standard length of some conventional rock songs.

While *Hex* and *Young Team* are two very different albums, both challenge the accepted conventions of rock composition and arrangement, albeit in different ways. *Hex* used instrumentation and form typical of rock music at that time, adding musical complexity and influence from other genres, such as jazz and electronic music. In contrast to this, *Young Team* took the raw materials of accepted rock music but stripped it back, shedding vocals and multi-sectional structure in favour of predominantly instrumental and monothematic music. The album prioritises timbre and dynamic movement above all else; this approach would go on to become a key characteristic of post-rock music.

Chapter 4: Sigur Rós - *Ágætis Byrjun*

Ágætis Byrjun, Sigur Rós' second album, was released in Iceland in 1999, but would not get a UK release until 2000 and a US release until 2001. The Icelandic music scene at this time was a very different landscape to the British music scene. One of the most popular Icelandic music exports up until this time had been the avant-rock band Sugarcubes and subsequently, lead singer Björk's solo career, which was also known for having left-field tendencies (Raymer 2017). The leap from the experimental style of these artists to that of the post-rock of Sigur Rós is not as great as the leap between British rock and the albums by Bark Psychosis and Mogwai. This raises the question of whether Sigur Rós were merely following on from this tradition rather than actively trying to subvert conventional rock as we have seen with other post-rock artists.

The key features of *Ágætis Byrjun* identified during data collection (see appendix 2.3) are as follows:

- The album has 10 tracks
- Track lengths range from 1.5 minutes to 10 minutes
- Album's total running time: 1 hour 12 minutes
- Average track length around 7 minutes long
- All the tracks have a slow tempo between 45 – 80bpm
- All but one of the tracks are 4/4, with the exception being in 6/8
- All songs have a standard minor or major tonality, roughly an equal split, with one track that suggests a mixolydian mode
- Instrumentation: vocals, drums, guitar (including extended technique of using a bow), bass, piano, organ, synthesizers, glockenspiel, Trumpet, Trombone, harmonica, violin, viola, cello, double bass, pedal steel, flute, piccolo
- Effects used: reverb, tremolo, delay, overdrive, distortion, reversed playback and slowed playback
- All tracks except one have sung lyrics
- All songs use standard song form

Like the tracks on *Hex* and *Young Team*, the average song length on *Ágætis Byrjun* is much longer than that of conventional rock songs. The tempo throughout this album is notably slower than conventional rock and typical of the post-rock genre. Much like Mogwai, Sigur Rós have worked with conventional rock time signatures throughout *Ágætis Byrjun*. In fact, of all the albums considered in this inquiry *Ágætis Byrjun* is the hardest to distinguish from a conventional rock album, as most of the compositional and arrangement choices are typical of that genre. While there are some unusual aspects to this album, such as the extended technique of playing a guitar with a bow and use of prominent orchestral arrangements, these are features which would not be out of place in prog-rock. This raises the question of where the line sits between post-rock and prog-rock, as there are definite similarities between the two genres. It could be said that prog-rock seeks to push the boundaries of accepted conventions within the rock genre, whereas post-rock actively subverts those conventions. *Ágætis Byrjun* almost straddles the boundary between these two camps. While the use of extended technique does occur in prog-rock, it is usually employed as a singular feature for a solo or specific section. In contrast, the extended technique used in this album – and many other post-rock albums – is often the norm rather than the exception. In this respect, it subverts the typical use of guitar in conventional rock

Another feature on this album which positions it as post-rock is the use of ambient sounds linking some of the tracks, to create a continuous listening experience. Lack of distinct ‘start’ and ‘end’ points for songs is a common characteristic in post-rock albums.

“Ny Batteri” is arguably the most post-rock song on the album. The brass section in the intro sound like they are warming up rather than playing a composition, with long notes and the extended technique of blowing air through the instrument. This is then joined by some drones before the rest of the band start coming in. There is also a strong sense of space created between the low-end bass and Falsetto vocals. The drones continue throughout the song, weaving softly through the mid-range; this is then contrasted by the drums when they come in, big and punchy.

Two tracks on the album are made up almost entirely of extracts from other tracks. ‘Intro’ is a reversed sample of the album’s title track and the closing track ‘Avalon’ is a slowed down extract of the string arrangement from ‘Staralfur’. In this way, Sigur Rós reject the need to compose something new, instead choosing to heavily alter an existing composition to create a new piece.

Jón Þór "Jónsi" Birgisson’s use of the cello bow with the guitar is central to Sigur Rós’ sound on this album. This extended technique creates unusual and interesting timbres that give Sigur Rós a distinctive sound. He often plays parts which harmonise with his vocals, an example of which can be seen in the refrain of ‘Svefn-G-Englar’.

A common feature of post-rock is that musicians try to avoid assigning meaning to their songs, leaving them open to interpretation. Typically, this is achieved through using mainly instrumental music. Sigur Rós have taken this further by creating their own gibberish language called Vonlenska (which loosely translates to ‘Hopelandic’ in English); this is used in combination with Icelandic on their first two albums *Von* and *Ágætis Byrjun* and used exclusively on their third album, (*).* The title of this third album represents another such subversion, which is continued throughout the album, as none of the tracks have names.

Despite having standard song structures that align it with conventional rock thinking, *Ágætis Byrjun* projects a sense of cinematic grandeur not typical of rock, but of post-rock. This almost conjures images of Icelandic landscapes; “with Sigur Rós, this connection to environment feels inherent and crucial.” (Chuter 2015, p.197)

The typically post-rock conventions observed on *Ágætis Byrjun* are seen to an even greater degree on Godspeed You! Black Emperor's *Lift Yr. Skinny Fists Like Antennas to Heaven*.

Chapter 5: Godspeed You! Black Emperor - *Lift Yr. Skinny Fists Like Antennas to Heaven*

If there is one band that is well-known as being an obvious example of the post-rock genre, then it is Godspeed You! Black Emperor (GY!BE). Their second studio album *Lift Yr. Skinny Fists Like Antennas to Heaven*, was released in 2000, when post-rock had become an established genre. This album combines and accentuates elements of all the compositional techniques discussed thus far in this inquiry.

The key features of *Lift Yr. Skinny Fists Like Antennas to Heaven* identified during data collection (see appendix 2.4) are as follows:

- Album has 4 tracks
- Track lengths range from 19 minutes to 23 minutes
- Album's total running time is 1 hour 27 minutes
- Average track length: 22 Minutes
- Tempo is variable within tracks due to use of movements, most of the movements have a slow to moderate tempo between 45 – 110bpm, with the occasional accelerando briefly pushing them into a faster tempo
- Time signatures used: 3/4, 6/8 and 4/4
- All songs have a standard minor or major tonality.
- Instrumentation: Guitar (including use of ebow), bass, drums (including extended technique of bowed cymbals), piano, organ, synthesizers, glockenspiel, Trumpet, violin, viola, cello, double bass, field recordings
- Effects used: reverb, tremolo, delay, overdrive, distortion
- Mostly all instrumental except for one movement in one track and some recorded speech
- Movements are mostly monothematic or through composed, with some strophic form

Lift Yr. Skinny Fists Like Antennas to Heaven takes the concept of structure and plays with it more so than any of the other albums analysed during this inquiry. It only has four official tracks but within each of those tracks are unique sections that blend from one into the next, acting as movements within the larger piece. These smaller sections are named only in so much as that they are labelled in a piece of artwork on the interior sleeve of the album (see appendix 4); this artwork also gives an indication of the dynamic movement of the whole album. Typical of post-rock, each movement has been arbitrarily named; this somewhat diminishes their importance as individual tracks.

The unconventional structure of this album causes problems when it comes to determining how the data should be collected (i.e. should the data be grouped into four tracks or separated out into the individual sections of the track?). As the focus of this inquiry is to determine compositional techniques within post-rock, some assumptions must be made about the compositional process. Namely, about whether each of the four tracks were composed as a whole, or whether the individual sections were composed separately and then joined together. Though no suitable evidence has been found to conclusively answer this question, the assumption that the smaller sections were composed individually has been made because there are inconsistencies between the timing of some sections suggested in the aforementioned artwork, and the timings in the audio. This indicates that the smaller sections may have been edited together after the artwork was created.

Lift Yr. Skinny Fists Like Antennas to Heaven features field recording more so than any other album addressed in this inquiry. Field recording is featured on *Young Team*, though not nearly as prominently. On this album field recordings make up entire sections within the larger tracks, which makes them an integral part of the overall listening experience. The choice of field recordings, such as a recorded announcement from a supermarket and another of children playing, give this album a very urban feel. This reflects the tendency of post-rock artists to create a sense of 'place' with their music.

Like the other albums addressed during this inquiry, *Lift Yr. Skinny Fists Like Antennas to Heaven* frequently uses slow tempos. Often the speed will increase throughout the tracks alongside the dynamic build. An example of this can be seen on 'World Police and Friendly Fire'.

GY!BE step further away from the traditional rock band line-up too. On formation, GY!BE started out as a trio, but rapidly grew to become a much larger band with anywhere between 9 to 14 members at any one time. This line up includes two drummers and two bassists. (Constellation records [no date])

Like Sigor Ros' album, *Lift Yr. Skinny Fists Like Antennas to Heaven* regularly features extended technique. One example of this is the use of bowed cymbals which can be seen in Terrible Canyons of Static and The Buildings They are Sleeping Now. Another example is a theremin-like sound, which is likely produced playing a guitar with an Ebow and a slide. This technique is a hallmark of GY!BE's sound.

Quite often throughout this album the music will start off with a minor lamenting feel but modulate to a more positive feel towards the end. An example of this can be seen in the first section of the first track; it starts off with a solo melancholy guitar line, which is gradually joined by other instrumentation. These are mostly playing very similar parts, some of which are almost in a round style, blurring the start and end point of the phrase. With each repetition more is added or the existing parts change slightly; the music is in a constant state of flux, building and evolving with each bar. This eventually builds to a crescendo with triumphant trumpets and military style drums. This is very typical of GY!BE and indeed of many other post-rock artists.

"For us every tune started with the blues but pointed to heaven near the end, because how could you find heaven without acknowledging the current blues, right?"

(GY!BE as quoted by Costa 2012)

We have seen it already on Mogwai's *Young team*, although the instrumentation and diversity of timbres used here give it a grander sound than Mogwai's. This album, more so than any other featured in this inquiry, uses through composition or singular sectional form, such as monothematicism or strophic form. This distances the music from traditional rock music and gives it

that cinematic feel typical of many post-rock songs. It can clearly be seen from the waveforms in appendix 3.4 that the dynamic structure of the tracks on this album are far removed from what is typically observed in conventional rock.

Based on the observations discussed in this chapter, it could be said that *Lift Yr. Skinny Fists Like Antennas to Heaven* combines many subversions of traditional rock composition seen in previous chapters, to create a sound that is even further removed from conventional rock. It is perhaps unsurprising that GY!BE's work has come to be known as the most obvious example of post-rock music.

Conclusion

There are no hard and fast rules about what post rock should be. In fact, to try and pin down and work to set of rules would be distinctly un-post-rock. That said, there are elements that are common to much of what is considered to be post-rock and it is certainly possible to use some of these as a starting point when composing in this style. Below is a list of key elements that are present in some, if not all the albums analysed.

- Albums have a unified sense of "space" or theme
- Traditional song structures are largely avoided in favour of more unusual forms
- Strong emphasis on dynamics, textures and timbres
- Removal of meaning from song, reverting to music as an abstract form open to interpretation
- Use of rock instrumentation and effects
- Use of extended technique
- Use of field recordings/spoken word/interview or other "non-musical" elements
- Long track lengths
- Use of drones and homogenized sounds
- A tendency for the focus to remain on the arrangement as a whole
- The inclusion of stylistic elements from other genres
- Slow to moderate tempos
- Tracks seeming to 'blur' together with lack of distinct start and end points
- Experimenting with unusual time signatures and/or polyrhythm and polymeter

In chapter 2, we said of post-rock at the time of Hex's release that it "was not a genre but rather a way for others to describe the musician's approach to songwriting." The undefinable nature of post-rock is summed up perfectly by Jack Chuter, in *Storm, Static, Sleep*:

"Reynolds tells me that post-rock was coined to describe the "open-ended space of possibility", where artists were spilling beyond the boundaries of rock in many different

directions. There was an excitement around this 90's post-rock because it did not erect barricades around how instruments should be utilised. There were no check boxes for post-rock to tick. When Reynolds referred to using guitar, bass and drums for "non-rock purposes", he wasn't being deliberately vague. Post-rock defined itself by what it wasn't, and there were no other restrictions over what it could be." (Chuter, p71)

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Appendix 1: Top ten lists

Factmag (30) best post-rock albums 20/04/16	Liveabout.com Top 10 post-rock albums 23/05/19	Paste Magazine The 50 Best Post-Rock Albums 19/12/16	The Vinyl Factory The 20 best post-rock records ever made 13/01/15	Treblezine.com 10 Essential Post-Rock Albums 21/03/13	Diffuser.fm 10 best post-rock albums 28/07/13	Soundblab.com The Best Post-rock Albums and EPs of the 21st Century 10/07/19	Vinyl me, please. The 10 Best Post-rock Albums to Own on Vinyl. 19/04/16
Bark Psychosis - Hex	Slint - Spiderland	Tortoise - Millions Now Living Will Never Die	Tortoise - Millions Now Living Will Never Die	Slint - Spiderland	Godspeed You! Black Emperor - F#A#∞	Explosions in The Sky - The Earth Is Not A Cold Dead Place	Explosions in The Sky - The Earth Is Not A Cold Dead Place
Slint - Spiderland	Talk talk - Laughing Stock	Slint - Spiderland	Cul De Sac - China Gate	Talk Talk – Laughing Stock	Sigur Rós - Agaetis Byrjun	Godspeed You! Black Emperor - Lift Yr. Skinny fist Like Antennas	Sigur Rós - Agaetis Byrjun
Tortoise - Millions Now Living Will Never Die	Bark Psychosis - Hex	Battles - Mirrored	Pullman - Turnstyles and Junkpiles	Bark Psychosis - Hex	Talk Talk - Spirit of Eden	Gregor Samsa - 55:12	Pelican - The Fire in Our Throats Will Beckon the Thaw
Talk Talk - Laughing Stock	Tortoise - Millions Now Living Will Never Die	Mogwai - young Team	Bark Psychosis - Hex	Disco Inferno - D.I. Go Pop	Godspeed You! Black Emperor - Lift Yr. Skinny fist Like Antennas	Sigur Rós - ()	A Silver Mt. Zion - He Has Left Us but Shafts of Light Sometimes Grace the Corner of Our Rooms
Rodan - Rusty	Rachel's - The Sea and The Bells	Bark Psychosis - Hex	Slint - Spiderland	Swans - Soundtracks for The Blind	Sigur Rós - ()	Silent Whale Becomes a Dream - Canopy	Appleseed Cast - Low Level Owl
Mogwai - young Team	Aerial M - Aerial M	Godspeed You! Black Emperor - Lift Yr. Skinny fist Like Antennas	Mice Parade - Bem-Vinda	Tortoise - Millions Now Living Will Never Die	Mogwai - young Team	Red Sparrowes - At the Soundless Dawn	Godspeed You! Black Emperor - F#A#∞
Godspeed You! Black Emperor - F#A#∞	Mogwai - young Team	Califone - Roomsound	Do Make Say Think - Besides EP	Mogwai - young Team	Fuck Buttons - Tarot Spot	Hood - Cold House	Dirty Three - Whatever You Love, You Are
Labradford - Mi Media Naranja	Sigur Rós - Agaetis Byrjun	Seefeel - Quique	Fridge - Sevens and The Twelves	Dirty Three - Oceans Songs	The Besnard Lakes - Are the Dark Horse	Mogwai - Rave Tapes	Tortoise - TNT
Sigur Rós - Agaetis Byrjun	Godspeed You! Black Emperor - Lift Yr. Skinny fist Like Antennas	Jessamine - The Long Arm of Coincidence	Godspeed You! Black Emperor - F#A#∞	Godspeed You! Black Emperor - F#A#∞	Explosions in The Sky - The Earth Is Not A Cold Dead Place	Blueneck - Repetitions	Slint - Spiderland
Gastr Del Sol - Camofleur	Explosions in The Sky - All of A Sudden I Miss Everyone	Talk Talk - Laughing Stock	Rachel's - Selenography	Sigur Rós - Agaetis Byrjun	Gregor Samsa - 55:12	Saxon Shore - It Doesn't Matter	Stars of The Lid - The Ballasted Orchestra

Appendix 2: Data collection tables

2.1: Bark Psychosis – *Hex*

Track number	Track Name	Length	tempo	time signature	key/tonality	Instrumentation	Effects	vocals	form/structure
1.	The Loom	5:16	83	4/4	Am	Piano, strings, drums, synth, bass, vocals, percussion	reverb,	Sung lyrics	Through Composed
2.	A Street Scene	5:36	100 with rall	4/4	Bm	Guitar, Bass, drums, vocals, trumpet, synth, flute, glockenspiel	Reverb, tremolo, delay, Chorus, Distortion	Sung lyrics	Song form with extended outro section
3.	Absent Friend	8:20	110	4/4 With Polymeter in the last section	E	Piano, Guitar, Bass, Drums, Vocals, melodica, vibraphone	Reverb, Delay, tremolo, Chorus	sung lyrics	Song form
4.	Big Shot	5:21	90	4/4	F#m	Piano, Bass, vibraphone, vocals, synth, drums, percussion	Reverb, Delay, tremolo, Chorus	Sung lyrics	Song form
5.	Fingerspit	8:21	100	4/4	Em	Guitar, drums, Vocals, piano, bass	Reverb, Delay, tremolo, overdrive	Sung lyrics	Song form
6.	Eyes & Smiles	8:31	135	6/8, with 4/4 section and polymeter	Em	Drums, Guitar, Bass, Vocals, Trumpet	Reverb, Delay, tremolo, Chorus, overdrive	Sung lyrics	Through Composed
7.	Pendulum Man	9:54	73	4/4	C/D	Guitar, Synth, Bass, Piano	Reverb, Delay, Chorus	None	Through Composed

2.2: Mogwai – Young Team.

Track number	Track Name	Length	tempo	time signature	key/tonality	Instrumentation	Effects	vocals	form/structure
1	Yes! I Am a Long Way from Home	5:57	67	4/4	A	Bass, guitar, drums	Delay, reverb, Distortion	Recording of speech at beginning and end, end speech is reversed.	Song form
2	Like Herod	11:41	130	4/4	B Dorian b2	Bass, Guitars, drums	Reverb, Distortion, delay	None	ABABCDABDE
3	Katrien	5:24	130	4/4	Am	Bass, guitar drums	Tremolo, Reverb, distortion	Spoken word	Through composed
4	Radar Maker	1:35	96	4/4	D	Piano, synth, field recording	Reverb, Tremolo	None	Binary form
5	Tracy	7:19	70- 80	4/4	G	Bass, Synth, Drums, guitar, field recording	Reverb, Tremolo	recording of phone conversation.	Monothematic
6	Summer (Priority Version)	3:28	70	6/8	Bm	Guitar, drums, bass, glockenspiel, organ	Reverb, distortion	None	Song form
7	With Portfolio	3:10	105	4/4	F#	Piano, field recording	Reverb, delay	none	Strophic form
8	R U Still in 2 It	7:20	85	4/4	C	Guitar, drums, bass, Piano, synth	Reverb, delay, tremolo	Spoken word, sung vocals	Song form
9	A Cheery Wave from Stranded Youngsters	2:18	60	4/4	Em	Piano, Drums	Reverb	Count in	Binary form

10	Mogwai Fear Satan	16:19	110	4/4	E	Guitar, drums, bass, flute	Reverb, distortion	None	Monothematic
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2.3: Sigur Rós - *Ágætis Byrjun*

Track number	Track Name	Length	tempo	time signature	key/tonality	Intrumentation	Effects	vocals	form/structure
1	Intro	1:35	70	4/4	D	Piano, drums, Vocals	Reversed playback, Reverb	Sung lyrics	Brief reversed sample of Ágætis Byrjun
2	Svefn-G-Englar	10:04	60	4/4	E	Drums, Bass, Organ, Bowed guitar, Vocal, piano, glockenspiel	Delay, Reverb, Overdrive	Sung Lyrics	Song form
3	Staralfur	6:46	70	4/4	Eb	Piano, Strings, vocals, Guitar, drum, bass	Reverb, Delay	Sung lyrics	Song form
4	Flugufrelsarinn	7:48	65	4/4	Em	Organ, drums, bass, guitar, bowed guitar, Vocals	Reverb, delay	Sung Lyrics	Song form
5	Ny Batteri	8:11	75	4/4	Bm	Trumpets trombone, bass, synth, Organ, Guitar Vocal	Reverb, distortion	Sung Lyrics	Song form
6	Hjartað Hamast (Bamm Bamm Bamm)	7:10	75	4/4	Em	Organ, harmonica, Bass, bowed	Reverb, distortion, delay	Sung lyrics	Song form

						guitar, drums, strings			
7	Viðrar Vel Til Loftarasa	10:18	80	4/4	E Mixolydian	Piano, Bass, strings, pedal steel, vocals, drums, guitar	Reverb, delay, distortion	Sung Lyrics	Song form
8	Olsen Olsen	8:03	45	6/8	D	Vocals, drums, guitar, bass, flute, trumpet, trombone, strings, piano, field recording, Piccolo	Reverb, delay	Sung lyrics	Song form
9	Ágætis Byrjun	7:56	70	4/4	D	Acoustic guitar, Piano, drums, bass, electric piano, vocals	Reverb, delay	Sung lyrics	Song form
10	Avalon	4:04	60	4/4	Original key is Eb	Strings	Reverb, reduced playback speed	N/A	Slowed down recording of string parts from Staralfur

2.4: Godspeed You! Black Emperor – *Lift Yr. Skinny Fists Like Antennas to Heaven*

Track number	Track Name	Length	tempo	time signature	key/tonality	Instrumentation	Effects	vocals	form/structure
1	Storm	22.32							
	Storm Part 1: Lift Yr Skinny Fists Like Antennas To Heaven	0:00 - 6:15 (6:15)	80-100	3/4	Bb	Guitar, trumpet, glockenspiel, Cello, violin, synth, drums	Delay, reverb, overdrive	N/A	Repeated 9 bar progression
	Storm Part 2: Gathering Storm/Il Pleut à Mourir [+Clatters Like Worry]	6:15 – 17:21 (11:06)	70-100 [120-rall]	6/8, 4/4, 3/4	Bb	Guitar, Cello, violin, synth, drums [glockenspiel, piano]	Delay, reverb, overdrive	N/A	AABA?
	Storm Part 3: Welcome to Barco Am/PM...	17:21 – 18:45 (1:25)	N/A	N/A	Fm	Guitar, tuned percussion, Cello, violin, synth, drums	Delay, reverb, overdrive	Field recording of tannoy announcement and traffic outside of mini market. Distorted voice	Strophic form
	Storm Part 4: Cancer Towers on Holy Road Hi-Way	18:45 – 22:32 (3:47)	Around 40, but free time	4/4	C#m	Piano, Synth	Reverb, Delay	Distorted recording of shouting, unintelligible.	Through Composed
2	Static	22.36							
	Static Part 1: Terrible Canyons of Static	0:00 - 3:37 (3:37)	Around 60 no strong rhythm	N/A	E	Soundscape, bowed cymbal. Synth, Strings.	Reverb	N/A	Strophic form

	Static Part 2: Atomic Clock	3:37 – 4:40 (1:03)	N/A	N/A	E	White noise	Reverb	Recorded Time announcement	Strophic form
	Static Part 3: Chart #3	4:40 – 7:23 (2:42)	50	4/4	C#	Violin, Cello, Guitar	Reverb, Delay, Tremolo	Speech	No Form - A
	Static Part 4: World Police and Friendly Fire	7:23 – 17:12 (9:49)	60 with accelerando	4/4	Ebm	Double bass or Cello, violin, drums, guitar, Glockenspiel	Reverb, Distortion	N/A	Through Composed
	Static Part 5: ...The Buildings They are Sleeping Now	17:12 – 22:36 (5:24)	75-80	4/4	N/A	Bowed Cymbals, Gong, chimes and various other drums and percussion.	Reverb	N/A	Strophic form
3	Sleep	23:18							
	Sleep Part 1: Murray Ostril - ...They Don't Sleep Anymore on the Beach...	0:00 - 1:10 (1:10)	N/A	N/A	N/A	Field Recording	None	Speech	N/A
	Sleep Part 2: Monheim	1:10 - 13:24 (12:14)	55 with accelerando	4/4	Bbm	Guitar, Violin, Cello, Double bass, Drums	Reverb, Distortion, Ebow	N/A	Through Composed

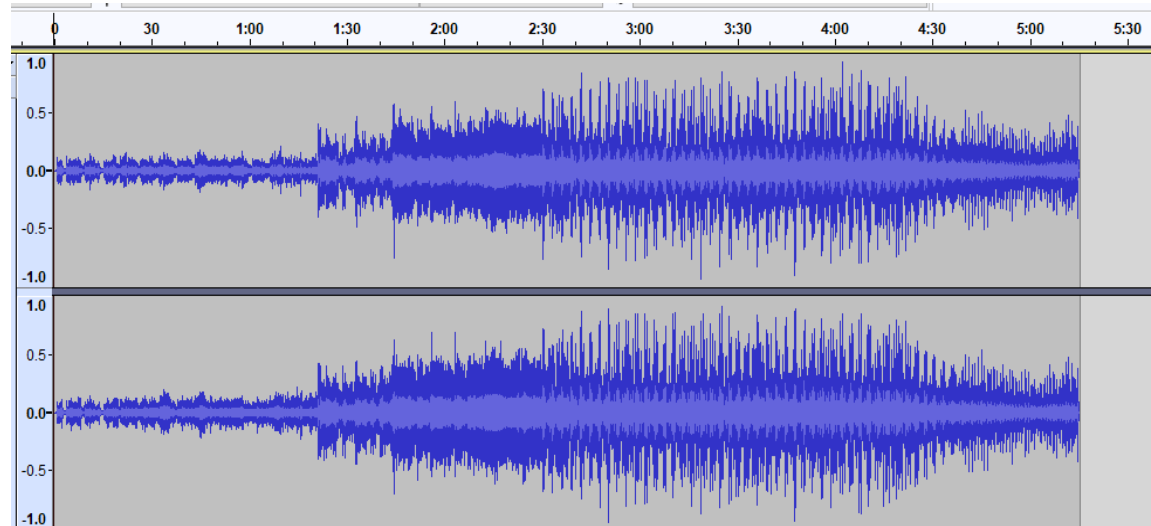
	Sleep Part 3: Broken Windows, Locks of Love pt. III	13:24 – 23:18 (9:54)	80 with accelerando	4/4	A	Guitar, Glockenspiel, Drums, Bass, Trumpet, Violin, Cello	Reverb, Delay, Chorus, Distortion	N/A	Through Composed
4	Antennas To Heaven	18:58							
	Antennas To Heaven Part 1: Moya Sings Baby O	0:00 – 1:04 (1:04)	Loose timing, around 75	4/4	G#m	Guitar, Vocals	Reverb	Sung vocals	Strophic form
	Antennas To Heaven Part 2: Edgy Swing Set Acid	1:04 – 1:58 (0:54)	N/A	N/A	N/A	Field recording	Reverb, Delay	N/A	N/A
	Antennas To Heaven Part 3: [Glockenspiel Duet Recorded on a Campsite in Rhinebeck, N.Y.]	1:58 – 2:45 (0:47)	75	4/4	C	Glockenspiel, Field recording	Reverb, Delay	N/A	No Form
	Antennas To Heaven Part 4: Attention... Mon Ami..Fa-Lala-Lala-La-La... [55-st Laurent]	2:45 – 4:03 (1:18)	N/A	N/A	N/A	Field recording	N/A	Children talking and signing	N/A

	Antennas To Heaven Part 5: She Dreamt She Was A Bulldozer, She Dreamt She Was Alone In An Empty Field	4:03 – 13:46 (9:43)	Variable	4/4	Db	Violin, guitar, Drums, Bass, Glockenspiel, Synth	Reverb, Delay, Tremolo	N/A	Through Composed
	Antennas To Heaven Part 6: Deathkamp Drone	13:46 – 16:56 (3:09)	60	4/4	Atonal	Synth	Reverb, Delay	N/A	Strophic form
	Antennas To Heaven Part 7: [Antennas to Heaven...]	16:56 – 18:58 (2:02)	100	4/4	A	Guitar, Violin	Reversed, Reverb, Delay, distorion	N/A	Through composed

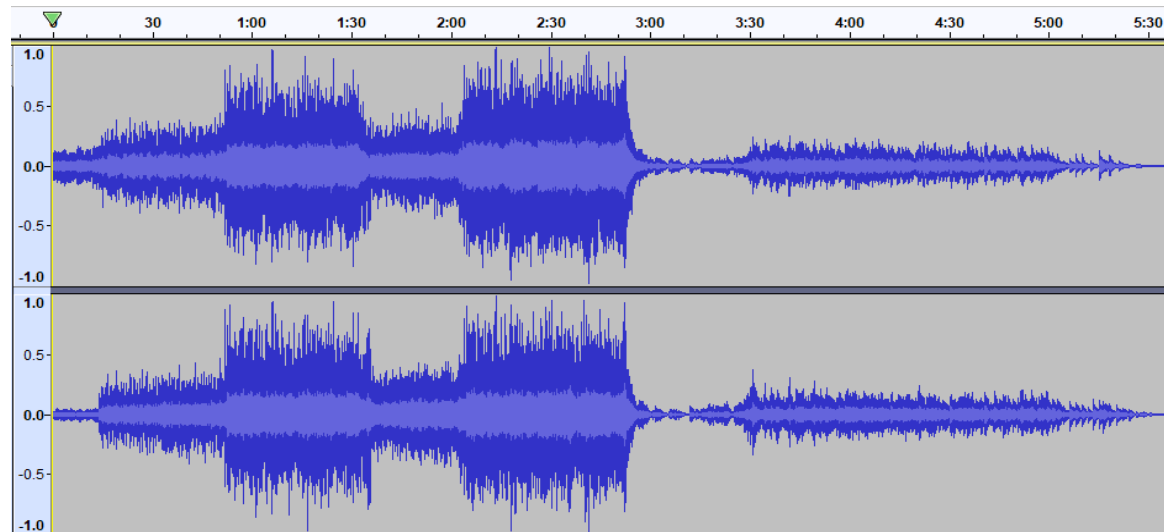
Appendix 3 Waveforms

3.1: Bark Psychosis - Hex

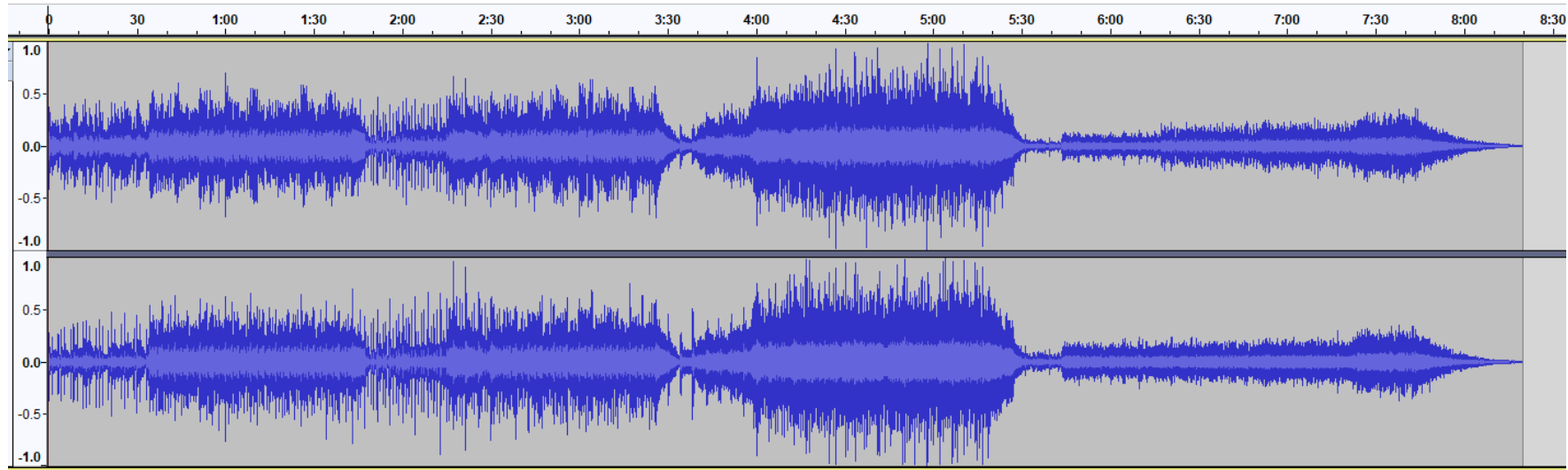
3.1.1 - The Loom



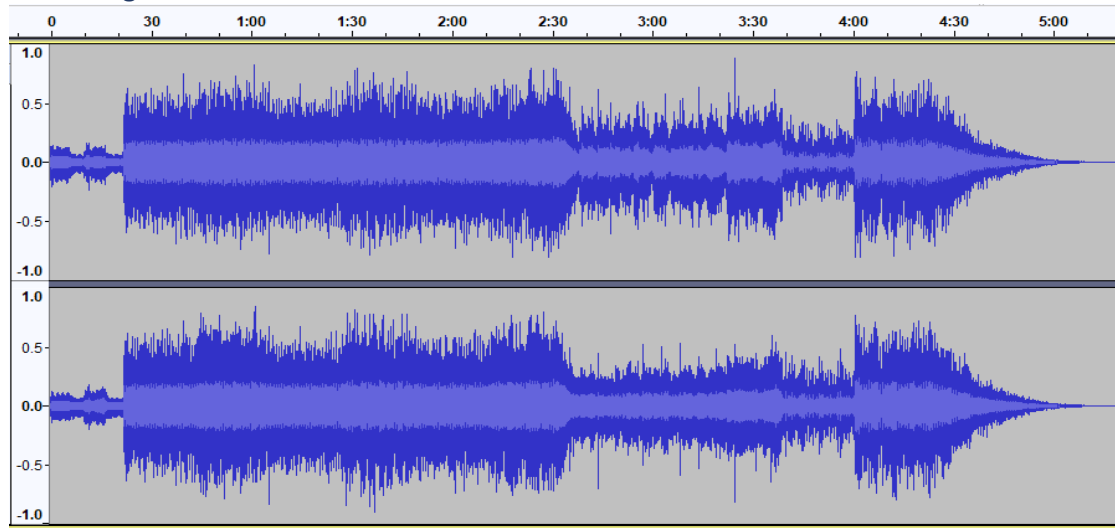
3.1.2 - A Street Scene



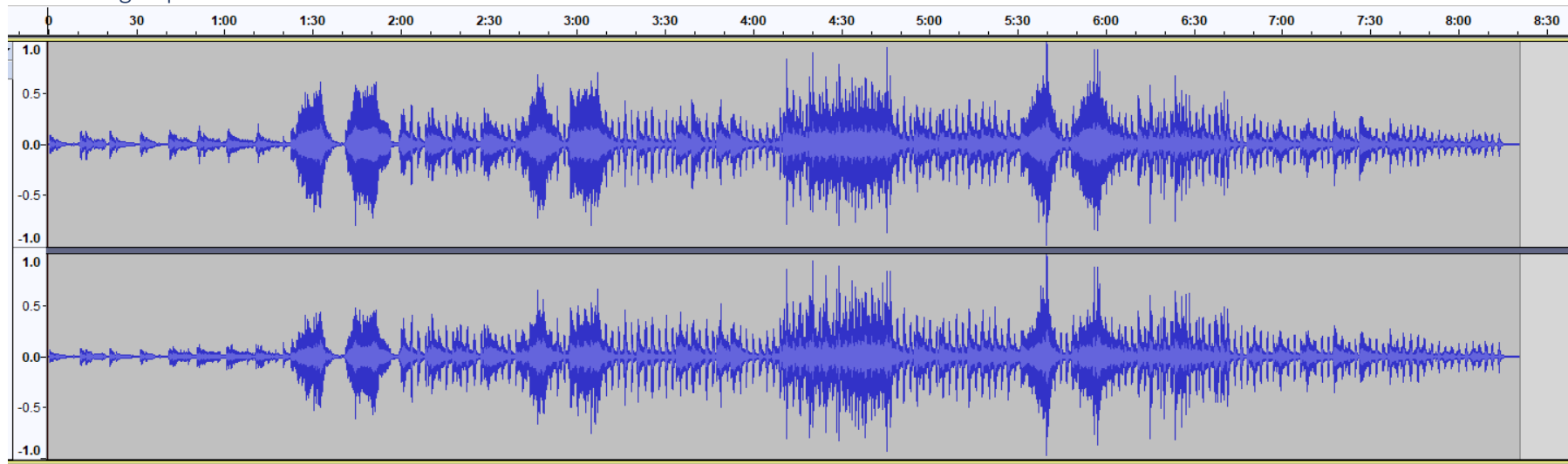
3.1.3 - Absent Friend



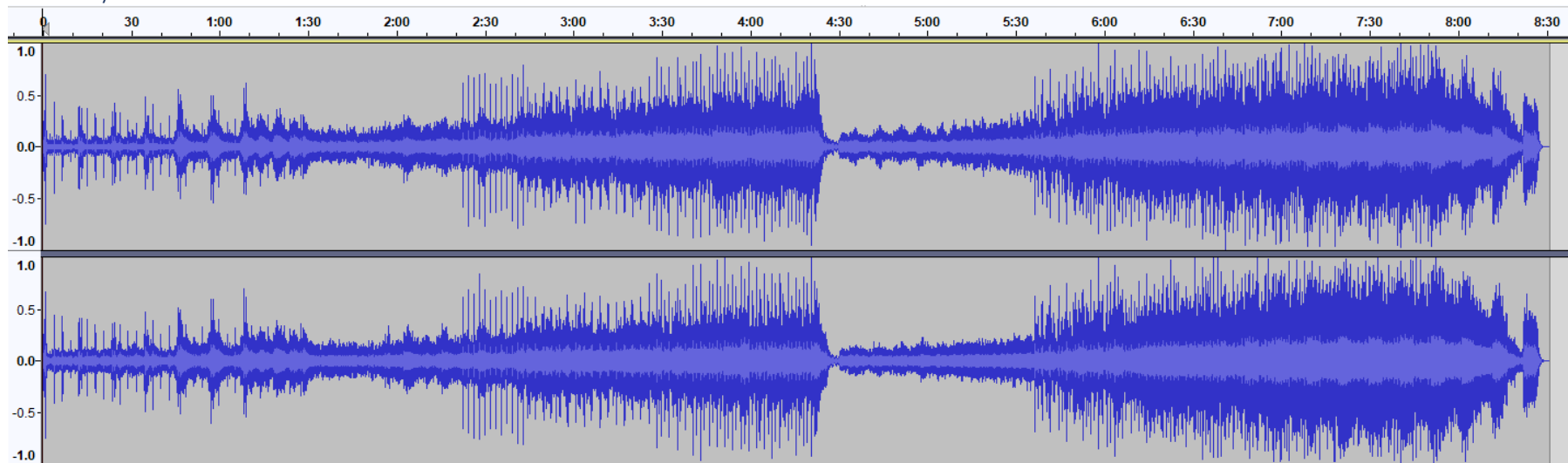
3.1.4 - Big Shot



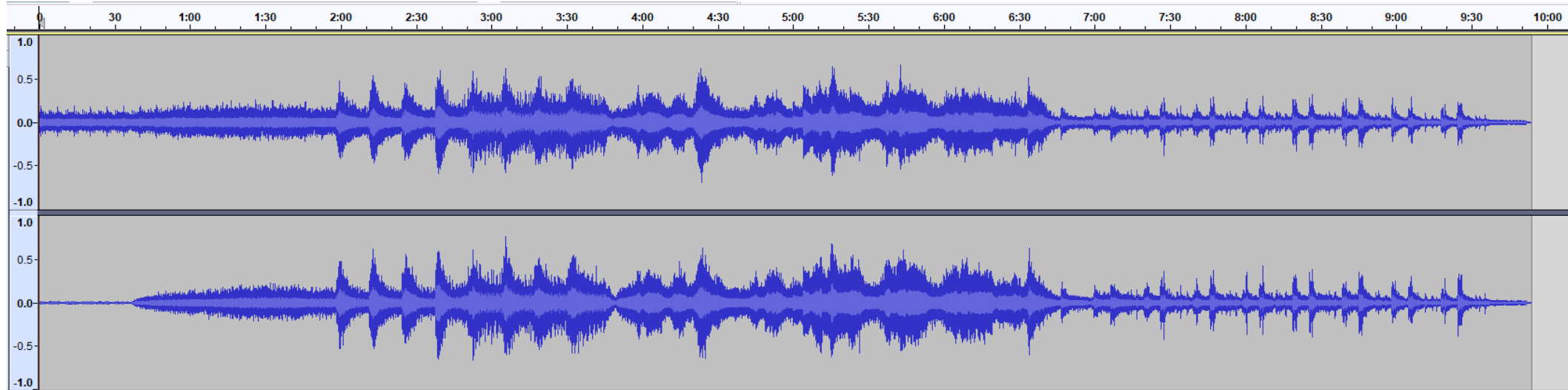
3.1.5 - Fingerspit



3.1.6 - Eyes & Smiles

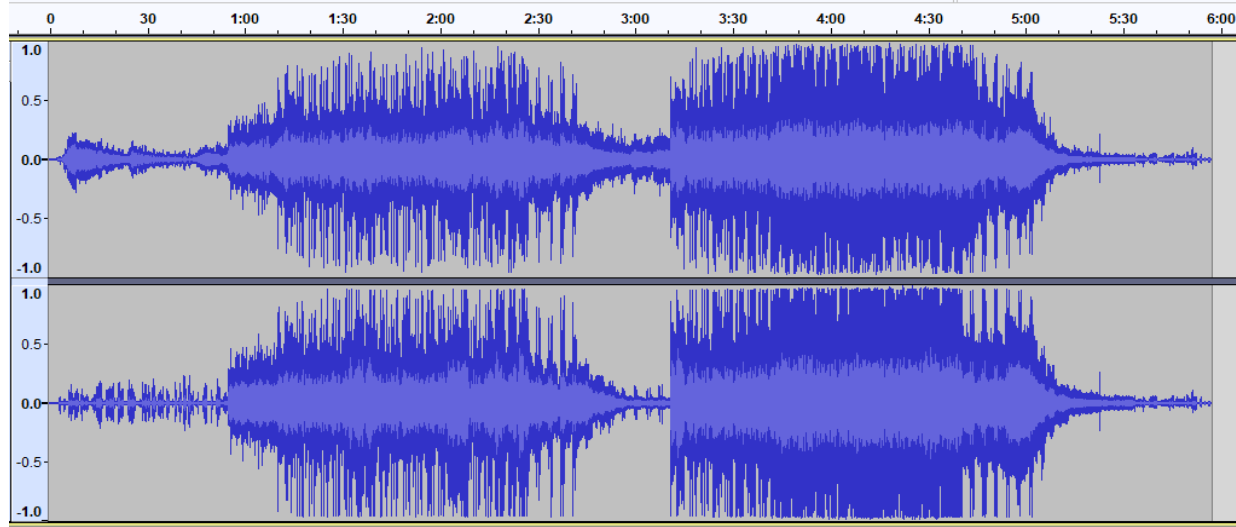


3.1.7 - Pendulum man

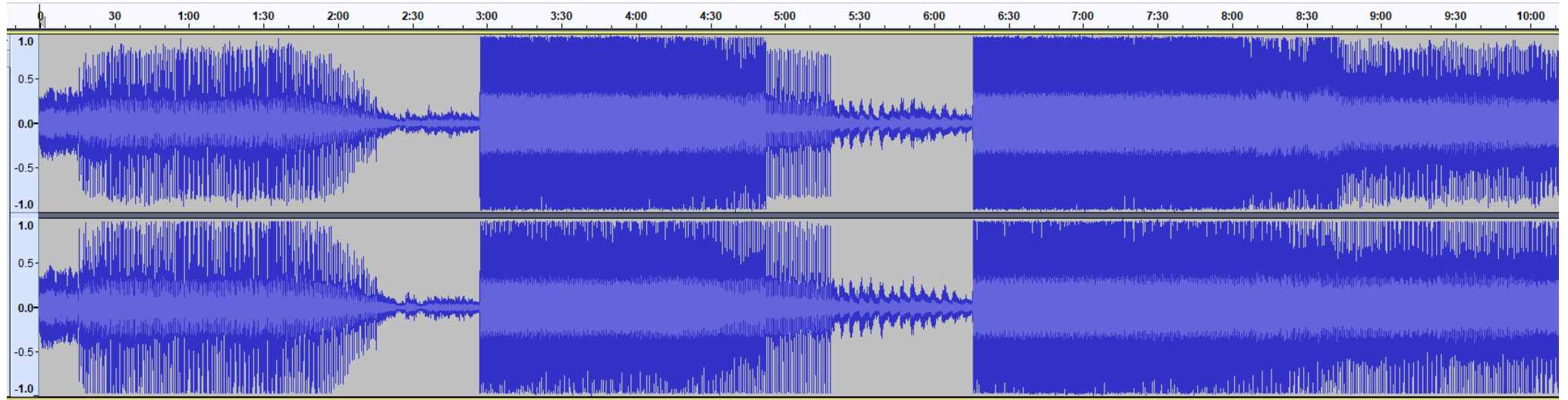


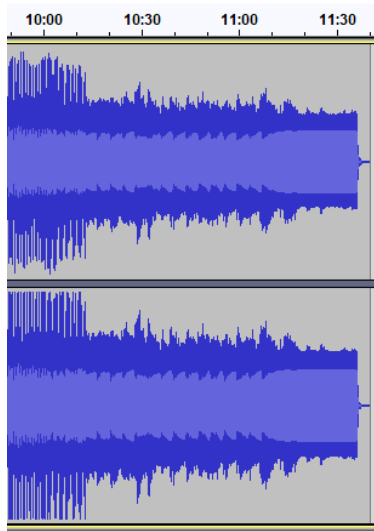
3.2: Mogwai - *Young Team*

3.2.1 - Yes! I am a long way from home

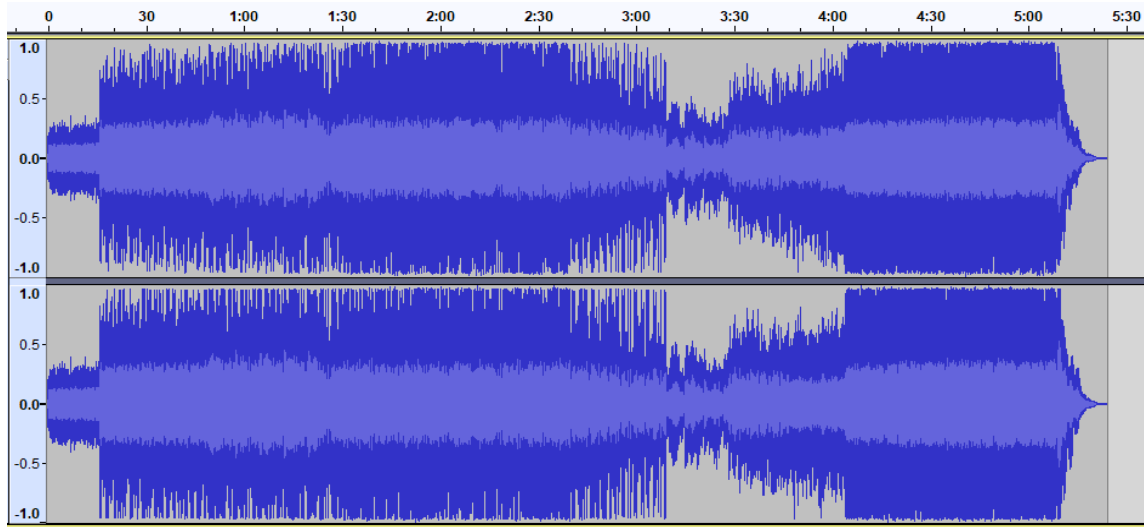


3.2.2 - Like Herod

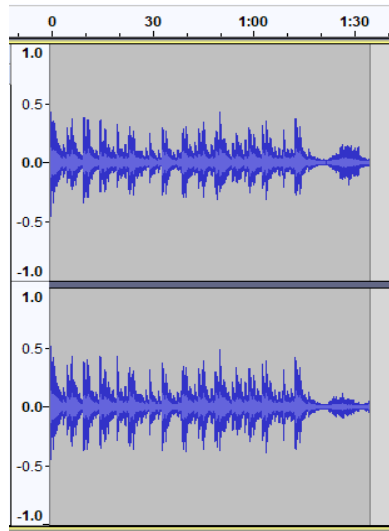




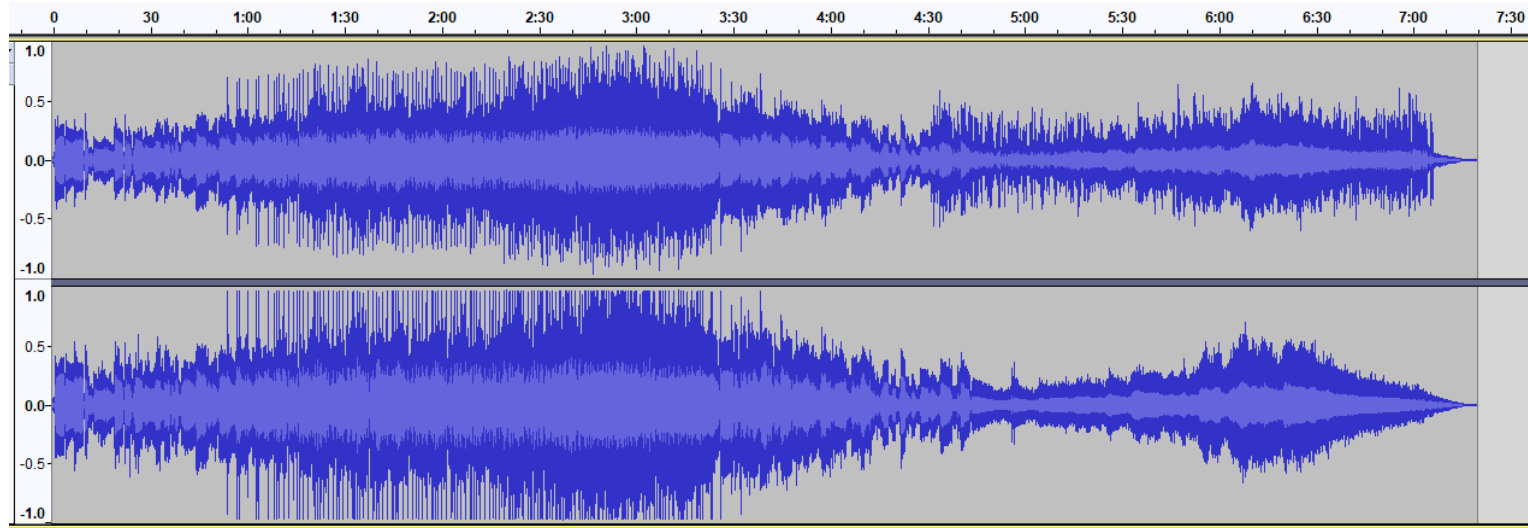
3.2.3 - Katrien



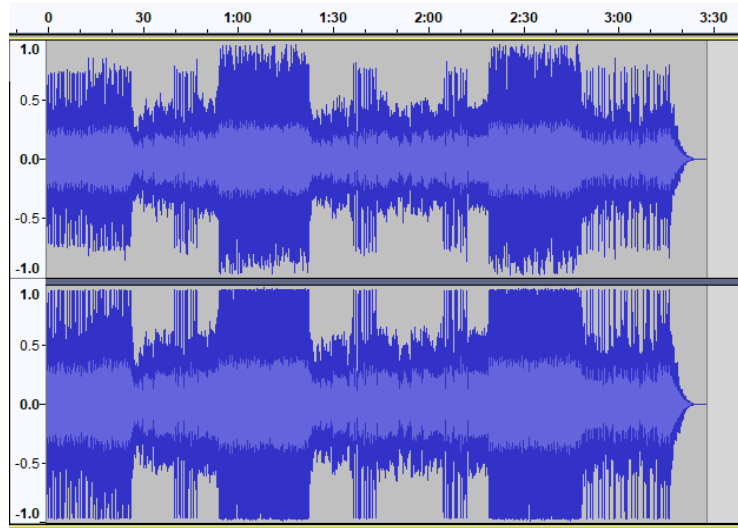
3.2.4 - Radar Maker



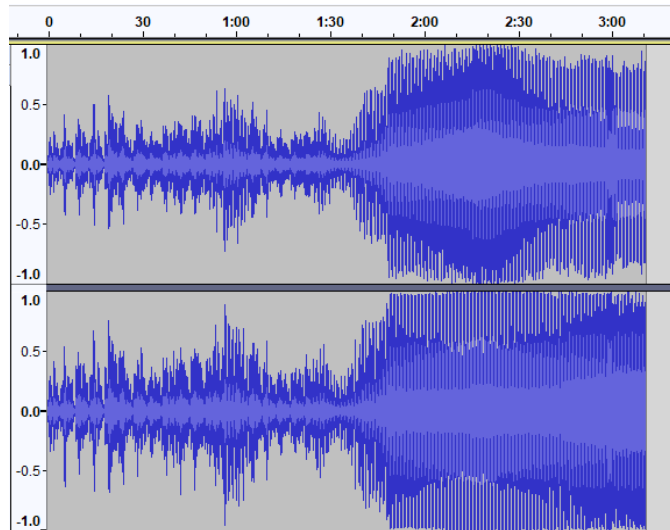
3.2.5 - Tracy



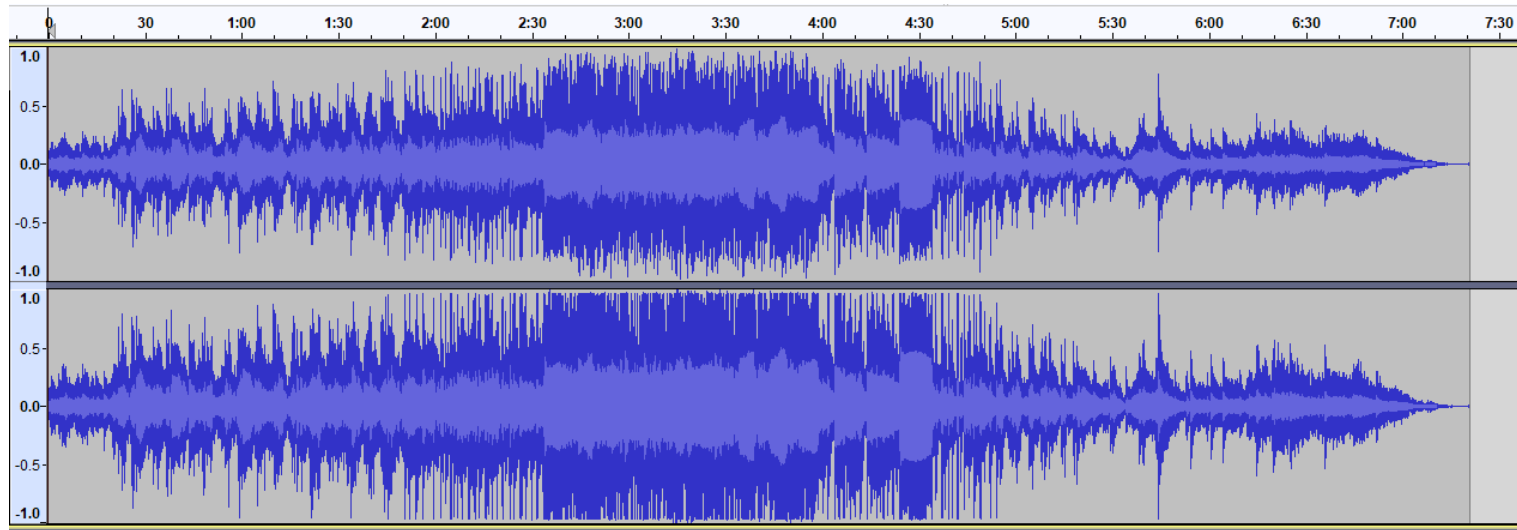
3.2.6 - Summer (Priority Version)



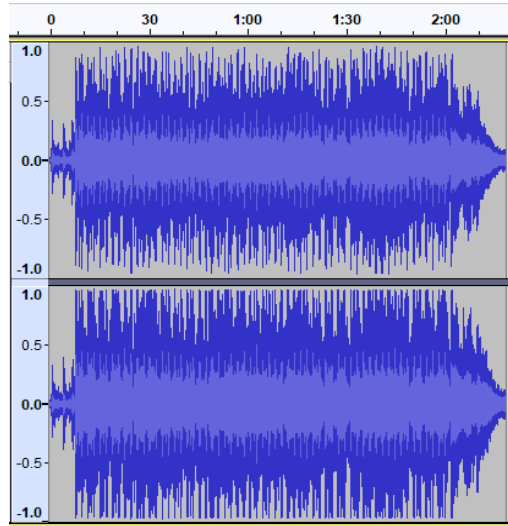
3.2.7 - With Portfolio



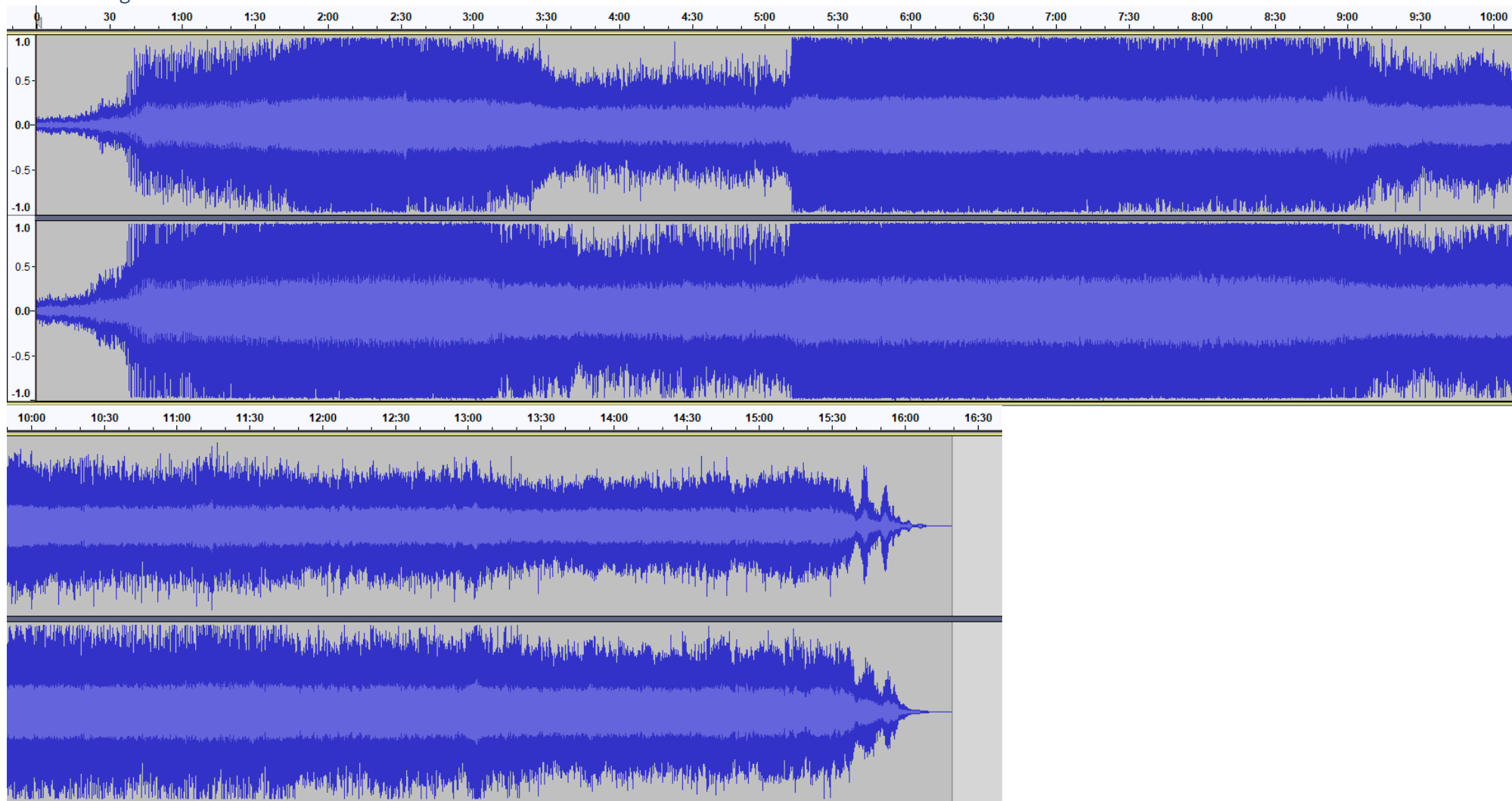
3.2.8 - R U Still in2 it?



3.2.9 - A cheery wave from stranded youngsters

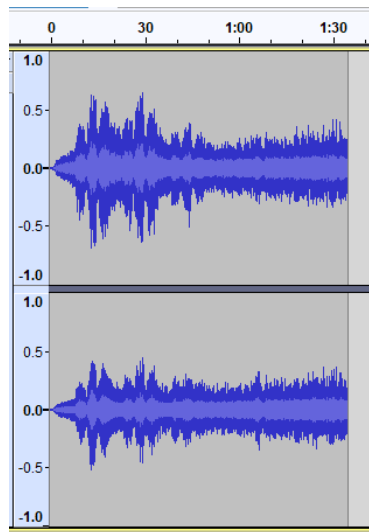


3.2.10 - Mogwai fear Satan

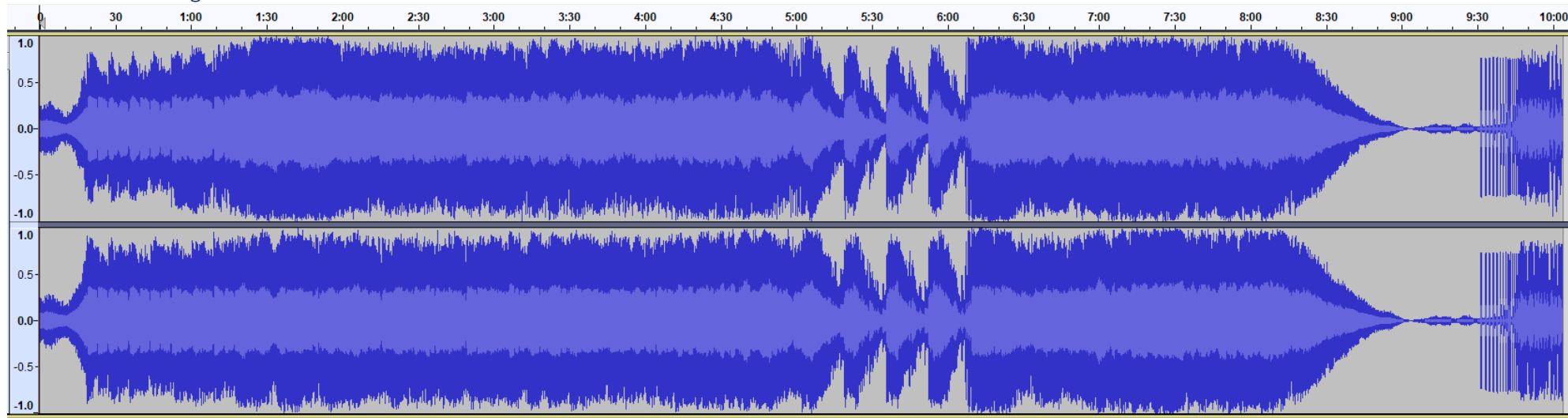


3.3: Sigur Rós - *Ágætis Byrjun*

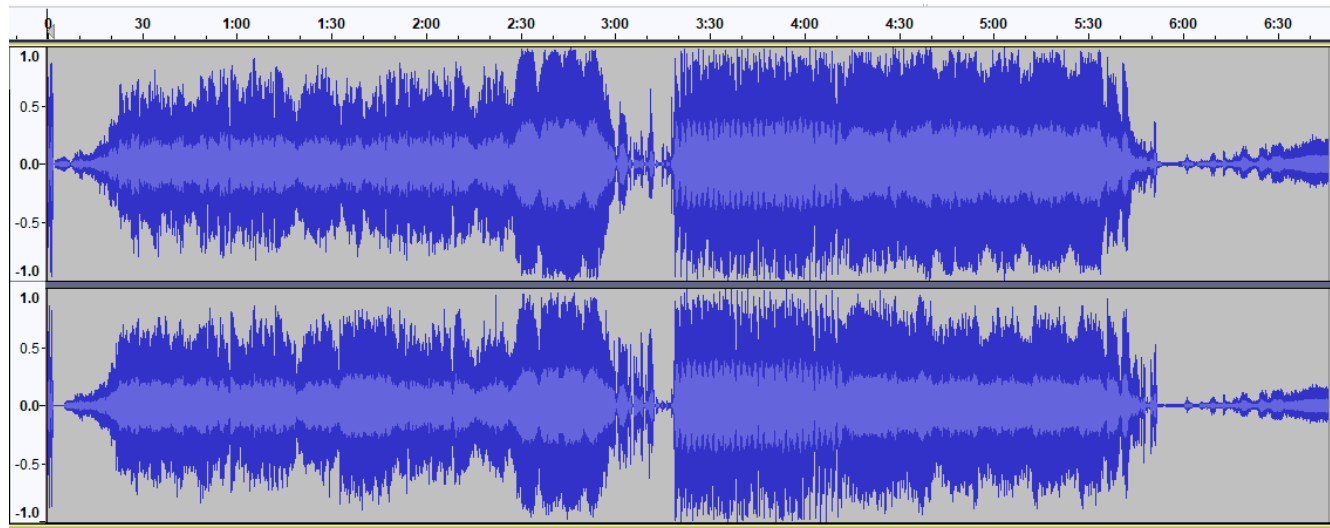
3.3.1 - Intro



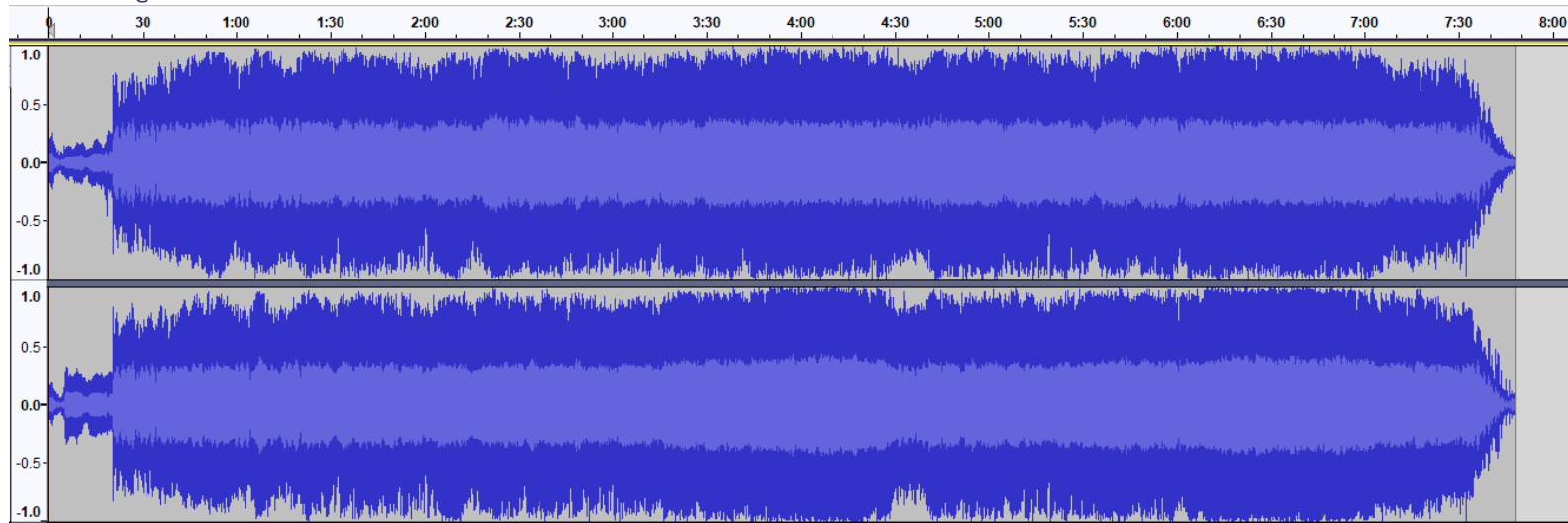
3.3.2 - Svefn-G-Englar



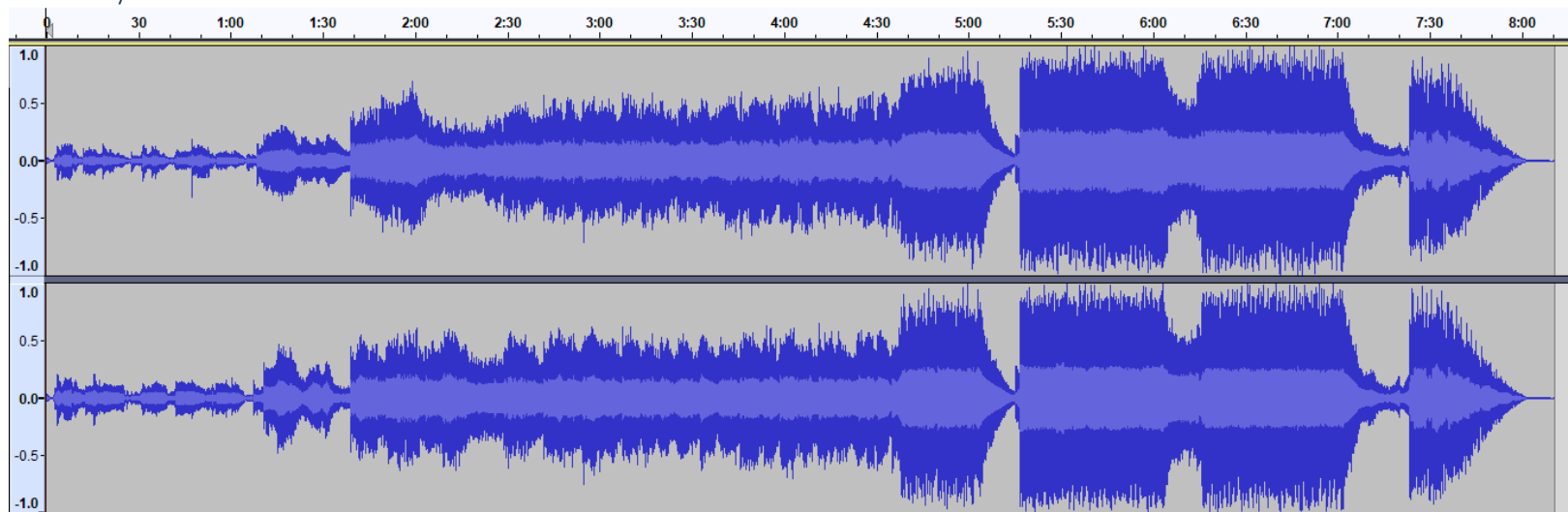
3.3.3 - Starálfur



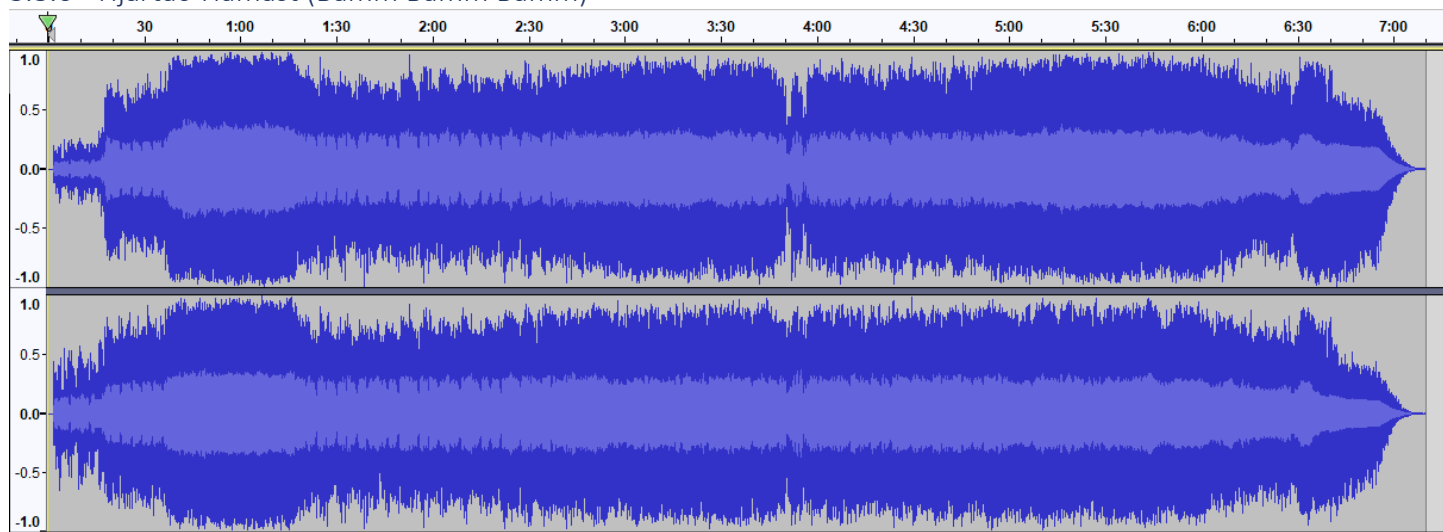
3.3.4 - Flugfrelsarinn



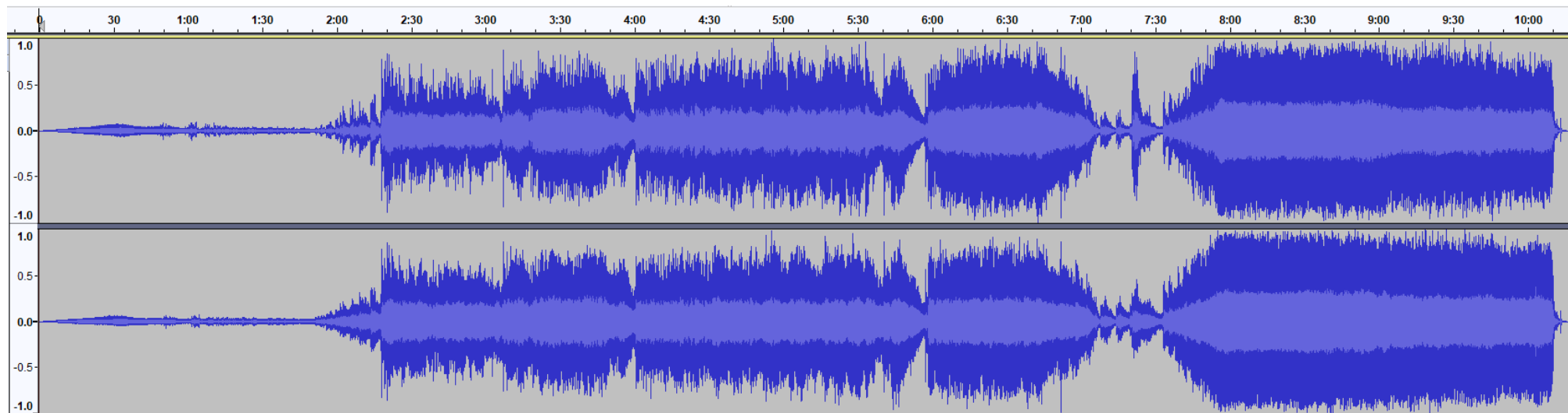
3.3.5 - Ný Batterí



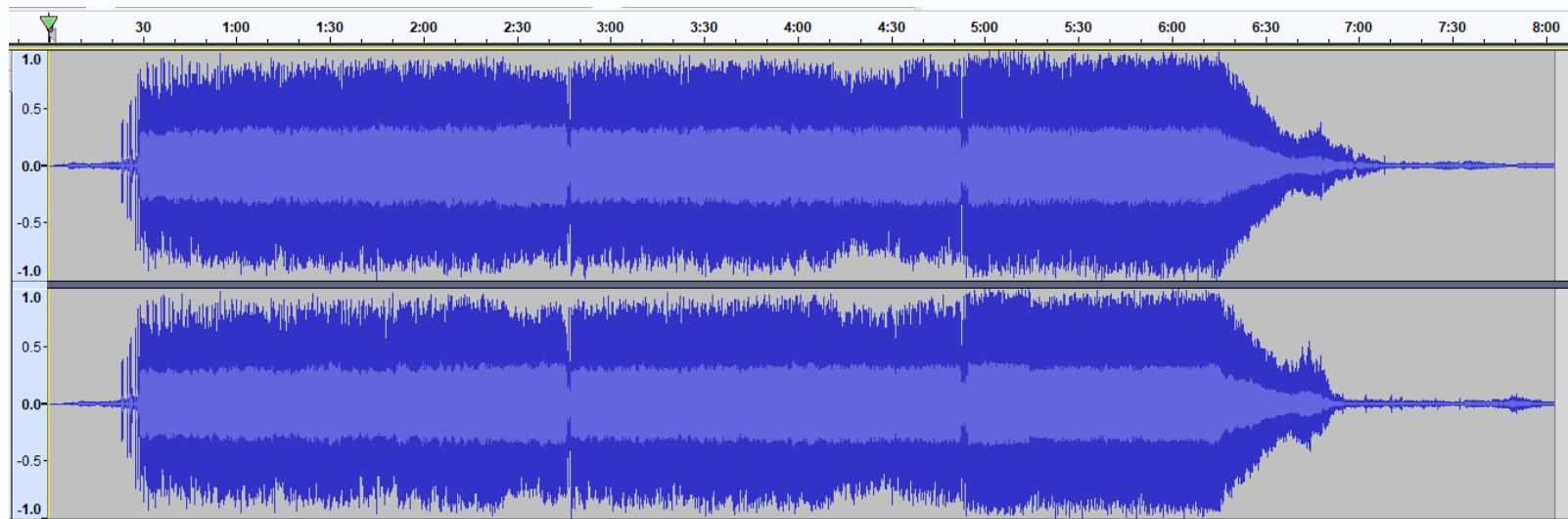
3.3.6 - Hjartað Hamast (Bamm Bamm Bamm)



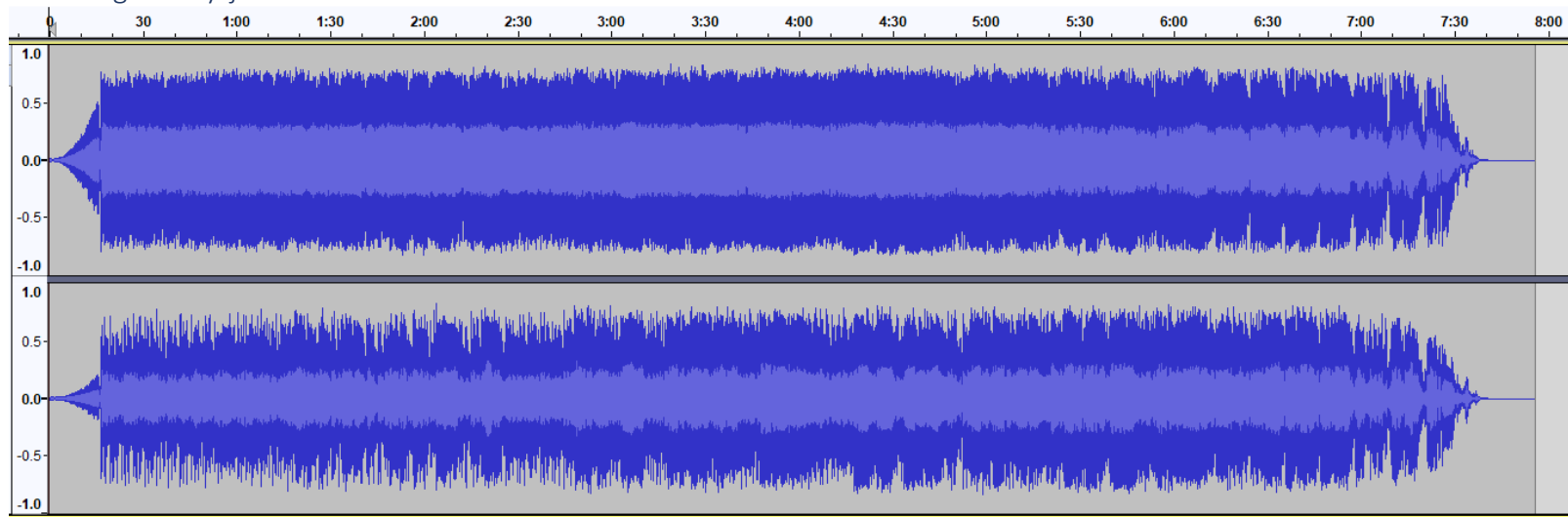
3.3.7 - Viðrar Vel Til Loftárása



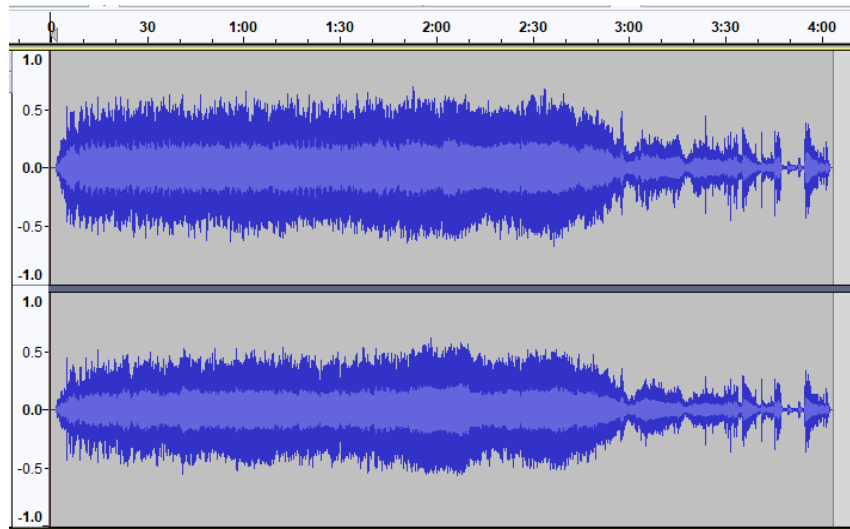
3.3.8 - Olsen Olsen



3.3.9 - Ágætis Byrjun

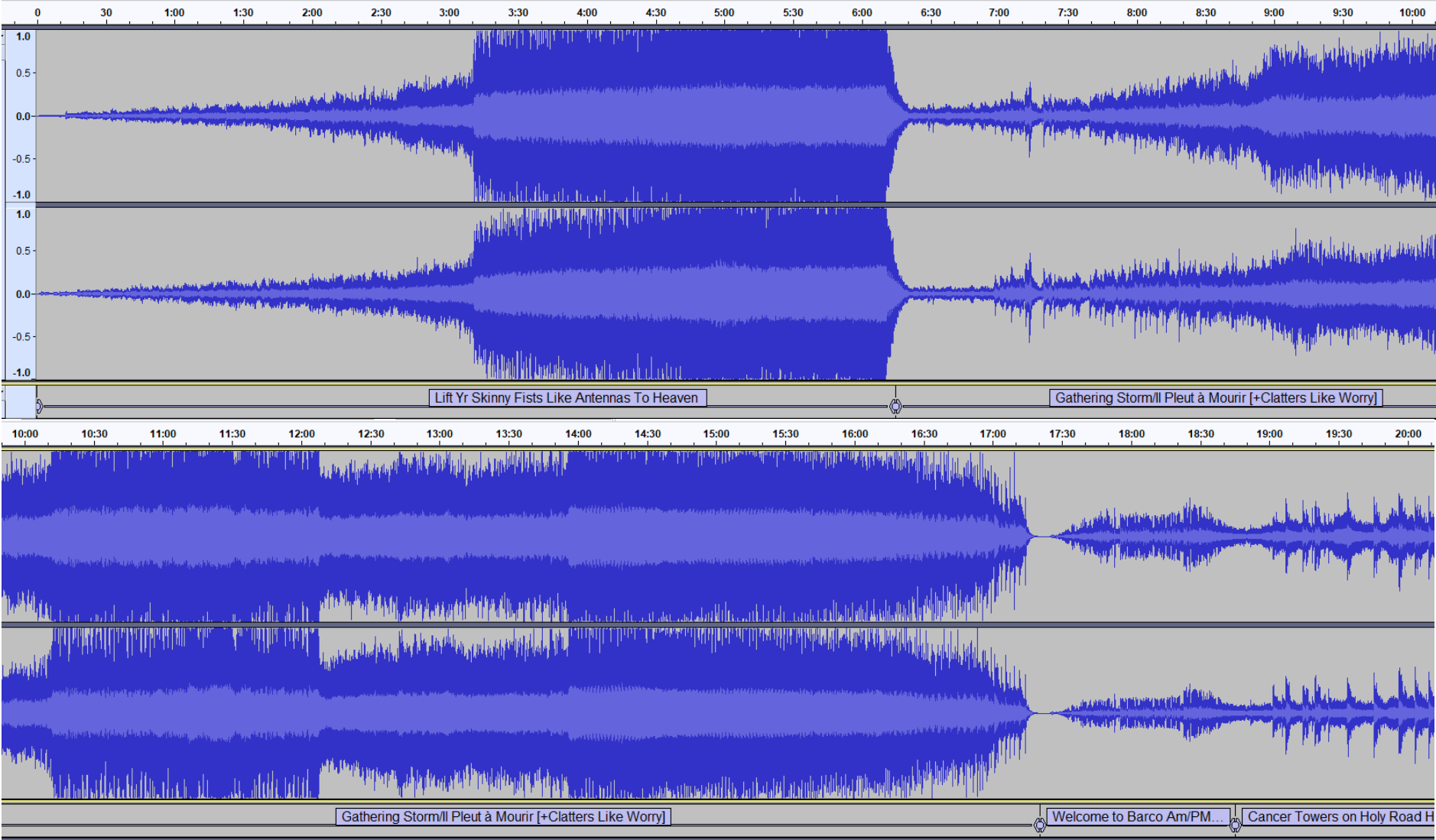


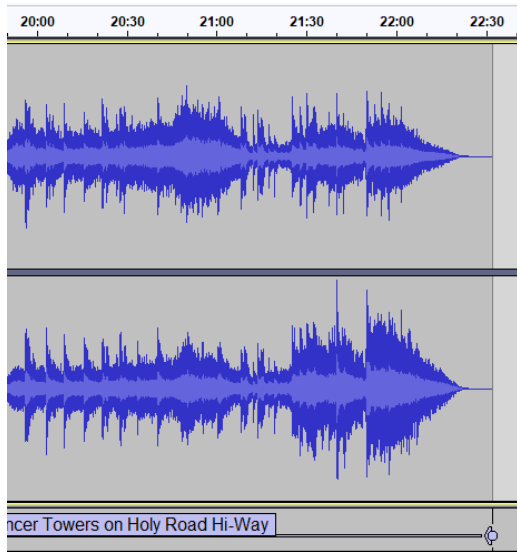
3.3.10 – Avalon



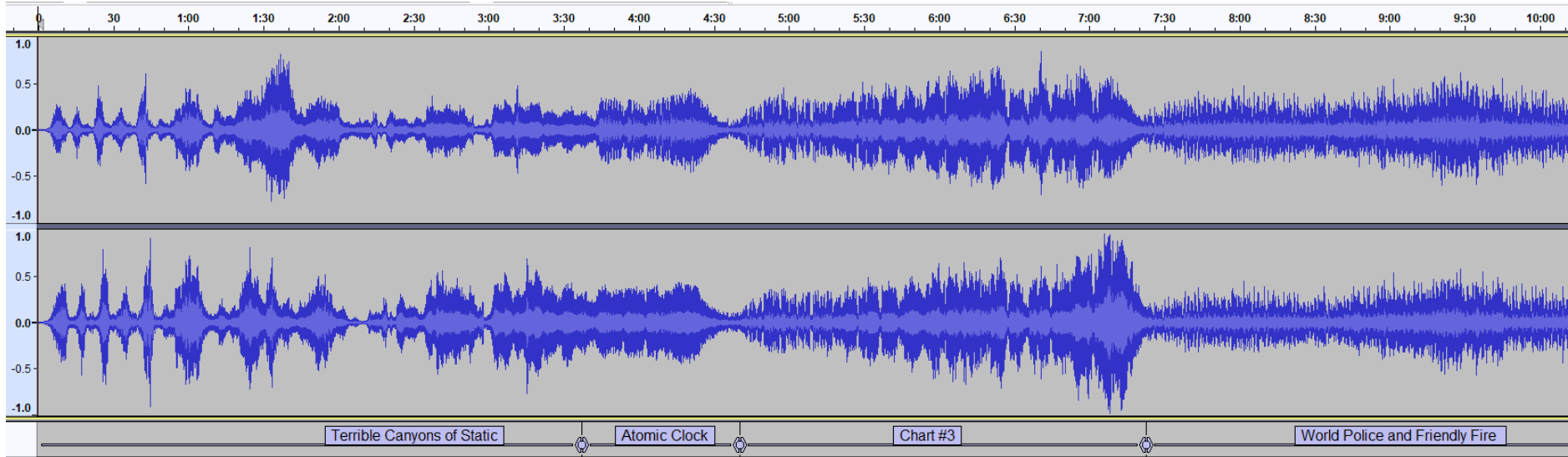
3.4: Godspeed You! Black Emperor - *Lift Yr. Skinny Fists Like Antennas to Heaven*

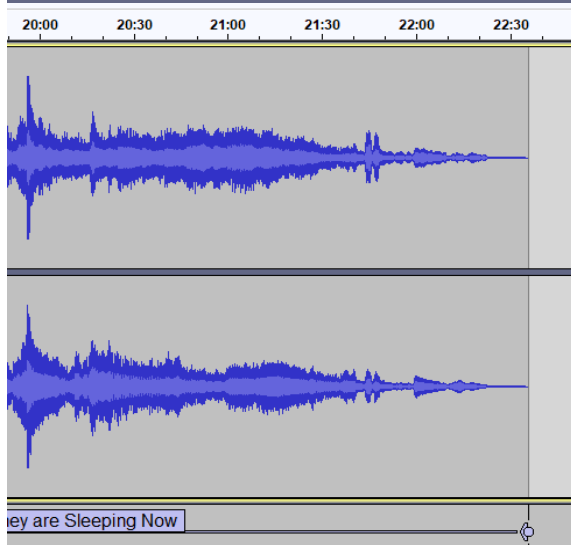
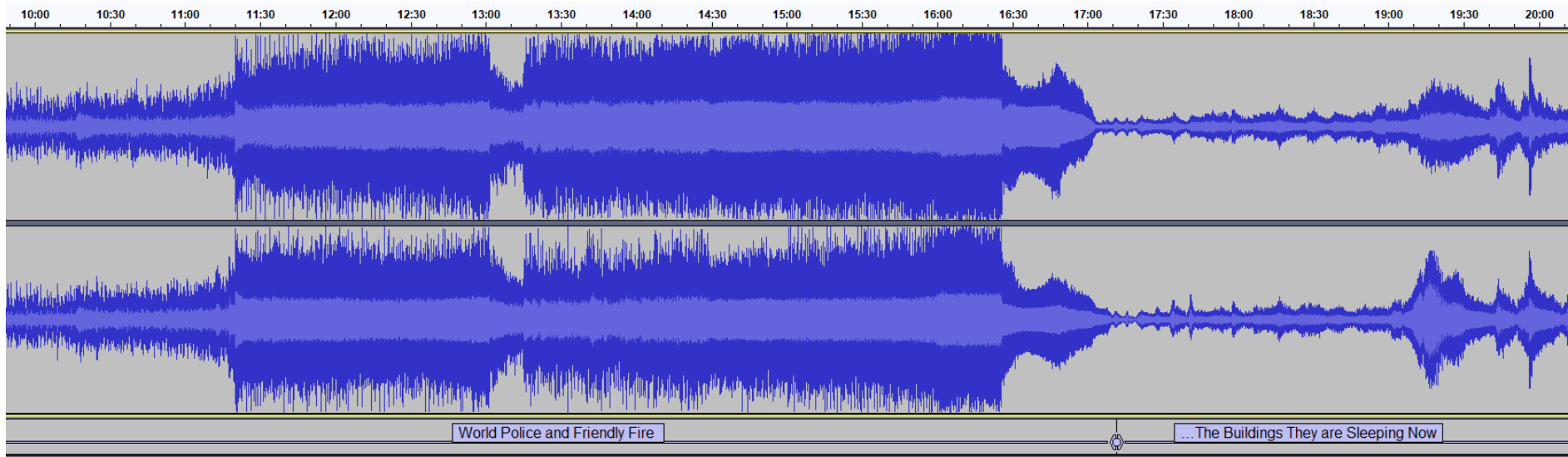
3.4.1 - Storm



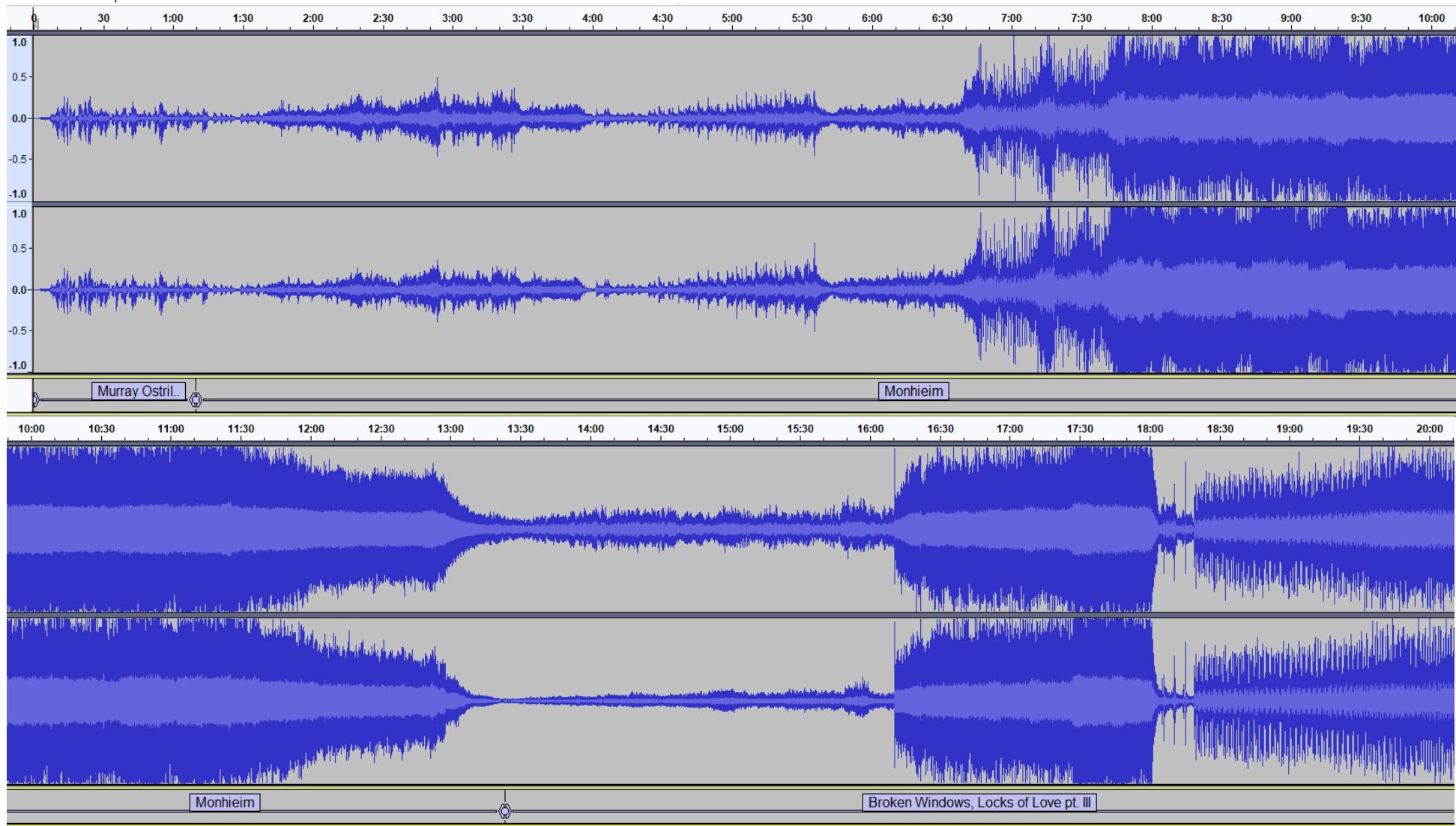


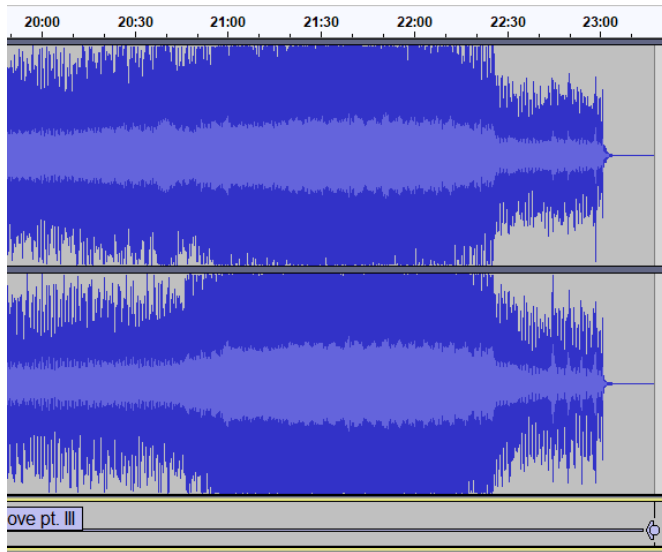
3.4.2 - Static





3.4.3 - Sleep





3.4.4 - Antennas To Heaven

