

Tonally and structurally, they're almost indistinguishable: swap out the mountains of *Mountain* for rivers, and you'll have a fair idea of what *River* entails. When rivers are eventually replaced by another landform, thus completing the final third of a trilogy that has already been hinted at,²⁰ it's a safe bet that the same template will be applied once more.

Though *Mountain* and *River* may be near identical twins, the latter encounters issues that its elder sibling never had to contend with. Mountains have a distinct shape and are therefore relatively easy to represent. Step back far enough and their beauty and grandeur can be suggested in a single postcard image; hand a kid a crayon and they'll whip one up in three seconds flat. Rivers are a much trickier proposition, especially to photograph. This is because they're long rather than big: rivers go on and on, snaking this way and that, connecting with other rivers and bodies of water, and cutting through vast swathes of land and all the diverse environments that this path entails. They lack the photogenic cohesiveness that mountains possess by birthright. In films, as in real life, even the grandest and most famous rivers are perceived only in fragments, as incomplete stretches of water.

But as *River* showcases in abundance, it has become possible to capture the sheer, expansive scale of a river – or even an entire river system, even in a single shot – if the camera can get up high enough. The technology that can enable this with relative ease might be recent, but the trade-off is age-old: the higher or farther you get, the more abstract things become. At a certain elevation, rivers invariably flatten into a series of lines and shapes²¹ – the kind of unusual, albeit gorgeous, sight that a bird or an astronaut might admire from above, far removed from what the rest of us plebs can see, hear, touch, smell or catch fish from at ground level. In any event, floating above the earth's surface has hardly been a convenient option for most of cinema's history – certainly not for documentaries. Which is why films have relied on a humbler, but tried-and-tested, approach when it comes to these waterways: travel horizontally rather than vertically, to see where the river doth flow.

Early on in *River*, the filmmakers grasp a golden opportunity to do both at once. The shot in question was filmed in Norway by Ralph Hogenbirk, a Dutch drone cinematographer who goes by the name Shaggy FPV online. Hovering precariously close to the ground for the entire duration of the shot, the drone camera orbits a glacier, latches on to a stream of water released from it, then follows its descent at breakneck speed as it plunges down the rock face and merges with the river below. It's a virtuosic spectacle made more so by the pairing of Bach's chaconne from *Partita No. 2 in D Minor*, which swells to a crescendo in perfect unison with the shot's trajectory. But it's also more than