

## With Biophilia, Björk Creates Album Art For The 21st Century (It's An App!)

Scott Snibbe, one of the designers Björk worked with to create her interactive musical fusion "Biophilia," tells Co.Design how it all came together.

A new album release by [Björk](#) almost always means some interesting design experiment sprung on the world -- whether it's her outfits, music videos, album art, or the music itself. Her latest, *Biophilia*, ups the ante by offering an interactive experience of the album comprising 10 apps (enclosed within a "mother" app), one for each song. The theme of the album is ambitious, too: life, the universe, and everything, to put it simply. (When your [promo video is narrated by legendary naturalist-filmmaker David Attenborough](#), you'd better aim high.)



To create *Biophilia's* "mother" app (as well as three of the enclosed ones), Björk tapped media artist, filmmaker, and interactive design researcher [Scott Snibbe](#). Snibbe is no stranger to experimental music-apps or megawatt collaborators -- [the last app of his that we wrote about, Oscilloscoop](#), had input from Brian Eno. Co.Design interviewed Snibbe about what collaborating on *Biophilia* was like.



**Co.Design: How did you come to connect with Bjork for this project? Have you worked with her before?**

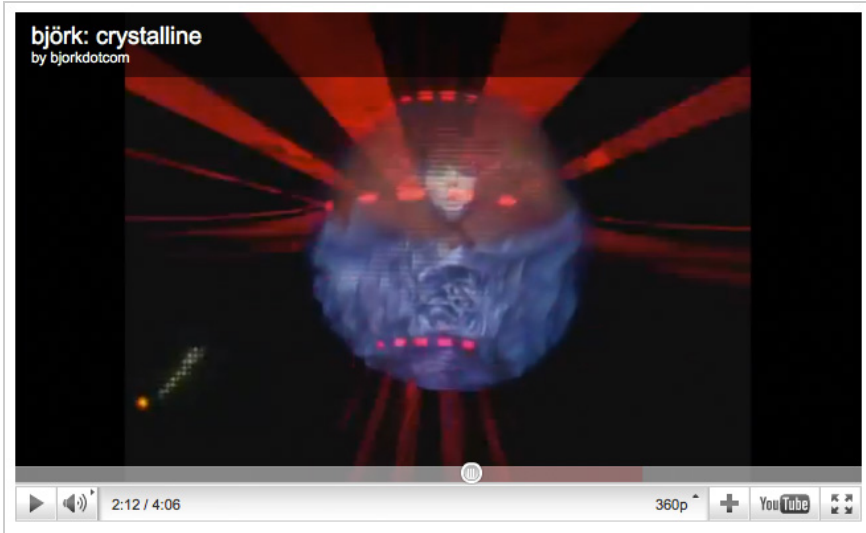
Snibbe: Last June Björk's manager, Derek Birkett, sent me an amusing email in typically understated English style that said "I am sorry to bother you, I work for the recording artist Björk, she is a massive fan of your work, we're looking to make an iPad app, do you know anyone who might be interested?" Obviously I was very flattered and offered to help. I'd been a fan of Björk's music since hearing the Sugarcubes while I was in college, and always admired her not only as an incredible musician, but as one of the world's great multimedia artists working across performance, video, visuals, and fashion.

**Co.D: What was your role, and what was the collaboration process like? Were you given a brief?**

Snibbe: Björk wrote a kind of email manifesto going into great detail about the overall concept and each song. The email was like a script or treatment for the project, and going back to read it, the final product very much reflects her vision. "Biophilia" is her first project going beyond her personal experiences -- her earlier albums are

quite personal -- and she's gone way beyond her personal experience to encompass all of nature, the universe, at all scales and all its variety.

Each song/app has three aspects to it: an aspect inspired by nature; a musicological aspect; and a technological/interactive aspect. For example, "Virus" is a kind of femme fatale love song between a virus and a cell -- she loves him so much, she destroys him. Musically, the app [for "Virus"] is about generative music, the creation of music that is always different depending on various interactive algorithms and processes. And interactively, we've created a kind game that you have to lose to win -- the only way to hear the whole song is to allow the viruses to kill the cell. I guess there is still a personal aspect to these apps and songs, though, as Björk has described some of them, such as "Crystalline", as expressing the way that she visualizes music in her mind as she listens to it.



Our role was to produce and engineer the entire Biophilia "mother app"; to create three of the song apps: "Cosmogony," "Virus," and "Thunderbolt"; and to provide some creative and technical contributions to the other apps as needed.

The experience has been intense -- we are working with several of the world's top interactive developers, as well as one of the world's great musicians. It's surprising how well everyone gets along and I credit Björk substantially for that -- I've learned a great deal from her on how to collaborate. She manages to be quite gentle and kind while still maintaining a strong hand and vision for the project.

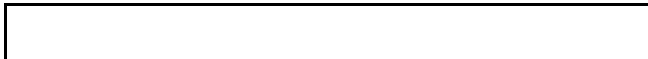
**Co.D: Do you think this album will set a precedent for others to follow -- a new standard in music consumption?**

Snibbe: *Biophilia* places interactivity on equal footing with music, not merely an illustration of the music, and also not purely an instrument, but a highly curated, crafted experience where you can have a unique, personal, creative audiovisual experience. I think for the moment it sets the bar and will challenge other artists to push music apps beyond music marketing and replicating instruments towards a new "[gesamtkunstwerk](#)" as the Germans say - a total work of art.

For me this feels like the birth of cinema or opera - the coming together of disparate media into a new complete whole. Human beings have five sensory inputs: sight, sound, touch, taste, and smell. Our brains are designed to synthesize these five data streams into the illusion of a unified whole, and our bodies can then reach in and manipulate this synthesized reality that really only exists in our minds. The iPad and interactive platforms like it present an

opportunity beyond cinema to create new synthetic, interactive realities with music that fulfill what most musicians want to create: a total sensory experience, and one that can transcend the limitations of lights, fog, and smoke onstage to take one to the far reaches of the universe, into a cell, or even into Björk's own mind.

[\[Download \*Biophilia\* in the iTunes App Store\]](#)



## JOHN PAVLUS

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