

# **The Craft of Yoiking**



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## **Philosophical Variations on Sámi Chants**

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# Abstract

The yoik is a vocal technique practised by the Sámi of Northern Europe. It relies on circular melodies, chanted in everyday life and *a cappella*, with or without lyrics. Each melody evokes a particular being, usually a person, an animal species, or a place. ‘Yoiking them’ is a way of making them present, exploring an attachment, and unfolding memories. The yoik is considered by many of its practitioners as a gift received from the environment, a mysterious craft that they come to know through personal experience and experimentation.

This thesis is based on conversations with yoikers, active in either the ‘traditional’ or ‘modern’ practices, and an apprenticeship in the craft of yoiking. It constitutes a series of essays, or ‘philosophical variations’, aimed at taking the yoik seriously and unfolding some of its philosophical affordances. As in the musical variations on popular melodies by classical composers, writing the yoik in variation means hosting it within another practice bearing its own constraints and possibilities. Practices of yoiking and writing are thus put in a dialogue at times converging, at times diverging, but always intended to be mutually stimulating. Various voices from social anthropology, ethnomusicology, psychology, theology, ethology, and the history of philosophy join the dialogue along the way.

The variations are ‘philosophical’ in that each of them creates one concept: horizon, enchantment, creature, depth, echo, primordial. Each concept seeks to capture a layer of depth perceived in the yoik’s practice: (1) the risks of metamorphosis; (2) the chants of animals and the wind; (3) the creation of yoiks as outgrowths of the sensuous world; (4) the inner landscapes of humans; (5) the resurgence of past memories and of the dead; (6) the roots of human chants in a chthonic, original past; and (*n*) the power of repetition and interruption.





# Sammendrag

Joiken er en vokalteknikk som er praktisert av Samene i Nord-Europa. En joik er en sirkulær melodi, vokalisert i hverdagen og *a cappella*, med eller uten tekst. Hver melodi fremkaller et bestemt vesen, vanligvis en person, en dyreart eller et sted. 'Å joike noen' eller 'noe' er en måte å gjøre dem tilstedeværende, å utforske en tilknytning og gjenopplive minner. Ifølge mange joikere er joiken en gave mottatt fra omgivelsene, en mysteriøs kraft som kommer til gjennom personlige opplevelser og eksperimenteringer.

Denne avhandlingen er basert på samtaler med joikere, aktive enten i den 'tradisjonelle' eller 'moderne' praksisen, og praktisk opplæring i joiketeknikk. Den inneholder essays, eller 'filosofiske variasjoner', som tar joiken på alvor og avdekker noen av dens filosofiske muligheter. Som i musikalske variasjoner over populære melodier komponert av klassiske komponister, betyr det å skrive joiken i variasjoner å være på dens grunnelementer innenfor en annen praksis som både har egne begrensninger og muligheter. Å joike og å skrive settes i dialog, som kan være konvergerende eller divergerende, og som er gjensidig stimulerende. Ulike stemmer fra sosialantropologi, etnomusikologi, psykologi, teologi, etologi og filosofihistorie blir med i dialogen underveis.

Variasjonene er 'filosofiske' fordi hver av dem skaper et konsept. Avhandlingen benevner disse konseptene som horisont, fascinasjon, skapning, dybde, ekko, og urtiden. Hvert konsept fanger en dimensjon av dybde oppfattet i joikens praksis: (1) risikoene i metamorfose; (2) dyrenes og vindens joikende stemmer; (3) veksten av den sanselige verden i skapningen av nye joiker; (4) den indre landskapet i mennesker; (5) revitaliseringen av minner og de døde; (6) joikenes røtter i en underjordisk, original fortid; og (n) kraften til repetisjon og avbrudd.



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# Abbreviations

ag.	Ancient Greek	cf.	<i>Cōnfer</i> / Refer to
da.	Danish	e.g.	<i>Exemplī grātiā</i> / For example
en.	English	et al.	<i>Et alii</i> / And others
fr.	French	etc.	<i>Et cētera</i> / And so on
ge.	German	i.e.	<i>Id est</i> / That is to say
it.	Italian	ibid.	<i>Ibidem</i> / In the same place
la.	Latin		
ls.	Lulle Sámi	AD	<i>Annō Dominī</i> / After Christ
no.	Norwegian (bokmål)	BC	Before Christ
ns.	North Sámi		
oe.	Old English	b.	Born
sk.	Skolt Sámi	d.	Died
ss.	South Sámi		
sw.	Swedish	§	Paragraph
sá.	Sámi		
us.	Ume Sámi	*	Translation





# Introduction

*‘A life without yoik is unthinkable. It makes me feel vital, melancholic and delay old age. I breathe in nature, I live through yoik – my whole life is a yoik. The joy, the pain, the sorrow, the deep valleys, the vast plains, humans, animal kingdom, and the fire in the Sámi tent... breathe’*  
(Ovllá & Gaino 2010).

The yoik is a chanting technique practised by the Sámi of Northern Europe. It can be described as a *craft*, an art of shaping breath along circular melodic variations. It is also a craft in another sense of the term – namely a power, a strength; it is in this sense that the yoik is reputed to have ‘more “craft” than dynamite’. If life without the yoik is ‘unthinkable’ for those who practise it, it is for what it makes possible, how its power opens a particular field of experience. In a nutshell, the yoik is a way of summoning the presence of familiar people, animals, and places for the time of a melodic vocalisation. As such, it is a craft of animation: it breathes, revives, arouses, transforms, unfolds, inspires, echoes, sets in motion; it brings to perception what would otherwise remain elusive: past memories, distant places, animal *ethé*, inner ecologies, the absent, the dead, the primordial within humans.

This thesis stems from an attentive engagement with this craft, achieved through my own practice, that is, as a *writer*. It consists of essays, or *philosophical variations*, aimed at thinking the yoik and thinking *with* the yoik. As in the musical variations of popular melodies by classical composers, my task has been to enhance the yoik’s craft, to cause it to grow within another medium. This implied taking the yoik seriously, acknowledging it as a practice in its own right and unfolding its capacity to

bring various dimensions of human life (e.g. temporality, metamorphosis, animality, presence, personhood, semiosis, environment) into a particular light. In doing so, the immediate experience of yoiking was transformed into concepts and linear arguments – like places, animals, and people are transformed into melodic gestures by the Sámi yoikers – with the aim of getting a glimpse of what the world can be like when engaged through yoiking and writing.

A yoiked vocalisation consists of multiple repetitions of a melody. It can be vocalised with or without lyrics, but it generally starts with one, or a few introductory tones, opening onto its circle. This vocal introduction is captured by the North Sámi expression *rohttet*: ‘to pull into motion’. This thesis, likewise, starts by pulling into motion some of the voices invoked in the following chapters. Each of these chapters constitutes a ‘variation’ of the yoik, in that it opens anew the description of its craft with one central concept: *horizon, enchantment, creature, depth, echo, primordial*.

The first voices that deserve introduction belong to the human community most closely involved with the craft of yoiking: the Sámi.

## **The Sámi**

In 1986, the Sámi Council stated in its political programme the following note: ‘We, Saami are one people, united in our own culture, language and history, living in areas which, since time immemorial and up to historical times, we alone inhabited and utilized’. When I first heard about the Sámi, they were referred to as ‘Lapps’ [fr. *Lapons*] – an expression which, nowadays, is considered pejorative. Many in Western Europe have become familiar with them through images of reindeer herding, sledges, conical tents, northern lights, and wide, snow-covered landscapes, evoking a haven

of quietness, wilderness, nomadism, and closeness to nature at the fringes of Europe.

This conception of their homeland, *Sápmi*, as a dreamland, ‘out of space, out of time’ (Verran et al. 2015), is conveyed by various means and actors, including the work of several ethnologists and the discourse of some yoikers. As the historians Lars Ivar Hansen and Bjørnar Olsen note about Sámi historiography, while the Scandinavians ‘are portrayed as belligerent, prone to change, individualistic, and hierarchical, the Sámi are equally narrowly depicted as peaceful, stable, collective, and egalitarian’ (Hansen & Olsen 2014: 7). Whether one endorses or rejects dichotomist views of Nordic identities, the Sámi remain unique in Europe by their being the only ‘indigenous’ people officially recognised as such within the European Union.

Building on the apparent fracture between two communities cohabiting in Northern Europe – the sedentary Scandinavians, Finns, and Russians on the one side, the nomadic Sámi on the other – ethnologists have occasionally placed the Sámi within a circumpolar rather than a European cultural continuum. Jarich Oosten and Cornelius Remie describe this continuum according to the following features: economies traditionally based on nomadism, an egalitarian and flexible social organisation with weak leadership, a strong tradition of shamanism, and a low population density (Oosten & Remie 1999: 3). I met numerous Sámi people who embraced this perspective, stressing feelings of brotherhood with indigenous communities of the Circumpolar North and beyond, invoking profound similarities between their modes of dwelling, their connection to nature, their musical traditions, or their political situation. The current environmental disruptions seem to have enhanced the supposed contrast between an oppressive ‘West’,

blind to the destruction of nature, and Sápmi as a place of resistance in Europe. A recent illustration can be found in the protests of a group of Sámi led by the yoiker Sara Marielle Gaup Beaska<sup>1</sup> in the streets of Paris during COP21 in 2015, chanting<sup>2</sup> the yoik *Gulahallat Eatnamiin* [‘We Speak Earth’].

This dichotomy between the Sámi and their European neighbours, relevant as it can be, only constitutes one dimension of the situation; and as such, both Sámi and non-Sámi actors also constantly undermine it. We know from history and archaeology that contacts between what is now known as *Sápmi* and the rest of the continent have been continuous since the settlement of Northern Europe at the end of the last Ice Age. The first known reference to the Sámi in the literature goes back to Tacitus’ *Germania*, where they are referred to as *Fenni*. Although the issue of the Sámi’s origins has been the subject of several theories in the past, it became a secondary concern as the archaeologist Knut Odner suggested that the Sámi did not migrate to Fennoscandia as a homogeneous ethnic group in the first place (Odner 1983). According to him, the Sámi progressively emerged as a community through their relationships with neighbouring populations, who dwelt mainly in southern Finland and along the Scandinavian coasts. While the latter turned to sedentary livelihoods and hierarchical organisations, the former mainly occupied the inner lands, maintained a nomadic livelihood based on hunting and developed into a community that we now call the Sámi. This does not mean that the Sámi do

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<sup>1</sup> All the yoikers mentioned in this thesis are listed and presented in Appendix 2.

<sup>2</sup> For reasons that will be explained further below, ‘yoiking’ must be distinguished from ‘singing’. I therefore refer to it as an act of ‘chanting’, more likely to evoke the circularity of yoiks, the fact that they are vocalised *a cappella*, and their incantatory quality.

not inhabit coastal areas: in Norway, the ‘coastal Sámi’ form a specific ensemble of communities, inhabiting what the anthropologist Harald Eidheim calls ‘the edges of the Lappish area’, due to the local predominance of the Norwegian language, in contrast to the situation in Inner Finnmark (Eidheim 1969: 41). The coastal Sámi have historically been more inclined to sedentarity and farming than their homologues from the inner lands (Hansen & Olsen 2014).

In most of Sápmi, and despite significant regional variation, a pattern of transition from economies based on hunting towards reindeer herding and farming progressively took place in response to new constraints and economic opportunities (*ibid.*). With regard to herding, the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries appear to be a turning point, although pastoralism might have been practised since the Viking Age (i.e. between 800 and 1000 AD), as suggested, for instance, by the seafarer Ohthere of Hålogaland’s written testimony as well as archaeological sources. It appears that the relationship between hunting and herding has been multifaceted and has implied countless variations rather than a sudden transition from the former to the latter (Bjørklund 2013: 175).

The origins of the Sámi is an issue that the Sámi themselves have approached with their own narratives. It constitutes the topic of two yoik texts written down by the priest Jacob Fellman (b. 1795 – d. 1875) (1903 [1847]: 239-247): ‘On the first inhabitants of Sápmi’ and ‘On the later settlement of Sápmi’. Yoiks like these, including long narrative lyrics, are rarely encountered nowadays. Fellman heard them in 1831 from a person who had learned them during his youth, in 1805. They divide the history of the settlement of Sápmi into three periods, which, according to the Sámi philologist Harald Gaski, might extend over several thousand years (Gaski

2011: 35). The first period covers the time when a community of settlers found Sápmi at the end of a long walk. In the second period, a new population arrived, bringing along the practices of herding and idolatry. According to Fellman, after several violent conflicts, the groups reconciled and blended into what we now know as the Sámi people. This reconciliation was followed by a long-lasting period of peace. Eventually, their renown attracted the attention of neighbouring kings, who started inquiring about them. This opened the third era of Sápmi, the time of colonisation, during which the Sámi would turn to Christianity.

As other poems gathered by Jacob Fellman suggest, this appeared to be a time of tension between acceptance and resistance vis-à-vis external influences. ‘The Thief and the Noaidi’ [ns. *Suola ja Noaidi*], for instance, is a dialogue between two conflictual characters: the thief is a foreign intruder who has harmed the earth, grass, and stones, while the *noaidi* is an autochthonous character who claims to possess a better understanding of the land. The *noaidi* eventually recognises that the thief has become the new master, yet he still has power and attempts to drive the thief away, to which the latter answers: ‘Then you will perish and disappear, *noaidi*’ (Fellman 1903 [1847]: 254-259).<sup>3</sup>

Since then, the establishment of national borders has divided the sovereignty over Sápmi among four countries: Norway, Sweden, Finland, and Russia. Today, ‘Sápmi’ commonly refers to an area comparable to

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<sup>3</sup> Unless otherwise indicated, all the written sources invoked in this work have been consulted in their original language and all English translations are my own. Texts that were directly consulted in a translated version are indicated by an asterisk [\*]. All italicised sections are italicised in their original sources, unless indicated by the mention ‘my emphasis’.

Germany in size, stretching from the Norwegian coast to the Kola Peninsula / *Куэ́лнэгк нё́аррк* (Murmansk Oblast, Russia)<sup>4</sup> and from Femund (Hedmark, Norway) to the North Cape / *Davvinjárga* (Finnmark, Norway). The region has a wide variety of landscapes (fjords, tundra-covered plateaus and mountains, taiga, lakes) and climates (arctic, subarctic, alpine, hemiboreal). It covers both sides of the Arctic Circle, which at approximately 66° North encircles the part of the Northern Hemisphere where the ‘polar night’ and ‘midnight sun’ phenomena occur.

Reindeer herding remains an emblematic activity, although it involves a minority of the Sámi population, most of whom have livelihoods similar to those of their Scandinavian, Finnish, or Russian neighbours. Thus, when I first visited the region of Finnmark (northern Norway) in April 2014, I was struck by the sight of Sámi towns like Karasjok / *Kárášjohka* and Kautokeino / *Guovdageaidnu*. At first glance, nothing seemed to distinguish them from any other typical Norwegian town, with their coloured wood panel houses spread over large areas, their supermarkets, their fuel stations, and their scenic surroundings. A more attentive eye, however, would notice the *lávvu* (conical tent) built in a backyard, the Sámi flag hung at a window, the *gákti* (traditional cloth) worn by some of the locals, the reindeer skins hanging over a balcony, or the use of the North Sámi language, one of ten related Finno-Ugrian languages spoken in Sápmi in addition to national languages.

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<sup>4</sup> Place names are indicated in relation to their official administrative regions and countries (cf. Appendix 3 for a map). Out of convenience, I use English versions of place names. The local Sámi name is mentioned on the first mention of a place in each chapter.

Historical factors partly explain the look of contemporary Sámi towns. Besides the fact that areas like Karasjok and Kautokeino have been rebuilt after the *Wehrmacht* destroyed them at the end of the Second World War (Gullickson 2014), their inhabitants have progressively been integrated, either willingly or through coercion, into the national economies. Nowadays, many of them have comparable standards of living to their Norwegian neighbours. The Swedish Sámi scholar Charlotta Svonni summarises the situation as follows: ‘Privileged as a Swede, discriminated as a Sámi’ (Svonni 2017). As this quotation suggests, the scars of colonisation and national assimilation of the Sámi still remain today, occasionally manifested by racist or patronising attitudes among their neighbours or by the general difficulty of inheriting from a cultural legacy that has been systematically downgraded over the past centuries by national or religious authorities. Sharing my work in southern Norway taught me that the yoik, in particular, is not particularly well known by the Scandinavian population. Everybody knows it as the ‘folk music’ of the Sámi, but few are aware of its ‘craft’.

On the political level, fractures remain, such as in the management of the land and reindeer herding, where despite the establishment of the Norwegian Sámi Parliament in 1989, Sámi voices are often silenced in favour of scientific institutions (Benjaminsen et al. 2014). As the Sámi philologist Harald Gaski put it,

‘The period of Norwegianization lasted from around the middle of the 19th century until well into the 1960s. During this time, the public’s view of Sami people underwent a change: Where Norwegians had once regarded the Sami as innocent, naive children of nature, they



gradually began to openly look down on everything that had anything whatsoever to do with that which is Sami. The Sami were to be made civilized, elevated to a higher cultural level. Obviously, under this cultural policy, no support could be given to any effort made by the Sami themselves. It became forbidden to use the Sami language in teaching, and separate wage scales were established for those teachers who were most successful in Norwegianizing Sami children' (Gaski 2011: 41).

The second half of the twentieth century can be considered as the turning point in a cultural revival, which I address below (cf. Section 'Modern yoiks'), although remarkable gestures of resistance to colonisation took place earlier, such as the Kautokeino Rebellion in 1852 and the Sámi Assembly of 1917, commemorated each year as the Sámi National Day [ns. *Sámi álbmotbeaivi*; ss. *Saemiej áålmegebiejjie*].

Nowadays, drawing a neat boundary between two cultural worlds is a delicate endeavour. Even among the Sámi, various groups cohabit with each other. From North to South, one finds the North Sámi, Lule Sámi, Pite Sámi, Ume Sámi, and South Sámi languages, while towards the east, one finds the Inari, Skolt, Akkala, Kildin, and Ter Sámi languages.<sup>5</sup> As the indigenous scholar Britt Kramvig reported, there is 'a history of intermarriage between ethnic groups and of systematic government assimilation of minorities such

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<sup>5</sup> When asked to what extent they understood each other, a North Sámi speaker described the situation as follows: A North Sámi speaker may understand a Lule Sámi, who may understand the Pite Sámi, who may understand the South Sámi. North Sámi remains the most widely spoken Sámi language, and in Norway, it is the most likely to be used as a common language, besides Norwegian.

as the Saami and the Kvæn. These processes have created a complex ethnic situation where distinct homogenous ethnic origins in many of the northern communities are hard to come by' (Kramvig 2005: 46). Another scholar, Trond Thuen, has likewise stressed that the idea of a monolithic Sámi people opposed to the majority populations is partly fictional. Not only have the Sámi been historically divided in terms of cultural and political projects, but 'Sáminess' is not exclusive: most Sámi in Norway also identify themselves as Norwegian citizens (Thuen 2007). As Christian Hicks and the yoiker Ánde Somby note:

'The Sámi are continually in conflict among themselves [...], owing to the fact that they see themselves as Norwegian or Swedish or Finnish first, and Sámi second. The main reason for this dual identity is their assimilation into the dominant culture. It is also based on the fact that the Sámi enjoy many of the benefits of being Scandinavian and readily identify with the Nordic culture owing to these cultures' co-existence with each other over centuries. Nor has there been one common identifying basis for Sámi culture. The coastal Sámi of Norway differ in culture from the mountain Sámi of Norway and Sweden, who differ from the Kola Sámi of Russia. To make things more difficult, Sámi cultural lines do not follow but rather transcend national boundaries. Sámi in northern Norway have more in common with Finnish Sámi than they do with southern Norwegian Sámi' (Hicks & Somby 2005: 275-276).

The Sámi yoikers I met in the course of this research have often stressed the same conception of Sáminess as a sense of belonging to a community that cohabits with a national belonging. Sáminess is not necessarily something

that one bears in mind at all times: one can live like any other Norwegian citizen in everyday life and only enact a Sámi belonging during special circumstances, such as during festivals. Both belongings can also be expressed at once: a Sámi person may be present on the streets of Oslo / *Oslove* to celebrate Norwegian Constitution Day on the seventeenth of May while wearing the traditional *gákti* instead of the Norwegian *bunad*, thus highlighting the multiple quality of the Norwegian identity.

In short, the Sámi appear as a diverging community inserted within the Nordic cultural landscape – one that knows many variations and only constitutes one dimension of the actors involved.

## The yoik

A yoik is a short melody,<sup>6</sup> with or without lyrics, repeated several times, and which evokes a person, an animal,<sup>7</sup> or a place.

The English expression ‘yoik’, or ‘joik’, refers both to a way of chanting [ns. *juoigat*] and to individual melodies [ns. *luohti*, ls. *vuolle*, us. *vuöllie*, ss. *vuelie*, sk. *leu’dd*]. It can also be used as a verb, ‘to yoik’ [ns. *juoigan*], referring to the act of chanting a yoik. The yoik is widely considered to be a Sámi expression, although it is today listened to, and is marginally practised, by non-Sámi persons in various parts of the world. However, some yoikers stress that the Sámi did not invent it; the yoik, according to

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<sup>6</sup> I use the word ‘melody’ throughout the thesis to refer to the musical line that constitutes a yoik. However, all yoiks are not melodic: a minority of them do not involve the use of discrete pitch or fast rhythmic structures.

<sup>7</sup> Out of convenience, and unless otherwise stated, the expression ‘animal’ is used to denote any sort of animal other than humans throughout the thesis.

them, was received as a gift from the *Gufihtar*, also called *Ulda*: underground beings who watch over the behaviour of humans and occasionally appear to them (Gaup 1995, Gaup 2005, Krumhansl et al. 2000, Lüderwaldt 1976, 2001, Somby 2016a, 2016b, Wersland 2005). Following this idea, it is often suggested that the yoik, unlike other musical traditions in Europe, is intimately tied to the mountains, to the earth, or to nature (Arnberg et al. 1997a, Aubinet 2017, Edström 2003, Gaski 2008, Graff 2011, Helander & Kailo 1998, Ramnarine 2009, Sara 2002). To what extent the yoik emanates from ‘more-than-human’<sup>8</sup> socialities and what this implies will be explored throughout the thesis.

In most cases, yoiks have few lyrics [ns. *dajahus*], or none at all. In the latter case, they are chanted with syllables without linguistic meaning. In all cases, one always retains the liberty of improvising a new text on any melody. Yoik texts are described by the Sámi philologist Harald Gaski as the oldest form of Sámi poetry (Gaski 2011: 34). As the yoiker Øystein Nilsen explained when I met him, the further east one gets in Finnmark, the longer these texts become (conversation 2017). For example, in the region of Nesseby / *Unjárga*, long texts may describe various aspects of the person who is yoiked, whereas in Kautokeino, the text is often limited to a few keywords.

Yoiks are generally chanted in everyday life, in solitude or among relatives, and *a cappella*. Most of the time, they are chanted by a single yoiker, but they can also be chanted in a group, either in unison (Einejord

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<sup>8</sup> The expression ‘more-than-human’ is borrowed from the work of the philosopher and magician David Abram. It seeks to highlight how being human involves being enmeshed with various presences such as animals, plants, landscapes, earth, and air (Abram 1997).

1975) or out of tune with one other (Jernsletten 1978: 114-115, Wright 2015). In the South Sámi and East Sámi traditions, things can be slightly different. South Sámi yoiks usually have narrower melodic intervals and sometimes a gradual rise of pitch through the vocalisation, while eastern yoiks, spread among the Skolt and Kola Sámi, often rely on minor melodic scales and include longer lyrics, especially in the so-called ‘epic yoiks’ (Arnberg et al. 1997a, Fagerheim 2014, Saastamoinen 2007).<sup>9</sup> This thesis is mostly based on the observation of the northern and, to a lesser extent, the southern traditions, as they occur in Norway. Other Sámi communities of Norway, like the Pite and Lule Sámi, are more marginally represented (cf. Section ‘Conversations’ on the issue of representativity).

One reason for this focus on a particular region of Sápmi is that northern yoikers tend to be more famous; they were easier to contact and meet, and their works were more easily accessible. The southern tradition, on the other hand, is described by the yoiker and researcher Krister Stoor as having ‘the weakest position in the third millennium’ (Stoor 2016: 715). Indeed, the yoik tends to be more invisible there than in Inner Finnmark, although it is now the object of a revival animated by the creativity of contemporary yoikers and partly nourished by recordings and transcriptions collected in the past. The South, Lule, and Pite Sámi I met would generally advise me to turn to Finnmark to find a lively yoiking tradition practised uninterruptedly since primordial times (cf. 6<sup>th</sup> variation). Through various personal encounters and the exploration of texts and recordings, I have acquired familiarity with other regional traditions and their singularities;

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<sup>9</sup> These observations are merely meant to draw *tendencies*: counter-examples could be invoked for each of them.

this allows me to refer to them at times, or to speculate that the observations gathered in this work are relevant for all crafts of yoiking in Norway and Sápmi. Yet it must also be borne in mind that attending more closely to other regional crafts might have resulted in a different thesis: for instance, what would the concept of ‘horizon’ (cf. 1<sup>st</sup> variation) have been if I had focused on communities of yoikers dwelling in densely forested areas, rather than on mountainous plateaus?

Until the end of the 1960s, the only possible musical accompaniment for the yoik was the *noaidi* drum. *Noaidi* [ss. *nåejtie*], sometimes referred to as Sámi ‘shamans’, were key actors of Sámi society up to the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. They were considered experts in ‘trance rituals’, during which their souls would journey in order to interact with spiritual entities or other *noaidi*, to predict the future, to cure members of the community, or to see what was happening in distant places. As the yoik was an important element of these rituals (Graff 1996, cf. 1<sup>st</sup> variation), Christian missionaries in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries readily considered it to be a heathen craft. According to nearly all the yoikers I have met, yoiking is still considered sinful in many Sámi communities of northern Norway, due to the yoik’s supposed relation to pre-Christian rituals or to alcoholism, and to the rigour of the Laestadian religious movement (Delaporte 1978, Graff 2016, Wersland 2005, cf. 6<sup>th</sup> variation).<sup>10</sup> They pointed out that since yoiking was banned from public areas it was most commonly heard during parties, when people were joyful or drunk enough

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<sup>10</sup> In Southern Sápmi and Sweden, the relation between the yoik and the church appears less conflictual. The yoiker and scholar Krister Stoor thus notes that ‘the Swedish church has officially accepted the yoik as a part of its activity’ (Stoor 2016: 729-730).

to challenge the rules. Several of the yoikers I met thus informed me that they learned how to yoik at parties. However, I never managed to meet anyone who actually considered the yoik as intrinsically sinful, nor to find any trace of these people. Nils Henriksen, a member of the Kautokeino parish council, insisted during a press interview that most Christians in Finnmark enjoy the yoik – only when chanted in a church does the yoik become sinful (Guttormsen 2014).

Today, in Kautokeino, yoiking in a public area is not explicitly forbidden, but it may be perceived as inappropriate by some. Conversely, it seems that yoiking at home or in the mountain does not feel wrong to anyone (Graff 2016: 27). As expressed by the Sámi poet Paulus Utsi (b. 1918 – d. 1975), a prominent figure of the Sámi cultural revival at the end of the 1960s:

‘When I arrive in the mountains  
I am at home  
Then, I dare raise my voice in a joyful yoik  
The oppression and orders of strangers  
do not reach here

here, I am at home’  
(Utsi 2000: 236).

Yoiks are generally described as ‘circular’ for the reason that they are usually repeated several times. Repetition is often inscribed within their melodic structure, as the last note leads back to the first one, like a snake biting its own tail. Therefore, one yoik can be chanted for a few seconds, minutes, or hours. Some yoikers stress that the melodies do not actually

have a beginning or an end, insofar as a vocalisation can start or stop at any stage of the melody.

The circularity of the yoik is an issue that has been recently studied by the ethnomusicologist Ola Graff through a critical approach. According to him, the description of yoiks as circles is a recent idea, born of a need among some yoikers (notably Nils-Aslak Valkeapää, cf. Section ‘Modern yoiks’) to distinguish Sámi culture from their Scandinavian and European neighbours, and affirming belongings to the indigenous diaspora. To state that the yoik is circular, he contends, is to suggest that it is like the seasonal cycles and the ongoing flow of rivers and winds, in contrast to the supposed linearity of European songs (Graff 2018: 70-72). Whatever its origins may be, the correspondence between the yoik’s circles and nature’s circles has become a widespread idea. The Sámi scholar Jorunn Jernsletten, for example, suggests that ‘the seasons follow one another, but they repeat themselves. Likewise, in the yoik, the melody repeats itself, but with variations’ (Jernsletten 2004: 50).

Without rejecting Graff’s interpretation, I have tried to take the yoik’s circularity more seriously than he did. Considering Valkeapää’s or Jernsletten’s ideas as mere political statements was not enough. Taking seriously, as the anthropologist Tim Ingold writes, means facing up ‘to the challenges [that others] present to our assumptions about the ways things are, the kind of world we inhabit, and how we relate to it’ (Ingold 2018a: 15). It does not imply agreeing with everything yoikers say, but it does imply that one cannot ‘duck the challenge’ (ibid.). The yoik’s circularity deserves to be taken seriously, not just because it denotes the fact that yoiks are indeed continuously repeated, but for the reason that circularity is a *powerful idea* – a *craftful* one, and one that became widespread among



yoikers precisely because it seems to capture an important dimension of their experience, regardless of possible political motivations. Circularity appears like a *primordial* figure (cf. 6<sup>th</sup> variation), enacting the moving shape of the *horizon* (cf. 1<sup>st</sup> variation) and the *depths* it conceals (cf. 4<sup>th</sup> variation). Think of the circularity of the *echo* (cf. 5<sup>th</sup> variation), of the concrescence between the yoik and the various beings it brings to presence, turned into *creatures* (cf. 3<sup>rd</sup> variation), or of the dialogue between humans and non-humans yoiking to one another, taking place in situations of *enchantment* (cf. 2<sup>nd</sup> variation).

I have just named the six central concepts that will accompany the reflection of the following chapters. I will come back to these later (cf. Section ‘Variations’). In the meantime, suffice to say that they all partake in the yoik’s circularity, as does the idea of *variation*.

### **Sonic pictures**

Each yoik relates to an element of the world, most of the time a person, an animal, or a place (or a landscape). Thus, any member of a Sámi community, or anyone who has spent time with yoikers, may have a personal yoik. The melody is often presented as a ‘sonic picture’ [no. *lydbilde*], in that it aims to describe its ‘object’ with tones. The yoik of a person is therefore supposed to sound like that person. Character traits like self-confidence, timidity, joyfulness, or absentmindedness, for instance, can be rendered into the melodic pattern (cf. 3<sup>rd</sup> variation). One of the most common sayings among yoikers is that one does not yoik *about* someone, in the way a songwriter might sing *about* something: one yoiks *someone*. It is indeed widely considered that the yoik has a closer connection with its ‘object’ than would a Scandinavian song, so that, according to the yoiker

Ánde Somby, ‘it is altogether impossible to envision [the yoik] in terms of subject and object’ (Somby 2007). As the yoiker Ingor Ántte Áilu Gaup explained to me, the yoik does not revolve ‘around’ the person it is supposed to evoke; instead, it goes right through that person and creates a contact ‘from soul to soul’. Hence, just like we do not say ‘I love about you’ but ‘I love you’, we say ‘I yoik you’ (yoik course 2018). Instead of ‘object’, I will use the expression ‘source’ for referring to the person, animal, or place evoked by a particular yoik.

Whatever the source, its relation to the melody is so tight that they appear ontologically linked: the reindeer’s yoik *is* the reindeer; your melody *is* you. As expressed by the yoiker Ursula Länsman, a member of the band Angelit, ‘it’s like a holographic, multi-dimensional living image, a replica, not just a flat photograph or simple visual memory. It is not about something, it is that something’ (Länsman 1999). As a crucial dimension of the yoik, the consequences of this idea will be explored throughout this thesis. One of the most important ones is that the yoik constitutes a way of *making present*. To yoik friends is a way of being in their presence, recalling memories and engaging with one’s attachment to them. As the yoiker Anders Bær put it, ‘when you are alone in the mountains and you are recalling a friend, you chant this friend’s yoik, and it makes you feel good’ (in Jernsletten 1978: 110). Even the dead can be brought to presence by yoiking and some yoikers consider that people remain alive as long as they are yoiked, even if they have stopped breathing (Eriksson 2002, Gaup 1995, Rydving 2013, Wennström 1996, cf. 5<sup>th</sup> variation on the practice of yoiking the dead).

The yoik has thus been described as an ‘art of memory’ [sá. *muitim konsta*] by the Sámi writer Johan Turi (b. 1854 – d. 1936) (Turi 1910: 91, 216, cf. also Rydving 2009, 2013), a renowned wolf hunter and reindeer

herder as well as the author of the first book written in a Sámi language by a Sámi writer (Gaski 2011: 39). As the *noaidi*, poet, and yoiker Ailo Gaup notes: ‘[the yoik] is a language of the soul that fills the room with memories and life’ (Gaup 2005: 320). By yoiking a person, a place, or an animal, yoikers summon a set of memories upon which they can dwell as long as the vocalisation lasts. The yoiker Mari Helander thus describes the yoik as a way of ‘wandering back in time’ (conversation 2018, cf. 5<sup>th</sup> variation). The emotions that are attached to these memories sometimes emerge in powerful, or even unbearable ways. They are considered by some as having therapeutic value, such as in the way they can cheer up a person who is in a bad mood or a state of depression (Domokos 2006, Gaup 2005, Gaup 1991, Hanssen 2011, Helander & Kailo 1998, Hämäläinen et al. 2017, 2018, Ragazzi 2012).

To be yoiked is also considered an honour and a mark of respect, although yoiks may occasionally be used to mock others. It is therefore forbidden to chant one’s own yoik, as that would be a sign of vanity; as Ingor Ántte Áilu Gaup explained to me, yoiking yourself is like walking in the streets and yelling your own name (yoik course 2018). However, there are, to my knowledge, four circumstances where yoikers *can* yoik themselves: (1) when they are extremely angry (Buljo 1998, Delaporte 1978); (2) when they want to introduce themselves (Gaup 1991, Hanssen 2011, Sara 2002); (3) when they are drunk (Gaup 1995); or (4) when asked to do so by others. The way people yoik each other is sometimes described as mysterious. Indeed, at any moment, one can never be sure whether they are being yoiked somewhere. I once heard an anecdote about a man in the Tana / *Deatnu* area (Finnmark, Norway) who had been yoiked for years without even knowing that he had a yoik.

Among the sources of yoiks, humans are clearly predominant in the repertoire. They are followed by animals, and then places. However, nearly anything can be yoiked, including natural phenomena (Einejord 1975), the stars (Gaup 2005), institutions like the Sámi Parliament (Graff 2004), or foreign politicians (Diamond 2011). It is also possible to improvise yoiks and to let oneself be inspired by landscapes, ideas, or memories, without yoiking a melody that refers to a particular being. When asked whether landscapes or animals from other parts of the world can be yoiked (e.g. a wild boar), the yoikers I met usually answered that it might be possible, although the only way to know is to try. To my knowledge, plants are never yoiked. The tundra can be yoiked, but it would perhaps be considered as a place rather than a mere vegetal entity. However, I doubt that anyone would affirm as a final statement that plants cannot be yoiked at all.

Whether ‘things’ like chairs, houses, or institutions can be yoiked is debatable, but the yoikers I asked about this suggested that they are unlikely to give interesting yoiks. As far as I can tell, the only human-made things that people commonly yoik are cars and snowmobiles, although these are rare sources in comparison to animals, places, and people. It may be that a guiding principle for what can be yoiked is movement: people, animals, vehicles, and landscapes are engaged by moving through the land, whereas institutions or cell phones may be considered more static.

An animal species normally has one yoik, which may not be the same from one community to another. Reindeer and dogs sometimes have individual yoiks, as humans do. Both men and women can be yoiked, although it is generally considered that their respective yoiks sound slightly different: the former sound more ‘masculine’ and the latter more ‘feminine’. Yoikers generally find it difficult to put into words what this means in terms

of melodic differences (Graff 1985). Ola Graff observed that male melodies are generally more ‘powerful’ and ‘harder’, whereas female melodies are described as ‘finer’ (Graff 2017: 35-36). On this issue, as on many others, any form of generalisation suffers exceptions.

In any case, men, women, and children appear to participate equally in the craft of yoiking. I have only encountered one text suggesting that men and women do not yoik quite the same things: according to the anthropologist Yves Delaporte, female yoikers in Kautokeino are more inclined to chant yoiks related to landscapes or animals, whereas male yoikers more often yoik other human beings (Delaporte 1978: 114). He adds that, as women have progressively been excluded from techniques of herding ‘since about twenty years ago’ (i.e. in the 1950s), their practice of yoiking nature tends to decline and personal yoiks are becoming hegemonic in Kautokeino (ibid.: 115). Forty years later, I have not made any observations suggesting a significant fracture.

Ola Graff approached this issue in a recent paper, highlighting the role of gender in relation to melodic aesthetics, ritual traditions, and lyrics. He reported, for example, that in contrast to Scandinavian folk singing, ‘there is no “queering” in the traditional Sámi yoik. The gender divide here appears as an unproblematic evidence’ (Graff 2017: 32). He also notes that this divide has no influence on yoiking skills: ‘Both men and women can be acknowledged as accomplished yoikers’ (ibid.: 44). Apart from Graff’s contribution, this remains an area that has been little explored by researchers and one to which this thesis has little to contribute.

Regarding who I interacted with, the conversations quoted in this work and the yoik courses I attended involved nearly twice as many male as female yoikers (cf. list of references at the end of this thesis), whereas the

*consultations* (to be distinguished from the ‘conversations’) gathered approximately 80 per cent of female participants (cf. Section ‘Strategies of attention’). In my conversations, I retained the overall impression that male yoikers sought to influence my perception of the yoik and to hold the command of the exchange more often than female yoikers did. When I asked unexpectedly weird questions, male yoikers appeared more likely to disregard them than the female yoikers, who would more readily welcome the opportunity of thinking their practice anew. I can think of a few conversations or fragments of conversations with male yoikers that occurred along the ‘female’ mode sketched here and, to a lesser extent, vice versa. Both modes were instructive in their own regard. During my consultations, the majority of the respondents were female, while the feedback I received from male participants tended to be more laconic, although not necessarily more negative.

### **Creation and apprenticeship**

Various ideas cohabit as to how new yoiks are created, but all point to the fact that they are not, strictly speaking, ‘composed’ by the yoikers: they are *received*. This may occur during sleep (Gaup 1995, Berit Alette Mienna in NRK 2017: episode 3, conversation with Johan Andreas Andersen 2017), during *adjágas*, i.e. a state between being awake and asleep (cf. Kramvig 2015), while driving a car, a snowmobile, or a boat, or when walking in the mountains. It could also happen in other circumstances, e.g. while walking in a city or watching television, although this seems more unusual. Most of the time, yoik-creators do not get particular credit for their creation: the yoik belongs entirely to its source (Buljo 1998, Hunsdal 1979, Jernsletten 1978). Thus, *your yoik is yours*, even though you are not supposed to chant it

yourself. Furthermore, if a personal yoik is beautiful, it is often considered to be due to the beauty of the person it evokes, and not necessarily to the skill of its creator.

Yoiks can be offered as gifts, for example for a birthday (conversation with Øysten Nilsen 2017). Most people have one personal yoik or none at all. Having more than one yoik is rare, but it may occur. If it does, then it indicates a certain prestige: a person who has several yoiks is someone who is greatly appreciated by the community. In some places, like Kautokeino, children can receive a particular type of yoik called a *dovdna*. These are usually high-pitched, simpler than adult yoiks, and chanted with tenderness, similar to lullabies. According to the Sámi musician Klemet Anders Buljo, a *dovdna* must evoke childhood and can be associated with a positive quality that the parents wish to develop in the child, such as to run quickly, to help others, or simply to have a positive personality (Buljo 1998: 141). The ethnomusicologist Ola Graff reported that a *dovdna* can be inherited by parents (Graff 1990: 19); the yoiker Ánte Mihkkal Gaup, for instance, gave his *dovdna* to his son (Gaup 1991: 19). Buljo also states that a *dovdna* may change over time and develop into an adult yoik, unless an entirely new yoik is created once the child has grown up (Buljo 1998: 141-142). Whether the yoik undergoes changes or not, the ethnologist Ildikó Tamás reported that it will eventually crystallise into an enduring form (Tamás 2013). There are no strict rules as to when a person should receive an adult yoik; it may occur at any stage of that person's life, or not at all. The Sámi philologist Nils Jernsletten mentions that children generally receive a yoik when they start playing important roles in the community, and then receive a new one when they become fully adult (Jernsletten 1978: 110). I have not heard of this pattern myself, more than forty years after he wrote this.

The craft of yoiking can be learned as one learns a mother tongue: by being immersed in a ‘yoik milieu’ (ibid.) – i.e. a place where yoiking occurs in everyday life – from early childhood – or even earlier, since the *dovdna* may be chanted to a child during pregnancy (conversation with Anne Lise Varsi 2017). Some yoikers state that they were able to yoik before they could talk (Graff 2016, Hanssen 2011) and adult yoik teachers sometimes consider the children’s capacities to learn how to yoik to be higher than those of adults (conversations with Anne Lise Varsi 2017 and Mari Helander 2018, cf. also Berit Alette Mienna in Hanssen 2017). However, my conversations indicate that this mode of learning as a child may have almost become the exception rather than the rule. Among yoikers born around the 1950s and 1960s, many consider that more people used to yoik when they were young, but that they had to suffer more condemnation by Laestadian religious milieus (cf. 6<sup>th</sup> variation).

Negative attitudes towards the supposedly sinful quality of the yoik varied from one family to another: some yoiked freely at home, others strictly forbade it, but many tended to be cautious when yoiking in public areas. As already mentioned, some yoikers learned the craft during parties, when participants were drunk or joyful enough to yoik in front of others. Among younger yoikers, some started to learn as adults by listening to recordings in archives, records, or on the internet. Consequently, concerns have emerged regarding the genuineness of these new yoiking voices and their divergences from the supposedly ‘authentic’ voice of the elder generations. This has led some yoikers to propose the idea of a ‘yoik police’ [no. *joikepoliti*], aimed at making sure that people yoik in an appropriate way, following the model of Norwegian groups like the so-called



'*folkemusikkpolitiet*' in the field of traditional music and '*bunadspolitiet*' in traditional clothing.

The idea of a yoik police was criticised by some of the yoikers I have met. According to them, it would restrict the creativity of yoikers and dissuade the younger generations from yoiking. The same people generally agreed on the importance of maintaining a practice of yoiking that does not become mere 'singing' (cf. 1<sup>st</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> variations on the relation between 'traditional' and 'modern' yoiks).

### **Musical structure**

The musical structure of yoik melodies can be approached through the analyses performed by ethnomusicologists such as Andreas Lüderwaldt (1976), based on yoiks from Finnmark; György Szomjas-Schiffert (1996), addressing the repertoires of a large area spreading from Kautokeino to Nunnanen / *Njunnás* (Lapland, Finland); Carol Krumhansl et al. (2000), based on yoiks from Kautokeino and Enontekiö / *Eanodat* (Lapland, Finland); and Ola Graff (2004), focused on the Norwegian coastal repertoire, as well as my own contributions in my master's thesis (Aubinet 2015). The latter is based on the analysis of thirty-one melodies recorded in 1953 and 1954 in the north of Sweden and edited as part of a triple-CD edition (Arnberg et al. 1997b). This section is the only point at which the musical structure of a yoik is systematically addressed as this work is primarily focused on the *practice* of yoiking, which does not normally involve concerns about structural systems (cf. 6<sup>th</sup> variation).

The structure of melodies is generally made of what Ola Graff calls 'musical paragraphs' [no. *musikalske avsnitter*] (Graff 2004: 189). In most cases, a yoik melody gathers four paragraphs, arranged along various

patterns depending on their affiliations. Graff mentions ABAC and ABCD as the most recurring patterns in his repertoire (Graff 2004: 190); Szomjas-Schiffert observes ABAC and ABCB as typical forms (Szomjas-Schiffert 1996: 65); and Lüderwaldt quotes the work of Armas Launis in 1908, who among 854 melodies, found the most common patterns to be ABCD (208 cases), ABAC (195 cases), ABAB (152 cases), and ABCB (106 cases) (in Lüderwaldt 1976: 88). My own analyses are consistent with these observations, with ABCB (8 cases), ABCD (6 cases), and ABAC (5 cases) being the commonest patterns (Aubinet 2015: 30). Although four is the usual number of paragraphs, Lüderwaldt reported that a melody may include three to twelve paragraphs (Lüderwaldt 1976: 96). I only encountered four- and six-paragraph melodies in my own analyses. The latter can be considered as being made of one of these typical patterns, juxtaposed between two paragraphs at the beginning or end of the melody, e.g., ABCC|BC or CC|ABCC (Aubinet 2015: 30).

In terms of musical scales, defined as ‘segmentations of the sonic continuum into discrete units in opposition to one another’ (Fernando 2007: 946), a certain consensus can likewise be observed. Pentatonic scales are predominant, with the majority of scales being anhemitonic. Additional degrees are occasionally present in the melodies without altering their overall pentatonic quality (Graff 2004: 199). In Szomjas-Schiffert’s analysis, 55 per cent of melodies are anhemitonic, 26 per cent are on the major (Ionian) scale, and 16 per cent are on the minor (Aeolian) scale (Szomjas-Schiffert 1996: 65). Krumhansl et al. report that most melodies include a fourth, fifth, and major sixth in addition to a fundamental note. The major second is mentioned as recurring, and the minor seventh as very rare (Krumhansl et al. 2000: 23). My analyses tend to confirm that nearly

all the scales involved include the fourth and fifth. To these are juxtaposed a tone varying between the major second and the major third as well as a minor of major sixth. The mean number of discrete levels in the melodies analysed is 4.47 (Aubinet 2015: 31). It also appears that the most recurring ambitus of melodies is one octave wide (*ibid.*: 38).

According to Graff, each paragraph answers a particular function in the melody (Graff 2004: 189-193). The first one is described as sufficient for recognising the melody. The second one is supposed to contrast with the first and offer space for creativity, either by presenting a new motive or varying the first. The third one is almost systematically affiliated to the previous ones, while the fourth one generally contrasts with the third by repeating or varying an element from the first half of the melody. In terms of melodic contours, Graff mentions U-shaped melodies – implying a descent in pitch followed by an ascent – a melodic ascent, a reversed U, and a melodic descent as the most common formulae. Furthermore, he distinguishes seven types of variations (Graff 2004: 193-194): the transposition of a paragraph, a change in its conclusion, an extension (e.g. an interval stretched to a fifth instead of a fourth), its shrinkage (reverse process), its inversion (e.g. a melodic ascent turned into a descent), a change in tempo, and its sequencing (repetition of a motive on different tonal levels). Elsewhere, Graff more succinctly suggested that every yoik has a ‘basic motive’, namely ‘a little melodic movement operating as a musical core for the yoik’, with other parts of the melody serving merely as contrastive figures (Graff 2018: 70).

According to Szomjas-Schiffert, the intervals most often used are the major second, the minor third, the fifth, and the octave (Szomjas-Schiffert 1996: 65). My own analyses indicate ascending movements of major

seconds as largely predominant, followed by ascending fourths and fifths. Intervals generally considered dissonant in European classical music (e.g. minor second, augmented fourth, major seventh) seem nearly absent. An ascending movement from the fundamental tone's fourth to the fifth, followed by a descending fifth towards the fundamental tone was also noted as the most recurrent pair of intervals (Aubinet 2015: 32-33). Krumhansl et al. likewise note a prevalence of intervals involving the fundamental tone, its fourth, or its fifth (Krumhansl et al. 2000: 24). Importantly, the yoik tends to make use of micro-intervals that, to my knowledge, have never been systematically studied by ethnomusicologists.

Regarding rhythmic organisation, all yoiks appear to belong to the field of 'measured music' and a majority of them can be qualified as 'regular' (Aubinet 2015: 35). The former category is defined by the ethnomusicologist Simha Arom as including durations bearing strictly proportional relationships with one another (Arom 2007: 927), while the latter refers to a metric organisation characterised by isochronous pulsation (ibid.: 936). In my own analyses, 52 per cent of the melodies were strictly binary or ternary, whereas asymmetric structures, involving a series of pulsations separated by variable durations but repeated along a regular pattern, represented 39 per cent of the melodies (Aubinet 2015: 35).

In his analysis, Szomjas-Schiffert directed particular attention to melodic ornamentation. Relying on a classical vocabulary, he mentions the importance of the *appoggiatura* (long or short, simple or multiple), the trill, the glissando, and the vibrato (Szomjas-Schiffert 1996: 69). However, the ornamentation he sees as most frequent is the 'vocal modulation', i.e. the 'consistent use of a group of colouring notes after the principal note with a contrasting secondary accent produced by the occasional straining of the

midriff’ (ibid.: 70). Like other ornamental patterns, this one is readily accompanied by a contraction of the diaphragm. Lüderwaldt also mentions the frequent use of ‘glottal stops’, which he describes as ‘the strained sound which is caused by rapidly and strongly flexing, and firmly closing, the vocal cords’ (Lüderwaldt 2001: 207).

Finally, some yoiks show an increase of intensity, which can lead to a progressive pitch rise while the width of intervals is maintained, as in the bear’s yoik chanted by Jonas Edvard Steggo (Figure 1).

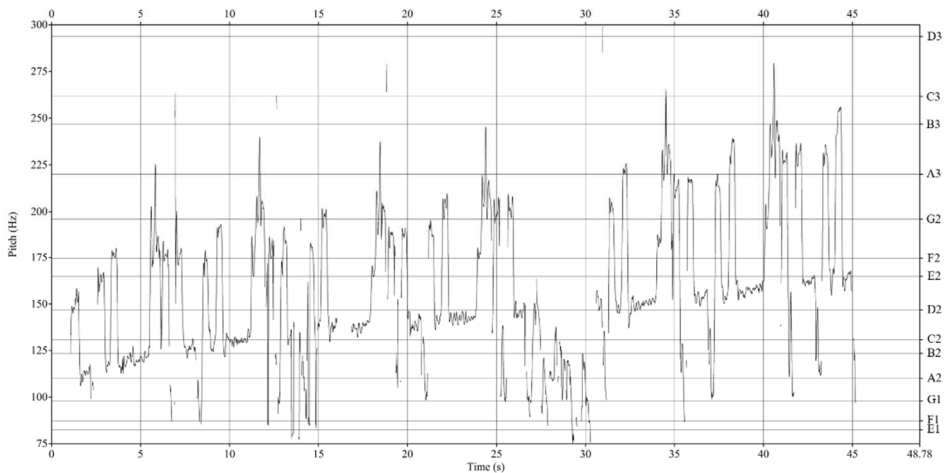


Figure 1. Pitch outline in Jonas Edvard Steggo’s bear yoik  
(Arnberg et al.1997b: CD2 track 54).<sup>11</sup>

### Vocal technique

Although the sound of the yoik is today appreciated by a wide range of non-Sámi listeners, it has historically been described in negative terms by outsiders. The Italian traveller Giuseppe Acerbi (b. 1773 – d. 1846), for

<sup>11</sup> This figure was copied from my master’s thesis (Aubinet 2015: 17).

example, reported that the only kind of music he heard among the Sámi was ‘dreadful [it. *spaventoso*] cries [that] obliged [me] to cover my ears. Eventually, I had to conclude that the errant Sámi do not have the least understanding of harmony’ (Acerbi 1832 [1802]: 162-163). Later, the Belgian musicologist François-Joseph Fétis (b. 1784 – d. 1871) would state that ‘the Lapps are the only people that do not sing’ (Fétis 1867: 141).

In fact, many yoikers might agree with Fétis in declaring that they do not *sing*. In Sápmi, yoiking and singing are often considered as different practices, referred to with different verbs in North Sámi (*juoigat* and *lávlu*, respectively) and relying on different vocal techniques. The yoiker Johan Anders Bær, for instance, mentioned that singing and yoiking arouse ‘completely different feelings’ (conversation 2017). The yoiker Annukka Hirvasvuoppio distinguishes these techniques by noting that ‘singing’ is done only ‘with the head’, whereas ‘yoiking’ involves ‘the whole body’ (Diamond 2007: 26). The yoiker Inga Juuso likewise states that one must yoik with ‘the whole body and get the tone far down in the throat’ (in Rapp 2008). More precisely, the yoiker and composer Frode Fjellheim states that yoikers rely on three muscles: a big one – the diaphragm – and two small ones – located between the mouth and ears. According to him, in order to get the characteristic sound of the yoik, one must shape one’s mouth as if one were about to yawn (yoik course October 2018). He also notes that, whereas classical singers must imitate the clean sound of instruments, the yoik relies on the ‘natural possibilities and limitations of the body’ (Fjellheim 2018: 4, cf. 6<sup>th</sup> variation on the naturalness of the voice). Besides the vocal technique, Fjellheim suggests that a vocalisation is a yoik and not a song if: (1) we say that it is a yoik, (2) its melody is circular, and (3) it describes something (yoik course 2018).

According to the yoiker Johan Anders Bær, the yoik technique shares common features with throat singing. The yoiking voice must be placed ‘just before the throat singing technique’, i.e. back in the throat, but not as far as in throat singing (conversation 2017); in contemporary Sámi recordings, yoiking and throat singing are often put in dialogue (e.g. Johan Sara Jr. & Group 2003: track 5, Vassvik 2009: track 7). Matts Arnberg et al. described the yoik’s technique as relying on ‘a compressed voice resulting from a great tension of the vocal cords and a narrow opening of the throat’ (Arnberg et al. 1997a: 55). According to the (non-Sámi) musician Sheila Louise Wright, ‘a yoik is sung from the throat with a constricted larynx and the mouth almost closed, and often at a loud volume particularly on higher pitches, a sound that is both nasal and constricted at the same time, again in contrast to Western singing styles’ (Wright 2015: 7).

During yoik courses, I noticed that my teachers tended to keep their mouths nearly closed. Reaching high-pitched tones did not induce a wider opening, as in European classical techniques, but a gesture of the mouth similar to a smile. Frode Fjellheim also noted through his analytical work that a common yoiking technique is to alternate between a tensed voice, using the ‘small yoik muscles’, and punctual low notes vocalised with a more relaxed voice. While explaining this, he would mimic the alternation with his hand, picking something between his fingers like a puppet and punctually dropping it before picking it up again (yoik course October 2018). As Fjellheim himself noted, vocal techniques may vary significantly depending on the region or the style of individual yoikers (Somby 2007). According to the ethnomusicologist Doris Stockmann, being able to switch from one technique to another is regarded as a sign of skill (Stockmann 1994).

Whether they invoke the yoik's vocal technique or other dimensions of its practice, many yoikers readily draw comparisons with musical traditions from other parts of the world. Mari Boine, for instance, considers that the yoik and Siberian throat singing come from the 'same source'; that is, they are both in touch with something 'primordial' in humans [no. *urmenneskelig*] and nature (in Hilder 2013: 199). In Elin Kåven's words, 'the yoik is actually the sound of the earth. [...] And this is how I have understood that all indigenous peoples share this. We have the same inspiration; we have the same power. It comes from the earth, from nature' (conversation with Elin Kåven 2017; cf. 6<sup>th</sup> variation on the 'primordial' quality of the yoik). Other comparisons encountered in this research involve the chants of native communities in Nicaragua (conversation with Hartvik Hansen 2017), Blackfeet Indians (Valkeapää 1994 [1985]), Indian Khasi (cf. Dutta & Kikhi 2016), Japanese Ainu (conversation with Terje Tretnes 2017), Arctic, Native North American, or Siberian traditions at large (Arnberg et al. 1997a: 59, Hilder 2013: 193, Keeling 2012, Nidel 2005: 124) but also the Scandinavian *kulning* and *vallåtar*, the Alpine *yodel* (Wright 2015: 5), bluegrass (cf. the yoiker Maxida Märak in Bateman 2016: 31), shepherd calls, laments, the Scottish *piobaireachd* (Dubois 2006), Old Norse chants (Braucher 2016, Tolley 1996), and Wagnerian leitmotifs (Weinstock 2014).

Ola Graff once noted that according to some yoikers, 'almost any indigenous music can be named yoik' (Graff 2018: 80) due to political discourses aimed at emphasising the similarities between the yoik and other indigenous traditions (cf. 6<sup>th</sup> variation on this generalised use of the term 'yoik'). When giving talks at conferences, members of the audience from Western Africa, South America, South-East Asia, or elsewhere occasionally



told me that there were very similar songs in their regions. On my part, I noticed similarities with cattle calls from my own region. The yoik is also compared to Christian psalms by some yoikers; some of them have explored the possibilities of musical dialogues between both (e.g. Mienna 2011, Wimme & Rinne 2013). In Kautokeino, it is common to say, as a joke, that people ‘yoik the psalms’, whereas the people of Karasjok ‘sing the yoiks’. According to the Sámi philosopher Nils Oskal, the difference between a yoik and a psalm lies not in the shape of the melody, which may be ambiguous, but in the intention of the chanter (conversation with Nils Oskal 2017).

Similarities between indigenous repertoires have occasionally been inquired by ethnomusicologists. By way of concluding this section, two studies are worth mentioning. Richard Keeling documented in 2012 what he calls ‘animal impersonation songs’, i.e. short songs imitating animals. The songs, he observed, can be encountered among multiple communities of the Circumpolar North, Japan (Ainu) and North America (Keeling 2012) as well as the Sámi. According to him, their structural resemblance across various regions indicates that they may be among the oldest songs that humans have preserved throughout the course of history. This speculation appeared corroborated by the discourse of indigenous people that he met, such as Frank Douglas from the Yurok community: ‘that song been going on for a million years probably’ (in *ibid.*: 260).

In 1999, Jean-Jacques Nattiez stressed a similar network of similarities between the indigenous communities of boreal and Arctic regions in America and Siberia, and the Ainu of Japan. Although he does not mention the yoik, it appears to fit into the ‘throat singing’ category, characterising Nattiez’s ‘circumboreal music’ (Nattiez 1999: 411). According to him,

there are three possible explanations for their similarities: ‘(1) a universalist one, (2) a diffusionist one, or (3) a phylogenetic one’ (ibid.). Resemblances with repertoires from other parts of the world, he suggests, must have something to do with the universality of the vocal apparatus (explanation 1), while other resemblances may find their roots in cultural contacts (explanation 2), or a common origin of the populations, who might have retained common musical expressions (explanation 3) (ibid.: 411-412).

In the 6<sup>th</sup> variation, I engage with another approach on this issue: one that does not resort to global-scale comparisons between cultures, but rather inhabits and explores the situated perspective of some yoikers who claim to enact a craft shared by indigenous communities by virtue of a shared contact with the distant past.

### **Modern yoiks**

What may be the first mention of the yoik, written in the eleventh century by Adam von Bremen, describes it as a ‘magical craft’ [la. *magicis artibus*] (Bremen 1876 [Eleventh century]: 179, cf. 2<sup>nd</sup> variation on this text). As already mentioned, when, in the seventeenth century, the campaigns of missionaries in Sápmi gained in intensity, the *noaidi* were severely persecuted and the yoik was readily described as a *satanic practice* by the ecclesiastical authorities (cf. 6<sup>th</sup> variation on the idea of satanic yoiks). In fact, it appears that the yoik only truly started to emerge as *music* around the nineteenth century (cf. *n*<sup>th</sup> variation on its becoming-music). The Italian traveller Giuseppe Acerbi then referred to it as ‘Lappish music’ [it. *musica lapona*] (Acerbi 1832 [1802]: 162) and was among the first people to write down yoik melodies on scores (Ramnarine 2009: 198).

Some writers, like the Norwegian politician Gustav Peter Blom, could still state in the middle of the nineteenth century that ‘the Lapps have no musical sense’ (in Johnsen 2007: 134), but many of his contemporaries acknowledged a musical dimension in the yoik. In their eyes, it nonetheless tended to remain a pitiful practice. The Sámi were often considered to have an undeveloped ear, naïve to the laws of harmony (Donner 1876, Gaup 2007: 81, Graff 2016: 31-32, Johnsen 2007: 134, Weinstock 2014: 265).<sup>12</sup> In line with the words of Giuseppe Acerbi mentioned above (cf. Section ‘Vocal technique’), the photographer Sophus Tromholt wrote the following account in 1885:

‘The only and poor substitute for musical enjoyment known by the Sámi is the so-called yoik [...]. The melody – if one wants to call a tedious, monotone play of two or three, or at the most four or five tones a melody – and the text are so often made of improvisations, which through perpetual repetitions express their mood, the character of nature and humans, etc. There is as little poetry in the words as there is music in the melody’ (Tromholt 2007 [1885]: 184).

Among European writers, it appears that the yoik became a musical tradition worthy of admiration at the beginning of the twentieth century. In 1909, the ethnologist Karl Tirén thus wrote to the Swedish composer Wilhelm Peterson-Berger that ‘what the highest musical culture has created such as Wagner’s leading motives has its counterpart in the age-old practice

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<sup>12</sup> Even the poetic contributions of the Sámi priest Anders Fjellner (b. 1795 – d. 1876), celebrated for the positive image of the Sámi culture they conveyed, focused on the yoik’s texts rather than its musical qualities (Graff 2016: 26).

of the indigenous Lapps' (in Weinstock 2014: 258). Peterson-Berger himself found in the yoik 'great artistic content' (in Ramnarine 2009: 198) and inspiration for his symphony *Same-Ätnam*, written in 1915.

Meanwhile, most writers assumed that the yoik was about to disappear; hence the efforts deployed at that time to collect and archive melodies through transcriptions or records (Jones-Bamman 1993: 239, Lundberg & Ternhag 2001: 7, Weinstock 2014: 266). In the end, not only did the yoik survive but it underwent a significant revival with the emergence of what came to be called the *modern yoik*. This movement can be traced back to the end of the 1960s, when the Sámi artist Nils-Aslak Valkeapää (b. 1943 – d. 2001) realised the first record containing yoiks accompanied by musical instruments: *Joikuja/Joik från finska Lappland* ['Yoik from Finnish Lapland'] (Valkeapää 1969), which was inspired by skiffle and folk music aesthetics (Jones-Bamman 1993: 283).<sup>13</sup> His aim was to respond creatively to the changes that were occurring in Sámi society and to break with the idea that the yoik was a sinful, shameful, or heathen practice. His work was first received with scepticism on the part of the public due, on the one hand, to the intrusion of musical instruments in the yoik, and on the other hand, to his vocal technique, which was considered to be 'singing' rather than 'yoiking'. Eventually, however, he became an icon of the 'Sámi revival' movement and today remains one of the most emblematic figures of the history of the yoik and of Sámi culture in general (Jones-Bamman 2011).

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<sup>13</sup> According to the yoiker Øystein Nilsen, yoiks have been significantly influenced by 'Western music' since the 1920s and 1930s (conversation 2017). However, they were not accompanied by musical instruments or recorded for commercial purposes prior to Nils-Aslak Valkeapää's first record (cf. Jones-Bamman 1993).

The emergence of the modern yoik went hand in hand with an intensification of efforts by Sámi communities for political and cultural self-determination, away from the policies of national integration that had been applied since the middle of the nineteenth century (Thuen 2007). This struggle reached a climax at the turn of the 1980s, as the Norwegian authorities planned to build a dam on the Alta-Kautokeino River in Finnmark. It was foretold that this project would impact disastrously on the behaviour of reindeer, the economic situation of the herders, their modes of organisation, and the cultural and political vulnerability of the Sámi at large (Paine 1982: 96, Somby 1999)

When groups of Sámi protestors gathered in front of the Norwegian Parliament [no. *Stortinget*], they chanted Valkeapää's yoik, *Sámi Eatnan Duoddarat*, which eventually became an unofficial anthem for the Sámi community. The dam was built, but the episode gave the Sámi unprecedented media attention and led to increased awareness and sympathy from the Norwegian population. This led to the creation of the Sámi Parliament [ns. *Sámediggi*] in Karasjok, endowed with a consultative authority for matters concerning Sámi interests. As expressed in the documentary *Dreamland*: 'The riot in Alta became the turning point. After Alta, the world could be done differently. In a land where two peoples lived, whose methods had been violent, where new realities had to be fought for' (Verran et al. 2015).

Valkeapää' was followed by numerous artists, including yoikers of international fame such as Mari Boine. Today, musical encounters between the yoik and non-Sámi musical traditions, such as jazz, choral music, rock, or other indigenous traditions, have become commonplace. More rarely, non-Sámi musicians, like the Faroese singer Eivør (Eivør 2015: track 10),

pagan folk bands (e.g. Omnia 2016: track 2), and various metal bands from northern and eastern Europe (e.g. Korpiklaani 2008: track 11, Arkona 2011: track 5) have included elements of yoiking in some of their compositions. Both movements gave birth to a wide variety of yoiking practices that cannot be grasped as a consistent ensemble and instead follow multiple directions of development.

This does not mean that researchers have not attempted to describe the relationship between the traditional and modern yoiks as a whole. For instance, it has often been suggested that whereas the traditional yoik is, first and foremost, concerned with the people, animals and landscapes sharing the yoikers' immediate environments, the modern yoik and contemporary Sámi music in general have become a milieu of political expression on a more global level – 'a yardstick to negotiate identity and politics', as the ethnomusicologist Thomas Hilder puts it (Hilder 2013: 45). As Ola Graff observes, 'the last decades have shaped the development of a new context where yoiking no longer occurs merely in small local societies: it is practised in relation to a large Sámi society, to a large Norwegian society, or to an international world society', endowing the yoik with 'new meanings and functions' (Graff 2016: 182).

Harald Gaski likewise suggested in 2008 that the yoik was at a crossroads between a development towards a 'common indigenous sound' and a renewed interest in local cultural heritages and preservation of 'the traditional sound' (Gaski 2008: 348). In this perspective, the modern yoik functions as a sign symbolising Sáminess, whereas it used to have a wider set of functions: 'In a very real sense, the yoik as first encountered and described by early travellers to the region has ceased to exist for many Saami [...]. But the yoik remains vital nevertheless, often serving in its most

public deliveries as an encompassing symbol for all of Saami culture' (Jones-Bamman 1993: 6). György Szomjas-Schiffert suggested a similar idea when he stated that the yoik, once nested in 'a body of beliefs', has been transposed into the profane realm of 'people of everyday life' (Szomjas-Schiffert 1996: 75).

Through my research, it appeared that the relationship between the traditional and the modern yoik is a complex issue that is best approached in 'horizontal' terms (cf. 1<sup>st</sup> variation on horizons), i.e. as a matter of concern where lines of thought are moving and new knowledge created. Thus, I consider the modern yoik to be a variation of the yoik in its own right, whose convergences and divergences vis-à-vis the 'traditional practice' deserve to be attentively observed. Meanwhile, one must keep in mind that the relationship between the traditional and modern yoiks is not necessarily symmetrical: some observations suggest that the latter is, or should be, an extension of the former – *not* vice versa (cf. 4<sup>th</sup> variation).

## **Theoretical landscape**

Insofar as they are written in the 'variation' mode, the chapters gathered in this thesis share a crucial feature with yoiks: whatever they create, whatever craft they possess, they derive it from a source that already exists. They seek to activate the yoik within a practice of writing, to transform it by repeating, to repeat it by transforming. In the European scholarly tradition, variations of this type have been primarily enacted in the form of commentaries. On the one hand, commentaries seek to construct a new discourse; on the other hand, they seek to state what was already, but silently, present in the source. The commentary puts something into variation in as much as it writes for

the first time what had been repeated all along and yet remained unwritten (Foucault 1971).

To state that the yoik is also a craft of variation is almost a truism: variation can be observed in all musical behaviours and has been a crucial challenge for ethnomusicology. One of its founding figures, the composer Lászlá Lajtha, stated in 1934 that ‘popular music is the quintessential art of variation’ (in Berlász 1980: 442). Perhaps the discipline missed a vocation to become a craft of variation, *in* variation, *as* variation. The idea of using written texts in order to transform popular melodies, to unfold their silent philosophical dimensions, has indeed remained marginal in ethnomusicological literature. What seems a missed opportunity probably stems from recurring definitions of variation as opposed to stability (List 1987), repetition (Diaz 2017), structure, regularities (Arom 1982), model (Agawu 1990), repetition (Schulte-Tenckhoff & Nattiez 1999), composition, or improvisation (Gray 2010). These contrasts can be traced back to pioneers like Ilmari Krohn and Béla Bartók, who systematically answered musical variation with comparison, classification, and archiving (Domokos 1982, Louhivuori 2018). ‘Variation’, as Constantin Brăiloiu succinctly put it in 1949, ‘is annihilated by writing’ (in Brăiloiu 1984: 57); as such, it could not be hosted within the practice of ethnomusicology.

Variation, as I understand it, need not be opposed to anything: it is a process in its own right. It does not have to be annihilated – it could just as well be enacted within the practice of writing. This is what I seek to achieve by defining this work in terms of ‘philosophical variation’: not to stabilise or analyse the yoik, but to extend it by turning it into a practice that can make us think; a practice to *think with*, along the etymology of ‘commentary’ [la. *com-mēns*] (Onions 1966: 194). Like classical



commentaries, the aim is to ‘supplement’ something with ‘new meaning(s) and context(s)’ (Kraus 2002: 1); to supplement the yoik with an extended craft. Consider the philosopher Marsilio Ficino: when he wrote his commentary *El libro dell’amore*, he supplemented Plato’s *Banquet* by hosting it in his own environment of thought. In so doing, he put both Plato’s text and philosophy as a whole in variation. The peculiarity of the project I propose here is that, if it constitutes a sort of commentary, it is one *without* a text; or, more exactly, it is a commentary on something *other* than a text, namely a vocal practice.

To what extent this can be fruitful at all, how relevant it can be to engage with the yoik *by writing* will be a recurring matter of concern throughout the thesis. For the time being, suffice to say that the yoik illustrates how a living phenomenon, be it a friend, a lover, a parent, a dog, a bird, a river, or a landscape, can be transformed into another modality, i.e. a vocalisation, while maintaining its *ethos*. The wolf’s yoik *is* still the wolf, not just because it resembles the wolf but because the yoiker’s voice stretches to wolfness and brings the animal to presence (cf. 1<sup>st</sup> variation on ‘stretching to wolfness’). To the con-vocation (‘to vocalise with’) of the yoik, I seek to respond with the com-mentary (‘to think with’) of the text, stretching the written medium to yoikness and providing ways of apprehending its craft in the philosophical mode. Hence the idea of variation: the text is a variation on the yoik insofar as it empowers this craft to grow in a new milieu.

Interestingly, although Bartók did not embrace variation in his ethnomusicological work, he knew perfectly well how to enact it in his own musical creations, deploying a startling creativity in turning popular melodies into musical *themes* (Brelet 1946). The insertion of popular melodies into complex compositions is a much older process, readily

achieved by European composers from the Middle Ages and throughout the subsequent periods, with countless fertile melodies like *L'homme armé* or *La folia*. In Norway, the emblematic figure in musical variation on popular melodies is the composer Edvard Grieg. For example, his composition *En liten grå mann* (Op. 66) constitutes a variation on a traditional song as well as a bold exploration of harmony. Like him, I have tried to explore the 'obscure depth' of the chants that caught my interest, and to express 'my ideas' about their hidden 'possibilities':

'The realm of harmony was always my dream world, and the relationship between my own harmonic sense and the folk music of Norway was a mystery to myself. I have found that the obscure depth of our melodies lies in their abundance and unsuspected harmonic possibilities. In my arrangement of folk songs, Op. 66 and elsewhere, I have tried to express my ideas about the hidden harmonies in our folk music' (Grieg 1957 [1900]).

I have compared my work to academic commentaries, to yoiks, and to classical music in order to highlight a few converging patterns in the way they enact variation. Johannes Ockeghem, in his *Missa l'homme armé*, puts both the melody *L'homme armé* and the Ordinary of the Mass in variation; Marsilio Ficino, in *El libro dell'amore*, puts both Plato's *Banquet* and the philosophy of his time in variation; yoikers vocalising the wolf put the wolf, the practice of yoiking, and their voices in variation. As the following chapters, or *variations*, will suggest, convergences tend to appear locally, from situated postures: the 1<sup>st</sup>, 2<sup>nd</sup>, and 3<sup>rd</sup> variations will emphasise ways in which writing does indeed converge with yoiking. By approaching the yoik through other concepts, the 4<sup>th</sup>, 5<sup>th</sup>, and 6<sup>th</sup> variations will tend towards

highlighting *divergences* and to relate this work to other compositional and scholarly modes of variation, foreign to the yoik's *ethos* and proper to written expressions.

So far, nothing has been said about the disciplinary affiliation of this work. Regarding disciplines, the philosopher Michel Foucault noted that, unlike commentaries, they suppose 'not a signification to be rediscovered, nor an identity to be repeated' (Foucault 1971: 32), but instead the inscription of texts 'in a specific theoretical horizon' (ibid.: 35). During this research, it became progressively clear that taking the yoik seriously implied taking some distance from ready-made theoretical horizons; not to depart from them entirely, but to let the yoik guide the research towards relevant fields without letting those crystallise into a framework. For the enveloping structure of disciplinary theories, I have tried to substitute the practice of yoiking as a source, a *locus of convergence* for the articulation of heterogeneous academic inputs. Thus, to the question: *what do the theoretical references I am about to invoke have in common?* The only answer is '*the yoik*'. Disciplines and elements of knowledge are summoned for the 'otherwise accentuated relevance' (Stengers 2002a: 295) each of them carries, shedding a creative light on the practice investigated. Relying on the works of Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz, Jacob von Uexküll, or Gilles Deleuze, for instance, does not suggest that yoikers are Leibnizian, von Uexküllian, or Deleuzian; it merely reveals a few possible variations within the craft of yoiking.

The disciplines summoned tend to differ from one variation to the other. The 1<sup>st</sup> variation relies significantly on social anthropology, the 2<sup>nd</sup> variation on ethology, the 3<sup>rd</sup> on semiotics, the 4<sup>th</sup> on philosophy, the 5<sup>th</sup> on psychology, and the 6<sup>th</sup> on evolutionary theory. In the following sections,

the input of three disciplines is described in more depth, due to the role they played in this project's initial inspiration and development: social anthropology, musicology, and philosophy.

Why speak of *philosophical* variations, if philosophy is only one source of inspiration among others? Because philosophy was defined by Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari as the practice of 'creating concepts' (Deleuze & Guattari 1991) and the ultimate outcome of the variations proposed below is the creation of six concepts: horizon, enchantment, creature, depth, echo, primordial. It is therefore as a *practice* rather than a 'field of study' that philosophy lies at the core of this work.

Importantly, I chose to rely on six *English*, rather than *Sámi* concepts, for two reasons. Firstly, most of my conversations with yoikers took place in Norwegian and I do not have the linguistic expertise allowing me to use Sámi concepts with relevance. Secondly, using English concepts makes explicit the fact that I am hosting the yoik in a milieu where it was not originally intended to dwell: I am not writing from a Sámi perspective, nor even from an ethnographic perspective, but from a *philosophical* perspective anchored in a practice of writing undertaken in a specific language carrying its own affordances and constraints. I leave to other researchers, and in particular Sámi scholars, the task of describing indigenous concepts with more relevance than I am able to do, if they wish to do so (cf. Mikkelsen 2017 for a recent example of such a contribution by a Sámi musicologist).

Before going further, one might ask: If the yoik is used as a practice to 'think with', what shall we think *about*? What kind of topic shall the description of the yoik open? This is a question that could not have been answered at the outset of the research. The process that animated this work

was desire more than planification, the attraction of a horizon more than a foreseen destination: *there is something worth exploring there, let us find out what it can be*. In this case, the topics addressed turned out to be as various as metamorphosis and wandering (1<sup>st</sup> variation), animal behaviour and fascination (2<sup>nd</sup> variation), artistic creation and semiosis (3<sup>rd</sup> variation), human interiority and spirituality (4<sup>th</sup> variation), temporality and dreaming (5<sup>th</sup> variation), prehistory and demonology (6<sup>th</sup> variation).

These topics find coherence in the kaleidoscopic description of the yoik they deploy, but also in the systematic ‘*vis-à-vis*’ they establish between writing and yoiking. The anthropologist Roy Wagner once argued that ‘every understanding of another culture is an experiment with our own’ (Wagner 1981 [1975]: 19). I tend to agree, but I prefer to speak of *practices* rather than *cultures*. I learned the English language and the craft of academic writing quite recently; within the culture I grew up in, these were marginal. Yet it is within these practices that this work finds its resources. My culture, whether it is ‘European’, ‘Belgian’, ‘*ardennaise*’, relating to a particular social class or political inclination, is not necessarily relevant. It is noteworthy that writing about the culture of *others* – for instance the Sámi culture – has not been a priority of mine either. What I seek to celebrate is not cultural diversity, but the way the world is turned into converging or diverging variations through the life of practices. Implicit in this project is the Spinozan observation that no one has ever exhausted the sources of wonders concealed in the powers of the body and the mind that is joined with it (Spinoza 1963 [1677]: 242 [Book 3]). Likewise, no one knows what

creative crafts a yoik possesses, what possibilities lurk behind its horizon, or what it can do to other crafts.<sup>14</sup>

### **Social anthropology**

This is where this project started, as part of a master's thesis initiated in January 2014. As a student of musicology, I found an opening into the field through the work of Philippe Descola and his proposition that the perception of the world must operate through one of four 'ontological schemes', which he termed naturalism, animism, analogism, and totemism (Descola 2005). Naturalism is defined as a scheme based on a physical continuity among humans and non-humans, and an internal discontinuity in terms of soul or intellect. *Like me, deer are mammals, but they lack my human cognitive capacities*: this would be an example of a naturalist assumption. One corollary of naturalism is a fracture between nature and culture, one that emerged in modern Europe along a singular historical trajectory. We may debate how important this fracture has been among Europeans in everyday life, whether they truly are, or have ever been 'naturalists'; in any case, it seems to have been fundamental to the pedagogical *discourses* (not necessarily their practices) of human and natural sciences (Serres 2015 [2009]: 95).

Social anthropology, as a branch of the *human sciences*, has thus been concerned with the ways humans represent or express beliefs about nature,

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<sup>14</sup> If I tend to use the expressions 'practice' and 'craft' interchangeably, it should be borne in mind that each of these expressions has an 'otherwise accentuated relevance' (Stengers 2002a: 295) too. 'Practice' insists on the concreteness of human activities; 'craft', in line with the Norwegian *kraft*, insists on their inscrutable powers.

whereas knowledge of nature as such has tended to remain the privilege of the natural sciences. In a naturalist light, nature constitutes a reality governed by necessary laws. As such, it is indifferent to human creativity. It constitutes a realm that can only be approached through objectivity and logical reasoning. Decentring naturalism as one among several ontologies, along Descola's proposition, offered me the possibility of taking the yoik more seriously. It also opened the way for considering the yoik as operating within a more-than-human world involving all sorts of non-human entities – animals, places, spirits, memories, things.

Philippe Descola's work focuses on 'cultural invariants' rather than variation. Consequently, I gave it secondary importance in this thesis, leaving aside its comparative power. It was still the opening that led me to a heterogeneous literature in social sciences, carrying various labels like 'ontological turn' and 'multinaturalism' (Viveiros de Castro 2015), 'actor-network theory' (Latour 2005), 'dwelling perspective' (Ingold 2015), 'multispecies ethnography' (Kirksey & Helmreich 2010), 'anthropology beyond the human' (Kohn 2013), 'epistemologies of the South' (Escobar 2016), 'Earthly cosmology' (Abram 2010), and the broad field of 'environmental humanities' (Plumwood 2002, Rose et al. 2012). I have nurtured an interest in these areas of research throughout the first two years of my PhD (until my attention was captured by philosophy). Despite significant differences, they share a common will to attend to the ways in which human activities are enmeshed within more-than-human socialities, bypassing or reconfiguring dichotomies that had previously been fundamental to the project of modernity: nature and culture, subject and object, mind and body, materiality and symbolism.

Through these postures, the world is not *a priori* considered as a neutral, objective background for human activities but as an open-ended place of engagement between various kinds of beings. This answers both the ethical considerations entailed by a decolonial approach and a commitment to research as an open-ended experiment with thought: attending to the crafts of others reveals startling depths in the possibilities of ‘making world’. This approach can therefore be summarised by paraphrasing the musicologist Victor Zuckerkandl. Observing that there can be no room for the phenomenal experience of music in the world described by physics, he asked:

*‘How music is possible – to understand this will be our chief task [...]. What must the world be like, what must I be like, if between me and the world the phenomenon of music can occur? How must I consider the world, how must I consider myself, if I am to understand the reality of music?’* (Zuckerkandl 1956: 7).

Substituting the word ‘yoik’ for ‘music’ gives a fair approximation of the questions that have motivated me throughout this project – from its origins to its crystallisation in the present form. The responses do not amount to a general discourse about the nature of reality, but to what one might call an ‘enchanted’ philosophy, i.e. one that finds animation in the experience of the chant (cf. 2<sup>nd</sup> variation on enchantment).

Among the anthropologists who have guided this thesis, in person or through their texts, Tim Ingold deserves a particular mention. When I first engaged with his work as a student, it seemed to capture with insightful intuitions and clear formulations what I was only beginning to sense by attending to the yoik. Crucial in this regard has been Ingold’s



conceptualisation of the ‘environment’ as more than ‘that which surrounds us’, namely, as a domain of entanglement: ‘It is within such a tangle of interlaced trails, continually ravelling here and unravelling there, that beings grow or “issue forth” along the lines of their relationships’ (Ingold 2011: 71). This called for an anthropology that does not merely describe others within their ‘context’, as this would amount to ‘laying them to rest, putting them to bed, so that we need no longer engage with them directly. Embedding lives in context implies an already completed conversation’ (Ingold 2016: 20). His reflection on ‘lines’ (Ingold 2007, 2015) likewise made me sensitive to the corresponding, linear movements of thinking, walking, singing, and drawing, and to the immersion of these activities within a world in ‘continuous birth’ (Ingold 2016: 4). As Philippe Descola’s work opened the field of social anthropology to me, Tim Ingold’s work also provided an opening for engaging with philosophy with renewed attention. Having spent four months at the University of Aberdeen under his supervision, his mark on my approach has developed further and I have tried to make his inclination for adventurous speculations anchored in ‘down-to-earth’ experiences my own.

This ‘down-to-earthness’ finds illustration in his argument about the ‘oneness’ of the world, directed against the discourse of ‘multinaturalism’ proposed by Eduardo Viveiros de Castro (*ibid.*). It is worth mentioning, because it touches upon important considerations regarding the approach sketched in this thesis, but also because multinaturalism is a concept through which social anthropology has made its way into musicological research (e.g. Brabec de Mori 2017, Brabec de Mori & Seeger 2013, Ochoa Gautier 2016, Taylor 2017).

Viveiros de Castro's work has been a precious source of inspiration. Besides the importance of multinaturalism for conceptualising the 'horizon' in the 1<sup>st</sup> variation, I share with Viveiros de Castro a common will to 'take seriously' and to allow the 'native discourse' to 'modify the matter implicit in the form of anthropological knowledge' (Viveiros de Castro 2015: 6). The very idea of multinaturalism departs from his taking seriously an idea encountered among native populations of Amazonia, that of 'perspectivism' (cf. Viveiros de Castro 2009, cf. 1<sup>st</sup> variation). Multinaturalism may be considered an inversion of multiculturalism: one culture and multiple natures instead of one nature and multiple cultures. It speculates that, although each (human or non-human) community thinks in the same way (one culture), *what they think* differs (multiple natures). In this light, the many natures shaped by concepts cannot be grasped under a totalising gaze; the best we can do is navigate from one world to the other. The sociologist John Law echoes this idea by arguing against a 'one-world world'. He contends that the post-colonial era implies 'a set of contingent, enacted, and more or less intersecting worlds in the plural' (Law 2015: 127).

The following philosophical variations will carry little relevance if the emphasis is put on fracture rather than continuity; if closures are favoured over horizons; if the yoikers and myself are assumed to inhabit 'incommensurable' worlds; and if I put my interest in 'radical alterity' rather than in the convergences and divergences of practices. *In order to think, I need to think in one world.* However, this oneness is not merely an axiomatic postulate; it relies on continual observations made along the course of the investigation. Each variation, in its own way, illustrates how the world of yoikers, my world, and the readers' may be considered as one. The 1<sup>st</sup> variation points out that all yoiks operate within a 'horizontal' space:

they are never fully Sámi nor fully human and always engage with other communities. The 2<sup>nd</sup> variation highlights that the yoik is not just accessible to Sámi humans but also to a multiplicity of non-humans sharing their environment, including animals and spirits. The 3<sup>rd</sup> variation describes the semiotic and creative processes involved in the yoik and the comprehensibility they afford for outsiders. The 4<sup>th</sup> variation suggests that all humans carry the same possibilities for development within themselves, inherited from evolution and actualised along diverging patterns. The 5<sup>th</sup> variation stresses that the ‘distant’ is always likely to echo into the ‘nearby’. Finally, the 6<sup>th</sup> variation follows the idea argued by some yoikers that the yoik makes use of ‘primordial tones’ that resonate with the original nature of all human beings.

If the yoik seems to convey the idea of one world, it is nonetheless a world in *chiaroscuro* (cf. 4<sup>th</sup> variation on Leibniz and metaphysics in *chiaroscuro*), one whose depths cannot be embraced by a birds-eye view, one that conceals in the same movement as it reveals. This may be described further through an oceanic metaphor. Consider the shape of fish and whales, so similar despite their phylogenetic distance. Where one might have expected infinite diversity, one observes a remarkable variation along the same form. Evolutionary biologists call ‘convergence’ this independent acquisition of features across taxa due to similar environmental constraints. This is not a case of environmental determinism. If fish and whales are convergent, divergence is just as remarkable: the ocean fascinates many humans not least due to the multiplicity of the forms it hosts and nurtures. From there, it is easy to postulate the radical alterity of Atlantic cod and bryozoa, but I am more interested in approaching them as variations of the same ocean.

The botanist and philosopher Emanuele Coccia uses the expression ‘sea of thought’ to qualify the enmeshment of ideas across disciplines (Coccia 2016: 146); I propose to think within a *sea of practices*, animated by diverging or converging movements, but always enacting possibilities of the same world. Using Maurice Merleau-Ponty’s expression, one could say that all practices are enacted within the same ‘flesh’ (cf. Merleau-Ponty 1964). Thus, although it is not a craft that I have grown up with – although it remains, to a certain extent, a ‘distant’ practice – the yoik can be experienced and put into variation by engaging in this flesh, which I believe is exactly what numerous non-Sámi persons do when they listen to and enjoy yoiks.

Thus, ‘one world’ and ‘several worlds’ do not need to be contradictory ideas. As the philosopher and psychologist William James writes: ‘Our “multiverse” still makes a “universe”’; for every part, though it may not be in actual or immediate connection, is nevertheless in some possible or mediated connection, with every other part however remote, through the fact that each part hangs together with its very next neighbors in inextricable interfusion’ (James 2008 [1908]: 130-131). In short, I have tried to engage with a world in variation; from there, this whole work can be approached as a reflection on ‘fish and whale’, i.e. the issue of convergence and divergence.

## **Musicology**

Unlike the case of social anthropology and despite my institutional affiliation, connections with musicology did not play a crucial role in the project’s original outline: most of them were found along the way. My education involved a focus on musical traditions prior to the advent of naturalism, especially notated music in medieval and Renaissance Europe.

This is where some of my strongest ties to musical studies have remained rooted. Central to more than a millennium of creative musical thinking were the relationships between what Boethius, in the sixth century, called *musica mundana* (concerned with the harmony of spheres), *musica humana* (concerned with the harmony within humans), and *musica instrumentalis* (concerned with the audible harmony of musical practice). Surely, this tripartition carries little relevance when approaching the yoik. Yet, the focus it induces on the mutual animation between music and the wider world has retained my attention. Generally speaking, the inclination of medieval and Renaissance thinkers for speculative reflections on music – captured by the expression *musica speculativa* – for bridging vocal practices (if only their most abstract dimensions) with a more-than-human world, and for taking seriously the agency of music as an ontogenetic craft, has been a significant source of inspiration.

Numbers and celestial objects are marginal in the yoik. Conversely, animals, spirits, landscapes, the wind, and the earth appear as key actors. As such, they receive scrupulous attention in this work. Closer to our time than *musica speculativa* writers, several theoretical approaches have aimed at relating similar non-human presences to music. The musicologists Hollis Taylor and Andrew Hurley distinguish five of them:

‘(i) music as commemoration or evocation of place; (ii) soundscape studies and sound art; (iii) acoustic ecology, ecomusicology, and the links between music and environmental activism; (iv) environmental ethnomusicology, archaeomusicology, zoömusicology, and biomusicology; and (v) music and its technological environment’ (Taylor & Hurley 2015: 2).

Most of the ideas gathered in this thesis belong to the fourth category, but it is one that I find too vague and too focused on ‘sound’ to be particularly enlightening here. In order to sketch my approach more distinctly, this section highlights convergences and divergences with the following trends: ecomusicology, acoustemology, zoomusicology, and ethnomusicology.

*Ecomusicology* is a recent field of study born of an encounter between musicology and ecocriticism (cf. Allen & Dawe 2015 for an overview of the field, Ochoa Gautier 2016 for a critique, Hilder 2013: 109-148 for an ecocritical study on Sámi music). Despite its emphasis on non-human presences, it has not significantly influenced my work, for two reasons. Firstly, the conceptual triptych *music, nature, and culture*, central to the project of ecomusicology, turned out to have limited relevance for my work, which is primarily focused on *practices* (i.e. the yoik and philosophy); dictating in advance the terms of my attention would have compromised my task. Thus, the yoik’s relations to music, nature, and culture are occasionally approached, when relevant, but do not constitute a central consideration.

Secondly, ecomusicologists tend to inscribe their works within a ‘green’ form of political activism. This is not my ambition: I have merely sought to follow the craft of yoiking and to describe it along relevant conceptual gestures. To my surprise, political considerations rarely came up as a central issue during my conversations with yoikers; many of them seemed to favour apolitical exchanges. Thus, although I believe that the following chapters contain relevant observations for thinking the current ecological disruptions and socio-economic orders, I do not emphasise them *as such*, as that would probably take me away from the life of practices and into political clichés of my own making. Therefore, I leave to *yoikers* and *readers* the task of hosting the yoik in their own political and ecological reflections if they so wish. In

the meantime, my effort of attention to situated practices may be considered part of what David Abram calls the ‘necessary work of *recuperation* to be accomplished (or at least opened and gotten well under way) before [the social and political spheres] can be disclosed afresh’ (Abram 2013: 9, my emphasis); it may not solve any societal problem or even directly point at them, but it may at least multiply the diverging voices that can take part in the discussion.

Steven Feld’s proposition for an *acoustemology* presents another field of convergence with my work. The term ‘acoustemology’ is a contraction of ‘acoustics’ and ‘epistemology’; the field it refers to is concerned with the ‘local conditions of acoustic sensation, knowledge, and imagination embodied in [a] culturally particular sense of place’ (Feld 1996: 91, cf. Feld 2017 for a recent description of the field, and Ramnarine 2009 for an acoustemological study of Sámi music). Three connections with this thesis must be noted here. First, attending to the yoik guided me to something akin to the ‘relational ontology’ that Feld came to propose (Feld 2015: 13). Once the relational dimension of ontologies is acknowledged, the important question remains: what forms of relations are observed? This first connection thus constitutes, at best, an opening for further dialogues. Second, the 2<sup>nd</sup> variation attends to modalities of listening to the environment, and the sound of the wind in particular, that may nurture acoustemological reflection, e.g. through the concept of ‘enchantment’. Third, and most importantly, I take inspiration from Feld’s recursive attitude, i.e. the way he turned the Kaluli’s attentive postures into insights, nourishing not merely the content but the form of his work.

However, the convergences of our works do not stretch much further, for the simple reason that a variation on the *practice* of yoiking is incompatible

with an acoustemological posture. Indeed, acoustemology is at once too wide – as it follows acoustic sensations resounding in a place, thus decentring the yoik and yoikers into a field of sonic actants – and too narrow – as it focuses on aurality, whereas the yoik appears to rely more on the animation of depths from human interiority (cf. 4<sup>th</sup> variation) or the earth (cf. 6<sup>th</sup> variation) than on sound *per se*. Attending to the ‘epistemological’ dimension of acoustemology would reveal a similar divergence from my work: at once too wide and too narrow, ‘epistemological’ concerns are too likely to divert my attention from the practice of yoiking for me to endorse them.

*Zoomusicology* is the study of musical behaviour among animals (cf. Mâche 1983, Martinelli 2009, Taylor 2017 for major contributions to the discipline). Although it is barely mentioned in this work, it had a profound impact on the definition of relevant questions for this project, as it provided the possibility of thinking human musicality from a displaced perspective and wondering at its peculiarity as a more-than-human practice. In particular, this thesis shares with zoomusicology a common tendency to mitigate the so-called ‘human exception’, but my approach is different. While zoomusicology proceeds by granting ‘music’ to particular animal species as an inherent quality, or at least by reflecting on the conditions of this granting, I rather seek to highlight how human melodies themselves stem from a field of attachment with more-than-human communities and the land that sustains them.

Along the way, a question occasionally triggered my interest: what would a philosophical variation on animal vocalisations be like; one that would take the animals seriously and attend to their craft in relation to relevant concepts? This question strikes me as important insofar as



zoomusicologists have rarely addressed it in these terms, preferring to inquire whether animal vocalisations are indeed ‘music’ or not. Hollis Taylor’s book *Is Birdsong Music?* (Taylor 2017) is emblematic in this regard: as the title suggests, the argument is reduced to a ‘yes or no’ answer from which birds are not empowered to diverge.<sup>15</sup>

Taylor holds that more regard is shown to birds by describing their sounds *as music* than as something ‘different’. Along the course of her argument, she quotes the ethnomusicologist Kofi Agawu, who encouraged researchers to write down African musics on Western staves, thus ‘bringing them into a sphere of discourse that is enabled by a distinguished intellectual history and undeniable institutional power’ (Agawu 1995: 392-393, cf. Taylor 2017: 64). Agawu’s proposition is thus to replace an ‘ideology of difference’ by an ideology of ‘sameness’ by highlighting the similarities between ‘African’ and ‘Western’ musics (Agawu 1995: 393). As outlined above (cf. Section ‘Social anthropology’), I am not particularly concerned with either difference or sameness; what retains my attention is the play of convergences and divergences between practices. Thus, whether birdsongs are *really* music is not the question I want to ask. Like the philosopher and ethologist Vinciane Despret, I rather wonder: ‘*How would it engage us to consider them as such?*’ (Despret 2011: 233, my emphasis), keeping in mind that any definition of music is a *conceptual* gesture, related to the craft of philosophy. In short, thinking about animal vocalisations led me to engage with concepts in terms of variation rather than determination.

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<sup>15</sup> As the ethologist and philosopher Vinciane Despret noted about elephant artists, ‘phrasing the problem in terms of “either... or” offers no chance to complicate it or to make it interesting’ (Despret 2012: 15).

As I have already illustrated, the same issue came up when I addressed *ethnomusicology*, a discipline that has occasionally been useful for me as a tool for thinking about musical behaviour through multiple modes of attention. Defined as ‘the study of a musical culture from an outsider’s perspective’ (Nettl 1989: 1), ethnomusicology is obviously related to my project. Yet, this field does not constitute a central input in the following chapters, due, as mentioned earlier, to its historical tendency to ‘annihilate’ variation and to my focus on *practices* rather than (musical) *cultures*. Moreover, I do not wish to circumscribe the yoik as the music [ag. μουσική] of a human group [ag. ἔθνος] from the outset. As will become clear in this work, the philosophical insights found in the yoik do not necessarily amount to a ‘Sámi’ philosophy. Likewise, the yoik is not merely music, it is not musical at all times, and its philosophical scope exceeds the field of music.

I am not denying that the yoik is always *virtually* Sámi, or that it always carries the *affordance* of being experienced as music. Nevertheless, gathering the yoik with British punk rock, Corsican polyphony, and Joseph Haydn’s symphonies under one category, one that is unilaterally assigned by the investigator, is a gesture that demands caution and hesitation. In particular, defining the yoik as the traditional ‘music’ of the Sámi does not give it credit as a practice in its own right. Thus, in this thesis, the yoik will only be approached as ‘music’ in relation to particular arguments, when relevant.<sup>16</sup> Incidentally, this is exactly what the yoikers I met usually did, sometimes describing the yoik as a musical practice like any other,

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<sup>16</sup> I contend that birdsongs and animal vocalisations probably deserve the same approach: undoubtedly, they can be music locally, perhaps within ‘enchanted’ situations (cf. 2<sup>nd</sup> variation) – yet they always retain the possibility of diverging.

sometimes as something else, e.g. a craft from nature diverging from what ‘we’ might call music (cf. 2<sup>nd</sup> variation on the shifts between these two discourses).

Taking the yoikers seriously, therefore, implied taking some distance from what the philosopher and motorcycle mechanic Matthew Crawford calls ‘universal equalitarianism’, the one that ethnomusicology tends to enact by defining its object of study in terms of *ἔθνος* and *μουσική*:

‘[The empathy of universalist equalitarianism], projected from afar and without discrimination, is more principled than attentive. [...] It is content to posit rather than to see the humanity of its beneficiaries. But the one who is on the receiving end of such empathy wants something more than to be recognized generically. He wants to be seen as an individual, and recognized as worthy on the same grounds on which he has striven to be worthy, indeed superior, by cultivating some particular excellence or skill’ (Crawford 2009: 202-203).

In the 6<sup>th</sup> variation, I propose to approach the convergence between music and yoik in an unusual direction: how would it engage us to consider, not that the yoik is a form of music, but that music itself is derived from the yoik?

## **Philosophy**

Philosophical inputs have been various and have played a key role in several of the arguments gathered in this work. Unlike anthropological sources, most of them were unknown to me at the outset of this PhD: they were discovered while I was exploring the yoik. Although twentieth and twenty-first century sources are prominent, various philosophical eras are

referenced, from Plato to Nicholas of Cusa, Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz, and Friedrich Nietzsche.

In a work about Sámi chants, mentions of these authors may seem surprising. However, two reasons justify the width of the philosophical span I have consulted: (1) the creative impulse it provided and (2) the emphasis it put on the situatedness of my own practice. For instance, classical authors – Ancient Greek philosophers in particular – appear in the 6<sup>th</sup> variation by virtue of their being, as the story goes, at the roots of European philosophy (cf. 6<sup>th</sup> variation); they are like the *Gufihtar* attended to by yoikers, mythical beings who left a heritage that we keep exploring with creativity, resurging every now and then in our productions, ‘as if by a miracle’ (Detienne 2013). Thus, my aim is certainly not to explain the yoik through philosophy, nor the opposite, but to remind the reader (and myself) that writing and yoiking are diverging crafts, each of which enacts its own inherited voices.

That the power of the ‘living land’, as incarnated by the *Gufihtar*, may resemble the power of written marks, as incarnated by the Ancient Greek alphabet, is an intuition encountered in the work of the philosopher and magician David Abram (1997, 2010). The originality of his voice derives from the encounter he draws between the phenomenology of Maurice Merleau-Ponty, environmental philosophy and social anthropology, as well as the poetic tone of his texts, distanced from orthodox academic standards. One of his key arguments lies in the rupture initiated by alphabetic writing between human voices and the land that once held them, and in the warning he addresses against the danger of a literate culture breaking its ties with orality and more-than-human fields of belonging. Commenting on David Abram’s work, the philosopher Isabelle Stengers noted that he ‘still writes, and passionately so’, stressing that the *experience* of writing can be one of

‘metamorphic transformation’, even though the written text that emerges along the way crystallises into an ‘unchanging form’ (Stengers 2012: 6, cf. 4<sup>th</sup> variation). I do not possess Abram’s writing skills; a poetic tone might have helped to keep the text metamorphic, and indeed, some of the most remarkable written descriptions of the yoik are found in poetry (e.g. Gaup 1982, Utsi 2000, Valkeapää 1994 [1985], cf. 5<sup>th</sup> variation on writing poetically on echoes). I have nonetheless attempted to make explicit the experimental quality of this work by emphasising its status as an *exercise in variation*, an experiment of thought aimed at accompanying the yoik towards even greater vitality.

I have just mentioned two important voices: Maurice Merleau-Ponty and Isabelle Stengers. Merleau-Ponty is a common influence of both Abram and Ingold. The inspiration I found in his work stems from his attention to the most original aspects of perception and the light it shed on the sensuous experience of yoiking. It was also Merleau-Ponty who made me realise that thinking with the yoik demanded that I invest my body in the exercise and engage in a vocal apprenticeship (cf. Section ‘Yoik courses’). Whatever concepts emerged to creation along my work, it appeared that they had to be anchored in vocal experience. As Nietzsche once put it, ‘The more abstract the truth you want to teach, the more you must seduce the senses to it’ (Nietzsche 1968 [1886-1887]: 95, cf. 4<sup>th</sup> variation on anchoring texts in oral practices).

This focus on practices follows the ‘ecology of practices’ proposed by Isabelle Stengers, in whose work I encountered the key insight that practices *diverge* (Stengers 2005) – although, as I found, they also tend to converge at times. Likewise, the idea of writing variations partly stems from her crucial note that ‘the very way we define, or address, a practice is part of

the surroundings which produces its ethos' (ibid.: 187). Writing about a practice is indeed a way of extending it, growing it into a novel 'creature' (cf. 3<sup>rd</sup> variation). Three other aspects of Stengers' work have been central to this thesis: (1) her promotion of the works of David Abram, Étienne Souriau, and Alfred North Whitehead – summoned in the following chapters – (2) her argument on the need for consultation in research, and (3) her advocacy of 'speculative gestures'. The latter two aspects are described in the following sections.

Another crucial philosophical voice belongs to Gilles Deleuze, and in particular to his collaboration with Félix Guattari. I will not attempt to summarise their mark on the present work for the simple reason that it is mostly invisible. I rarely use their concepts (except in the 1<sup>st</sup> variation); what interests me is their transformative craft and how they shaped my attention and habits of thought towards finer attunement with the life of practices. It is noteworthy that I only started to be sensitive to Deleuze's thoughts after I had acquired some familiarity with the yoik, as if attending to the craft of yoiking opened the way for engaging with his texts. Later, I would have the same experience with Leibniz, discovering the *Monadologie* and wondering whether this was secretly a book about the yoik (Leibniz 1974 [1714], cf. 4<sup>th</sup> variation).

Returning to Deleuze and Guattari, I will limit myself to mentioning one concept: *rhizome*. The knowledge outlined in the following pages is rhizomic in two ways. Firstly, it seeks to proceed from the *milieu* without laying a fast foundation for the reflection, favouring alliances over kinship, and deploying the many threads I found in the yoik towards multiple fields of thought. Secondly, it is rhizomic in that it seeks to grow in the earth. When applied in philosophy, the term 'rhizome' could be mistaken for a

systematic effort of critique and deconstruction, or for a free circulation of concepts akin to the neoliberal economic order, but these are not necessarily rhizomic gestures, they may just as well be *lines of death*. A rhizome is anchored in a soil; it nurtures deep roots and projects its plant towards the surface. If I claim this work to be rhizomic, it is because the yoik itself has a rhizomic quality: one could almost write a *botanic* of the yoik, from its roots in the dwelling of the *Gufihtar*, in the air, and in evolutionary history (cf. 4<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> variations) to the flowering melodies that pour out of yoikers' mouths. Nurturing rhizomic reflections thus means nurturing *radical* ideas, that is, in this case, ideas that have 'roots' [la. *radix*] (Onions 1966: 735) in the deep crafts of yoiking and of philosophy. Let the following chapters be the visible part of the rhizome, the one that grows above the surface; the physiology of its roots will be sketched in the next sections.

The encounters triggered by this rhizomic approach occasionally lead to *comparative* considerations – for instance, between the yoik and musical modality (4<sup>th</sup> variation), or dreams (cf. 5<sup>th</sup> variation). When this occurs, the aim is never to produce a list of similarities and differences between two elements, but rather to establish a milieu of thought in which the yoik is made to appear in converging or diverging shades and, thus, to reveal some of its possibilities. As for the continuous comparison between writing and yoiking, it is noteworthy that I do not stand in a position of exteriority from which I could appreciate their '*vis-à-vis*'. Strictly speaking, the task is not to *compare*, but rather to use the craft of writing as a way of *learning to know* the yoik – 'learning to know', as Vinciane Despret noted, is a task best pursued by 'learning, first, how to recognise oneself' (Despret 2011: 35).

## **Strategies of attention**

‘Attending to’ something means several things: ‘to pay attention to’, ‘to be present at’, ‘to wait for’, ‘to care for’ and, etymologically, ‘to stretch towards’ [la. *ad-tendere*] (Onions 1966: 61). It is in every sense of the term that gestures of attention have guided this research: paying attention to the yoik, being in its presence, waiting for it to manifest some of its depths, caring for its vitality, and stretching towards its *ethos* through the practice of writing. This approach bears resemblances with what anthropologists call *recursivity*, namely this effort ‘to extend postplurally the form of the object of analysis to the form of the analysis itself’ (Pedersen 2011). By adopting a recursive approach, one empowers the ‘object’ of study to not only deliver discrete elements of knowledge to the ‘analyst’, but to transform the form of knowledge created. Defined as such, recursivity is not so much a method that one applies, but a continuous experiment aimed at letting the craft of others grow within our own. This task is perhaps best pursued by keeping in mind the words of the yoiker Ánde Somby, published in an essay entitled *Joik and the Theory of Knowledge*: ‘The yoiker may perhaps be considered an integral part of the yoik, and this has interesting connotations for the debate about objectivity in research. To what extent is the researcher a part of his research, and how far is the research part of the researcher?’ (Somby 2007).

In terms of research methodology, it would be expected that things are done in the right order: first, choose a topic, then find a relevant theoretical framework, and then reflect on how this choice can be transposed into a methodology. Only then can the actual work begin. As in classical architecture: start with the foundations, erect the framework, and the rest



will follow. I did not follow this order when I initiated this work. Taking the yoik seriously meant being prepared to adapt my *strategies* along the course of the research and to improvise my way along multiple paths; a ‘methodology’, i.e. a meta-path or *meta-hodos* (Jullien 2015: 75), would have simply been an impediment. Relevant gestures of attention were found along the research journey and it is only once it started coalescing into a written text that I was able to write retroactively about the paths taken. The idea of variation, for instance, was not premeditated; it emerged through repeated experiments with writing. In 2015, I concluded my master’s thesis with the observation that the yoik and academic writing were perhaps more similar than they seemed to be, but at the time I did not consider the possible relationships of convergence and divergence between both. When I became mindful of this a few years later, I embraced and developed it. This exemplifies how my commitment to gestures of *attending* often meant that I had to *wait* for the matter of this thesis to manifest itself and then *care* for it when it did so – as yoikers do when ‘receiving’ new yoiks (cf. 3<sup>rd</sup> variation).

I found out that *ideas* surged in much the same way as yoiks tend to do with yoikers. ‘Thinking’, etymology tells us, once meant ‘causing to appear to oneself’ [oe. *þencán*] (Onions 1966: 917) – a craft akin to tracking and hunting. David Abram captures this evanescent quality of ideas through the following comparison:

‘Certain ideas [are] like deer, visiting our awareness in much the same way that wild deer make contact with us – graceful, shy, lingering at the edge of our awareness, yet slipping back into the forest if too wilfully focused upon [...]. Some [ideas] slither mostly unseen

through the grass, sporting different hues and patterns in keeping with their favored haunts; others bask on warm rocks in the midafternoon, only to skitter away at our incautious approach. Certain lightweight thoughts flutter in the air around us, so small and erratic we easily neglect to notice them, while other more muscled notions lope unexpected across our roads, marking their passage with scent or scat' (Abram 2010: 118).

The challenge was to attend to these ideas and to develop some of them, to explore and to crystallise them into a written form, or, to take an expression by the philosopher Étienne Souriau, to *instaurate* [fr. *instaurer*] them. Instaurating means meeting a demand, devoting oneself to receiving and giving shape to something that first appears as a 'work-to-be-done' (Souriau 2009 [1943], cf. 3<sup>rd</sup> variation).

This does not mean that I adopted a passive and contemplative attitude until ideas spontaneously appeared. If you want to see deer, you should learn to track them; if you want to write on the yoik, you should 'stretch towards' it, hold it in your thoughts and continuously follow its tracks. In my case, this effort relied on readings, conversations with yoikers, a practical apprenticeship in yoiking, consultations with Sámi yoikers, and repeated attempts at writing. As with the craft of animal tracking, described by the philosopher Baptiste Morizot, this tracking of the yoik was both *systematic* – as when an animal is followed 'track by track' – and *speculative* – as when the track is momentarily lost and speculation takes over: 'What would I do if I were you, animal?' (Morizot 2018: 177). Readings and conversations tended to belong to systematic tracking; learning how to yoik and writing rather belonged to the speculative side.

Returning to Sápmi and organising consultations sought to reconcile both, to assess to what extent the speculative tracks I had been following were familiar to yoikers themselves. In truth, systematic and speculative approaches were usually intertwined, as I suspect they are in animal tracking: speculations always relied on systematic inquiry, and vice versa.

The following sections start by describing the circumstances of my first encounters with the yoik and the genesis of the doctoral project. The autobiographic dimension responds to a curiosity, repeatedly encountered among yoikers, as to why a foreigner like myself became so interested in their practice: this deserves an explanation. I then turn to descriptions of my conversations with yoikers, my practical apprenticeship in yoik courses and the consultations I organised with Sámi yoikers at the end of the inquiry. There is little to say regarding my strategies of reading, besides the fact that I sought texts of various types (e.g. academic contributions, poetry, newspapers articles, blogs) and in various languages, namely Danish, English, French, German, Italian, Norwegian, Swedish, and, with some assistance, Ancient Greek and Latin. I have translated a few texts written in Sámi, but the majority of this literature has remained inaccessible to me, as were texts written in Finnish, Russian, Hungarian, and Old Norse, to which I only refer via secondary sources.

One might wonder why *participant observation* is not mentioned among the strategies I have used. Some of these strategies, especially my practical apprenticeship, could be related to participant observation. However, I did not spend extended periods of time in the company any particular yoiker nor followed any of them in their everyday life. Consequently, various dimensions of the yoik have remained entirely inaccessible to me. For instance, I know from my readings and conversations that it is common for

yoikers to alternate between speech and yoiking during their conversations. I have not directly witnessed this, and if I had I would probably have been ill-equipped to follow what was going on. The yoik, in its traditional practice, to a large extent remains a subterranean craft that does not deploy itself in its entirety to the observer, even for a *participant* observer. Most yoikers prefer to yoik when they are alone or are among close relatives – contexts in which I did not try nor wish to intrude upon.

This limitation was useful to me. It reminded me that despite all my conversations, apprenticeship, and consultations, the yoik still concealed inscrutable depths that I could not see. Yoikers are in a similar situation when they seek to create new melodies for animals (cf. 3<sup>rd</sup> variation on yoik creation). Consider the example of the fox: any animal tracker knows that foxes appear and disappear. Even the most advanced tracking devices do not empower us to scrutinise all the facets of their existence. Yoikers do not follow the animals into their dens – instead, they are content with observing what the fox reveals of itself in the open and relying on its apparitions for creating a melody that captures an *ethos* of ‘foxness’. I am likewise satisfied to let the yoik live much of its life away from me and to nurture the apparitions that it willingly grants me.

### **Getting acquainted**

My first encounter with the yoik dates from 2004 – I was 13 years old then. I was listening to the folk metal record *Jaktens Tid* by the Finnish band Finntroll, which includes a few tracks with yoiked refrains. The yoiker on these tracks, Jonne Järvelä, is not Sámi, although he learned how to yoik during a stay in Sápmi and through a collaboration with the Sámi yoiker Maaren Aikio in the band Shamaani. At the time, I had no idea who the

Sámi were, but the sound of the yoik already had my attention. It was 2010 by the time I found a webpage about the yoik that was published in French on Wikipedia (I could hardly read English back then). Through this, I was able to learn a little about its practice.

Until then, I had been living in the Belgian Ardenne, away from any form of ‘academic’ concern. For a long time, the most nearby university campus, located in Liège, seemed like a distant and intimidating place. It is there that I eventually enrolled in a study programme in art history and archaeology (with an option of musicology) and learned to develop my intellectual inclinations. I acquired a particular interest in social anthropology during my master’s studies at the Université catholique de Louvain, as my involvement in the traditional music of my region, my interest in orality, and the desire I had to travel turned part of my attention away from classical Europe and, later, focused it on the yoik.

Why the yoik in particular? On the one hand, there was an ineffable attraction to its musical *ethos*, to what I perceived as its minimalism, its immediacy, its roughness, its originality, its wildness; the idea that there were philosophical insights worth exploring in the yoik was primarily *intuitive*. On the other hand, the yoik seemed like a practice ‘lurking behind the horizon’, like wild animals do (cf. 1<sup>st</sup> variation on horizons and lurking), i.e. a practice that did not belong to my immediate environment but remained accessible through various continuities. One of these continuities was geographic: the Sámi and I share the same continent and, for some of them, the same European institutions. I always visited Scandinavia and Sápmi by train, bus, boat, or car, making me sensitive to the continuity of roads, railways, seas, and landscapes that separated ‘their home’ from ‘mine’. I thought that visiting the Sámi or returning home by plane would

have involved a fracture – a metaphysical gap between their world and mine, one that was unlikely to be inspiring (cf. Section ‘Social anthropology’ above). Another continuity was stylistic: I discovered the yoik via musical genres that were more clearly ‘mine’ at the time, like metal and traditional music. A third continuity was socio-cultural: like many Sámi yoikers, I grew up away from urban areas, in a region where oral traditions and local folklore remain nurtured, remote from the main centres of political power, and known for its lower population density and colder climate vis-à-vis national standards. Most of the time, Sápmi and its inhabitants reminded me more of the place in which I grew up than Oslo did; exoticism is not necessarily where one expects it.

The final decision to focus on the yoik was made in January 2014 when, as a master’s student, I had the opportunity to spend three weeks in Göteborg to explore the literature on the yoik available at the university library. The idea was triggered by a paper written by the ethnomusicologist Ola Graff, *The Relation between Sami Yoik Song and Nature* (Graff 2011), a study that I found exciting for the questions it asked, but limited by the critical stance it adopted. Exploring the issue further with the input of social anthropology became the topic of my master’s thesis. Therefore, I learned the Norwegian (*bokmål*) language, spent one year at the University of Oslo as an exchange student through the Erasmus programme, and read everything I could find on the topic. In April 2014, I spent two weeks in Inner Finnmark in order to attend the Easter Festival in Karasjok, to familiarise myself more with the country, and to meet some locals. In January 2015, I spent two weeks in Tromsø / *Romsa* (Troms, Norway) and had my first conversations with Ola Graff, who manages the ‘yoik archives’ [no. *joikesamlinga*] (cf. 6<sup>th</sup> variation on the yoik archives) at the university

museum, and Ánde Somby, a renowned yoiker who works at the same university. This provided enough material for me to complete the thesis in May 2015. An advertisement for two doctoral positions about ‘Music in the Nordic Regions’ opened the following year in Oslo. I proposed to extend the work I had already begun and took the position in September 2016.

## Conversations

‘Conversation’ is a more relevant word than ‘interview’ for denoting the exchanges I had with yoikers. An interview is an interaction between A and B, a transmission of knowledge: I ask the questions and you give me the answers. A conversation is an act of *turning* with someone around a topic [la. *con-vertere*] – along the same etymology as ‘converting’ (Onions 1966: 212).

The reason why these exchanges could not be called interviews is that, as I gradually found out, there is no consistent body of knowledge shared by all yoikers. Of course, there are numerous recurring ideas, e.g. the fact that one does not yoik ‘about’ something, that yoiks are ‘received’, that the mountains are a privileged place for yoiking, or that the yoik imitates its sources. However, once we explore what these ideas imply, what we find is a multiplicity of observations and situated experiences. This is a crucial aspect of the craft of yoiking: it is widely considered to be a mystery by those who practice it, not because it is esoteric – i.e. known only to an elite group – but because *it reveals its craft through participation*. The yoikers I met were generally more inclined to describe it as a *gift* received from elsewhere (e.g. from nature, from the wind, from the earth, from their ancestors, from the *Gufihtar*) than something they invented and mastered. Most of the time, they only felt entitled to speak about their own experience,

with little inclination for generalisation. When I presented to them an idea that they had not heard before (for instance an idea I heard from another yoiker), they agreed with it or replied that they had not experienced anything that confirmed it, but they never questioned the legitimacy of other yoikers' observations. Thus, the yoik appears to be primarily known through experience and experimentation. This echoes the Spinozan statement mentioned earlier (cf. Section 'Theoretical landscape'): we do not know what a yoik can or cannot do – all we can do is navigate between experiences of 'enchantment' (cf. 2<sup>nd</sup> variation).

The yoikers I conversed with were there to guide me into the yoik's threads, teaching me what I should be attentive to, and sharing their personal experiences – they were *converting* me into their craft. I could not directly converse in speech with the yoik, but I could seek its presence in the propositional knowledge that the yoikers establish from their privileged contact with it. To the extent that the knowledge acquired in the process was summoned and articulated through our conversations – that it did not actually exist in articulate form before we started our discussions – the conversations can be considered as efforts to explore, by linguistic means, the *ethos* of the yoik; engaged along a 'systematic tracking' mode, they always stretched towards 'speculative tracking'. Consequently, what I was engaging with must be understood as *ethic* knowledge rather than *emic* discourses to be analysed in the *etic* mode, as is sometimes considered in ethnology. I doubt that the emic/etic dichotomy would have made any more sense to the yoikers I met than it did for me, as both were inextricable in the process of conversing. Some yoikers let me know at the end of the conversations that it had been an enriching experience for them, as it made



them reflect on certain aspects of the yoik that they had never thought about before, as if their knowledge had become more distinct in the process.

Concerning the issue of *representativity*, I chose not to postulate a strict line between authentic and inauthentic discourses. I consider that all yoikers – young or old, self-taught or born within the tradition – have been in touch with a variation of the yoik in its own right. I do not believe that they made up their discourses *ex nihilo* during our conversations; there were always lived experiences behind their ideas. In the end, which ideas are explored in this work, and which ones remain unexplored was my decision, but I have tried to put an emphasis on the ideas most dearly nurtured by the yoikers who shared them. Likewise, although I take my own experience of yoiking seriously, I tend to give more importance to the experience of skilful yoikers, recognising their being in the yoik's presence to be more intense than mine. 'Who should be attended to?' thus remains an open question, one that must be navigated rather than determined in advance. In the meantime, the yoikers I have met must not be considered as representative, but as *representants* of their craft, following a distinction drawn by Vinciane Despret (2011: 196-197): they do not stand for the craft of yoiking or for the community of yoikers in general, but each of them nonetheless had *something* to reveal about the yoik.

The relationship between the traditional and the modern yoik was approached along similar lines in order to multiply my observations on the possibilities of the yoik rather than to seek exhaustivity. During my research, my work has occasionally been criticised by colleagues who considered that I tend to rely on the discourse of yoikers that they consider as 'modern' (e.g. Ailo Gaup, Nils-Aslak Valkeapää, Torgeir Vassvik) without systematically mentioning that they do not belong to the authentic

tradition. Hence the need to make clear that, although I have tried to distinguish the traditional and modern *practices* and to explore their relationships with particular attention, I do not make any distinction between traditional and modern *discourses*: all the yoikers I have met existed in the present and therefore enacted *present* variations of the yoik from a multiplicity of situated postures that I do not wish to reduce to a dichotomy.

The majority of the conversations took place in Norwegian (with two exceptions in English, with people who were fluent speakers).<sup>17</sup> I do not speak Sámi languages with a sufficient degree of fluency to conduct conversations. Norwegian was a middle ground, a second language for them as for me – only a few of the yoikers with whom I conversed had Norwegian as their first language – but it was a language in which they were all fluent. Each conversation was recorded with a microphone, allowing me to play back what I had not immediately understood during the conversations and to quote my interlocutors with exactitude. I would meet the yoikers either at their home, at their workplace, or in public areas like a pub or café.

I always started by saying a few words about myself, how I got interested in the yoik, and what kind of project I was involved in. I then asked the yoikers to tell me how they learned how to yoik. From there, I had a set of topics to discuss that could vary from one conversation to another, with recurring themes such as the creation of new yoiks or the relationship between the traditional and the modern yoik. Efforts were made for the

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<sup>17</sup> One of them, Ola Graff, is not a Sámi and he is known as a scholar rather than a yoiker. I have nonetheless included him in the list, considering that our conversation took place in a way similar to any of my conversations with yoikers.

conversations to be informal and the yoikers were free to bring up alternative topics they considered important. These were often the most interesting parts of the conversations because they were unexpected. Most of the key ideas presented in this work (e.g. the possibility of yoiking to animals, the depths within humans, the ‘primordial’ quality of the yoik) stem from these valuable moments.

The list of references at the end of this work gathers the fourteen conversations quoted in this thesis. These must be added to approximately twenty discussions with yoikers or yoik-interested persons, which were either not recorded or left out in the final version of the thesis. Most of the encounters took place over a period of six months spent in northern Norway, from January to June 2017. I rented an apartment in Tromsø, the main centre for higher education in the north of the country and a location connected to all the Norwegian regions of Sápmi via public transportation. Most of that period was spent away from the city, particularly in Inner Finnmark, where Sámi speakers represent an arithmetic majority and where I was generally hosted by locals.

Arranging conversations proved to be challenging at times. Even when a contact could be made with particular yoikers, they would often postpone our meetings until I was no longer in the area (cf. Section ‘Authority’ on these difficulties). Being assisted by a local host significantly contributed to easing things. My hosts in Karajsok and Tana have been particularly helpful in this regard. Whether productive in terms of conversations or not, every stay in Sápmi was an opportunity to get acquainted with its environment, inhabitants, landscapes, languages, and rhythms. If I do not always refer to the modest familiarity I acquired with the area, it nonetheless lies among the roots of my arguments.

All mentions and quotations of yoikers in relation to conversations and yoik courses are included in these pages with their approval, obtained once at the time of our meeting and once again at the time of the text's completion. In the latter case, the paragraphs where they appear were sent to them two months before the thesis' final submission, either in English or in a Norwegian translation, according to their preference.

### **Yoik courses**

Thinking retroactively about the strategies used for this work, it seems that learning how to yoik could have been an obvious move from the outset. However inspiring the conversations were, writing philosophical variations on the yoik required a firmer anchorage in its practice if I wanted to ensure that this text was still a variation *on the yoik*, in touch with the craft it seeks to describe. My actual apprenticeship started after most of the conversations had taken place and towards the end of my stay in northern Norway. Naming specific elements of knowledge that this apprenticeship provided me would merely be pointing at the tip of the iceberg. I did not follow a goal-oriented endeavour like '*I want to understand this, and a yoik apprenticeship is the way to get the answer*'; on the contrary, in order to learn how to yoik, I let myself be guided entirely by my teachers. If they merely focused on the vocal technique, so be it, I would work on that, even though this did not seem relevant for my thesis at first sight. In truth, this compliance with my teachers was also a way of engaging with the yoik in a non-academic way for my own sake, exploring aspects of the practice that reading and writing had barely touched upon so far. Whether this would lead me anywhere with regard to my thesis or not, exploring the yoik in this livelier way would at least satisfy my own curiosity.

I began the process by attending a yoiking session with Ingvald Guttorm in May 2017, who taught me a few animal melodies. I then registered for Johan Sara Jr.'s online course *Juoiggas!* In June 2017, after my stay in northern Norway, I attended an introductory course in practical aspects of the yoik at the SOAS University of London with the Scottish musician Merlyn Driver, who had learned the craft of yoiking with Sámi yoikers. In July 2017, I joined a four-day yoik course in Switzerland with the Sámi artist In̄gor Ántte Áilu Gaup. Later, I continued to practise and to get familiar with the animal yoik repertoire in particular. In December 2017, it was my turn to give a short yoik course at the University of Lille (*Université Lille-III*) in northern France.<sup>18</sup> In February 2018, I followed a second three-day intensive course with In̄gor Ántte Áilu Gaup in Oslo, where I received my own yoik as a gift from him and the other participants (cf. 3<sup>rd</sup> variation). In June 2018, I joined a yoiker from the Nordic countries who chose to remain anonymous for a course lasting for one evening in Central Europe. In July 2018, I attended the two-day yoik course, which is given annually by Berit Alette Mienna at the Riddu Riđđu Festival. Finally, I took a university course entitled *Med yoik som utgangspunkt* ['With the yoik as a starting point'], conducted by the yoiker and composer Frode Fjellheim at

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<sup>18</sup> This course was supposed to complement a lecture given at the same university about my research. I originally suggested the organisers to invite a Sámi teacher. For financial and linguistic reasons, it was impossible. Eventually, I accepted to animate this practical workshop, but oriented it towards the apprenticeship of a *repertoire* (i.e. North Sámi animal yoiks), as teaching about the yoik's *vocal technique* would have been beyond my skills. Chanting animal yoiks together was primarily intended to attune the participants' attention to the recordings of Sámi voices that I played after each of our vocalisations. The participants appeared enthusiastic about this experience.

the *Nord Universitet* in Røstad over five days, spread from October 2018 to February 2019.<sup>19</sup>

However uncertain it might have been at first, the outcome of this apprenticeship turned out to be crucial; most of the philosophical variations gathered here could not have been written as they are, had I neglected to initiate it. This outcome took time to reveal itself, remaining hidden from plain sight for most of the investigation, working secretly by educating me to think and write in certain ways. For instance, during yoik courses, we were always encouraged to experiment with the voice. We were told not to try to control everything, and not to over-think. This was especially important when we had to improvise yoik-like melodic patterns: think about it beforehand and nothing comes out. However, leave room for spontaneity and let whatever comes resound around the room, and the outcome can be startling. The point was not to ‘get it right’, but to get to know the yoik through our bodies and to know our bodies through the yoik. This education in the craft of experimenting, speculating, and attending in all the meanings of the term, is among the main skills I have tried to reproduce in writing.

Although I came to the courses with the will to be guided by my teachers, I also came with my own body and my own voice. These had been shaped by years of life and growth that took place far away from Sápmi, within the sounds and textures of other local languages, atmospheres, and landscapes. I was therefore in no position to accurately reproduce the sound of the teachers or to aim to do so. However, the aim of the course was for the participants to get in touch with their *own* yoiking voices, by turning inwards under the guidance of the teachers (cf. 4<sup>th</sup> variation). Some of the

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<sup>19</sup> This list is summarised in the references at the end of the thesis.

teachers insisted that by yoiking, we were, in a way, enriching the yoik tradition by developing it along the timbres and creativities of our respective voices. As Frode Fjellheim once wrote: ‘Maybe you can use the yoik in a way that no one has thought of before? Just try!’ (Fjellheim 2018: 4). Berit Alette likewise responded the following when asked by journalists whether anyone could learn how to yoik:

‘Yes, but it is important to get in touch with your own tones and rhythms and to manage to attune yourself with the world and the people around you. This is also the aim of my course. [...] You must play with the voice. In order to learn, you must listen, imitate, and find your own sound’ (in Hanssen 2017).

Through our efforts, we got perhaps *a glimpse* of what it feels like to be a yoiker, but we certainly did not become ‘Sámi yoikers’. Learning from them did not place me in their shoes, nor did it give me any right to speak in their name, especially since I am not a trained singer and my yoiking technique has remained basic. Throughout this work, I have engaged with the yoik not as a yoiker, but as a *writer*, trying to explore it from my own situated practice rather than trying to enter the ‘inside’ of an already constituted tradition. My practical apprenticeship was but one way of attending to it and informing my own task of writing. The craft of yoiking appeared to me like an elusive presence that one follows along speculative gestures, not a fortress that one could take and inhabit.

‘Speculative gesture’ is an expression proposed by Isabelle Stengers and Didier Debaise (2015). In this instance, it implies ‘adding’ something to the yoik, exploring not necessarily what it is, but what it does and what it could become. As Stengers puts it,

‘A speculation is produced “for the world” when, far from relieving, it supplements; it takes the risk of introducing a “possible”, an additional dimension. This dimension is relevant if it allows formulating the question in a slightly different way, to displace the issues at stake, to complicate the positions’ (Stengers 2002b: 30e).

Speculation engages with what is not immediately known or knowable and occurs in what Marcel Mauss describes as ‘the unknown. [...] the indeterminate areas where the urgent problems lie [...]. That is where we must enter. We can be sure that truths lie there to be found’ (Mauss 1973 [1936]: 365).

Talking about speculation can be helpful for approaching the issue of whether outsiders like myself can have any pretensions at all for learning how to yoik, even if a glimpse of the yoiking experience is all they seek. In my experience, many Sámi yoikers are enthusiastic about non-Sámi people being interested in the yoik and trying to learn its craft. Most of the teachers who conducted the yoik courses in which I participated are among the most renowned and respected yoikers in Sápmi, and all of them favoured the idea of sharing their craft with outsiders, in both their acts and discourses.

There is still an obvious bias here – I am more likely to encounter people who want to share their craft with me than people who want to keep it for themselves. Controversies on this topic have occasionally occurred, such as in 2013 when the non-Sámi Swedish ethnomusicologist Olle Edström yoiked in public during the Sámi National Day in Göteborg. Some Sámi yoikers found this offensive, arguing that the yoik should remain a strictly Sámi expression. Yet it seems that the controversy was due to specific circumstances. The yoiker Biret Ristin Sara, for example, stressed that she



was not generally against the idea that a non-Sámi person could yoik. She merely objected to the idea that one could do so *in their name*, as part of a Sámi celebration (Vuolab 2013).

Regardless of moral considerations, my capacity for experiencing the yoik at all, as a non-Sámi person, does not have to be acknowledged from the outset by the reader, precisely because it is *speculative*. What will matter is the observations that the supposition affords. Supposing that I *can* experience a glimpse of the yoiking experience at least opens the possibility that I might learn something in the process and that this thesis might have some value. In William James' words, 'the strength [of an argument] is in the outcome, the upshot, the *terminus ad quem*. Not where it comes from but what it leads to is to decide' (James 1896: VI).

## Consultations

In order to assess to what extent these 'speculative gestures' might be considered relevant by the yoiking community, I presented my research at eight Sámi institutions between January and March 2019. These included the *Oslo Sámiid Searvi* association in Oslo, universities or research centres in Levanger / *Lievenge* (Trøndelag, Norway), Umeå / *Ubmeje* (Västerbotten, Sweden), Tromsø, and Kautokeino, and museums in Karasjok and Varangerbotn / *Vuonnabahta* (Finnmark, Norway).<sup>20</sup> Among the audiences were important authorities on the yoik and Sámi culture, including renowned yoikers and scholars as well as museum staff in Karasjok and Varangerbotn. The presentations lasted between forty minutes and one hour and were followed by discussions with the audience. Those lectures taking

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<sup>20</sup> These institutions are listed in the 'References' section at the end of this thesis.

place in academic environments were conducted in English, while those taking place in cultural institutions were conducted in Norwegian. Yoikers that I had met earlier and who lived in the area were invited to come to the events and the audience was always encouraged to provide feedback at the end of the lectures. I followed the structure of this thesis, starting with an overview of my theoretical and strategic approaches before going through each of the six main chapters and describing their central concepts: horizon, enchantment, creature, depth, echo, primordial.

Shortly before I returned to Sápmi, one of my master's thesis supervisors told me that I seemed to keep the yoik in mind *as hunters do with animals*. While I have already engaged with the 'animal tracking' comparison in the previous sections, it appears particularly relevant in this case. Ethnologists of the Circumpolar North and Amazonian areas have often observed that hunters *need the approbation of their prey* for hunting them; they must at least defend their case. The philosopher Michel Serres makes this a central aspect of 'animism', an 'order that obliges hunters to utter a long plea aimed at showing the victim-to-be the legitimacy of their hunt' (Serres 2015 [2009]: 48). Perhaps the order I established by organising these consultations was of the same type. The anthropologist Nastassja Martin, while observing the Gwich'in hunters of Alaska, speculated that it is because animals are absent, because they do not 'immediately' give themselves to humans, but instead elude them, that people hunt them (Martin 2016: 147, quoted at length in the 6<sup>th</sup> variation). Could we not say the same of anthropologists themselves, attracted by the desire of what lurks behind their horizon (cf. 1<sup>st</sup> variation)? Not that we seek to kill anyone, but we do seek to feed on others, to use their vitality in order to nourish our own

hunger – in my case literally, as exploring the yoik is what provided me with an income during the three years and therefore fed me.

In the same way as the ‘animist’ hunters appear uncomfortable with the idea of eating the flesh of animals by virtue of their having a ‘soul’ like humans (Descola 2005: 392), writing about the practices of others is likely to arouse discomfort. Like many anthropologists before me, I did feel uneasy at times, when trying to meet yoikers or asking their guidance. I obviously knew that, like me, they had their own lives, their own practices, their own attachments, and that asking them to feed me with their knowledge was an odd thing to ask, especially coming from a foreign scholar who appears to have no particular reason for being so interested. Perhaps the ways in which ethnomusicology has transcribed the yoik and other musical traditions from recordings into musical scores, and then turned them into analysable features, is a move akin to rituals used by ‘animist’ hunters, aimed at ‘desubjectifying’ the food, turning it into a ‘thing’ before ingesting it in order to avoid cannibalism (*ibid.*).

Among the Yukaghir hunters of Siberia, as described by the anthropologist Rane Willerslev, the ethics of the hunt go through a game of *seduction*: ‘the hunter takes on the identity and appearance of his prey, thus projecting back to the animal (and its invisible spiritual counterpart) an image of itself’ (Willerslev 2007: 190). Likewise, my task was to assess whether my discourse reflected the identity and appearance of the discourse of yoikers and their invisible craft – not to ‘trick’ them, but to assess what degree of hesitation and caution was needed in my research. This, as I will illustrate, led both to successful and unsuccessful attempts.

Five types of feedback received from the consultations’ participants can be distinguished. Firstly, and perhaps most importantly, *only some*

*participants shared feedback* after each presentation; others remained silent, and what they thought will remain inscrutable. This reminded me of an observation sketched earlier (cf. Section ‘Strategies of attention’): I can only ever get *glimpses* of what I am looking for, while most of the depths of the craft of yoiking will remain elusive.

Secondly, some participants commented on *academic considerations* pertaining to the structure of my arguments: I only received this type of comment in universities, i.e. in Umeå, Tromsø, and Kautokeino.

Thirdly, some participants were primarily curious about the fact that *a foreigner was interested in their practice* and asked questions about how I ended up doing research on this topic. Noting that it was considered important, I eventually added a short section on this issue as part of my presentations (as well as in this text, cf. Section ‘Getting acquainted’). This is at least a first indication that my ‘taking on the identity of my prey’ was compromised from the beginning: writing about the yoik as a foreigner already appeared to be a remarkable divergence from the normal course of events.

Fourthly, some participants shared *comments on my project as a whole*. These were predominantly positive. For instance, a renowned yoiker in Kautokeino laconically stated the following: ‘Your description of the yoik is accurate’. Another yoiker in Levanger suggested that many yoikers would find the concepts I created relevant. Others were enthusiastic about the general idea of engaging philosophically with the yoik, considering it a relevant move. My approach was also described as ‘humble and respectful’ by two participants in Karasjok, who considered these qualities to be of great importance when addressing the yoik as an outsider.

This sort of feedback sometimes concerned specific concepts. For example, one participant in Karasjok reacted to the idea of ‘horizon’, explaining that she had not thought about it in those terms before, but that it actually captured what she experienced when yoiking. From that moment, I systematically asked the audience whether some concepts were considered more or less relevant than others. None of them was mentioned as irrelevant; on several occasions, participants responded that they all had a certain relevance or seemed complementary. However, ‘horizon’ and ‘primordial’ were recurrently named as the most relevant ones. I was particularly surprised concerning the latter: the idea that the yoik might be ‘primordial’ is a thought-provoking one that, to my knowledge, has never been taken seriously in academic scholarship before. Warned by (non-Sámi) scholars who found it ‘essentialist’, I considered that some yoikers might find it inappropriate. Overall, the consultations reminded me that, when determining whether a topic is relevant or not, the voices of yoikers required particular attention, as they may easily be silenced by moral considerations and habits of thought proper to the academic environment.

I have noted two unsuccessful, but no less instructive attempts at ‘seduction’, taking place in two different consultations. During the first one, a renowned yoiker stated the following: ‘This [i.e. my presentation] is not how we think about the yoik’. He added that it was ‘as it should be’, considering that I am a researcher bringing my own perspective on their practice, but his initial comment was crucial in highlighting that there could be a gap between my discourse and the experience of yoikers, wide enough for them not to feel a continuity between both sides. I was, in part, pleased to hear this comment, which seemed to indicate some sort of boundary to the relevance of my approach. It also made me feel slightly ridiculous, like

a philosopher stepping out of his office with polished concepts, which of course can only be displaced from the immediate, ‘craftful’ milieu of the yoik. It reminded me that yoikers do not generally spend their time creating concepts, that I was playing a rather exotic game, and that, had my concepts been more relevant, the yoik would still, always, elude me, because I approach it through a diverging, philosophical practice. This unsuccessful seduction paradoxically amounts to what the philosopher Isabelle Stengers considers a successful consultation: namely one that triggers hesitation about how to phrase one’s position, and forces researchers to face questions that ‘real researchers need not ask themselves’ (Stengers 2013: 47). For example, why would anyone *write* about the yoik?

The second unsuccessful attempt went as follows: after my presentation in Oslo, someone stood up and stated that she grew up surrounded by yoikers, that she was very familiar with the *practice* of yoiking, but that, unlike me, she did not know the *theory*. I wanted to answer that she knew the yoik’s ‘theory’ better than I do. But more importantly, my task, as I saw it, was never to go from practice to ‘theory’, but to approach the practice of yoiking through a practice of writing. However, it may be that this move to writing had denatured the yoik enough for it to enter an entirely different realm, one supposedly inaccessible to yoikers: *theory*. It is noteworthy that the consultation in Oslo was probably my clumsiest performance: it was the first one I organised, the first time I tried to summarise the entirety of my work, and the first public talk I ever gave in Norwegian. I do not know whether this might explain why I appeared to be focusing on ‘theory’, but it is a concern to be borne in mind. The fact that my questioner acknowledged me some form of legitimacy that she supposedly did not have for discussing ‘theory’ also brought to light my authoritative position as a

researcher (cf. Section ‘Authority’). If I cannot streamline the continuity between the concreteness of practice and my conceptual creations, if I become a ‘theoretician’ rather than a practitioner engaging with other practitioners, then the institutional authority of my position comes to the forefront and the possibility of attending to the yoik is compromised.

Thus, the two ‘negative’ comments I have just presented encouraged me to inquire further as to the situatedness of my practice of writing and its divergence from the practice of yoiking; a leitmotif in the following variations.

The fifth and final type of feedback I received consisted of *personal anecdotes*. After suggesting that she did not know the theory of the yoik, the participant who responded to me in Oslo went on to describe how she learned to yoik as a child in Sápmi, without making explicit connections with what I had been presenting. Most of the time though, it is in response to particular ideas expressed in my presentation that participants responded to with anecdotes. For instance, in response to the concept of ‘horizon’, a yoiker mentioned that she often yoiks her daughter who lives far away from her. In response to the title of my presentation, *joikens kraft* [The craft of yoiking], another participant told an anecdote from the time of the Alta-Kautokeino controversy (cf. Section ‘The yoik’), when she and other protestors held one another by the shoulders and yoiked together while police officers were approaching to remove them from the area; it was then that she understood *joikens kraft*. In Karasjok, my presentation became the subject of a short television report published online by the broadcasting corporation NRK Sápmi. At the end of the event, some of the participants were interviewed. I was not there to hear what they were saying but I watched some of the comments online afterwards. One of them reacted to

my mention of yoiks being used to communicate with animals, reporting an anecdote of her own about how she yoiks to puppies (cf. 2<sup>nd</sup> variation).<sup>21</sup>

These responses were valuable insofar as they revealed that some of my ideas and concepts found a local echo in the participants; that they occasionally had a relevance sharp enough to awaken memories that they considered relevant (cf. 5<sup>th</sup> variation on echoes and further considerations on these comments). Occasionally, they also revealed issues that I had overlooked. In response to particular moments in my presentation, anecdotes about the conflictual relation between the yoik and the church came up several times. At the time, I had not systematically approached this issue. Since then, I have added some reflections on this in the 3<sup>rd</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> variations.

### **Authority**

These consultations were intended to assess whether I was successfully ‘tracking’ the craft of yoiking, or whether my diverging practice and my speculations had led me away from it. They were supposed to make me ‘slow down’ and think again about my text, by giving to representants of the yoiking community the possibility of publicly denying the legitimacy of my endeavour.

However, the consultations did not entirely erase the regime of power and authority inherent to this sort of work. The participants were not empowered to stop me from doing my job, to make direct modifications on

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<sup>21</sup> Anecdotes about yoiks to animals were frequent and reproduced the paradox observed with the ‘primordial’ concept: here too, a topic that has almost never been approached by academic research was revealed to have a significant importance among yoikers.



my text, to freeze my salary, or to have me fired if they were unsatisfied. During the consultations, I was still protected by an institutional context, related to my affiliation with the University of Oslo and the type of venue chosen (universities, museums, cultural associations). ‘Those you address’, Isabelle Stengers once wrote, ‘must be empowered to evaluate the relevance of your interest, to agree or refuse to answer, and even to spit in your human, too human, face’ (Stengers 2011: 63). In my case, it would have taken great courage from the participants to spit in my face, either literally or metaphorically.

Generally speaking, one could say that a doctoral thesis always relies on authority if only by the fact that it is *signed* and claimed as one’s own: *it carries authority because it has an author* – or at least it pretends to establish one, since, as Deleuze and Guattari highlighted, a book is primarily an ‘assemblage’ of lines ‘and as such is unattributable’ (Deleuze & Guattari 1980: 10).

Does it not already imply a ‘disanimation’ of the yoik’s inspiring power, to claim that the ideas gathered here are *mine*? Yoikers are perhaps attentive enough to this issue to avoid the emergence of authors: hearing a new yoik, one does not ask who created it, but whom it evokes (cf. 3<sup>rd</sup> variation on authorship in the yoik). In the end, organising consultations might even have *enhanced* this work’s authority rather than undermined it. Authority is indeed a matter of responsibility, derived from the Latin *auctor* (Onions 1966: 63) – in relation to Ancient Roman lawmakers, who built their own craft through public consultations (Mantovani 2018). Consulting yoikers increased this responsibility: whatever I write in the following variations, the reader is now ensured that I had opportunities for assessing its relevance

with these yoikers – which of course, does not imply that I have been successful in *attending* to these opportunities.

What about *after* the text's completion? How can yoikers (or any other reader who feels concerned) retain a voice then? How can they affirm, deny, displace, or complexify the text's legitimacy?

Considering these questions, I am drawn back to the craft of hunting. 'Animist' hunters know that if they show no regard to their prey, the latter will cease to make themselves available in the future. As Tim Ingold put it, 'the animals have the power to withhold, if any attempt is made to coerce what they are not, of their own volition, prepared to provide' (Ingold 2000: 71). I met a similar issue when trying to be in the presence of the yoik, for instance by meeting yoikers for conversations: a protective attitude on their part was frequent. As some people in Finnmark explained to me, many locals have kept in mind the memory of disrespectful ethnologists who travelled to Sápmi in order to collect information and afterwards completely disappeared from sight; images of anthropologists measuring Sámi skulls as part of racist research programmes have also remained vivid in the collective memory.

Thus, the task of 'seduction' was one that I had to enact not just in consultations but *in most of my exchanges* with yoikers; I continuously had to organise a fragile reconciliation between the yoik and academic practitioners. This at least reveals one way by which yoikers can put researchers 'back in their place' when necessary: by denying them the privilege of sharing their knowledge. Thus, whenever someone refused to meet me or politely sought ways of avoiding a conversation with me, I was careful enough to respect their position and did not insist; hence the

relatively small number of conversations formally recorded and quoted in this thesis.

Occasionally, I have also witnessed how yoikers can *publicly* react to the authority of academic research. This may occur in various ways, but the following example struck me as amusingly relevant. It occurred during the spectacle *Juoiggas!* by the Beaivváš Sámi theatre [ns. *Beaivváš Sámi Našunálateáhter*], which I saw in Oslo. The show consisted of a succession of scenes evoking various aspects of the yoik and its history. In one of them, two characters, a researcher and his assistant, arrived on stage. The researcher was a weird character with a funny accent. His assistant carried on his back a ridiculously large machine resembling a seismograph. Together, they asked a Sámi person to yoik into a microphone that completely distorted the yoiker's voice. While the yoiker was chanting, the researcher only paid attention to the lines drawn by his seismograph and gave various instructions to his interlocutor as to how he had to yoik. At one point, he exclaimed, 'Fascinating!' Of course, from the outside, the situation was ludicrous – no one knew what this strange character might find fascinating in what seemed to be meaningless linear patterns.<sup>22</sup>

Among hunting, 'animist' or 'shamanic' communities, humour and irony have been documented as a crucial means by which humans undermine authority, especially the authority of spirits (e.g. Martin 2016: 202, Pedersen

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<sup>22</sup> This scene reminded me of humorous situations observed in the yoik, such as Wimpe Saari yoiking the state of Texas while partly 'failing' at sounding North-American, or Johan Andreas Andersen yoiking the cat and 'failing' at not being human (cf. 1<sup>st</sup> variation on these examples). Likewise, scholars exploring the 'craft of yoiking', because they are *writers* and not *yoikers*, can only fail, in part at least, which may be what makes them potentially laughable.

2011: 215, Willerslev 2012). According to Willerslev, this does not mean that ‘animists’ reject the existence or agency of spirits, but rather that the system these spirits establish ‘must never become total’, as this would ‘give the spirits the moral right to consume them in a series of divine predatory attacks’ (Willerslev 2012: 6). Likewise, I have had countless occasions of observing that scholarly work can be admired and valued by yoikers, and yet these yoikers retain the power to break the spell of academic research, if only by reminding its practitioners how funny they are, with their heavy equipment and theoretical apparatus, their lack of attention, and their habit to complicate things.

Observing the humorous dimension of animism, Willerslev thus asked: ‘Is animism being taken too seriously [by anthropologists]?’ (ibid.). For my own part, I remain committed to the task of taking the yoik and its practitioners seriously. Of course, the more seriously a text is written, the more readers are empowered to approach it with irony; I find that legitimate, perhaps even desirable. I do contend that the craft of yoiking *seriously* deserves the attention of readers, but one should also bear in mind that a 400-page long philosophical dissertation on the subject with a pompous title (‘PhD thesis’) could also be a source of amusement.

If not amusing, it is at least *incongruous*, for two reasons. Firstly, because it takes unnecessary detours in response to an impulse. If one must engage with the yoik, why do it in *writing* and with *concepts*? Why not simply *yoik*? Note that this form of incongruity is not necessarily deplorable: it is perhaps the displacement it establishes that induces the possibility of a creative gesture (cf. 3<sup>rd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> variations). Secondly, there is incongruity in this work in that, at a time when Europe is marked by growing social inequalities and ecological disruptions, it neglects the imperative of addressing urgent

issues and instead follows an ‘idiotic’ formula, as Gilles Deleuze would perhaps have called it: ‘there is a deeper problem. What problem, I do not quite see. But leave me. Everything can burn... this problem must be found’ (cf. Deleuze 2003: 296). Indeed, one could ask: is it really a time to write seemingly ‘apolitical’ texts about chants?

Deleuze relates ‘idiocy’ to Akira Kurosawa’s characters, such as the Seven Samurai and their obsession with the question, ‘What is a samurai? What is a samurai, that is, not in general, but at that particular time? Someone who has become useless. The lords no longer need them and can defend themselves alone’ (ibid.). Maybe this is the problem: what is a writer?

I do not have an answer to offer at this point, but what matters is that, idiotically or not, *writing and yoiking are two crafts that caught my attention*. Hence my desire to experiment with them and assess whether there is any power to derive from their encounter. ‘Authority’ here finds another etymology: the task is to increase, augment, expand, even *exaggerate* [la. *augēre*] (Onions 1966: 63, cf. *n*<sup>th</sup> variation on ‘exaggeration’). Whether the experiment is worth it is left for the reader to appreciate, but again, since we do not know in advance what writing or yoiking can or cannot do, any insight must be found in ‘the outcome, the upshot, the *terminus ad quem*’ (James 1896: VI, cf. Section ‘Yoik courses’).

Meanwhile, taking the yoik seriously may at least contribute to attuning our attention to the creativity of situated crafts, to the multiplicity of possible variations in thinking, writing, and chanting, and to their ever-present capacity to converge and diverge in startling ways.

## Variations

This thesis consists of six chapters and a conclusion. Each of these is called a ‘variation’ and designated by an ordinal number – from 1<sup>st</sup> to 6<sup>th</sup> for the chapters,  $n^{\text{th}}$  for the conclusion. The reason for this formula will become clearer in time. Suffice to say here that it is in line with the repeated variations enacted in yoiked vocalisations and their necessary interruption at an  $n^{\text{th}}$  iteration. Each of the following variations develops ideas encountered during conversations with yoikers and found to be worth exploring. Their respective contents can be summarised as follows:

- 1<sup>st</sup> variation: The yoik implies a process akin to metamorphosis. Yoikers must stretch towards something that is not immediately present; a place, animal, or person lurking behind the *horizon*. It is important that they do not *cross* the horizon, but only get a glimpse of the sought presence, so that they may find their way back. The yoik must therefore empower yoikers to approach the horizon and, at the same time, anchor them in their situation. This pattern is observable in the traditional and modern yoiks, as well as in the shamanic rituals of *noaidi*, as they are described by historical sources. Philosophy, likewise, appears as a practice of ‘stretching towards’ the practices of others while keeping one’s feet anchored in writing. Insights from social anthropology and the notion of ‘perspectivism’ nourish the discussion.
- 2<sup>nd</sup> variation: The yoik is sometimes described as a privileged means of communicating with animals. Various examples of such experiences are gathered. One particular anecdote, involving the

achievement of scaring away two elk by yoiking the bear, is explored in depth. Conversely, non-human actors, the wind in particular, may yoik to humans. In both cases, yoiking with non-humans occurs in remarkable circumstances of fascinated immersion in the situation of yoiking, which I call *enchantment*. Enchantment, when it occurs, reveals startling possibilities in the environment that were earlier unnoticed. To what extent academic writing can be enchanting is itself a matter of enchantment. Insights from ethnomusicology and ethology nourish the discussion.

- 3<sup>rd</sup> variation: The craft of yoiking consists in creating ‘sonic pictures’ of people, animals, and places. Various means by which these beings are explicitly evoked are reviewed. The creation of new yoiks demands familiarity and attention towards the yoik’s source. One generally needs a melodic starting point carrying an evocative dimension, which is then grown into a fluid vocal movement that captures this source. The melody is an ‘outgrowth’ of its source: animals become *creatures* insofar as they are at once repeated and instaurated in another mode of existence, growing the animal in one possible direction; a process that does not necessarily fit in the conception of creation conveyed by some theological discourses. The possibility of relating to this craft of sonic evocation as an outsider is explored. Writing about the yoik likewise implies growing it into a philosophical creature. Insights from semiotics nourish the discussion.

- 4<sup>th</sup> variation: Humans have an entire realm of *depth* within themselves. This realm is in touch with the depths of the ‘outer’ environment. In particular, yoikers are said to be inhabited by a community of animals whose presence can be summoned and grown by chanting the appropriate yoik. The aerial medium of yoiks itself constitutes a realm of depth: yoiks live a life of their own and visit humans in unexpected ways before receding to their deep dwelling place. Engaging with breath makes the correspondence between inner and outer folds immediately sensible. This exploration of depth always involves one fold at a time: depths conceal other depths and cannot be completely unfolded at once. The modern yoik converges in many ways with the traditional yoik but dwells in the depths of institutional assemblages rather than in the immediacy of the breathing body. Engaging with the yoik in writing implies consenting to a certain loss of depth for the sake of the new affordances it provides. Insights from philosophy nourish the discussion.
  
- 5<sup>th</sup> variation: The yoik appears as a craft of memory: much of its power lies in its capacity to summon the past with remarkable intensity. The dead can also be yoiked and it is commonly considered that they are alive so long as their melodies remain chanted. The future can also be projected by yoiking. In all cases, what occurs is an *echo*, i.e. the experience of throwing forth a yoik and hearing that the past, the dead, or the future yoiks back at you. This craft recalls the craft of dreaming in the temporality it establishes, despite significant divergences. Textual dissertations



appear unlikely to echo like yoiks, although the ideas and aphorisms they contain may keep looping in our minds long after being read. Insights from phenomenology and psychology nourish the discussion.

- 6<sup>th</sup> variation: The yoik is readily presented as one of the oldest forms of music in Europe. This position could be argued in light of various historical and archaeological sources, but it is primarily its seemingly *primordial ethos*, and its convergence with other indigenous chanting traditions, that provides an original quality to the yoik. Taking the yoik's primordially seriously opens the possibility of reviewing the literature in evolutionary musicology and opening anew the question of the origins of music. This primordially of the yoik is one factor of friction with the Christian church, yet the yoik and the church appear to be reconcilable. Academic texts have no pretensions to being primordial; they are at best 'ancient' and have their own myths of origins. Unlike the ancient legacy, the yoik would perhaps not disappear, even if it were momentarily forgotten and all its recordings were lost; its craft might still be reclaimed from the earth itself. Insights from evolutionary theory nourish the discussion.
  
- $n^{\text{th}}$  variation: Yoiks are repeated  $n$  times before the vocalisation comes to an end. At each iteration, their intensity increases, the yoik is continuously opened anew and pushes further the craft of the previous variation. A reiteration of the convergences and divergences observed between the yoik and this thesis is presented, after which the text is interrupted.

All of these variations explore the same craft of yoiking, approached through different ‘tips’ (cf. 3<sup>rd</sup> variation), depending on the concept invoked: *horizon*, *enchantment*, *creature*, *depth*, *echo*, or *primordial*. These were chosen at various stages of the research process and on a variety of occasions.

*Horizon* appeared relevant after several experiences in Finnmark and Scotland of observing the landscape and *not* seeing the animals (reindeer and red deer respectively) that were nonetheless close; these experiences later appeared relevant for thinking the stretching movement achieved by yoikers chanting animals. *Enchantment* is a concept encountered in the academic literature. Attending to its etymology made it relevant for my own purposes. *Creature* is a term that caught my attention when I read it in an essay by the yoiker Ánde Somby; tracing the term back to medieval philosophy revealed its potential for approaching the yoik’s semiosis. *Depth* is a concept explored by the philosopher and magician David Abram; it appeared to capture an important quality of the inner presences felt by yoikers. *Echo* is derived from an Ancient Greek myth exhibiting a relationship between the past and the present that converges with observations made on the yoik’s relation to memory. *Primordial* was the word used by a person who heard a yoik for the first time, during a yoik course in Switzerland.

For each concept, particular attention is given to etymology, as a way of stressing that concepts have roots that can always be actualised in relation to present problems, in line with the quality of the yoik as a primordial legacy continuously reclaimed (cf. 6<sup>th</sup> variation). Countless other concepts in any language could have engendered other lines of argument, more or less diverging from the ones proposed here. Likewise, other dimensions of

the craft of yoiking could have been turned into philosophical variations, e.g. its therapeutic benefits or its role in political protests. I did not engage with these due to my lack of time as well as my inability to derive an interesting conceptual gesture from them. Furthermore, each of the following variations could have constituted the object of an entire doctoral thesis, although I do not presently have enough material to develop any of them to that extent. As a gesture of variation on a practice: this work must remain an exploration scattered along multiple routes; a work of *sounding*, like a navigator sounding the depth of the water under the ship. I did not seek to map out the entirety of a local seabed, but to find a few navigable paths for philosophical thought to follow (cf. 5<sup>th</sup> variation on ‘sounding’ and ‘re-sounding’).

To the best of my knowledge, many of the ideas I approached have never been described in academic texts, e.g. the risks of metamorphosis in traditional and modern yoiks (cf. 1<sup>st</sup> variation), the practice of yoiking to animals (cf. 2<sup>nd</sup> variation), or the inner depths of humans (cf. 4<sup>th</sup> variation). Others have been mentioned but left unexplored, e.g. the primordial quality of the yoik (cf. 6<sup>th</sup> variation). Still others have been explored along lines of thought from which this thesis significantly differs, e.g. the yoik’s semiosis (cf. 3<sup>rd</sup> variation) or its capacity to invoke both the past and the dead (cf. 5<sup>th</sup> variation).

Whether it is due to the topics approached, to the theoretical references invoked or to the strategies adopted, this thesis is likely to seem unorthodox to some readers. I am aware of this, hence the need for the following clarification. Unusual as it may be in its form and content, this text is not written against anything or anyone, be it yoikers, scholars, paradigms, theories, or habits of thought. Its unorthodoxy does not stem from a critical

impulse, nor from a desire to do things differently, to stand out, or to propose new approaches for research, but from a more stoic consideration: academic scholarship, its evolution, and its debates do not *directly* concern me. What concerns me is the *resources* they provide for achieving my task, namely, attending to the craft of yoiking and deriving a philosophical text out of it. Consequently, readers eager to discover academic innovations or frontal controversies may find this thesis disappointing; those who seek a conventional form of ethnomusicological report may find it disorienting.

The ideas gathered in these pages are neither meant to be disappointing or disorienting, but as I have already mentioned, all of them are meant to be *radical*, in the sense that they aim to be *rooted* in the crafts of yoiking and of philosophy (cf. Section ‘Philosophy’). This is where my attention lies: keeping these roots in mind and growing them at the cost of orthodoxy when necessary. Thus, I have tried to develop this work not in relation to ‘past’, ‘future’, or even ‘present-day’ research in general, but from a specific situation of depth: between inherited soils – the crafts of yoiking and philosophy – and a horizon – a task of writing.

# 1<sup>st</sup> variation: Horizon

*Hon na how lo*

*Hon na how lo*

*Hon na how lo*

*Hon na non na*

- The wolf

Kautokeino / *Guovdageaidnu* is located on the plateau of Inner Finnmark, in Norway. It is often considered to be an important centre for Sámi culture, language, reindeer herding and yoiking. It is accessible through the European route E45 from the fjord of Alta / *Áltá*, located about 130 kilometres to the north, where the nearest airport and harbour are found. Alta, like most coastal areas in Norway, is predominantly Norwegian speaking. The city offers a wide panorama over the fjord, fractured by various layers of headlands advancing into the sea. Towards the south, the view is more limited, as the inland areas are hidden by nearby hills and mountains. The road to Kautokeino engages in their folds along the Alta River and into a canyon, before revealing the open view of the plateau.

The distance of the horizon all around Kautokeino and the soft curves of its surroundings, almost resembling a seascape, are among the striking elements that I recall from my first stay in the area, at a time when the plateau was covered with a thick layer of snow. The most peculiar aspect was perhaps the continuity between the soil holding my feet, the folds of the land around, and what I imagined was lurking beyond the horizon. This gave me a strong desire to go and look for these presences.

Perhaps this desire was related to another striking element: the absence of reindeer. Not that I expected to see them wandering in the streets, but it seemed odd that reindeer could be such an emblematic animal, omnipresent in the discussions I had with locals, and yet, to a traveller like myself, an invisible one. When I asked herders where the herds were, they would generally point at the horizon surrounding the valley and say something like: ‘Up there, not far’. Getting a glimpse of the herd would require following the horizon’s circle, up to a point where I could have observed the animals on the one side and the lights of Kautokeino on the other. In the meantime, the horizon would have been animated by my movement, constantly varying its line, concealing presences by the same process as others are revealed. I would never quite reach this horizon – it would always recede further – but for someone as unfamiliar with the land as I was, a significant risk would be to let it lead me astray, following it up to a point where I could not find my way back. In that season, I would have needed a snowmobile, skis, or at least snowshoes in order to make the journey. If the conditions allowed it, I could probably have followed my tracks in the snow back to Kautokeino: this thread laid between my initial position and the areas explored would have kept me safe.

To yoikers who grew up in Finnmark, the line of the horizon can appear as a source of creativity. Mari Helander, for instance, told me that although it is possible to yoik in Oslo / *Oslove*, the densely forested terrain surrounding the city makes it a less powerful place for yoiking than the Tana region (conversation 2018). The idea that the sight of the mountainous plateau encourages people to yoik is one that I have encountered on countless occasions; as the yoiker Per Hætta once put it, ‘the [yoik’s] tones

have been grasped from the womb of the Finnmark plateau’ (cf. 6<sup>th</sup> variation for full quotation).

This variation follows the concept of horizon, or *albmeravda* in North Sámi, in order to explore the journey enacted in the act of yoiking, and the metamorphosis it may involve, in both the traditional and the modern yoik. As with my imaginary wanderings on the plateau, the yoik offers a glimpse of what lurks behind the horizon and, at the same time, constitutes a means of remaining anchored in one’s position. The danger of being led astray by the yoik, of literally *crossing the horizon* into another realm, remains tangible, particularly regarding the historical *noaidi* ceremonies, or in the modern yoik, associated with the dangers of merging with spirits and merging with human music respectively, without being able to come back to one’s original position. It is worth reminding that, as with all the central concepts of the following variations, ‘horizon’ is a term of my own choosing – I have not heard Sámi yoikers using it directly. Applying it is a creative move intended to capture a dimension of the craft of yoiking earlier left unwritten *as such*.

### **Along the horizon**

In a short essay published online, the yoiker Ánde Somby states that ‘a yoik has neither a beginning nor an end and is therefore circular rather than linear’ (Somby 2007). In the TV show *Muitte mu – Husk meg* (NRK 2017), where Norwegian singers learn how to create yoiks from Sámi teachers over the course of a few days, this is presented as one of the main differences between a ‘song’ and a ‘yoik’. The yoik must be a circle, meaning that the final tone must lead back to the first one, so that the yoik can go on and on.

I mentioned the issue of the circle in the introduction of this thesis: it is perhaps a recent idea, as suggested by Ola Graff (2018), but it is certainly a powerful one that lies at the core of the practice of contemporary yoikers. However, Ánde Somby mitigates his observation as he notes that, ‘even a circle is not an adequate graphical description of the structure of a yoik, because a yoik lacks the Euclidean symmetry of a circle’ (Somby 2007). His text does not extend the reflection much further, but this already provides a starting point for the present exploration. Arguably, the Euclidian representation of circles is a closed and static one: an ‘Ideal’ circle, in the Platonic sense of the term. It may be more appropriate to picture a circle made of movement and variations, like a *whirling* gesture. The yoik-circle is not a closure, it does not draw a limit. Rather, it appears as an opening towards someone or something that was not there before the chant started: someone chants a yoik-circle and suddenly the grouse bird from which it stems appears in all its vitality.

The horizon is another example of an open circle serving as a moving threshold between presence and absence. ‘Horizon’ is derived from the Ancient Greek *ὄροϛ* (Onions 1966: 448) which, as the philosopher Martin Heidegger observed, expresses ‘that from which something begins its presencing’ (Heidegger 2000 [1951]: 156). As such, it carries crucial importance to reindeer herders, who learn to be attentive to clouds appearing at the distance, to the movements of their herds, to the location of grazing areas, and to predators hidden from sight by the folds of the land.

The Sámi artist John Savio (b. 1902 – d. 1938) gave a dynamic depiction of horizon lines in a woodcut entitled *A mountain Sámi visits a coastal Sámi* (Figure 2). Accompanied by a reindeer and a dog, a person dressed in the traditional Sámi *gákti* interrupts his walk on a snow-covered mound. The



person they planned on visiting has just appeared and the three travellers remain immobile for a while, as if startled by this presence that, just a moment ago, had remained hidden. They do not immediately cross the mound, nor do they walk back; they remain in this space between the fjord and the plateau.



Figure 2. John Andreas Savio,  
*A mountain Sámi visits a coastal Sámi.*<sup>23</sup>

In Sápmi, yoiks and the horizon are not the only open circles involved in processes of ‘presencing’. In the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, written reports from Christian writers describe how circular drums were used by the *noaidi* in order to reach a state of trance that would allow their

<sup>23</sup> This woodcut is in the public domain.

‘free soul’ to travel and interact with spiritual entities – I come back to the case of *noaidi* later (cf. Section ‘Beyond the horizon’). One can also think of the *arrán*, a bonfire built either on the tundra or inside the *lávvu* (the traditional conical tent) and used to prepare coffee. The anthropologist Rossella Ragazzi describes it as ‘an agent of sociality and conviviality in the Sámi way of life’, where the presence of various people, places, and animals are invited through ‘stories, secrets, requests, deals, arguments, daydreaming and yoik’ (Ragazzi 2012: 11).

Tim Ingold noted that inside the Sámi *lávvu*, ‘there were no horizons to be seen’ (Ingold 2013b), but this is only because the *lávvu* itself constitutes a horizon. Unlike typical Scandinavian and Finnish houses, built of hard materials such as wood, bricks, stones, or concrete, arranged around doors and windows, the conical tent hides the surroundings from sight, but retains the possibility of an irruption of something lurking outside – of which an example is presented below. All these circles involve a centre: it takes a seeing eye for the mountain to draw a circular horizon, a breathing fire for the *lávvu* to form a circular veil, a striking hammer for the drum to become a vibrant circle, a yoiking voice for the yoik to whirl. What interests me here is the occurrence of moments when one, while inhabiting the centre, strives to approach the edge of the circle and projects one’s perception beyond it, or conversely when the circle comes to host something that earlier dwelt beyond it, which in both cases amounts to an animation of the horizon.

The philologist Jens Andreas Friis (b. 1821 – d. 1896) wrote in the nineteenth century that the ‘rounder something was, the more it approached the Sámi ideal of Beauty’ (Friis 1871: 83). There might indeed be an aesthetic of the circle to consider, one whose ideal of beauty stems from the circle being put into motion, into vibration, into variation. In particular, I

find the following anecdote powerful and potentially beautiful. This is an anecdote heard on several occasions during my conversations and readings. A herder was spending the night alone in his *lávvu*. While sitting by the fire, a lone wolf suddenly entered the tent. The wolf sat down and looked at the herder, who returned its gaze, and so they remained, sitting and looking at each other for the whole night (cf. Helander-Renvall 2010: 50 and Hilder 2013: 93 for similar stories). Ánde Somby, who first told me this story, indicated that the person who met the wolf that night was his father. The incident happened before he was born, but his father would later suggest a connection with him:

‘Then he said: “The wolf had your eyes, Ánde”. [...] I was 17, then. I replied to my father: “that is why I chose you to be my father”. I replied that without considering that as a reply. And since then, I have always had this question that I am obviously a human who works at the university and so on, but I have always had this openness to the question that “am I also a wolf?” And the yoik gives me space to explore that question. To be in that space. [...] [This story] was a starting point for me to work with the wolf. But later on, then, the yoik has developed and I’m not sure how much of this starting story is now embedded into that’ (conversation 2015).

Yoikers often find themselves in the same situation as the herder in his tent. By yoiking, a person, an animal, or a place is convoked. The yoik becomes a way of exploring one’s attachment to this being, of recalling memories and feeling it *resound within oneself* (cf. 4<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> variations). A similar visual contact is involved, as yoiking generally implies visualising the source of the yoik. The yoiker Wimme Saari, for example, explained that,

‘when I yoik the bear, it appears in front of me. It comes very close, with its big head’ (NRK 2013: 14’50”).

When discussing this anecdote, Ánde Somby compared the vocalisation of yoiks to the art of acting; yoiking an animal ‘in a profound way’ involves impersonating the animal. Some yoikers describe this as an element distinguishing yoiks from songs: yoiking the wolf is not just about ‘singing the wolf’s melody’. Another kind of commitment is necessary. As our teacher, Inǵor Ántte Áilu Gaup, put it during a yoik course, ‘in order to yoik the wolf, you must almost become the wolf’ (yoik course 2017); in the words of the yoiker and scholar Krister Stoor, ‘one should remember that that when you yoik someone, you enter into the role of what you are yoiking. Then, there is an intimate vicinity with what you yoik’ (Stoor 2016: 722).<sup>24</sup>

For Inǵor Ántte Áilu Gaup, ‘almost becoming the wolf’ meant impersonating the animal, adopting its voice, alternating the yoik with howls, moving around the room like a predator and growling at the participants, who would growl in return. To a certain extent, it was a game: yoiking the wolf, the bear, or the raven was fun, especially if one adopts Ian

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<sup>24</sup> During a consultation in Tromsø / Romsa (Troms, Norway), as I was talking about this issue, a participant asked me why anyone would want to ‘become the wolf’. He was surprised that the wolf example was so often mentioned by yoikers when discussing their experiences, given its negative reputation among herders. This is indeed an intriguing observation. Whether it is depreciated or not, it seems that the wolf does attract a degree of fascination, as its yoik is possibly one of the most popular animal yoiks in the northern part of Sápmi, recorded by various yoikers such as Per Hætta (in NRK 1995: track 24), Mathis Gaup (in Various artists 2005: track 14), Inga Juuso (Juuso & Skullerud 2011: track 3), Johan Sara Jr. (Johan Sara Jr. & Group 1995: track 6) Torgeir Vassvik (2009: track 8), and Ánde Somby (2016: track 4). A speculative explanation for this is proposed in the 4<sup>th</sup> variation.

Bogost's definition of fun as 'the feeling of operating [a system], particularly of operating it in a new way, in a way that lets us discover something within it, or to rediscover something we've found before' (Bogost 2016: 114). Repeating the peculiar experience of the wolf's yoik again and again through variations and improvisations is evidently part of the fun. With Ingor Ántte Áilu Gaup, it entailed a constant challenge: he yoiked the melody in front of each of us and we had to respond with increasing intensity, adding to his gestures, howls, grunts, and whimpers (cf. 4<sup>th</sup> variation on learning the wolf's yoik).

Another example of a funny animal yoik is Johan Andreas Andersen's cat. Johan Andreas Andersen is considered as an expert on animal yoiks in eastern Finnmark, and the cat is one of his specialities. When I visited him, he yoiked it for me and constantly alternated tones with meowing and hissing. His vocalisation was deliberately humorous, and his wife laughed throughout his chant (conversation 2017).

The philosopher Henri Bergson famously noted that everything funny is human; a landscape is never funny, and an animal is only funny insofar as it enacts a human attitude or expression (Bergson 2002 [1900]: 10). Perhaps humans enacting animals recall the same funny experience. In truth, we do not actually laugh at a cat behaving like a human: a cat who would start speaking English would probably be more frightening than funny. We laugh when cats *fail* to behave like humans, in the same way as we laugh about yoikers when converging with the animal *ethe*, but still diverging from them too much to be entirely convincing: the yoiker is too obviously a human.

How humans fail to imitate animals in chants was explored by the ethnomusicologist Bernd Brabec de Mori in his study of the Shipibo in Peru. One of his papers focused on humorous chants called *osanti*, which include

a text uttered from the perspective of an animal. As in the yoik, *osanti* chants involve some form of becoming-other, but the terrifying perspective of actually becoming an animal during the vocalisation is kept at a distance by resorting to errors in the melody or the pronunciation, or by introducing puns in the chant's lyrics. The animals in the chants are thus made laughable and inoffensive, as if they were failing at being human (Brabec de Mori 2013). In the yoik, it takes a skill like Ánde Somby's to impersonate the wolf with intensity and seriousness; yet, even in his wolf impersonations, humour occasionally occurs. The threshold towards humour appears to be a thin one. Johan Andreas Andersen, despite his inclination for funny vocalisations, can also take the yoik very seriously. Before I met him, I heard about him from other yoikers, who presented him as an expert on animal yoiks, particularly skilled at communicating with animals by yoiking (cf. 2<sup>nd</sup> variation). I have heard people living in the same region stating that he has '*noaidi*' skills.

In short, animal yoiks are ambiguous. Laughing indicates that one does not actually consider oneself as a cat, but it does not imply that there is not a genuine engagement with the cat going on. The philosophers Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari called this process of feeling the animal resound within oneself 'becoming-animal' (Deleuze & Guattari 1980). According to them, becoming-animal does not mean that one becomes *an* animal. Yoikers never literally turn into wolves; regardless of how intense the yoik becomes, no one gets bitten. Yet, ethnographers have reported that yoiking the wolf can be risky. For instance, in the 1950s, the ethnomusicologist Wolfgang von Laade observed that several yoikers refused to chant the wolf's and the bear's melodies for him, under the pretext that they were considered as

dangerous as the animals themselves (in Domokos 2006: 68).<sup>25</sup> The anthropologist Yves Delaporte reported another anecdote about a person who, after a violent quarrel, yoiked the bear while improvising new lyrics directed towards his opponent (cf. Delaporte 1978: 113). When ‘something-of-the-bear’ takes hold of the yoiker’s behaviour, things can surely get out of control. Johan Sara Jr., active both as a traditional and modern yoiker in Inner Finnmark, highlights the risk of pushing the yoik too far, noting that this sort of intensity belongs to an ‘ancient Sámi context’:

‘The yoik starts in the stomach, it starts inside us, at a deep level. During the vocalisation, the intensity increases, and the tonal anchorage moves, depending on the mood and atmosphere. Meanwhile, you become more active. The rhythmic structure’s tempo accelerates. “The feeling of the phrase shifts in relation to breath”. The yoik rises in temperature and ends in the form of a galaxy. Then, you finally feel within yourself that, if I continue further, it is going to end in catastrophe. And quite rightly, so you usually stop before getting that far. It is a tradition known in the old Sámi context’ (Sara 2002: 20, cf. *n*<sup>th</sup> variation).

Yet it seems that, in most circumstances, the yoikers do not experience the risk of catastrophe and yoiking animals does not induce a process of metamorphosis with no coming back. As Ingor Ántte Áilu Gaup put it, one must *almost* become the wolf. This ‘almost’ makes the whole difference. It is as if the yoikers followed an *asymptotic* movement towards the animal,

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<sup>25</sup> The ethnologist Sigrid Drake reported in 1918 that even using the wrong name for referring to wolves may be dangerous (Drake 1918: 343).

stretching towards it, approaching it without quite merging with it. As the anthropologist notes while reflecting upon asymptotic movements of becoming, ‘at every crossing there is always a moment in which one is neither on one side nor on the other, neither what one was nor what one will be; for so long as they are discriminated, the contiguous never really touch. One is in suspension – hovering timelessly in between’ (Crapanzano 2004: 61).

Like the travellers in John Savio’s woodcut, yoikers retain some distance with whom they visit: they remain anchored in their abode. Laughing can serve this purpose, reminding everyone that the yoiker and the audience are still here, that their humanness remains tangible. Various anthropologists working in circumpolar and circumboreal regions have described this inclination for humour and irony as systematic strategies aimed at preventing ideas or spiritual powers from becoming too powerful; a way of infusing indeterminacy into cosmologies that ethnologists strive to model (Martin 2016: 202, Pedersen 2011: 215, Willerslev 2012, cf. Section ‘Authority’ in the thesis’ introduction).

Other means of conjuring the risks of transformation include the fact that a yoik always distinctly remains a *human* chant. The wolf’s yoik may include howling and grunting, but it also includes a melody, exhibiting human musical features such as discrete pitch and the use of pentatonic scales, octave equivalence, structural organisations distributing the melodic elements along such patterns as ABAC or AAAB, and stable rhythmic structures (cf. Section ‘Musical structure’ in the thesis’ introduction). There are a few examples of non-melodic yoiks, like Inga Juuso’s *guovža* [the bear] with her band Skáidi (2008: track 8), which does not use discrete pitches and instead consists of a series of guttural vocalisations. Yet even on this track, her voice is distinctively human, and she remains accompanied by the sound



of the bassist Steinar Raknes. I do not know of any instance where yoikers have tried to conceal the humanness of their voice. Using the words of the yoiker, poet, and *noaidi* Ailo Gaup, we engage with other animals not to erase our humanness, but on the contrary, to become ‘*more completely human*’; meanwhile, one must remain in control and avoid becoming ‘victims of the animal’s call’ (cf. 4<sup>th</sup> variation on Ailo Gaup’s work).

What about the yoiks that stem from humans and places, one might ask? During my consultations, it has once been pointed out to me that one would not normally say that a transformation goes on when yoiking a human being: If you yoik your neighbour, you do not, strictly speaking, *become* that neighbour. Indeed, the semantic field of ‘metamorphosis’ does not seem to arouse the same fascination when dealing with other humans as it does when dealing with animals. Yet a similar process of stretching towards someone, or towards a place, does occur. Yoiking your neighbours is still a way of hosting them in your voice and in your thoughts; yoiking a place is still a way of feeling its presence for the time of a vocalisation. Krister Stoor goes as far as suggesting that, when yoiking a river, the yoiker may ‘[become] a part of the river’ (Stoor 2011: 81).

Yoiking may respond to a desire, or a feeling of longing: for instance, a girl who obsessively yoiks a boy’s yoik probably does so because she is in love with him. In all cases, an attachment to someone or something is explored, a movement towards the horizon is accomplished, but the thrill of approaching a threshold is perhaps particularly intense when animals are involved.

## **Beyond the horizon**

The preceding section identified an attitude of convergence and divergence between the yoikers and the animals they yoik: yoikers stretch towards the animal, but retain some degree of distance. However, I have not yet addressed the issue of what would happen if the herder followed the wolf outside the *lávvu*. What if John Savio's travellers actually crossed the mound separating the plateau from the coast? What if the yoikers went too far and passed to the other side of the circle they chant? What if they became victims of the animal's call? As a reckless traveller once observed, 'It's a dangerous business, [...] going out your door. You step onto the road, and if you don't keep your feet, there's no knowing where you might be swept off' (in Tolkien 1966 [1954]: 83). Indeed, neglecting to 'keep your feet' might well turn the journey into what Deleuze and Guattari no longer call a 'becoming-animal', but 'a line of death and abolition' (Deleuze & Guattari 1980: 349).

The ethnography of the Circumpolar North and Amazonia abounds in examples of such scenarios. For instance, Rane Willerslev reported the story of a Yukaghir hunter who had been following a herd of reindeer for several hours when he decided to stop for the night. In the morning, he met a stranger, who did not answer when asked who he was. The stranger made a gesture of invitation for the hunter to follow him. Soon, the hunter noticed that the stranger left reindeer footsteps on the snow, despite the fact that he was wearing skin-covered skis. Once he reached the stranger's village, he found himself among people who ate lichen instead of meat and grunted instead of talking. Taking part in their meal, he noticed that he was forgetting things – the name of his wife, for instance. After a while, he had

a dream where a voice reminded him that he did not belong in this place and had to go away. The hunter woke up and followed the voice's advice. When he arrived back in his village, everyone was surprised to see him alive. While he thought he had been gone for a week, he had actually been missing for a month. In the meantime, everybody had assumed that he was dead. 'It seems', he said, 'that the people I met were reindeer, and I should have killed them, but at the time I did not know' (Willerslev 2007: 90).

This seems like a remarkable case of what the anthropologist Eduardo Viveiros de Castro calls *perspectivism* (Viveiros de Castro 2009). Drawing from the ethnography of Native American communities, he arrives at the conclusion that most of them, if not all, share the notion that the world entails a multiplicity of points of view. The universe is inhabited by various kinds of subjective actors – humans, animals, plants, spirits – who consider themselves as people. This does not mean that all beings are people at all times, but that they always retain the possibility of enacting a subjective position. He develops his viewpoint:

'Humans will, under normal conditions, see humans as humans and animals as animals. As for spirits, seeing these normally invisible beings is a sure indication that the "conditions" are not normal (sickness, trance, and other altered states). Predatory animals and spirits, for their part, see humans as prey, while prey see humans as spirits or predators. [...] In seeing us as non-humans, animals and spirits regard themselves (their respective peers) as human: they perceive themselves as (or become) anthropomorphic beings when they are in their houses or villages and apprehend their behaviour and characteristics in a cultural form – they perceive their food as human

food (jaguars see blood as manioc beer, vultures see the worms in rotten meat as grilled fish, etc.); they see their corporeal attributes (coats, feathers, claws, beaks) as finery or cultural instruments; their social system is organised in the same way as human institutions (with chiefs, shamans, exogamous moieties, rituals...)' (ibid.: 21-22).

In the yoik, a similar play on perspectives was described by the Sámi philologist Harald Gaski (2000). The yoik's lyrics [ns. *dajahus*] can, for instance, evoke a person or animal while alternating between the first and second person, adopting at times the source's perspective; the yoikers and the yoik's source thus converge and diverge. In an earlier presentation of perspectivism, Viveiros de Castro himself stressed the importance of personal pronouns, distinguishing 'I' as the subjective pronoun of culture, 'you' as referring to an 'other' understood as a subject, and 'it' as an impersonal pronoun tied to nature (Viveiros de Castro 1998).

Viveiros de Castro chooses not to get rid of the nature/culture dichotomy, but rather to redistribute it according to what he calls *multinaturalism*: every kind of entity, human or non-human, shares the same unique *culture* (one where people drink manioc beer and eat grilled fish), but the *natures* they live in are different. 'One culture, several natures' becomes an inversion of modern multiculturalism, which postulates the existence of one nature peopled by many human cultures. In multinaturalism, the coincidence between two perspectives must be understood in terms of homonyms rather than synonyms: what jaguars and humans drink are homonymous in that they are both 'manioc beer', even though from a human perspective, what the jaguars drink is blood (Viveiros de Castro 2009). Combining

perspectives would show that what the jaguar drinks is ‘beer|blood’, but there can be no category subsuming both in an encompassing gaze.<sup>26</sup>

A mosquito yoik’s *dajahus*, made by Ánde Somby, illustrates this inclination of the yoik at playing with perspectives:

‘I sting you.

I sting you because blood is so sweet.

I sting you because it is through this little sting  
that you will notice that you are alive’

(conversation 2015).

Here, the yoiker not only takes the animal’s perspective as an ‘I’, but also describes the bodily sensations of this animal drinking the blood of what is probably a human or a reindeer, referred to as ‘you’. Through the sting, ‘you’ is brought to life by the mosquito ‘I’, which indicates an ability among non-humans to enhance the life of the world as the Sámi do with the yoik (cf. 3<sup>rd</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> variations). In other cases, the *dajahus* is not uttered in the first person, but describes the animal engaging in human-like activities, as in the wolf’s yoik in the northern part of Sápmi: ‘It skis through nine valleys in one afternoon’.

Whether this can be considered a manifestation of Viveiros de Castro’s perspectivism or not, these changes of perspectives still appear harmless in comparison to the Yukaghir hunter’s anecdote. However, the theme of

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<sup>26</sup> By insisting on homonymy rather than synonymy, Viveiros de Castro does not attend to the possibility that the blood and the manioc beer may belong to the same flesh, perceived along diverging gestures. This leads him to postulate a plurality of worlds contrasting with the oneness I proposed in the thesis’ introduction. This divergence between his approach and mine is irrelevant for this discussion.

‘passing to the other side’ seems to have been ubiquitous in the practices of the *noaidi* of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. The *noaidi* were experts in the craft of trance journeys and were central figures in Sámi communities until the nineteenth century. Their ‘shamanic’ – as it is often called in the scholarly literature – craft was probably practised by every man in the community, and possibly by some women (Lundmark 1987, Grydeland 1997). The services of a *noaidi* would be called upon for important issues. These could involve curing illness – considered as being caused by harmful spirits – predicting the future, or watching what is currently happening in other parts of the world (Schefferus 1678 [1673]\*, Hultkrantz 1965, cf. also Adam von Bremen 1876 [Eleventh century], discussed in the 2<sup>nd</sup> variation). The first known text mentioning a *noaidi* ritual is the *Historia Norwegiæ*, a twelfth-century manuscript written by an anonymous monk.

This text tells of a *noaidi* who, in an attempt to cure a person bewitched by an evil magician, entered a state of trance and took the shape of a whale in order to pursue the magician through the ocean and chase him away. The magician then took the shape of a sharp rock. The whale hit it and died and the *noaidi* never woke up. Another *noaidi* was called on for help. He entered a state of trance, managed to cure the bewitched man, and woke up. He then told everyone what had happened to the former *noaidi*. This tale is in line with other accounts of *noaidi* experiences. It stresses the dangers involved in their activities: when passing to the other side, one can never be sure of coming back.

In 1675, the Sámi priest Nicolas Lundius wrote another anecdote, which took place after an offering was made to cure a person who was ill. Here,

chthonic spirits appear as humans, indicating that the *noaidi* is not in a 'normal' condition:

'After the offering, the sorcerer starts beating his drum. While doing so, he falls onto the ground and remains lying, as if dead. His body is hard and rigid like a stone. He stays there for an hour, after instructing the people present to start singing once the hour is elapsed. When they start singing, the dead stands up again, takes his drum and puts it against his ear while playing softly by intervals. After drumming for some time, he sits and meditates for a while. Then, he starts describing where he has been. He says that he has been under the earth, and that people live there, with their legs opposed to ours. He tells us that these people are very beautiful. The sorcerer's spirit has taken the Lapp's spirit among these people and the Lapp say that they possess an object belonging to the sick person, a cap, a shoe, or a mitten. These people below know in advance that the Lapp is about to come down under the earth, and the Lapp says that the underground people cautiously close their doors. However, the Lapp certainly manages to find an opening through which he makes his way. When he starts his journey back, the sorcerer's spirit takes his spirit through hills and valleys with such speed that stones and sand whip him like rain and hail' (in Pentikäinen 2011\*: 133-135).

The importance of yoiking during *noaidi* ceremonies has been debated. The musicologist Karl-Olof Edström, for instance, argued that it was not a necessary part of the trance ritual (Edström 1978: 203) – others have argued the same about the use of drumming (Sommarström 1991: 165). Drawing his argument from historical sources, the ethnomusicologist Ola Graff

defended a different position by emphasising the importance of the Scandinavian verb *å rune*, used by the missionaries to refer to practices that include both drumming and yoiking. The yoik, he argues, has been the privileged medium used by the *noaidi* for communicating with spiritual forces (Graff 1996). Following his point, although it may be that the yoik was not necessary for reaching a trance-like state, it seems likely that it had an important role to play in most ceremonies.

In the anecdote told by Lundius, not only the *noaidi* but also the *audience* would yoik to bring him back to his body. In other sources, it is suggested that female members of the audience should yoik during the *noaidi*'s journey (Schefferus 1678 [1673]\*: 108, cf. Edström 1978, Hultkrantz 1978). According to Edström, the purpose of this collective yoik was to remind the *noaidi* of his mission and to help him find his way back to his body once it was achieved (Edström 1978: 76-77). The ethnomusicologist Richard Jones-Bamman adds that the *noaidi* could give instructions to the participants before his journey regarding what and when they had to yoik in order to guide him (Jones-Bamman 1993: 79). Thus, in the context of *noaidi* ceremonies, the yoik appears to have operated like a vocal equivalent of Ariadne's thread, or of my imaginary footsteps in the snow around Kautokeino. 'One ventures from home along the thread of a tune', as Deleuze and Guattari put it (Deleuze & Guattari 1980: 383). In this case, one *returns* home along the same thread – two 'moments' of the same *Ritournelle*, or *Refrain*, as the two philosophers call it (ibid.).

In short, the yoik here exhibits the same double aspect described in the previous section: engaging with the invisible while anchoring the yoikers to their bodily presence, visiting another space while retaining the possibility of coming back home – travelling while 'keeping one's feet'.



At first glance, it seems that such risky journeys belong to the past, even though there are still *noaidi* in Sápmi today; I met several of them during my research. ‘The preservation thesis’, as the religious scholar Siv Ellen Kraft terms it, claims that certain features of the traditional *noaidi* craft have been maintained up to this day, despite the missionaries’ campaigns against it. Yet, it is only in the 1980s that the Sámi ‘neo-shamanism’ emerged as a visible movement, under the influence of the anthropologist Michael Harner’s work (Kraft 2015). Within European neo-shamanic groups, the yoik is a common way of achieving an altered state of consciousness, occasionally practised in shamanic courses beyond Northern Europe. My curiosity occasionally led me to participate in shamanic courses, both in Norway and Belgium. To my knowledge, it is not commonly considered a particularly dangerous practice and I have never heard of someone being trapped on the ‘other side’ while taking part in it. A more dangerous practice among the Sámi is perhaps the *gann*, a kind of sorcery used to curse another person that has been described as a form of contact with highly dangerous powers coming from ‘the other side’ (Mathisen 2000: 67). However, reports of this practice are rare nowadays, and, to my knowledge, it is not necessarily associated with the yoik.

Perhaps the most common case of contemporary yoikers risking passing to ‘the other side’ lies in a more unexpected place, namely in what Richard Jones-Bamman calls the ‘modern yoik’ (Jones-Bamman 1993), to which I now turn.

## **Modern horizons**

The modern yoik movement started with the first recording by the Sámi artist Nils-Aslak Valkeapää, *Joikuja* (Valkeapää 1969). Valkeapää’s major

contribution in this regard was to be the first to record yoiks accompanied by a musical instrument – in this case, a guitar. Other records followed, both by Valkeapää and other artists; many different aesthetic encounters have emerged and some Sámi modern yoikers have achieved fame within the Nordic countries and abroad (cf. Hilder 2013, Jones-Bamman 1993).

Convergences and divergences between the contemporary practices of traditional and modern yoiks are not easily grasped, but they can be approached in light of the observations made about *noaidi* ceremonies. Indeed, both involve the modern and ‘shamanic’ yoiks invoking a presence, during which remaining anchored in the ‘here and now’ is a matter of life and death. Consider the work of Wimme Saari, who is both a respected traditional yoiker and a prominent actor of the modern yoik. The first time I heard him was in Kautokeino, where my hosts played the track *Texas* on their computer (Saari 1996: track 1). They found it funny. As the name indicates, the yoik is supposed to evoke an American state. It includes an electronic musical accompaniment and a *dajahus* consisting of linguistically meaningless syllables and repetitions of the word ‘Texas’ and the expression ‘Oh yeah!’

Whether this track is deliberately humorous is uncertain, but it is hard to deny that it is catchy and amusing. As in Johan Andreas Andersen’s impersonation of the cat, it is obvious that Wimme Saari is not American, that the place he is yoiking is a distant one, and that his yoik does not sound genuinely Texan. Regardless of how many times he utters ‘Oh yeah’, his expression remains unambiguously Sámi. Wimme Saari ventures to Texas along the thread of this tune, but firmly ‘keeps his feet’ during the journey.

In collaboration with the Finnish musician Tapani Rinne, Wimme Saari issued another yoik called *Human* (Wimme & Rinne 2017). This is the only

yoik I know that evokes the ‘human’ in general, rather than specific persons. It is perhaps worth wondering who this ‘human’ may be. For example, does it encompass Wimme and Rinne? It is understood that any Sámi yoiker belongs to what we call ‘humanity’, yet it may be more appropriate to suggest that Sámi yoikers are always *virtually* human, in the same way as the yoik is always *virtually* music (cf. Introduction): a possibility that is not relevant at all times. After all, the boundaries of humanity, as defined by European writers from earlier generations, have not always been the ones that one might have today. At the end of the seventeenth century, the Sámi barely appeared human to the French playwright Jean-François Regnard (b. 1655 – d. 1709), who wrote the following note: ‘This, Sir, is the description of this small animal we call the Lapp; and we can say that there are none, except the monkey, more similar to man’ (Regnard 1843: 540).

In the eyes of Norse communities, the Sámi were not necessarily human either: as written sources indicate, they were often referred to as trolls, giants, dwarves, or elves; a sign that the Sámi had become ‘more or less synonymous with magical otherness’ in medieval Iceland (Storfjell 2013: 121, cf. also Mundal 1996, Pálsson 1999). In 1910, the Sámi writer Johan Turi himself described the Sámi as ‘strange animals [...] easy to frighten, they are very shy’ (Turi 1910\*: 235). It is also worth recalling the words of Ánde Somby, suggesting that he is not only a human, but also, perhaps, a wolf (cf. Section ‘Along the horizon’).

That Wimme Saari should *yoik* the human in itself suggests that he might not entirely merge with this category: one never yoiks oneself. The chant affords the possibility of stretching towards humanness, but because he is yoiking, and not singing (cf. Introduction about this distinction), Wimme Saari retains the possibility of nurturing a *diverging* presence in the world.

This is a core issue in the modern yoik, as the idea of a ‘yoik police’ (cf. Introduction) illustrates. *The modern yoik remains a risky activity because it plays with potentially dangerous boundaries* involving, for instance, the risk of cultural assimilation. Losing the yoik and merging with music might amount to losing Sáminess and merging with mere humanness – who knows whether one will be able to come back once the horizon has been crossed?

Hence the relevance of the title chosen by the ethnomusicologist Richard Jones-Bamman for his doctoral thesis: ‘As long as we continue to yoik, we’ll remember who we are’ (Jones-Bamman 1993). It suggests that the task of modern yoikers is similar to that of the historical *noaidi* and traditional animal yoikers: venturing from home while ‘keeping one’s feet’. All these variations on the same gesture keep reminding me of the desire I felt in Kautokeino. Fascinated by the continuity of the soil beneath my feet and the distant horizon, I thought to myself: ‘*What if I followed the horizon? What if I visited the reindeer hiding behind its line?*’

Unlike the horizon surrounding Kautokeino, the horizon approached by Wimme and Rinne cannot be *seen* in the distance. It emerges within a specific space established by particular media that do not necessarily appear in the traditional yoik, e.g. musical markets, concert halls, travel technologies, television, radio, social networks (cf. 4<sup>th</sup> variation on the displacement towards technological assemblages in the modern yoik). On the one hand, these media may enhance a feeling of Sáminess: as the musicologist Tina Ramnarine noted, ‘Pan-Sami notions of belonging to Sápmi have been strengthened by the new travel technologies and transnational circulation of musical performances’ (Ramnarine 2013: 99). On the other hand, it is through these media that new possibilities of engaging with human communities living behind the horizon – and the risk

of turning into them – are established. Thus, the concept of ‘horizon’ has as much to do with the folds of the land on the Finnmark Plateau as it does with contemporary musical technologies; or more exactly, the concept of horizon, although created by observing the former, can be *stretched* towards the latter.

Whether qualified as traditional or modern, playing with the horizon appears to be a crucial dimension of the craft of yoiking. Since yoiking oneself and merging with what lies behind the horizon must both be avoided, it is in the temporary tension between a soil and horizontal areas that the yoik appears to flourish. How, then, might we determine whether this of that yoik is still Sámi? Is it still anchored in a situated practice, or has it become a *song* enriched with an exotic flavour? Among the yoikers I have met, some did not feel concerned with these questions, nor did they find the modern yoik particularly problematic. Others considered them important. Yet all appeared enthusiastic about the modern yoik and attentive to its horizon, one where novel modes of presencing, belonging, knowledge, and creativity continue to manifest themselves in startling ways.

### **Antlered ideas**

I did not follow the call of the snowy horizon that day in Kautokeino, but I have followed the horizon of the yoik for several years now and have likewise experienced it as a vibrant circle along which presencing occurs. The philosopher Immanuel Kant theorised a similar attraction to horizons in his *Kritik der reinen Vernunft* [‘Critique of pure reason’]. Horizons, he contended, are closures separating the phenomenal world, accessible to our senses, from the noumenal world, lying beyond the grasp of reason. According to him, engaging with what lurks behind the horizon is an

endeavour to be undertaken through faith and religious speculation; an effort of ‘imagination’, an intuition without object, a free exercise of the mind disanchored from the world of phenomena and, as such, uncreative. Imagination, he suggests, can always be traced back to a set of perceived phenomena. Kant was at least right in stating that we cannot ‘*a priori* determine’ what lurks behind the horizon (Kant 1956 [1781]: 693), but I am inclined to think that he failed to notice the continuity between the soil holding his feet and the noumenal presences lurking in the distance, so apparent around Kautokeino.

Did he not himself engage with a horizon every time he found an idea to write down on paper? I mentioned in the introduction (cf. Section ‘Strategies of attention’) a comparison proposed by the philosopher and magician, David Abram, between ideas and deer. Both, he writes, are ‘graceful, shy, lingering at the edge of our awareness, yet slipping back into the forest if too wilfully focused upon’ (Abram 2010: 118). ‘Idea’ and ‘species’, Abram further notes, were once synonymous terms – one in Greek and the other in Latin. Through the diverging directions of Platonic and Aristotelian philosophies, they came to be differentiated: ideas became ‘private ephemera of an individual mind’, whereas species ‘lost all association with the intellect’. Yet, he notes, ‘how powerfully [the] rooted and antlered forms [of deer] echo the manifold shapes that still move within our mind!’ (ibid.: 121). The landscape of Kautokeino and the antlered beings it concealed merely announced what was to be the challenge of this thesis: stretching towards the ‘animals|ideas’ and hosting them in a text, like yoikers host them in chants.

Ideas about the yoik, including the concept of horizon, did not merely come by writing down the discourse of yoikers about their practice, nor by

becoming *a* yoiker, but perhaps through an ongoing and horizontal process of '*becoming-yoik*', of stretching towards yoikness. This, as later variations will illustrate, soon revealed the limitations of *writing* as a tool for enacting the processes of yoiking, but this is as it should be: a philosophical variation, as a horizontal practice, must direct its attention towards a presence in the distance *while 'keeping its feet' in its own mode of expression*, regardless of how far its speculations venture. No one wants a cat for a husband; no one wants a circular melody for a thesis either.





## 2<sup>nd</sup> variation: Enchantment

*Eio lo lon*

*Go lon le wo na*

*Leio wo wo lon*

*Go lo no no*

- The bear

The Norwegian artist Stahl Stenslie describes the sound of the yoik as ‘*enchanted, mystical, even seductive*’ (Stenslie 2018: 340, my emphasis). ‘Enchantment’ appears to be a recurring expression in the yoik (e.g. Anderson 2005: 230, Kraft 2015: 249), and one that takes several forms. Under the North Sámi expression *Gierran*, it is the name of a record by Wimme Saari (1997), in which his yoiks respond to various soundscapes elaborated by his collaborators (cf. Diamond 2007: 36). In some of its manifestations, enchantment is captured by the North Sámi expression *lihkahus* and the Norwegian *rørelse*, denoting both *ecstasy* and *movement*, as in ‘being moved’ (cf. 4<sup>th</sup> variation on *lihkahus*). In English, ‘enchantment’ can carry magical undertones – as indicated by the figure of the *enchanter*. It then refers to a craft summoned by humans and exceeding their natural capacities. Already in the nineteenth century, the priest Jacob Fellman observed that there are ‘ancient songs, in which one acquires superhuman crafts [sw. *krafter*] and invisible things are moved [sw. *beröras*]’ (Fellman 1903 [1847]: 195-196); enchantment would here denote a transgression, an anomaly vis-à-vis the normal order of things.

Outside Sápmi, the concept enchantment has been developed in various philosophical works and for various purposes, e.g. in James George Frazer’s

anthropology, where it denotes the magical beliefs in which primitive societies are supposedly ensnared (Frazer 1900, cf. also Josephson-Storm 2017); in Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer's philosophy, who understood modernity as a *disenchantment* of the world through 'the extirpation of animism' (Adorno & Horkheimer 2002 [1947]: 2) and the advent of a nature 'stripped of qualities', becoming 'the chaotic stuff of mere classification' (ibid.: 6); more recently, in Jane Bennett's work, who adopted a positive stance vis-à-vis enchantment and defined it as an experience where one is 'struck and shaken by the extraordinary that lives amid the familiar and the everyday', a privileged means for propelling joy and ethical engagement in the world (Bennett 2001: 4); or in the ethnomusicological theory of Victor Stoichiță and Bernd Brabec de Mori, who define it as one possible 'posture' adopted by a listener in response to a sonic stimulus (Stoichiță & Brabec de Mori 2017, cf. Section 'Enchantment and belief').

The conception of enchantment I propose in this variation diverges from all these sources and goes back to its etymology: 'in the chant' [la. *incantāre*] (Onions 1966: 312). It does not rely on the assumption that enchantment belongs to the past or relies on beliefs; on the contrary, enchantment relies on *presence* and appears as a way of *conjuring* 'beliefs'. Neither is it necessarily a joyful experience. It does have to do with ethics, but not in the sense that it stimulates a morality that might guide us to a better world; rather, it is ethical because it reveals an unforeseen *ethos* in a particular situation. Enchantment itself has many *ethe*, pleasant or unpleasant, seductive or frightening, delightful or dreadful. Furthermore, the enchantment I am writing about is not related to a listening subject or a sonic object; it rather appears as an encompassing condition of the environment: enchantment simply *happens*, in unpredictable ways.

In this variation, I develop the concept of enchantment by attending to the ways in which humans can yoik to non-humans (animals, in particular). I start with a review of typical cases of such interactions before focusing on one particular anecdote. Then, I turn to cases where *non-humans* yoik to humans – again, starting with a review and then focusing on one particular instance. In both cases, enchantment occurs as the environment is revealed to be ‘more’ than it was thought to be – more alive, more colourful, more frightening, more startling, more penetrating in its modes of presence. Enchantment, however, remains ephemeral – it does not necessarily enable us to formulate a final statement about the nature of the environment that, for a while, appeared so fascinating. Thus, whether animals can understand the yoik and whether the wind can yoik remain uncertain, but a door is always left open to the idea that, yes, *they might do*.

### **Yoiks to non-humans**

The history of humans yoiking to other animals seems to stretch at least as far back as the eleventh century. In what appears to be the first mention of yoiking in a written text, *Gesta Hammaburgensis Ecclesiae Pontificum*, the chronicler Adam von Bremen depicts the people who dwelt in the Norwegian Arctic as hunters dressed in animal skins, proficient in magical crafts. He illustrates these crafts with two examples. The first one concerns their ability to see what is happening in other parts of the world. The second is expressed with the following sentence in Medieval Latin: *Tunc etiam potenti murmure verborum grandia cete maris in litora trahunt* (Bremen 1876 [Eleventh century]: 179). The noun *murmur* can refer to a murmur, a

hum, or a growl.<sup>27</sup> It is preceded by the inflected form of the adjective *potēns* (akin to the verb *pōtēre*), ‘powerful’, namely ‘that which has power, that which can do’. As for *verborum*, it refers either to words or to speech, the latter being more likely in this case.<sup>28</sup> Thus, the whole sentence can be translated as follows: ‘And by a powerful vocal murmur / hum / growl, they even drew large cetaceans from the sea onto the shore’.<sup>29</sup>

What Adam von Bremen describes is the practice of powerful vocalisations, distinct from normal speech and aimed at influencing the behaviour of animals. In light of what follows in this variation, we can safely speculate that these utterances are probably yoiks – or something akin to yoiks – and that yoiking to animals may be a millenary tradition (cf. 6<sup>th</sup> variation on how old the yoik might be). This section is intended to provide an overview of similar cases where humans yoik to non-humans.

Nine hundred years after Adam von Bremen, the Sámi artist Nils-Aslak Valkeapää stressed the following:

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<sup>27</sup> *Murmur* can also refer to a softly uttered prayer, but this is a rather marginal meaning and is unlikely to be used in this context.

<sup>28</sup> I would like to thank the philologists Mathilde Puissant and Simon Midrez for their assistance in this translation.

<sup>29</sup> This manuscript dates from a time when the Sámi were probably involved in cooperation with Norse whalers. Along the coast of Finnmark, they may have been responsible for processing whale blubber into oil (Hansen & Olsen 2014: 61). This is also a time when Norse communities would frequently request the services of the Sámi for various tasks that required high levels of skill in magical crafts (cf. Hansen & Olsen 2014, Mundal 1996, Storfjell 2013). That the Sámi could have used their crafts to attract the whales to the seashore is a reasonable assumption.

‘The yoik is not merely music. Its functions are much wider than that. They include ways to social contact. To calm down the reindeer. To frighten the wolves. The yoik was never intended to be performed as art. Art requires public. The yoik was used to call up friends, even enemies. The land and the environment. Animals. The yoik was also a step to another world, which makes it religious’ (in Krumhansl et al. 2000: 18).

Reindeer herding is indeed a privileged environment for yoiking with animals. In addition to calming down the herd and frightening predators, the ethnomusicologist Ola Graff (2016: 27) identifies three functions of the yoik within that context: making sure that the reindeer do not mistake the yoikers for predators when approaching them; communicating over long distances; or spending time in a pleasant way during the long periods of solitude spent in the mountain.

Among the yoikers I have met, all those who were involved in herding activities mentioned that they used the yoik to interact with their reindeer. Hearing their yoik, according to them, makes the reindeer happy. A reindeer pulling a sledge will also feel better and will run faster when it is yoiked (Eriksson 2002: 133). The yoiker Siri Päiviö, from the region of Arjeplog, shares a similar view:

‘The reindeer likes very much to listen [to the yoiks]. I can directly see that they move their ears. They listen. [...] You can see a lot when watching properly. It also understands when we talk. The reindeer understands. I usually talk to my herd and it understands everything’ (in Skaltje 2014: 40, cf. also *ibid.*: 86-87, 213).

I once heard that some mushers participating in a race called *Finnmarksløppa* also yoiked to their dogs in order to make them run faster, as others do with the reindeer. However, in my experience, the case of puppies comes up more often. Nils Oskal, for instance, told me that puppies become joyful when they hear their yoik (conversation 2017). During my consultation in Karasjok / *Kárášjohka* (Finnmark, Norway) (cf. Introduction), a participant mentioned the same example, insisting that puppies react to their own yoik, but not necessarily to other yoiks, as if they knew that this was their melody. Wolves are occasionally mentioned, beyond the particular case where the yoik is supposed to frighten predators. For instance, Jonne Järvelä, the (non-Sámi) yoiker of the folk metal bands Shaman and Korpiklaani, explained in an interview that he learned to yoik by attempting conversations with them: ‘This is how I found my yoik technique. When I was living in Sápmi, I was really in the middle of the forest. [...] I used to sit on a rock with a hundred bottles of beer and try to speak with the wolves, which could be heard from a distance’ (in Anonymous 2005).

Fish can also be yoiked: two fishermen from the Tana / *Deatnu* region (Finnmark, Norway) mentioned that they yoiked the salmon while fishing, with the hope of catching more of them – however, both of them were unsure about the technique’s efficiency (conversations with Anne Lise Varsi 2017 and Ingvald Guttorm 2017). Lastly, cats appear to be able to respond to the yoik in interesting ways. Johan Andreas Andersen once chanted their yoik on a Sámi TV show, with the humorous tone described in the 1<sup>st</sup> variation, and shared an anecdote from the time he was a sailor staying in New York. He started to yoik in the streets and was quickly surrounded by cats attracted by the yoik. At some point, the biggest of them

started to walk around him and was about to mark him with urine. Johan Andreas Andersen responded by yoiking more intensely, indicating his anger to the cats, who ran away and disappeared quickly (NRK 2016).

Animals are not the only non-human listeners to whom people can yoik. The *noaidi*, for instance, used the yoik in order to contact spiritual entities or, when they are on the other side, to find their way back to their body (cf. 1<sup>st</sup> variation). As with animals, the yoik here achieves a form of communication that speech cannot realise.<sup>30</sup> A similar process is probably involved when the yoik is used to ask ‘difficult mountain passes, ice on the lakes, and snow on the marshes to treat the traveller well’ (Gaski 2011: 35), to contact the old Sámi gods (Eriksson 2002), or to get in touch with the *Gufihtar* (Somby 2016a, 2016b, Turi 1910\*: 211-220). The case of infants was also pointed out to me by Elin Kåven:

‘[My niece] was perhaps one or two years old on the first day I yoiked her. It was really fantastic to see because I can say to her “I love you” or “I like you”, but what happens with the yoik is completely different. What happens when we yoik people is that they can feel it. And in the Sámi tradition it has been important to yoik children to give them self-confidence, to make sure they feel loved and cherished. [...] When I

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<sup>30</sup> Speech may be used to communicate with some animal species, such as the bear, which is reputed to know everything and to understand the Sámi language (Buljo 1998: 144, Helander-Renvall 2008: 323, Stoor 2007: 137). In this case, the achievement sought by speakers is to play with words in order *not* to be understood by the animal (Hansen & Olsen 2014: 121, Helander-Renvall 2008: 323). With other animals, there seems to be a wide agreement that the yoik is a more effective means than speech for communication.

yoiked her, it was fantastic to see how it mattered to her, completely beyond words' (conversation 2017).

Finally, the yoik has been widely used for communicating with non-Sámi communities, who cannot generally communicate in any of the Sámi languages. A spoken utterance directed towards national authorities, world leaders, or indigenous communities might remain unheard, but a yoik, conveyed via the musical market or social networks, might prove more effective. Examples include Nils-Aslak Valkeapää's *Sámi Eatnan Duoddarat*, chanted during protests against the construction of the Alta-Kautokeino dam at the end of the 1970s (cf. Hilder 2013), and Sara Marielle Gaup Beaska's *Gulahallat eatnamiin*, chanted during COP21 in Paris in 2015 (cf. Reinert 2016).

### **The bear and the elk**

Having set the stage, I now turn to one particular anecdote. In 2014, the yoiker Ánde Somby was staying in a cabin in the Lofoten Islands / *Lofuohta* (Nordland, Norway) for a photography project with the Norwegian artist Anne Katrine Dolven, in relation to the production of his record *Yoiking with the Winged Ones* (2016, cf. 5<sup>th</sup> variation). At some point, he noticed the presence of two elk (*Alces alces*) calves on the property, who were interfering with their project. He tried yelling at them in order to scare them away but did not observe any response from the animals. Then he got



another idea: ‘I immediately sent the dynamite: the bear’s yoik’<sup>31</sup> (in Emberland 2014). As soon as the yoik began, the elk’s ears stood up in an attentive posture. After a few seconds, the animals turned around and walked away.<sup>32</sup> As Ánde Somby explained to me,

‘I am able to replicate the order of the bear saying to the elk that “you don’t come here, because here lives a bear!” And the elk then decides to respect that. Because we have been trying to shout with human voices, saying “get off the field!” But they don’t respect that’ (conversation 2015).

Unlike the anecdotes mentioned earlier, this one is remarkable in that Somby used a clearly identifiable yoik to interact with another animal. As far as I can assess, yoikers addressing animals generally chant that animal’s yoik; in this case, Somby invoked a third presence and presented it to the elk’s attention.<sup>33</sup> This is not the only time Ánde Somby found this sort of success among non-human listeners. On another occasion, he unwittingly traumatised a dog by yoiking the wolf during a concert. More intriguingly,

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<sup>31</sup> Ánde Somby here refers to the verse ‘Yoik has more power than dynamite’ [no. *Joik har større kraft enn krutt*], sung by Mattis Hætta and Sverre Kjelsberg at the 1980 edition of the Eurovision Song Contest.

<sup>32</sup> The event was recorded in a video made public by the journal *Nordlys* in an online article (Emberland 2014). I saw this video when I visited Ánde Somby in January 2015. Since then, it has been removed from the article’s webpage.

<sup>33</sup> In the academic literature, vocal (or whistled) calls that are intended to influence the behaviour of animals are commonly referred to by the French word *huchement*, proposed by the turcologist Rémy Dor. Within Dor’s terminology, *huchements* intended to scare away an animal are referred to as ‘somatofugal’ (Dor 2002: 132).

he once yoiked a grouse bird next to a hunting dog and the dog immediately took its pointing stance, indicating that it had spotted prey. According to him, ‘the ultimate applause you can get as a yoiker is when animals respond to you like this’ (conversation 2015).

During conversations with other yoikers, I often mentioned the elk anecdote. Most of them found it interesting or worthy of admiration. Some found it amusing, but no one denied its legitimacy: surprising or not, the fact that an elk can respond in this way was plausible. The responses I found in the academic environment also denoted interest, but occasionally concealed sceptical postures. In particular, the following question by a colleague of mine retained my attention: was it not Somby’s voice, rather than its evocation of the bear, that frightened the elk?

One might answer that the elk only reacted when Somby started to yoik, not when he yelled at them. However, by asking this seemingly reasonable question, my colleague implicitly suggested that the meaning of a yoik lies somewhere other than in the voice, as if it had to have some form of transcendence vis-à-vis its medium of expression. Is this a relevant assumption to make? Relying on the work of the linguist Walter Ong, Tim Ingold argued that the divorce in speech between words and their meanings originally stemmed from a familiarity with the written word: it is because we *see* words as immobile entities that they are considered as mere physical objects on top of which meaning must be added (Ingold 2007: 8-9). The yoikers I met never made this distinction within their practice; on the contrary, many of them stressed the idea that the bear’s yoik *is* the bear. The elk were indeed scared by Somby’s voice, but a voice immanently laden with beariness. Here, the words of the philosopher Maurice Merleau-Ponty take on a clear relevance: ‘I do not perceive anger or threat as a psychic fact

hidden behind the gesture, I read anger in the gesture, the gesture does not make me think about anger, it is anger itself' (Merleau-Ponty 1945: 32).

The 3<sup>rd</sup> variation explores semiotic considerations in more detail. At this point, it is sufficient to observe that the fear experienced by the elk does not have to be overly surprising: Somby's yoiking voice was an angry and powerful one that, to a human ear at least, convincingly conveyed a sense of predatory threat: anything that chants in this way is likely to sound harmful. The melody was aptly chosen, since bears are the most important threat of predation for the Scandinavian elk besides humans (Swenson et al. 2001).

On that note, it is noteworthy that existing studies on animal responses to music often focus on the stimulation of pleasure. Pleasure generally requires that the music be adapted to the metabolic rhythms of the animal. For example, cats appreciate music insofar as it has been composed 'for them', by taking their metabolism into account, for example by using higher pitches and a faster tempo than human music (Snowdon et al. 2015: 29-30). The experience of yoikers suggests a similar picture, since animals such as puppies and reindeer are happy to hear their own yoik, which is supposed to sound in correspondence with their frequencies (cf. 3<sup>rd</sup> variation on semiosis and frequencies). However, for an elk as for any other animal, it is crucial to be responsive to the rhythms of *other* metabolisms too, especially those that represent a danger. As the biologist Jacob von Uexküll would perhaps have formulated it, the elk must be 'bear-like':

'Being *bear*-like means that the *elk* has included certain elements of the *bear* into its constitution. [...] In other words, the *bearness* of the *elk* means that the latter has integrated certain motives from the

*bear-tune* into its bodily composition’ (Paraphrased from Uexküll 1956: 145, my emphasis; the original quote is about the fly and the spider).

In truth, the fear of predators is not necessarily experienced. Ethologists have observed that elk tend to lose this fear when the predators have disappeared from their environment, as is the case in the region where Somby’s anecdote took place. By grazing in the open landscape near his house, the elk were exhibiting the typical behaviour of deer unworried by predators. However, this fear can be reactivated if the environment is repatriated by carnivores, as the fear of predation always remains, if only in a dormant, virtual mode. Thus, in a study conducted in Alaska, a population of moose<sup>34</sup> living in an area repatriated by carnivores fully recovered their fearful behaviours over the course of one generation (Berger 2007, cf. also Hettena et al. 2014).

Giving this fear back to the elk is precisely what Somby attempted to do, as he stated in an interview related to the event: ‘The elk thinks of itself as the king of the forest. [...] Then [after they heard the yoik] they were considerably more timid’ (in Emberland 2014). Instead of introducing predatory threats with animals of ‘flesh and bone’, Somby was shaping the ecology and behaviour of the elk with the craft of his voice, reactivating a fear that the elk should not have lost in the first place. What Somby did, in short, was yoiking in a way that brings to actuality a possible mood of the elk, one of fear; this is what I call a situation of enchantment.

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<sup>34</sup> The European elk and the American moose belong to the same species.

## Enchantment and belief

When it comes to enchantment, the first observation to make is that, in Ánde Somby's vocalisation, the bear was 'en-chanted'. Enchantment is considered here in its etymological sense: *in the chant*, or *in a situation of chanting*. As a practice supposed to bring to presence various beings of the environment, the yoik as a whole could be described as a craft of enchantment – or a craft of 'incantation', derived from the same Latin root (Onions 1966: 467).

Etymology may be what led the ethnomusicologists Victor Stoichiță and Bernd Brabec de Mori to theorise enchantment as one possible 'posture of listening' corresponding to a stance where 'sounds seem to form an autonomous realm' (Stoichiță & Brabec de Mori 2017: §31) and 'new beings [are brought] to social interaction' (ibid.: §51). As they observe, this occurs in various instances, such as the perception of a building of 'tension' and 'release' within the sounds of tonal music (ibid.: §35) – the authors would probably consider the way animals are brought to presence by the voices of yoikers as another example. Enchanted listening is in this regard opposed to 'indexical listening', a posture in which listeners pay attention to the *source* of a sonic stimulus, and 'structural listening', a posture relying on the abstraction of 'relevant patterns from auditory data' (ibid.: §24), as supposedly occurs in language. These postures are suggested (although hesitantly so) to be mutually exclusive by the authors (ibid.: §52).

Useful as this framework may be for analytical or comparative purposes, I find it inappropriate for my own variation in that it entirely relies on a fracture between a listening *subject* and a sonic *object*. As Somby himself noted, 'it is altogether impossible to envision yoik in terms of subject and object' (Somby 2007). Indeed, what happens when these cannot so easily

be distinguished? What happens, for example, when Somby *becomes* the bear (cf. 1<sup>st</sup> variation on becoming)? Arguably then, the bear cannot be located either in a sound emitter, in sound itself, or in a listener. What I propose instead is to consider that enchantment does not merely occur to ‘someone’, but to ‘*sometime*’ and ‘*somewhere*’. What is enchanted (or *enchanted*; not distinguishing between subject and object implies not distinguishing between active and passive voices) is a *situation*. Being enchanted by the bear’s yoik, I always retain some degree of agency – I can try to ignore the bear within the melody and focus on its melodic structure, hoping to conjure the enchantment, to ‘disenchant’ myself – but I only have this power because I am part of the situation of enchantment and try to inflect it *from within*. In the meantime, the bear is an enveloping and penetrating presence, one that whirls around me, echoes in the surroundings, and moves me from the inside: a *prégnance*.<sup>35</sup> Thus, the bear is not in the sound: it saturates the entire environment of the elk.

In a critique of Stoichiță and Brabec de Mori’s proposition, Tim Ingold suggested that, at a sensuous level, all experiences of listening belong to ‘enchantment’, understood as an ‘affective correspondence’ in which listener and sound are ‘caught up in each other’s resonance’ (in Dokic et al. 2018: §21), and that other postures have more to do with the authors’ own

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<sup>35</sup> The sinologist and hellenist François Jullien proposes the French word *prégnance* as a concept inspired by Chinese philosophy and operating without the opposition between presence and absence; an opposition nurtured in European philosophy as part of its emphasis on ontology. Unlike presence, *prégnance* ‘is infiltrating, insinuating, penetrating from all parts without warning and therefore without being noticeable’ (Jullien 2015: 85). Presence, understood as a phenomenon of attention, akin to the North Sámi verb *leahkit* [‘to be present’], remains in my view a relevant concept for addressing the yoik.

‘analytical moves’ than with the actual experience of listening (ibid.: §20). However, I do not wish to generalise enchantment to all aural experiences, as this would flatten its conceptual interest. I prefer to use enchantment as an evocation of extraordinary situations of fascination within a startling field of *prégnance*. In this perspective, some situations are perhaps ‘more intensely’ enchanted than others.

Intense or not, enchantment is always ephemeral, and any charm eventually ceases to have an effect (cf. *n*<sup>th</sup> variation). Other enchantments, stronger or weaker, might then take over. Having fled from Somby’s house, the elk will probably be able to return to quietness, immersed in their tasks of grazing (or any other activity they might judge worth engaging in) until another remarkable situation occurs. Attention moves on, but the memory of an enchantment remains and keeps echoing into the present (cf. 5<sup>th</sup> variation on echoes). Thus, Somby’s anecdote was one that still made him wonder about the yoik, about elk and about himself. I could not help asking him: *Did the elk really know that the yoik referred to the bear?* Does it mean that the elk species can understand the yoik? I was a student then; I probably expected a clear answer reflecting the caricatured picture of animism I had in mind: ‘Yes, the elk can understand us because, like humans, they have a soul’, or something of the sort. Instead, Somby guided me in a different direction:

‘Well, I have no idea how an elk will think. But the interesting thing is that, before the video recording starts, the elk are deep in their grazing. Then, I come on this balcony and I start to yoik. And it was so fascinating, because they suddenly raise their heads, and then their ears come up, and they start to listen: “What’s this?” And then they

communicate with each other. And then they decide to run from the spot' (conversation 2015).

In short, he did not seek to *explain* what had happened, but rather *pointed* at it. The anecdote spoke for itself: indeed, it was probably more powerful than any attempt of explanation could have been.

As he stated further in an interview: 'Nils-Aslak Valkeapää wrote that the yoik was "a means for calming the reindeer". I can add that it is also a way of scaring elk' (in Emberland 2014). This does not mean that *all* attempts at scaring elk with the bear's yoik will be successful in the future – it merely leaves the door open to the possibility that it can happen. This attitude reminded me of an observation made by the anthropologist Alfred Irving Hallowell among the Northern Ojibwa:

'Since stones are grammatically animate, I once asked an old man: Are all the stones we see about us here alive? He reflected a long while and then replied, 'No! But some are.' This qualified answer made a lasting impression on me. And it is thoroughly consistent with other data that indicate that the Ojibwa are not animists in the sense that they dogmatically attribute living souls to inanimate objects such as stones. The hypothesis which suggests itself to me is that the allocation of stones to an animate grammatical category is part of a culturally constituted cognitive 'set.' It does not involve a consciously formulated theory about the nature of stones. It leaves a door open that our orientation on dogmatic grounds keeps shut tight' (Hallowell 2002 [1960]: 24).



‘Leaving a door open’ here implies that what occurs in the mind of an elk remains largely inscrutable. Yoiking the elk might help to stretch towards ‘elkness’ and get a glimpse of its world (cf. 1<sup>st</sup> variation), but it cannot unfold the depths of elk cognition in an all-encompassing model that would account for its reaction on this particular occasion (cf. 5<sup>th</sup> variation on unfolding depth). Based on my conversations, it appears that this sort of acknowledgement of ignorance – ‘I have no idea how an elk will think’ – is commonplace among yoikers.

Among those I have met, most stressed that there are dimensions of their practice that they cannot fully understand, that it is in touch with realms that they cannot contemplate from an all-encompassing viewpoint; not just animal cognition, but the origins of (vocal) inspiration (cf. 3<sup>rd</sup> variation), the ‘animal depths’ inside humans (cf. 4<sup>th</sup> variation), the realm of dreams (cf. 5<sup>th</sup> variation), or the primordial past (cf. 6<sup>th</sup> variation), to name but a few topics addressed in the following variations. Thus, the following statement by the American writer Deborah B. Robinson is the last thing we should be observing in the yoik: ‘The Sámi believe they can communicate with animals’ (Robinson 2002: 40). That the Sámi can communicate with animals is not in doubt – any person who has spent a little bit of time with other mammals knows that communication is likely to occur. But more importantly, *yoikers do not have to ‘believe’ anything*: they only have to experiment and remain attentive to enchantment.

One could, in fact, argue that attention to situations of enchantment continually conjures the possibility of beliefs, if ‘belief’ is considered, with the philosopher David Hume, to refer to a habit that, although it originally stemmed from accidental impressions, became autonomous enough in the mind of people to be taken for granted (Hume 2000 [1738]). Taking for

granted that all elk, at all times, will flee when hearing the bear's melody would indeed be a belief. Supposing that an elk responding to a yoik is an impossible thing would also be a belief. Enchantment amounts to *a disruption of beliefs* in that it captures one's attention in the immediacy of a startling impression, away from ready-made assumptions.

Formulated in epistemic terms proposed by the philosopher Bruno Latour, the yoikers I have met could be described as being 'additive empiricists':

'The additive empiricists are just as interested in objective facts and grounded claims, but they like to add, to complicate, to specify, and, whenever possible, to slow down and, above all, hesitate so as to multiply the voices that can be heard. They are empiricists, but in the fashion of William James: if they want nothing but what comes from experience, they certainly don't want *less* than experience' (in Despret 2016 [2011]: ix).

Since no one knows in advance what a yoik(er) can or cannot do, the yoik reveals its affordances parsimoniously, whenever an unexpected *ethos* of the environment appears to one's attention. In the words of the ethologist and philosopher Vinciane Despret, 'the animals show what they can be capable of' (Despret 2011: 55) because yoikers make themselves available to their enchanting power. For the time of a vocalisation, the elk turns out to be receptive to the craft of yoiking; Somby turns out to be a bear; and the yoik turns out to be 'more efficient than speech to communicate with animals' (conversation with Ánde Somby 2015). These qualities may no longer be felt once enchantment has vanished, but its echo (cf. 5<sup>th</sup> variation) reminds us that they remain virtually present, always likely to surge again.

The attention is now more finely attuned to the possibilities that the enchantment revealed earlier.

## **Yoiks from non-humans**

An asymmetry can be observed in the elk incident and other instances of yoiking to animals: whereas yoikers can virtually make any animal present, it is uncertain whether animals are capable of doing the same. Howling wolves, growling bears, or singing birds can indicate their own presence with vocalisations, but can they *yoik*?

Ethological studies of vocal mimicry among animals have mainly focused on birds, which are considered to be more inclined to engage in this activity than mammals (Zentall 2004, cf. Dalziell et al. 2014 for a review on avian vocal mimicry) – exceptions include some marine mammals, like seals, but these are rarely yoiked. Examples of birds using deceptive vocal mimicry in order to scare away other animals have been documented, in line with Ánde Somby's accomplishment (Igic et al. 2015, Flower et al. 2014). In the yoik too, birdsongs constitute a particular case. The yoiker and poet Nils-Aslak Valkeapää was reputed to understand the language of birds. As he himself reported, 'I understood the language of the birds better than I understood the language of the human being' (in Helander & Kailo 1998: 93). I rarely heard about yoiking birds directly, but they constitute a recurring figure in poetry, as seen in the lyrics of the track *Lihkolaš* by the band Adjágas<sup>36</sup> (2007: track 1) and in a poem by Valkeapää:

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<sup>36</sup> The band Adjágas, which gathered Sara Marielle Gaup Beaska and Lawra Somby, must be distinguished from the North Sámi concept *adjágas*, referring to a state between sleep and wakefulness. The former derives its name from the latter.

‘The wind caresses my hair so softly  
 Birds yoik the melody of life, bringing it to a higher plane  
 A flower tickles my feet, sharing power

Thoughts come crashing in like endless waves  
 Feelings come crashing in like endless waves  
 In the sea of life, waves never stop

The night recalls the sun’s warmth  
 Looks forward to the new day’  
 (Adjágas in Fagerheim 2014: 79).

‘in my breast I carry	<i>‘dál rattistan guottán</i>
the singing and yoiking	<i>dan šuvččagan cizáža</i>
of the frost-bitten bird’	<i>dan vizardemiid ja juigosiid’</i>
(Valkeapää 1994 [1985]). <sup>37</sup>	(Valkeapää 1985).

On the other hand, non-human mammals are, to my knowledge, not considered to be yoiking creatures. I have never heard of a wolf vocalising a human presence in order to approach a reindeer herd, for instance. This asymmetry is even more striking considering that yoikers are not supposed to yoik themselves. It is as if humans vocalised the presence of others, while animals vocalised their own presence.

The asymmetry is not exclusive to the Sámi milieu. The difference in nature between human and non-human vocalisations has been a recurring idea in the history of European philosophy. The Renaissance humanist

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<sup>37</sup> The translations of Nils-Aslak Valkeapää’s poems quoted in this thesis are not my own. The original Sámi text is systematically attached.

Matthaeus Herbenus of Maastricht, for example, reported that animals, ‘though they vocalize (*vociferantur*) and maintain one constant sound (*tenor*) according to the condition of their kind, are said not to sing, since they lack skill (*ars*)’ (in Stoessel 2014: 213). Might we say that most animal creatures ‘lack the yoik’, as Herbenus argues that they lack *ars*? Probably not: yoikers do not necessarily seek to *determine* whether animals can or cannot yoik. The possibility can remain open: who knows whether a situation of enchantment will not present a yoiking wolf? It is, after all, by listening to them that Jonne Järvelä found his ‘yoik technique’ (in Anonymous 2005, cf. Section ‘Yoiks to non-humans’).

In the meantime, various beings of the environment other than animals are frequently mentioned to be yoikers; this section offers a review of recurring cases. The chthonic spirits called *Gufihtar*, for instance, sometimes yoik to humans. As the Sámi writer Johan Turi reported at the beginning of the twentieth century, ‘some Ulda [i.e. *Gufihtar*] are very skilful at yoiking, the Sámi often hear them, and they have learned the yoik from the Ulda’ (Turi 1910\*: 211). In his record *Yoiking with the Winged Ones*, Ánde Somby attempted a yoiked conversation with them by chanting their yoik in the mountains. He considered the echo of his voice in the valleys as the voice of the *Gufihtar* yoiking back to him (Somby 2016b, cf. 5<sup>th</sup> variations on this record). The reindeer herder Siri Päiviö describes the *Gufihtar* as particularly good yoikers:

‘The underground people yoik, in any case. [...] It was told that [they] yoiked when we moved here, to this area. They yoiked the following: “When Sunná Vulle Nihko Ovllá’s herd grazes, they are so calm”. The underground people are so good at yoiking. Divinely good [sw.]

*Himla duktiga*]. How good they are! I have never been able to hear them myself, but I have always tried to listen when someone else heard them’ (in Skaltje 2014: 41-42).

Mentions of yoiking rivers are also frequent. In his poem *Kulturen er en elv* [‘Culture is a river’], Ailo Gaup refers to the controversy about the Alta-Kautokeino dam at the turning point of the 1980s and writes, ‘It is here that our river yoiks. [...] there are many good yoiks in a flowing river’ (Gaup 1982: 83). Rivers have also inspired the yoiker Johan Sara Jr., whose track *Vuolggán juostá* [‘Somewhere I start’] consists of a mixing of yoik with ‘the journey of water from the first drops of melting snow, through a subterranean ice cave, to the roar of a river as it meets the sea’ (Hilder 2013: 139). Associations between the yoik and rivers also reveal a more general inclination to compare the yoik with the movements of water. The journalist John Gustavsen, for example, compares the yoik to waves in the ocean: ‘they melt together and keep flowing, never ending’ (Gustavsen 1999).

The case of aurorae, or northern lights, is rarely mentioned, but it carries noteworthy elements. Nils-Aslak Valkeapää wrote the following:

‘northern light	‘ <i>guovssahasat</i>
fire of the sky	<i>almmi dolat</i>
the yoiks	<i>luođit</i>
the words	<i>sánit</i>
the powerful	<i>main lea vuoibmi</i>
yoiks	<i>luođit</i>

fire of the sky	<i>almmidolat</i>
the wide yoik sea	<i>viiddis luđiid áhpi</i>

yoiking'	<i>juoiggada'</i>
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(Valkeapää 2017 [2001]: 183). (Valkeapää 2001: 183).<sup>38</sup>

Whereas most sources do not point to the northern lights as yoiking entities, nor even as particularly important phenomena in the Sámi tradition (cf. Mathisen 2014), one source reported that ‘the Saami word *guovssahasak* means “audible lights”, because they associate the aurora with whistling sounds interpreted as the voices of the dead. One Saami woman told her granddaughter, since they are ancestral spirits, we all have something of the Northern Lights within us’ (Logan 2009: 8). In light of this quotation, aurorae could be thought of as yoik-like, insofar as they can be considered audible and that they enact the voice of the dead (cf. 5<sup>th</sup> variation on yoiking the dead).

More generally, many yoikers stress the similarity between the sound of the yoik and the sounds of the environment. For example, Torgeir Vassvik told me that ‘it is nature that has been the instrument of the yoik. The sounds of nature, in all their diversity, have been the instrument of the yoik. It has influenced the yoik, the way we use the voice, and other things. It has always been a dialogue’ (conversation 2016). In a press interview, the yoiker Jon Henrik Fjällgren likewise stated that ‘the yoik has received its tones from the sounds of birds, rivers and the wind’ (in Engvall 2015: 8). The idea that the yoik was originally received as a gift from the *Gufihtar* is also widespread (Gaup 2005, Gaup 1995, Krumhansl

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<sup>38</sup> The original poem is printed with a particular typographic layout not reproduced here.

et al. 2000, Lüderwaldt 1976, 2001, Somby 2016a, 2016b, Wersland 2005).

One of the most remarkable non-human yoiker in Sápmi remains to be addressed: the wind.

### **The blowing of the wind**

The importance of the wind in the Sámi culture has often been noted; some Sámi people refer to themselves as the ‘sons of the Sun and the winds’ (Jannok 2013: 42). European foreigners travelling to Sápmi have occasionally suggested a complicity between the Sámi and the wind. According to them, the Sámi were apparently able to capture the wind in knotted strings and sell it to their Scandinavian neighbours (Hagen 2006, Storfjell 2013). One of the most famous anecdotes of Sámi magical achievement has remained the day when the *noaidi* Johan Kåven (b. 1836 – d. 1918) stopped *Hurtigruten*, a coastal ferry, by altering the winds (Kraft 2015: 242). Today, herders tend to consider the wind as a force that can never be fully controlled, but on which their whole livelihood depends. As Mikkel Nils Sara notes, ‘Herders often speak of reindeer as *biekka buorri*, “a good governed by the wind”. This means that full control is impossible even though you can have reasonable hope to succeed in watching the herd’ (Sara 2009: 172). When asked about their own observations of climate change in their area, many herders stress the fact that ‘there are no winds anymore’ as a major source of concern and disorientation (Helander 2004: 307, cf. also Hiltunen & Huovari 2004).

In the yoik, the wind is a significant source of inspiration. Countless yoiks are created by imitating its sound (cf. 3<sup>rd</sup> variation). Here too, the wind



has a will of its own and inspiration does not always occur. Thus, Anne Lise Varsi reported that,

‘We hear many delightful sounds in nature, like the wind whistling [she blows air for a few seconds]. Once I was at a festival with my [noaidi] drum. I stood and I tried to imitate the wind to create a yoik out of it. But this time, it did not work. I stood there and the yoik did not come’ (conversation 2017).

What primarily interests me in this section are instances where *the wind itself is experienced as a yoiking entity*. There are countless mentions of yoiking winds in Sámi poetry; I will focus on two poems from Valkeapää’s book *Trekways of the Wind*, here quoted at length:

‘Can you hear the sound of life in the roaring of the creek in the blowing of the wind	‘ <i>Gullatgo eallima jienaid joga šávvamis biekka bossumis</i>
That is all I want to say that is all’	<i>Dat lea visot máid áigon dadjat dat lea visot’</i>
‘to ask the wind why it blows why birds fly why creeks flow why the leaves fall from the trees why summer shy dark time  nothing is heard except the	‘ <i>jearrat biekkas manin dat bossu     manin girdet lottit manin jogat golget manin gahččet lasttat muorain manin geassi manin skábma  iige gullo earágo bieggá šuvvá</i>

wind's song	
the wind's song	<i>biegga šuvvá</i>
beyond my gaze a string of visions	<i>čalmmiid meaddel oainnuid ráidu</i>
small fingers kneading the mother's breast	<i>unna suorpmažat láibume eatni čiččiid</i>
life's first stumbling steps	<i>eallima vuosttaš suoibu lávkkit</i>
the first teeth the first words	<i>vuosttaš bánit vuosttaš sánit</i>
into the world of adults	<i>rávesolmmožin rahpaseapmi</i>
adult life adult responsibilities	<i>olles agi olles fuolat oaidnit šat</i>
nothing else to see	<i>eará</i>
and those who only travel among memories	<i>ja sii geat eai šat vájalge earágo muittus</i>
on the lost moors of yesterday	<i>ivttáš máilmmi jávkan guolbaniin</i>
To ask the wind why it blows and hear	<i>jearrat biekkas manin dat bossu ja gullat mot biegga šuvvá</i>
the wind's song	<i>biegga šuvvá</i>
Bring forth a yoik	<i>rohttehit luođi</i>
a ringing yoik	<i>čuoddjilis luođi</i>
courageously meet	<i>roahkkadit geahččat</i>
eye after eye	<i>čalmmis čalbmái</i>
Bring forth a yoik	<i>Rohttehit luođi</i>
take hold of a hand	<i>ja dolet gieđa gihtii</i>
make a heart	<i>váimmu ravdda</i>
beat closer	<i>lagabui čoalkut</i>

Bring forth a yoik	<i>Rohttehit luod̄i</i>
From these blue tundras	<i>dáid duoddariid alihis</i>
I hear the story of life	<i>gulan eallima muitalusa</i>
winds rivers forests	<i>biekkain jogain vumiin</i>
yoik	<i>juoigame</i>
And the tundra's winds yoiked	<i>ja duoddariid biekkat juige</i>
in the forests gorges valleys	<i>vumiin gorssain legiin vuonain</i>
fjords	
the symphony of nature	<i>čuojai luonddu sinfoniia</i>
resounded	
I suckled mother Sápmi's breast	<i>eadni-Sámi rattis njammen</i>
from the spring's silver vein	<i>ádjagiid silbasuonain</i>
in the cradle of stones in the	<i>juovaid geađgegietskamis</i>
scree	
the spring sun rocked opened	<i>giđa beaivi vuohtui</i>
the buds on the slopes	<i>rabai čuolmmaid urbbi</i>
the ice on the rivers	<i>jogaid jienjain</i>
and the tundra's winds yoiked'	<i>ja duoddariid biekkat juige'</i>
(Valkeapää 1994 [1985]).	(Valkeapää 1985).

When we discussed these poems, the Sámi philosopher Nils Oskal suggested that Valkeapää's text was merely metaphoric. According to him, what Valkeapää wanted to convey is that we should listen to nature; he added that 'there is nothing mystical in that' (conversation 2017).

Indeed, many writers, like William Shakespeare, wrote of singing winds and were not considered to be mystics. Yet, mentions of singing winds tend

to indicate unusual situations in European literature. Consider this example: Alonso, King of Naples, is wracked with guilt for his past crimes against Prospero, Duke of Milan. Asked by a companion why he is standing ‘in a strange stare’, Alonso tells of the ‘monstrous’ thing that just happened to him:

‘Methought the billows spoke, and told me of it,  
The winds did sing it to me... and the thunder,  
That deep and dreadful organ-pipe, pronounced  
The name of Prosper; it did bass my trespass’

(*The Tempest*, Act 3, Scene 3, cf. Shakespeare 1957 [1623]: 56).

The fact that the winds *sing* – and invokes a human person by *naming* him – occurs here within an exceptional circumstance: one of frightful enchantment. Alonso is perhaps like Somby’s elk, caught in a charm that makes him abnormally sensible to the voice of the elements, arousing a fear concealed in himself.

Valkeapää’s winds evoke a different, but no less enchanted situation. As the musicologist Tina Ramnarine notes, Valkeapää seeks to write how ‘the sounds of wind, the bird, and human thought are the same, indistinguishable from each other, not needing to be constructed as distinct’ (Ramnarine 2009: 204). As Valkeapää himself put it, ‘Is it not so that the wind, the waterfall, the fire, and the yoik are one music without beginning nor end?’ (Valkeapää 1979: 63). According to Ola Graff, this discourse is primarily determined by a historical context calling for a revival of Sámi culture and a definition of the yoik in line with natural phenomena and in contrast with neighbouring European musical traditions (Graff 2018). I already mentioned that I do not wish to reduce the discourse of yoikers to their socio-cultural or historical contexts, but in this particular case, it is worth

noticing that the association between wind and yoiks might be quite old. Consider, for instance, the yoik text *Moarsi fávvrot*, written down by the humanist scholar Johannes Schefferus (b. 1621 – d. 1679). The text tells of a boy who longs for a woman and dreams about ways of reaching her. He eventually manages to be in her presence by merging with the wind, ‘that which is free to touch everyone’ (Gaski 2011: 34-35). As the text puts it, ‘the boy’s will is the wind’s will’ [ns. *bártni miella lea biekkka miella*] (Schefferus 1678 [1673]\*: 263-264). This is perhaps a situation of enchantment in which a wind-like *ethos* is revealed in the boy. All acts of yoiking what lurks behind the horizon (cf. 1<sup>st</sup> variation) can be approached as a situation of enchantment where the yoiker, through breath, stretches towards the invisible.

There is another important way in which the wind might trigger enchantment: by giving a voice to elements of the environment, i.e. by making them chant within its flow. The wind, like the yoik, never chants itself: *it always sounds in relation to something*. This is also the case for echoes and rivers, which reveal the sound of the topographies that they inhabit. Returning to Valkeapää’s words: ‘And the tundra’s winds yoiked / in the forests gorges valleys fjords / the symphony of nature resounded’. When blowing in the valley, the wind brings its presence forth to attention, it provides it with a more intense voice. The valley, earlier silent, is revealed as a chanter performing ‘the symphony of nature’, or ‘the sound of life’. As for Somby’s elk incident, this enchantment should probably not be understood as a wind-subject blowing through a valley-object, nor as a human-subject analysing the sonic stimulus of the wind-object. Nor should any instance of wind blowing necessarily be understood within this frame, as David Abram noted in his book *Becoming Animal* (2010). One of his many reflections on the wind starts from the presentation of a man who

understands ‘the *dialects* of the trees’. By listening to the wind rushing through its branches, he could identify ‘the species of pine or spruce or fir stood above him’. Abram deplored that ‘overeducated folks’ protest about the idea of trees having speech,

‘The rustling of needles, they point out, can hardly be considered the speech of a tree, since the sound is created not by the tree but only by the wind blowing *through* the tree. Curiously, these clever persons seem not to notice that it is demonstrably the same when they speak. We talk, after all, only by shaping the exhaled air that rushed into our lungs a moment earlier. Human speech, too, is really the wind moving through...’ (ibid.: 171).

Thus, *the wind provokes an enchantment* of trees when blowing through a forest, an enchantment of valleys when blowing in its folds, of wolves when rushing into wolves, revealing a startling intensity of life in all these beings. When it blows in human voices, however, something else appears to occur. All sorts of beings are brought to presence: the voices of various people, animals, and places are revealed. The wind then behaves like white light passing through the prism of human interiority, displaying a whole range of colours, although always one at a time. It is as if everything was already there in humans, folded, like an interior topography for the wind to blow through. This is indeed a consideration that corresponds with descriptions of human interiority that I have encountered among some yoikers – I explore them in the 4<sup>th</sup> variation.

The enchantment of the wind may be a widespread phenomenon, in Sápmi as elsewhere. After all, who is not enchanted by the wind? Whenever we speak, we are already enchanted by ‘exhaled air rushing through our

lungs'. Yet, the concept of enchantment seems particularly relevant within the craft of yoiking. A short comparison with the modalities of listening among the Darhad of Mongolia, as they were described by the anthropologist Laurent Legrain, can illustrate why. According to Legrain, the sounds of songs, human voices, and some elements of the environment, including the wind and rivers, belong to the same Darhad conceptual category *duu*, a sonic continuum that 'arouses the sense of audition' (Legrain 2011: 343). As it does among yoikers, the wind here stimulates the attention by blowing through the land, 'undulating the high herbs and making the branches of the tree resound' (ibid.: 372).

However, *duu* refers to an actual sonic category perceived by the Darhad, clearly expressed in their conceptual categories and consciously transmitted from one generation to the next. Legrain uses the French mathematical expression *opérateur d'inclusion* to refer to the process of assessing whether a sound belongs to the category *duu* – some sounds fit in, others do not. Some sounds can be equivocal. For example, Legrain (ibid.: 343) witnesses how the sound of a helicopter, first referred to as *duu*, suddenly leaves the category to become *šuuḡian* (noise). On the other hand, the blowing of the wind always appears to be nested in *duu*. In contrast, the winds of Sápmi are only referred to as 'yoiking' in remarkable situations of enchantment. The yoik is primarily encountered as a human practice; one could say that the wind *becomes-chant* by ephemerally stretching to 'yoikness', in the same way as yoikers stretch to 'windness' by chanting the distant. Thus, yoikers do not *determine* the wind as yoik, they merely leave the door open for the possibility of experiencing it as such.

For Nils Oskal's suggestion that yoiking winds are *metaphoric* figures, I therefore propose to substitute the idea of *metamorphic* figures. Observing

that the literal/metaphoric dichotomy belongs to a discourse that is already divorced from the ‘sensuous terrain’ by the technologies of writing, David Abram proposed the ‘metamorphic’ expression as a way of expressing of ‘each palpable presence [seems] crouched in readiness to become something else’ (Abram 2010: 296). I have not forgotten Oskal’s warning against ‘mysticism’: the wind and the yoik appear more metamorphic than metaphoric not due to a belief about metamorphosis, but because experience tells yoikers that each conceals the *ethos* of the other within itself, always likely to surge in situations of enchantment.

### **A thousand colours in the land**

In 1998, Nils-Aslak Valkeapää released a CD called *The Magic of Sámi Yoik* (Valkeapää 1998), covered by a painting of his own (Figure 3).

This is a particularly evocative picture of an enchanted landscape. The mountains in the distance, the soil, and what appear to be birches are vibrant with unexpected shades. Such is perhaps the ‘magic of Sámi yoik’ that it puts the land in variation, revealing its thousand possible colours, although always sparsely; bringing to awareness its many modes of presence, although always one at a time. The yoiker Olov Sunna expresses this by saying, ‘even today, we yoik the mountain Čokču [...]. It is like a king to us, I think. It is a beautiful mountain and it can be seen from afar. And *it becomes even more beautiful when it is yoiked*’ (in Skaltje 2014: 229, my emphasis). The mountain appears like a kaleidoscopic being, the experience of which cannot be exhausted: how many more memories, how many more colours, how many more feelings can one find in its folds? In its navigation, the kaleidoscope must remain parsimonious: should all of the *ethe* of the mountain come out at once, there would probably be nothing to see.





Figure 3. Nils-Aslak Valkeapää, *The Magic of Sámi Yoik*.<sup>39</sup>

The landscape can thus be compared to a musical instrument – ‘It is nature that has been the instrument of the yoik’, as Torgeir Vassvik put it (cf. Section ‘Yoiks from non-humans’). According to the philosopher Michel Serres, the remarkable quality of musical instruments lies precisely in the infinite number of possible acts that they conceal and reveal: ‘a thousand musical scores, future or past’ (Serres 2014 [2011]: 127). As Tim Ingold wrote about his cello:

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<sup>39</sup> This picture was included with the permission of Valkeapää’s record label.

‘Stowed in its case, the cello is just an object. In my estimation, it is a beautiful and superbly crafted object. Beyond that, however, not much is to be ascertained merely by looking at it. The instrument begs to be played. Yet at the moment when I start to play, the instrument seems to explode. What had been a recognisable, coherent entity becomes something more like a bundle of affects, a meeting of bowhair, rosin, metallic strings, wood and fingers, coupled with resonant air’ (Ingold 2015: 108).

Striving to avoid the ‘subject/object’ habit of thought also leads me to consider that yoikers may just as well *be* the musical instruments of nature. The novelist Stendhal spoke of landscapes playing on his soul like ‘bows’ (Stendhal 1913: 18); attending to the yoiks showed how the wind can likewise be a yoiker chanting in us. This is but one way in which the environment itself brings out the many possible colours of yoikers – or, as Ola Graff observed, of their chants. ‘If’, he wrote, ‘a close friend has passed away and is remembered with great sorrow by chanting his or her yoik, both the text and the tones are *coloured* by the sorrow’ (Graff 2004: 167, my emphasis) – this friend’s yoik certainly has a thousand colours of its own to reveal.<sup>40</sup>

As I write in English, I cannot directly evoke these cases of enchantment without using the active and passive voices, moving from one to the other and vice versa. Calling the yoik ‘enchanting’ or calling it ‘enchanted’

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<sup>40</sup> Among the Lule Sámi, this ‘colouring’ of the vocal expression by sorrow is captured by the expression *ármme*, as observed by the Sámi musicologist Mikkel Eskil Andre Mikkelsen, which is considered as a genre of yoik in its own right (Mikkelsen 2017, cf. 5<sup>th</sup> variation).

remain two ways of navigating the same phenomenon. In both cases, the Spinozan formula mentioned in the thesis' introduction (cf. Section 'Theoretical landscape') resurges: *we do not know what a (chanting) body can or cannot do*. Thus, research itself could be approached as a way of revealing some of the possible modes of the yoik: research as an *ethical* – or *ethological* – craft, concerned with what practices 'are capable of, what they do, what their powers are' (Despret 2015: 20, cf. also Deleuze 1980).

Indeed, I cannot think of any scholarly approach to the craft of yoiking that is not, in some way, enchanting. Even an analytical approach of the yoik's musical structure reveals startling dimensions of the yoik that were earlier unnoticed. Ola Graff, for instance, by approaching the yoik 'in light of the semiotic-structural theory' (Graff 2018: 75), has shown how the yoik could be considered as a symbolic 'language' (Graff 1985, cf. 3<sup>rd</sup> variation). This is doubtless a creative gesture. However, some texts written on the yoik have tended to draw a closure, in what appears to be an effort to impede other forms of enchantments to occur, other colours to emerge. Graff, for instance, concludes from an analysis that 'the yoik is a musical expression like any sort of music. It has its particularities, but it is fully orderly and understandable' (Graff 2007: 67).

Closing the discussion here would be like affirming once and for all that the sounds of the wind cannot be yoiks and that the elk cannot understand the yoiks of humans – or, conversely, that they *always* can. This sort of statement, as I argued, would amount to 'beliefs' (cf. Section 'Enchantment and belief'). I prefer to consider that analytical musicologists are writing within productive situations of enchantment of their own. Yoikers do not need to think of their craft as a musical practice 'like any sort of music' – not at all times, anyway. They certainly do not think in the analytical mode

when their vocalisations make them notice something startling about their environment. What analysts bring to light is one possible *ethos* the yoik, its affordance to be experienced as a musical practice like any other or as an ‘understandable’ object. The structural yoik and the magical yoik may be considered *two variations of the same flesh*, that is, two diverging shades of enchantment.

This became progressively apparent after several conversations with yoikers whose discourses, at first sight, seemed full of contradictions. When I met Ingvald Guttorm, for instance, he began the conversation by stressing that the yoik was nothing more than ‘the folk music of the Sámi’: all the people in the world had their own music, the Sámi had theirs. There was, he explained, nothing particularly special in his practice. This seemed like a final statement. I asked him whether the yoik was truly like other forms of folk music – does it not, for instance, have roots in nature? Then, he answered with what seemed to be a different discourse: ‘Yes, the yoik stems from nature. We can yoik the wind, we can yoik the wolf, the sounds of nature, then the tones come, and we start to yoik to reindeer and humans’ (conversation 2017). Later, when I asked him about the possibility of yoiking the dead, he answered that when you do this, you establish a contact with spirits ‘flying in the air around us’ (cf. 5<sup>th</sup> variation).<sup>41</sup>

It seems that both discourses found relevance in his view, as if they both had an ‘otherwise accentuated relevance’ (Stengers 2002a: 295), each giving voice to a particular *ethos* sensed in the practice. It will come as no

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<sup>41</sup> Due to a technical issue, I do not have the recording of this part of our conversation and cannot therefore quote him at length. This paragraph was nonetheless approved by Ingvald Guttorm *a posteriori*.

surprise that Ingvald Guttorm is both a respected traditional yoiker of the Tana region and a pioneer in the emergence of the modern yoik, through his participation in the band Tanabreddens Ungdom / Deatnogátte Nuorat. Entering Guttorm's house, I expected to engage with a univocal expert of the yoik. What I found instead was a person attentive to its ethical multiplicity, more concerned with situated discourses that capture portions of experience than with the mutual consistency of these discourses – a person who nurtured 'impressions' and conjured 'beliefs', as David Hume would perhaps have put it (cf. Hume 2000 [1738]: 7-16).

Going back to considerations on research approach, I observe that I write about the yoik because I find some of its variations – including the conversation I had with Guttorm – enchanting enough to try and capture their evanescence in writing, within a philosophical medium that involves its own requirements. Hearing about the elk responding to Somby's yoik or about Valkeapää's winds created a situation where another colour of the yoik – or of philosophy – could be brought to light. Enchantment is where it starts, in a *milieu* of experience. Is it also where it goes? Are texts 'enchanting' in the way they bring new aspects of the world into presence? Must we restrict the concept of enchantment to situations of chanting, or generalise it further?

The best way to avoid diluting its power is perhaps to adopt the stance I observed among yoikers: enchantment occurs primarily in chanting like yoiking primarily occurs in human vocalisations, but a door can be left open for the concept to find relevance elsewhere, such as in writing. Like yoikers stretching towards the horizon and yet 'keeping their feet' (cf. 1<sup>st</sup> variation), anchoring the concept in chanting is what empowers it to venture into other fields of experience without losing its local relevance. The 4<sup>th</sup>, 5<sup>th</sup>, and 6<sup>th</sup>

variations will explore in more detail how practices of writing diverge from practices of yoiking, by observing (1) the regime of depth they inaugurate, displaced from the immediacy of breath into the written medium; (2) the incapability of texts to echo in one's awareness as a whole; and (3) their roots in an ancient rather than primordial legacy. In the meantime, suffice to say that they might, at times, be alike and that their situated convergences are remarkable enough to be closely attended to.

The same could be argued regarding the modern yoik. What happens to the 'chant' when it is complemented with musical instruments? As the 4<sup>th</sup> variation will show, whatever craft it retains is to some extent displaced from the immediacy of chanted breath. Modern yoiks, because they are generally recorded and 'more-than-vocal', do not necessarily modulate themselves according to the field of presence that they address. For example, most of them are unlikely to be understandable by animals. Enchantment seems best exemplified by situations of mere 'chanting', when the *a cappella* voice addresses one source and immerses itself in the immediacy of a field of *prégnance*, to which it continuously responds. This does not mean that the modern yoik cannot be enchanting, but I am inclined to think that its propensity for being so is not as intense as the one found in the traditional practice.

However, this supposition points not to a weakness in the modern yoik, but to the necessity of naming its own mode of craft: if enchantment primarily captures an *ethos* of the traditional yoik, what concepts will capture the many *ethe* of the modern yoik? This thesis has been more anchored in the traditional than in the modern practice; hence my inability to answer. Stretching the concepts derived from the traditional yoik towards its modern counterpart and assessing how far they can venture without losing their interest, is as much as

I can offer from my perspective. I leave to others the task of following the opposite direction if they want to, from modern to traditional, along a path that will certainly not be symmetrical to mine; one that, like the practice it would attend to, would be diverging (and, perhaps, enchanting).





### 3<sup>rd</sup> variation: Creature

*Eio go lo lo lo longo*

*Sarvva aleilo go elga*

*Leio go low no*

*Loi lo go low longo*

- The elk

‘Creature’ is a term that readily calls forth images of ‘cryptids’, i.e. imaginary beasts such as the Loch Ness Monster, the Yeti, or the chimeras of ancient bestiaries like the *Physiologus*, although the expression finds its roots in the Latin *creāre*, ‘to grow’ or ‘to make [something] grow’ (Onions 1966: 226). It is in relation to this etymology that medieval philosophers would refer to ‘creatures’ as living species created by God – the North Sámi term *sivdnáduosat* likewise means both ‘creatures’ and ‘the blessed ones’ (Jernsletten 2010). In Nicholas of Cusa’s texts, all creatures are described as infinite unities in that they contribute to the manifestation of divine unity through a plurality of things. Whether human, animal, or other, they appear as so many *contractions* of God (cf. Miller 1978): ‘If you remove God from the creature, nothing remains’ (Cusa 1964 [1440]: 334).

In Genesis, the first creatures are humans. As the philosopher Peter Sloterdijk notes, their creation starts with clay modelling and is accomplished when the creature is ‘animated by a living breath’ corresponding to the Hebrew *ruach*, namely ‘moving air, breath, breath of life, spirit, feeling and passion, thought’ (Sloterdijk 1998: 36, cf. 4<sup>th</sup> variation on breath). While humans would later be capable of creating in the ‘clay-modelling’ way, only God would bear the power of animating through

living breath. The case of Frankenstein's monster thus appears as an aberration: in substituting electricity to *ruach*, a hideous and frightening being is brought to life. This monster, however, is not a creature as it did not grow. Like the sirens and unicorns of the *Physiologus*, it is a *composition*, a 'putting together' of heterogeneous elements – of corpses in *Frankenstein*, of different creatures in the *Physiologus*.

Approaching the yoik calls for an attentive distinction between compositions and creatures. Yoiks are not compositions because they are not usually experienced as assemblages of parts – instead, they are outgrowths of phenomena hosted in the vocal mode. Thus, in addressing the relationship between yoik melodies and the beings they denote, Nicholas of Cusa might be a better guide than Mary Shelley, on the condition that the power to create is redistributed within the immanence of human and earthly beings. Humans, animals, landscapes, and their yoiks then appear akin and partake in the same ongoing breath. This seems in line with what Ánde Somby suggests in the quotation that first led me to think in terms of creatures:

'It is not easy even for the trained ear to hear the differences between an animal's yoik, a landscape's yoik or a person's yoik. This perhaps emphasizes that you don't differ so much between the *human-creature*, the *animal-creature* and the *landscape-creature* as you regularly do in a western European context. Your behaviour will therefore maybe be more inclusive towards animals and landscapes. In some respects this also emphasizes that we can have ethical spheres not just towards fellow humans but also to our fellow earth and our fellow animals' (Somby 1999: 57, my emphasis).

In this variation, the idea of yoiks as ‘creatures’ is developed along semiotic considerations: Does the yoik sound like the world? How can we approach the relationship between people and their yoiks? Can we talk of *Tonmalerei* [‘painting with tones’] in the yoik, as some musicologists call it? To what extent can outsiders<sup>42</sup> follow what is being yoiked? How are yoiks created in the first place and does the model of composition bear any relevance at all?

## Painting with sounds

As far as I could assess, all yoikers seem to agree on the fact that a yoik must sound like its source: whether traditional or modern, it is always supposed to imitate something.<sup>43</sup> This is sometimes expressed through the expression ‘painting with sounds’ [no. *lydmaleri*, ge. *Tonmalerei*] among both musicologists and yoikers. For instance, the yoiker Per Hætta described a ‘good yoiker’ as someone who is able ‘to portray a person entirely with tones’ (in Jernsletten 1978: 114). During a yoik course, the composer and yoiker Frode Fjellheim suggested that there are three ways of accomplishing this: the yoik can either evoke the sounds of the thing it evokes, its shape, or its movements (yoik course 2018).

Evoking *sounds* is a recurring technique in animal yoiks. The most obvious example I encountered is the long-tailed duck’s yoik, chanted by Per Hætta (NRK 1995: track 27). Its melodic contour is so similar to the

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<sup>42</sup> ‘Outsiders’ here refers to people who have had little or no exposure to the experience of yoiking or listening to yoiks in their life; this encompasses most non-Sámi persons.

<sup>43</sup> When asked on this matter, the yoiker Hartvik Hansen stressed that the descriptive quality of yoiks was not necessarily transparent. For instance, he does not experience the yoiks of Kautokeino in a particularly descriptive way because he grew up in another region (i.e. Tana) (conversation 2017).

actual sound of the bird that Per Hætta suggested that the bird created its own yoik (Graff 1985: 129). In the North Sámi area, the raven is yoiked with syllables that evoke the bird's caws, while the bear is yoiked with a powerful and guttural voice. By chanting a series of yoiks, Anne Lise Varsi illustrated to me that melodies evoking humans may also depict their sounds. For example, she chanted a strange yoik that evokes the unusual diction of a particular person (conversation 2017).

Fjellheim's second strategy, the rendition of *shapes* in melodic form, has been attentively analysed by twentieth-century musicologists (Danckert 1956, Lüderwaldt 1976: 153-154, Stockmann 1991a, Tirén 1942: 48, Laade 1958: 494). In 1956, Werner Danckert noted that the sun, the bear, a mountainous landscape, or a large wild bird tend to be evoked with melodies exhibiting wide intervals, whereas small animals like the weasel or the raven are more often yoiked with narrow intervals (Danckert 1956: 288-293) – I come back to Danckert's analyses later (cf. Section 'Creaturely semiosis').

Karl Tirén, a Swedish railway officer and amateur ethnologist who collected a wide collection of yoiks in the early twentieth century, suggested that this also applies to yoiks evoking places. In his work, he presented examples in which the melodic contour of the yoik reproduced the shape of the horizon: 'a mountain with a single peak generally gives one high-pitched tone, coming back at each repetition of the melody, while the yoik of a mountain ridge with several peaks has more high-pitched-tones' (in Lüderwaldt 1976: 152). In his manuscripts, he occasionally transcribed melodies juxtaposed to drawings of the horizon in order to highlight their correspondence.

The (non-Sámi) yoiker Jonne Järvelä indicated something similar in an interview: ‘I made many of the yoik songs back then [i.e. when living in Sápmi] by going to the highest place and allowing the melody to follow the horizon’ (in Anonymous 2005). The same way of yoiking is described by the yoiker Isak Parfa:

‘When you reach the bottom of a valley, the tones should be different. Suddenly you find a cliff and you then change your voice according to the landscape. If it is a flat cold mountain, the yoik is long-lasting, like a serenade, a long, slow melody. [...] When the ground is hilly, it sounds like noo no no non nono and then the voice falls down like in a valley. And when you reach the heights again, or the mountain top, the voice also rises’ (in Skaltje 2014: 77).

Frode Fjellheim illustrated the third strategy, the imitation of *movements*, by presenting a sheet of paper and asking us to yoik it. Like the other students, I was puzzled. Then he started moving the sheet, twisting it, folding it, throwing it into the air. The sheet’s shape itself was not inspiring, but its movements animated our playfulness, as following them offered a wide range of possible vocalisations that converged to a greater or lesser extent.

As far as I can tell from my own encounters with yoiks, the rendition of movements seems to be the most widespread of Fjellheim’s three strategies.<sup>44</sup> The puppy’s yoik, for instance, is chanted with a rhythm that

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<sup>44</sup> From a large-scale, comparative, anthropological perspective, the attention to movement has been identified by the anthropologist Philippe Descola as one of the main means of representing animals in the Circumpolar North. According to him, this constitutes a

evokes the clumsy walk of the animal, always likely to fall on the ground (Laade 1958: 493). Likewise, the raven's yoik evokes the bird's hops on the ground as well as its caws (Graff 1985: 12). The bear's yoik, as yoiked by Jonas Edvard Steggo, relies on a slow and powerful sonority (Arnberg et al. 1997b: disc 2, track 54). In the area of Kautokeino / *Guovdageaidnu* (Finnmark, Norway), the hare's yoik is chanted at various speeds depending on whether the yoiker aims to imitate a hare that peacefully hops through the tundra or one that runs away in a panic (Fjellheim 2004: 58-59, Gaup 1998: track 9). Other examples include a mouse yoik chanted with fast, sudden suites of tones followed by short interruptions; an Arctic fox yoiked with flexible and adroit movements (Rydving 2009: 325); and a reindeer yoik entailing a rhythm depicting the movements of a castrated draught reindeer (Arnberg et al. 1997a: 21).

Yoiks that evoke humans tend to focus on movement and dynamic behaviour too, especially in depicting the person's gait, which can be fast or slow, confident or hesitant, quiet or agitated (Delaporte 1978, Hanssen 2011, cf. Section 'The creation of new yoiks' for a concrete example). Yoiks evoking places and landscapes are also based on movement. Landscapes should not be considered here as static sceneries contemplated from afar, as the naturalist tradition has conceived of them since the fifteenth-century Flemish painters (Descola et al. 2010). The North Sámi term *meahcci*, which at first sight may evoke the English *nature* or *wilderness* – or the Norwegian *utmarka* – encapsulates a conception of the mountain as a place

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minimalist means of evoking, at once, the specificity of animal bodies (their 'exteriority') and the inner principle governing their movement (their 'interiority'). Examples include miniature figurines of animals by the Inuit populations of Canada and Thule (Descola 2008, cf. also Ingold 2000: 111-131, Laugrand & Oosten 2008 on Inuit miniatures).

of familiarity and movement, where various activities are undertaken (cf. Helander-Renvall 2010, Mazzullo & Ingold 2008, Schanche 2002, cf. 6<sup>th</sup> variation). This movement through *meahcci* along its meshwork of paths is considered by the anthropologists Nuccio Mazzullo and Tim Ingold as ‘the underlying principle that animates the Sámi world’ (Mazzullo & Ingold 2008: 36). That yoiks referring to places must be approached in relation to movement, memories, and activities, was indicated by various yoikers that I met during my research. Hartvik Hansen, for instance, reported the following examples:

‘I have made a yoik for the mountain, where we pluck berries and fish, etc., so a melody is shaped around this. It is the same with a melody for the Tana River that I have made. Then I have thought about all the persons that I can remember in relation to this river, and I remember: oh yes, that’s what we used to do! This is how the Tana River is!’ (conversation 2017).

The yoikers I interrogated on this issue considered that modern yoiks are generally imitative too (conversations with Elle Marja Eira 2017, Johan Anders Bær 2017, and Torgeir Vassvik 2016). The musicologist Paal Fagerheim gives an example of this: the track *Šuvvi Ljat*, by Adjágas, is supposed to imitate the sound of walking on the solid snow crust (Fagerheim 2014: 77). It even appears that some people or places are better imitated with modern yoiks than with traditional ones. For instance, the yoiker Inga Juuso once yoiked the yoiker Mari Boine at a concert in Nesseby / *Unjárga* and pointed out that this was a modern yoik: a traditional one, she contended, would not have been appropriate to evoke her (NRK 2013: 24’). Likewise, when asked whether it would be possible to yoik

places that are not usually yoiked, like large cities or foreign landscapes, the yoikers I met would generally tell me that it might be possible, although the yoik would have to depart from its traditional form and become something slightly different. This is what Wimme Saari accomplished with his yoik *Texas*, which perhaps imitates the American state in a more convincing way than a traditional yoik could have done (Saari 1996: track 1, cf. 1<sup>st</sup> variation on this particular yoik).

Frode Fjellheim's three ways of 'painting with sounds' are helpful for providing an overview of the relationship between the yoiks and the beings they evoke. However, paying close attention to a wide repertoire of yoiks would soon reveal the limits of that framework. There are indeed numerous yoiks, perhaps a majority of them, that fit in neither category. In Finnmark, the elk's and the fox's yoiks do not necessarily carry any obvious imitative quality in terms of sound, shape, or movement (Gaup 1998: tracks 19 and 21, respectively). On the first listen, it might even be argued that both yoiks are interchangeable (cf. Section 'Listening as an outsider' on the elk's case). Yet, they are meant to be imitative and are experienced as such by skilful yoikers. Some of them speak of 'frequency'; each being in the world has a particular frequency and the yoiker's task is to find a melody that enacts the same.

The problem for scholars lies in the fact that these frequencies are ineffable and inaccessible for analysis. This may be why some musicologists, like Ola Graff, have argued that the yoik primarily relies on a *symbolic* form of semiosis (Graff 1985, 2004). According to him, the original relation between a yoik and what it evokes is *arbitrary*. When imitation occurs, it merely reinforces a pre-existing convention: the yoik's reference, he contends, lies 'outside the music' (Graff 2007: 59). To build



his argument, Graff mentions the fact that one yoik can have several interpretations as to how it is imitative. One example mentioned earlier is the case of the raven's yoik, which imitates the bird's hops on the ground, or its caws, depending on whom you ask. He also highlights the practice of attributing existing yoik melodies to new referents, evidencing that one yoik can refer virtually to different people (Graff 2004: 153).<sup>45</sup>

When I met him, Ola Graff argued along similar lines by telling me how one of his yoiks was created: a yoiker started by presenting him with two melodic ideas and asked Graff which one he preferred. The suggestions were different enough to ensure that, had he chosen one rather the other, his yoik would have been completely different; Graff saw an indication of arbitrariness in this anecdote. Another example involved the case of a Sámi herder, Ánte Mihkkal, whose father had once created a yoik for a reindeer herd with female animals. Later, Ánte Mihkkal's uncle recalled this yoik and gave it to him. According to Graff, this indicated arbitrariness in three regards: (1) an animal yoik can also fit a human; (2) a yoik evoking a herd can also fit an individual; and (3) a female yoik can also fit a man; as if yoiks did not require to imitate their source in a truthful way (conversation 2015). 'The yoik', suggested Graff, 'does not require any likeness with its object. A person who has a yoik could always have received another, and a

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<sup>45</sup> One could answer that this does not imply that *any* yoik could be transferred to *anyone*. For instance, Harald Grundström notes that the Virgin Mary has 'received' a yoik that earlier belonged to the Sámi goddess Sáráhká (Grundström 1994, cf. also Edström 1978: 84-85). This transmission was not random, since the Virgin Mary was closely associated with Sáráhká during the Christianisation of Sápmi (Rydving 2010: 218, Stoor 2016: 722-723); their similarity was perhaps a condition for the transmission of the yoik from one to the other.

single person could well have several yoiks that are completely different' (Graff 2004: 149). Thus when he describes the yoik as a *language*,<sup>46</sup> 'language' must be heard in the Saussurian sense, namely as a system of signs in relation to one another through relations of differences; 'the linguistic sign' is itself arbitrary (Saussure 1971 [1916]: 100).

As the observations gathered in the following sections suggest, the yoik can indeed be thought of as a symbolic language. However, this requires a particular stance of systematic analysis, one that I have rarely encountered among yoikers themselves.<sup>47</sup> The question is perhaps not so much whether the yoik is an arbitrary system or not, but on what condition, in relation to which 'interpretant' (cf. Section 'Creaturely semiosis'), it appears so. The philosopher Maurice Merleau-Ponty argued along similar lines when questioning the arbitrary nature of spoken languages, stressing that they would not even seem conventional, were we to consider the 'emotional sense' of words:

'Conventions are a late mode of relationship among humans. They suppose a preliminary communication, and one must situate language within this communicative flow. If we only consider the conceptual and terminal sense of words, it is true that the verbal form – with the exception of desinences – seems arbitrary. It would not be so, were

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<sup>46</sup> Cf. his work 'The yoik as a musical language' [no. *Joik som musikalsk språk*] (Graff 1985).

<sup>47</sup> One exception is the yoiker Frode Fjellheim, who is very attentive to musical analysis (cf. End of this section). It is noteworthy that Frode Fjellheim does not consider himself to be a 'traditional' yoiker but rather a composer and classical musician with a South Sámi background who came to use the yoik as a source of inspiration for his own music (yoik courses 2018 – 2019).

we to consider the emotional sense of the word, what we have earlier called its gestural sense, which is, for instance, crucial in poetry. We would then find that words, vowels, and phonemes are so many ways of singing the world and that their purpose is to represent objects, not – as the naïve theory of onomatopoeiae believed – due to an objective resemblance, but because they extract, and literally express, its emotional essence’ (Merleau-Ponty 1945: 218).<sup>48</sup>

Likewise, it is true that a person may have several, contrasting yoiks, and that these may focus on an insignificant anecdote rather than what Merleau-Ponty might call the person’s ‘emotional essence’. The anecdote of the herder who received a feminine yoik evokes, at best, a synecdochic gesture, i.e. part of a person stands for the person as a whole (cf. Section ‘The creation of new yoiks’). However, displacing the terms of the reflection may reveal another picture. The imitative dimension of yoiks, for instance, does not have to be considered as an act of causation. To state that a yoik imitates its source does not necessarily imply that the yoik is *determined* by the source. The person could be considered a *resource* approached in a variety of ways by yoikers, through what I will call diverging gestures of ‘prehension’. The ethnomusicologist Jean-Jacques Nattiez sketched, in his own words, an approach similar to the one suggested here:

‘The fact that the association of a musical signifier with a divinity as a signified result from a cultural convention does not imply that this convention does not find its motivation in an immanent feature of the

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<sup>48</sup> For anthropological reflections extending Merleau-Ponty’s argument on language, see the works of David Abram (1997: 56-62) and Tim Ingold (2000: 406-419).

sign. [...] After all, we have never seen, to my knowledge, a lullaby that induces trance or possession, or a tarantella encouraging transcendental meditation. This is why it is crucial to retain, in the study of the semantic mechanisms of music, the immanent presence of a certain emotional or affective character in the musical signifier, which precedes any cultural codification, yet at the same time makes it possible, and even partly explains it' (Nattiez 2005: 981).

The issue of the creation of new yoik offers a first entry point for developing this perspective.

### **The creation of new yoiks**

In July 2018, a concert was held in a village church in Switzerland featuring Ingor Ántte Áilu Gaup, a renowned yoiker from Kautokeino who also works as an actor for the Beivváš Sámi Theater. The performance was followed by a conversation with the audience. At some point, someone asked him how new yoiks are created. In response, Ingor Ántte Áilu Gaup asked her to join him in the church's choir and then to walk along the nave. She did so with a shy and hesitating gait and stumbled on a cable as she was leaving the choir. Ingor Ántte Áilu Gaup then followed her, imitating her walk while improvising a melody imitating these movements. The melody thus had a timid quality and the stumble was accompanied by a sudden high-pitched tone. By the time he had walked ten metres, a melodic idea for a new yoik had just been created.

I met Ingor Ántte Áilu Gaup again in Oslo / *Oslove* in February 2018 during a three-day yoiking course. On the last day, we randomly picked out a course participant who would receive a personal yoik. My name was

picked, and the process of creation went as follows: Gaup started by asking each participant, all of whom were ‘non-Sámi’, to describe me in one word. He then asked them how these descriptions could be expressed in a melodic gesture: how shall we evoke this or that trait with tones? About five melodic gestures were gathered, which Gaup attempted to bring together into a single gesture by improvising for a while. This seems like an emblematic example of ‘composition’, i.e. a gesture of ‘putting together’ [la. *compōnere*] (Onions 1966: 198). However, as these five gestures progressively merged into a singular melodic circle, their individual characteristics became progressively less audible. It did not seem particularly important that the melody should retain the series of evocative motives proposed from the outset. These melodic pieces, rather, appeared as *starting points*, from which the improvised creation of a new melody could proceed. Removed as it was from these starting points, the final melody convinced all of us that it was a rather successful attempt to evoking me.

Later, a participant shared his account of the experience and suggested that, as an experienced yoiker, Ingor Ántte Áilu Gaup had a lot of ‘yoik pieces’ in memory that he could assemble into new yoiks, whereas it was harder for us to depart from the ‘Western’ melodic ideas that we have in mind. Gaup seemed sceptical of this. He replied that ‘there might be some truth in that’, reflected on it for a while, and then phrased the issue in his own way. The point, he contended, was not so much to assemble yoik pieces, but to find a suitable melodic movement for the person evoked (yoik course 2018).

A good yoik, he went on, must be *njuovžil*, referring to a North Sámi expression similar to the English word ‘fluent’. It can be used to qualify language proficiency: to speak North Sámi *njuovžilit* is to speak it fluently.

Ingor Ántte Áilu Gaup described this concept while waving his arm in front of him like a snake. Whereas musicologists have tended to emphasise that yoiks are made of parts (e.g. musical paragraphs) assembled into structures (cf. Introduction), he pointed to another aspect of the practice, one that does not so easily fit in analytical agendas. What mattered to him was (1) to be attentive to the person's character and (2) to find the right, *njuovžil* movement.

Once my yoik had taken shape, Ingor Ántte Áilu Gaup tried to find a *dajahus* in North Sámi that would depict me. After a time of reflection, he chose to evoke the first time we met in the Swiss Alps. At that time, I had just been walking in the mountains for several days in order to reach the village where our yoik course would take place. Consequently, my *dajahus* went as follows: 'He walks on high mountains, he wanders, he walks' [ns. *Deid alla váriid vázzi, vánddardá, vázza*]. Gaup then noted how the succession of ascending and descending movements of the melody can evoke a hike in the mountains. This is another case of seemingly synecdochic semiosis, in line with Ola Graff's example of a feminine yoik being attributed to a male herder: while my yoik aims at imitating me entirely, it does so by relying on an anecdotal part of my life. An anecdotal hike in the Alps comes to stand for my entire person. Yves Delaporte tells a similar example: a person once received a yoik evoking the movement of wings in the air for the sole reason that this person had once flown in an aeroplane (Delaporte 1978: 111). The same can be observed in animal yoiks – for instance, Ánde Somby once created a yoik for the fly that solely imitated the insect's sound, the sound standing for the animal as a whole.

Yet is it really relevant to speak of synecdoche? I started to doubt this after having the following exchange with Ánde Somby, who explicitly

stated that the fly's sound was indeed a *starting point*, like the character traits would be in my own yoik:

Aubinet: 'Is it necessary to imitate the fly's sound?'

Somby: 'Well, that is an interesting question. I have a starting point in replicating first, because I think that the people with whom you communicate, if they find everything strange, then they can't hook themselves up to the communication. So, replication can be a way to start the communication. Then, they can hear a fly in the yoik, and they listen. Then I can bring them with me to the points where I also comment on the fly' (conversation 2015).

In this case, one could say that the fly is taken by its 'sonic tip'. In the philosopher Alfred North Whitehead's words, the entire fly is locally *prehended* (e.g. Whitehead 1978 [1929]: 219) – i.e. grasped, seized – through the gesture of imitating its sound. The imitation of this particular feature affords an opening towards the animal, one that listeners can relate to; from there, the melodic imitation can proceed. After my exchange with Somby, the metaphor of the *circle* thus appeared more appropriate for capturing the gesture involved than my original idea of a relation of parts and wholes. Yoiks are almost systematically described today as melodic circles that can be entered at any point of the melody (cf. Graff 2018 for a critical assessment of this idea), but one could likewise *think of a person as an ongoing, living circle* affording a multiplicity of possible 'starting points' for imitation (e.g. anecdotes, appearances, sounds, movements), all of which open towards the same circle. My walk in the Alps *is* me; not a part of me, but a bias through which my entire being can be explored.

The idea of finding a ‘starting point’, of locally ‘prehending’ what is to be yoiked before creating a melodic circle, appears to lie at the core of the creation of new yoiks. A detailed description of this activity was written by Ánte Mihkkal Gaup (1995),<sup>49</sup> another renowned yoiker from Kautokeino and the brother of Ingor Ántte Áilu Gaup. According to him, the person who is about to receive a yoik should participate in the creative process. He suggests taking as a starting point the person’s *dovdna* (i.e. a simple yoik-like melody received by some people when they are children before they receive their adult yoik, cf. Introduction) or the yoik of a relative, which can then be transformed into a new melody. If none of these are available, he suggests presenting three melodic ideas to the recipients and to ask which one they like best. He then asks them a series of questions, e.g. what kind of place in nature they enjoy, whether they prefer ‘soft nature’ or ‘hard nature’ (Gaup does not elaborate on what these expressions refer to). He also emphasises the importance of paying attention to a person’s movements. In addition, he notes that ‘a woman’s yoik should be softer [ns. *litnáseappot*] than a man’s because of physical differences’ (Gaup 1995: 91, cf. Introduction on the difference between ‘masculine’ and ‘feminine’ melodies).

Once a starting point has been found, the creation of the yoik can then proceed. It is important then that the recipients recognise themselves in the final melody and validate it (*ibid.*: 91-92). Ideally, the yoik will be validated not only by its recipient but by the wider community. It may occasionally happen that a new yoik presented to an audience is not acknowledged due

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<sup>49</sup> I translated this paper from North Sámi with the generous assistance of Andreas Njarga, who hosted me during my stay in Polmak.



to the fact that, for instance, the melody fails to capture a person's movements (ibid.: 77-78, cf. also Arnberg et al. 1997a: 50).

Ánte Mihkkal Gaup has created countless yoiks for people from different parts of Finnmark and beyond. It is not surprising, therefore, that he should have developed a meticulous method for creating them. As noted by Yves Delaporte, although anyone may create yoiks, some are more talented than others (Delaporte 1978: 112). In Ánte Mihkkal Gaup's words, some people 'probably' have 'some sort of antenna' enabling them to receive the yoik's 'signals' (Gaup 1995: 90). The yoiker Lars Henrik Blind likewise suggests that 'the [yoik-creator] must be a penetrating [sw. *djupsinnig*] person. You must catch everything: the soul, the setting, the personality, and all the characteristics' (in Skaltje 2014: 261).<sup>50</sup> Renowned yoik-creators are likely to be 'ordered' yoiks by other people, which may for instance be offered as a birthday present. When I met the yoiker Mari Helander, she told me that she was once asked to create a yoik for a child that she had never met. She had no starting point from which a melody could take shape. She therefore asked the parents to choose three keywords describing their child (conversation 2018). Through these keywords, she could vocally *prehend* the child and come up with a melodic idea.

This case seems to constitute an exception rather than the rule. To my knowledge, all yoikers agree that in order to create a yoik for someone, you should know that person well (Hunsdal 1979: 38, Lundby 2014: 26', NRK 2013: 30', Skaltje 2014: 37, conversations with Elle Marja Eira 2017, Johan

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<sup>50</sup> Sometimes, several yoikers can collaborate for creating a new melody: in the region of Nesseby, the yoiker Øystein Nilsen reported that yoiks are often created by two persons sitting at a table and yoiking alternately, adding on what the other has just yoiked until a complete melody emerges (in NRK 2013: 34').

Anders Bær 2017, Mari Helander 2018, and Øystein Nilsen 2017). Ánte Mihkkal Gaup adds that creating a yoik for a person with a strong charisma is generally easier. In these cases, the creator ‘sees’ through that person and knows exactly which melody is appropriate (Gaup 1995: 90).

Among animals, the ones that have been in closest contact with the Sámi are also the ones that will most often be yoiked (cf. Per Hætta in Graff 1985: 1, Laade 1958: 494). Thus, as Yves Delaporte argues, creating a yoik for the fox first requires attentive observation of the animal’s behaviour and movements:

‘When I was a child, we used to observe the fox, we studied its movements: it observes its preys, it swings a little as it walks, and suddenly it stops. Then, we made a yoik where you could hear all that. It was the fox’s yoik and it resembled the fox’ (Delaporte 1978: 111).

Ánde Somby gave me a similar illustration with the mosquito’s yoik, which evokes the sounds of a mosquito through melodic ornamentations and a high-pitched voice: ‘In order to create this yoik, I did not kill a mosquito for years. I had to hear it fly around me and I had to feel its sting on my skin’ (conversation 2015). The ethnologist Nikolai Nikolaevich Volkov likewise states that ‘to “create” a song, the Sámi have to put their attention on some outstanding event in their life. Then they “create” a song and sing it’ (in Ramnarine 2009: 190). However, according to the Sámi scholar and yoiker Krister Stoor, there is a limit to this in that the reindeer and the wolf, two emblematic animals, are also the most difficult animals to yoik (Stoor 2007: 131); likewise, the yoiker Sara Marielle Gaup Beaska once stated that the *people* one knows best are also the most difficult to yoik (in NRK 2017: episode 1).

Ánte Mihkkal Gaup's account suggests that finding a melodic starting point *ex nihilo* should be avoided: if there is no *dovdna* or existing yoik to develop, the starting point should be inspired by people's personalities or movements – hence the importance of knowing them beforehand. Regardless of the strategy adopted, the starting point must come from the yoik's source, not from the creator. Thus, a common saying among yoikers is that *yoiks are not composed but received*. As the yoiker Biret Ristin Sara once phrased it, they come 'to a head from a place' (in Hilder 2013: 167). The creation of a yoik is not always triggered by a deliberate decision on the part of the yoiker; the yoik may come by itself, as in these lines from a poem by Nils-Aslak Valkeapää:

'the yoik	<i>'luohti</i>
it is not I	<i>dat in leat mun</i>
who creates it	<i>mun in bija dan</i>
nor the words	<i>in bija dajahusaid</i>
they just come	<i>dat fal bohtet</i>
[...]	[...]
the yoik	<i>luohti</i>
the yoiks	<i>luođit</i>
no	<i>ii</i>
I do not know	<i>mun in dieđe</i>

why	<i>manin</i>
where from	<i>gos</i>
they just	<i>dat fal</i>
come'	<i>bohtet'</i>

(Valkeapää 2017 [2001]: 43-46). (Valkeapää 2001: 43-46).

Receiving yoiks may happen in a variety of ways. Johan Andreas Andersen told me that new yoiks tended to come to him in his dreams (conversation 2017). Berit Alette Mienna likewise mentioned that she sometimes receives yoiks just before she wakes up (NRK 2017: episode 3). This moment between sleep and wakefulness, sometimes called *adjágas* in North Sámi, is also mentioned by the anthropologist Britt Kramvig as a ‘tender moment’ where ‘reconnection with the Sámi landscape, ancestors, and spirits can come into being [...]. Stories, images, or a yoik coming from a specific place appear to the person in the moment between sleep and awakening’ (Kramvig 2015: 190, cf. 5<sup>th</sup> variation on dreams). The anthropologist Rossela Ragazzi likewise reported that ‘in this peculiar condition [i.e. *adjágas*], it is said that one can unveil reality and tune into the most profound and original joiks’ (Ragazzi 2012: 3).

European writers from the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries like Nicolai Lundius (b. 1659 – d. 1726) and Isaac Olsen (b. 1680 – d. 1739) noted that yoiks may be received from spirits (Edström 1978: 19, 191, cf. also Gaup 2005: 319). It is notable in this regard that dreams are sometimes described in Sápmi as belonging to a spiritual realm (cf. 5<sup>th</sup> variation). Where yoiks come from is still a mystery today; they seem to surge

unexpectedly from inscrutable depths (cf. 4<sup>th</sup> variation on the ‘obscure life’ of yoiks).

Yoikers tend to receive more yoiks when they are outdoors. This is where Anne Lise Varsi, for instance, receives most of her yoiks. According to her, this is due, on the one hand, to the fact that the yoik originally comes from nature and the sound of the wind; and on the other hand, to the fact that she feels happy in the mountains and therefore wants to yoik (conversation 2017). The yoiker Inga Juuso tells of a similar feeling: ‘On many occasions, while I wander in nature, I come up with new yoiks. And in nature I get more energy to create a new yoik as compared to sitting at home and listening to cars roaring outside’ (in Helander & Kailo 1998: 138). Receiving yoiks while sitting at home is also possible. For example, Mari Helander spontaneously received a yoik for the Sámi goddess Sáráhkka while at home, after she had been longing for that melody:

‘It took some time. I was sitting at home and wondering: “When is this melody going to come?” Other melodies came from time to time, but I thought: “No, this one does not suit Sáráhkka”. Then it finally came. I do not know how it happened, but there is an unconscious process that must take place for the melody to come’ (conversation 2018).

Generally speaking, it appears that, whether in Sápmi or elsewhere, the best way to receive yoiks is to move through the land – by foot, skis, car, boat, or snowmobile (Buljo 1998: 143, Delaporte 1978: 111, Saastamoinen 2007: 18, Wennström 1996: 8). The movements of the wind can also be inspiring. Such was the experience of Øystein Dolmen, a (non-Sámi) Norwegian artist invited to learn the craft of yoiking on the TV show *Muitte mu – Husk meg*,

which suggests that receiving yoiks might be possible for outsiders too (I have never personally experienced it):

‘This yoik I am about to chant; I do not actually know whether I made it myself. It just came soaring in on the breeze one morning, progressively gathered itself in my head, and then I knew that it was a melody, I knew that it was your yoik, Maria’ (NRK 2017: episode 3).

As far as I could assess from my conversations with yoikers, it seems that what is most often received, from the wind or elsewhere, is not the final yoik, but *its melodic starting point*. Even if a promising yoik idea comes to mind, it has to be chanted and improvised upon for a while. As Mari Helander stressed, ‘inspiration lasts an instant, it can be only two seconds. When it comes, you must grab it’ (conversation 2018). Berit Alette Mienna and Johan Andreas Andersen also report that after receiving yoiks in sleep or *adjágas*, they will forget some of them (NRK 2017: episode 3, conversation with Johan Andreas Andersen 2017). Thus, a yoik, even when it is received, is ephemeral and can disappear, like an animal surging from behind the horizon, always likely to recede into its realm of depths (cf. 1<sup>st</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> variations on horizons and depths respectively).

Borrowing an expression from the philosopher Étienne Souriau, the yoik has to be *instaurated*. Instaurating implies *meeting a demand*, namely the demand of inspiration to be given flesh, hosted, attended to, and actualised (Souriau 2009 [1943]). The improvisation of my yoik by Ingor Ántte Áilu Gaup, after he had received melodic starting points from the other participants on the course, can be considered as a gesture of instauration, aimed at hosting a yoik that only exists as a virtuality (Souriau’s ‘*Œuvre à faire*’) into a state of actuality.

In the North Sámi-speaking areas, yoikers do not speak of ‘instauration’; they have their own terminology. Most of the time, they say that they ‘set’ or ‘put’ [ns. *bidjat*, no. *å sette*] a yoik *on someone*.<sup>51</sup> Ánte Mihkkal Gaup mentions the same verb as well as ‘to create’ [ns. *ráhkadit*] and ‘to make’ [ns. *dahkat*] as valid ones. Elle Marja Eira confirmed to me that *bidjat* is the term most commonly used in Inner Finnmark (conversation 2017). It is not a mere translation of ‘instauration’, both terms are complementary. *Bidjat* is helpful in reminding us that a yoik always comes to life *in relation to* someone or something (one sets a yoik *on* someone), that what is yoiked must be kept in mind throughout the process of instauration the melody, that the yoik-creator instauration not just a melody but also the person it evokes. Thus, Anne Lise Varsi explained to me that when she freely improvises yoiks in the mountains, she may suddenly realise that a certain melodic idea could be appropriate for a person that she knows (conversation 2017); *then*, the ‘instauration’, the gesture of ‘setting the yoik on the person’ can take place.

In line with this report, the Sámi musicologist Mikkel Eskil Andre Mikkelsen observed in a Lule Sámi context (Nordland, Norway) a difference between the concepts *juoigos* and *vuolle*. While the former concept may refer to an improvised vocalisation, the latter corresponds to its possible crystallisation into a stable yoik melody attributed to a person. As Geira, one of his informants, explains:

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<sup>51</sup> In the documentary *Firekeepers*, Rossella Ragazzi translates what the yoiker Sara Marielle Gaup Beaska says on the matter as: ‘In Saami, we don’t say “I made a yoik,” you say “I saw a yoik”’ (Ragazzi 2012: 4’50”). This is an interesting notion, but Ragazzi’s translation appears to be incorrect. Sara Marielle Gaup Beaska seems to say ‘I set’ [no. *jeg setter*] a yoik rather than ‘I see’ [no. *jeg ser*] a yoik.

‘*Juoigos* is what naturally comes out of the soul and the heart, for example in the mountains, in the forest, and in everyday life, and if you remember and repeat it again, then it becomes a *vuolle*. *Vuolle* is what follows people. Someone starts to yoik other people and then it becomes their *vuolle*’ (Mikkelsen 2017: 53).

Instauration enables the yoiker to pass from the *juoigos* to the *vuolle*, to give an enduring form to the yoik, to ‘grab’ the passing inspiration and host it in a melody that may be remembered.

However, this gesture does not have to be pursued all the way: some yoikers are satisfied with turning inspiration into an ephemeral improvisation. I observed this during a yoik course taught by Frode Fjellheim. One of the students, Jungle Svonni, was a *noaidi* from the area of Tysfjord / *Divtasvuodna* (Nordland, Norway) who learned to yoik by himself after learning the craft of shamanism for several years in Peru. Along with Fjellheim, a yoiker primarily trained as a classical pianist and composer, they formed a diverging pair of characters who, through their respective crafts, had learned to nurture different aspects of the practice of yoiking. Svonni had a remarkable yoiking technique and an acute skill in improvising melodies inspired by landscapes or images. However, to Fjellheim’s ears (as well as mine), these melodies strongly resembled one another; they were floating and constantly changing, with no clearly identifiable structure. Svonni would usually forget them shortly after chanting them. Fjellheim would systematically encourage him to develop the ‘identity’ of his yoiks – in Lule Sámi terms, he encouraged him to turn his *juoigos* into a *vuolle*.



As a composer who had analysed innumerable yoiks from various regions of Sápmi, Fjellheim was unsurprisingly inclined to favour the creation of yoiks that might fit in a repertoire. In contrast, Svonni was guided by his attention to shamanic crafts and had nurtured a greater interest in how a yoik can capture ‘frequencies’ (as he called them) and enact them in the vocal mode. What mattered to him was not the yoik’s insertion into a repertoire, but its actual connection with an object (yoik course 2018 – 2019); its ‘immediacy’, as the linguist Linda Waugh would perhaps call it, that is, its semiotic redundancy in immediate continuity with its source; a ‘singleness of reference’ short-circuiting the double-articulation of language (in Jakobson 1988: 255-271).

Yet, both Fjellheim and Svonni deployed the same attention to (1) the anchorage of the creation in a source perceived in the environment and (2) the task of hosting it in the voice along a creative gesture. Considering all the observations presented above, it appears that this pattern recurs systematically, underneath a wide variety of strategies of creation, triggered either by a deliberate effort or an unexpected reception.

What remains to be considered is what happens afterwards, namely how a yoik and its source can become enmeshed in a ‘conrescence’ engendering a ‘creature’. This process is approached in the next section through the issue of listening to the yoik as an outsider.

### **Listening as an outsider**

The musicologist Thomas Andreassen wrote in his master’s thesis that those who grow up within a Sámi community are endowed with cultural patterns that enable them to better ‘understand’ yoiks (Andreassen 2017: 67-68). Yet he also notes that distinguishing the bear’s yoik from the puppy’s yoik

presents no form of difficulty to outsiders (ibid.: 55). This apparent paradox lies at the core of the issue approached in this section: whether the yoik's evocative power is accessible to outsiders cannot be reduced to a 'yes or no' answer.<sup>52</sup> An example of this ambiguity is the yoik *The reindeer herd on Oulavuolie* [sw. *Renhjorden på Oulavuolie*], chanted by the retired herder Nils Mattias Andersson in Tärnaby (Västerbotten, Sweden), and recorded by a team sent by Swedish national radio consisting of Matts Arnberg, Håkan Unsgaard, and Israel Ruong; the latter was a Sámi. As Unsgaard noted,

'Musically, many of the yoiks in our collection are more interesting than this, but despite its relatively simple form, Nils Mattias was able to convey the atmosphere of the yoik even to those of us who understood not a word of the language. It was only when we received Israel Ruong's masterly interpretation in Swedish, however, that we realised we had witnessed the birth of a remarkable piece of Lapp poetry' (in Arnberg et al. 1997a: 125).

Nils Mattias Andersson's yoik is a unique accomplishment in poetic improvisation; most yoiks today do not involve such extensive use of

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<sup>52</sup> To my knowledge, this issue has never been systematically approached in an academic text. Two works have explored the 'cross-cultural cognition' of yoiks, respectively, among Finnish music students and Western musicians unfamiliar with the yoik (Krumhansl et al. 2000), and among South African traditional Pedi healers (Eerola 2004). Their observations rely, first and foremost, on melodic expectancy – not on the yoik's semiosis. However, like in this section, both studies conclude that cultural relativism tends to be overemphasised: outsiders are not entirely disoriented while listening to yoiks (cf. McDermott & Hauser 2005 for a general review of cross-cultural semiosis in music; cf. Appendix 1 and further in this section about a 'cross-cultural' experimental of my own).

improvised *dajahus*. In most cases, the *dajahus* is short, subordinate to the melody, improvised, or simply non-existent. The Sámi philologist Harald Gaski has nonetheless emphasised that it can operate as a ‘code’ known only by yoikers who have grown up in the tradition. In a colonial context, playing on the *dajahus* with allusions and double meanings, for instance, could ensure that outsiders would not understand what was being said (Gaski 1999, 2011).

Whether esoteric or not, grasping the *dajahus* at least requires some proficiency in the language involved, which most outsiders do not have. Yet, as noted by Arnberg and his colleagues, the yoik still appears able to convey an ‘atmosphere’ to a degree that can be startling. A few examples can illustrate this. When I first met her, Anne Lise Varsi told me that her daughter once yoiked the tundra to her friends, who were not Sámi and had no knowledge of the yoik. She then asked her friends what she had just been yoiking. One of them immediately answered: ‘I am in the tundra!’ Anne Lise Varsi assured me that her daughter had not said anything before chanting the yoik and that it was only the vocalisation itself that led her daughter’s friends to guess correctly (conversation 2017). I also encountered several cases of non-Sámi people who received a personal yoik and clearly recognised themselves in the melody. For instance, Eman Udaya, a student in indigenous studies, was attributed a yoik by Ingor Ántte Áilu Gaup and wrote: ‘By receiving that yoik I felt like I was embodied in the yoik itself’ (Udaya 2017: 44).

Anne Lise Varsi explicitly illustrated to me how personal yoiks can be imitative, by chanting the yoik of a very confident and energetic person, followed by that of a quiet and introverted person; both were indeed clearly imitative (conversation 2017). During a yoik course at the Riddu Riđđu

Festival, Berit Alette Mienna yoiked a few people and animals and each time asked the participants either to describe the person she was yoiking or to identify the animal (yoik course 2018). They would often guess correctly. Of course, Anne Lise Varsi and Berit Alette Mienna may have chosen these yoiks because they were particularly explicit, yet my experience leads me to think that this form of imitation is common. Interestingly, both Berit Alette Mienna and Anne Lise Varsi noted that the people who are most skilled in identifying an animal from its yoik are not necessarily Sámi adults, but children (cf. Appendix 1).

Ánte Mihkkal Gaup tells another intriguing anecdote, where the same process of recognition happens ‘backwards’. A Sámi herder from Norway once visited another part of Sápmi in Sweden. The places he discovered were entirely new to him. He started to improvise new yoiks until one of the local herders heard him and asked where he had learned ‘the yoiks of his roots’ (Gaup 1995: 89). Engaging with a foreign landscape had engendered autochthonous melodies. If this can occur, it is hardly surprising that the question ‘Who created this yoik?’ is often considered irrelevant by yoikers (e.g. Buljo 1998: 142, Hunsdal 1979: 38, Jernsletten 1978: 111, Wright 2015: 6). As Elin Kåven puts it, ‘If I yoik someone and the yoik is very beautiful, it is not because I am good at creating yoiks, it is because that person is beautiful’ (conversation 2017). To what extent Ánte Mihkkal Gaup’s anecdote is genuine is unimportant here; what matters is that it was found relevant and interesting by the yoikers I told it to, none of whom had heard it before. They did not seem particularly surprised that something like this could have taken place.

Based on these observations, I decided to make an experiment in my home village in Belgium, presented in detail in Appendix 1. A total of

ninety-six participants (children from four to eleven years old and adults) had to listen to animal yoiks and answer the following question: ‘Which animal does the chant make you think of?’ They had two choices, materialised by cards with animal pictures. Six animal yoiks, chanted by Ánte Mihkkal Gaup (1998), were used, with the pairs of animals randomly generated. In line with existant research on musical development, a threshold was observed between seven and eight years old, after which the participants were able to identify the animal correctly above chance level.

It was also found that the participants who were most familiar with the fauna of their own region had better results, whereas familiarity with the six Nordic animals evoked by the yoiks was only weakly correlated with the test results. It may be that a form of *translation* was going on: the listeners did not assess the musical evocation on the basis of the six animals presented on the pictures, but on similar animals living in Belgium (e.g. the red deer instead of the elk or the mallard instead of the long-tailed duck). Despite the overall high success rate in some age groups ( $p < 0.01$ ), some translations were more successful than others. For instance, the long-tailed duck’s yoik, because it imitates the highly peculiar sound of the bird, which was unknown to the participants, was rarely recognised. Thus, some yoiks are more accessible to outsiders than others, but in this case at least, the accessibility seemed more related to ecological conditions favouring or obstructing translation than to the presence or absence of imitation in the melody.

I mentioned earlier the elk as an example of a yoik where I could not clearly point to an explicitly imitative content. This is perhaps another case of unsuccessful ecological translation. The European elk (or American moose) has disappeared from my native region during the Middle Ages and

it remains an exotic animal to most of my fellow countrymen in Belgium, one that is occasionally confused with the reindeer (cf. Appendix 1). When I started my research on the yoik, the sounds, movements, appearances, and behaviours of various animals like the salmon, the mosquito, and the bear were familiar enough for me to relate to their yoiks. In contrast, the elk's yoik seemed arbitrary. Not that the melody sounded particularly inappropriate, as it might have been the case if it had a melody resembling the mosquito's yoik, but I would not have been overly shocked if the yoiks of the elk and the reindeer, for instance, had been inverted.

My perspective started to change when, at some point during my work, I lived in a shared house in a somewhat remote part of Nordmarka, a forest just outside Oslo. There, I often had the opportunity to observe elk roaming around the house. Once, for fun, I opened my window and chanted the elk's yoik to one of them. I wondered: how might it react to its own yoik? In this particular case, the animal looked at me for a while and then slowly walked away (a few other experiences with red deer triggered the same reaction). This is certainly not the most remarkable form of response one can get from animals (cf. 2<sup>nd</sup> variation). However, gathering the experiences of the elk's sensuous presence *and* of its yoik in a single instant created an unexpected alchemy. It suddenly struck me that, yes, perhaps there was indeed an 'elkness' in the yoik, that its creator had subtly captured, something that had hitherto eluded me. Something about the elk's massive size or its oblong head – I had not paid enough attention to this head before. Maybe it was something about how it quietly made its way through the thick layer of snow.

Maybe it was all of these at once: an ineffable intensity, a *frequency* emanating from the animal that I found repeated in the yoik. From then on, the yoik sounded to me like an 'enchantment' of the elk (cf. 2<sup>nd</sup> variation).

I still recall this quiet elk visiting my house from behind the window whenever I hear its melody. Conversely, the yoik still guides my attention whenever I see an elk (How could I not have noticed this head before?). Earlier, this semiotic relation had seemed arbitrary, but now I had a satisfactory explanation: earlier, I did not have a clue about what an elk was.

The personal experience I describe here finds correspondence with the act of creation among Sámi yoikers. As already mentioned, the creation of a yoik normally stems from a high degree of familiarity with what is yoiked: that is, the creation must be anchored in the sensuous experience of the animal, person, or place that is to be yoiked. Mari Helander suggested that someone who spends a lot of time in nature is more likely to ‘sense’ [no. *føle*] yoiks evoking animals or natural areas than someone who does not (conversation 2017); an idea that my own experimental work tends to validate (cf. Appendix 1). Borrowing David Abram’s comments on language, it seems that ‘meaning [...] remains rooted in the sensory life of the body – it cannot be completely cut off from the soil of direct, perceptual experience without withering and dying’ (Abram 1997: 55, my emphasis). That the yoik should guide the perception of animals and shape the way we think of them is an idea I also encountered among yoikers. For instance, Terje Tretnes, a yoiker from Karasjok / *Kárášjohka* (Finnmark, Norway), mentioned that yoiking can serve in the education of children:

‘By listening to the wolf’s yoik, children could hear that this animal may be dangerous. [...] There are several ways of chanting this yoik, such as when the wolf has eaten reindeer and no longer needs to hunt. It is quiet, unlike the starving wolf, who is restless. But both can be

chanted, just like the bear. It is meant for the children, so that they can associate a personality with these animals' (conversation 2017).

In summary, there seems to be a play between, on the one hand, a correspondence between the yoik and the perceived animal, both of which partake in the expression of the same frequency, and on the other hand, a guidance of the yoik in the perception of the animal, an emphasis of a particular dimension of its character – a play of 'difference and repetition' as Gilles Deleuze would perhaps have called it (Deleuze 1968). Theorising this play led me to engage with the work of the anthropologist and semiotician Eduardo Kohn.

### **Creaturely semiosis**

In his book entitled *How Forests Think*, Eduardo Kohn elaborates a biosemiotic anthropology 'beyond the human' nested both in his fieldwork among the Runa of Ecuador and his reading of the philosopher Charles Sanders Peirce's work (Kohn 2013). According to him, contemporary anthropologists tend to understand humans merely through attributes based on symbols. In response, Kohn suggests that symbolic semiosis, while being proper to humans, is nested and emerges from a semiotic web that pertains to a wider, more-than-human ecology. In particular, icons and indices constitute semiotic means in which non-humans also partake.

In Kohn's theory, *icons* stand for something else for an interpretant by virtue of a resemblance. 'Interpretant' does not refer to an individual person, but to the *effect* produced by the sign, in touch with a 'self just coming into life in the flow of time' (Peirce in Kohn 2013: 34). Strictly speaking, icons are based on *absence* rather than resemblance: they imply *not noticing* what



differs between the sign and what it stands for. For example, a phasmid has an iconic relationship with twigs in the eyes of its predators, not because the latter notice a resemblance, but because they do not notice a difference. Iconicity thus ‘marks the beginning and end of thought. [...] with icons thought to be at rest’ (ibid.: 51). *Indices* also rely on an absence in that they predict what is not yet present. Indices focus the attention; *they point to something*. The Sámi philosopher Mikkel Nils Sara reported that in the context of reindeer herding, an ‘explosion-like rumble’ announces a wolf attack (Sara 2009: 168). Here, the rumble is an index: it announces a potential event. As for *symbols*, they rely on absence ‘by virtue of the ways in which [the sign] is embedded in a symbolic system that constitutes the absent context for the meaning of any given word’s utterance. [...] The constant play between presence and these different kinds of absences gives signs their life’ (Kohn 2013: 37).

As Kohn stresses, indices do not stand by themselves. They emerge from assemblages of icons, in the same way as symbols emerge from assemblages of indices, so that all forms of semiosis remain rooted within an iconic soil. This can be illustrated by the anecdote of Ánde Somby and the elk, presented in the 2<sup>nd</sup> variation: Somby was trying to scare away two elk calves and eventually managed to do it by yoiking the bear. The yoik was supposed to reconstitute a ‘bearness’, to make the bear resound within the voice. Focusing too much attention on the *sound* of the yoik would probably be a mistake; the yoik, as suggested in the 4<sup>th</sup> variation, derives its power from the inner depths of the people that it brings to presence, such as the *inner bear*. In my own experience, trying to yoik an animal with intensity implies playing with the tensions and contractions inherent to the melody, and attending to how the yoik stretches, twists and constricts the body (cf.

4<sup>th</sup> variation). I agree with the musicologist Nina Eidsheim, when she argues that musical experience involves more than sound and induces a ‘soundstate’ in the entire organism (Eidsheim 2015: 46). Listening, she notes, offers the opportunity of partaking in this state (ibid.: 179). However, in the yoik, listening only seems to offer a glimpse. In order to feel their evocative power more intensely, it is common to join in the yoiks of others. For example, in the traditional yoik, passive listening rarely occurs, so that during the first modern yoik concerts by Nils-Aslak Valkeapää, the audience would yoik back at him (Diamond 2007: 29). Thus although we may debate to what extent the yoik’s *sound* ‘resembles’ the bear, what primarily matters is that the inner sensation aroused by the bear’s yoik has an iconic relation with real bears of ‘flesh and bone’ – one feels the bear resounding within oneself (cf. 1<sup>st</sup> variation).

What if we take another interpretant, such as the frightened elk? When hearing Ánde Somby’s voice, an important part of the elk’s experience probably lies in the fact that it *indicates* that there is something there, a potential danger.<sup>53</sup> The movements of their ears and heads indicate (another index) that their attention is suddenly focused. Whether they know exactly what it is that Ánde Somby is yoiking or not, the index emerges from a series of icons operating together, namely (1) an iconic association between the powerful sound of Ánde Somby’s voice and other powerful sounds; (2) an iconic association of dangerous events with other dangerous events; and (3) a guess that both must be linked (cf. Kohn 2013: 52 for a corresponding

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<sup>53</sup> This may recall the idea of ‘indexical listening’ presented in the 2<sup>nd</sup> variation, just like enchanted listening might evoke iconic signs and structural listening evoke symbols. However, Stoichiță and Brabec de Mori’s theory significantly differs from Peirce’s and Kohn’s in that it relies on *listening subjects* rather than *interpretants*.

description of indexical emergence in another context). Why the elk were scared by the yoik, but not by people yelling at them earlier, may reveal another semiotic process based on iconism: the condition of the yoiker is then iconically heard as a ‘bearness’. As outlined in the 2<sup>nd</sup> variation, this does not necessarily imply a specific recognition of the voice as stemming from *Ursus arctos*, but the arousal of a sense of danger. For iconism to take place, all the elk have to do is ‘not noticing’ any difference with bears. In short, one could say that the frightened elk probably experience the yoik as an index relying on iconism.

What if the interpretant we chose was Werner Danckert, the musicologist mentioned above (cf. Section ‘Painting with sounds’), as he was analysing patterns of *Tonmalerei* within a collection of yoiks in the 1950s (Danckert 1956)? Danckert might pick one yoik and read beneath its score that this is the reindeer’s yoik. If he wishes so, he can memorise the association and recognise the reindeer when someone yoiks this melody in the future. But this indexical association – the yoik indicates the reindeer – is not what he is after, as he has an entire collection of yoiks to make sense of. He might, therefore, look at another yoik, the bear, and notice that, like the reindeer’s melody, this one uses large interval leaps. Moreover, he could notice that the salmon, the lemming, and the squirrel are yoiked with narrow melodic intervals. He could therefore conclude that large and wild animals are yoiked with large intervals, while small animals are yoiked with small intervals. There are some exceptions: the horse’s yoik, for example, has small intervals that are regularly repeated, which, he suggests, must be because the melody evokes its gallop (ibid.: 293). What Danckert has now highlighted is a heterogeneous semiotic dimension. The correspondence between the size of animals and the melodic ambitus may be understood in

an iconic light. That *this* particular yoik is the bear is indexically informed by the score. But more importantly, Danckert has highlighted the relationships of yoiks with one another as part of a *symbolic* system. Here, the indexical relationship between particular yoiks and the corresponding animals is subordinate to the indexicality of the yoik with other yoiks. The yoik derives its semiotic process from a relationship among melodies as well as a relationship among animals.

Once the symbolic dimension in the yoiks is brought to light through a play of indices, it is easy to lose track of the iconic and indexical associations and to overemphasise the system's symbolism.<sup>54</sup> Yet Danckert did not manage to elaborate an encompassing account of the yoik as a symbolic system beyond a few selected examples. As the ethnomusicologist Richard Jones-Bamman noted, all attempts at building a yoik 'grammar' have, in some way, been unsatisfactory: 'No amount of objective data, apparently, will get us any closer to the "meaning" of the joik and how it is conveyed musically, unless we also focus our attention on the specific "joik milieu" wherein composition and performance occurs' (Jones-Bamman 1993: 139). Indeed, thinking symbolically requires the juxtaposition of a large number of yoiks, preferably written down on paper so that they may be grasped in simultaneity. This does not normally happen among yoikers, as this would require an analytical ambition as well as specific forms of oral memory or the use of written notation. Combining various yoiks into a single vocalisation does not normally occur either. One cannot chant the

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<sup>54</sup> Eduardo Kohn's attention is particularly acute when it comes to the risk of disconnecting symbolism from its roots (cf. for instance his reflection on 'the feeling of radical separation' in Kohn 2013: 42-49).

reindeer's yoik next to the mountain's yoik and expect any form of emergence between both. Chanting both yoiks at once in polyphony is even more unthinkable. Yoiks are chanted one at a time and each one opens a singular perspective of relations and memories (cf. 4<sup>th</sup> variation on chanting one yoik at a time).

Thus, relationships among melodies do not seem to interest most yoikers. What appears to fascinate them more is rather the iconity, the 'not noticing' implied by the yoiker Ursula Länsman when she said that the yoik 'is not about something, it is that something' (Länsman 1999). However, this 'not noticing' is never complete. As has already been mentioned, the yoik also aims at guiding the attention of the yoikers and listeners, and at *indicating* the character of a particular being, like the elk's yoik making me more aware of the elk's movements. Yoiks are thus indexical in that they stem from a situated starting point that they bring forth to attention; they *locally apprehend* the animal, person, or place. Consequently, yoiking the elk does not merely replicate an elkness that was already there, already grown: the indexicality of the yoik also *develops* this elkness. By focusing the attention on particular dimensions of the animal, it shapes the perception and imagination of the elk. It could be said that the yoik *names* the elk, if 'naming' is understood, according to the philosopher Isabelle Stengers, as being an operation 'that bestows what is named the power to make us sense and think on the mode that the name calls for' (Stengers 2013 [2009]: 33).

As already mentioned, 'prehension' is a concept borrowed from the philosopher Alfred North Whitehead. Using another of his favourite terms, it appears that the phenomenal experience of observing and yoiking elk at the same time does not induce a *composition* – i.e. things 'put together' – but rather a *concrecence* – i.e. things growing with one another.

Concrescence defines the ‘production of a novel togetherness’, or in other words the occurrence of ‘novelty’ and of ‘concrete togetherness’ (Whitehead 1978 [1929]: 21). Whitehead’s account of the world as ‘process’ can be approached as a constant movement of concrescence between beings into *actual entities*, or, as he also calls them, ‘creatures’ (ibid.: 22). In the yoik, indexicality is what ensures that a concrescence takes place. By guiding my perception of elk, the yoik engendered a novel being – an *elk-creature*. Yet, now that this creature has grown, I have become more sensitive to the imitative quality of the melody. It appears as if, while enacting indexicality, *the yoik always longed for iconicity*. The difference between the yoik and the elk-as-perceived-earlier remains, but it is subordinate to a likeness between the yoik and the novel elk-creature that it contributes to shaping. In other words, once instaurated in a yoik, the elk becomes a creature and it is *in relation to this creature* that iconicity must then be approached.<sup>55</sup>

That yoiks are created by attending to their sources, and that they are always vocalised while visualising these sources, ensures a lasting correspondence between the hare-creature and the hare of flesh and bone. Thus, outsiders who have some degree of familiarity with hares – or even with rabbits – are likely to hear the movements of the animal in the yoik (cf.

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<sup>55</sup> The anthropologist Alfred Gell describes a similar semiotic pattern in terms of ‘a-posteriori motivated’ iconism. For instance, the French ‘believe’ that the word *fromage* resembles cheese because they are used to associating both (Gell 1979: 59, cf. also Gell 1995). However, this phrasing suggests the idea of a world as made of already constituted entities. Proposing instead that the word *fromage* indexically guides the attention into the phenomenon of cheese, and thus redefines its being, suggests that this is not a matter of belief or illusion, but of novel attunement.

Appendix 1). Yet comparing an animal yoik to what one *a priori* supposes this animal to be, without participating in the chant, is likely to result in a reduction; *one can only experience the yoik's iconicity if one allows the melody to enact its concrescence with the animal*. In reducing bears, reindeer, and horses to their large sizes, Danckert did not notice that we do not know what a bear, a reindeer, or a horse *can* be. He was trapped in an iconic spell of his own making, a systematic 'not-noticing' proper to the practice of musical analysis. Consequently, his attempt at theorising the yoik's *Tonmalerei* could never be complete; he could not approach the feeling that, in the words of Harald Gaski, 'one does not yoik about somebody or something, there is a direct connection; one yoiks something or someone' (Gaski 1999: 5).

In summary, the issue with Danckert's approach is not so much that his attempts at theorising the yoik as a symbolic system are inherently misled, but that in doing so, he missed the opportunity of empowering the yoik with the possibility of making his attention on the world diverge under its guidance.

### **The apostle and the genius**

It has been mentioned previously that the creative breath *ruach* was, in certain theological discourses, the privilege of God. Might we conclude that yoikers are committing heresy by bringing new creatures into the world with their breath? The yoik has indeed conveyed ideas of heathenism, sin, or witchcraft among various people, from seventeenth-century missionaries to contemporary Laestadian Protestants in northern Sápmi, and this conflictual relationship does seem to have something to do with the way yoiks animate the world with renewed life (cf. 6<sup>th</sup> variation). However, it would be

misleading to assume that the yoik's power to call forth creatures belongs solely to the creativity of humans. The yoik also belongs to the air (cf. 4<sup>th</sup> variations), to the *Gufihtar* (cf. 5<sup>th</sup> variation), to the earth and nature, or even, according to some, to Christ (cf. 6<sup>th</sup> variation). The invocation of creatures by yoikers appears to be more aptly understood as a *participation* in the life-giving process of these realms, like breath can be understood as a participation in the wind, rather than its mastery. The Sámi priest Tore Johnsen suggests in this regard that sin consists in seeking mastery over participation: 'We want to be in control. We want to be our own source. Sin occurs when we become our own gods' (Johnsen 2007: 61). I have never met yoikers claiming to master their craft (cf. 2<sup>nd</sup> variation).

Another way of approaching the status of yoik-creators vis-à-vis divine creation is through the distinction sketched by the philosopher Søren Kierkegaard between two creative figures: the *apostle* and the *genius*. The figure of yoiker-creators appears to converge with and diverge from both categories. They are like the apostle in that they are 'not responsible for the content of their message, all [they have] to do is deliver it faithfully' (Kierkegaard 1849: 82). A yoik indeed has no author: the yoik-creator merely causes a person, an animal, or a place to grow. Knowing who created a particular yoik is far less interesting to yoikers than knowing what it evokes. However, yoik-creators are also like the genius in that they are in touch with what Kierkegaard calls 'the innate, the primordially, the originality, the immediacy, the gift of nature' (ibid.: 66). Their teleology is immanent: their creativity is entirely nested in their experience and never calls for a transcendent move. Yoik-creators thus appears as an indeterminate figure with regard to the classical categories of European philosophy and theology. Within some religious milieus, they may be



perceived as sinners for nurturing a love for the perceived environment (cf. 6<sup>th</sup> variation), and yet they are devoted to participating in a creative breath wider than themselves, following the words of Nicholas de Cusa: ‘to create means that God is everything’ (Cusa 1964 [1440]: 324).

Whitehead and Nicholas of Cusa approach the concept of creatures along similar lines. Creatures always constitute expressions of the divine unity insofar as each creature is prehended into God; ‘God’s conceptual nature is unchanged, by reason of its final completeness. But his derivative nature is consequent upon the creative advance of the world’ (Whitehead 1978 [1929]: 488). This finds illustration in occasional instances where the wind, a major source of inspiration for the creation of new yoiks (cf. Section ‘The creation of new yoiks’ and 2<sup>nd</sup> variation), is compared by yoikers to the Holy Spirit. One example is the following *dajahus*, stemming from a modern wind’s yoik, *Biegga luohte*:

‘Now the wind blows  
 It comes with the Holy Spirit  
 A greeting from God  
 To humans  
 In our Sápmi, with blessing’  
 (in Vokal Nord 2012: track 4).

It may be that the craft of yoiking bears the same form of semiotic relationship with the creative breath as specific melodies have with their sources. The craft of yoiking iconically repeats breath through participation, but it also enriches it with a situated pattern, indexically drawing attention to one of its many virtualities (cf. 4<sup>th</sup> variation for further reflections on this issue). Taking some distance from theological discourses, it can be

suggested that a creature is born and lives as a variation of *earthly life*, defined as a medium which itself has no determinate form but, as Nicholas of Cusa stated about God, constitutes ‘the form of all [living] forms’ (ibid.: 328). Of this earthly life, each creature instaurates one possibility, based on a play of indexicality and iconicity.

A similar gesture appears to be enacted in academic works, and in this text in particular. It seeks to achieve an *iconic* relationship with the yoik through which the readers might forget that they are looking at ink on paper (of pixels on a screen) and feel that, by reading, they are engaging with a vocal craft. For the text to operate, they must momentarily ‘not-notice’ its difference vis-à-vis the practice it evokes. The text is also engaged in an iconic relationship with *other* written texts. If it is left on a shelf in a library and remains unopened it is remarkably iconic – no one will notice that it is different from the book standing on its left, on its right, or on any other shelf. However, the text would be entirely uninteresting if it merely replicated the yoik (supposing this is possible) or other books; the purpose of the text is *variation*, not mere replication. It locally prehends both the yoik and the craft of writing and engages these into a condescence engendering a novel creature (‘the craft of yoiking’), extending them along *indexical* patterns of attention. Once this gesture is accomplished, the text can *return to a form of iconicity*, merging in a ‘not-noticing’ with the creature that it has grown.

However, one should not expect a text to ever reach the iconic intensity of a yoik. It would be unexpected (and undesirable) that readers should state something like: ‘This thesis is not *about* the yoik, it *is* the yoik’. Even when stretching towards iconicity, the craft of philosophy remains firmly anchored in indexical and symbolic processes: it has its own semiotic

affordances and constraints. But it is precisely because this craft differs from the craft of yoiking that an interesting creature can emerge. To the best of my knowledge, no one has ever created a ‘yoik of the yoik’, but yoikers do occasionally seek toprehend the craft of yoiking as a whole by hosting it in another medium, for instance *speech*, as they did during our conversations. Displacing the task into the philosophical medium pursues the same ambition: to grow the yoik by attempting to put it into words. The craft of yoiking as a whole is prehendend along a situated gesture.

The creature sketched in these pages is therefore one among countless possible, more or less diverging creatures stemming the yoik. However, if (and only if) it has been attentive enough to the phenomenal presence of this craft, then yoikers unfamiliar with the craft of philosophy (‘outsiders’, as one might call them) might still recognise their own yoik-creatures in these lines, as I recognised my own hare-creature in theirs.



## 4<sup>th</sup> variation: Depth

*Eia lei le le*

*Leio lo le lo lo lo*

*Leia le le le heio o le*

*O lo loo*

- Polmak

Depth, or *čikŋodat* in North Sámi, is defined by the philosopher and magician David Abram as ‘the dimension of closeness and distance. [...] the visceral stretch between the near and far of things – the continuum, or glide, between the known and the unknown. [...] a reality that discloses itself to us only by holding some part of itself in the uncertain distance’ (Abram 2010: 84). In his view, depth should be contrasted to ‘flatness’: the moving plays of presence and absence involved in wandering the depths of a landscape, for instance, contrast with the flat extension of the map. According to Abram, it is through an oblivion of depth, and a fascination for the flatness of written texts and screens, that we fall into the misconception of nature being ‘an objective, determinate phenomenon that can best be studied from outside, not an enveloping mystery in which I am wholly participant’ (Abram 2005b: 470). The anthropologist Tim Ingold expressed a similar view in the following note:

‘It is, paradoxically, in the depths of the woods that the world opens up most fully to our perception, for it forces us to cast aside the illusion, to which people in high places are prone, that the world we inhabit is spread out like a mosaic beneath our feet, with its forms and

patterns already impressed upon the physical substrate of nature’ (Ingold 2013a: 88).

This 4<sup>th</sup> variation stems from the issue of depth, in particular the ‘animal depths’ of human interiority, the modal depths of melodies, the spiritual depths of the air, their interpenetration, and the displaced regimes of depth enacted in the modern yoik. At its core lies the idea, proposed by some yoikers, that humans hold an entire community of animals, people, and places within themselves; in other words, that the ‘inner folds’ of humans correspond with the ‘outer folds’ of the land. While the yoik can allow navigation between these inner presences, this variation enacts its own mode of navigation by repeatedly resorting to philosophical references and dialogues, showing how the philosophical medium itself establishes a field of depth through the dialogues it affords.

### **Animal depths**

In an aforementioned quotation, the yoiker Johan Sara Jr. noted that ‘the yoik starts in the stomach, it starts inside us, at a deep level’ (Sara 2002: 20, cf. 1<sup>st</sup> variation). This deep realm within humans is considered by some yoikers to be a space concealing many presences that are not necessarily perceived at all times. This is what the yoiker Ánde Somby suggested when I asked him what exactly he was yoiking when he yoiked the wolf: was it a particular wolf living in the mountain, the species *Canis lupus*, or something else?

‘Well, you can refer to wolves in nature and you can refer to wolves in traditions. But the traditional Sámi religion comes in as well, the shamanistic religion, because in the shamanistic religion, the idea of

transformation was very important, that a person could transform into an animal. For example, a shaman, who was on mission solving problems and, for example, for the need of transportation, then the shaman had to be able to transform into a fish so that he could cross a lake or cross a river that was too big to cross. Or that he could transform into a bird in order to go over long distances. So that means that there are also referential animals inside us. So, I would almost say yes to all your alternatives, that yes, this wolf yoik refers to wolves. It refers to some existential things with a wolf. And it refers to the wolves that live inside me and it refers to the wolves that live inside other people, for example, you. And then, it becomes a bridge of subtlety and mystic energy between these alternatives that the yoik refers to, to actual physical wolves that are actually situated in the nature. [...] What we share in the commonality. And then, this deep existential memory that, I think, all humans share in some respect that. We have an animal heritage that is deeply embedded into our genes, in any respect of the term “gene”. So, yes, yes, and yes. [Laughs]. [...] There is a wolf in me, and a raven, and a bear, and a lot of other animals’ (conversation 2015).

There are at least five noteworthy ideas in this quotation: (1) a person is inhabited by a community of animals; (2) this is true not only for yoikers, but for all humans (Ánde Somby suggests that I too have an inner wolf, despite the fact that I had never tried to yoik at the time of this conversation); (3) these inner presences are related to the craft of shamanism; (4) they stem from a shared memory between humans and non-humans imprinted onto the body; and (5) the animals inside us and the animals ‘out there’ are

bridged by the yoik. Later, similar ideas were expressed to me by the yoiker and throat-singer Torgeir Vassvik:

‘This has become a cliché, but it is true that you sing about something, but you also yoik something. When you yoik, you do not yoik “about”. You are what you yoik. So, if it is a wolf for instance, you make contact with your inner wolf. You have an inner image of what is a wolf, of what the wolf is, in itself, as a being. And you have a feeling that, since you are thinking about the wolf, it means something special, something different from a mouse or a cat. So perhaps the best way to say this is that we contact it, and then you can turn to other things happening around you. You try to be there, in the situation, and to take it as a point of departure. This is the difference between singing about something and doing this physically. [...] The wolf is a power [no. *en kraft*] that is good to take forward, good to show off, it is a strength, it gives strength. We can connect to it and develop it in various directions, right? It can be a wolf yoiked against the current government, for instance’<sup>56</sup> (conversation 2016).

Thus, according to Torgeir Vassvik, the presence of inner animals lies at the core of one of the most widely shared ideas among yoikers: one never yoiks *about* something. He further stresses that getting in touch with an inner animal opens a new perspective, a new world to explore along its various affordances (cf. Section ‘Appetition’).

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<sup>56</sup> Our conversation took place at a time when the Norwegian government had just proposed the culling of a significant number of wolves.



Although inner animals are the most oft-mentioned inner presences, there appear to be all sorts of human and non-human presences dwelling inside a person. The yoiker Mari Boine, for instance, explains in the documentary *Joikefeber* (Lundby 2014) that the yoik's sound must come from within, pointing to her stomach.<sup>57</sup> She then explains:

‘When I started to sing, I was afraid of nature, in a way. But as a child, I had been often been there [in nature]. So, it was inside me. So, I used to travel inwards, inside myself. Inside ourselves, we have a mirror image of everything there is in nature. So, you can also travel inside yourself and meet nature there. It is really exciting’ (Mari Boine in Lundby 2014: 48’).

Mari Boine often discusses the inner world of humans in her interviews. This world may correspond with the North Sámi concept *lihkahus*, or *rørelse* in Norwegian, described as a form of ‘Arctic hysteria’ by some ethnologists (Mériot 1980: 281). In Sápmi, it seems to be more readily described as a ‘religious ecstasy’, during which believers would ‘clap their hands, jump, and thank the Almighty. In a way, they are overtaken by the spirit. It was common to attain such a state in most of the Laestadian meetings until the 1970s and 1980s’ (Henriksen 2014: 156). According to the Sámi linguist and politician Ole Henrik Magga, *lihkahus* was also a way of publicly obtaining a pardon through pity, crying and ecstatic movements (Magga 2008). Mari Boine herself stated that ‘*rørelsen* lies at the heart of

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<sup>57</sup> This idea of vocalising ‘from the stomach’ can be taken literally. The yoiker and poet Nils-Aslak Valkeapää once stated that when Mari Boine yoiks, it sounds as if she is about to throw up (Tonstad 2012: 251).

everything [she has]. Ecstasy, psalms and the forbidden yoik’ (in Thomassen 2010: 70). The author of her biography, Per Lars Tonstad, further explains that ‘it is this feeling from her childhood that she seeks in her concerts. A kind of extra-physical experience, an atmosphere where the listeners open the doors to their innermost selves, are receptive to spirits, and travel’ (Tonstad 2012: 109). Going back to the literal sense of the term *rørelse*, one could say that the listener is ‘moved’ from within.

The idea of an inner world was famously put into a poem by Nils-Aslak Valkeapää: ‘My home is in my heart; it migrates with me’ (Valkeapää 1994 [1985]) / ‘*Mu ruoktu lea mu váimmus; ja dat johtá mu mielde*’ (Valkeapää 1985). As noted by the Sámi philologist Harald Gaski:

‘In this fairly long poem Valkeapää expresses the views of a nature-based culture when it comes to the question of ownership of land and water, the clashing of totally different notions of closeness to the places a person moves in, and most of all the feeling of inadequacy and impossibility in reaching across with an explanation as to *why the whole surrounding* – including landscapes, people, weather, the bushes, the lakes – *why it all is a part of a person, an inseparable part of that person’s whole identity*’ (Gaski 2011: 44, my emphasis).

The *noaidi*, poet, and yoiker Ailo Gaup has explored this idea explicitly and at length in his work, particularly in his book *Inn i naturen* [‘Inside nature’] (Gaup 2007). According to him, ‘we are natural phenomena. We do not need to go out in nature, because we are nature. We exist in a context, as a relation between wind and waves, roots, and the earth’ (ibid.: 13). He also emphasises the continuity between the outer processes of nature and the inner processes of thought when he states that, ‘what moves one sensation

to the next, one thought to the other, may well be the same craft [no. *kraften*] that moves the clouds in the sky and the stars on their paths' (ibid.: 14). Ailo Gaup also shares with Ánde Somby the idea that 'we are born with an animal legacy' present in our 'genes': animal powers are part of 'our temper' (ibid.: 15). The animal legacy thus constitutes an 'echo' of the possibilities of our inner selves (ibid.: 16, cf. 5<sup>th</sup> variation on echoes).

The 'inner wolfpack', for instance, 'can mirror how someone can develop oneself [no. *arte seg*] in adult life: leading wolf... bloody wolf... grey wolf... lone wolf... injured wolf... which of these are you in your adult life, your working life, your family life?' (ibid.: 41). Note here the use of the Norwegian verb *å arte seg* ['to develop oneself'], symptomatically related to *art* ['species'], to the Latin *ars* ['art, craft'], and to the Middle High German root *art* ['descent, ancestry, inherited nature'] (Falk & Torp 1991: 25, Walshe 1951: 10). Ailo Gaup could not have chosen a more appropriate expression as it inherently denotes the craft of growing through the enactment of a living species or the invocation of an inherited nature. In Ailo Gaup's words:

'We all come into the world like bags of seeds. So, our job is to find out more about these seeds and to water those we want to grow. [...] Everything there is in a human, the whole legacy, all the skills strive to express themselves and to grow more' (Gaup 2007: 85).

The yoik appears as one of the ways through which these seeds can be encouraged to grow. 'When you yoik your power-animals, they start to dance. If you yoik them for a long time and yoik them powerfully, then they start to grow' (Gaup 2005: 320). Thus 'developing oneself' amounts to 'an extension of the repertoire' (Gaup 2007: 17) – it is up to each person to yoik

the wolf or the raven and make it part of one's repertoire, or temper. The animals living inside humans then appear as so many 'strings to play' (ibid.); as presences awaiting *creation*, one could say, if 'creating' is understood as 'causing something to grow' (cf. 3<sup>rd</sup> variation).

As mentioned in the 1<sup>st</sup> variation, Ailo Gaup emphasises that one must not get lost in one's engagement with inner animals, i.e. one must not become a victim of 'the animal's call' (cf. 1<sup>st</sup> variation). By exploring one's animal legacy, one rather seeks to become 'whole' and to develop one's 'humanity' (Gaup 2007: 10). Thus, yoiking the wolf can make a person better prepared to face certain situations in a human life where a wolf-like temperament may be needed. Ailo Gaup has several recommendations as to which animals should be nurtured. In particular, he advises his readers to have at least one animal per sense: for instance, a bear for the sense of smell, a wolf for taste, a reindeer for hearing, and a bird for sight. In so doing, we acquire 'a beating heart, sharp senses, flying thoughts, many attributes and temperaments' (ibid.: 44). In this perspective, yoiking is a way of developing one's personality and bodily aptitudes by growing the non-human within the human.<sup>58</sup>

Ailo Gaup's texts converge here with an argument made by the philosopher and animal tracker Baptiste Morizot, on what he calls the 'animal ancestralities' of humans. While tracking a snow leopard in a nature reserve in Kyrgyzstan, Morizot suddenly realised that the patience he is

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<sup>58</sup> This is in line with what the Sámi ethnologist Elina Helander-Renvall observes about Sámi society at large: 'The personhood of different beings is an unclear notion and the human self has many dimensions from a Sami interpretation because a human person can simultaneously belong both to human and non-human dimensions' (Helander-Renvall 2010: 53).

enacting in his quest belongs to the leopard itself: ‘it is with the leopard’s patience that one tracks the leopard’ (Morizot 2018: 101). He describes this ability as a ‘gift from eco-evolution’: ‘The leopard’s patience, as a behavioural aptitude, may be part of these cognitive and emotional matrices that we share with some living beings, those with which we have shared similar ecological living conditions during a long period of our evolution’ (ibid.: 102).<sup>59</sup>

The leopard’s patience in this regard is not unique – ‘We have a thousand animal ancestralities roaring within us, sedimented, stemming from a distant past, but they do not all express themselves in the same conditions’ (ibid.: 105). Like Ailo Gaup’s various ‘inner wolfpacks’, the various ‘patiences’ we carry within us include the baboon’s patience that we enact when we remain serene in front of an annoying person, or the wolf’s patience, that we enact by keeping calm when taking care of agitated children (ibid.: 104). Thus, the specificity of humans, Morizot notes, is perhaps not that they have no instinct, but that, as frugivorous animals who became predators, they have acquired *too many* instincts, constantly recomposing themselves into novel combinations (ibid.: 107-108).

Taking the yoik seriously appears to lead in a similar direction; this is one of the many convergences with philosophy that will be highlighted in

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<sup>59</sup> It has been mentioned in the 1<sup>st</sup> variation that the propensity of yoikers to yoik the wolf was surprising, considering the negative reputation it has acquired among herders. One explanation for this mystery perhaps lies with the fact that humans and wolves have a particularly intimate history of companionship and co-evolution (cf. Schleidt & Shalter 2003 on the co-evolution of humans with canids in relation to reindeer). Consequently, wolves could perhaps be particularly powerful presences within what Ánde Somby calls our ‘animal heritage’.

this variation. Hence the expression used here: *animal depths*, referring both to the animal presences within humans and to the fact that these presences stem from humans being animals engaged in eco-evolution.

## **Modal depths**

It is perhaps to be expected that thinkers who engage closely with similar animals (e.g. wolves and bears) through their respective crafts – yoiking, shamaning, animal tracking – might encounter converging ideas. However, the possibilities for fruitful philosophical dialogues with the yoik can be found elsewhere, notably in the work of Plato. Two dialogues in particular will be discussed in this section: *Meno* and the *Republic*. Both of these texts were composed in the early 4<sup>th</sup> century BC. Along with *Theaetetus*, *Meno* constitutes one of the main contributions that Plato made to epistemology. In this dialogue, the leading protagonist, Socrates, explains to his host, Meno, that learning always amounts to *recollecting*:

‘Thus the soul, since it is immortal and has been born many times, and has seen all things both here and in the other world, has learned everything that is. So we need not be surprised if it can recall the knowledge of virtue or anything else which, as we see, it once possessed. All nature is akin, and the soul has learned everything, so that when a man has recalled a single piece of knowledge – learned it, in ordinary language – there is no reason why he should not find out all the rest, if he keeps a stout heart and does not grow weary of the search, for seeking and learning are in fact nothing but recollection’ (Plato 1989b [Fourth century BC]\*: 364).

He illustrates this by ‘extracting’ knowledge from one of Meno’s slaves. When asked about how large a square with twice the area of another square must be, the slave first expresses his ignorance. Socrates then asks the slave a series of simple questions, which he is able to answer correctly, thereby guiding him towards the correct answer, namely that the square must have the same length as the original square’s diagonal.

According to Socrates, the slave had the knowledge within himself, but it needed to be pointed out to him in order for it to be awakened. This ‘spontaneous recovery of knowledge’, as he calls it, constitutes a ‘recollection’ insofar as ‘if [the slave] did not acquire the knowledge in this life, then he must have had and learned it at some other time’ (ibid.: 370-371), i.e. before he was born. As mentioned in Ailo Gaup’s account, to develop oneself amounts to invoking an inherited nature. Generally speaking, the yoik is often considered by its practitioners to be a ‘primordial’ craft – i.e. as an ancestral type of vocal practice that resonates with something original in all humans (cf. 6<sup>th</sup> variation on the primordial quality of the yoik). The yoik, in this perspective, appears more as something recovered or reclaimed, something that resurges from a legacy that precedes the life of contemporary humans than as a cultural object invented by humans in their lifetime. Indeed, in the yoik courses I participated in, the teachers frequently emphasised that we had to find our own ‘yoiking voice’; learning how to yoik meant pulling the yoik from within us (cf. Section ‘Breathed depths’).

In the *Republic*, we again find Socrates discussing the form of an ideal city-state. Particular attention, he contends, should be given to the education of the younger citizens, which should start with music – with the aim of educating the soul – and gymnastics – with the aim of educating the body –

keeping in mind that a good soul also improves the body. The importance of music derives from an association between musical modes and the virtues they awaken in those who play or listen to them – an association commonly referred to as the ‘*ethos doctrine*’. As Socrates explains:

‘Education in music is most sovereign, because more than anything else rhythm and harmony find their way to the inmost soul and take strongest hold upon it, bringing with them and imparting grace, if one is rightly trained’ (Plato 1989c [Fourth century BC]\*: 646 [Book III]).

Socrates further stresses that some musical modes must be favoured over others in the education of warriors, namely harmonies that enhance bravery, endurance, and temperateness, rather than softness and sloth (ibid.: 643-644 [Book III]). Temperateness is also developed by keeping the music ‘simple’ and prohibiting any form of musical innovation (ibid.: 665-666 [Book III]).<sup>60</sup>

As in the craft of yoiking, various forms of musical expression arouse and strengthen different qualities in humans; the raven’s, the mosquito’s, or the Tana River’s yoik could be understood as so many *modes* rather than individual melodies. Plato’s recommendation of keeping the music ‘simple’ likewise recalls an implicit rule among yoikers, according to which one should avoid yoiking ‘too beautifully’ or favouring the exhibition of vocal skills over the evocation of the yoik’s source. As Per Hætta put it, a ‘good yoiker’ is not necessarily someone who yoiks beautifully, but someone who can ‘portray a person entirely with tones’ (in Jernsletten 1978: 114, cf. 3<sup>rd</sup>

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<sup>60</sup> Augustine of Hippo would later argue along similar lines, insisting on the role of education for developing ‘divine seeds’ (cf. Jeserich 2013 [2008]: 88), in echo with Ailo Gaup’s animal ‘seeds’.



variation for full quotation). However, if this constitutes a rule in Sápmi, it is a rather flexible one: yoiking is sometimes used within competitions, either official ones, like the Sámi Grand Prix in Kautokeino / *Guovdageaidnu* (Finnmark, Norway), or informal ones where a few yoikers (generally male) respond to one another, as in rap battling. Yoikers nonetheless tend to promote a certain degree of simplicity and humility in the traditional practice, hence the prohibition of yoiking oneself. Simplicity is also enacted in the yoik by the fact that each melody stems from a *singular* source: *one* person, *one* animal, or *one* place.<sup>61</sup>

There are two crucial differences to highlight between the yoik's practice and Plato's propositions. Firstly, if one considers yoiks to be 'vocal modes', it appears that there is virtually an infinite number of them. Each person, each animal, each place carries the virtuality of becoming one or several new modes (cf. 3<sup>rd</sup> variation). Thus, in contrast to Ancient Greek music, the yoik's modality appears to contain inscrutable depths in the possibilities of its development. Secondly, these depths are not merely human qualities (e.g. courage, temperateness) or feelings (e.g. joy, pain). They correspond with presences 'out there' in the world.

In Plato's philosophy, virtues are in touch with the intangible world of Ideas, itself irrigated by 'the Good', which constitutes the ultimate horizon of the philosopher. His disregard for the imitation of the sensuous world knew at least two notable developments along the history of European classical music: music would tend to arouse *human passions* or create a contact with a

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<sup>61</sup> As will be shown later (cf. Section 'Appetition'), yoiks cannot be combined in the traditional practice. In Plato's views, the combination of musical modes was a sign of depravity, as he made clear in another dialogue, the *Laws* (Plato 1989a [Fourth century BC]\*: 1294-1295 [700a-701b]).

*supersensible* dimension. René Descartes, for example, stated that the purpose of music was to entertain the spirit and stimulate passions in the soul (Descartes 1656 [1618]: 33); one century later, Johann Jakob Engel's theory of 'musical painting' [ge. *musikalische Malerey*] explicitly encouraged composers to restrain from 'painting' the outer world and to focus on turning the *impressions of the soul* into music (Engel 1780: 12). On the other hand, Renaissance humanists tended to posit music as a nodal point between the sensible and the intelligible (Tomlinson 1993), whereas Arthur Schopenhauer, for example, would define music as 'completely independent from the phenomenal world' and an immediate 'copy' of the *Wille*, a realm inaccessible to the senses and reached through philosophical or artistic devotion (Schopenhauer 1972 [1819]: 304 [Book 3, §52], cf. also Tomlinson 1999). Despite their significant divergences, these few examples point to a detachment between the presences aroused by music and the sensuous terrain. Meanwhile, in Ailo Gaup's text, one finds that the craft animating the inner life of humans is the same as the one moving the clouds, and that the wolf's mode is an opening towards the phenomenal wolves living in the mountains and forests. It is as if the yoik's modes were so many 'wormholes' in touch with the 'outer' terrain, approached along the melody's circle – although not necessarily all the way to the other side (cf. 1<sup>st</sup> variation).

Another converging figure from European philosophy already appears: Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz, according to whom 'each portion of matter may be considered as a garden full of plants, and as a lake full of fish. But each bough in the plant, each part of the animal, each drop of its moods, is also such a garden, such a lake' (Leibniz 1974 [1714]: 58 [§67]). In other words, each substance (or 'creature', cf. 3<sup>rd</sup> variation) expresses all the others as a 'living and perpetual mirror of all the universe' (ibid.: 55 [§56]). The

relevance of Leibniz's metaphysics is explored later (cf. Section 'Appetition'). The question to be addressed for now is how the 'inner landscapes' can be in touch with the 'outer landscapes', i.e., how Nils-Aslak Valkeapää's 'feeling of inadequacy and impossibility' appears. This, as the next sections suggest, seems to be a matter of interpenetration between two realms, one that occurs on a particular *locus*: breath.

## Spiritual depths

Where do melodies dwell when they are not being vocalised? The question might seem completely irrelevant; yet, the yoiks do seem to circulate in a realm of their own, as an ecology of beings akin to spirits and having their own will.

The very term *spiritus* refers both to 'spirit' and 'breath'. In the philosophy of the Renaissance humanist Marsilio Ficino, songs are described as animals or 'demons' made of air in motion. This aerial nature makes them capable of moving the *spiritus* of humans, another aerial substance acting as an intermediate between the body and the soul (Tomlinson 1993: 110-112, 125). In Norwegian, an exhalation can be called *åndedrag*, literally a 'spiritual pulling'. The philologist and mythologist Eldar Heide mentions the use of *heagga* in North Sámi and *hiegke* in South Sámi as referring to both 'wind' and 'soul' (Heide 2007: 86). The priest Hans Skanke (b. 1679 – d. 1739) thus noted in the eighteenth century that among the Sámi, 'soul/spirit [da. *Aande*] is a motion of the air [da. *luft-rør*] going in and out of their lungs' (Skanke 1945 [1730]: 214). He also reported that 'the old *noaidi*' consider the air as a being related to God [da. *Guddoms væsen*] (ibid.: 188). The Sámi priest Tore Johnsen noticed the same root in the North Sámi words *vuogŋa* ['spirit'], *vuogŋat / vuogŋjahat* ['to breathe'],

*vuoijnastit* / *vuoijnastus* [‘to calm down, to relax’], and *vuoigna* [‘brain’], suggesting that the latter term may indicate an old idea that ‘thought is filled with spirits’ (Johnsen 2007: 55-56).

As these recurring lexical affinities suggest, the idea of souls/spirits belonging to the aerial medium is remarkably widespread among humans (Abram 1997, McNeley 1981, Merkur 1983, Parkin 2007, Petersen 1996). In a treatise entitled *On the soul*, Aristotle reported it as a conception held by pre-Socratic philosophers. Reviewing their stance, he wrote: ‘why does the soul not produce an animal, when present in air or fire [...]? [...] To speak of fire or air as an animal is very irrational’ (Aristotle 1907 [Fourth century BC]\*: 43 [Chapter 5]). Aristotle is here at odds with Ficino in doubting the possibility of aerial souls – although, strictly speaking, Ficino writes about ‘spirits’ in the air and clearly distinguishes them from ‘souls’. He might have thought otherwise, had he been aware of the craft of yoiking, which had perhaps already been resounding for millennia in Sápmi when he was alive (cf. 6<sup>th</sup> variation). One of the clearest teachings of the yoik, as shown in earlier variations, is indeed that animals *can* and *do* exist in the air. As the yoiker Ursula Länsman puts it, ‘[the yoik] is not about something, it is that something’ (Länsman 1999); for the time of a vocalisation, the animal is made present in the air.

Thus, one might wonder: Can we think about the bear’s yoik as some sort of spiritual dimension of the bear? Can we think of a person’s yoik as some sort of *soul* of that person? When people are yoiking a particular river, are they hosting its soul in their breath?

That would at least explain why yoiks tend to come to humans during sleep and *adjágas* – i.e. a state between wakefulness and sleep – as these are readily understood as journeys to the spiritual world (cf. 5<sup>th</sup> variation).

It would also shed some light on the tendency of yoiks to wander and surge into the awareness of humans in unexpected ways. In this regard, the ethnomusicologist Thomas Hilder reported the following:

‘I enquired deeper into the process of *yoik* inspiration, composition, and intersubjectivity when speaking with the *yoiker* Biret Ristin Sara (p.i., 20/11/2008, Karasjok). She explained that the *yoik* “comes into the head from a place,” it “can happen whenever,” and for her this is a “spiritual” process. *Yoik* “finds an owner through the head” and the *yoik* decides on this itself, Sara continued. In this way “*yoik* lives its own life,” will be performed more often than the *yoiked* person is aware, and “the people who are *yoiked* cannot control it”. Thus, a *yoik* lives “by the side of that who owns the *yoik*,” like a “shadow that doesn’t quite follow you” (Hilder 2013: 167).

Nanni Mari Westerfjell, a *yoiker* from Trøndelag (Norway, southern Sápmi), likewise explains that ‘there are yoiks you can initiate and those who take you. Therefore you can’t refuse to yoik, you must do it when it takes you’ (in Ragazzi 2012: 12). I encountered similar ideas in my own conversations, for example with the *yoiker* Anne Lise Varsi:

*Varsi*: ‘When I think about my daughter, who is so far away in the South, then the yoik comes, regardless whether I want to yoik or not, it comes. And then I think about her.’

*Aubinet*: ‘And when the melody comes, do you really have to yoik it? Can you not ignore it?’

*Varsi*: ‘No, I have to yoik it, or at least to hum [no. *nynne*] it’ (conversation 2017).

This form of enchantment (the yoik literally ‘chants itself in’ the yoiker, cf. 2<sup>nd</sup> variation) gives substance to a proposition by the ethnomusicologist Merlyn Driver, who stated that, ‘like a great whale of the ocean, a [yoik] melody lives primarily hidden – only returning to the surface in order to continue its life below’ (Driver 2012: 12). In an American context, the ethnomusicologists Bernd Brabec de Mori and Anthony Seeger speak of the ‘occult life’ of songs:

‘A song, however, or any sonic manifestation, may be considered a “thing” that has an “occult life” in the Amerindian context, enacting agency and maybe even intentionality in certain conditions or situations. Singers of magical songs among the Peruvian Shipibo, for example, may “summon the songs” for ritual use, and the songs may “come” and pass through the singer’s mouth, or may refuse to do so, thus causing the ritual to fail’ (Brabec de Mori & Seeger 2013: 278).

The ethnomusicologist Ola Graff, commenting on the idea that the yoik is ‘endless’ due to its circularity, notes, perhaps too quickly, that ‘taken literally, this is of course wrong’ (Graff 2018: 72) insofar as all vocalisations eventually come to an end (cf. *n*<sup>th</sup> variation). However, the end of the vocalisation in human breath does not necessarily amount to the end of the yoik – its ‘occult life’ may go on. In this sense, yoiking seems to amount to a participation within an ecology of yoiks and to an act of *hospitality*. Not just any sort of hospitality though. By yoiking spirit-chants, yoikers appear

to enact what, according to the ethologist and philosopher Vinciane Despret, we could call *an animal form of hospitality*:

‘[Among animals], practices of hospitality repeat themselves; better, *they find their sense in repetition and from repetition*. [...] we humans can draw, translate, enact hospitality in *space* – a place, a door, a room, a sofa [...]. Among humans, significations are stabilised by institutions – considering that a closed space is already an institution, that of property. [...] On the contrary, among animals nothing has a stable signification [...], it is rather time that affords hospitality [...] [Animal] gestures of hospitality take their signification in time: they are repetitive because they must be continuously renewed’ (Despret 2010: 21).

As suggested later, it is precisely in their departure from this ‘animality’ in the mode of hospitality they achieve that modern yoiks diverge from traditional yoikers (cf. Section ‘Modern depths’).

## **Breathed depths**

That the ‘ecology of yoiks’ is in touch with the animals, people, and places perceived in the environment was suggested in the 3<sup>rd</sup> variation: the yoik extends their beings by reproducing their character in an iconic way, while growing them by attuning attention in an indexical way. The yoik and the animal of ‘flesh and bone’ then become two instantiations of the same ‘creature’. How the aerial ecology of yoiks corresponds with the ‘inner ecology’ of humans, however, needs to be explained further.

To my knowledge, there is no ready-made and articulate discourse on this matter to be collected among yoikers. Most of the insights that I can share are based on my own experiences of participating in courses and trying to learn from skilful yoikers. As our teachers never used any form of written musical score, our first challenge was to memorise the melodies. In as much as most melodies were difficult to learn for an ‘outsider’ (cf. 3<sup>rd</sup> variation) like myself, to simply be content with listening to the teacher and passively learning the melody by heart seemed an ineffective way of learning. During the courses, we would join in the yoiks and attempt to follow our teacher’s voice, making many errors at first, as if we were walking a sinuous path with our eyes blindfolded. We used to stumble, to walk astray, to find the path again, to miss a curve, to take inappropriate shortcuts. Sometimes, we would gain confidence in our pace, only to find that once our teacher was no longer leading us, we had no idea about where to go; we were wandering the terrain of our voices along completely unknown tracks. As expressed by the ethnomusicologist Theodore Levin in the context of Tuvan chants, ‘learning begins not from physical techniques, but from aural models; not from memorization of fixed sequences of sounds, but *from a process of sonic self-exploration*’ (Levin 2006: 62, my emphasis). In the context of apprenticeship, this again recalls the Socrates-slave pattern.

After a while, the general outline of the melodic path became familiar enough for us to follow it on our own. However, we were yet to explore the subtle inflexions of its curves, the textures of its lines, and the many affordances for variation that it provides along the journey. Just as we do not walk on sand as we do on rocks or grass, different yoik melodies also required different sorts of vocal qualities, melodic leaps, or syllables.



Meanwhile, I realised that the path always concealed hidden depths. For instance, it was only after countless repetitions of a yoik by Ingor Ántte Áilu Gaup that I noticed that the musical scale he used was not at all equally tempered (yoik course 2017). Until then, I had been following a trajectory more or less parallel to the path, one that felt more comfortable to my musical acquaintances as an outsider; an error familiar to ethnolinguists and referred to by Franz Boas as ‘alternating apperception’ (Boas 1889: 53). Noticing the presence of microtones brought me back on track – or at least closer to it.<sup>62</sup>

As the vocalisation progressively improved, the yoik became ‘ours’. Eventually we could chant it without even thinking about it, as if our voices knew the way and no longer needed our attentive minds to complete the task; a common sensation in all forms of apprenticeship, as the philosopher and psychologist William James reported:

‘When we are learning to walk, to ride, to swim, skate, fence, write, play, or sing, we interrupt ourselves at every step by unnecessary movements and false notes. When we are proficient, on the contrary, the results not only follow with the very minimum of muscular action requisite to bring them forth, they also follow from a single instantaneous “cue.” The marksman sees the bird, and, before he knows it, he has aimed and shot. A gleam in his adversary’s eye, a momentary pressure from his rapier, and the fencer finds that he has instantly made the right parry and return. A glance at the musical

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<sup>62</sup> This, again, recalls the semiosis described in the 3<sup>rd</sup> variation: iconism made me ‘not-notice’ the difference between my scales and his; once it was indexically pointed to my attention, the melody transformed itself in my awareness and I could seek to retrieve iconism.

hieroglyphics, and the pianist's fingers have ripped through a cataract of notes. And not only is it the right thing at the right time that we thus involuntarily do, but the wrong thing also, if it be an habitual thing' (James 1981 [1890]: 119).

Yoiks thus induce many *habits* in the chanting body. However, what took hold of our behaviours during the yoik courses, the patterns we hosted in our bodies, were not merely practical skills like walking, riding, or swimming. Insofar as the yoik stems from the animal, person, or place that engenders it, it is *this source* that came to grow inside of us. This reminds the philosopher Gaston Bachelard's concept of paths and house:

'What a beautiful, dynamic object is a path! How precisely the familiar paths of the hill remain in the muscular awareness! A poet evokes this dynamism in a single verse: "O my paths and their cadence" [...]. When I relive dynamically the path that "climbed" the hill, I am quite certain that the path itself had muscles, counter-muscles. [...] As I write these pages, I feel liberated from my duty of walking: I am sure of having gone out of my house. [...] But beyond memories, the house we were born in is physically inscribed in us. It is a group of organic habits. After twenty years, despite all the anonymous stairways, we would retrieve the reflexes of the "first stairway", we would not stumble on that rather high step. The house's entire being would unfold, true to our own being. We would push the creaking door with the same gesture, we would venture in the dark towards the distant attic. The tiniest latch has remained in our hands' (Bachelard 1961 [1957]: 29-32).

Bachelard uses the concept of ‘inscription’ as if the house ‘wrote itself into’ our physical self. In reference to the 2<sup>nd</sup> variation, this could also have been termed ‘enchantment’, as a gesture through which the melody ‘chants itself into’ the yoiker. Borrowing Maurice Merleau-Ponty’s words, ‘the melody sings itself in us much more than we sing it’ (Merleau-Ponty 1995: 228). Through inscription, the yoikers’ inner being is reconfigured, their ‘muscular awareness’ inflected, and their affects multiplied by an ecology of actors chanting themselves into humans.

Once again, the wolf’s yoik seems an appropriate example for conveying my meaning: its melodic outline is so configured that it would be difficult to chant it in a relaxed way. In my experience, it carries a sense of agitation that pertains to the yoiker’s entire body. If I try to chant it, the muscles of my arms become more tense and my legs spontaneously anchor themselves more firmly to the ground. When chanted by skilful animal yoikers like Torgeir Vassvik or Ingor Ántte Áilu Gaup, the yoik makes its way to the expression of their faces, inducing a whole spectrum of grimaces, growls, and ferocious gazes. When practising this yoik during a course, Ingor Ántte Áilu Gaup would walk around us while imitating the animal’s gait, howling, grunting, and whimpering, as in a theatrical performance; our challenge was to respond to him with the same wolf-like attitude (yoik course February 2017, cf. 1<sup>st</sup> variation on the ‘fun’ of this task). The aforementioned words of Ailo Gaup then acquired a concrete, sensuous dimension: ‘When you yoik your power-animals, they start to dance. If you yoik them for a long time and powerfully, they start to grow’ (Gaup 2005: 320, cf. Section ‘Animal depths’). The yoik becomes an *ethos* of the yoiker’s body; the wolf makes itself at home inside of us, forming, after continuous circulations, a trail along which it could roam. In other words, we *domesticated* the animal

(or has the animal domesticated us?), in that we hosted it in a novel home, a novel *domus*.

That this hosting gesture took place through the medium of our breath evokes the words of the philosopher and botanist Emanuele Coccia: ‘To blow, to breathe, indeed means making this experience: what contains us, the air, becomes contained in us and, conversely, what was contained in us becomes what contains us’ (Coccia 2016: 23).

## **Appetition**

Continuing the series of philosophical dialogues initiated with Morizot and Plato, I now turn to Leibniz, whose metaphysics presents other converging insights. At this point, it would evidently be a lie to pretend that I am not, at least in part, tracking convergences for their own sake; I find that there is content to be gleaned from these encounters. Yet, as in the previous sections, by seeking convergences, I also aim at revealing various aspects of the yoik that otherwise do not necessarily come to our attention. Engaging with Leibniz at least makes it possible to name the process of navigation that both yoikers and myself enact in our respective crafts, through the concept of *appetition*.

In his metaphysical system, Leibniz develops a vision of the inner life of ‘substances’, or ‘monades’ (hereafter named ‘creatures’, cf. 3<sup>rd</sup> variation),<sup>63</sup> in *chiaroscuro*: they are complex in that most of it lies in darkness and is only known ‘confusedly’, while one cannot know all the aspects it conceals at once (Leibniz 1989 [1684]\*: 25). A creature ‘may only read in itself what

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<sup>63</sup> The divergences between my conceptualisation of ‘creatures’ and Leibniz’s conceptualisation of ‘monades’ are irrelevant for this discussion and can here be ignored.

is distinctly represented; it cannot develop all its folds at once, because these are infinite' (Leibniz 1974 [1714]: 57 [§61]). Gilles Deleuze speaks of 'perspectivism' in Leibniz's system, as it is in the way subjects unfold their depths, how they experience various point of view from within, that they emerge as subjects (Deleuze 1988: 27). Each creature, be it human or non-human, expresses the same world in its entirety, but it only *clearly* expresses one part of it, so that different creatures will vary in the way they develop this world – in the way they invoke Ailo Gaup's 'inherited nature' (cf. Section 'Animal depths'). Therefore, the Leibnizian individual is constituted through 'the actualisation of pre-individual singularities' (Deleuze 1988: 86).

Along this line of thought, we can indeed consider the wolf taking shape within yoikers as a virtuality awaiting actualisation – a 'deep existential memory', as Somby put it; a 'seed', in Ailo Gaup's words. Learning a new yoik becomes a way of shedding light on a fold that was already present, but unnoticed. This is at least what Ailo Gaup suggests when he writes that excesses of anger may come from the unknown presence of an untamed 'alpha wolf' within the person. Activities like yoiking and shamaning assist us in finding the 'roots' of this wolf and nurturing the awareness of a presence that was there all along (Gaup 2007: 17).

As mentioned earlier, the yoik can only express *one* creature at a time. Yoiks cannot be assembled into hybrids or meta-yoiks that would simultaneously express several things. One cannot, for instance, combine the yoik of a herder and a reindeer herd in hope of expressing all of them at once. Even if it were possible, it would be pointless, because the herder's yoik *already* constitutes an opening for engaging with the reindeer, as in this example provided by the anthropologist Johannes Falkenberg: 'When [the Sámi] yoiked about a man who for instance had a thousand reindeer,

they repeated this motive indefinitely for the thousand reindeer, with small variations' (Falkenberg 1941: 79).

As suggested in the 1<sup>st</sup> variation, the yoik does indeed open a perspective, like a circular eye that establishes a new dimension of depth into the world – yoiking the wolf opens a 'wolf-perspective', for example. Speaking of an 'inner topography of persons' in correspondence with the 'outer topography of the landscape', as proposed by Morten Axel Pedersen in a study of shamanism among the Darhad of Mongolia (Pedersen 2011: 117), highlights this condition of always dwelling between two folds, with a horizon concealing what lies beyond our immediate reach while at the same time affording the possibility of following it towards other perceptions. Breath itself must be chanted between two folds – it only becomes audible when set into motion, elevated, and differentiated. Breathing the folds of the wolf will bring the animal into presence by revealing its *ethos* within the aerial medium; breathing several animals at once will only bring confusion and indetermination into the air (cf. 2<sup>nd</sup> variation).

As already mentioned, Leibniz considers the folds of creatures to be 'infinite': any fold, once deployed, will present another infinity of folds within itself, as any horizon will open to countless other horizons. 'Each person and each substance is like a little world, which expresses the larger world', Leibniz writes, but each *locus* of the person's 'little world' likewise contains an entire world (Leibniz 1974 [1686]: 18 [Chapter XVI]). This, according to Leibniz, is what distinguishes human-made machines from creatures: if we disassemble a machine, we get several pieces that do not, in themselves, constitute machines. Creatures, on the other hand, can be infinitely divided. As Gilles Deleuze put it, they have 'a spatio-temporal order that makes it so that the "department" of an individual continues in

the department of the near or the next, infinitely’ (Deleuze 1988: 89). Thus, the practice of yoiking can virtually entrain the yoiker in an infinite series of unfolding gestures.

For instance, as I have spent some time in Polmak (Tana Municipality, Finnmark, Norway) during my research and happened to learn the village’s yoik, I could chant it and try to recall memories stemming from this place (cf. 5<sup>th</sup> variation). Inhabiting this situated perspective, my thoughts may run towards the Tana River, which flows through the village, and invite me to yoik it. This, in turn, might lead me to yoik the salmon, then a fisherman from the area, then perhaps the hares running around his house, then the tundra, the wind, the reindeer, with countless possibilities at each stage. Thus, each yoiking experience itself affords an infinity of folds, each of which opens to another infinity of folds; *horizons conceal horizons, depth conceals depth*.

It is this ongoing movement from one perception to the next that Leibniz calls *appetition*. As he notes, ‘it is true that appetite cannot reach the entirety of the perception towards which it tends, but it always receives something from it and reaches new perceptions’ (Leibniz 1974 [1714]: 49 [§15]). A similar observation was made in the 1<sup>st</sup> variation: stretching towards wolfness, one does not normally cross the horizon, but one nonetheless gets a glimpse of what the other folds conceal. Various as the appetitions induced by the yoik may be, it is remarkable that all of them are induced by uttering melodies that seem rather similar to one another, as noted by Ánde Somby in a quotation mentioned in the 3<sup>rd</sup> variation:

‘It is not easy even for the trained ear to hear the differences between an animal’s yoik, a landscape’s yoik or a person’s yoik. That perhaps

emphasizes that you don't differ so much between the human-creature, the animal-creature and the landscape-creature as you regularly do in a western European context' (Somby 1999: 57).

If the similarity of melodies indicates a similar nature in all creatures, so does the fact that they can all be made present within the same breathed, aerial or bodily medium. However different a river may appear to a grouse or a reindeer herder, they find in the yoik *a field of continuity affording the ongoing appetition from one to the other*.

This multiplicity within one medium may seem puzzling. Consider the wind, for example. On the one hand, the wind is the medium of all earthly life, joining every creature to one another (cf. 3<sup>rd</sup> variation). On the other hand, it encompasses various portions of wind that locally penetrate individual creatures, revealing a multiplicity of lives. How might we reconcile the unity of 'the wind' with the multiplicity of 'winds?' The ethnologist James Kale McNeley writes about this apparent paradox encountered among the Navajo of North America. The wind, he notes, is considered as the ultimate life-giving element, but it may be used in either the singular or plural form. 'The wind' has existed from the near beginning of the Navajo universe, while all humans are inhabited by 'a wind', from which they derive their life. As one of his informants explains, 'there is only one Wind but it has many names' (McNeley 1981: 17). The vital principles of creatures are understood to be so many local instances of 'the' wind, i.e. so many *ethe* within the same medium.

This issue recalls the one highlighted in the 3<sup>rd</sup> variation: a play of difference and repetition, through which the wind, in each of its affects, is repeated, but also oriented along a particular mode of attention. Likewise,



the breath of each individual *is* the wind, but it is not strictly identical to the wind as a whole: it constitutes one of its many dimensions; it is the wind *in variation*, i.e. the wind as perceived through depth. McNeley follows the same line of thought in speculating that the Navajo wind is but ‘a *variant* of a pan-Indian concept having a wide distribution among native North Americans’ (ibid.: 61, my emphasis).

While thinking along converging lines, Leibniz granted a particular status to God, as the ultimate source who designed creatures to be attuned to one another. God is the only being that can contemplate all the folds at once: unlike humans, God has no border (Leibniz 1974 [1714]: 51-52 [§30]). Breath may be approached as a similar medium in the yoik: *the* breath encompasses us and rushes into all creatures at once, while yoikers only navigate their appetitive impulses along its continuity, from *one* breath to the other. As David Abram puts it, we are ‘enfolded within the [earth and air], permeated, carnally immersed *in the depths* of this breathing planet’ (Abram 2010: 101). Yoikers themselves are one, yet they have many possible names, hence perhaps Ánde Somby’s question: ‘I am obviously a human who works at the university and so on, but I have always had this openness to the question that “am I also a wolf?”’ (conversation 2015, cf. 1<sup>st</sup> variation).

## **Modern depths**

When, during a yoik course, our teacher, Frode Fjellheim, asked us whether there was a difference between the traditional and the modern yoik, the yoiker Elin Kåven answered that the traditional yoik was ‘deeper’ (yoik course 2018). The (non-Sámi) shaman and writer Jörgen I. Eriksson likewise wrote the following:

‘[The] popularisation [of the yoik] also means depletion. The yoik is a force in itself, a sort of primordial force, whose power, individual variations and slides *are straightened out* [sw. *slätas ut*] when it is accompanied by Western instruments. Therefore, there are yoikers of a more traditional school that refuse to use instruments other than their own voice’ (Eriksson 2002: 128-129, my emphasis).

Keeping in mind David Abram’s distinction between depth and flatness, should we consider that the modern yoik is *flatter* than the traditional yoik?

The trouble with highlighting divergences between both practices is that, although it seems an easy task at first, it conceals countless unexpected challenges – and countless possibilities for playful speculation. The issue can still be approached by looking back at the observations made so far in this variation, starting with the issue of *animal depths*. Consider the track *Eadni Nieida* by the Sámi band Intrigue (Intrigue 2011: track 1): a hard rock song with a catchy yoiked refrain. One could argue, along the reflection proposed in the 1<sup>st</sup> variation, that the musicians use the yoik in order to stretch towards the hard rock genre while remaining anchored in Sáminess. But in terms of depth, is it quite the same process as the one that occurs in a traditional vocalisation of, say, the wolf’s yoik? I have never heard yoikers suggest that the musical genres they engage with – e.g. hard rock, jazz, techno – are located inside them, nor, *a fortiori*, that these are gifts received as part of a natural heritage. Humans have a shared history of eco-evolution with wolves, birds, rivers, mountains, valleys, and other humans, but the apparition of hard rock is recent in the species’ history.

One could still argue that hard rock can move listeners from within like animals do. One could even suggest that listening to a lot of hard rock might

enhance its presence in the *ethos* of listeners and influence their behaviour and personality.<sup>64</sup> Yet, attending to *modal depths* highlights further possible divergences between the traditional and modern yoiks. It has already been suggested that animals, people, and places may be considered as so many musical modes performed by yoikers. Can *hard rock* be considered a yoik mode? If it is a mode, then, in line with the traditional yoik, and in contrast to Plato's music, there would appear to be countless possible modes stemming from countless musical genres. However, in contrast to both the traditional yoik and Plato's music, the modes are neither in touch with a singular human virtue (e.g. temperateness) nor with a singular presence in the sensuous environment (e.g. the hare). That is, *unless* one were to consider hard rock to be the musical incarnation of a 'hard rock entity', a *community* living behind the horizon and manifesting its presence in particular circumstances, e.g. a concert. Yoiks chanted in the 'hard rock mode' would then bring this entity to presence.

Considering *spiritual depths* enables us to develop the contrast. Modern yoiks have the particularity of being *recorded* – or amplified in a concert setting, but the amplification generally involves a process of recording. The occult life of traditional yoiks, dwelling in their aerial medium and surging to human awareness at unexpected times, is to a large extent *domesticated* by technological assemblages – i.e. hosted in the *domus* of these assemblages. Approached through an online media database, Intrigue's *Eadni Nieida* is available to be listened to at any time – supposing one has unrestricted access to this database. When it is not listened to, the song's

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<sup>64</sup> Psychologists have been more inclined to inquire the reverse phenomenon, i.e. the influence of personality on musical taste (e.g. Ferwerda et al. 2015, Nave et al. 2018).

dwelling can be traced in digital networks and electronic circuits, from which it does not normally ‘get out’. In truth, it *can* get out, but its possibilities for doing so appear to be limited; one example is the case of ‘earworms’, discussed in the 5<sup>th</sup> variation.

Thus, if hard rock was really to be considered a musical incarnation of a ‘hard rock entity’, like the reindeer’s yoik is the vocal incarnation of the reindeer, it is doubtful that this musical incarnation still constitutes an equivalent of ‘soul’ for that person. Can a soul be dissociated from living organisms and contained in a MP3 file? Maybe, for it is also possible that this ‘hard rock entity’ does not merely exist in *humans*, but already encapsulates a technological assemblage of musical instruments, microphones, amplifiers, recording studios, digital systems; perhaps even clothes, magazines, and various accessories. What would hard rock be without these? The soul of hard rock, contained in a MP3 file, would still bear continuity with its more-than-human body. One could even say that the MP3 file *is* part of the more-than-human body from which it stems. Might we then say that *Eadni Nieida* is a manifestation of the soul of hard rock?

Attending to *breathed depths* reactualises the contrast. Hard rock does not fit in breath. Try performing *Eadni Nieida*, or AC/DC’s *Highway to Hell*, using the sole resource of your voice – you will probably fail. Commonsensical as this may sound, this appears as one of the most crucial dimensions of divergence between the traditional and modern yoiks. There might be an arousal of hard rock taking place within the listener during each listening experience; there might be a correspondence between the tune and a community dwelling ‘out there’; the tune might even be considered the soul of the more-than-human hard rock community. Yet, the gesture by which the yoik is hosted is *displaced from the yoiker’s animal body and the*

*immediacy of human breath*; hospitality now takes place within *institutional spaces*, including recording studios, musical labels, and an international economic market.

Consequently, the modern yoik offers a different field of appetitions: it not only invokes presences concealed within the human interiority by virtue of a natural heritage inscribed in the genes, but also presences concealed within distributed institutional assemblages. The wolf has inscribed itself in humans throughout evolutionary history, so that yoikers can find now the wolf within themselves. Hard rock has inscribed itself in musical networks and digital systems, so that yoikers can now find it within their musical instruments and recording studios. Note here that *Eadni Nieida*, like many modern yoiks, is not ‘circular’ – it is not based on the repetition of a melodic line but on an alternation of verses and a refrain. The act of hospitality thus no longer occurs in the ‘animal’ mode (Despret 2010, cf. Section ‘Spiritual depth’), due to two departures: (1) from the immediacy of the animal body and (2) from the power of repetition.

With these observations in mind, the relationship between traditional and modern yoiks appears asymmetrical: the modern depths include the depths of human bodies and cannot exist without them. The animal heritage of humans, on the other hand, has no need for modern depths: for most of its history, the traditional yoik has resounded in Sápmi without recordings. This asymmetry carries importance when considering the resilience of the yoik, i.e. its capacity to endure shocks and keep on flourishing. Should the traditional yoik disappear in favour of the modern yoik, the latter would be vulnerable to possible future resource depletion, financial crises, or other forms of impediments that might undermine access to technological means.

As long as the traditional practice is maintained, the yoik can keep dwelling in human and aerial depths and live its obscure life.<sup>65</sup>

Yoikers, it seems, tend to be well aware of this. All those I have met were enthusiastic about the modern yoik, but many also stressed the importance of maintaining the traditional practices. For example, the yoiker Ella Marie Hætta Isaksen, winner of the 2018 edition of the *Stjernekamp* song contest in Norway (NRK 2018), answered along similar lines when asked by a journalist whether she was afraid of the current ‘commercialisation’ of the yoik:

‘Yes. “Afraid” is perhaps exaggerated. But I am very conscious of it [...]. But I try to do it with respect, and *I know that I can yoik traditionally, so I am entitled to stretch the borders.* [...] I am a bit afraid that the yoik might be becoming something that only exists on stage. I want to encourage everyone to keep yoiking in everyday life’ (in Gravdal 2019, my emphasis).

These considerations invited me to sketch one last philosophical convergence, one that involves the author who originally guided my attention to the issue of ‘depth’, David Abram, and in particular his argument on the ‘rejuvenation of oral culture’. This expression encompasses the project of reclaiming an ‘intelligence’ nested in ‘oral

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<sup>65</sup> One could also consider the possibility that, should the traditional practice disappear, the obscure life of yoiks would not necessarily be terminated. They could still dwell in aerial and chthonic depths, only to resurge in humans later in the course of history. This possibility is discussed in the 6<sup>th</sup> variation.

tales’, considered as stemming from ‘the living land itself’ and ‘the direct, face-to-face exchange between those who dwell and work in this place’.

His argument originally stemmed from his observations of the increased use of technologies in classrooms. ‘Our excitement about the internet’, he wrote, ‘should not blind us to the fact that the astonishing linguistic and intellectual capacity of the human brain did not evolve in relation to the computer!’ (Abram 2005a). His proposal does not suggest that we renounce the flatness of texts and computers (cf. Abram 2005b), but that we anchor these within the soil of a thriving oral culture:

‘In contrast to more abstract forms of media, the primary medium of oral communication is *the atmosphere itself*. In other words the unseen air, which is subtly different in each terrain, and which binds *our own breathing bodies* to the metabolism of oak trees and hawks and the storm clouds gathering above the city, is the implicit intermediary in all oral communication. As the most ancient and longstanding form of human discourse, oral culture provides the necessary soil and support for those more abstract styles of communication and reflection’ (Abram 2005a, my emphasis).

Removed from the field of orality, the modern yoik is perhaps not so much ‘flatter’ than the traditional yoik, but its depths lie beyond the affordances of breath and animal bodies. From the soil of aerial and bodily depths, modernity grows its own depths. As the next section shows, a converging argument can be made about the depths of written texts.

## Literate depths

Isaac Olsen (b. 1680 – d. 1739), a teacher and collaborator of the influential missionary Thomas von Westen (b. 1682 – d. 1727), once reported the following anecdote:

‘There lived a man in Varanger by the name of Mathias Melchersen. He was married and was also able to read. In 1704, *noaidegadzene* [the *noaidi*’s spirit helpers] came to him and offered to teach him the art [no. *kunst*] of *noaidi*, which was his heritage from his deceased ancestors, as he was born and bred to receive that art. However, the man said he did not want to learn it, even if he had been born and bred ten times to it. Besides, he had a weak head that could not tolerate or host too many kinds of arts and exertions. He had just learned how to read books and could not therefore promise to learn the art of *noaidi*, because his head could not tolerate or host two kinds of skills. So [the spirits] told him to believe only in his book, and to die, and see what benefit he had of it, since as he refused to accept the good art that had belonged to his forefathers, and which they had used to help both themselves and their families in sickness, accidents, and other bad events, and to make a living and have a happy and long life, they were now going to curse him and torment him until he died. The man immediately became ill, and *noaidigadzene* tormented and cursed him with many countless kinds of afflictions until he died’ (in Pollan 2002\*: 53).

Mathias Melchersen’s mistake was perhaps that he favoured the literate depths of the craft he had managed to acquire over the spiritual depths of



the land he grew up in, the ones that ‘he was born and bred to receive’. Perhaps this issue concerns all writers. It should be clear by now that the practices of writing and reading operate within their own realm of depth, removed to some extent from the immediacy of breath and displaced onto material supports and institutional networks beyond the reach of the animal body. Like the modern practice of yoiking, the establishment of literate depths provides new fields of appetitions for the yoik to follow, for instance towards Plato and Leibniz, Aristotle and Abram. The white page may be flat, but it is animated by the countless presences that the written marks reveal and conceal.

Captivated by the appetitions among texts that the page affords, writers can easily forget the debt owed by literacy to the soil of orality. In David Abram’s work, this constitutes a major issue: the propensity of written texts to picture ‘an entirely *flat* world seen from above, *a world without depth*, a nature that we are not a part of but that we look at from outside – like a God, or like a person staring at a computer screen’ (Abram 2005b: 470). Therefore, engaging with the craft of yoiking, in particular with its traditional practice, calls for an awareness that aerial and animal depth can never be contained in writing. Writing on the yoik necessarily implies *consenting to a loss*, for the sake of the new possibilities it affords.

‘Consenting to the loss’ is an expression that I borrow from the anthropologist Lucienne Strivay, for whom it encompasses the impossibility, in writing, of capturing an observation with completion: ‘Whether we want it or not, the more we write, the more we feel what evades our grasp... *What overflows the resources of language and narrative*’ (Strivay 2009: 326). In this particular case, nurturing the awareness of a loss – that there is a deeper field of orality lying underneath the text – implied

avoiding getting lost in self-referential intertextual dialogues. Plato, Leibniz, and Abram are not summoned for the relation they bear with one another, but for the light each of them brings on the breathed practice of yoiking. As abstract as the reflection may become, it is intended to remain in touch with the soil of a vocal craft, following Friedrich Nietzsche's aphorism: 'The more abstract the truth you want to teach, the more you must seduce the senses to it' (Nietzsche 1968 [1886-1887]: 95).

After all, traditional yoikers themselves consent to a loss when they turn the startling presence of wolves into a vocalisation. There is perhaps some form of domestication going on in their own craft – the presence of the wolf is made more available, more intensely established within the *domus* of breath, a medium that remains available at all times.<sup>66</sup> However, yoikers remain attentive to the life of people, places, and animals captured in their vocalisations. Yoiks must still constitute outgrowths, *creatures* stemming from sensuous presences (cf. 3<sup>rd</sup> variation).

Thus, writing about the depths of the yoik supposes that one avoids Mathias Melchersen's mistake. Writing can be a beneficial, transformative experience (cf. Stengers 2012 in this regard). It may bring to light various dimensions of the craft of yoiking through the novel appetitions it affords, as long as the orality lying beneath literacy and the deep breath of the yoik are borne in mind.

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<sup>66</sup> The yoiker Ingor Ántte Áilu Gaup once stated the following: 'When I do joik, it doesn't matter if I am in the moon or Jupiter' (in Udaya 2017: 45). In truth, it does matter: you can yoik anywhere and at any time, as long as you have a human body and the power of breath – which, on the moon or on Jupiter, you may not have.

## 5<sup>th</sup> variation: Echo

*Eeeio leeeei*

*Looo looi*

*Lo loo*

*Oioo*

- The *Gufihtar*

In *Daphnis and Chloe*, the Ancient Greek author Longus wrote the following version of the story of Echo:

Echo was the beautiful daughter of a nymph, taught in the musical arts by the Muses themselves. Jealous of her skills and frustrated by her vow of virginity, Pan sent madness to the shepherds and goatherds, who tore Echo to pieces and scattered her still singing remains across the whole earth. As a favour to the nymph, Gaia concealed these remains and preserved their music within herself. They still sing and imitate all sorts of sounds, including the music of Pan, who to this day wonders who ‘his invisible imitator’ might be (Longus 1968 [Second century]\*).

Why start with a Greek myth? Because it highlights a quality of echoes – *skádja* in North Sámi – that will recur throughout this variation. Despite her being dead, invisible, inscrutable, we know that Echo is there because she responds to our calls. Her presence remains in the vocal mode.

Ánde Somby, in the aforementioned record *Yoiking with the Winged Ones* (Somby 2016b), took a similar approach by making sure that the earth was indeed still inhabited: ‘[The] yoik was given to the Sámi by the underground people. So, in other words, it has been given to us by the earth, the earth gave us the yoik. And then, for me, working with these echoes

means that I can communicate with the underground people’ (conversation 2015).<sup>67</sup> Somby’s attempt appears successful: the *Gufihtar*, or *Ulda*, still echo, they still inhabit the earth, despite a war that has been ‘stripping the earth of its soul and giving free license to aggressive exploitation’ (Somby 2016a). In Somby’s record, as in Longus’ story, echoing means that something is returning the calls one projects into the environment; that the frequency of one’s voice has found a presence with which to re-sound.

Echoes occur in a variety of ways within the yoik; the ones explored in this variation all have to do with *time*. A crucial dimension of the yoik’s practice indeed lies in the way it summons past experiences, making them echo in the present with startling emotional intensity. Even the presence of the dead can be made to resound within the yoik. The Sámi writer Johan Turi’s already described the yoik as ‘a practice for recalling other people’ (Turi 1910\*: 216). In 1918, the ethnologist Sigrid Drake illustrated this aspect of the practice with the following anecdote:

‘A little Lapp girl sat a long while, evening after evening, and sang. The only word in the song was *vjelha*, brother. But the word reminded her of father and mother, sisters and the little brother, who were staying far away, down in the country. These memories inspired her

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<sup>67</sup> The linguist Jurij Kusmenko observed that ‘the word for echo in the Sámi language is the same as the word designating small creatures dwelling in the mountains, which corresponds entirely with the designation of echo in Old Icelandic (dvergmál “talk of dwarves”)’ (Kusmenko 2013: 193). When I contacted him, he told me that he encountered this word in the work of the philologist Jens Andreas Friis. A dictionary by Friis indeed mentions *gàniš*, or *gàniča*, as referring both to ‘echo’ and ‘daemon montanus, troll, who lives in the mountain’ (Friis 1887: 200).

and her song, which was melodious and beautiful, and expressed an inner longing for those who were absent' (Drake 1918: 296).

More recently, the ethnomusicologist Doris Stockmann phrased the issue as follows:

'Yoiking is a means of detailing the native environment – the mountains, lakes, and animals – and its human inhabitants – the family members, who are often separated from each other by labor, friends, and neighbors, including the deceased. Singers try to remember, memorize, and realize social ties, which may mediate the feeling of belonging to a social group in native surroundings and in its continuity between a known past and as yet unknown future' (Stockmann 1991b: 332).

Thinking about this practice in terms of *echoes*, as this variation proposes to do, implies that it is the past itself, the dead themselves, the future itself that surges into sonic presence through the yoik. Yoikers *call* and the invisible *re-calls*, as much as it *is* recalled. As is already apparent, echoes are difficult to approach in active or passive voices.

*Yoiking with the Winged Ones* was recorded in the Lofoten Islands / *Lofuohta* (Nordland, Norway) – a place known for its spectacular mountains emerging from the sea. The choice was a deliberate one: for echoes to resound powerfully, depth and folds are required. The previous variation focused on the depth of the human, and the folds of interiority and breath. Starting this variation with the folds of the past will lead to consider the future, as well as dreaming, a craft whose relationship to the past is in many ways reminiscent of yoiking, and the phenomenon of earworms, i.e. songs

stuck in the head. However, addressing these issues first calls for a few considerations on the temporality of practices and the feeling of nostalgia, a recurring theme in various artistic expressions of Europe that appears to be remarkably rare in the yoik.

### **Echoes from the past**

According to the archaeologist and ethnologist Ingela Bergman, written sources from the seventeenth century document a Sámi concept of time that is different from ‘the Western linear time trajectory’. The Sámi, she notes, ‘made no distinction between different distances into the past. It seems that there was no chronological or genealogical scale against which to measure past events. Time did not possess a value in itself’ (Bergman 2008: 21, cf. 6<sup>th</sup> variation). Observing a similar temporality in the discourse of Lars-Erik Ruong, a Sámi from Arjeplog (Norrbotten, Sweden), she notes that it cohabited with the ‘modern time reckoning’, but manifested itself when Ruong was ‘internalising his own cognitive landscape’ (ibid.: 21). As an archaeologist ‘trained in dividing and measuring time into epochs and periods’, she found this conception of time peculiar and difficult to grasp.

In a comparative study about an experience of resettlement in Finnish and Skolt Sámi populations in Salla (Lapland, Finland), Tim Ingold observed another pattern of diverging temporalities. The Finns, as ‘pioneer farmers’, integrated the experience into their identity and thought of their lost homes with nostalgia. ‘If anything’, Ingold wrote, their sense of identity was ‘enhanced’ by the resettlement (Ingold 1997: 66-67). As for the Sámi, who perceived their history as ‘woven into the landscape’, they had to experience ‘a rupture between memory and experience that struck at the heart of their sense of identity’. In the Sámi’s former dwellings, as Ingold

noted, the past was constantly available for recollection. ‘For a people whose history is so palpably present to them’, he wrote, ‘there can be no sense of longing for a lost past, no such feeling as nostalgia’ (ibid.: 66, cf. also Jernsletten 2004 on the perception of landscapes as ‘storytellers’ in Sápmi) – an observation in line with his earlier and influential argument about the ‘temporality of the landscape’ (cf. Ingold 1993).

The contrasts drawn by Bergman and Ingold respectively, distinguish a Sámi person or population from (1) Bergman’s own archaeological education and (2) a Finnish population at a particular historical moment. Interestingly though, the ‘temporality of the landscape’ argument, according to which landscapes are stories collected by people who attend to their presence, was not intended to capture a ‘Sámi temporality’, but rather to describe the practice of *archaeology* itself – the one performed by Bergman in her work. Thus, two observations must be emphasised: (1) temporalities observed in various social environments (e.g. a resettled Sámi community and a group of archaeologists in the field) may converge and (2) several modes of temporality enacted in a single practice (e.g. archaeology) may diverge. Archaeology indeed appears to wander between a temporality based on clearly divided ‘epochs’ and ‘periods’, and one that seeks to revitalise the past memories embedded in the sensuous terrain.

Therefore, a discussion about the temporality of the yoik will, at best, bring to light some of the *possibilities* it opens for experiencing time; *enchanted* temporalities (cf. 2<sup>nd</sup> variation). As the yoiker Ánde Somby made clear to the ethnomusicologist Thomas Hilder, the yoik’s temporality does not reveal an already present Sámi conception of time, but rather reveals affordances for thinking about time along diverging modes:

‘How would thought be if one thought in a *joik* way, that one “*joik*-thought”... that *joik* goes in cycles, structured in a cycle, how is a cyclical way of thinking? [...] But it is exactly there where *joik* can serve as a useful contrast, and reminds us that it is nevertheless not so inevitable to think like that.... So that is one of the contributions, I believe that *joik* will be able [to make], in other words, to relate to *joik* as a way of thinking, or *joik* as a way of being in the world in an existential way.... Both the Sami culture has use for new understandings of itself, but I also believe that the world has use for new understandings and that there can lie a number of opportunities I believe... for example... how we structure time’ (in Hilder 2013: 101).

If the yoik opens temporal perspectives, it also seems to restrain others from emerging. It is, for instance, remarkable that, in line with Ingold’s observations in Salla, nostalgia, defined as a ‘fundamental non-identity between a self and the self who the former attempts to recapture by recapturing a past time’ (Kaushik 2008: 234), seems rare in the experience of yoiking. Instead, the yoik seems to put its practitioners within past moments that always seem likely to resurge to presence.

It has been argued by some anthropologists that a ‘past’ that could emerge to presence would not be a past at all, ‘in the same sense that a married bachelor is not a bachelor’ (Holbraad et al. 2014). Yet, a closer focus on the etymology of the word reveals the Latin root *passus* (‘step’) (Onions 1966: 655), which reminds us that past experiences are made of movements along paths, within landscapes, leaving imprints not only in people’s minds as internal pictures but also in the terrain in which they have wandered (cf. Ingold 1993). In this sense, the past does not appear as a



segment located on a timeline, but as a quality – it is always *something* that is past. Past moments can be like animals whose steps cover the surroundings (cf. Morizot 2018). However distant and invisible, their traces always make them reachable, present to anyone who can relate to them with an appropriate practice (e.g. animal tracking, yoiking).

When I first met the yoiker Mari Helander, she expressed her experience of enchanted temporality in particularly explicit terms. The yoik, according to her, is ‘a musical expression in which we meet the past; we go and wander back in time, and suddenly we are twenty years back, exactly as it was then’ (conversation 2018). When people yoik a nearby mountain, they might be exploring a wide temporality, bringing to awareness the continuity of generations who have dwelt on this mountain as well as the quality of the terrain and the yoiked voice as ‘vectors of convergence’ through time – this will be explored in the 6<sup>th</sup> variation. What Helander indicates here is a more commonplace experience among yoikers, one that summons *autobiographical memories*. Yoiking the mountain readily recalls the time spent there in childhood: the games, the anecdotes, the hunts, the berry picking, the journeys experienced in its presence. As Anne Lise Varsi explained to me, the emotions felt when these memories resurge can be overwhelming – for example, some drivers listening to yoiks on the radio must sometimes stop on the side of the road and wait for their crying to stop before continuing (conversation 2017).

Yoiks evoking places may themselves have been inspired by a remarkable anecdote. For instance, Ola Graff reported that the enthusiasm about a remarkable run of luck when fishing once resulted in a yoik for the waterfall where the fishing took place (Graff 2004: 151). As this example illustrates, specific memories do not normally receive a yoik of their own:

they are summoned via a place, animal, or person that stands in relation to them. This points to the close association between time and space; in many cases, summoning past experiences implies travelling through the land. Ánte Mihkkal Gaup describes his own experience as follows: ‘When I want to yoik a particular place in nature, such as a remarkable river or a special mountain, I travel to this place in my mind. We come there, we see the place for ourselves, and in a way, we are there’ (in Eriksson 2002: 131-132). As Nils Oskal explained to me, when you yoik a place, ‘you call forth, invoke, or create [no. *skaper*] [the place] in the performance, simply [no. *rett og slett*], you remember the feeling of being in the place [no. *tilstedsværelse*]. There is nothing “metaphysical” here [laugh]’ (conversation 2017).

An ability to travel through space was repeatedly observed among the Sámi by European writers of the past centuries, such as Adam von Bremen (1876 [Eleventh century], cf. 2nd variation) and Johannes Schefferus:

‘When the Lapps want to find out what is happening in foreign lands, one of them beats a drum [...]. At the same time, he sings a song that the Lapps call Jouke with a strong and distinct voice. [...] After a while, he falls on the ground, like a dead man [...]. This gave to some the impression that his soul did leave his body and that, guided by the Demon, it reached distant lands [...] and that, when returning, it brought back some sign as a proof of its journey’ (Schefferus 1678 [1673]\*: 106-107, cf. also Wersland 2005: 25, Pentikäinen 2011, Storfjell 2013).

Adam von Bremen describes this ability in terms of ‘magic’ and Schefferus describes it as a ‘demonic’ journey. Yet, as Nils Oskal’s quotation stresses, travelling the land with the yoik does not require thinking within these frames. It can be a prosaic experience – the ability to invoke distant places

lies in the concreteness of a *practice* rather than a metaphysical discourse accounting in advance for its possibility. What remains striking is the *intensity* that this journey takes in the yoik. It is as if the past was not merely remembered from afar but was encountered in its own *locus*: ‘in a way, we are there’. The past surges into awareness with powerful emotions from the moment a performance starts and remains accessible as long as it goes on. Unlike the experience of collecting the past by dwelling within the surroundings (cf. the ‘temporality of the landscape’ argument), the yoik affords to engage with any memory from any time and any place, whenever and wherever one finds oneself, as long as one’s mood is inclined to it.

Consider the contrast with musical expressions anchored in a temporality of nostalgia. The musicologist Benedict Taylor identified Mendelssohn’s String Quartet in A minor, Op. 13, as an emblematic example. In this composition, a peaceful theme in A major is followed by an agitated A minor theme that runs through the entire piece along several, intertwined musical trajectories until the A major key is finally recovered in the coda. According to Taylor, this reflects a ‘quest for a non-present’, ‘a yearning for the unattainable’ culminating in the authentic but ephemeral recollection of a fragment of past experience, i.e. the A major theme (Taylor 2010). Mendelssohn’s String Quartet illustrates an experience of time as made of several strands tangling with one another and generated through the Self, in contrast to the temporality observed in Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart’s compositions by the musicologist Karol Berger, i.e. a Newtonian conception of time understood as an external mechanism evolving along a single straight line (cf. Berger 2008). Within this temporality, all that can be hoped for is a fugitive overlapping of successive times, the ephemeral grasping of a past moment, exemplified by Marcel Proust’s madeleine:

sipping his cup of tea, the narrator of *Du côté de chez Swann* is suddenly possessed by ‘a powerful joy’ due to the triggering of a pleasant memory. Trying to reproduce the experience, he finds himself unable to bring back this sensation to its full intensity. Through intense effort, he manages to identify the source of the memory, but its emotional essence has already faded away (Proust 1919 [1913]: 65-69).

Perhaps the diverging temporalities afforded by Mendelssohn’s String Quartet and the yoik of the nearby mountain lie in the very structure of these musical expressions. According to the philosopher Edmund Husserl, melodies are perceived in a temporality of *Retention*: each tone makes sense thanks to the retention (i.e. the maintained presence) of the previous ones. Once the last note has resounded, the melody is completed. If one recalls it later, the process involved is no longer one of retention, but of *Vergegenwärtigung*, i.e., representation (Husserl 1969 [1893-1917]: 37-39). The melody, then, is no longer ‘perceived’ as such: it has left the immediate consciousness and can only be recalled ‘as it were’ – as something that ‘of course, no longer exists’ (ibid.: 36).

What would Husserl have thought about the yoik? A yoik melody is never complete – as a circling movement, it continuously goes on. It may even be suggested that, when the vocalisation stops, the yoik itself lives on; it merges back into its aerial medium, only to surge again into sensuous presence at another place and another time (cf. 4<sup>th</sup> variation). There is therefore no ending point, no temporal closure from which the yoik could be gazed upon in the *Vergegenwärtigung* mode. All that remains is *Retention*: a field of temporal experience where the past always remains within reach.

Again, it must be stressed that these observations stem from the most prosaic of experiences: when people yoik the nearby mountain, memories resurge. Moving away from the phenomenological language of Husserl, the term ‘echo’ points to the concreteness of this temporality – a yoik is thrown forth and something answers; a past memory appears with vitality; emotions flow back to the yoikers. Is this remarkable at all? Is it not a well-known feature of various – if not all – musical genres in Europe that they tend to arouse memories with surprising intensity?

Psychologists refer to this phenomenon as ‘music-evoked autobiographical memories’ or ‘MEAMs’ (Janata et al. 2007). This activation of episodic memory has been identified by the musicologists Patrick Juslin and Daniel Västfjäll as a recurring modality of ‘emotional responses’ to music (Juslin & Västfjäll 2008). Amy M. Belfi et al. concluded from experimental observations that memories aroused by music are particularly vivid, inducing ‘strong emotional responses comparable to those experienced during the original event’ (Belfi et al. 2015: 985). Memories likely to be associated with a piece of music are usually happy ones, most often involving lovers, friends, or family (Baumgartner 1992), and most often related to songs heard between the ages of fifteen and twenty-four (Platz et al. 2015).<sup>68</sup> However, the evocation of memories is likely to be distorted after repeated recollections (Snyder 2000: 75) – for

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<sup>68</sup> Positive effects on patients suffering from Alzheimer’s disease have been observed in both the use of MEAMs (e.g. Cuddy et al. 2017) and the practice of yoiking. The scholar and nurse Ingrid Hanssen reported that, ‘several interviewees told stories about how their old, demented relatives were not able to recognise or remember them when they came to visit, but when they yoiked the old person’s yoik and their own, memory and recognition would return’ (Hanssen 2011).

example, a song that was once associated with childhood may lose this evocative power if it is repeatedly listened to later in life.

The yoik diverges from the musical experiences investigated by psychologists in that *every yoik evokes one specific source* (i.e. a person, an animal, or a place) filled with autobiographical memories. MEAMs are therefore likely to occur systematically and are recognised by yoikers as a crucial aspect of their own practice. Episodic memories may fluctuate in the yoik, as they do in pop songs, but they always remain in touch with the same person, animal, or place; for example, the yoik of Karasjok / *Kárášjohka* (Finnmark, Norway) will always trigger memories associated with the town – unless the melody is reattributed to another source (cf. Graff 2004: 153).<sup>69</sup> Thereby, the MEAMs induced by yoiks have a collective dimension that psychologists focusing on ‘songs’ do not observe: the memories directly stem from a node located within the environment, from where moments of life experienced by the community are woven together and find consistency.<sup>70</sup>

In other words, many vocalisations of the same melody by various yoikers will reveal a ‘polyphonic’ memory derived from the same *locus* of

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<sup>69</sup> When we discussed this issue, Nils Oskal nuanced my point by highlighting that people can listen to a yoik without knowing its source and accidentally attach unrelated memories. This is noteworthy, although it appears to be the exception rather than the rule.

<sup>70</sup> The musicologist Tia DeNora observed that the so-called ‘the song is you’ phenomenon, in which a particular person comes to be associated with a particular song, is frequent. Her ‘respondents’ described to her how ‘music helped them to recall lovers or former partners and, with these memories, emotionally heightened phases or moments in their lives’ (DeNora 2000: 63). Again, the apparent similarity with the yoik is limited insofar as the phenomenon described by DeNora is individual and accidental.

experience – from the same *cantus firmus* – although these memories will only emerge to awareness one memory at a time – one cannot recall all the memories stemming from the mountain at once; rather, one navigates the polyphony from a situated perspective, ‘between two folds’ (cf. 2<sup>nd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> variations). Each gesture of yoiking thus reproduces the achievement of Somby with the *Gufihtar*: (1) a yoik is addressed to the land along a particular frequency; (2) a presence concealed by the flows of time and space resurges and yoiks back at you.

### **Echoes from the dead**

If there is one aspect of the yoik apt to indicate its power in making past memories resurge, it is probably the practice of yoiking the dead. In Sápmi, it is common to hear that people are alive as long as they are yoiked. As the historian of religions Håkan Rydving reported:

‘At the time of the drums [i.e. in the Sámi society up to the seventeenth or eighteenth century], life did not depend on whether a person breathes or not; rather, it was a qualitative notion. To live was to be in relation with other human beings. To recall those who no longer breathe (these beings that we call “the dead”, but who the Sámi considered to belong to “the invisible”) was to retain their life. The “dead” expressed their community with those who breathed by appearing in their dreams; the ancestors were alive as long as they were remembered and those who lived on the earth maintained their memory. Conversely, if someone was forgotten and no longer had relationships with other humans, he was considered to be dead, even if he was still breathing’ (Rydving 2013: 13-14).

As suggested for the issue of temporality, one should not conclude that there is a necessary contrast between a homogeneous ‘Sámi’ way of relating to the dead and a neighbouring ‘European’ or ‘Western’ population. Through an attentive inquiry, the ethologist and philosopher Vinciane Despret showed how the imperative of *mourning*, and the underlying conception of the dead as no-longer-existing people, are met with resistance elsewhere in Europe. Based on her observations about the creativity of the living in their relationships with the dead, she suggests that the latter still exist, although in another modality than the former’s; they retain agency as long as the living attend to the virtuality of their presence and host them in their lives (Despret 2015).

The agency of the dead is an issue that has aroused particular interest among anthropologists over the past few years (e.g. Broz 2018, Delaplace 2018, Kohn 2013, Willerslev & Christensen 2013). From this literature and her own investigation in Belgium, Despret concludes that interacting with the dead is all but exceptional; on the contrary, she suggests, it is the assumption that the dead are gone forever and no longer exist that constitutes the exception (Despret 2015: 122). Therefore, following Nils Oskal’s warning, one should not consider that the presence of the dead in the yoik rely on any ‘metaphysical’ form of belief. Using the anthropologist Grégory Delaplace’s words, we should say, rather, that in the yoik, the presence of the dead occurs to yoikers as a prosaic event: ‘ghosts happen’ (Delaplace 2018).

There are countless anecdotes to collect among yoikers about contacts with the dead achieved through the yoik. For instance, the scholar and nurse Ingrid Hanssen tells of a yoiker who had lost two relatives, ‘NN’ and ‘XX’:



‘It was much harder to process NN’s death than XX’s, because I could yoik XX, but not NN. I constantly yoiked XX. Whenever I was driving my car, I would yoik him. While NN – that sorrow I had to process through talking. I have [children] and we talked very much together, and I probably talked such a lot because NN died and I could not yoik him. While we yoiked XX’ (Hanssen 2011).

Eventually, one of her friends created a yoik for ‘NN’ and she was able to accept his death. When people pass away, yoiking them obsessively appears to be a common reaction, as in this other story: ‘a South Sámi told that her grandmother yoiked her husband for many days when he died, and her children thought it was so sad to hear’ (Jernsletten 1978: 113).

According to Berit Alette Mienna, a person’s yoik maintains this person alive even if the yoiker does not know the deceased. This happens for instance when famous yoik melodies are chanted by children who are not concerned with its source; they still maintain that person’s memory and keep it alive within them (NRK 2017: episode 3). Elle Marja Eira likewise told me that one of her ancestors appears to her when yoiked, although she has never met him:

‘If I yoik this person I know and who is away, I see this person in front of me. But the yoik of my great-great-grandfather, who travelled to Alaska more than a hundred years ago, and whom I have never met, I can see his shape, I can hear what kind of person he was’ (conversation 2017).

In some cases, the sorrow experienced by the bereaved can trigger the reception of a new chant, as can be the case among the Lule Sámi in what

they call *ármme*. *Ármme*, as the Sámi musicologist Mikkel Eskil Andre Mikkelsen described it, refers to a genre akin to the yoik and to a vocal quality coloured by feelings of sorrow and longing. Unlike Christian psalms, they are chanted outside of ritual contexts, in solitude. Unlike most yoiks, they do not necessarily have a clearly identifiable melody, but are chanted spontaneously in a specific condition of sorrow, to which they remain connected. *Ármme*, Mikkelsen observes, is a tradition that knows a more intense vitality than the yoik in the Lule Sámi area, perhaps due to the fact that it is more spontaneous, less clearly ‘articulated’, and therefore could not be condemned as easily as the yoik by missionaries (Mikkelsen 2017: 52, cf. 6<sup>th</sup> variation on missionaries and the yoik). One of his informants, Sunná, reported the following story after the loss of her child:

‘The *ármme* suddenly came to me. I was lamenting so much, I was so afraid. I had such a fear that I did not know what to do. It suddenly came to me in the middle of the night, when I was completely alone. I was so afraid, you know. I did not know what I should do, I did not know what help I could receive. It was such a burden. But I believe it is like a consolation. I believe this sort of things come to humans when they are completely in touch with themselves [no. *tilstede i seg selv*]. I was in touch with the sorrow, or with the pain. I do not think I would have received it, had I not experienced this pain, and it would not have come. For it came from inside of me. It came to me while I cried, and helped my sorrow:

God Father, protect the child

God Father, protect my child

God Father, protect [him/her]

God Father, protect the child'  
(ibid.: 42).

There seems to be no single discourse as to where the dead are when they are not yoiked. In the seventeenth century, Johannes Schefferus reported that the Sámi believe in neither resurrection nor the immortality of the soul; they believed human souls to be similar to animal souls and refused the very idea of an afterlife (Schefferus 1678 [1673]\*: 63). Other historical sources suggest that the Sámi world was stratified into three horizontal levels: heaven, earth, and the underworld. The actual realm of the dead was *Jábmiid-áibmu*, located beneath the earth. The Sámi supposedly had two souls: one 'free soul', active when the body was not in its normal state (i.e. in dreams, in visions, or in trance) and one 'body soul', which remained tied to the body after death and only wandered occasionally among the living as a ghost. After death, the free soul could obtain a new body in *Jábmiid-áibmu* or join the higher realm after some time in the underworld, depending on the tradition (Hansen & Olsen 2014: 111).

According to the religion scholar Louise Bäckman, this cosmology was influenced by the Christian distinction between Purgatory, Paradise, and Hell. 'In traditional Sámi beliefs there was only one universal realm for those who died in an ordinary way' (Bäckman 2004: 34). *Saajvoe*, or *Saivo*, is another recurring place name in historical sources, possibly referring to a place inspired by the Christian Paradise (Hansen & Olsen 2014: 112). It is a world of light inhabited by the *noaidi*'s helping spirits. They are joined there by deceased *noaidi* and skilful yoikers (Wersland 2005: 35, 67). My conversations and consultations never led to any mention of these realms,

which tends to affirm that the presence of the dead is enchanted rather than derived from metaphysical assumptions.

Although the idea of reincarnation may have been present in Sápmi up to the nineteenth century, as reported by the priest Jacob Fellman (1903 [1847]: 23), the yoiker Johan Andreas Andersen was the only one to suggest it to me: ‘Our soul is eternal and reincarnates, perhaps soon after death, or perhaps after several years. It is a cycle, a circle, not linear’ (conversation 2017). Mari Boine, for her part, considers that ‘we become a part of nature when we die, according to shamanism [...]. I walk in nature and talk to my dead parents. I can feel that they are there’ (in Kraft 2015: 237). The archaeologist Marianne Skandfer likewise reported that among present-day Sámi communities, ‘the landscape also contains the spirits of the forefathers, moving between the world of the dead and the world of the living through open passages between the rocks used to construct the graves’ (Skandfer 2009: 93).

According to the yoiker Cecilia Persson, the dead are inside her: ‘[The yoik] is like a way to retrieve people and place that are no longer there but still live in me’ (in Wennström 1996: 7). When I first met him, Ingvald Guttorm suggested that the yoik establishes ‘contact with the spirits [of the dead] flying in the air around us’ (conversation 2017, cf. 4<sup>th</sup> variation on spirits). He followed this suggestion with a joyous laugh and I could not assess how seriously he took this idea; assigning a clear *locus* for the dead is perhaps a task that one should approach along a ‘horizontal’ gesture, for example by using humour (cf. 1<sup>st</sup> variation and section ‘Authority’ in the introduction, cf. also Willerslev 2012 on taking animism ‘too seriously’).

The idea of merging with the wind and becoming a yoik at the time of death is evoked by the following poem by Nils-Aslak Valkeapää:

‘wind,	‘biegga
we were a wind	<i>biegga mii leimmet</i>
life’s singing wind	<i>šuvaideaddji eallima bieggá</i>
caressing the cheeks of the tundra	<i>njávkkame duoddara muođuid</i>
the forests, the valleys	<i>vuomážiid, gorssaid</i>
a disappearing yoik	<i>láhppovaš luohti</i>
the reds of evening, wind	<i>eahketroadji ruoksadin, bieggá</i>
we were a wind	<i>biegga mii leimmet</i>
we came and left	<i>ja mii bođiimet ja manaimet</i>
and nothing remained of us	<i>iige mis eará báhcán</i>
but a yoik in the singing wind	<i>go luohti bieggá šuvas</i>
a dream about being’	<i>niehku leahkimis’</i>
(Valkeapää 1997 [1988]: §546).	(Valkeapää 1988: §551).

Wherever they are located – in the air, in the melody, in the voice, in a lower or higher realm, in the land, in the yoiker – what matters is that the dead echo the calls addressed to them. When yoiked, the feeling of their presence surges, regardless of where it comes from. Evidently, echoes do not erase the pain inflicted by the death of a loved one. As Despret stressed, relying here on Étienne Souriau’s theory of ‘modes of existence’ (cf. Souriau 2009 [1943]), ‘the dead have “ways of being” that makes them quite real *in their own register*’ (Despret 2015: 19, my emphasis). They do not ‘stand on their own’ (ibid.: 61) and depend on favourable circumstances for their apparitions – the advent of electricity, for instance, seems to have diminished their potential of presence in Europe (ibid.: 62). Writing about the dead, she writes, amounts to an ‘ethology’, concerned with the

description of their *ethos* (ibid.: 20). To remain living within a yoik is likewise to remain living through a particular *ethos*, one that affords constant access to memories, but does not merely reproduce a person made of ‘flesh and bone’. The relationship between both is of a ‘creaturely’ nature (cf. 3<sup>rd</sup> variation): iconic in the experience of not noticing their difference, indexical in that the yoik’s *ethos* brings to awareness *one* possible mode of presence of that person.

### **Echoes from the future**

In his *Phénoménologie de la Perception*, the philosopher Merleau-Ponty argued that ‘a preserved perception is a perception, it keeps on existing, it is still present’ (Merleau-Ponty 1945: 475). According to him, reproducing an experience is done thanks to direct contact with past experiences in their own *locus* (ibid.). He illustrates the direct contact we can get with past experiences through the metaphor of a stone on the riverbed. What we see is the stone itself, perceived through the mass of water that slides on it (ibid.: 479). This may be considered a visual analogue to the sonorous figure of an echoing past, one that bears its own relevance. The statement ‘I keep my oldest experiences, I do not carry some replica or picture in me, I hold the experiences themselves, exactly as they have been’ (ibid.: 485) could probably have been expressed by a yoiker. In line with the speculations above, Merleau-Ponty suggests that time must never be completely constituted – it is essential that it occurs without deploying all its folds at once. Should its profile be levelled into flatness, time would not occur at all (ibid.: 476). Similar to the depths of human interiority described in the previous variation, the depths of time are only engaged with one fold at a time, moved through temporal appetitions (cf. 4<sup>th</sup> variation).

If Merleau-Ponty's conception of past experiences as potentially 'still-present' carries some relevance for approaching the practice of yoiking, it is notable that he also describes the *future* as already 'present in the world' (ibid.: 471). It is his proposition that guided my attention to the role of the future in the yoik. Ola Graff wrote that some yoiks can evoke future events, invoking the example of a yoik text [ns. *dajahus*] mentioning that a person will die young (Graff 1985: 13). I have never encountered such examples myself. It has been mentioned earlier that a yoik can be effective in a concrete sense and can alter the course of the future, such as when one yoiks the salmon in hope of catching more fish, or when Ánde Somby yoiks the bear in the hope of scaring the elk away (cf. 2<sup>nd</sup> variation). It has also been shown that yoiking animals can alter one's personality and ability to face issues in life (cf. 4<sup>th</sup> variation). The idea of engaging with the horizon itself implies some form of engagement with the future. As David Abram notes, the horizon incarnates our relationship to future times insofar as it 'carries the promise of something more, something *other*' (Abram 1997: 127).

However, the yoikers I met were generally less talkative about things to come than they were about past events. Mari Helander provided me with helpful indications:

*Aubinet*: 'Can we also engage with the future in the yoik?'

*Helander*: 'Yes, I believe we can, right? I think so.'

*Aubinet*: 'How can we do this?'

*Helander*: 'Well, for instance, I am a very positive person, I am very emotional, I think, and then I get good images. I want things to happen

in the times to come. So, in a way, I can attach yoik-tones to this image I have of the future, so that it may happen. Do you see what I mean?’

*Aubinet*: ‘Yes, I think I do.’

*Helander*: ‘It is a good way of expressing things: that I wish to live long, have good health, and so on. You can say all this with yoik-tones. Then, it becomes an expression of the future. That we should take care of the community, of the earth, sustainable development, right?’ (conversation 2018).

The yoik as ‘an expression of the future’ can therefore be one that gives flesh, in the mode of existence of yoiks, to a possible future. It can be a means for caring for ‘things-to-come’ that are considered desirable.

In Sápmi, one project of this type has been the advent of a global indigenous diaspora devoted to a decolonial ambition, an idea that was developed significantly during the 1970s and 1980s around the time of the Alta-Kautokeino controversy (cf. Introduction). The track *Gula gula* by Mari Boine (1989: track 1) constitutes an emblematic example of a yoik incarnating this envisioned alliance; it is also one of the most famous yoiks in the world. Its melody is inspired by the yoik of the village of Máze (Thomassen 2010: 42), which, as Ingor Ántte Áilu Gaup told me, is itself based on a personal yoik (yoik course 2018). The official English translation of Mari Boine’s lyrics are as follows:

‘Hear the voices of the foremothers! Hear!

They ask you why you let the earth become polluted, poisoned,  
exhausted?’



They remind you where you come from, do you hear?

Again, they want to remind you that the earth is our mother.

If we take her life, we die with her'

(Boine 1989: track 1).

This *dajahus* almost carries a universal dimension. Although it is uttered in North Sámi, it does not carry any specific reference to the Sámi community.<sup>71</sup> The pronoun 'you' is indeterminate and could address all the listeners who recognise themselves in the accusation of deafness to their foremothers' voices. These people whom we let pollute, poison, and exhaust the earth are likewise unnamed. The lyrics are alternated with typical yoik syllables, thus allowing non-Sámi audiences to chant along. This universality is reflected in the musical accompaniment, made of breath sounds and instruments from various ethnic minorities, including an Andean *quena* and an Igbo *udu*. Mari Boine's voice itself has often been described as sounding 'Amerindian' rather than 'Sámi' (Thomassen 2010: 49) – Boine acknowledged that her main musical influences come from Native American musicians like Buffy Sainte-Marie (Hilder 2013: 198). Therefore, *Gula gula* appears as the yoiked expression of Mari Boine's project of a global indigenous community resisting the rule of industrial modernity.

'There is no common world, we must compose it', stated the philosopher Bruno Latour (2011). If he were commenting on Mari Boine's work, he

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<sup>71</sup> Regarding language, the ethnomusicologist Beverley Diamond reported that 'Mari Boine [...] feels one of the values of a CD is the possibility of including text translations: "It gives you an opportunity to communicate with the whole world"' (Diamond 2007: 32).

would perhaps have pointed out that there is no common indigenous community unless it is enacted in practices, be it through the creation of yoiks, the establishment of relevant institutions, perhaps the writing of ethnological accounts or some other sort of creative endeavour – as Gilles Deleuze once put it, ‘there is no artwork that does not call forth a people that *does not yet exist*’ (Deleuze 2003: 302, my emphasis). Like Vinciane Despret’s dead, we could say that this people does exist, but as a virtuality, a ‘possible’ whose creators’ task is to host, to give shape, to *instaurate* (cf. Souriau 2009 [1943] on virtualities and instaurating). Once embodied in Mari Boine’s yoiking gesture, the indigenous community is thrown forth and made available to awareness. This involves a speculative dimension. Who knows in advance whether *Gula gula* will turn out to be a good yoik? Who knows if the project it draws upon will indeed emerge in the future? The yoik is projected like a lasso cast by herders on one of their reindeer (cf. woodcut by John Savio in the 3<sup>rd</sup> variation); whether it will catch the animal is all but certain.

The improvisational quality of lasso casting has been described by Tim Ingold thus:

‘This is not just a matter of mastering a particular movement, involving a throw of the arm, a flick of the wrist, a tug on the rope and digging in with the feet to take the strain. Above all, it involves fine judgement: of pitch, velocity and direction; and of just the right moment to throw so as to ensure that the trajectory of the rope with its evolving loop is perfectly timed to answer to the running of the animal. [...] To concentrate is to gather concurrent movements into a focus, and to seize the moment of their convergence. It is to be ever-alert to a world that is

continually incipient – where nothing is given, and everything just on the cusp of being given’ (Ingold 2018b: 453-454).

In an aforementioned quotation, David Abram compared the life of ideas with the life of deer: they are ‘graceful, shy, lingering at the edge of our awareness, yet slipping back into the forest if too wilfully focused upon’ (Abram 2010: 118, cf. Introduction and 1<sup>st</sup> variation). An idea for the future can be captured with the yoik in the way that a deer can be caught with a lasso – it requires patience and skill. One could thus say that the future is *anticipated*, i.e. ‘captured beforehand’ [la. *ante-capere*] (Onions 1966: 40).

In short, the future can be approached like past memories and Somby’s mountain: it is a topography – time must never be fully flattened, as Merleau-Ponty suggests – into which yoiks are thrown forth and *might* echo. These depths are too inscrutable to be mapped; the depths of time *as a whole* cannot be thoroughly *sounded* – in both senses of the term, either put into sound or measured like a navigator sounds the seabed (cf. Introduction). They can only be approached along situated gestures. Navigable paths for future worlds may be found, but time as such remains an ocean of virtualities moving in and out of actuality. That some yoiks should find an echo, that *Gula gula* should become one of the most famous modern yoiks, indicates in this case that there is a virtual presence, akin to the spirits inside the mountain, answering Mari Boine’s call.

## **Echoes from dreams**

How could anyone describe the craft of yoiking without, at some point, thinking about dreams? They had to appear in this work, beyond the observation made in the 3<sup>rd</sup> variation that new melodies tend to come to

some yoikers during sleep.<sup>72</sup> Like yoiks, dreams normally have neither beginning nor end; they merely open a *milieu* (in all the meanings of the term) of experience. Like yoiks, they are *created* as much as they are *received*. Dreamers are taken away, improvising their way along a flow, undergoing the presence of an environment. They are not ‘authors’ of the events because they are not ‘responsible’ for them (cf. Introduction); they dwell somewhere between the status of ‘apostle’ and ‘genius’ (cf. 3<sup>rd</sup> variation). A dream can also be a project for the future, a vision that must be given flesh, like Martin Luther King’s ‘I have a dream.’ Following the psychoanalyst Paul Lippmann, dreams experienced in sleep indeed appear akin to the project that Mari Boine captures in *Gula gula*:

‘How much like dreams are birds. They float in and out of our awareness. They fly where they will without our will involved. They float in air, the original luftsmenschen. But at times also, dreams are like fish. Fish live outside our immediate awareness in all layers of the

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<sup>72</sup> Incidentally, it seems that one can also yoik *while sleeping*, although I only encountered this idea twice. In an interview of Siri Maria Blind, a yoiker from the region of Jokkmokk / *Dálvvadis* (Norrbotten, Sweden) reports the following: ‘My father only yoiked while he was sleeping. Then indeed, he would yoik. Whenever he was tired, he had to yoik. We used to hear him during the night. [...] When he was really exhausted, he would start yoiking as soon as he fell asleep. And he used to talk in his sleep every night’ (in Skaltje 2014: 111). In the same collection of texts, another yoiker mentions someone who yoiks during his sleep. I do not know whether this is the same person (ibid.: 262).

sea, from the surface to the depths. Sometimes we catch one, mostly they go their own way, like dreams' (Lippmann 2013 [2000]: 5).<sup>73</sup>

In terms of temporality, the yoik responds to the dreams' three temporal 'functions' identified by psychologists: 'a state of present consciousness, a means for processing past experiences, and a preparation for future experiences' (MacDuffie & Mashour 2010: 190), inducing a temporality where 'the past, present, and future are no longer perceived as three discrete, easily separable dimensions' (ibid.).

One of the most striking similarities between yoiks and dreams is the way they bring memories to life in a manner so lively that the yoiker and dreamer can both say that they *are* there; the people, places, and animals known from the world of wakefulness are made present, instaurated in another realm, put in variation. Might these realms – the folds of yoiks and the folds of dreams – be related? Both of them seem at least related to what we might call a 'spiritual' realm (cf. 4<sup>th</sup> variation on yoiks as spirits). The *noaidi* Aslakka, from Kautokeino / *Guovdageaidnu* (Finnmark, Norway), once stated that 'in sleep, the soul belongs to the world of spirits, and then you can go wherever you want and talk to any creature. Everyone is in the spiritual world during sleep, but there are not many who know this' (in Therman 1940: 240, cf. also Johnsen 2007: 121). Britt Kramvig likewise notes that 'via dreaming, the spiritual life of people, animals, and nature comes into reality' (Kramvig 2015: 183).

It is also noteworthy that the realms of yoiks and dreams can both be inhabited by the dead. The only time I have personally been able to engage

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<sup>73</sup> This quotation can be related to the ethnomusicologist Merlyn Driver's comparison of yoiks with whales, quoted in the 4<sup>th</sup> variation.

with the dead with an intensity comparable to that experienced by yoikers was through dreaming. Suddenly, an acquaintance who passed away many years ago appears in all his vitality. In the most lucid of these dreams, there can be a faint awareness that this person should not be here: *Was he not dead? I am not sure*. Most of the time, I engage with that person as if he were alive. When I wake up, I wonder: how could I manage to picture such a living image of that person? In Britt Kramvig's words, I had been dreaming that person, 'not *about* him' (Kramvig 2015: 200), in the same sense as one does not yoik *about* someone. I suppose that this sort of experience will be familiar to most readers; as Vinciane Despret notes, tales and dreams are often privileged means of sustaining the existence of the dead (Despret 2015: 61).

Whether they engage with the dead or the living, yoiks and dreams both involve fragments of autobiographical memory. According to experimental psychologists, 49 to 65 per cent of dreams content comes from the memory of people and places known by the dreamer; a substantial part of the remaining content is made of imagined future scenarios (MacDuffie & Mashour 2010, Nielsen & Stenstrom 2005, Wamsley 2018). Thus, although some memorable dreams are bizarre, most of them are more commonplace and more similar to everyday life than might be assumed (Domhoff 1996, Hall & Van de Castle 1966). As in yoiks, the past experiences repeated in dreams are not 'episodes' – they do not reproduce events as they once unfolded, except in rare cases of dreams related to traumatic experiences. Rather, they articulate a linear experience around an emotional core. A milieu filled with emotional content takes shape in the dream as a node from which a 'hyperassociativity' is performed, assembling diverse episodes and improvised creativity into a more or less consistent dream scenario

(MacDuffie & Mashour 2010). Likewise, yoiking the reindeer will put the yoiker and listeners in contact with the same animal, but what sort of journey it will be, which paths will be followed, what kind of past experiences will be invoked, will vary. The reindeer's yoik does not tell a past story, it merely opens a field of perception likely to arouse past experiences.<sup>74</sup>

Comparing the interpretation of dreams among the Sámi and in Sigmund Freud's work, Britt Kramvig identifies what may be their most salient point of divergence: 'The dreamer in Sápmi engages himself in or with the world, independent of whether he is asleep or awake. There is no conflict between the dream and the awake state' (Kramvig 2015: 193). The Sámi poet Kirsti Paltto also contrasted the Western worldview – according to which 'Truth must be felt. Touched. Seen. Proven' – to the Sámi stance: 'Life is a dream, the dream real, and experience is truth' (in Dana 1997: 24). Dreams, then, are not hallucinatory experiences, 'they are a way of seeing' (Kramvig 2015: 188).

Along similar lines, the art historian Jérémie Michael McGowan writes that 'in the Sámi context, knowledge, language, and belief are closely tied to the land, and the land exists as a vibrant, living landscape. [...] By dreaming, the Sámi, especially *noaidi*, are able to travel in the landscapes of the familiar world and within the territories of the supernatural'

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<sup>74</sup> The emotional milieu of a dream may undergo transformations: for instance, the peaceful house I am dreaming of may turn into a boat in the middle of a storm at sea. This shift of milieu can occur in the yoik as well, although more rarely. For instance, the musicologist Tina Ramnarine describes the following yoik, performed by Wimme Saari: 'His joik started as a bird, then changed to a wolf, and ended with a church hymn' (Ramnarine 2009: 206). Here as in dreams, milieus still unfold *one at a time* (cf. 4<sup>th</sup> variation).

(McGowan 2004: 38). The anthropologist Knut Odner suggests that among the Sámi, dreamers are taken across a frontier and enter an alternative reality, where physical and sensorial abilities do not have the same constraints. However, he stresses that dreams remain ‘facts’ and should be taken seriously (Odner 1995: 133-135). The Sámi anthropologist Elina Helander-Renvall likewise states that for ‘the Sami, the altered dreaming state and the waking state are contained in one and the same cosmic wholeness’ (Helander-Renvall 2008: 319). She stresses the importance, in Sápmi, of translating dreams into stories to share with others (ibid.: 320), as well as the capacity of dreams to ‘function as keys to the possibilities in one’s own life’. In particular, she reports a dream of hers during which she experienced a metamorphosis as a bear, a spiritual encounter that eventually made her start painting: ‘What works by the way of truth of my dream, is passed to others through my paintings’ (ibid.: 331).

For more than a century, ethnography has documented numerous instances of human communities where, as among the Sámi actors mentioned by Kramvig, McGowan, Odner, and Helander-Renvall the relationship between dreams and wakefulness is not experienced as a strict dualism (e.g., Hallowell 2002 [1960], Kohn 2013, Radin 1914, Tedlock 1987, Willerslev 2007). One should wonder again, as Vinciane Despret did, whether ‘we’ – ‘we’ who supposedly consider dreams as hallucinations – are not the exception, after all. While Freud is often used by anthropologists as a bogeyman to represent this ‘we’, contemporary experimental psychologists tend to acknowledge that the experience of dreams and wakefulness are more similar than might be assumed. For instance, the ‘continuity hypothesis’ suggests an overlap between cognitive processing across sleep and wakefulness (Horton & Malinowski 2015, Schredl &



Hofmann 2002). Dreaming is recognised as one kind of thinking among others, an alternative neurophysiological state concerned with topics similar to those of wake (Barrett 2017: 1). If similarities between dreams and wakefulness have today been significantly investigated, the exact relationship between both remains unknown to experimental psychologists (Wamsley 2018: 464). Yet, they have observed that dreams have impacts on the awakened state by stimulating creativity, by inducing emotional insights, consolidating memory, by attuning the dreamer's behavioural responses to various situations in life (Barrett 2017, MacDuffie & Mashour 2010, Nielsen & Stenstrom 2005, Schredl 2017), or even by changing our affective relationships (Selterman et al. 2013).

Experimental psychologists nonetheless tend to remain nested in a conception of dreams as hallucinations, insofar as when sleeping, the primary sensory zones appear to be deactivated. Images appearing in dreams are then (supposedly) endogenously generated, and therefore do not occur in the external world. The dreamer does travel through familiar places and meet familiar people, but these are mere representations – in the *Vergegenwärtigung* mode – of the actual places and people living their lives in the outside world. However, as proposed in the 4<sup>th</sup> variation, *the world we find by turning inwards might just be the same as the one we find outwards*: the inner depths of humans may be understood as a realm of folds in touch with the folds of the outer terrain.

David Abram, relying on a similar conception of interiority, thus suggested that awareness and intelligence may be properties of the world in which we participate, rather than internal capacities. ‘What if’, he asked, ‘there is, yes, a quality of inwardness to the mind, not because the mind is located inside us (inside our body or brain), but because we are situated,

bodily, inside it [...]?’ (Abram 2010: 123). In this line of thought, engaging with ‘endogenously generated’ thought still leads us outwards into the world:

‘By acknowledging such links between the inner, psychological world and the perceptual terrain that surrounds us, we begin to turn inside-out, loosening the psyche from its confinement within a strictly human sphere, freeing sentience to return to the sensible world that contains us. Intelligence is no longer ours alone but is a property of the earth; we are in it, of it, immersed in its depths’ (Abram 1997: 156).

This idea implies a significant reversal of ‘modern philosophy’, which, according to the anthropologist Eduardo Viveiros de Castro, was able to build itself precisely by interiorising the experience of dreams:

‘The ban on dreams, spectra, and ghosts has been fundamental for modern philosophy. That is to say, in order to banish, to expel all these beings [...], the people of dreams, we must interiorise these beings and state that they are, in fact, only the ghosts of our psyche. Then we say: “The [American] Indians project their ghosts onto the world. That is the primitive narcissism”. But we could describe the exact contrary: it is us who have interiorised, introjected, unrealised, reduced to thought, reduced to a noematic function what, in fact, were perfectly real beings’ (Viveiros de Castro 2016).

In Somby’s *Yoiking with the Winged Ones*, taking the mountain seriously meant attending to the unique forms of echoes it sends back when skilfully addressed; attending to the fact that, addressed with a human voice, ‘fairies and elves’ can yoik back at you; that the voice that comes back is not merely

one's own. As the philosopher Mladen Dolar once wrote: 'The moment there is a surface which returns the voice, the voice acquires an autonomy of its own and enters the dimension of the other; it becomes a deferred voice, and narcissism crumbles' (Dolar 2006: 40). Taking dreams seriously likewise implies acknowledging their inscrutable topographies and the echoes they host when we dive into them. It also implies avoiding the 'modern narcissism', once denounced by the Yanomami shaman Davi Kopenawa when he said, 'you Whites sleep a lot, but you dream only of yourselves' (in Viveiros de Castro 2015b: 12).

According to the psychoanalyst Dana Birksted-Breen, the very possibility of dreaming originally stems from echoing experiences, namely the echoes occurring between an infant's sounds and the mother's response. The dream space, she writes, 'is the maternal container stemming from the reverberation back and forth between the mother's receptive reverie and the infant's experience which has been internalized' (Birksted-Breen 2009: 45). It could likewise be argued that it is by engaging with the land and observing that 'presencing' occurs in response to our gestures that the possibility of yoiking can emerge. Like dreams, the yoik can be approached as a 'container', or rather an *amplifier* enhancing the possibilities of this presencing in the vocal mode.

While developing these reflections, it must be borne in mind that, despite the convergences between the crafts of yoiking and dreaming, divergences also appear: for instance, yoiks can be summoned immediately and at any time, their content can, to a certain extent, be commanded by the yoiker, and their experience is more easily shared insofar as they are articulated on *one* known source – one *cantus firmus*. Their divergence is what enables them to echo with one another, whenever the world of waking is extended

in dreams or, conversely, when yoiks received in dreams are hosted in wakefulness.

## **Echoes from texts**

Written texts do not normally echo as powerfully as yoiks.

One of the observations that leads me to this statement is that texts do not normally appear in dreams. Reading and writing belong to a category of activities underrepresented in dream experiences, even among people who spend most of their time awake either reading or writing (Hall 1951, Schredl & Erlacher 2008). According to the psychoanalyst Ernest Hartmann, this may be due to the fact that ‘we dream of phylogenetically or ontogenetically old activities rather than recently acquired skills’ (Hartmann 2000: 110, cf. also Massey 2006: 45). Sexual activity, interpersonal relationships, and walking, for example, are frequent in dreams and supposedly stem from an early stage of human life, whereas reading, writing, arithmetic, and typing are readily considered as recent innovations (Revonsuo 2000: 886, Schredl 2000).<sup>75</sup>

Here again, dreams and the traditional yoik converge, insofar as the latter primarily tends to evoke presences that Palaeolithic hunters might have encountered: familiar places, people, and animals. Books, computers, equations, national institutions, and discourses are not normally yoiked. In dreams, Hartmann observes that even *speech* seems to undergo significant distortions in dreams, as we rarely recall sentences spoken word-for-word when we wake up. Memories like ‘We were talking about ...’ or ‘My friend

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<sup>75</sup> How the yoik and academic texts measure in terms of age is explored further in the 6<sup>th</sup> variation.

said something like ...’ appear more common (Hartmann 2000: 109). In this regard, the neuroscientist Irving J. Massey has suggested that music might be ‘the only faculty that is not altered by the dream environment’ (Massey 2006: 42). Indeed, Valeria Uga et al. reported an experiment that resulted in the following results: 55 per cent of musical dreams involve the ‘factual reproduction of existent musical pieces’ that are ‘exactly reactivated’, while only 17 per cent present ‘unusual versions of known pieces’ – the remaining 28 per cent include original musical experiences (Uga et al. 2006: 356).

Might we conclude that ‘music’ as a whole is more likely to echo in our awareness than written texts and speech due to our evolutionary past? Perhaps, but attending to another psychological phenomenon, the so-called ‘earworms’, leads to further considerations. *Earworms* – also called ‘involuntary musical imagery’ or ‘stuck song syndrome’ in the relevant literature – refer to the ‘experience of an inability to dislodge a song and prevent it from repeating itself in one’s head’ (Beaman & Williams 2010: 637). In contrast to dreamed music, the music involved in earworms is almost always known – ‘musical hallucinations’ without identifiable input stimulus exist, but they are rare (Taylor et al. 2014: 582).

Earworms may be understood as ongoing echoes of past musical experiences. Although, in exceptional cases, it can be a constant or near-constant condition (Brown 2006), the vast majority of people, at least within the populations investigated by psychologists, experience it as an ephemeral phenomenon, lasting from a few minutes to several hours, and occurring at least once a week (Hyman et al. 2013, Liikkanen 2008). That music ‘came out as the most commonly occurring form of involuntary recollection’ (Liikkanen 2008: 409) tends to affirm its propensity to echo in the

topography of human awareness. However, nearly all the existing studies on earworms converge on the observation that long and complex musical pieces do not get stuck in our heads. Earworms generally consist of *fragments* of musical pieces, typically, a chorus or refrain (Beaman & Williams 2010: 641). Even when several pieces of a song are recalled, we often ‘experience difficulty leaping across the gap’ that separates these (Hyman et al. 2013: 213).

Simple and repetitive fragments thus loop in our heads, ‘forever repeating rather than running to completion’, as the psychologist Tom Stafford puts it. ‘Some people’, he further noted, ‘report that singing an earworm to the end can help get rid of it’ (Stafford 2012). This idea reminds me of the observation made earlier about Husserl’s *Retention* and *Vergegenwärtigung* modes of musical memory: a past musical experience remains present, within a temporality of retention, precisely because the suite of notes cannot come to an end; completing it might conjure the spell. In any case, the length of musical fragments that induce earworms seems to oscillate between fifteen and thirty seconds (Levitin 2006: 151, Taylor et al. 2014: 582). The psychologist Daniel J. Levitin suggested that this length corresponds to what he calls an ‘echoic’ memory corresponding to ‘the capacity of auditory short-term memory’ (Levitin 2006: 151), while Stafford noted that whether earworms involve short-term or long-term memory is debatable (Stafford 2012). Like popular song refrains and commercial jingles (Levitin 2006: 151, Beaman & Williams 2010: 641, Taylor et al. 2014: 582), yoiks thus appear inherently suited for looping in our minds as earworms – although a yoik that comes to one’s awareness is perhaps more often chanted, or hummed, than internally experienced (cf. Anne Lise Varsi’s quotation in the 4<sup>th</sup> variation).

Yoiks, then, are always likely to echo, whereas only fragments of longer songs may do the same. One could say that a yoik behaves like a valley: a situated and folded *locus* encircled by the horizon. Mendelssohn's String Quartet in A minor, by contrast, appears like a journey through an entire mountain range. Each of its themes, each of its valleys, is likely to provide earworm-echoes, whereas the composition – the mountain range – is only recalled through *Vergegenwärtigung*. In other words, if I listen to the piece five times in a row, only fragments of it will later loop in my mind. The piece as a whole is not an echoing gesture, but, according to Benedict Taylor, 'an ongoing development' eventually '*echoing* the opening of the work in the finale's coda' (Taylor 2010: 47, my emphasis).

It is symptomatic that, on Mendelssohn's original score, the composition's original motif is named *Frage* ['Question']. The *Frage* appears like Somby's yoik to the *Gufihtar*, i.e. a short question that calls for an echoing response: *Are you there?* In Mendelssohn's String Quartet, the response is postponed, reached after a complex journey along various musical folds. In Somby's yoik, it is immediate, in part due to its form, halfway between a traditional yoik and a scream, lasting only five seconds and alternated each iteration with a period of silence (Somby 2016b: track 1).<sup>76</sup> Like commercial jingles composed by advertisers for echoing in our

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<sup>76</sup> One could wonder to what extent the operatic 'cry' fulfils a similar function. As the musicologist Gary Tomlinson suggests, 'the [operatic] cry is the "immediate expression of the anguished will" that puts us in touch with an alternative to phenomenal reality, a "sound-world." This alternative reality, parallel to the "light-world" of dreams, is "an Essence of things that eludes the forms of outer knowledge, Time and Space"' (Tomlinson 1999: 86). The cry, in modern opera, seems intended to echo in the topography of the

minds as earworms, we could say that Somby's yoik is intended to become *the mountain's earworm*.

In light of these observations, two propositions emerge. Firstly, academic texts diverge from music in that they are not hosted in dreams; secondly, they converge with European classical music in their inability to echo in one's thoughts in their entirety. Consider the case of Merleau-Ponty's *Phénoménologie de la Perception*. This thick philosophical treatise is unlikely to surge to awareness as a whole, from its beginning to its end – is it even possible to *read* it from beginning to end? However, I have experienced echoes stemming from several of its *loci*. For instance, the idea of past experiences resembling rocks on a riverbed is one that retained my attention and kept dwelling in my mind long after I read it, occasionally revealing some of its implications as it looped; within the book's mountain range, only situated valleys tend to echo.

In truth, experiencing the echo of entire treatises may be possible. This was a common ambition in the literary culture of medieval Europe. As the historian Mary Carruthers noted:

'The medieval scholar's relationship to his texts is quite different from modern objectivity. Reading is to be digested, to be ruminated, like a cow chewing her cud, or like a bee making honey from the nectar of flowers. Reading is memorized with the aid of *murmur*, mouthing the words subvocally as one turns the text over in one's memory [...]. Gregory the Great writes, "We ought to transform what we read within our very selves, so that when our mind is stirred by

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Kantian noumenon, or the Schopenhauerian *Wille*, revealing the possibility of feeling a presence hidden from sight, if only ephemerally.



what it hears, our life may concur by practicing what has been heard.” Hugh of St. Victor writes of walking through the forest (*silva*) of Scripture, “whose ideas [*sententias*] like so many sweetest fruits, we pick as we read and chew [*ruminamus*] as we consider them” (Carruthers 2008 [1990]: 205).

Experiencing echoes from written texts is perhaps like *dreaming* about texts. If you spend your days writing, you might dream of this activity slightly more often, but the overall tendency of the craft of dreaming favours other activities. Likewise, in order to memorise and ‘ruminate’ texts or melodies in the European Middle Ages, these had to be divided into shorter sections and arranged into a spatio-temporal frame (e.g. the imagined walk across a palace with many rooms) (Carruthers 2008 [1990], Berger 2005). Ideally, medieval readers had to be able to recite a text backwards (Carruthers 2008 [1990]: 21). It may be that someone like Thomas Aquinas, through his remarkable achievements in memorising classical texts, might have dreamt of Aristotle’s *Metaphysics* or had it looping in his mind. Contemporary academic readers, unfamiliar with the demanding task that he performed, are unlikely to experience this. From Merleau-Ponty’s treatise, only local ideas are likely to loop in their awareness, while the past that links them remains elusive.

This thesis is likewise not made for echoing as a whole: it is neither a commercial jingle nor a yoik. Stretching further towards the yoik’s propensity towards echoes might have reduced the text to a single aphorism, such as ‘Yoiks are circles’, leaving to readers the task of developing it in their thoughts. In line with the following poem by Nils-Aslak Valkeapää, echoes could also have been integrated within the form of the text:

'yoik	'juoigat
yoikyoikyoik	<i>juoigatjuoigatjuoigat</i>
yoikyoikyoikyoik	<i>juoigatjuoigatjuoigatjuoigat</i>
yoikyoikyoikyoikyoik	<i>juoigatjuoigatjuoigatjuoigatjuoigat</i>
<b>YOIK</b>	<b>JUOIGAT</b>
we cease to exist	<i>mii eat leat šat</i>
we do not exist	<i>mii eat leat</i>
the yoik the yoik the yoik	<i>luohti luohti luohti</i>
the yoiks	<i>luođit</i>
we become a yoik	<i>mii šaddat luohtin</i>
and even if we stop yoiking	<i>ja vaikko mii heaitit juoigame</i>
the yoik grows expands and fills	<i>dat luohti šaddá viidu deavdá</i>
us entirely	<i>min olles min</i>
fills us	<i>deavdá</i>
boils over	<i>hábbu</i>
overflows	<i>hábbu badjel</i>
yoik	<i>luohti</i>
the yoiks	<i>luođit</i>
we yoik'	<i>mii juoigat'</i>
(Valkeapää 2017 [2001]: 155).	(Valkeapää 2001: 155). <sup>77</sup>

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<sup>77</sup> The original poem is printed with a particular typographic layout not reproduced here.

Whether achieved in the aphoristic or poetic mode, a horizon would have been crossed and the practice of writing a doctoral thesis would have been lost from sight (cf. 1<sup>st</sup> variation). This text, because it is a thesis, cannot echo as a whole. It may still reveal some *loci* carrying echoing power such as ideas, concepts, and stories. Witnessing the depths of the craft of yoiking, I have tried to *sound* them in order to find such *loci*; whether they might echo, or ‘re-sound’, depends on the inscrutable topographies of the future. It occasionally happened during the consultations that took place in Sámi institutions at the end of my investigation (cf. Introduction). Some participants reacted to my project as a whole, usually in positive terms, e.g. ‘Your description of the yoik is accurate’. Others chose to respond to a particular idea that retained their attention, and the participants then readily responded with personal memories. For instance, after hearing some of my arguments about the yoik’s temporality, a participant responded with an anecdote about how she yoiks whenever she misses her daughter, who lives far away from her. In these particular instances, I was standing in front of the audience like Ánde Somby stood in front of his valley. My *Frage* – ‘Are you there?’ – had found an echo.

This text, like any academic text, can thus be described as an ecology of ideas, arranged along paths of reflection intended to be navigable for readers. Like Mendelssohn’s String Quartet, it relies on ‘several strands tangling with one another’ – e.g. considerations on nostalgia, memory, mourning, dreaming, indigeneity, medieval literacy. It still converges with the yoik in that it is not haunted by a fear of loss. My own *Frage*, uttered at the beginning of this variation, was the concept of echo, and although writing these paragraphs demanded some degree of effort on my part, perhaps akin to Mendelssohn’s ‘quest’, the resulting text echoes the *Frage*

throughout its course, hosting its voice along the pages, parsimoniously revealing its relevance as it loops.

## 6<sup>th</sup> variation: Primordial

*Heia lei la la*

*Heia lei la la*

*Heia lei la la*

*Heia lei la la*

- A pastor

If the yoik is in touch with an ‘enchanted’ (cf. 2<sup>nd</sup> variation) temporality, it is not only in the echo of past experiences it affords (cf. 5<sup>th</sup> variation), but also in the connection it creates with a more original past, a feeling of earthly power and contact with the ‘old Sámi life’, longed for by Nils-Aslak Valkeapää in one of his poems:

‘How I respect	<i>‘Mot mun anáŋge gudnis</i>
the old Sámi life	<i>dološ sámi eallima</i>
That was true love of nature	<i>Dat lei duođalaš luonddu</i>
	<i>ráhkisteapmi</i>
where nothing was wasted	<i>mas miige ii mannan hohkkái</i>
where humans were part of	<i>mas olmmoš lei oassi luonddus</i>
nature	
Not until now have they	<i>Dat leat dál viimmat jáhkkán</i>
realized	
that the people who lived here	<i>ahte sámit leat orron dáppe juo</i>
ten thousand years ago	<i>logenár duhát jagi</i>
melted to become the Sámi	<i>Dat main lea suddan sápmi</i>

That is a long time	<i>Dat lea guhkes áigi</i>
The wanderings of the Egyptian Pharaohs	<i>Egyptta fáraoid vádjoleapmi</i>
The riches of the Roman empire	<i>Roma-riikka riggodagat</i>
The glory of the Greek culture	<i>Greikka kultuvrralaš gudni</i>
short moments if you compare	<i>bottažat bálddas</i>
How I respect	<i>Mot anánge gudnis</i>
the life of the ancient Sámi	<i>dološ sámiid eallima</i>
and how meaningless	<i>ja man dušši leage</i>
for decades and centuries	<i>moadde logi moadde čuođinai jagi</i>
to have learned the national	<i>oahppat amas álbmogiid</i>
days of other nations'	<i>álbmotbeivviid'</i>
(Valkeapää 1994 [1985]).	(Valkeapää 1985).

This variation is centred on descriptions of the yoik as a craft received from this ancestral time. The central concept it proposes came up during a yoik course in Switzerland in July 2017. As I went jogging with our teacher, Ingor Ántte Áilu Gaup, we met a local who inquired about what type of chants we were going to learn. Gaup answered with a short yoik. Our interlocutor was clearly impressed and commented (in English): ‘It sounds *primordial!*’ The term may be considered a translation of the Germanic *ur-* prefix, often used by yoikers describing their practice in Norwegian, and corresponding to the North Sámi *eami-* prefix, which can also mean ‘innate’. *Urkraft* and *eamičápmu* thus refer to a ‘primordial craft’. The semantic field of ‘primordial’ (including for instance ‘primal’, ‘primordial’, and ‘original’) is remarkably recurrent among non-Sámi listeners, as evidenced by comments posted in response to videos on the internet.

As some of my colleagues pointed out while I was working on this variation, caution was required regarding whether speaking of a primordial quality in the yoik was a relevant or a fantasised, perhaps even offensive, gesture. To my knowledge, the only author who approached the issue in the academic literature is the ethnomusicologist Thomas Hilder, commenting on an interview with the yoiker Mari Boine (cf. Section ‘How old is the yoik?’). He reacted to the idea with some degree of scepticism, stressing that discourses about the yoik as *urmusikk* are potentially ‘essentialist’ (Hilder 2013: 199). Supposedly ‘essentialist’ discourses are also deplored by another musicologist, Paal Fagerheim, who identifies as ‘problematic’ and ‘mystical’ some of the arguments he heard from yoikers. The arguments, he contends, aim at ‘organising cultural difference’ (Fagerheim 2014: 75).

Given that the ‘primordial’ quality of the yoik recurrently came up, not just in my exchanges with non-Sámi listeners, but primarily in my conversations with yoikers, I was inclined to wonder whether a fear of essentialism on the part of scholars might have prevented them from taking an important aspect of the yoik seriously. Eventually, the consultations I conducted in Sámi institutions revealed that, among the concepts articulating each variation, ‘primordial’ was considered particularly relevant by various audiences. Evidently, one should not expect *all* yoikers to embrace the term as a relevant expression, in as much as it merely points to one variation of the craft of yoiking; it is *as one possible variation* that it is here explored.

The expression ‘primordial’ stems from the Latin roots *prīmus* and *ōrdior*, indicating a beginning, an origin, a firstness (Onions 1966: 710). In the practice of weaving, *ōrdior* refers to the act of laying the warp, a starting

point for creation to proceed. This variation starts by reviewing some of the written, archaeological, and linguistic sources about the yoik's origins before turning to how Sámi yoikers actually consider its primordality, namely within a past that cannot be dated. This will open the way for a dialogue with the existing literature on the evolutionary origins and functions of human music. Attending to the yoik's primordality can result in a diverging speculative picture: might there be a 'thirst for existence' at the roots of music, still nurtured in its primordial form by yoikers? To what extent can the philosophical medium partake in this temporality? Before addressing the latter question, a digression on the conflictual relation between the yoik and Christianity, approached in light of the yoik's primordality, is presented.

### **How old is the yoik?**

As the yoiker Torgeir Vassvik once told me, 'what is special about the yoik is that it is incredibly old' (conversation 2016). According to the yoiker Inga Juuso, it is from its connection with 'the old Sami religion' that the yoik derives its power (in Helander & Kailo 1998: 136). In the nineteenth century, the priest Jacob Fellman already suggested that the yoik had been practised since 'primordial times' [sw. *urminnestid*] (Fellman 1903 [1847]: 193). I have encountered the idea that it constitutes (one of) the oldest music forms in Europe on countless occasions. The media scholar Anna Nacher pushes this claim further by arguing that 'yoik and yoiking belong to one of the oldest musical traditions *in the world*' (Nacher 2018: 77, my emphasis).

As far as written sources can inform us, the yoik seems to date back at least as far as the eleventh century, as suggested by a text by Adam von Bremen (1876 [Eleventh century]: 179, cf. 2<sup>nd</sup> variation). About one



hundred years later, the anonymous text *Historia Norwegiæ* tells of a Sámi ritual during which someone, who seems to be a *noaidi*, drums and chants himself into a trance. The historian Sheila Louise Wright also mentions the Saga of Erik the Red, dating from the thirteenth century, as possibly containing a reference to the yoik. This text tells of a Sámi seeress, named Thorbjorg, encircled by women who chant an invocation of spirits (Wright 2015: 4). According to the musicologist Karl-Olof Edström, the first reliable sources where the yoik is clearly identified with the Swedish term ‘jojk’, derived from the Sámi verb *juoigat*, date from the seventeenth century and were written by missionaries and priests (Edström 2003: 170). As the ethnomusicologist Ola Graff stresses, the activity of yoiking was then often subsumed under the Scandinavian expression *å rune*, which also referred to drumming (Graff 1996). According to the musicologist Tina Ramnarine, the first transcriptions of yoik melodies date from the early nineteenth century, for instance in the travel report of Giuseppe Acerbi (Ramnarine 2009: 198, cf. Acerbi 1832 [1802]).

Based on these sources, nothing allows us to attribute an older origin of the yoik than we might attribute to, say, European plainchant, a chanting tradition that has continuously been maintained from the Middle Ages until today with a fair degree of vitality. Yet European plainchant is never seriously thought of as being ‘the oldest music in Europe’.

Stretching the scope of the investigation to other types of sources affords going further back in time – and further into more daring speculations. The Sámi writer Maj Lis Skaltje reported the observations of Pekka Sammallahti, a professor in Sámi language at the University of Oulu in Finland, who claims that the word *juoigat* is at least four thousand years old, based on its belonging to a common Proto-Sámi-Finnic language.

Likewise, the term *vuolli*, encountered among the South and Lule Sámi and which refers to a yoik melody, goes back to the Uralic level and may be six thousand years old (Skaltje 2014: 282). As for the Sámi drumming tradition, which was supposedly accompanied by yoiks, Maj Lis Skaltje suggests that it ‘could be five thousand years old’. Indeed, figures in the rock carvings near Alta / *Áltá* (Finnmark, Norway), dating from 3,000 BC, seem to represent human characters holding drums (ibid.: 283).

If taken seriously, these speculations give a fair degree of venerableness to the yoik. However, the historical, linguistic, and archaeological evidences that sustain them are rarely mentioned in the academic literature and I did not encounter them during my conversations with yoikers. That a significant number of listeners on online video platforms might have consulted them before commenting on the yoik’s ‘primordially’ seems highly unlikely. Clearly, the idea of the yoik as primordial finds its motivation elsewhere than in scholarly sources.

In truth, calling the yoik *urmusikk* does not necessarily bring us back to a discrete period of human (pre)history: whether it is one, five, ten or a hundred thousand years old is perhaps not the point. The age of the yoik could be understood along Lars-Erik Ruong’s temporal thinking mentioned in the 5<sup>th</sup> variation (cf. Bergman 2008: 20-21), namely as an indeterminate, ‘very old’ time, but the use of the superlative (the *oldest* music in Europe) indicates something more specific. Indeed, the *ur-* prefix and the Latin root *primus* convey the idea of an origin, something like: ‘*However old other musics may be, the yoik is older*’. Such an idea is perhaps unlikely to find support from scientific research; in fact, it appears rather to be ‘enchanted’ (cf. 2<sup>nd</sup> variation), in the sense that it finds its source in the experience of

the vocalisation. It is indeed towards the voice that Mari Boine guides Thomas Hilder's attention when asked about the primordality of the yoik:

'For Boine, *yoik* and Siberian throat singing come from the "same source." Pressing further for what this "source" might be, Boine explained that it had to do with the "primordial" (*urmenneskelig*) and its connection to nature. This quality, she reiterated, can be heard in *yoik*, especially [Inga] Juuso's voice. Like with *yoik* and other "related" vocal traditions, Boine continued, it is the way one uses the voice. Whereas "Western" vocal traditions are descriptive and are removed from and outside of what they are singing about, the "primal-voice" (*urstemmen*) is the very thing it sings, she reasoned. It is only through *yoik* and related traditions that the "primordial" can be achieved, and it is thus the "primordial-voice" that Boine has been in search of through her musical development' (Hilder 2013: 199).

The yoik, in this light, is primordial by virtue of its vocal quality and the fact that one does yoik 'about': these are the two points that I also encountered in my own research. The 'naturalness' of the voice was often emphasised by yoikers. Frode Fjellheim, for instance, wrote that, in contrast to European classical voices, which seek to imitate instruments, the yoik relies on the 'natural possibilities and limitations of the body' (Fjellheim 2018: 4). The musicologist Thomas Andreassen reported several converging descriptions by (anonymous) yoikers, who used the expression 'primal sound' [no. *primallyd*]:

'Yoiking is as close as you get to the natural voice, not something ideal nor something we strive to achieve, but something we simply

do. [...] ['Primal' refers to] the raw unpolished sound of your own voice [...], without processing sound or copying someone else. It is your core voice' (Andreassen 2017: 62-63).

In Elin Kåven's words, the sound of the yoik is directly derived from its earthly origins, as she found out in a moment of 'enchantment' (cf. 2<sup>nd</sup> variation):

'It was then that I realised that the yoik is in fact the sound of the earth. It is exactly as if you drew energy from the earth and then it comes out by itself. And it is as if you were some kind of instrument, and the sound of the earth goes through you. And it is then that I knew that we have this in common, all indigenous peoples have this in common. We have the same inspiration; we have the same power [no. *kraft*]. It comes from the earth, from nature' (conversation 2017).

The 'indigenous' quality of this voice came up as obviously audible in an anecdote reported by the Sámi philologist Harald Gaski: in 1975, Nils-Aslak Valkeapää was sent as an ambassador of the Sámi people to the *World Council of Indigenous Peoples* in Port Alberni (Canada) and faced scepticism among the assembly as to whether the Sámi were indeed indigenous. Yet once Valkeapää had vocalised a yoik, his interlocutors were convinced that he was one of them (Gaski 2008).

As the ethnomusicologist Ola Graff noted, some yoikers, including Valkeapää, actually consider that 'almost any indigenous music can be

named yoik’ (cf. Graff 2018: 80)<sup>78</sup> – I will refer to this common music as the *universal yoik*. There is indeed a strong awareness among many Sámi yoikers of the similarities between the yoik and vocal practices from other indigenous groups, in particular Native American and Siberian populations (cf. Introduction), as the indicator of a universal, original source derived in a multiplicity of practices. Universal as the yoik’s *urtoner* may be for humans, one may still wonder to what extent being a Sámi implies a more intense propensity to engage in primordial crafts like yoiking. There does not seem to be a single answer. During a yoik course in Central Europe, a yoiker from the Nordic countries explained to me that her grandmother was Sámi and that *due to this ascendancy* the yoik was always in her – in her ‘genes’ as she phrased it – although it is only when she started to drum that the technique of yoiking naturally came to her. As far as I can tell, this perspective assuming a genetic specificity among the Sámi is rarely expressed. It nonetheless points to the fact that discourses about primordiality and indigeneity stem from living matters of concern rather than homogeneous consensuses. They constitute ‘horizons’ for thought (cf. 1<sup>st</sup> variation), and it is within this ‘horizontal’ primordiality that I will now circulate.

## **The origins of music**

The ‘horizon’ of the primordial yoik recalls another horizon, one that has animated various speculations and discussions within academic research,

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<sup>78</sup> ‘Yoik’ is then used like anthropologists use the expression ‘shamanism’, derived from the Tungusic *šaman* (Eliade 1968: 21) but today referring to a phenomenon enacted in various parts of the planet and often presented as a primordial form of religion.

namely the issue of the origins of music. This section and the next aim at attending to the convergences and divergences of both horizons through a review of contemporary theories in evolutionary musicology.

Native communities of Sápmi, Siberia, and the Americas do not receive particular attention as the bearers of a ‘first’ tradition in contemporary biomusicological research. The collective work *The Origins of Music* (Wallin et al. 2001), a major contribution in the field, only tangentially addresses them, except in one chapter by the ethnomusicologist Bruno Nettl. In his chapter, Nettl seeks to take his ‘interest in Native Americans as a basis’ for a reflection on musical universals. In particular, he introduces the idea of ‘the world’s simplest music’, a form of music supposedly present in every society and consisting of ‘songs that have a short phrase repeated several or many times, with minor variations, using three or four pitches within a range of a fifth’ (Nettl 2001: 469). According to him, the specificity of ‘peoples living in widely separated isolated areas of the world’<sup>79</sup> is that they have the world’s simplest music as their only or main mode of musical expression. In ‘societies whose music is otherwise more complex’, this music can be observed in children’s games, games in general, and ‘obsolete’ rituals (ibid.). Bruno Nettl’s theory is therefore based on the remnants of a basic kind of music close to ‘the earliest music of humans’ and overtaken by ‘more complex music’ throughout the course of history (ibid.). This simple music is described as a ‘statistical universal’, i.e. something that is encountered in *most* societies, as opposed to ‘true universals’ like language (ibid.: 467, 470).

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<sup>79</sup> The Sámi probably fit in what Bruno Nettl is trying to picture, although some might ask: ‘*Isolated from what?*’

Bruno Nettl is aware of the risks entailed in taking universals in present-day music as a basis for imagining the music of our ancestors (ibid.: 471). However, his reflection exemplifies a recurring approach in evolutionary musicology: a focus not on musical experience *per se*, but on musical form as it appears after a double reduction consisting of (1) reducing musical expression to its sonic components – in continuation with René Descartes’ founding statement: ‘the object of music is sound’ (Descartes 1656 [1618]: 1), and (2) laying it down on a classical score for analytical purposes. Once translated into this framework, born within the musical practices of European literacy, the yoik might indeed appear more ‘simple’ than, say, a symphony by Anton Bruckner.

Indigenous expressions are thereby classified among the ‘non-serious’ activities; they recall the expressions of children’s songs and games. Their ‘original’ character is acknowledged, but only within a linear narrative stretching from simplicity to complexity, from immaturity to seriousness, in line with the evolutionist argument advanced earlier by the sociologist Herbert Spencer on the origins of music in his *First Principles of a New System of Philosophy* (Spencer 1862, cf. Kleinman 2015). In short, the yoik is what it is by virtue of its relation to what comes after. The world’s simplest music, one could say, is not primordial, but *primitive*. While the former adjective suggests a relationship with an original craft, the latter considers the musical expression in relation to its supposed subsequent developments; hence its recurring use in evolutionist theories at the early moments of social anthropology and ethnomusicology, from Richard Wallaschek’s *Primitive Music* (Wallaschek 1893) to Cecil Maurice Bowra’s *Primitive Song* (Bowra 1963).

Arguably, Bruno Nettl does not explicitly advocate an evolutionist view of human progress and his primitivism is the exception rather than the rule in current research in evolutionary musicology. Yet it may be the same inability to think in primordial terms, and the potentially patronising quality of primitivism, that justifies the absence of traditions like the yoik in most of the relevant literature. The expression ‘primitive’ is not abandoned but assigned to other actors such as animals, infants, and the brain (cf. Wallin et al. 2001: all the occurrences of the word ‘primitive’ are related to one of these). For example, animal vocalisations such as ‘referential emotive vocalisations’ (REV) uttered by primates are readily considered as precursors to both music and language (e.g. Brown 2001, Mithen 2005: 107-111, Snowdon et al. 2015, Spencer 1901, Tomlinson 2015: 111).

REVs are defined by the musicologist Steven Brown as ‘a type of call (not song) that serves as an on-line, emotive response to some object in the environment, but that also has the property of semantic specificity for the class of object being responded to’ (Brown 2001: 291). According to Brown, REVs illustrate a precursor to the common ancestor between human language and music, which he calls ‘musilanguage’ – a precursor already speculated by the poet Johann Gottfried von Herder in 1772 (cf. Altenmüller et al. 2013: 317). The move from REV to musilanguage, Brown elaborates, occurred with the meaningful use of discrete pitch levels, ‘in contrast to the unpitched grunts of many primate calls’ (ibid.: 292). Music and language then differentiated along diverging patterns of discreteness and combinatoriality: the former focused on ‘sound emotion’ while the latter focused on ‘sound reference’ (ibid.: 278). This conception of music and language as stemming from a common ancestor breaks with a classical assumption according to which the latter derived from the former, earlier



suggested by influential thinkers like Jean-Jacques Rousseau (1990 [1781]) and Charles Darwin (1902 [1871], cf. Kleinman 2015).

Brown's proposition was developed by the archaeologist Steven Mithen, who rebaptised 'musilanguage' as 'HmMMMM', an acronym for 'holistic, multi-modal, manipulative, musical, mimetic' (Mithen 2005: 138). Reviewing what is meant by these adjectives goes beyond the scope of this variation; suffice to note here that the 'holistic' nature of HmMMMM is opposed to the 'compositional' nature of language and that, according to Mithen, 'music emerged from the remnants of "HmMMMM" after language evolved' (ibid.: 266). The 'holism' of HmMMMM implies that 'they were complete messages rather than words to be combined, and were employed to manipulate the behaviour of others rather than to tell them things about the world' (ibid.: 138). As Mithen suggests, the shift to composition and music may only have concerned *Homo sapiens*, while Neanderthals maintained holistic vocalisations. Interestingly, HmMMMM is not described as a 'primitive' type of music but as an elaborate means of communication relying on a high level of sensibility to aural phenomena. It is looked upon as something 'we' have lost but may still experience in our experience of music, not unlike the echoes described in the 5<sup>th</sup> variation:

'Hence my final words take the form of a request: listen to music. When doing so, think about your own evolutionary past; think about how the genes you possess have passed down from generation to generation and provide an unbroken line to the earliest hominid ancestor that we share. That evolutionary inheritance is why you like music – whatever your particular taste' (Mithen 2005: 278).

In his book *A Million Years of Music*, the musicologist Gary Tomlinson offers a critique of both Brown's and Mithen's approaches, judged too simplistic with regards to current theories in evolutionary biology (Tomlinson 2015: 33-34). He suggests instead that music did not evolve as a whole, but along two movements: (1) the apparition of increments along the phylogenetic record and (2) 'their late coalescence in music' (ibid.: 34). Music is envisioned here as the offspring of heterogeneous cognitive developments based on processes of cultural accumulation and genetic dedifferentiation.

When elaborating his proposition, Gary Tomlinson nonetheless joins with Brown and Mithen in speculating a (pre)historical move from holism to compositionality as well as a progressive emancipation from the 'here and now' towards a capacity for 'thinking at a distance'. Within his narrative, the mimetism of the Acheulean industry is a starting point, as mimesis supposedly constitutes an ancient behaviour that preceded the emergence of language and *Homo sapiens* and by which memory is archived in the form of patterned gestures and is transmitted from one body to the other (ibid.: 75). Through the accumulation of such behaviours, a 'cultural archive' progressively emerges between the organism and the environment, affording a 'release from proximity': while the Acheulean industry required the co-presence of 'sociomaterial interactions and cultural knowledge transmitted across generations' (ibid.: 92), the expressive means of humans drift towards arbitrariness, discreteness, and combinatoriality. Tomlinson acknowledges a capacity for hierarchical thinking in Neanderthals but attributes the composition of 'mutually distinct units selected from limited sets' into 'limitless array of larger units' to *Homo sapiens* alone (ibid.: 168).

As a musical tradition that supposedly does not emphasise composition as a central process, the yoik appears to fit in with the picture of prehistoric music outlined by these authors, as it does with regard to its mimetic dimension (cf. 3<sup>rd</sup> variation). The definition of holistic vocalisations as ‘complete messages rather than words to be combined, [...] employed to manipulate the behaviour of others rather than to tell them things about the world’ is largely suitable for describing the yoik, although the relevance of concepts like ‘message’ and ‘manipulation’ could be questioned. Likewise, the yoik does present both ‘emotional’ and ‘referential’ elements, as, supposedly, would a proto-linguistic and proto-musical means of expression. Borrowing Merleau-Ponty’s expression quoted in the 3<sup>rd</sup> variation, one could say that the yoik is a way of ‘singing the world’, i.e. one whose referential meanings should not be disconnected from its ‘emotional’ senses (Merleau-Ponty 1945: 218).

If Merleau-Ponty takes this to be a feature of all spoken languages, Tim Ingold extends the argument by suggesting that languages are sedimented forms of music. According to him, any kind of music is engaged in a process of becoming-language occurring through the crystallisation of conventions. This is broadly consistent with Tomlinson’s emphasis on the progressive release from the ‘here and now’ and ‘drift to arbitrary’ along the course of human evolution (Tomlinson 2015: 107). As noted in the 3<sup>rd</sup> variation, the degree of arbitrariness involved in the creation of yoiks is likewise rather limited.

Yet, all the aforementioned evolutionary narratives significantly diverge from the primordially of the yoik in other regards. Although not explicitly formulated in ‘primitive’ terms, theories like Tomlinson’s are not devoid of teleology. This is an unfair reproach, considering that the prehistory of

music is, for an academic scholar, never immediately present. As there is no fieldwork from which its practice may be attended to, one has no choice but to approach it under the guidance present practices; the prehistorical past is necessarily approached via *biases*. ‘Bias’ needs not be approached as an inherently negative term. As suggested by the sinologist and hellenist François Jullien, a bias is a ‘resource’ affording the possibility of approaching an issue ‘obliquely’ rather than ‘frontally’. ‘Instead of going straight towards a goal’, he wrote, ‘biases depart from the individuality and singularity of each situation in order to choose the angle of view (of attack) under (by) which our intervention may succeed’ (Jullien 2015: 79-80). The issue is not so much whether evolutionary theory is biased, but what bias it establishes; whereas Nettl’s stance on ‘the world’s simplest music’ is biased by his anchorage in analytical musicology, Tomlinson’s bias seems to lie in what one could call his *analogist* intelligence.

Analogism is defined by the anthropologist Philippe Descola as one of four ontological modes governing the perception of the environment (Descola 2005). The analogist environment is composed of a multitude of discrete elements bearing no similarity with regards to either physicality (‘exteriority’) or soul (‘interiority’). Facing the discontinuity of the world, analogists express a vivid interest in connecting the things of the world into webs of correspondence, sympathy, and emergent structures, turning a fundamental plurality into a cosmic architecture akin to the convenances, emulations, analogies, and other correspondences famously identified by the philosopher Michel Foucault in Renaissance philosophy (Foucault 1966). Other examples of predominantly analogist environments invoked by Descola include the ancient cultures of China, India, Mesoamerica, and West Africa (cf. Descola 2005: 280-320). According to him, the domination

of analogism in European philosophy declined in the seventeenth century in favour of ‘naturalism’ (cf. Introduction).

However, analogism seems to have known a significant resurgence in the humanities and social sciences of the past few decades, exemplified by a fascination for networks, systems, and ecologies (cf. Serres 2015 [2009]: 63-85). As it happens, Tomlinson’s theoretical approach seems exemplarily analogist. His insistence on the concepts of emergence, discreteness, and combinatoriality, in particular, primarily contributes to guiding his attention towards the development of analogist thought and practices. Music can reasonably be approached as such an analogical, compositional practice insofar as it does tend to rely on elementary units (e.g. notes, rhythmic patterns) arranged into emergent wholes (e.g. melodies, symphonies). However, the craft of yoiking diverges from this picture in that it does not primarily rely on compositional or analogist impulses.

As argued in the 3<sup>rd</sup> variation, the systematic nature of the yoik only appears relevant in the eyes of analysts who displace the immediacy of its expression by reducing it to sound and scores, and then appreciate the paradigmatic features of melodies supposedly constituting a repertoire. Meanwhile, what retains the attention of yoikers is not the compositional quality of their chants, but their being outgrowths of the people, animals, and places they evoke. Each yoik primarily draws its own power from its *source* located in the environment: the wolf’s yoik is experienced in relation to the animal, not in relation to a compositional system.

Herein lies the danger of overemphasising combinatoriality, an ever-present risk for scholars who, in their own practice of writing, continuously resort to an analogist intelligence. As Descola noted, writing is indeed indissociable from complex forms of analogism and does not seem to have

appeared elsewhere (in Latour & Gagliardi 2006: 264). According to François Jullien, this propensity to analogism in writing is particularly pregnant in what he calls ‘the European language-thought’, which relies on alphabetic elements arranged into main or subordinate clauses, sentences, and discourse, in contrast to the processes of the Chinese language-thought (Jullien 2015: 100-101), whose classification in ‘analogism’ by Descola appears to him to be reductive (*ibid.*: 290).

The philosopher and magician David Abram likewise presents the alphabet as the origin of a rupture from the ‘living land’: while oral cultures locate knowledge within the environment and participate in a more-than-human sensibility, the literate mind dissociates a specifically human form of intelligence from the phenomenal world lived through our animal senses. The Ancient Greek alphabet, defined by the tragedian Aeschylus as ‘the art of combining letters’ (in Kerckhove & Lumsden 1988: 1), here marks a rupture vis-à-vis earlier, Semitic systems of writing, which only marked down the consonants of words. Only with the advent of vowels could the entirety of speech be contained on a page (cf. Abram 1997, 2010). The sociologist Derrick de Kerckhove converges with these perspectives by referring to a ‘literate bias’:

‘The literate bias has been to break information down into parts and then to order such parts in a proper sequence. Metaphorically, one could say that this was the beginning of artificial intelligence. There is not much that is “natural” about Western intelligence. Indeed, I am considering the possibility that the adoption of the alphabet by Western cultures has had a reordering effect on the brain and the

whole nervous system of literate people, including their sensory modes' (Kerckhove 1988: 417).

Engaging with prehistory *in writing* and *in English* thus constitutes a significant bias in itself. Not that there is necessarily another – non-analogist, non-written, or non-English – bias that would be more appropriate: Tomlinson's account on the origins of music remains an important contribution to the field, because analogism is a bias that he uses with skill. Yet, deploying systematic attention to the biases summoned in approaching the original past might prove necessary if one seeks to take the original music seriously, i.e. if one seeks to empower it to diverge from our own crafts (e.g. contemporary music and writing). Hence the attention deployed in this thesis in tracking just how convergent and divergent (two concepts incidentally borrowed from evolutionary theory, cf. Introduction) the crafts I am investigating are.

It is precisely this diverging and ineffable quality of the yoik that seems to fascinate its practitioners. For Tomlinson's narratives – distributed along a dated timeline, from the Acheulean industry to modern music, each era corresponding to a book chapter – the yoik calls to substitute a bias of its own, based on *variation*. There is undoubtedly much to learn from the application of evolutionary theory to music, yet approaching its origins via the crafts of others, and in particular those who pretend to incarnate its primordially in the present, can be a fruitful gesture for multiplying and experimenting with the issue. This gesture can be explored further through another academic review concerning the 'function' of music.

**Thirst for existence**

Given the costs of musical behaviours for human organisms, scholars generally consider that they must carry some form of ‘survival’ benefit (Kleinman 2015). A widely shared view in this regard is that music fosters cohesion within human communities and their capacity to work together through ‘entrainment’ (e.g. Brown 2001: 296, Cross 2003, McNeill 1995, Mithen 2005: 209, Snowdon et al. 2015: 19-30). According to Charles Darwin, music is related to sexual selection (Darwin 1902 [1871]), an idea developed today by the evolutionary psychologist Geoffrey Miller (2000), who states that music aims at exhibiting hidden qualities in order to convince potential mates of one’s fitness for survival. Others have argued that music constitutes a ‘transformative technology of the mind’ with lasting effects on various brain functions like language and attention (Patel 2010) or that it has become a ‘playground for auditory learning’ originally derived from ‘chill responses’ (Altenmüller et al. 2013).

In contrast, some have argued that music is fundamentally useless. The philosopher and psychologist William James thus situates the love of music in relation to seasickness, supposedly stemming from an ‘accidental origin’ (James 1981 [1890]: 1097). This ‘non-adaptationist’ stance is defended today by the psychologist Steven Pinker who suggested that ‘compared with language, vision, social reasoning, and physical know-how, music could vanish from our species and the rest of our lifestyle would be virtually unchanged’ (Pinker 1997: 528). Music, according to him, is like pornography and cheesecake: we did not evolve to enjoy it, but they solicit heterogeneous evolved circuits that trigger enjoyment (ibid.: 525). Pinker is joined in this argument by the musicologist Ian Cross, who finds music to



be ‘inefficacious’ and proposes this quality as a key element for a ‘generalisable definition of music’ (Cross 2003: 33).

As in the previous section, my primary aim is not to offer a critique the literature on this topic, but to propose to displace the attention towards diverging observations. Consider what these theories all tend to have in common: the assumption that the milieu where our distant ancestors dwelt, what the psychologist John Bowlby termed ‘man’s environment of evolutionary adaptedness’ (Bowlby 1982 [1969]: 58-64), was a milieu ruled by the imperative of *surviving*. Thus, some writers observe that music does indeed constitute an advantage for the perpetuation of the human species and conclude that it does have a function; others do not observe such an advantage and conclude that it has none.

Various works have tended to spread a different picture of the distant past. The anthropologist Marshall Sahlins, for example, argued that the age of hunter-gatherers was one of ‘abundance’ (Sahlins 2004 [1974]). Indeed, survival does not seem to be a major matter of concern in the discourse of contemporary hunter-gatherers (except in the context of survival against national and economic authorities), such as those dwelling in the Circumpolar North. The anthropologist Nastassja Martin, for instance, reported after her stay among a Gwich’in community of Alaska that their desire to hunt does not stem primarily from survival impulses (the Gwich’in could just as well survive by adopting an agricultural livelihood), but from a desire to enhance the presence of animals:

‘It is the incertitude regarding the positioning of the other in space that reproduces the desire, every time, to go on a hunt, since, precisely, the animals “do not offer themselves” immediately to men but elude them.

It is because they are elusive that we track them; because they are not there that we look for them' (Martin 2016: 72-73).

I am in no position to comment on the purpose of hunting or to speculate an original function for 'music' at large, but I want to ask: might it be that what most resembles a 'function' in the yoik could be a similar will to enhance the life of others? Not to survive, but perhaps to *flourish* in an environment?

Indeed, the primordial quality of the yoik lies perhaps in the *fertile circularity* it establishes between the environment – often referred to in Norwegian as 'nature' [no. *natur*]<sup>80</sup> by yoikers – and the yoikers themselves. Nature provides yoiks and these are insufflated back into the environment in a mutually animating way. Thus, according to the yoiker Lars Henrik Blind, 'yoiks are born in nature. There must be something special that arouses the emotions. The yoik does not come by itself, there must be something that inspires and encourages' (in Skaltje 2014: 258). The same yoiker relates the possible disappearance of the yoik to an impoverishment of the world's vitality: 'The yoik is about to disappear. It was so peaceful in nature when it could still be heard. Everything was so open, and life seemed alive. We heard people yoiking all the time. Nature itself yoiked' (ibid.: 262). Along a similar line, the yoiker Olov Sunna reported the following: 'Even today, we yoik the mountain Čokču [...]. It is like a king to us, I think.

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<sup>80</sup> In North Sámi, 'nature' corresponds to various expressions such as *meahcci*, which refers to a familiar meshwork of itineraries filled with memories and affordances for various activities (e.g. hunting, berry picking, fishing, playing), or *luondu*, which is translated as 'nature' in most dictionaries, but originally referred to the 'inner nature' of a being, something akin to the *ethos*, e.g. the inner nature of humans or reindeer (cf. Eikjok & Birkeland 2004, Helander-Renvall 2010, Mazzullo & Ingold 2008, Schanche 2002).

It is a beautiful mountain and it can be seen from afar. And it becomes even more beautiful when it is yoiked' (in Skaltje 2014: 229, this quotation was earlier invoked in the 2<sup>nd</sup> variation). Commenting on these statements, the Sámi writer Maj Lis Skaltje's noted that the yoik 'makes life living' (ibid.: 213). A similar stance is proposed by the Sámi anthropologist Elina Helander-Renvall, according to whom 'through songs, placenames, stories and memories, the lands become even more alive than they are thought to be' (Helander-Renvall 2010: 48).

The (non-Sámi) Finnish writer Erik Therman, on visiting Sápmi, likewise noted an animation of the land achieved through the yoik. Contemplating a local mountainous landscape, he felt that it deserved its own type of vocal style. While a walking song vocalised by a group of tourists would feel out of place in this 'endless, white-dazzling silence', he observed that 'when the Sámi yoik, then it is as if the mountain had a voice' (Therman 1940: 122). This is in line with the following account by the yoiker Per Hætta:

'For centuries my people have lived in close contact with nature, and that has made an impression on me that I neither can nor wish to erase. The tones have been grasped from the womb of the Finnmark plateau. How many times have I tried to sing a "civilized song" when I was sitting in a reindeer sleigh driving over the tundra, but how miserable and inane it seemed; it was as if it didn't suit the surroundings. It belonged to an unfamiliar world. Had I taken a yoik melody instead, well then I wouldn't have just been waking myself up, but somehow it seemed that every stunted bush, every little rolling hill in the terrain, everything in nature would wake up and want to yoik along. The

reindeer would prick its ears and raise its head; it seemed to pick up the pace. The tapping of its hoofs kept the beat. At every pause in the yoiking it was as if nature shouted: “juoigga, juoigga” – that is our song, yoik as much as your lungs can take, and we will yoik along’ (in Weinstock 2014: 265).

When taking the yoik seriously, it appears that it is in this mutualism between the voice and the land, captured by various concepts along the course of this thesis (horizon, enchantment, creature, depth, echo), that its primordial quality might reside.

Of course, this may still be considered as a form of strategy within a ‘struggle for existence’ perspective, in line with the emphasis put by the naturalist and philosopher Peter Kropotkin on the need for sociability and mutual aid among species:

‘Therefore, while fully admitting that force, swiftness, protective colours, cunningness, and endurance to hunger and cold, which are mentioned by Darwin and Wallace, are so many qualities making the individual, or the species, the fittest under certain circumstances, we maintain that under ANY circumstances *sociability* is the greatest advantage in the struggle for life’ (Kropotkin 2009 [1904]\*: 57, my emphasis).

The yoik might indeed foster relationships with the environment, which themselves benefit to survival. The yoik could perhaps be seen as a means of establishing territories, used either to host other species within one’s sensuous environment (cf. 1<sup>st</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> variations) or keep them at a distance (cf. 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> variations), and thus weave more-than-human social

networks. The idea that yoikers should attend to the earth and other species occasionally came up during my conversations with yoiker. However, here again I am inclined to wonder whether this actually constitutes a central matter of concern every time they yoik; is there really an attempt to nurture the conditions of cohabitation between yoikers and animals in each vocalisation? Is it fair to speculate that a hidden motivation for survival lies behind their practice, unbeknownst to them?

Perhaps these words by Friedrich Nietzsche better capture the sort of impulse that compels yoikers to chant:

‘The famous “struggle for life” [...] seems to me more asserted than proven. It occurs, but as an exception; the overall aspect of life is neither one of distress or hunger; it is one of abundance, opulence, even absurd waste – anywhere there is struggle, it is a struggle for power... One should not confuse Malthus with nature’ (Nietzsche 1999 [1889]: 120).

The comparison between the yoik and Wagnerian leitmotifs, first proposed by the ethnomusicologist Karl Tirén (1942, cf. Weinstock 2014), thus receives more substance along the words of Nietzsche in *Richard Wagner in Bayreuth*:

‘Of Wagner, the musician, one can say that he has given a language to everything in nature [...]: he does not believe that anything must be mute. Thus, he dives into the dawn, the woods, the mist, the cliffs, the mountain heights, the shiver of the night, the moonlight, and recognises in them a secret desire: they too want to sound. When the philosopher says that there is a will thirsting for existence in the

animate and inanimate nature, the musician adds: and this will always want a sounding existence' (Nietzsche 1967 [1888]: 62-63).

A nature 'thirsting for existence' might well be a relevant description for the yoik's 'environment of evolutionary adaptedness', one where humans are continuously driven by the desire to enhance the presence of humans and non-humans around them. The yoik may tangentially have to do with survival; it does foster cohesion among Sámi communities, it is occasionally used for seducing 'mates', it probably fosters cognitive capacities and carries significant health benefits (Hanssen 2011, Hämäläinen et al. 2017, 2018). Yet how it 'makes life living' (Skaltje 2014: 213) by amplifying the voices of the environment and hosting them within one's own appeared far more striking in the discourse of the yoikers I have met.

As to whether this constitutes a primordial aspect lying at the roots of *all music*, in Europe and elsewhere, a field of possible speculations lies open. Some might argue that one should first study the chants of other indigenous communities, compare them with the yoik, and then identify a series of features that might characterise the 'universal yoik' they all partake in. However, this would imply returning to an analogist mode of intelligence, one that would arrange cultures into networks of resemblances and differences in order to highlight paradigmatic features. Whether the American Cree, the Siberian Yukagir, or the African San, for instance, correspond with the *situated* description of the universal yoik proposed by Sámi yoikers is perhaps not the central issue. Their chants are likely to be diverging practices. If they do pretend to enact primordiality by chanting, it would probably be worth exploring what *their* particular primordiality consists of.

The universal yoik can thus be considered as a craft in variation, one enacted in various situated forms; multiple perspectives from which one can stretch towards the others. Thus the perception by yoikers that all indigenous groups partake in the same craft as theirs does not even have to be reciprocal – i.e. the Cree, Yukaghir, and San do not have to recognise a version of their own craft in Sámi yoiks – for it to be legitimate. If one can observe such reciprocity, as was the case in the aforementioned anecdote about Valkeapää in Port Alberni (cf. Section ‘How old is the yoik?’), then one has witnessed a remarkable situation of convergence, which is worth celebrating as such. Meanwhile, variations also allow and foster divergences.

Remaining anchored in the Sámi yoikers’ situated perspective on the universal yoik, one could speculate about the case of other, non-indigenous, musical practices through Mari Boine’s metaphor of a common ‘source’ where indigenous chants find their inspiration. If time was a river, one could either live by its source and quench one’s thirst with the original water pouring out of the earth, or dwell further downstream, along one of its historical ramifications, and consume a water perhaps enriched by the course of human history, but one that has diverged from other ramifications and has perhaps lost the source from sight. Secondary mythical sources come to be nurtured: African-North-American contacts as the source of jazz; the pre-industrial peasantry as the source of European folk music; the Reformation as the source of Protestant hymns; Ancient Greek dramas as the source of Richard Wagner’s *Gesamtkunstwerk* – whatever *glimpse* of primordially Nietzsche’s quotation suggests the latter may have. As Valkeapää would perhaps have commented: ‘Short moments if you compare’ (Valkeapää 1994 [1985], cf. Introduction of this variation).

In terms of evolutionary theory, one could speak of *exaptation*, i.e. the displaced use of an ability acquired over the course of evolution in novel situations. The universal yoik, in direct contact with singular presences dwelling within the inner depths of humans and the outer depths of the land, is displaced onto distributed communities involving large-scale institutions and technological networks (cf. 4<sup>th</sup> variation). Modern horizons replace the sensuous horizon (cf. 1<sup>st</sup> variation), animals and the wind no longer participate in enchantment (cf. 2<sup>nd</sup> variation), creatures become inserted within compositions, so that one now sings *about* them (cf. 3<sup>rd</sup> variation), extensive developments substitute for singular echoing *loci* (cf. 5<sup>th</sup> variation).

This is perhaps a caricatural picture; another variation on the myth of indigenous peoples living in harmony with nature? I warned the reader earlier that the yoik's primordality is unlikely to find support from sound scientific research; scientificity is *not* where its power resides. Myths do not have to be proved nor even believed in, so long as they carry a local relevance and some form of power. Conjure myths on the grounds of 'essentialism', 'ethnocentrism', 'exoticism', or 'romanticism', and you lose a potentially valuable opportunity of engaging with their power, if only ephemerally. I ask the readers to consider that the universal yoik's myth can at least find relevance in situations of enchantment, like the one that makes Mari Boine hear a kinship between yoiks and Siberian chants, or the one that makes the sound of the earth surge into Elin Kåven's awareness.

The myth also finds relevance in the observation that, no, the craft of writing that I am enacting in these pages is probably *not* primordial; it has a temporality and origin myths of its own. I address these later (cf. Section 'Earthbeats'). Before that, I first follow suggestions received during the consultations organised at the end of this research and grant a few more



pages to the issue of the yoik's relationship with Christianity, displaced by the observations that have been gathered so far.

### **Satan's chant**

It has been mentioned in the previous variations that the yoik has had a long relationship of conflict with Christianity. In Finnmark, I often heard that it is seen as a sinful practice by some locals, hence its prohibition in several churches. Various explanations have been advanced for this enduring reputation, including the recurrent association between the yoik and the consumption of alcohol (cf. Introduction), itself considered a 'mortal sin' within Laestadian circles (Mériot 1980: 300). Another layer of complexity may be added to the debate by suggesting that the rejection of the yoik in some Christian environments might stem from the primordality described above.

The priest Jacob Fellman wrote about the association between the Devil and the yoik in the middle of the nineteenth century, suggesting that it relied on beliefs disseminated among the Sámi populations by earlier priests preaching in the area (Fellman 1903 [1847]: 195). He also mentioned the existence of ancient yoiks that could grant supernatural powers and move invisible things. According to him, the locals did not dare vocalise these yoiks in his presence, fearing punishment (*ibid.*: 195-197). Fellman was not hostile towards these yoiks (*ibid.*: 197), but his predecessors did give reasons for yoikers to be cautious: Elin Margrethe Wersland reported that under the rule of Charles XI of Sweden (r. 1660 – 1697), at least one person was condemned to death solely for his knowledge of old yoiks (Wersland 2005: 17).

According to the historian Lars Ivar Hansen and the archaeologist Bjørnar Olsen, approximately three hundred death sentences for witchcraft were pronounced in Norway between 1550 and 1700, thirty-one per cent of which were issued in Finnmark, even though less than one per cent of the national population lived there (Hansen & Olsen 2014: 321-322). The *Steilneset Memorial* in Vardø today commemorates the condemnation of ninety-one individuals during the seventeenth century. According to Rune Blix Hagen, the Sámi stand out among witch-hunt victims in Europe by the high proportion of males prosecuted (Hagen 2006: 230), probably due to the prohibition of *noaidi* drums, which were perceived as ‘Satan’s bible’ (Bäckman 1975: 51) and traditionally beaten by men (Mériot 1985: 84).

At the time of the great witch-hunts, Sápmi as a whole tended to be associated with Satan. Johannes Schefferus, for example, described Sápmi as ‘a dreadful place, in the middle of forests, among wild beasts’, whose inhabitants lived ‘a life inclined to superstition and dealings with the Devil’ (Schefferus 1678 [1673]\*: 61). According to demonologists, the North was considered the centre of evil (Hansen & Olsen 2014: 322, Zacharasiewicz 2009: 33). Jean Bodin (b. 1530 – d. 1596), for instance, reported that ‘there are more sorcerers in Norway, Livonia, and other northern regions, than in the rest of the world’ (Bodin 1604 [1580]: 243-244).

The proponents of this perspective traced its possible justifications back to the Old Testament, e.g. ‘Then the Lord said to me, “Out of the north evil shall break forth upon all the inhabitants of the land [...]”’ (in Jeremiah 1:14, cf. May & Metzger 1962\*: 909). The aforementioned manuscript *Historia Norwegiæ* (cf. Section ‘How old is the yoik?’) already mentions the Sámi’s ‘intolerable paganism, and the amount of devilish superstition they practise in their magic’ (in Tolley 1996: 53). Yet the urgency of

hunting down the *noaidi* and converting the Sámi population emerged in all its intensity at a specific historical moment. Earlier relationships between the Sámi and their neighbours were certainly ambiguous and occasionally conflictual (Mundal 1996), but they appeared to rely on a certain mutual respect – illustrated for instance by historical evidence of economic collaborations (cf. Hansen & Olsen 2014), or by descriptions of the Sámi as great wizards, wise enough to advise Odin himself, in Old Norse literature (Kusmenko 2013: 172-173, cf. also Pálsson 1999).

The Christianisation of Scandinavia manifestly contributed to the deterioration of this relationship: by the thirteenth century, consulting Sámi wizards became forbidden under Norse laws (Kusmenko 2013: 174-175). Although the Reformation made the conversion of the Sámi more urgent, it was only under the reign of King Christian IV of Denmark and Norway (i.e. between 1588 and 1648 AD) that a serious crackdown against paganism was initiated. This seems to be the time when the perception of the yoik as a satanic craft most clearly appeared (Graff 2016), perhaps because its practice was closely related to the act of drumming (Graff 1996).

According to a recurring narrative within academic works published over the last few decades, missionaries condemned the yoik out of ignorance. Christine Hunsdal, for instance, suggested that the missionaries of the past ‘did not understand the yoik’ (Hunsdal 1979: 33). It is worth reminding here that among the yoikers I have met, none claimed to ‘understand the yoik’, but the idea that present-day scholars might at least understand it better than the historical missionaries is widespread in the academic literature. The historian of religions Håkan Rydving, for instance, reported the following:

‘[The missionaries of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries] were entirely ignorant about the culture and religion of [the Sámi] and, with a few exceptions, did not speak their language. Their texts had no scientific purpose and the authors did not seek to reach impartial and nuanced descriptions. They merely sought to increase their knowledge of the indigenous religion in order to fight it. [...] Since these persons were interested in theological questions, it is theology that determined the nature of the questions they asked to the Sámi as part of their interrogatories. [...] The purpose of these texts is clear, sometimes excessively so, since the indigenous religion is condemned in almost every page’ (Rydving 2010: 215).

Rydving provides here a ‘negative’ image of what an acceptable approach should be: impartial, nuanced, and not directed by an agenda or a discipline. However, what interests me here is not whether missionaries were bad epistemologists or not. What retains my attention is rather: what did they feel that we do not feel today? What sort of variation of the yoik did they experience?

For example, although it is clear that some missionaries carried out culpable acts in Sápmi,<sup>81</sup> it remains intriguing that they could consider the yoik as powerful enough to invoke who they considered the greatest threat of all: Satan Himself. *Ignorance or diverging sensibility?*

It is, in any case, remarkable that their perception was partly in line with the one I have observed among contemporary yoikers. They might indeed

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<sup>81</sup> The Sámi Krister Stoor notes in this regard that (1) some missionaries were sympathetic regarding the yoik (Stoor 2016: 713-714, cf. further below) and (2) the yoik in Sweden suffered more from national assimilation policies rather from missionaries (ibid.: 715).

agree with the missionaries of the past centuries that the yoik comes from chthonic beings. Consider these two myths telling the origins of the yoik. One of them, widespread among yoikers, suggests that it was originally received as a gift from the *Gufihtar*. Another, written down by the ethnologist Karl Tirén, states that it stems from Satan's chant, uttered from hell and embodying his anger towards God after being expelled from heaven (in Stoor 2016: 719).

The *Gufihtar* on the one hand; Satan and demons on the other. Could they be related? Could it be that European writers reported the presence of Satan in the North not because they were ignorant and trapped in superstitious beliefs but because they were aware that spiritual forces inhabited the land, acknowledged their power, and found that 'Satan' was the most appropriate term to qualify them?<sup>82</sup>

The anthropologist Elina Helander-Renvall observed that some contemporary Sámi consider that they live their lives in accordance with a contract sealed with the *Gufihtar*: the Sámi would not offend the *Gufihtar* and, in exchange, the latter would improve the lives of the former (Helander-Renvall 2008: 317). This alliance reminds me of Johannes Schefferus' aforementioned note, according to which the Sámi are inclined

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<sup>82</sup> What may seem a bold hypothesis would in fact be in line with recurring fractures between popular and ecclesiastic classes in the history of Europe. For instance, the historian Nancy Mandeville Caciola reported a case in medieval Italy where 'the people' claimed to be in contact with the spirits of their dead relatives, while the 'elite' class of monks and ecclesiastics pretended that these were not ancestral spirits, but demons (Caciola 2018). It is also noteworthy that the Latin expression *daemon* [ag. δαίμων] can refer either to a genius loci or, in a Christian perspective, to an evil entity (cf. 5<sup>th</sup> variation on a definition of the *Gufihtar* by Jens Andreas Friis as 'daemon montanus').

to live their lives ‘among wild beasts’ through ‘dealings with the Devil’ (Schefferus 1678 [1673]\*: 61). Likewise, in 1995, the anthropologist Knut Odner reported that the *Gufihtar* occasionally visit the Sámi during their dreams in order to convince them to renounce Christianity (Odner 1995: 129). This recalls the temptation of Christ, who was visited by the Devil as he lived in the desert, ‘with the wild beasts’ (Mark 1: 12, cf. May & Metzger 1962\*: 1214). It should come as no surprise that chants received from such suspicious beings living in the depths of the earth should appear intolerable to missionaries of the seventeenth century – a time where European ecclesiastic and temporal authorities were literally obsessed by the fear of Satan (Delumeau 1978).

In all likelihood, the fact that these chants attend to the people, animals, and places dwelling in the sensuous environment and establish some form of ‘fertile circularity’ with the land (cf. Section ‘Thirst for existence’) could only make things worse. This is at least what Ola Graff seems to suggest as he wrote that the yoik is judged to be too ‘worldly’ [no. *verdslig*] for Laestadian communities. He commented that according to detractors of the yoik, ‘songs should be spiritual and should guide towards salvation. [...] One should focus on the spiritual, and not on the world, with its pleasures and temptations. The yoik is just worldly and therefore not something to be nurtured’ (Graff 2016: 30).

Graff further suggested that, in a Laestadian perspective, *all songs* – i.e. not just the yoik – could be sinful, with the exception of liturgical songs. Yet the yoik seems to have a particularly problematic quality, as exemplified by an anecdote reported by the Sámi priest Tore Johnsen about a priest who got angry when he heard another man yoiking. The yoiker did not understand why yoiking should be worthy of more condemnation than

singing. He asked the priest: “But where do the psalm melodies come from? Which people does it come from?” “You do not understand”, said the priest. “The Sámi melody is worse than the other melodies. The melodies of other peoples are more holy than the yoik” (Johnsen 2007: 131).

The yoik at least incorporates two potentially satanic features that other European musical traditions do not necessarily have, both of which are related to its primordality: (1) it is rooted in chthonic depths and (2) it enhances the environment rather than the biblical legacy. In this regard, it is noteworthy that Satan assumed his contemporary image – as a horned entity with cloven feet living underground – during the Middle Ages, as a result of a transformation of the pagan chthonic divinities of fertility:

‘The root of the similarity is the association of the Devil with the chthonic fertility deities, who were rejected by the Christians as demons along with the other pagan gods and who were particularly feared because of their association with the wilderness and with sexual frenzy. [...] The association of the chthonic with both sex and the underworld, and hence with death, sealed the union’ (Russell 1987 [1977]: 126, cf. also Šmitek 2017: 134).

It is worth making clear here that I do not consider the yoik to be satanic. The point is rather that, from the perspective of a specific theological stance, the yoik *may* be approached as a satanic craft without this being the result of mere ignorance or intellectual dishonesty. The satanic yoik remains one possible variation of the yoik, although one that is not necessarily relevant today.

Indeed, Krister Stoor stressed that, even among missionaries and priests of the past centuries, many adopted a positive stance towards the yoik (Stoor 2016: 713-714) and therefore did not partake in the ‘satanic yoik’ variation.

In his book *Jordens barn, Solens barn, Vindens barn* [‘Sons of the Earth, sons of the Sun, sons of the Wind’], Tore Johnsen extended this tradition by attending to the possible reconciliation of the yoik (and Sámi culture at large) with the Christian faith (Johnsen 2007). This reconciliation is concretely enacted by yoikers through various forms of blending between yoiks and psalms (e.g. Mienna 2011, Wimme & Rinne 2013) or liturgic music inspired by the yoik (e.g. Fjellheim 2014). However, Johnsen sought to consolidate it through theological discourse.

He was joined in this effort by the priest Harald Hauge, author of an article entitled *Joik som teologisk ressurs* [‘The yoik as a theological resource’]. ‘The yoik’, he stressed, ‘cannot be reduced to a musical expression. In philosophical terms, one could say that the yoik has as much to do with ontology as it does with song’. According to Hauge, the yoik ‘carries existence’ – it maintains life, even when someone is physically dead (cf. 5<sup>th</sup> variation). ‘If this is so’, he wrote, the Christian liturgy can be experienced as ‘*the Spirit yoiking Christ*’ (Hauge 2014).

The mass gives a body to Christ in the same way as the yoik gives voice to various sources from the sensuous environment. As long as someone is yoiked, this person remains alive; ‘as long as the Church performs anamnesis, Christ has a body in the world’. What may be the crucial point of his argument lies in his conciliation of temporalities. Instead of the anxiety felt towards the yoik’s roots in a pre-Christian, heathen past kept alive in its practice,<sup>83</sup> he proposes the following idea: ‘[Christ] is home also

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<sup>83</sup> Gary Tomlinson reported a similar source of anxiety among Spaniards in the New World: ‘Everywhere in New Spain, it seemed, the Spaniards could rest assured that the old gods *were truly dead only when they silenced the voices that invoked them*. Conversely, where these



here [in Sápmi]. Christ was here before we were aware of it' (Hauge 2014). Johnsen likewise stresses converging modalities of attention towards the earth between the indigenous traditions and neglected aspects of the biblical message:

'Humans shall not simply "cultivate" the garden, but also "tend to" and "watch over" it (Genesis 2:15). Adam, from *adama* – earth-human – thus watches over the earth that he was taken from and takes care of it. Does this not recall ideas we find in indigenous spiritual traditions?' (Johnsen 2007: 17).<sup>84</sup>

Along similar lines, The Sámi scholar Jorunn Jernsletten tells an anecdote about a *noaidi* called Náhkuorgörnje, who lived at the end of the nineteenth century:

'In the tale about Náhkuorgörnje, he was about to die. His relatives were worried about what would happen to his soul. They urged him to pray to *dan Stuore Jubmielisse* (the great God). Náhkuorgörnje said, "I don't know how to pray, but I can just as well *yoik* '*dan Stuore Jubmielisse*". His relatives answered, "You can't *yoik* God!" But Náhkuorgörnje started yoiking *Jubm'elen vuölieb* (God's *yoik*). While he was yoiking, the canvas of the tent started flapping. You could see that the heavens opened up and a white bird rose from the

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voices were raised again (or raised still), the friars' deepest fears and most dogged efforts of cultural extermination were set in motion' (Tomlinson 2007: 176-177, my emphasis).

<sup>84</sup> Pope Francis wrote along similar lines in his encyclical *Laudato si'* by promoting 'a spirit of creativity and a deep love for the land', described as values 'deeply rooted in indigenous peoples' (Pope Francis 2015: 131 [§179]).

tent just as Nähkuorgörnje drew his last breath. This is how his relatives knew that God had listened to Nähkuorgörnje prayer, even if it was just a *yoik*' (Jernsletten 2010: 389).

In all these encounters, the pre-Christian dimension of the yoik recedes into the background in favour of a new temporality. The biblical time and the primordial time merge into a common wisdom, and a novel variation of the craft of yoiking is revealed.

## **Earthbeats**

If integrating the yoik within Christian theology establishes a new temporality, so also does the task of writing philosophical variations on its craft. European philosophy itself does not have any pretensions towards a primordial or even a biblical legacy. It has its own diverging myths of origins and whatever contact it might have had with a primordial source seems long forgotten.

One of the most recurring myths traces academic crafts back to the so-called 'Greek Miracle' and the emergence of the *polis* in the classical Hellenic world. The hellenist Jean-Pierre Vernant points to the eighth and seventh centuries BC in particular as 'a departure, a genuine invention' (Vernant 1962: 40). This 'new spirit' implied (1) the pre-eminence of speech, favouring the 'contradictory debate, discussion, argument' over the 'ritual word' and the 'just formula' (ibid.: 40-51); (2) a 'full exposure given to the most important manifestations of social life', implying the publication of 'knowledge, values, and mental techniques' (ibid.: 42); and (3) the homology between citizens, defined as *Homoioi*, men who are 'alike' (ibid.: 52). Philosophy, he notes, occupies an ambiguous position in that space,

somewhere in between the secrecy and initiations of religion and the new disputations of the agora (ibid.: 51-52). In many regards, philosophy and academic writing have remained rooted within this ambiguity, at once public and obscure, operating within the agora while offering various degrees of accessibility to the public.

However seriously one considers the Greek Miracle, contemporary academic writers in Europe still rely on the alphabetic craft inherited from Ancient Greece (cf. Section ‘The origins of music’).<sup>85</sup> This is perhaps where the *ancient* legacy is most clearly visible today in the craft of writing; ancient, but not primordial. As Valkeapää noted in the poem that opened this chapter, the ‘glory of the Greek culture’ is but a ‘short moment’ (Valkeapää 1997 [1985]) in contrast to the depths of the Sámi past. The Ancients may resemble the *Gufihtar* in that they reside at the source of a craft – their voices may even echo in contemporary pages as the *Gufihtar* echo in contemporary yoiks (cf. 5<sup>th</sup> variation) – but they do not appear to have the same form of primacy nor the same roots in the living terrain. Even Ancient Greek poetry was only indirectly rooted in the earth: Gaia (the earth) and Uranos (the sky) gave birth to Mnemosyne (memory), who, through a union with Zeus, gave birth to the Muses, from whom poetry

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<sup>85</sup> Philosophy, described as the practice of creating concepts (Deleuze & Guattari 1991), primarily occurs in writing. Among the most emblematic counter-examples is the anecdote of Diogenes walking the streets of Athens with his lantern in broad daylight, looking for ‘a man’, referring to Plato’s idea of man (Laërtius 2018 [Third century]\*: 279 [Book VI, 41]). It should perhaps be unsurprising that such an unexpected character as Diogenes, far removed in this anecdote from the resources of the *lógos* and the alphabet, was a philosopher who rejected civilisation and nurtured a particular form of primordiality inspired by animal and infantile models (Tremblay 2013: 179).

stems. The primordial race of Titans was already a distant legacy, whose echo had been partly undermined by the mythical Titanomachy.

Herodotus incarnates a later turning point as his practice, relying on ‘inquiries’ [ag. *ἵστορία*] and prose, removed written creation even further from chthonic or divine inspiration. At that time, Sápmi had perhaps already been resounding to the sound of the yoik for millennia. Since then, it may be that philosophy remained, as Alfred North Whitehead put it, ‘a series of footnotes to Plato’ (Whitehead 1978 [1929]: 39). Texts can perhaps *stretch* towards primordial practices (cf. 1<sup>st</sup> variation), but the source of their craft lies further downstream.

Evidently, the Greek Miracle and the invention of the alphabet remain myths in the practice of (philosophical) writing; the ancient heritage constitutes a *legacy*, i.e. a resource to be collected, selected, gathered, and read [la. *lĕgāre*] (Onions 1966: 522). As such, it carries no sense of necessity and it may or may not be relevant in relation to local problems. Likewise, a legacy cannot *determine* the practice it inspires. Borrowing the words of Isabelle Stengers, one could say that the legacy ‘proposes’ and practitioners ‘dispose’, in the same way as an organism disposes of the environment’s resources much more than it is determined by it (Stengers 2007: 52). A legacy may, in fact, be forgotten. Practices are then likely to run adrift, diverging from their source towards more or less distant variations.

Is this what happened to *music* when it lost its primordial source from sight and diverged from the primordial, universal yoik? The idea is at least worth contemplating.

Cases of oblivion that are better documented by history include the history of European philosophy and the partial loss of the ancient legacy

during the Middle Ages. If the Italian Renaissance marks a key moment in the history of scholarly thought, it is in no small measure due to the resurgence of this legacy and the possibilities it opened. Today, despite all the manuscripts, and all the printed and digital records, it remains a possibility that this ancient legacy might fall into complete oblivion – burn all the records and the ancient craft of philosophy will soon be forgotten. Could one make a similar argument about the yoik? What would it take for its legacy to disappear?

As mentioned in this thesis' introduction, the yoik has tended to appear as an endangered tradition within scholarly discourses of the early twentieth century. In response to this threat, some began to write down and record yoik melodies and texts in a systematic way, storing their collections in publications and archives. As Thomas Hilder noted, archives belong to a tradition that valorises enduring materials over embodied practice, but they also retain the possibility of having their content translated back into embodied knowledge (Hilder 2013: 171-173). The yoik archives do at least find a legitimacy in the convergence they afford between past and present yoiks; to consult them amounts to exploring the craft of yoiking further upstream in order to renew one's own yoiking skills. Thus, archives themselves are not sufficient; there must be a milieu of embodied practice where their legacy can be collected. Ola Graff and Harald Gaski, observing that the 'spiritual-religious' function (i.e. its use in *noaidi* ceremonies) and its 'working context' (i.e. its use in herding) have declined, suggest that the remaining 'root' of the traditional yoik lies in its 'signification as a social and socialising factor'. They add that this signification is undermined by the modern yoik, and the divide it establishes between performers and listeners appears to be threatening in this regard (Graff & Gaski 1994: 413).

To sum up: (1) the traditional yoik will survive as long as a favourable social milieu is nurtured; and (2) it will converge with voices from the past (generally up to a few decades, two centuries at the most) as long as archives can be consulted.

In light of what has been described in this variation, another perspective takes shape – I now conclude this variation by attending to this alternative. Even if the archives burnt, even if ten generations neglected the practice and the traditional milieu of sociality disappeared, even if the yoik was entirely lost, one should consider the following possibility: *novel variations of the universal yoiks might still resurge in the future*. The *noaidi*, poet, and yoiker Ailo Gaup made a similar argument about shamanic techniques, noting that while some may disappear, ‘new ones emerge, or *are taken back from the earth and sky*’ (Gaup 2005: 324, my emphasis). It is remarkable here that converging ideas are defended by a *noaidi* and a Christian priest, Tore Johnsen. Both appear more concerned with the transmission of attentive postures towards the earth than of a fragile repertoire:

‘No one can be content with romanticising their own cultural legacy. Humility towards nature is not inscribed in the genes. It must be learned at every new generation.

So how can we learn to remember the sacred context of creation?

We find help in the traditional Sámi wisdom:

Listen to the voice of nature!

Live in gratitude to the Creator of earth’s gifts!

Bless all that live!

(Johnsen 2007: 28)

In the following quotation by the Sámi philologist Harald Gaski, this sensibility to the earth carries a mythical dimension, directed towards what we could call ‘earthbeats’:

‘One Sami myth has it that, when the Great Spirit created the people who were to become the ancestral mothers and fathers of the Sami, he knew the difficulties that awaited them. In order to give them something in which to believe, something to comfort them in trying times, he placed the living, beating heart of a two-year-old female reindeer at the center of the earth, so that each time the Sami felt their existence threatened, they could simply put their ears to the ground and listen for the heartbeat beneath. If the heart was still beating, their future was secure, and their problems would be solved’ (Gaski 2011: 52).

The preservation of archives, beneficial as it may be, remains subordinate to this primordial legacy; the universal yoik will perhaps remain accessible so long as the earthbeats find echo in the attention and vocal practice of humans.

Back in Ancient Greece, Aristotle wrote in the *Poetics* that the task of poets was to make a story their own and use their ‘legacy’ [ag. *Παραδεδομένοις*]<sup>86</sup> in a ‘beautiful’ way (Aristotle 1969 [Fourth century

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<sup>86</sup> *Παραδεδομένοις* is a derived form of the verb *παράδομι*, meaning ‘to give, to hand over’. Its conjugation in the perfect tense indicates an action that has been accomplished in the past but retains an agency in the present – another indication that various languages

BC]: 49 [Chapter 14]). The yoik appears as primordial because it nurtures the stories of *earthly phenomena* – people, animals, and places – which it attends to, nurtures, and grows into vocalisations before returning them into their living terrain. Regardless of the chronological distance between generations, or the geographical distances between indigenous communities, the earth keeps beating; its craft pulsates towards the surface and humans put it in variation.

Will it continue? Will there still be any yoikers in a hundred or a thousand years from now? I do not know and cannot be sure that this is a relevant question to ask. What retained my curiosity is rather what forms of earthbeats are *currently* moving beneath our feet and what variations of the universal yoik are lurking behind the present horizon. While in touch with things ‘past’, ‘future’, and ‘distant’ (cf. 5<sup>th</sup> variation), the yoik, as the variations gathered in this thesis have shown in various ways, remains, in all the meanings of the term, a craft of *presence*. Primordially, in particular, is something that is occurring now.

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have various resources for approaching echoes and primordially. I am grateful to the philologist Simon Midrez for pointing this out to me.



## **$n^{\text{th}}$ variation: He io lo lei lo!**

When do yoikers cease their chanting? During his journey to Sápmi in 1799, the traveller Giuseppe Acerbi observed that the Sámi went on repeating the same melody until they were out of breath (Acerbi 1832 [1802]: 174). In this regard, the yoiker Johan Sara Jr. stated the following:

‘The yoik rises in temperature and ends in the form of a galaxy. Then, you finally feel within yourself that, if I continue further, it is going to end in a catastrophe. And quite rightly, so you usually stop before getting that far. It is a tradition known in the old Sámi context’ (Sara 2002: 20).

In any case, a yoiked vocalisation only has  $n$  variations: it does not go on forever. The  $n^{\text{th}}$  variation opened here serves as a conclusion, primarily for breathing reasons. Most of the inspiration received has been exhausted and there is little left for me to share in this thesis.

As in a yoiked vocalisation, if there has been some increase in intensity along the preceding sections, it is due not to a climax arranged within their composition but to the gesture of starting the description anew in each variation, extending a few of its dimensions along one concept and then starting over again. According to Gilles Deleuze, the origins of ordinal numbers stem from this attention to increasing degrees of power (Deleuze 1984) – or increasing degrees of *craft* – with each repetition pulling something to a deeper intensity: yoik <sup>$n$</sup> .

As suggested in the introduction, the yoik was incorporated into the field of modern music relatively recently, perhaps at the time of its first transcriptions onto scores, when Giuseppe Acerbi referred to it as ‘Lappish

music' [it. *musica lapona*] (Acerbi 1832 [1802]: 162, cf. Ramnarine 2009: 198). The composition of Wilhelm Peterson-Berger's symphony *Same-Ätnam* in 1915 consolidated this newly acquired, musical status. Of course, it could be that yoikers extended their practice towards music earlier, without having left any written traces of their experiments. In any case, stretching the yoik towards music and music towards the yoik redefined both fields; they were revealed to have more possible variations than might have been assumed beforehand. These proved to be powerful variations, considering that, as far as I can assess, most Europeans today are likely to agree that the yoik is indeed musical.

Before I started writing, the yoik was also *philosophical*, not just in the broad sense, as a practice that triggers reflection about the world, but more specifically in the way it creates *concepts* – such as the *circle* (cf. Graff 2018, Somby 2007). A philosophical horizon had been established – one that concealed unexplored depths within its folds. Thus, the philosophical variations gathered here have merely sought to enhance a becoming-concept already at work within the yoik.

This remains a precarious exercise, one that entails the risk of drifting away from the life of practices, as in this consultation during which a participant stated that she knew the 'practice' of the yoik but not its 'theory' (cf. Introduction). Many yoikers may not recognise themselves as philosophers or 'theorists'; they still hold a remarkable philosophical power when they state that they do not compose but 'receive' their yoiks, or that they do not yoik *about* the world. This reminds me of the following quotation by the philosopher Arthur Schopenhauer (paraphrased from Leibniz): 'Music is an occult metaphysical exercise of the soul, which does not know that it is philosophising' (Schopenhauer 1972 [1819]: 313 [Book 3, §52]).

I have just named two of the main ideas explored throughout the preceding variations. Firstly, the yoik is a *gift*, received from nature, the earth, the *Gufihhtar*, the primordial past, animal lives, the wind, or some other inscrutable realm of depth. What lurks behind the horizon, the wild animals and the spiritual realms, the global musical market (cf. 1<sup>st</sup> variation), the genesis of knowledge, the voice of the wind and the sensibility of animals (cf. 2<sup>nd</sup> variation), inspiration, phenomena and their possible growths (cf. 3<sup>rd</sup> variation), the depths of human interiority, the aerial life of chants, breath (cf. 4<sup>th</sup> variation), the past and the future, the dead, dreams (cf. 5<sup>th</sup> variation), chthonic dwellings, prehistory, earthbeats, and the primordiality within humans (cf. 6<sup>th</sup> variation) are so many dimensions, so many *tips* of the yoik that cannot be fully rendered with words, nor even fully perceived either by the senses or by the wandering movements of thought. Already, a question surges: how could these ‘tips’ be put in variation by such an incongruous practice as *writing*?

Secondly, one does not yoik *about* something. Yoiking implies an actual journey within a horizon and a process of becoming-other (cf. 1<sup>st</sup> variation), the expression of a vocalised (enchanted) presence (cf. 2<sup>nd</sup> variation), a growth of people, animals, and places, rather than a mirror image of them (cf. 3<sup>rd</sup> variation), an ongoing movement of folding within breath and human interiorities (cf. 4<sup>th</sup> variation), an engagement in the depths of time and its echoing topography (cf. 5<sup>th</sup> variation), and a participation in a primordial legacy in response to a thirst for existence (cf. 6<sup>th</sup> variation). All these observations amount to taking seriously the simple idea that a yoik *is* what it evokes, that yoiks constitute ecologies of creatures, that any singular life can be captured and expressed by a melodic circle: ‘I live through yoik – my whole life is a yoik’ (Ovllá & Gaino 2010, cf. Introduction).

Thinking life as a yoik and yoik as life recalls the ongoing movement of a line in variation: the circle. Caught in circulation, the yoik is perhaps unfit to provide us with an overarching perspective on the organisation of the world. If it has a cosmic dimension, it lies in its repetition of a primordial gesture of creativity: the breathed circle as a fundamental process of life and the ‘universal yoik’ as the quintessence of chanting (cf. 6<sup>th</sup> variation).

At this point, I anticipate a question from the readers: is it not an ‘exaggeration’ to write in such length on these two simple ideas, to suggest that there is a cosmic gesture in a commonplace chanting technique enacted in everyday life? Yes, it certainly is an exaggeration, but in the original sense of the Latin *exaggerāre*: an exalting, amplifying, magnifying gesture (cf. Onions 1966: 333). This text deliberately exaggerates the yoik, like yoikers exaggerate the wolf with their voices. How could variation and repetition not lead to exaggeration?

The problem with this text is not whether it exaggerates, but *what* it exaggerates. This constitutes a third recurring theme of the preceding variations, not one that I directly encountered among yoikers this time but one that appeared as part of the transformative endeavour that I pursued. Is this text actually in touch with the practice of yoiking? Or has the exercise of philosophical variations taken us too far away? Does this work draw a possible convergence between the yoik and philosophy? Or has it become an exaggeration based on a void, like Samuel Beckett’s monologue in *L’Innommable*? I mentioned a possible response to these questions in the introduction: that philosophical variations on the yoik could be successful is a speculative assumption, and something that must be judged by its outcome, not by its axiomatic foundations. This is the Spinozan ‘leitmotif’: *no one knows in advance what practices can or cannot do*. Hence the

repeated efforts for addressing my practice of writing at the end of each variation, an effort that now deserves its *n<sup>th</sup>* iteration.

This work started with a *horizon* and the feeling that something is lurking along its line like an elusive animal, that in the yoik's circle lies something worth engaging with. As in Edvard Grieg's variations on popular melodies or Marsilio Ficino's variations on Plato, the aim is to stretch towards something else and feel a glimpse of it resonate within one's own medium. It is by concentrating on the yoik, and yet remaining anchored in the practice of writing, that a horizon is made to vibrate from afar.

One way to approach this horizon is to attend to situations of *enchantment*, each of which reveals unexpected dimensions in the craft of yoiking, some of its 'thousand colours'. The text becomes a milieu for hosting and nurturing these situations more intensely, revealing more of their enchanting power. Writing with enchantment supposes limited pretensions in terms of universality or monopoly of knowledge; the insights it reveals remain tied to a specific *milieu* of experience and encounter, one that is always situated, but whose possibilities can never be exhaustively apprehended. Whether the written medium itself becomes a means of enchantment is a question to approach by leaving a door open: yes, perhaps, at times, a philosophical text may, like the wind, be revealed to have a yoiking quality.

While seeking to be in presence of the yoik, my task has been to grow its craft into a *creature*. This can be done by attempting to capture the craft of yoiking in an iconic way; an attempt necessarily compromised in that it occurs in the displaced form of a *text*; hence, it has an indexical quality that attunes the reader's attention to specific dimensions perceived in the yoik – a gesture that, to a certain extent, redefines the original possibilities of iconicity. Evidently, the yoik is not transformed as a whole: the extension it

receives is itself situated and only remains *locally* relevant. Through their practices, yoikers constantly instaurate and nurture creatures of their own.

When approaching the issue of *depth*, diverging dimensions start to appear between the life of yoiks and the life of philosophical texts. The yoik brings to presence virtualities contained within the yoiker and received as gifts from an eco-evolution with other animals, humans, and places; it opens a field of appetite between various sources perceived in the sensuous ('inner' and 'outer') terrain. The voices summoned along these pages are of another nature. They are not inscribed in our 'genes'; the possibility of their presence stems from assemblages built upon a soil of orality but displaced from its breathed immediacy. A loss of depth takes place in the task of writing, but one that carries its own interest, namely the establishment of a novel field of appetite affording new perceptions, likely to draw to attention some of the depths concealed in the craft of yoiking, one at a time.

Writing about depth made me consider the case of *echoes*, i.e. the experience of projecting one's voice and perceiving that something is responding. Illustrated by the cases of memories, the dead, the future, and dreams, the propensity of yoiks to trigger echoes appears remarkably intense. A written text, by comparison, does not generally echo as a whole among contemporary readers; it only hosts, at best, situated *loci* of echoes (e.g. ideas, concepts, stories) arranged into compositional structures. Whether the ideas gathered are in touch with a presence concealed within yoikers or readers is not known in advance: they must first be thrown forth along gestures of anticipation. While pieces of philosophical texts may echo – or *be echoed* – by the experience of yoikers, they do not appear to stem from the same original source.

According to their respective myths, the yoik was a gift received from the *Gufihtar* in *primordial* times, who keep echoing in the land, whereas European philosophy was received from ancient writers, who keep echoing in the pages throughout the history of philosophy. Burn all the texts, and the ancient legacy is likely to be lost; the primordial yoik, on the other hand, remains rooted in the vitality of the land, attuned to earthbeats, and is always likely to resurge later. Writing about the yoik always implies hosting it within an ancient temporality; hence, the benefit of nurturing the awareness that its roots might reach further back in time.

In short, the yoik converges and diverges; it presents countless philosophical affordances while retaining an elusive form of presence. The Spinozan leitmotif – *What can a (yoiking) body do?* – has revealed some of its possibilities and surely withholds others. Meanwhile, as I was learning from yoikers, I tried to engage with texts like they engage with chants: reading as a digression, a diversion, a divergence, an oblique craft that wanders, extends, and enhances situated practices and belongings more than it substitutes for them; a craft of variation.

For the time of a yoik, a creature is made present and explored in depth through the power of primordial tones; it is exaggerated, up to its penultimate –  $(n-1)^{\text{th}}$  – repetition. Then the vocalisation stops. The enchantment that took place earlier now dissolves, the creature returns to its hidden dwelling behind the horizon and only echoes of its presence remain. Hence the difficulty of concluding. Yoiks do not come to conclusions: they are interrupted, sometimes abruptly so, but the melody may well keep turning in one's mind for a while, or resurge later, provoking its hosts to resume the exploration.

*He io lo lei lo!*





# Appendix 1: Experimental study

## Introduction

This appendix consists of a ‘cross-cultural’ experiment conducted while I was working on the preceding chapters. Although it does not rely on philosophy or variation, it is intended to complement these chapters with a diverging mode of research. The experiment consisted in playing animal melodies to 96 listeners with no prior knowledge of the yoik and assessing to what extent they were able to identify the animal being evoked.

Within the field of so-called ‘cross-cultural’ studies on music, it presents the particularities of (1) attending to the evocation of animals rather than the arousal of emotions or musical expectancy; and (2) taking into account the specificity of the bio-cultural environment of the listeners, namely a municipality in the High Ardenne in Belgium. Consequently, it has no pretensions towards unveiling ‘universals’ in human musical cognition; rather, it seeks to explore the ecological conditions for the possibility of translation between two particular environments. Therefore, it does not phrase its issue within orthodox fractures in the field, e.g. particular/universal, innate/acquired, or natural/cultural. I will call my approach ‘intensive’, in contrast to the ‘extensive’ study of universals.

The usual focus on emotion arousal in music and its articulation around the listening subject appears to stem from a musical ontology prefigured by Vincenzo Galilei in 1581 in his *Dialogo della musica antica e della moderna*, sketching the primacy of aural experience over Pythagorean concerns on cosmic harmony (Galilei 1581). René Descartes would affirm this model in 1618 in his *Compendium Musicae*: Human sensibility

progressively became a central concern of musicological reflection, as the attention shifted from metaphysical considerations on music towards its capacity to entertain and arouse passions (Descartes 1656 [1618]).

Contemporary research in experimental musicology, despite significant developments throughout its history (cf. Schneider 2018), has mostly remained committed to this picture. As it has often been noted, experiments in this field have mostly involved listeners exposed to music from their own culture (Balkwill et al. 2004: 337, Snowdon et al. 2015: 26, Yang & Hu 2012: 19), hence the supposed need for cross-cultural approaches in order to assess the universality of their results. However, whereas engaging with otherness has, in other disciplines like social anthropology, significantly affected the models of inquiry in a recursive move, experimental musicologists engaged in cross-cultural approaches have generally maintained their epistemic approaches unaffected.

Consider, for instance, a classic study: Thomas Fritz et al. (2009) set to explore the universality of emotional arousal in music by experimenting with the Mafa population in Cameroon. They chose the Mafas of Cameroon due to their unfamiliarity with the ‘Western’ repertoire, as the purpose of the experiment was to assess whether sensibility to the evocation of emotions in ‘Western’ songs was conditioned by cultural conventions or universal aptitudes. In this perspective, a capacity among the Mafa to understand ‘Western’ songs could suggest that a biological basis is involved. Meanwhile, the researchers did not grant any particular attention to Mafa understandings of music and how *their* perspective could enrich the experimental design or interpretative framework; these were established in advance.

This form of reductionism is productive in terms of data outcome. It has made it possible to highlight that humans are generally equipped to relate

emotionally to the music of others, although their accuracy in approaching foreign repertoires rarely equals the one observed when relating to music stemming from their own cultural environment (Balkwill & Thompson 1999, Balkwill et al. 2004, Cespedes-Guevara & Eerola 2018, Fritz et al. 2009, McDermott & Hauser 2005, Snowdon et al. 2015, Swaminathan & Schellenberg 2015). Cultural relativism, in this light, appears to be ‘overemphasised’ (Eerola 2004).

Some cross-cultural studies have explored musical experiences through other approaches, such as attending to melodic expectancy (Cameron et al. 2015, Demorest & Osterhout 2012, Eerola 2003), rhythm processing (Hannon et al. 2012), neural activation patterns (Morrison et al. 2003, Nan et al. 2007), or by using comparative analysis in order to highlight recurring structural forms (Brown & Jordania 2011, Savage et al. 2015). Here too, researchers have been inclined to interpret their results in terms of ‘universality’ – whether ‘absolute’ or ‘statistical’ (Nettl 2001) – versus ‘diversity’, assuming that the capacity to relate to music must either be innate (i.e. natural) or acquired (i.e. cultural), thus affirming the anchorage of current cross-cultural reflections in the Cartesian – or, as the anthropologist Philippe Descola would call it, ‘naturalist’ (Descola 2005) – ontology.

As noted by the philosopher and sinologist François Jullien (2008), such is the paradox of ‘universality’ that it stems from a specific historical trajectory involving a heterogeneous set of phenomena like the emergence of the Ancient Greek *lógos*, Roman law, apostolic messages, and Kantian morality. According to Jullien, this resulted in a singular tension between, on the one hand, logical abstractions and, on the other, the concrete ‘here and now’, as well as a need for European thought to export its fruits in order

to exist. This perspective, he observes, has remained unsuspected by – or tangential in – the philosophies of Islam, and those of India, China, and Japan. Incidentally, these are also the cultural milieus most often approached by Western scholars in cross-cultural experiments on music.

Cross-cultural studies about ‘sound symbolism’ have been more numerous in the field of linguistics than musicology (cf. Jakobson 1988: 181-234 for a classical review, cf. also Dingemans et al. 2015, Sidhu & Pexman 2018 for recent ones). The classical example of *maluma* and *takete* (Koehler 1929, cf. also Sapir 1929) – two nonsense words that respectively evoke a jagged or curvy line – is readily considered as revealing necessary features about human cognition, e.g. an innate sense of synaesthesia possibly involved in the emergence of language in the course of evolution (De Carolis et al. 2016, Ramachandran & Hubbard 2001, Wichmann et al. 2010). The ethnobiologist Brent Berlin likewise hypothesised non-arbitrary features in animal names (Berlin 1992, 2006). Here again, a form of nature/culture dualism is reproduced by systematically resorting to the necessity/arbitrariness pair of concepts.

The yoik itself has been the object of two experimental studies investigating the issue of musical expectancy. These were conducted, respectively, among Finnish music students and ‘Western musicians’ unfamiliar with the yoik (Krumhansl et al. 2000), and South African Pedi healers (Eerola 2004). Both studies identified a notable ability among participants to relate to unfamiliar musical systems, depending on cultural distance and musical expertise. Unlike the experiment presented below, they followed the extensive approach in that they projected concerns stemming from the researchers’ own musical traditions (i.e. musical expectancy) and thus integrated neither the situated ecology of the actors

involved nor the discourse of yoikers in the experimental design and interpretation of results.

Some researchers have indicated inclinations for a more ‘intensive’ approach. In a study of synaesthesia among Japanese listeners, Etsuko Hoshino (1996) noted, for example, that Western major and minor modes express more vivid contrasts in emotional character than Japanese modes. He explained these results by stressing that traditional Japanese music was never intended to express emotions, feelings, or individual thoughts; rather, it is considered to be ‘a gift from the gods, and usually describes the beauty of nature’ by expressing harmony and balance. Hoshino thus encouraged researchers to ‘know the historical and cultural background of the music when conducting research in this field’ (Hoshino 1996: 45). Along a different approach, Yi-Hsuan Yang and Xiao Hu highlighted the challenges involved in cross-cultural music mood classification and the imperfect overlaps of emotional categories that needed to be taken into account (Yang & Hu 2012). Marco Susino and Emery Schubert also proposed a ‘Stereotype Theory of Emotion in Music’, according to which the emotional environment of the participants must be taken into account: Japanese culture, for instance, is described as ‘reticent about expressing anger’, hence their propensity not to sense anger in European music (Susino & Schubert 2016: 10).

In a paper written in defence of the complementarity between ‘universals’ and ‘cultural specificity’, Jean-Jacques Nattiez called for a reconciliation of ‘the universal and the relative, of the innate and the acquired, of nature and culture’ (Nattiez 2012: 91). Following this call along one possible development, the present study does not criticise the idea of universals as such; rather, it stresses that they are universal only vis-à-vis the singular, ‘naturalist’ musical ontology nurtured by the majority of

experimental musicologists. Musical universals may be approached as the outcome of a ‘unilateral comparative operation’ (Stengers 2011: 55), one that is enlightening only insofar as an awareness of its situatedness is nurtured.

The intensive approach sketched here does not imply desertion from scientificity; it still operates within the constraints of experimental musicology. It is intended, instead, to respond to extensive approaches by displacing and complicating the terms of the discussion, and by taking seriously both the listeners, approached as actors dwelling in a situated environment, and the yoik’s practitioners, whose insights on their own practice here nourish the interpretation of results.

### **The yoik**

Cf. Thesis introduction.

### **Recordings**

The yoiks played during the experiment are those of the elk or moose (*Alces alces*), the brown bear (*Ursus arctos*), the gray wolf (*Canis lupus lupus*), the common raven (*Corvus corax*), the long-tailed duck (*Clangula hyemalis*), and the mountain hare (*Lepus timidus*). Each yoik recording lasts approximately one minute. They were selected due to their popularity within the yoik repertoire of Kautokeino / *Guovdageaidnu* (Finnmark, Norway) and the diversity of animal taxa they represent. The yoiks were recorded by Ánte Mihkkal Gaup as part of a record devoted to animal yoiks, which was released in 1998. He is among the most respected yoikers of Kautokeino and Sápmi at large.

$\text{♩} = 140$   
Elk

$\text{♩} = 200$   
Wolf

$\text{♩} = 150$   
Long-tailed duck

$\text{♩} = 100$   
Brown bear

$\text{♩} = 200$   
Northern raven

$\text{♩} = 190$   
Mountain hare

Figure 4. Transcriptions of the yoiks played to participants.<sup>87</sup>

## Kautokeino

Kautokeino [ns. *Guovdageaidnu*] is a municipality located in the county of Finnmark, in northern Norway. It has a population of nearly 3,000 inhabitants, including 1,400 reindeer owners.<sup>88</sup> 90% of its population use

<sup>87</sup> These scores do not render the microtonal dimension of the melodies.

<sup>88</sup> Cf. <https://www.ssb.no/kommunefakta/kostra/guovdageaidnu-kautokeino/befolkningsprofil>

North Sámi as their first language.<sup>89</sup> The population density is about 0.3 inhabitants per km<sup>2</sup>. It is an emblematic place for yoiking and reindeer herding, with approximately 100,000 reindeer grazing in the area during the winter (the reindeer spend the summer along the coast). Kautokeino is home to numerous renowned Sámi yoikers and hosts the Sámi Grand Prix: an annual yoik and chanting contest taking place during the Easter Festival. It is also home to various Sámi institutions, like the Beaivváš Sámi Theatre and the Sámi University of Applied Sciences [ns. *Sámi allaskuvla*]. The landscape is one of tundra-covered mountainous plateaus crossed by the Alta-Kautokeino River.

Among the animals presented during the experiment, the elk, the common raven, the long-tailed duck, and the mountain hare can be observed within the municipality. Wolves and bears are no longer settled in the area, but individuals coming from Finland occasionally visit the area.

### **The High Ardenne**

Participants in Groups A-B-C-D were students in a public school located in the High Ardenne, in Belgium. Participants in Group E came from locations situated within a range of 10 kilometres around the school.<sup>90</sup> The school's

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<sup>89</sup> <https://www.regjeringen.no/no/tema/urfolk-og-minoriteter/samepolitikk/samiske-sprak/fakta-om-samiske-sprak/id633131/#nord>

<sup>90</sup> Participants in Group E gave their authorisation for the publication of their results by signing a consent form. For Groups A-B-C-D, written authorisations were gathered among the parents, using the same form. The form mentioned the purpose of the research, the methodology used, and the intention of publication. The children were systematically asked whether they wanted to participate in the experiment. I met them in their school, one by



municipality is home to 7,145 people and has a population density of 84 inhabitants per km<sup>2</sup>. The closest large city is Liège, located 45 kilometres away, and French is the main language spoken in the area. Local traditions include practices related to seasonal festivities (especially carnivals), gastronomy, music and dance, and the Walloon language. The landscape is one of forested and meadow-covered hills and fen-covered plateaus.

Among the animals presented during the experiment, only the common raven can be observed in the region, although the carrion crow is more common. Observations of wintering long-tailed ducks are too rare to be taken into account. The elk and the brown bear lived in the region until the Middle Ages, but the former is today widely considered to be a ‘northern’ animal. The gray wolf disappeared during the nineteenth century, although in the past few years, a few individuals have returned to Belgium from neighbouring countries.

## **Methodology**

Three experiments were undertaken with 96 participants split into five groups:

- Group A: 18 members of a 3<sup>rd</sup>-year maternal school class (4 – 5 years old), 8 boys and 10 girls.
- Group B: 19 members of a 1<sup>st</sup>/2<sup>nd</sup>-year primary school class (6 – 7 years old), 9 boys and 10 girls.

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one in a separate room, so that they could refuse to participate without the other children being aware of their refusal – all of them still accepted to participate.

- Group C: 19 members of a 3<sup>rd</sup>/4<sup>th</sup>-year primary school class (8 – 9 years old), 7 boys and 12 girls.
- Group D: 20 members of a 5<sup>th</sup>/6<sup>th</sup>-year primary school class (10 – 11 years old), 10 boys and 10 girls.
- Group E: 20 adults (24 – 79 years old), 9 men and 11 women.

For Experiment 1, six cards representing the animals evoked by the yoiks were created from photographs (Figure 5). They were all designed along the same pattern, picturing the animals as black silhouettes on a white background, facing right, standing, and looking straight ahead. When male and female individuals differed significantly, male animals were chosen, so that the elk might be more easily recognisable.

Each participant underwent the experiment individually. They were shown a pair of cards and then listened to a yoik through headphones evoking one of the animals represented on the cards. Their task was to answer the question: ‘Which of these animals does the chant make you think of?’ They were not given any information about the yoik tradition and the origins of the melody, nor that the chants actually referred to one of these animals. The participants were free to answer while the yoik was playing or to wait until it was finished. The test was conducted three times with each participant, each time with a different pair of animals, so that each of them was presented the six animal cards but heard only three yoiks.

The pairs of animals, their order of appearance, and which of the two animals was played were changed with each participant, so that in a group of 20 people, each yoik was played ten times and each possible pair of cards appeared four times. The playlist was generated in advance so that I did not

know which yoik was being played. The results are assessed in relation to chance level. Assessing them in relation to results obtained among Sámi listeners would have involved a problematic bias, as the Sámi are made familiar with the animal repertoire of yoiks from childhood. In a place like Kautokeino, this experiment would merely approach the participants' knowledge of the repertoire, not their sensibility to the yoik's evocation.

Experiment 2 was undertaken immediately after Experiment 1. Here, the participants were asked to identify the animals represented on the cards. This experiment had two aims: (1) assessing to what extent the participants recognised the animals they had to choose from; and (2) providing results that might serve as indicators of the degree of knowledge of animals, in order to inquire about its possible correlations with the success rate in Experiment 1.

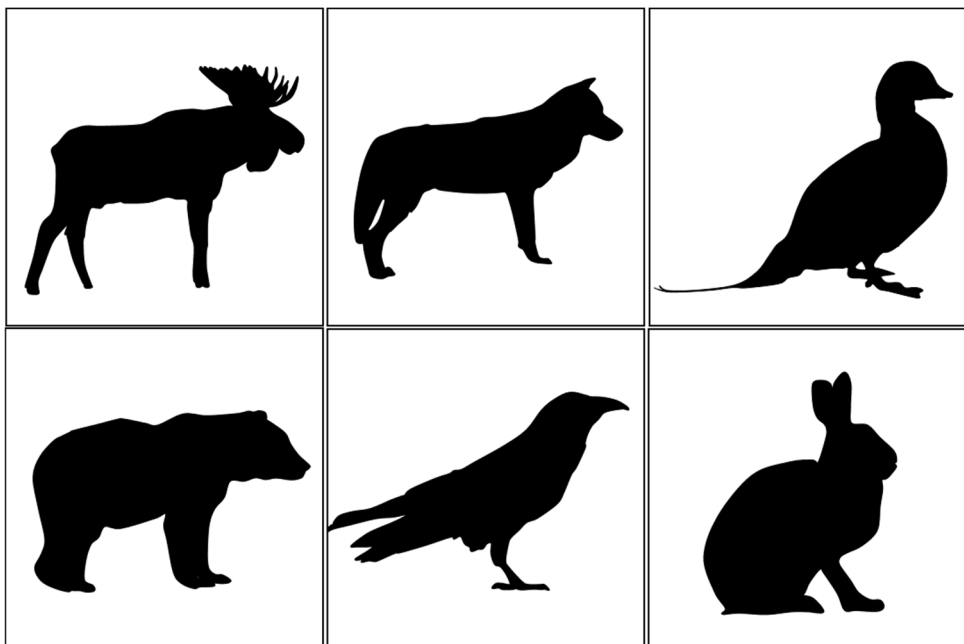


Figure 5. Cards presented to the participants.

Experiment 3 was only conducted with Group E. It consisted of a written questionnaire assessing the participants' familiarity with 11 animals along with the following question: 'For each animal, assess your degree of familiarity with its appearance, its way of moving, and its vocalisations, along a scale from 1 to 5 (with 1 corresponding to "I do not know this animal" and 5 to "I am perfectly familiar with this animal")'. Among the animals involved in Experiment 3, six of them were the animals involved in Experiment 1 and five of them were animals similar to the ones involved in Experiment 1 but living in the High Ardenne.

They were also asked whether they had seen these animals 'in their natural habitat'. The focus on the animal's appearance, movements, and vocalisations follows the teachings of the Sámi composer Frode Fjellheim, according to whom these are the key elements of the yoik's iconicity. According to him, it is by turning one or several of these elements into a melodic circle that a yoik is created (yoik course 2018, cf. 3<sup>rd</sup> variation).

Finding animals that were both similar to those evoked by the yoiks and familiar to the participants was made possible by the preliminary conduction of Experiment 2 with Groups A-B-C-D and the selection of recurrent mistakes in the identification of animals by the participants. The elk was readily seen as a red deer (*Cervus elaphus*), the mountain hare as a European rabbit (*Oryctolagus cuniculus*), the long-tailed duck as a mallard (*Anas platyrhynchos*), the common raven as a carrion crow (*Corvus corone*), and the gray wolf as a dog (*Canis lupus familiaris*). Nearly all participants managed to identify the bear: only two 4-year old participants mistook it for, respectively, a 'badger' (*Meles meles*) and a 'werewolf'.

## Results and discussion

### Recognition from yoiks (exp. 1)

The success rate in selecting the animal card corresponding to the yoik (hereafter named SR1) was 58.04% in all groups combined. This result is only slightly significant, as the probability of reaching an equivalent of higher rate (hereafter 'p') equals 0.06. However, the results differed from one group to the other. SR1 for Groups A and B were 53.70% and 52.63%, respectively, i.e., close to chance level. These groups appeared to understand the task they were asked to perform and apparently expressed the same degree of confidence as the other groups in their choices.

Groups C and E give a higher SR1, respectively of 64.91% and 65% ( $p < 0.01$ ). This is in line with research conducted on emotion recognition among children, with the frequent mention of a 'threshold' in development, from which the subjects start being sensible to modes and not only to tempo and features associated with arousal (Cespedes-Guevara & Eerola 2018, Dalla Bella et al. 2001, Hunter et al. 2011, McDermott & Hauser 2005) and to identify emotions other than happiness and sadness (Cespedes-Guevara & Eerola 2018, Stachó et al. 2013). This threshold is generally located among 6- to 8-year-old children and overlaps with significant development in spontaneous singing (Barrett & Tafuri 2018, Kreutzer 2001).

The SR1 in Group D was only 56.67% ( $p = 0.1$ ). On a qualitative level, the participants in Group D were observed to be generally less playful during the test, with two participants explicitly mentioning that they were confused with the task they had to perform – this did not occur in the other groups. In line with Hunter et al.'s argument, the approach of adolescence may have had an impact on these results (Hunter et al. 2011: 90-91). As

shown below, results from Group D still differed significantly from Groups A and B in that they exhibited a clear preference for some animals over others.

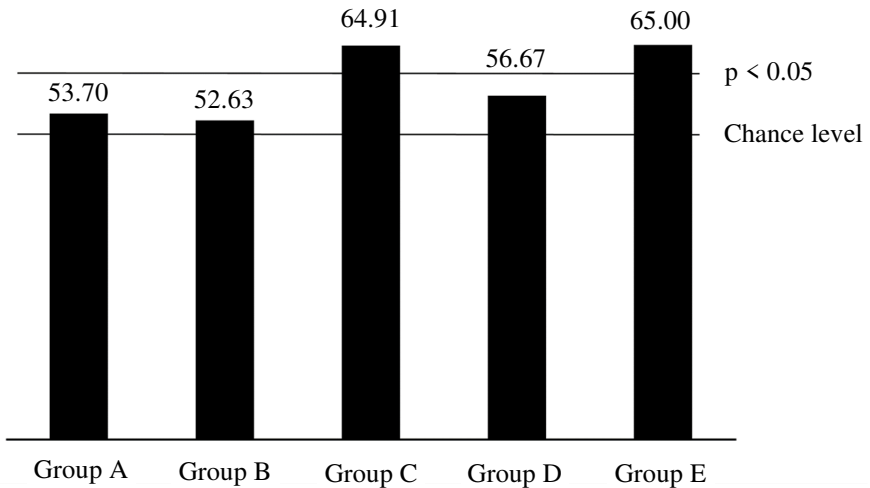


Figure 6. Success rate in Experiment 1 in percentage per group.

Throughout all the groups, the male participants had a higher SR1 (62.26%,  $p = 0.01$ ) than the female participants (55.51%,  $p = 0.14$ ). These results may be due to the fact that the yoiks were performed by a male voice.

### **Familiarity with animals (exp. 2 and 3)**

Familiarity with animals can be approached through the results of Experiments 2 and 3. In Experiment 2, the bear was the most widely recognised animal, with only two mistakes among the 96 participants. The wolf and the raven also had a high rate of correct identification (hereafter named 'SR2'). The long-tailed duck was, at best, identified as a 'duck'. The mountain hare was identified either as a 'hare' or as a 'rabbit'. The elk was correctly identified by 18 members of Group E and by nine members of Group D. In Groups A, B, and C, 67.3% of participants identified the elk as

a 'red deer', 14.6% as a 'reindeer', and only 12.7% as an 'elk'. Exceptions in Group A include identifications of the elk as a 'donkey', a 'goat', and a 'cow'.

If the only correct answers are taken to be 'wolf', 'bear', 'elk', 'raven', 'long-tailed duck', and 'hare', their average number significantly increased between Groups B and C and between Groups D and E (Figure 7).

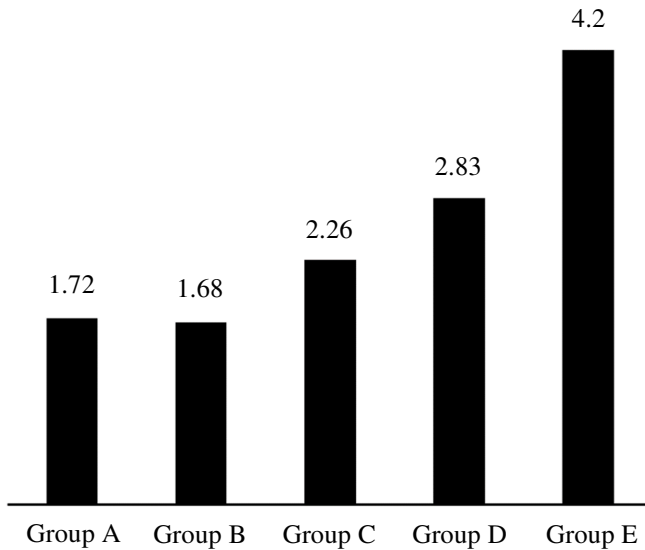


Figure 7. Average amount of correct answers per group in Experiment 2.

Experiment 3 revealed the dog and the red deer as the most familiar animals of the list, with a mean note (hereafter 'n') of 4.8 and 4.3, respectively. It was followed by the other animals currently living in their region (European rabbit, carrion crow, mallard, common raven), then by animals that had inhabited their region in the past (grey wolf, brown bear), and then by animals present in Sápmi but not in their region (elk, mountain hare, long-tailed duck) (Figure 8).

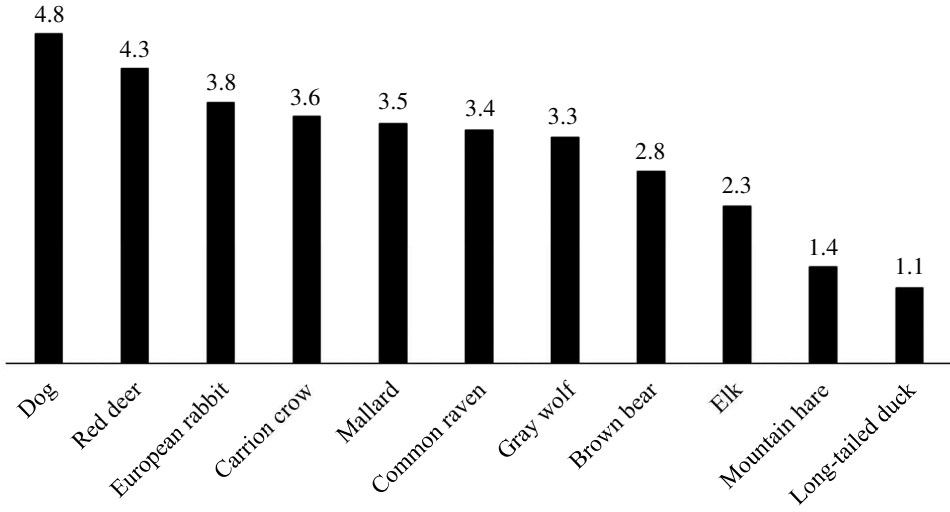


Figure 8. Degree of familiarity among the participants per animal in Group E.

Experiment 3 also evidenced that nearly all the participants in Group E had observed the animals living in their region (Figure 9), while comparatively few had observed the ones involved in Experiment 1.

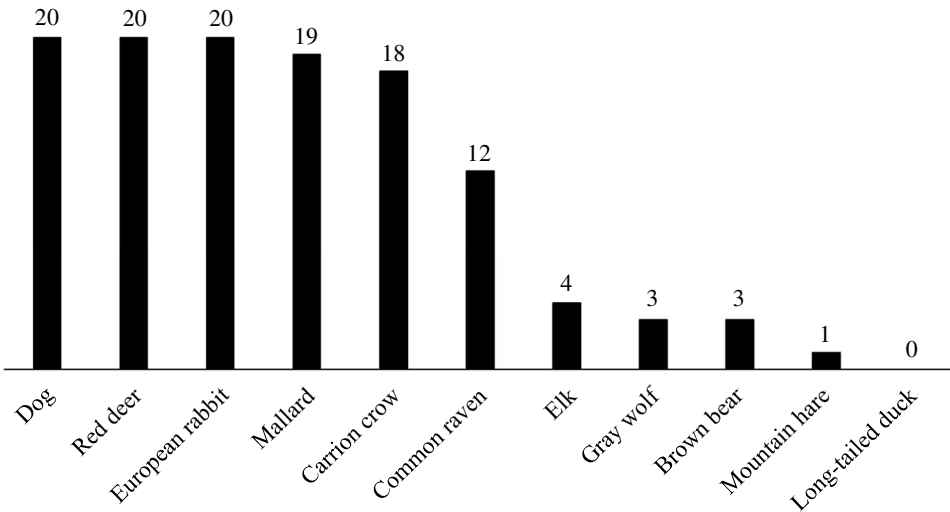


Figure 9. Number of participants in Group E who have observed each animal in its natural habitat.



**Correlations between results (exp. 1, 2, 3)**

Members of Group E were the only ones that exhibited a weak correlation between SR1 and SR2, with a Pearson correlation coefficient (hereafter 'r') of 0.35 (for other groups,  $r < 0.15$ ). Given the imprecise nature of the pictures, the strictness of the count of correct answers, and the limited adequacy of Experiment 2 as an indicator of animal familiarity, these coefficients only allow for speculation. They still indicate that among adults only, SR1 and SR2 might be correlated.

In Group E, no significant correlation was observed between the SR1 and the participants' respective degree of familiarity with the animals evoked by the yoiks ( $r = 0.22$ ;  $r = 0.2$  if the bear is not taken into account as it has no living equivalent in the participants' region). In contrast, a strong correlation was observed between SR1 and the degree of familiarity with the five animals living in the participants' region (red deer, mallard, carrion crow, dog, European rabbit), with  $r = 0.61$  ( $p = 0.004$ ).

It might have been expected that familiarity with the animals of Experiment 1 would be correlated with the familiarity with the animals presented on the cards. How could it not help to be familiar with their appearance, sound, and movements, when these supposedly constitute the basis for the yoik's mimesis? Instead, it appears that the participants of Group E approached the yoik through the animals they personally knew, even though they had a high SR2 and therefore knew, in most cases, that these were not the animals presented to them. Thus, when confronted with the elk and the long-tailed duck, it may be that the participants, either knowingly or not, relied on their familiarity with the red deer and the mallard.

The issue thus appears to be one of translation: to what extent can ‘elk’ be translated to ‘red deer’ when moving from one bio-cultural environment to another? As was the case for mood categories in the aforementioned study by Yi-Hsuan Yang and Xiao Hu (cf. the introduction of this appendix), the translation of animals appears to be effective in several cases, but may suffer ‘significant degradation of classification performance compared to the results of within-culture evaluation’. Consequently, although it may be that ‘elk’ can be translated as ‘red deer’ in this particular case, translating ‘long-tailed duck’ as ‘mallard’ is deceptive, insofar as its yoik evokes the peculiar call of the animal, which is radically different from the mallard’s call. The long-tailed duck may in this regard be related to the mood category ‘tenderness’, highly present in Chinese songs and apparently absent in Western songs according to the same study (Yang & Hu 2012: 22).

In any case, these results resonate with a widespread idea among Sámi yoikers, by which the yoik stems from nature, from the earth, from the reindeer, from the wind, or from the spirits of the mountains (the *Gufihtar*, or *Ulda*) (Gaup 1995, Helander & Kailo 1998, Hilder 2013, Sara 2002, Skaltje 2014, Szomjas-Schiffert 1996, Turi 1910, Wersland 2005). In addition, a high degree of familiarity with one’s natural environment induces higher skills in yoiking animals (cf. 3<sup>rd</sup> variation, section ‘Listening as an outsider’). In the academic literature, converging ideas are encountered in fields such as ecopsychology and biosemiotics, according to which being in contact with other-than-human forms of life enhances one’s immersion in communicative flows ‘beyond the human’ (cf. Abram 2010: 167, Kohn 2013: 49). In this regard, it is notable that the yoik is readily

described as an effective means of communicating with animals (cf. 2<sup>nd</sup> variation).

To what extent the animal yooks of Experiment 1 could be understood by communities unfamiliar with any animal species that would resemble those chanted by Ánte Mihkkal Gaup (assuming that such a community exists) remains an open question.

### Differentiation in choices (exp. 1)

Another analysis undertaken with the results of Experiment 1 consisted of counting how many times the participants selected each animal when it was included in the pair of cards shown to them, independently of whether that choice was right or wrong. As shown in the figures below, this highlighted three ensembles: (1) Groups A and B had a low degree of differentiation with a variance (hereafter named 'v') of 0.027 and 0.013, respectively; (2) Groups C and D had a high degree of differentiation ( $v = 0.07$  and  $0.06$  respectively); and (3) Group E had the lowest degree of differentiation ( $v = 0.01$ ).

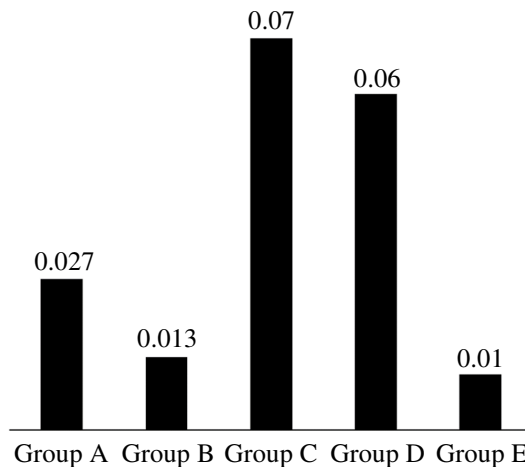


Figure 10. Variance in the selection of animals per group in Experiment 1.

If Groups A, B, and D are distinct from Groups C and E by virtue of their low SR1, then Groups A, B, and E are distinct from Groups C and D by virtue of their low  $v$ . This confirms the hypothesis of a critical threshold between Groups B and C, i.e. in children between 7 and 8 years old. This may be interpreted in light of an idea encountered with Sámi yoik teachers, who claim that it is easier to teach the yoik to children than to adults (interviews with Anne Lise Varsi 2017 and Mari Helander 2018, cf. also Berit Alette Mienna in Hanssen 2017). The low  $v$  and SR1 in Groups A and B indicate a state of indetermination from which teaching might be more easily undertaken. In this sense, the yoik could be a way of shaping not only the musical sensibility of children, but also their knowledge of animals. The following idea was suggested by the yoiker Terje Trednes, from Karasjok / *Kárášjohka* (Finnmark, Norway):

‘By listening to the wolf’s yoik, children could hear that this animal may be dangerous. [...] There are several ways of chanting this yoik, for instance when the wolf has eaten reindeer and no longer needs to hunt. It is quiet, unlike the starving wolf, who is restless. But both can be chanted, just like the bear. It is meant for the children, so that they can associate a personality with these animals’ (conversation 2017, cf. 3<sup>rd</sup> variation).

If, at 8 years old, the participants start showing clear preferences for some animals over others, the fact that adults return to a low  $v$  but a high SR1 may indicate a shift towards a more strategic attitude during the test, informed by a better awareness regarding the foreign nature of the chants and of the experimental design; in particular, the fact that one answer might be ‘more correct’ than the other. This may have led to a higher inclination

among adults to choose animals that are different from the ones that would spontaneously come into their minds.

**Results per animal (exp. 1, 2, 3)**

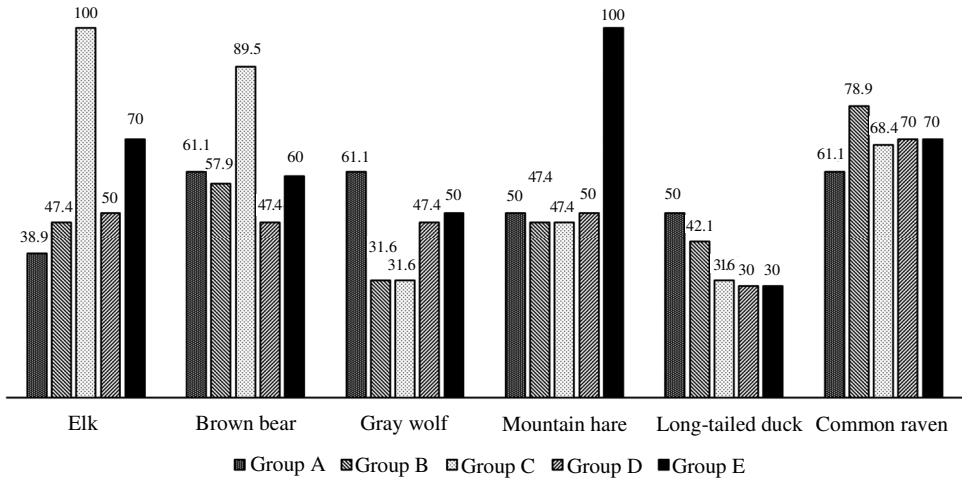


Figure 11. Success rate in percentage when each animal is yoiked.

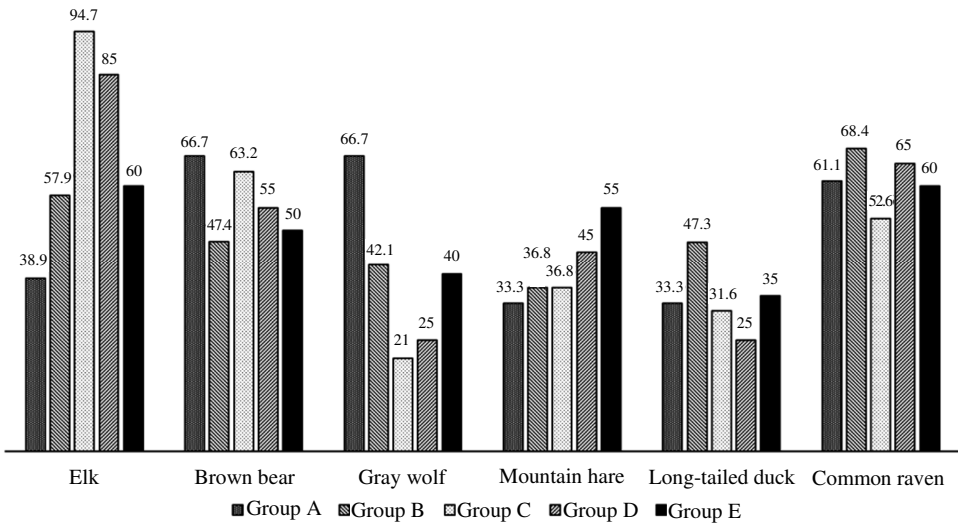


Figure 12. Preference rate in percentage when each animal is present in the pair of cards.

***The elk***

A paradox appears in the participants' behaviour towards the elk. Experiment 2 evidenced that it was readily seen as a red deer, and to a lesser extent as a reindeer, particularly in Groups A-B-C-D. The questionnaire presented to Group E revealed that the participants had a low degree of familiarity with the elk ( $n = 2.3$ ), even though 18 of them identified it correctly in Experiment 2. Yet, its yoik was correctly identified by all participants of Group C ( $p < 0.001$ ), 80% of Group D ( $p = 0.05$ ), and 70% of Group E ( $p = 0.17$ ). In Groups C, D, and E, it was the animal that had the highest rate of recognition.

The reason for this apparent paradox is that the elk was systematically chosen when it was presented to Groups C and D in the pair of animal cards (cf. Section above). In other words, any yoik was considered to evoke the elk or the deer. In Groups C, D, and E, this preference for the elk decreased along with the rate of confusion between elk, red deer, and reindeer. While 94.74% of Group C selected the elk when the card was presented to them, 84.21% of them identified it incorrectly in Experiment 2 against rates of 60% and 10%, respectively, for Group E. Thus, it may have been the general idea of 'deer' that incited the participants to associate the elk's card to all the yoiks.

Several hypotheses can be formulated as to why the yoik might be considered 'deer-like'. First, the red deer is among the most emblematic animals of the forests in the High Ardenne, incarnating ideas of grace, beauty, and discretion, in contrast to the (also emblematic) wild boar (*Sus scrofa*) (Donneau 2006). Possible interpretations of the yoik as a music 'close to nature' (cf. Section 'Correlations between results' further above) may have called deer-like images to mind.

Furthermore, numerous Sámi yoikers suggested that the yoik has been shaped by people cohabiting with reindeer. As noted by Ola Graff, the activity of herding the reindeer is indeed a privileged milieu for yoiking, as it is used in order to reassure the herd, to approach them without frightening them, to scare away their predators, to call other herders in the distance, or to pass the time during long periods of solitude (Graff 2016: 27). It is a widespread idea among herders that the reindeer listens to, understands, or enjoys the yoik (cf. 2<sup>nd</sup> variation). It is therefore readily described as ‘the reindeer’s music’ (Skaltje 2014: 12).

These considerations bring to light not only that the yoik is perceived as ‘deer-like’ in Groups C and D but also that the preference for the elk appears to decline with the age of participants, as the animal becomes more clearly distinguishable from local deer species. The yoik may be ‘(rein)deer-like’, but it is only indirectly ‘elk -like’.

### ***The bear***

The success rate in recognising the bear’s yoik is as high as the elk’s, even though it received a lower degree of preference when its card was presented to participants. These results may be considered surprising insofar as the imitative dimension of this yoik is not explicit. For instance, unlike some bear yoiks coming from other parts of Sápmi, the recordings played to the participants did not use guttural vocalisations.

It may still be possible to speculate imitative components: the rhythm may be considered evocative of the bear’s pace, while the ‘roundness’ of the voice, which mainly uses the sounds [o], [l], [w], [n], and [g], may evoke the animal’s shape, as can be observed in physiognomic aspects of sound

symbolism in language (Gell 1979, 1995, Holland & Wertheimer 1964), and in particular the French word *ours*.

Importantly, six participants in Group E spontaneously mentioned that this yoik resembled musical bears encountered in other settings, in particular fictional characters such as Baloo in the Disney movie *The Jungle Book* or Nounours in the French children's TV show *Bonne nuit les petits*. It is therefore possible that the brown bear was translated as familiar fictional animals, rather than phenomenal animals living in the participants' region. Thus, the principle of translation across bio-cultural environments may still have occurred despite the absence of animals resembling the bear in the Belgian forests.

The only reliable assumption at this point is that some animals may present a high SR1 without their yoik being obvious in what aspect of the animal they imitate.

### ***The wolf***

In contrast to the elk, the wolf not only had a low rate of recognition in Experiment 1, but it was also rarely chosen by the participants, especially in Groups C and D. Thus, if the yoik was globally perceived as 'deer-like', it was not perceived as 'wolf-like'. This may appear paradoxical, insofar as this yoik is among the most widespread and most popular yoiks in northern Sápmi. Ánte Mihkkal Gaup recorded two versions of the wolf's yoik, respectively labelled 'the wolf (angry)' and 'the wolf (wandering)'. The melody is the same on both tracks, but the former is performed with a more tense and aggressive voice than the latter. In Experiment 1, the participants heard the angry wolf.



It is noteworthy that the wolf has an ambiguous status in Sápmi today. The Sámi writer Johan Turi wrote in 1910 that ‘it is the Devil that made the wolf’ (Turi 1910\*: 174). According to the biologist Luigi Boitani, the Sámi of Scandinavia ‘originally had an immense respect for the wolf. Their attitude changed when they started reindeer domestication; they began to refer to the animal as one of their worst enemies’ (Boitani 1995: 8). Conceptions of the wolf as a blood-thirsty animal that kills more reindeer than it can actually consume are indeed present among herders. However, the popularity of the wolf’s yoik and of stories associated with the animal (e.g. Helander-Renvall 2010: 50) also indicates a feeling of fascination towards it.

In contrast, despite children stories about the Big Bad Wolf, the animal is generally not considered as an actual threat in Belgium. The fact that free-range herding is not practised in the area and that the wolf disappeared as early as the 19<sup>th</sup> century may have led to a relation to the wolf different from that of the Sámi and to difficulties in hearing the animal in the yoik. Furthermore, if the wolf was indeed translated into its local counterpart (i.e. the dog) by the participants, the ‘angry’ quality of the yoik may have been all the more inappropriate.

### *The hare*

The mountain hare’s yoik is frequently mentioned by Sámi yoikers as an example of a yoik that is explicitly imitative. The melody is supposed to evoke the hopping pace of the animal. Frode Fjellheim reported that this yoik can be performed at two different speeds, depending on whether the hare is quietly wandering or fleeing in panic (Fjellheim 2004: 59).

The success rate in Experiment 1 nonetheless remained at chance level in Groups A-B-C-D. By contrast, it reached 100% in Group E. A total of nine of its participants identified the animal as a hare, while 11 identified it as a rabbit: this apparently had no impact on the success rate. They reported a low degree of familiarity with the mountain hare ( $n = 1.4$ ) and a high one with the European rabbit ( $n = 3.8$ ). Thus, approaching the mountain hare in light of their knowledge of the European rabbit appears to be a successful translation. Why the participants in Groups A-B-C-D did not reach a similar result remains an open question.

### ***The long-tailed duck and the raven***

The long-tailed duck presents a rate of recognition in Experiment 1 and a level of preference below chance level in all groups. It was thus the least recognised and least selected animal. As it was identified by all participants as ‘a duck’ (with three exceptions in Group A, who identified it as ‘a bird’, ‘a magpie’, and ‘a baby eagle’), the general sonority of the yoik was apparently not considered to be ‘duck-like’.

Like the hare, the long-tailed duck is readily mentioned as an example of highly imitative yoiks. The yoiker Per Hætta went as far as stating that the bird ‘gave its own yoik’ (in Graff 1985: 129). Its melodic contour and the syllables used by Ánte Mihkkal Gaup do indeed evoke the highly characteristic vocalisations of the long-tailed duck. Among the duck species known in the High Ardenne, including the mallard, no similar vocalisation can be heard. Therefore, the participants of Experiment 1 had no way of being aware of the yoik’s imitative component.

The common raven’s yoik presents the same kind of explicit imitation of bird vocalisation, although some Sámi yoikers state that it rather evokes the

bird's hops on the ground (Laade 1958: 493). In the recording played to the participants, Ánte Mihkkal Gaup uses syllables intended to imitate caws, thus making the former possible form of mimesis highly explicit. The common raven and the carrion crow emit similar caws and the yoik could therefore imitate one or the other, albeit indistinctly. In other words, the participants were equipped to hear the yoik's imitation, unlike what was observed in the long-tailed duck's case. This makes the common raven the best recognised animal on average, with a recognition rate in Experiment 1 higher than 60 % in all groups.

Thus, although an explicit imitation of the animal's sounds is present in both yoiks, only the imitation of the common raven (or the carrion crow) was perceived, while the long-tailed duck evoked something that was simply absent in the listeners' sensibility. The translation from one bio-cultural environment to the other may be effective in some cases, but it nonetheless suffers degradation in others.

## **Summary and conclusion**

This study highlighted that participants aged 8 or above were capable of identifying animals from their yoiks above chance level, with a low success rate at ages 10 and 11, which could possibly be related to pre-adolescence. At age 8, the participants also started expressing higher degrees of preference for specific animals. Among Groups C, D, and E, most yoiks are thus considered as 'deer-like', in line with Sámi definitions of the yoik as 'the reindeer's music'.

Participants who had a high degree of knowledge of the animals living in their region clearly had a higher success rate, while the degree of knowledge of the animals played during the experiment did not present any

correlation. This suggests that a process of translation from one environment to the other occurs (and is, in some cases, effective) and resonates with the idea that animal yoiks are not merely human inventions and require familiarity with the land to be approached, as stated by some yoikers. This translation, however, may have involved not only phenomenal animals observed in the area, but also fictional animals.

Approaching these results in extensive terms would obscure most of their interest. They become meaningful when the discourses and local ecologies of the actors involved are taken seriously; when concerns about cognitive universals across cultures – i.e. a core set of features *X* common to cultures *A*, *B*, *C*, and *D* – give way to concerns about the possibilities of translation and dialogue across environments – e.g. from *A* to *B*, *B* to *C*, *C* to *B*, *D* to *A* – and their ecological conditions, that is, when the depths of diverging ecologies and populations are substituted for the flat extension of universality.

## Appendix 2: List of yoikers

**Aikio, Maaren:** From Inari / *Aanaar* (Lapland, Finland). She was part of the band Shaman Duo, along with Jonne Järvelä. I have not met her.

**Andersen, Johan Andreas:** From Nesseby / *Unjárga* (Finnmark, Norway). I met him at his house during a stay in eastern Finnmark. He was often referred to me as a particularly skilful animal yoiker.

**Andersson, Nils Mattias:** From Tärnaby / *Dearna* (Västerbotten, Sweden). He is a reindeer herder who recorded a remarkable yoik when he was visited by the Swedish national radio (cf. Arnberg et al. 1997a, 1997b). I have not met him, as he died in 1974.

**Blind, Lars Henrik:** From the region of Jokkmokk / *Dáálvvadis* (Norrbotten, Sweden). He is a traditional yoiker who shared his views on the yoik in a book by Maj Lis Skaltje (2014). I have not met him.

**Boine, Mari:** From the region of Karasjok / *Kárášjohka* (Finnmark). She is sometimes considered as the most famous yoiker in the world and is an emblematic figure of Sámi culture today. I have not met her.

**Bær, Anders:** From Karasjok. He is a traditional yoiker quoted by the Sámi scholar Nils Jernsletten in one of his papers (Jernsletten 1978). I have not met him.

**Bær, Johan Anders:** From Karasjok. He is a traditional yoiker and reindeer herder who has also recorded modern yoiks with the band Dronefolk. I met him in a cafeteria during a stay in Karasjok, along with his cousin Terje Tretnes.

**Driver, Merlyn:** From Scotland. He is a musician and musicologist who learned how to yoik with Sámi yoikers. He was my teacher during a yoik course in London.

**Eira, Elle Marja:** From Kautokeino / *Guovdageaidnu* (Finnmark). I met her during the Sámi National Day in Trondheim, where she gave a modern yoik concert. She is a young yoiker engaged with both the traditional and modern yoiks.

**Fjellheim, Frode:** From the South Sámi area in Norway. He was educated as a classical musician and has composed music inspired by the traditional yoik. He is one of the most famous representants of the South Sámi yoik in Norway. He was my teacher during a yoik course in Levanger.

**Fjällgren, Jon Henrik:** From Mittådalen / *Mihte* (Jämtland, Sweden). He is a young yoiker, mainly known as the winner of the television contest *Talang Sverige* in 2014, where he chanted a modern yoik. I have not met him.

**Gaino, Ole Larsen:** From Finnmark. He is an elderly traditional yoiker who participated in some records (e.g. Ovollá & Gaino 2010). I have not met him.

**Gaup, Ailo:** From Kautokeino. He is mainly known as a poet and shaman. He played a key role in reviving the practice of shamanism in Sápmi has been. He was also a traditional yoiker. I have not met him, as he died in 2014.

**Gaup, Ánte Mihkkal:** From Kautokeino. I met him once during one of my consultations in Kautokeino, as he teaches at the Sámi University of Applied Sciences. He is mainly known as a traditional yoiker, although he also recorded modern yoiks. He has created many yoik melodies for various persons.

**Gaup, Ingor Ántte Áilu:** From Kautokeino. He is a traditional yoiker and works as an actor. I first met him during a conference in Tromsø. Later, he was my teacher during two yoik courses, in Switzerland and in Oslo.

**Gaup Beaska, Sara Marielle:** From Kautokeino. I have not met her. She is known both as a traditional and modern yoiker, for instance through her work with the band Adjágas.

**Guttorm, Ingvald:** From the region of Tana / *Deatnu* (Finnmark). I met him at his house during a stay in eastern Finnmark. He is a retired fisherman, known both as a traditional and modern yoiker. Like Hartvik Hansen, he was a member of one of the first modern yoik bands, Tanabreddens Ungdom.

**Hansen, Hartvik:** From the region of Tana. He is a politician working at the Tana Municipality. I met him in his workplace during a stay in eastern Finnmark. Like Ingvald Guttorm, he was a member of one of the first modern yoik bands, Tanabreddens Ungdom.

**Helander, Mari:** From Finnmark. I met her at her workplace in Oslo, where she now lives. I know her as a traditional yoiker.

**Hirvasvuoppio, Annukka:** From the region of Lapland (Finland). She is a traditional and modern yoiker, and a member of the band Vilddas. I have not met her.

**Hætta, Ella Marie:** From the region of Tana. She is a young traditional and modern yoiker, winner of the 2018 edition of the television contest *Stjernekamp* in Norway. I have not met her.

**Hætta, Mattis:** From Masi / *Máze* (Finnmark). He is a traditional and modern yoiker, mainly known in Norway for his participation at the Eurovision Song Contest in 1980. I have not met him.

**Hætta, Per:** From Kautokeino and Karasjok. He was a traditional yoiker. He was particularly renowned for his animal yoiks, some of which have been recorded. I have not met him, as he died in 1967.

**Juuso, Inga:** From Kautokeino. She yoiked both as a traditional and modern yoiker, for instance with her band Skáidi. She worked in cultural institutions and has been a key figure in the yoik revival. I have not met her, as she died in 2014.

**Järvelä, Jonne:** From Vesilahti (Pirkanmaa, Southern Finland). Although he is not a Sámi, he learned how to yoik by himself and with the yoiker Maaren Aikio while living in Sápmi. He has been a member of the bands Shaman Duo and Shaman. He is now the singer of the folk metal band Korpiklaani. I have not met him.

**Kåven, Elin:** From Karasjok. She is a young artist, mainly known as a modern yoiker and as a dancer, although she also engages with the traditional yoik. I met her during a Skype conversation and again at a yoik course in Levanger, under the supervision of Frode Fjellheim and Berit Alette Mienna.

**Länsman, Ursula:** From the region of Inari. I know her as a modern yoiker and a member of the band Angelit. I have not met her.

**Mienna, Berit Alette:** From the region of Karasjok. I met her at two yoik courses, in Levanger and in Troms. I know her as a traditional yoiker and a yoik teacher. She has also recorded some modern yoiks (cf. Mienna 2011).

**Märak, Maxida:** From Jokkmokk and Stockholm / *Stuehkie*. I have not met her. I first heard about her in the television documentary *Muitte mu – Husk meg* (NRK 2017: episode 5), where she was presented as a traditional and modern yoiker, hip-hop artist, and activist.

**Nilsen, Øystein:** From Nesseby. He is a traditional yoiker working as a farmer. I met him at his house during a stay in eastern Finnmark. Other people living in the area described him as particularly knowledgeable about the yoik tradition of the Varanger region.

**Ovllá, Lásse:** From Karasjok. He is an elderly traditional yoiker who participated in some records (e.g. Ovllá & Gaino 2010). I have not met him.



**Parfa, Isak:** From the region of Jokkmokk. He is a traditional yoiker who shared his views on the yoik in a book by Maj Lis Skaltje (2014). I have not met him.

**Persson, Cecilia:** She is a traditional yoiker and an actress, quoted in an interview along with Johan Anders Bær (Wennström 1996). I have not met her.

**Päiviö, Siri:** From the region of Arjeplog / *Árjepluovve* (Norrbotten). She is a traditional yoiker who shared his views on the yoik in a book by Maj Lis Skaltje (2014). I have not met her.

**Saari, Wimme:** From the region of Enontekiö / *Eanodat* (Lapland). He is one of the most famous modern yoikers, although he is also a renowned traditional yoiker. His modern yoiks often combine traditional yoiking techniques with electronic music. I have not met him.

**Sara, Biret Ristin:** From Karasjok. She is a traditional yoiker and former head of the yoikers association *Juoigiid Searvi*. She was interviewed by Thomas Hilder about the creation of new yoiks (2013: 167). I have not met her.

**Sara Jr., Johan:** From Alta / *Áltá* (Finnmark). He is known both as a traditional and a modern yoiker. I briefly met him after one of his concerts in Nordland (Norway), exchanged a few emails with him, and participated in his online yoik course *Juoiggas!*

**Somby, Ánde:** From the region of Tana. He works at the University of Tromsø as an assistant professor in Law. He has engaged in both the traditional and modern yoiks. He is particularly renowned for his intense vocalisations of animal yoiks. I visited him at his university in 2015, when I was a student.

**Somby, Lawra:** He is mainly known as a member of Adjágas, where he engaged in the modern yoik. He has also been active as a poet and actor.

Through his parents, he has roots both in the North and South Sámi traditions (cf. Ragazzi 2012). I have not met him.

**Stoor, Krister:** From the region of Kiruna / *Giron* (Norrbotten). He is known both as a traditional and modern yoiker. He works as a scholar at the University of Umeå and has published several texts on the yoik. I met him at his university during one of my consultations.

**Svonni, Jungle:** From the region of Tysfjord / *Divtasvuodna* (Nordland). He is a traditional yoiker and a shaman. He learned shamanism while living in South America and now teaches shamanism in Norway. I met him in Levanger, where we participated in the same yoik course, under the supervision of Frode Fjellheim and Berit Alette Mienna.

**Sunna, Olov:** From Bardu / *Beardu* (Troms, Norway). He is a traditional yoiker who shared his views on the yoik in a book by Maj Lis Skaltje (2014). I have not met him.

**Tretnes, Terje:** From the region of Karasjok. He is a musician and a traditional yoiker. I met him at a cafeteria in Karasjok, along with his cousin Johan Anders Bær.

**Valkeapää, Nils-Aslak:** From Enontekiö and Skibotn / *Ivgobahta* (Finnmark). He was a (traditional and modern) yoiker, poet, and visual artist. He is often considered to have initiated the ‘modern yoik’ movement and remains an emblematic figure of the recent Sámi history. I have not met him, as he died in 2001.

**Varsi, Anne Lise:** From the region of Tana. I met her at her house during a stay in eastern Finnmark. I know her as a traditional yoiker and a yoik teacher. She has recorded a collection of traditional yoiks together with her daughter and mother (Golbma Buolvva 2016).

**Vassvik, Torgeir:** From Gamvik / *Gáŋgaviika* (Finnmark). After contacting him via emails, I met him in a pub in Oslo, where he now lives. Later, I participated with him to an event related to Nordic music at the Deichman Library in Oslo. I know him mainly as a modern yoiker, musician, and composer. His records often combine the yoik with throat singing techniques.

**Westerfjell, Nanni Mari:** From Namsskogan / *Nååmesje* (Nord-Trøndelag, Norway). She is a traditional yoiker. I have not met her.



## Appendix 3: Map



Figure 13. Map of official administrative divisions in Sápmi (Norwegian counties before the 2020 reform, Swedish counties, Finnish region, Russian oblast).



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## Conversations

<b>Date</b>	<b>Interlocutor</b>	<b>Place</b>	<b>Language</b>
<i>12/01/2015</i>	Ánde Somby	Tromsø	English
<i>13/01/2015</i>	Ola Graff	Tromsø	English
<i>31/10/2016</i>	Torgeir Vassvik	Oslo	Norwegian
<i>18/01/2017</i>	Johan Anders Bær	Karasjok	Norwegian
<i>18/01/2017</i>	Terje Tretnes	Karasjok	Norwegian
<i>25/02/2017</i>	Elle Marja Eira	Trondheim	Norwegian
<i>24/04/2017</i>	Nils Oskal	Kautokeino	Norwegian
<i>27/05/2017</i>	Johan Andreas Andersen	Nesseby	Norwegian
<i>27/05/2017</i>	Øystein Nilsen	Nesseby	Norwegian
<i>29/05/2017</i>	Ingvald Guttorm	Tana	Norwegian
<i>31/05/2017</i>	Anne Lise Varsi	Tana	Norwegian
<i>07/06/2017</i>	Hartvik Hansen	Tana	Norwegian
<i>29/09/2017</i>	Elin Kåven	Alta	Norwegian
<i>22/02/2018</i>	Mari Helander	Oslo	Norwegian

**Yoik courses**

<b>Date</b>	<b>Teacher</b>	<b>Place</b>	<b>Duration</b>
<i>29/05/2017</i>	Ingvald Guttorm	Tana	2 hours
<i>26-27/06/2017</i>	Merlyn Driver	London (UK)	2 evenings
<i>14-17/07/2017</i>	Inggor Ántte Áilu Gaup	Feldis (Switzerland)	4 days
<i>05/12/2017</i>	Stéphane Aubinet	Lille (France)	2 hours
<i>23-25/02/2018</i>	Inggor Ántte Áilu Gaup	Oslo	3 days
<i>13/06/2018</i>	Anonymous	Central Europe	1 evening
<i>12-13/07/2018</i>	Berit Alette Mienna	Manndalen – Riddu Ridđu Festival	2 days
<i>18/10/2018 – 01/02/2019</i>	Frode Fjellheim and Berit Alette Mienna	Levanger	5 days
<i>Continuous</i>	Johan Sara Jr.	Online course <i>Juoiggas!</i>	Continuous

**Consultations**

<b>Date</b>	<b>Institution</b>	<b>Place</b>
<i>19/01/2019</i>	Oslo Sameforening – Oslo Sámiid Searvi	Oslo
<i>31/01/2019</i>	Nord universitet	Levanger
<i>20/02/2019</i>	Umeå universitet	Umeå
<i>11/03/2019</i>	Universitetet i Tromsø – Norges arktiske universitet	Tromsø
<i>12-13/03/2019</i>	Sámi University of Applied Sciences – Sámi allaskuvla	Kautokeino
<i>14/03/2019</i>	De Samiske Samlinger – Sámiid Vuorká-Dávvirat	Karasjok
<i>15/03/2019</i>	Varanger Samiske Museum – Várjjat Sámi Musea	Nesseby

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