

**Environmental Perception and Activism through Performance:  
Alpine Song and Sound Impressions**

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In the summer of 2012, Swiss newspapers, radio, and TV news featured a remarkable story: The inhabitants of the Valais village Fiesch, known as a tourist gateway to the glacial environment of the Aletsch region, were finally allowed to pray the first prayers for the *growth* of the *Aletschgletscher* (“Aletsch Glacier”).<sup>1</sup> Located in the eastern Bernese Alps, the *Aletschgletscher*, with a length of 22.75 kilometers (approximately fourteen miles), is the largest glacier of the European Alps (see also Figure 1). However, as photographs demonstrate, the glacier has been visibly receding in recent decades.<sup>2</sup> In 2009, local mountain guide Herbert Volken was received by the Pope to ask for permission for the local community to be relieved from a 340 year-old solemn promise, when, with the blessing of Pope Innozenz XI in 1678, the locals vowed to pray against the growth of the glacier, which had often brought death and destruction to the region, and which was further intensified in the eighteenth century by additional vows, such as abstaining from public dancing.<sup>3</sup>

This seemingly obscure report paradigmatically reflects the highly complex relation of humans and their environment, and the way that the actual relationship between humans and nature is highly versatile. This becomes particularly visible in extreme environments, such as the Arctic and, as in this

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<sup>1</sup>Martin Wilhelm, “Walliser beten für den Gletscher,” *Tagesanzeiger* (27 July, 2012), <https://www.tagesanzeiger.ch/panorama/vermishtes/Walliser-beten-fuer-den-Gletscher/story/31501391> (accessed 1 August, 2019).

<sup>2</sup>The Website of the ETH Zürich provides a detailed account of the destructions since the nineteenth century (<http://glaciology.ethz.ch/inventar/glaciers/aletsch.html>) and the transformation of the glacier (“Variations of Grosser Aletschgletscher”: <https://www.hfsjg.ch/wordpress/reports/2006/133.pdf>, accessed 1 August, 2019).

<sup>3</sup>Philippe Welti, “Glaube versetzt Gletscher,” initially published in *Alpenmagazin* (2012), [http://www.alpenmagazin.org/index.php?option=com\\_content&view=article&id=731:glaube-versetzt-gletscher&catid=87:schweiz&Itemid=248](http://www.alpenmagazin.org/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=731:glaube-versetzt-gletscher&catid=87:schweiz&Itemid=248). See also <https://www.kulturflaneur.ch/oberster-chef-ndert-gelbdeziel/> (accessed 1 August, 2019).

case, the Alpine-glacial context. Within large glacial regions,<sup>4</sup> of which the Aletsch region is only one example, the Swiss Alps closely resemble Arctic and, thus, Northern conditions, the latter being vulnerable toward even smaller climate alterations.

As is argued here, a deeper understanding of the relationship between music and performance and environmental aspects in extreme contexts, such as the North and Alpine regions, provides insights into the constantly shifting human concepts of nature. By analyzing historical and modern accounts of nature-related music and performances in the Swiss Alpines, this article also draws on personal ethnographic observations undertaken in Switzerland between 2009 and 2017. Starting out with a broader theoretical perspective on perceptions of nature, the article then focuses on the interconnectedness between local traditional performing practices, particularly yodeling, and landscape. The findings are subsequently contextualized through an analysis of several situations that each reveal different, partly hidden relations to nature, by addressing the following guiding questions:

- What is the underlying perception of nature in the different contexts?
- Who is actually voicing environmental concerns—and where?
- What kinds of music or performance styles are preferably used by individuals and musicians?
- What roles do traditional practices, such as yodeling, play here?
- How do concerns for environmental stability correlate with issues of musical-cultural stability and change?

This article aims at adding a critical and nuanced perspective on the often romanticized interconnectedness between nature and local cultural identity, as expressed by Alpine yodeling and extreme nature. While Alpine Switzerland is indeed exemplary of the process of landscaping<sup>5</sup> through music and sound, it is actually a patchwork of a variety of musical articulations that each reflect environmental concerns and is shaped by the experience of extreme natural surroundings.

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<sup>4</sup> 62.5% of Switzerland (that covers appr. 40,000 km<sup>3</sup>) belongs to the Alps. The 1800 glaciers that can be found in Switzerland cover approximately 1800 km<sup>3</sup> (= 5.2% of the Alpine region). See also *Eidgenössisches Departement für auswärtige Angelegenheiten*, “Kennzahlen” (2013):

<http://www.swissworld.org/de/geografie/ueberblick/kennzahlen/> (accessed 1 August, 2019).

<sup>5</sup> i.e., interconnecting a landscape with a specific perception and vice versa.



**Figure 1:** View of the *Aletschgletscher* (photo: Britta Sweers)

### **Theoretical Considerations: The Relationship between Humans and Nature**

During a lecture on Urban Ethnomusicology, which I taught at the University of Bern in 2010, I entered into a discussion with students on the urban nature of Switzerland. While the course focused on central metropolitan regions like London, New York, Hanoi, and Johannesburg, students reflected on the ways that these cities' structural characteristics may be visible in Switzerland, emphasizing strong similarities to their home country, even when they came from small places with just 5,000-6,000 inhabitants which I perceived as rural.<sup>6</sup> Some Swiss students even pointed repeatedly to the issue that there was “no nature left in Switzerland.”

The mountain panorama of the Bernese Oberland, located south of the Swiss federal capital Bern, can be impressive when the weather conditions allow a view of Eiger (3,970m), Mönch (4,107m), and Jungfrau (4,158m). The prominent formation that frames the northern side of the Aletsch glacial region is a conglomeration of the various tributary glaciers from these mountains. Surrounded by Lake Thun and Lake Brienz, it is covered by rich woods below 2000 meters.

Having long embodied the ideal of an intact natural environment, Switzerland is particularly represented by images of the Oberland region, such as majestic snow-covered mountains, cows on

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<sup>6</sup> According to the Swiss definition, settlements with 10,000 inhabitants count as city, although there are many small places with only a few hundred inhabitants that maintain a historical city right (Schweizerischer Städteverband: “Neue Stadt- und Agglomerationsdefinition: Abbild der Urbanisierung.” [https://staedteverband.ch/cmsfiles/141218\\_mm\\_agglosuisse.pdf](https://staedteverband.ch/cmsfiles/141218_mm_agglosuisse.pdf) (accessed 15 August, 2019).

green hills, crystal clear rivulets, waterfalls, blue-green lakes, and wooden alpine huts. These images and their related soundscape also take up a large space in Swiss TV advertising intermissions. The latter are full of yodeling chickens, holiday spots with ibex, which, along with groundhogs, are even used in advertisements for beer.<sup>7</sup> This, as well as the yodeling sound clip that greets visitors in the Skymetro to and from Terminal E at Zürich airport, indicates that the interconnectedness of music and nature has been a central element of the Swiss economy. However, only fifteen per cent of the population was still living in a rural environment in 2017.<sup>8</sup> One of the earliest European countries to develop a tourism business in the late eighteenth century, Switzerland has long been utilizing regional musical styles like yodeling and alphorn playing as icons of its Alpine environment. This has strongly contributed to the perception of Switzerland and Swiss cultural expressions as deeply embedded into contexts of intact nature. At the same time, the developed tourism infrastructure with its network of cable railways and well maintained spectacular hiking trails also provides the urban population with easy access to this extreme natural environment.

The students' responses thus left me extremely puzzled until I started to investigate the actual concepts of nature employed in this discussion. Besides voicing a general concern about the increasing urbanization of Switzerland,<sup>9</sup> the students apparently defined nature as an environment of wilderness that was "uncontaminated" by human presence, i.e., characterized by complete human absence. From the perspective of my Swiss students, there were indeed few places in Switzerland without at least one Alpine hut, hiking, and skiing trail, the striking Alpine environment and green meadows that also surround Bern itself notwithstanding.

This example indicates that an analysis of the interconnectedness between humans, nature, and music first requires an analysis of our own conception of nature, including the location of humans within this concept. Defining the concept of "nature" has always been difficult, as a comparative study of nature sociologist Rainer Brämer<sup>10</sup> indicates, which I have used here as an exemplary reference.

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<sup>7</sup> Since 2007, the Kanton Graubünden has been advertising the region with video spots centered on the talking Capricorns Gian and Giachen. The meat company Bell designed advertising spots with yodeling chicken likewise in 2007; while the beer company Calanda designed two controversial spots with a Capricorn and a groundhog at that time.

<sup>8</sup>In 2017, 15% of the population lived in a rural area (Schweizerische Eidgenossenschaft/ Eidgenössisches Departement für Auswärtige Angelegenheiten: "Die Bevölkerung—Fakten und Zahlen": <https://www.eda.admin.ch/aboutswitzerland/de/home/gesellschaft/bevoelkerung/die-bevoelkerung---fakten-und-zahlen.html>, accessed 8 January, 2019).

<sup>9</sup> See, for instance, Hans Rudolf Meier et al., *Monitoring urbaner Raum Schweiz: Analysen zu Städten und Agglomerationen* (Bern: Bundesamt für Raumentwicklung ARE, 2009).

<sup>10</sup> Rainer Brämer, "Natur paradox: Was ist oder meint 'Natur?'" *Natursoziologie.de* 3 (2009), <http://www.natursoziologie.de> (accessed 8 January, 2019).

Having analyzed forty-five encyclopedias, mostly from the 1990s, Brämer<sup>11</sup> observed that encyclopedias were either extremely vague, or varied to such an extent that a comparative basis was difficult to establish. Definitions ranged, among others, from concepts of an *Allnatur* (“universal nature”) and a *Vitalnatur* (“vital nature”; i.e., “every living thing”) to those who fell back on the initial Greek/Latin meaning of self-reproducing/growing/birthing, etc., and those who defined, as my students did, nature as an environment shaped by human absence.

Brämer<sup>12</sup> thus came to the conclusion that it might be more useful to compare, for instance, central conceptual features like the human being in relation to nature. As he pointed out,<sup>13</sup> we can observe two general positions here—one often related to the past or the idealization of indigenous cultures, and emphasizing the human being *as part of nature*; the other emphasizing the *contrast between humans and nature*—be it, as is apparent in the introductory example, by perceiving nature as the enemy of humans, or be it, as is evident in present environmental discussions, by regarding humans as enemies of nature. On a similar level, this positionality is also evident in my students’ responses, who rejected the human-inhabited or *-affected* world as actual nature.

These observations on the highly subjective perception of the human relationship to nature and subsequent interaction with nature parallel the observations of anthropologists Julie Cruikshank<sup>14</sup> and Tim Ingold.<sup>15</sup> Both indicated that cultural sciences could uncover a knowledge that is highly valuable in environmental discourses. However, the modern situation was shaped by two different, divisive perspectives. One can be described as environmental knowledge based on traditional elements, such as local narratives, songs, and performance practices. It thus often seems to be restricted to a smaller local context. The other one, which is currently the publicly dominant discourse of the natural sciences, predominantly approaches climate change as a global phenomenon.<sup>16</sup> As Cruikshank<sup>17</sup> thus pointed out, “environmental politics have so normalized our understanding of what ‘nature’ means that we can no longer imagine how other stories might be significant.” These different stories are also maintained in the human musical interaction with nature that can contribute significantly to an alternative knowledge. The following sections will thus elucidate how far an understanding of musical practices, particularly

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<sup>11</sup> Brämer, “Natur paradox: Was ist oder meint ‘Natur?’”

<sup>12</sup> Rainer Brämer, “Varianten des Naturbegriffs: Versuch einer Orientierung,” *Natur subjektiv: Studien zur Natur-Beziehung in der Hightech-Welt*, *Natursoziologie.de* 3 (2009), <http://www.natursoziologie.de> (accessed 8 January, 2019).

<sup>13</sup> Brämer, “Natur paradox: Was ist oder meint ‘Natur?’”

<sup>14</sup> Julie Cruikshank, *Do Glaciers Listen? Local Knowledge, Colonial Encounters, and Social Imagination* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2005).

<sup>15</sup> Tim Ingold, *The Perception of the Environment: Essays on Livelihood, Dwelling and Skill* (Milton Park, Abingdon, New York: Routledge, 2011).

<sup>16</sup> Cruikshank, *Do Glaciers Listen?* 3–20 (Introduction).

<sup>17</sup> Cruikshank, *Do Glaciers Listen?* 258.



yodeling as the most prominent iconic music practice in Switzerland, can help to reflect on the human interaction with the Alpine environment.

### The Human Interaction with Nature Through Music

Contrary to the above-sketched divide, Cruikshank<sup>18</sup> could actually prove, here with regard to oral mythology in Alaska, that cultural forms of expression can indeed preserve knowledge of climate change. Broader environmental knowledge is also evident in all other art forms. In the case of ethnomusicology, several authors, including Steven Feld and Theodore Levin, have been addressing the actual process, context, and extent of the human relationship with the natural environment through music in the last decades.<sup>19</sup> The specific role of music has similarly been discussed outside the field of musicology, especially within Social Anthropology. One significant example are the writings of Ingold,<sup>20</sup> who asked what music can actually express with regard to the human perception of nature. Falling back on Susan K. Langer's *Philosophy in a New Key*, who emphasized that music has the ability to express a "morphology of feeling,"<sup>21</sup> Ingold, by also quoting the writings of composer Leoš Janáček,<sup>22</sup> posed the following question: If we assume that sound is not merely a vehicle or transmitter of feeling, but an outward expression of inner feeling and human experiences, what does this generally mean for a music that is *intertwined* with nature?

One possible answer was already provided in Steven Feld's seminal *Sound and Sentiment: Birds, Weeping, and Song in Kaluli Expression*.<sup>23</sup> Based on Raymond Murray Schafer's *soundscape* concept,<sup>24</sup> Feld's so-called concept of *acoustemology* elaborates how sound, as well as its connection to musical performance practice, plays a central role for the establishment of human relations to place and time. As the ethnomusicologist<sup>25</sup> revealed in the case of the Kaluli culture, which is located in the rich sound texture of the Papua New Guinean rain forest, human (emotional) interaction patterns can be approached through the analysis of sound (bird song) and music (songs). Feld's study was considered one of the central scientific "turns" in ethnomusicology in the 1980s, as it integrated sound in the contextualization of music.

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<sup>18</sup> Cruikshank, *Do Glaciers Listen?*

<sup>19</sup> E.g. Steven Feld, *Sounds and Sentiment. Birds, Weeping, Poetics and Song in Kaluli Expression*, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed., (Durham, NC, London: Duke University Press, 2012 [1982]) and Theodore Levin, *Where Rivers and Mountains Sing: Sound, Music, and Nomadism in Tuva and Beyond* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2006).

<sup>20</sup> Ingold, *The Perception of the Environment*.

<sup>21</sup> Susan K. Langer, *Philosophy in a New Key: A Study in the Symbolism of Reason, Rite and Art* (New York: American Library, 1957), 238, cit. Ingold, *The Perception of the Environment*, 23.

<sup>22</sup> Ingold, *The Perception of the Environment*.

<sup>23</sup> Feld, *Sounds and Sentiment*.

<sup>24</sup> Raymond Murray Schafer, *The Tuning of the World* (New York: Random House, 1977).

<sup>25</sup> Feld, *Sounds and Sentiment*.

Yet the Kaluli are just one, albeit spectacular, example among many others, such as Tuvianian overtone singing,<sup>26</sup> which most likely originated as a mimetic tradition based on the sounds of the surrounding steppe environment. Similarly, Saami yoiking, Inuit throat singing, and Alpine yodeling are each singing practices that represent environmental knowledge through musical-physical experience. In all these cases, human music making is perceived as part of and embedded within nature. Moreover, all these related techniques not only require a strong physical or emotional performance, but also employ different sounds and resonant areas than western (art) singing.<sup>27</sup>

Focusing mostly on yodeling<sup>28</sup> in this article, this practice can be described as a vocal technique based on the alteration between chest and head voice. Contrary to western *belcanto* singing, the yodeling technique emphasizes the audible break between the registers, particularly by using specific syllables like “jo” or “ja” in the chest voice, and “i” and “ü” in the head voice. Yodeling is not only apparent in the Alpine regions, in Saami yoiking, and in Georgian polyphonic singing, but is also employed by the Ba’Aka in Central Africa. With regard to Alpine yodeling, authors<sup>29</sup> usually differentiate between *Naturjodel* (“natural yodel”) and *Jodel-Lieder* (“yodel songs”). Only based on syllables, the *Naturjodel* has often been regarded as the most natural form of yodel, together with other forms of expression like the *Juchzer* (“joyous shouts”), *Almschrei* (“alm yell”), and *Viehrufe* (“cattle calls”). Each form takes an interim position between linguistic and musical articulation, and is usually performed outdoors, often interconnected with a highly emotional inner state of feeling. Combining folk-song verses with refrain-like yodeling passages, the *Jodel-Lieder*, in contrast, are often viewed as more cultivated forms. They are not only often performed in polyphonic singing based on predominantly major scales, they are also frequently sung with more even voices and are predominantly set in indoor or stage-related contexts. Each form thus reflects a different traditional layer and human relationship with the environment in the broadest sense. Yet, it is particularly the nature-related concept of yodel that has become iconic.

### **Yodeling as an Emotional Interaction with Nature, Traditionally and in the Context of Revival**

Returning from a long-distance flight, travelers, commuting with the Skymetro from Zürich airport’s Terminal E, encounter an iconic soundscape after the loudspeaker announcements inside the trains:

<sup>26</sup> Levin, *Where Rivers and Mountains Sing*.

<sup>27</sup> As an Inuit singing teacher told me during a workshop at the bi-annual ICTM world conference at St. John’s Newfoundland (2011), she perceived Western art singing as highly limited, as it only employs a small segment of vocal expression possible (personal communication, St. John’s, 18 July, 2011). This likewise corroborates Ingold’s assumption of a limited western perception (Ingold, *The Perception of the Environment*, 255–258).

<sup>28</sup> The onomatopoeic expression refers to the Alpine yodel-call “yo.”

<sup>29</sup> Max Peter Baumann, *Musikfolklore und Musikfolklorismus: Eine ethnomusikologische Untersuchung zum Funktionswandel des Jodels* (Winterthur: Amadeus Verlag, 1976); Max Peter Baumann, “Jodeln,” in *Die Musik in Geschichte und Gegenwart*, Sachteil Vol. 4, ed. Ludwig Finscher (Kassel, etc.: Bärenreiter, 1996), col. 1488–1504; Dieter Ringli, *Schweizer Volksmusik: Von den Anfängen um 1500 bis zur Gegenwart* (Altdorf: Mülirad-Verlag, 2006).

bird chirping that is interrupted by a loud *Juchzer*, followed by a sequel of alphorn sounding, cowbells, sheep baas, more cowbells, a polyphonic *Jodel-Lied* excerpt, further cowbells, and a cow loudly mooing. As a journalist of the *Neue Zürcher Zeitung* remarked concisely, each are audible elements of the so-called *Swissness* brand.<sup>30</sup> At the same time, this example indirectly reflects the hypothesis of the origin of yodeling, based in human interaction with the natural and agricultural environment. As is argued here, besides being a means of communicating with animals and across large mountain ranges, yodeling could have developed as a result of human interaction with mountain echo effects.<sup>31</sup> The interconnection between the performance and perception of yodeling and the above mentioned emotional sentiments appears most remarkable in this context. This is also reflected in the so-called affect-based origin hypothesis,<sup>32</sup> according to which the vocal overturn was the result of the emotional interaction with nature, and for which we have early sources. For example, the interaction between landscape and human soundscape and emotion is already apparent in the following quote by composer Felix Mendelssohn-Bartholdy (1809–1847), who wrote to his teacher Zelter from his Swiss holidays in 1822:

It cannot be denied that this kind of singing is raw and uncomfortable close-by or in the room. But if it is answered by or mixed with echoes, if one stands in a valley and hears the yodeling and the Jauchzen on a mountain, which is produced by the Swiss in enthusiasm for their landscape . . . then this singing is beautiful, . . . it is almost part of the Swiss landscape.<sup>33</sup>

However, even at present, yodeling as a musical expression of extreme natural-emotional sentiment is a returning element in descriptions among yodelers,<sup>34</sup> which comes strikingly close to descriptions of

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<sup>30</sup> Christian Güntlisberger, “Der Juchzer im Klotener Untergrund,” *Neue Zürcher Zeitung* (19 February, 2012). [http://www.nzz.ch/aktuell/zueroich/stadt\\_region/der-juchzer-im-klotener-untergrund-1.18009340](http://www.nzz.ch/aktuell/zueroich/stadt_region/der-juchzer-im-klotener-untergrund-1.18009340) (accessed 8 January, 2019). The article includes the discussed sound sample.

<sup>31</sup> Baumann, *Musikfolklore und Musikfolklorismus* and Baumann, “Jodeln.”

<sup>32</sup> Baumann, *Musikfolklore und Musikfolklorismus* and Baumann, “Jodeln.”

<sup>33</sup> “Es ist nicht zu leugnen, dass diese Art von Gesang in der Nähe oder im Zimmer rau und unangenehm klingt. Doch wenn Echos darauf antworten oder sich damit vermischen; wenn man im Tale steht und auf dem Berge oder im Walde das Jodeln und das Jauchzen hört, das der Enthusiasmus der Schweizer für ihre Gegend hervorbringt; . . . —dann klingt dieser Gesang schön, ja, er hängt genau mit dem Bilde zusammen, das ich mir von einer Gegend mache, und gehört gleichsam zu einer Schweizer Landschaft.” Felix Mendelssohn Bartholdy in a letter to Carl Friedrich von Zelter, September 1822. Cit. in Ernst Wolf, *Felix Mendelssohn Bartholdy: Meisterbriefe* (Berlin: Behr, 1907); reprint (Barsinghausen: Unikum-Verlag, 2011), 5.

<sup>34</sup> Various publications also include a (often unreferenced) statement that then-Cardinal Ratzinger—former Pope Benedict XVI—saw a relationship between yodeling and the medieval jubilus (the ritually fixed melisma of the Gregorian chant), which he described as a “wordless outpouring of a joy which is so large that it disrupts all words” (“wortloses Ausströmen einer Freude, die so groß ist, dass sie alle Worte zerbricht.”). *Sänger und Musikantzeitung* 4, no. 6 (1961): 106. (N.a., “Natürlich bin ich ein Bayer geblieben,” *dom.radio.de*,



shamanic procedures. Apparently, yodeling (mostly *Naturjodel*), like yoiking, conveys an experience so significant for performer and listener that it is often felt essential for a human being-in-the-world and in nature. This is similarly reflected in the documentary film *UR-Musig*<sup>35</sup> from 1993, which depicts “ancient Swiss folk music, from traditionally connected folk musicians and other mentalities, embedded into the soundscapes from which they originate, from Central Switzerland and Appenzell.”<sup>36</sup> Directed by Cyrill Schläpfer, the film, with its strong focus on natural imagery and minimal dialogue, portrays the interconnectedness of the region’s rural inhabitants, who still perform *Betrufe* (“prayer calls”) and *Juchzer* in the Alpine outdoor surrounding. *UR-Musig* is not only an exploration of the region’s music making, but also a quest for understanding the way that this style is a modern resource for identity making. As Schläpfer added here, “The intention of the film is a search for the entombed roots of our music and identity.”<sup>37</sup> *UR-Musig*’s highly emotional atmosphere is a recurring element with other modern performers as well. We could almost speak of a sacred side, for instance when experimental yodeler Christian Zehnder of the duo Stimmhorn similarly remarks in Stefan Schwieterts’s documentary *Heimatklänge* that “[y]ou need to counter these powerful mountains with something.”<sup>38</sup> All these examples position the act of yodeling and related cultural activities as an expression of a deep human connection to nature, as described by Brämer.<sup>39</sup>

Schläpfer’s film and Zehnder’s modern perception of yodeling appear in tune with many European folk revivals, that, the stylistic and sociocultural variety notwithstanding, have often searched for similar body-centered performance styles. These styles seem similarly to convey a specific aura of “authenticity.” As the art philosopher Denis Dutton<sup>40</sup> elaborated, “authenticity” can be described as a relational concept that can only be understood within its broader context. For example, the idea of an “authentic nature” only makes sense if set in contrast to the human world. Similarly, the idea of

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<http://www.domradio.de/nachrichten/2006-08-31/benedikt-xvi-fuehlt-sich-auch-als-papst-seiner-heimat-verbunden>) (accessed 8 January, 2019).

<sup>35</sup> Cyrill Schläpfer, *Ur-Musig* (Zürich: CSR-Records, 1993).

<sup>36</sup> “Über urtümliche Schweizer Volksmusik, von traditionell verbundenen VolksmusikerInnen und anderen Mentalitäten, eingebettet in die Klanglandschaften, aus denen sie stammen, aus der Innerschweiz und dem Appenzell. “Schläpfer, *UR-Musig*, film description.

<sup>37</sup> “Die Absicht des Films ist eine Suche nach den verschütteten Wurzeln unserer Musik und Identität” (In Schläpfer, *UR-Musig*).

<sup>38</sup> “Diesen gewaltigen Bergen muss man doch etwas entgegensetzen.” In Stefan Schwieterts, *Heimatklänge—Vom Juchzen und anderen Gesängen* (Ventura-Film, 2007).

<sup>39</sup> Brämer, “Natur paradox.”

<sup>40</sup> Denis Dutton, “Authenticity in Art,” in *The Oxford Handbook of Authenticity*, ed. Jerrold Levinson (New York, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), 258–274.

authentic, i.e., “uncontaminated” music traditions, which is apparent in many concepts of traditional music,<sup>41</sup> only works if contrasted with urban contexts and related music forms.

As I already observed during my fieldwork on *Electric Folk in England* in the 1990s,<sup>42</sup> many revival performers of the 1960s/70s grew up completely detached from traditional contexts. Rather than taking English singers as models, who tend to sing with relatively soft voices that often make little use of the body’s resonances, they preferably chose Irish or Scottish Travelers as models, who had developed their performance styles in outdoor contexts. As an analysis of contemporary recordings revealed,<sup>43</sup> singers of these traditions are strongly in control of the physical side of sound production, e.g., the muscles around the vocal cords and the diaphragm.

During interviews, the revivalists repeatedly pointed to their search for a more “earthy performance style.”<sup>44</sup> This description relates to not only the actual physical sound production, but also includes dissonant effects that were often copied from the increasingly popular Bulgarian singers, whose technique is based on singing with tightly closed vocal cords that allow a wide sound projection. This search for a bodily performance style, that was often related to Bulgarian or Balkan techniques, became even more apparent in subsequent decades. For example, in the 1990s, the Finnish group Värttinä developed a similar performance style of highly metallic and sharply accentuated polyphonic singing. The nature-related perception was further implemented through texts relating to mythology and nature-related album covers, as evident with the colorful wood depictions on *Miero* (2006), that contributed to a nature-mystic aura. This could, of course, be interpreted as an intellectual appropriation of an authentic aura or for marketing, and as a distinguishable performance practice that might sell better on the then growing world music market.<sup>45</sup> However, not only has this adaption been accompanied by a highly emotional side, incorporating these performance elements often means alienating established folk audiences, and this happened partly with Värttinä, who instead saw their efforts as a reclaiming of older existent pre-Lutheran singing traditions,<sup>46</sup> or with the Latvian post-

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<sup>41</sup> Cf. International Folk Music Council, “Definition of Folk Music,” *Journal of the International Folk Music Council* 7 (1955), 6–7.

<sup>42</sup> Britta Sweers, *Electric Folk: The Changing Face of English Traditional Music* (New York, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005).

<sup>43</sup> Sweers, *Electric Folk*.

<sup>44</sup> Sweers, *Electric Folk*.

<sup>45</sup> Cf. Tina K. Ramnarine, *Ilmatar’s Inspirations, Nationalism, Globalization, and the Changing Soundscape of Finnish Folk Music* (Chicago, London: University of Chicago Press, 2003), 113. As Ramnarine pointed out, Värttinä’s music was perceived by several authors of containing a Balkan element.

<sup>46</sup> Ramnarine, *Ilmatar’s Inspirations*, 113.

folklore group *Iļģi*, whose front singer Ilga Reizniece developed her style from the outdoor singing of *teivējas* women.<sup>47</sup>

These examples seem to confirm that the adaptation of vocal singing styles reflects a deeper need for humans to interact with their environment, as indicated by Ingold.<sup>48</sup> A similar intensity can be observed in Inuit throat singing and Saami yoiking, reflecting the combination of a highly emotional and partly physical performance practice, the latter also being employed in shamanic trance rituals. Each of these styles are based on a strong physical involvement that requires the physical presence of the singer, including for pragmatic reasons, as one could easily hurt the vocal cords otherwise, which might be one of the reasons why these styles have been perceived as “earthy.” It might also explain why these performance practices in particular, including yodeling, are almost automatically associated with the western ideal of “indigenous cultures”—the disappearance of these practices notwithstanding—and human interrelation with nature. As it seems, they convey an ideal of an undiluted physically-experienced human authenticity, that evokes the idea of humans as being an integral part of nature, and is read as an opposition to an estranged contemporary urban life, in which nature and humans are perceived as separate entities.

### Critical Thoughts

From this perspective, it seems reasonable to regard yodeling as a fundamental form of musical interaction with nature, or, to return to Dutton,<sup>49</sup> as a *nominal* authentic musical articulation that provides access to an “original” human-nature relationship. However, as I could observe during my university classes in Bern, the question whether some students were still yodeling often resulted in giggles. As further discussions revealed, yodeling has partly been rejected by the younger generations in Switzerland. For example, one of my students emphasized that Anglo-American popular music and Swiss rap/hip hop was much more important for his identity. Other students, who had grown up in villages, recalled a musical life dominated by institutionalized *Vereine* (“organizations”), which they often described as “an embarrassing childhood experience.” One female student pointed out that she found yodeling somehow interesting, due to its unusual vocal technique, but was just looking for a less embarrassing *context*. These statements indicate that students could not relate this musical expression to

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<sup>47</sup> Cf. Britta Sweers: “The revival of traditional musics in new contexts: Electric Folk from a comparative perspective,” in *Concepts, Experiments, and Fieldwork: Studies in Systematic Musicology and Ethnomusicology*, eds. Rolf Bader, Christiane Neuhaus, and Ulrich Morgenstern, *Concepts, Experiments, and Fieldwork* (Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 2010), 351–67.

<sup>48</sup> Ingold, *The Perception of the Environment*, 23.

<sup>49</sup> Dutton, “Authenticity in Art.”

their own experiences, which reflects, what Dutton<sup>50</sup> called, *expressive* authenticity. And neither could the students relate yodeling to a performance practice intertwined with the—similarly emotional—experience of nature. As is apparent here, besides the association of “fake-folksy” performance styles with older audiences, which has dominated mainstream media since the end of the Second World War, a central reason for young people’s rejection has been the revival context and its strict performance rules (see further below). Set against this background, Schlöpfer’s *UR-Musig* film, contrary to the promise evoked by the Zürich airport soundscape and organized musical movements, in fact depicts a highly marginalized music culture that is almost perceived as exotic by young listeners. As is further evident in students’ preference for modern hip hop music as an expression of their own contemporary experiences, we thus need to be careful not to over-stylize or -value practices depicted as “traditional” or “folk” cultures as personifications of inborn local environmental knowledge.

On a broader level, we might wonder how far this division might thus be taken as an actual indicator of a physical as well as emotional estrangement of the general population from the natural environment. Within this context, the ideal of the “noble savage”<sup>51</sup> plays a central role, which positions related cultures as inseparable from nature and has strongly influenced modern environmental movements. From this perspective, we can observe, as was the case with *UR-Musig*, a tendency of wanting to consciously *contrast* the image of so-called indigenous and local cultures to that of a modern urban or global world, which is also evident in the iconization processes within the world music scene, as the popularity of Tuvianian overtone singing demonstrates.<sup>52</sup>

Such idealizations are also apparent in the interpretation of yodeling as an “ancient,” i.e., nominal, authentic musical expression. For instance, referring to the origin-hypotheses, Austrian Alpine music specialist Gerlinde Haid<sup>53</sup> warned that we need to be aware that many aspects remain on the speculative side, given that, as she argues, research only started in the nineteenth century after a process of nationalization and, thus, stylization. The oldest interlocutors were born in the first half of the nineteenth century, which means that the earliest oral knowledge of yodeling practices barely dates back to the eighteenth century. I will subsequently elaborate some of these critical and alternative arguments in order to elucidate the range of possible interactions between music and nature in the Alpine context.

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<sup>50</sup> Dutton, “Authenticity in Art.”

<sup>51</sup> That reflects the idealized human natural state as elaborated in Jean-Jacques Rousseau’s *Discours sur l’origine et les fondements de l’inégalité parmi les homes* (1755), cf. Ter Ellingson, *The Myth of the Noble Savage*, (Berkeley etc.: University of California Press, 2001).

<sup>52</sup> This has likewise long dominated the structuralist branch of ethnomusicology. Focused on secluded cultural systems ideally untouched by western cultures, this perspective strongly shaped the discipline until the 1980s and obscured the awareness of alternative strategies, as is also evident in popular music.

<sup>53</sup> Gerlinde Haid, “Überlegungen zur Geschichte des Jodelns,” *Histoire des Alpes—Storia delle Alpi—Geschichte der Alpen* 11 (2006): 49–60.

### The Human Being and Extreme Nature: Silence and Banning

As Cruikshank<sup>54</sup> remarked about the glacial knowledge in Alaska, “Narratives passed on in indigenous communities depict glacier behavior as occurring within a deeply moral universe where natural-cultural histories are always entangled.” As is argued here, uncovering this traditional local perception could tell us something about the specific human relationship to nature and related patterns of behavior. Inspired by Cruikshank, I started to look for similar material related to glacial perception in Switzerland and the Alps and discovered a broad range of material. Exemplary of the *predominant* folk song material is a romantic imagery, as characteristically elaborated in ‘Der Gemsjäger’ (‘The Ibex Hunter’) by Gottlieb Jakob Kuhn (1775–1849, text) and Ferdinand Huber (1791–1863, melody). Similar to many so-called “traditional songs” that were written during the nineteenth century and shaped the modern perception of the Alpine region, this song depicts nature, in this case the glacial environment, as a threatening-majestic, yet also beautiful experience.

The traditional perception of this extreme part of nature, however, looked different prior to the Romantic movement. Returning to the Bernese Oberland, for a long time most mountain peaks did not carry a name,<sup>55</sup> as they were perceived as a threatening part of the world. This is also reflected in the names of many other mountains of that area, such as the *Finsteraarhorn* (“dark horn of the Aare”; 4274m), *Faulhorn* (“foul horn”; 2681m), *Wetterhorn* (“weather horn”; 3701m), or the *Schreckhorn* (“horn of horror”; 4078m). Likewise, this impression is apparent in the perception of glaciers. Similar to Alaska, there is a rich lore about glaciers in Switzerland. However, as was reflected in the introductory example, nature was mostly depicted in a negative, highly threatening way. For example, one can discover this reiterated trope of the threatening mountains in various myths,<sup>56</sup> such as the tale of the mountain range *Blüemlisalp* (“flowery alm” 3661m), which describe sinful behavior, often with regard to food that is used improperly, e.g., for cleaning, or that is thrown away in a paradise-like environment that was punished by nature or transcendental powers. In the case of the *Blüemlisalp*, the region is transformed into a rugged landscape through a glacial slide. As the German anthropologist Bernd

<sup>54</sup> Cruikshank, *Do Glaciers Listen?* 242.

<sup>55</sup> This is also reflected in literature. When Heidi asks Peter about the mountains’ names in the third chapter of Johanna Spyri’s world-famous novel, her friend answers, “Berge heissen nicht.” (“Mountains are not named.”). The Eiger is an exception. First mentioned in a medieval text from 1252, it was the second earliest documentation of a Swiss mountain peak, and even later the peaks would normally be named after the Alps below and landholdings (the Jungfrau refers to a former monastery in nearby Interlaken). The idea that the expression Eiger—probably a population of the region (it could also be the Latin name of acer, sharp)—was related to a being called Oger seems to be a nineteenth century re-mystification. Cf Daniel Anker, *Eiger—die vertikale Arena*, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. (Zürich: AS Verlag, 2000).

<sup>56</sup> Cf. Hans Haid, “Über Gletscherbannungen, Bittgänge, scharfe Gelübde, Kinderprozessionen zum Ferner usw.,” in: *alpine space—man and environment, vol. 4: Ist es der Sindflus?* (Innsbruck: Innsbruck University Press, 2008), 75–83.



Rieken<sup>57</sup> suggested, this trope has been preserved in oral lore, and reflects the environmental transformation during the small Ice Age, which occurred between 1180 and 1300 and dominated human experiences until the nineteenth century.

We can assume that the local population performed a highly varied musical repertoire at that time.<sup>58</sup> However, the musical reaction to these events was not so much apparent in ballads and song texts. Rather, they were particularly evident in religiously motivated actions, such as specific ceremonies and by banning processions—and through silence. As was pointed out above, the inhabitants of the villages below the *Aletschgletscher* not only avowed to undertake yearly processions and prayers against the growth of the glacier in the seventeenth century,<sup>59</sup> yet when the situation became worse, the Catholic Church set up a prohibition of dancing on Sundays and public holidays.<sup>60</sup>

As is apparent here, the ideal of nature shifted away from the differences between humans and their surrounding threatening nature, and towards an idealization of the connectedness between nature and humans in the nineteenth century. This was, as the *Aletschgletscher* example indicates, interconnected with an altered concept of environmental sustainability focused on the preservation of nature, which became fully apparent in the twentieth century. As these observations indicate, prevailing and dominant concepts of culture and nature can be evaluated according to completely different standards in different societies, but also with regard to historical perspectives. Likewise, the interconnection with nature is not necessary tied to one single style or genre of music and performance. Moreover, those forms that have been idealized and authenticated on a supercultural level<sup>61</sup> as representing humans as a part of nature might also exist in contexts that are clearly detached from nature.

### **Yodeling as an Iconic Element of Landscaping and National Identity**

For example, the previously sketched situation in the *Aletschgletscher* region conveys a sound image that clearly deviates from the material that can be heard on a more official (or supercultural) level, which directs us to the beginning of tourism in Switzerland. Contrary to the negative perception of the Alpine-glacial region, the Alps were, while being influenced by the Geneva-born philosopher Jean Jacques Rousseau (1712–1778), increasingly aestheticized and then romanticized since the late

<sup>57</sup> Bernd Rieken, “Wütende Wasser, bedrohliche Berge. Naturkatastrophen in der populären Überlieferung am Beispiel der südlichen Nordseeküste und den Hochalpen,” *alpine space—man & environment, vol. 4: Ist es der Sindflus?* (Innsbruck: Innsbruck University Press, 2008), 99–119.

<sup>58</sup> Cf. Ringli, *Schweizer Volksmusik*.

<sup>59</sup> The so-called “Katastrophen-Gelübde” (“Disaster Vow”) of 1678.

<sup>60</sup> Hans Haid, “Über Gletscherbannungen.”

<sup>61</sup> One or more umbrella-like layers that consist of a technoscape; mediascape, and finanscape network (music industry, television, advertising systems), the state and its institutionalized rules and venues (e.g. schools) or a body of culturally shaped assumptions (including stereotypes, standardized styles, repertoires). Cf. Mark Slobin, *Micromusics of the West* (Hanover and London: Wesleyan University Press, 1993).

eighteenth century. This process not only led to growing travel for the purpose of tourism, but also transformed the perception and context of Alpine traditions like yodeling.

At the foot of the Eiger-Mönch-Jungfrau mountain, the city of Interlaken (15,000 inhabitants, including the neighboring Unterseen and Matten) nestles on an alluvium between Lake Thun and Lake Brienz. Interlaken is significant strategically, as it provides a junction for connecting roads, Swiss railway lines, and two central valleys of the Bernese Oberland, i.e., of Lauterbrunnen and Grindelwald. While its origins date back to the foundations of a monastery in the twelfth century, Interlaken became particularly known as the tourist gateway to the Bernese Oberland in the early nineteenth century. Johann Wolfgang von Goethe traveled this region as early as 1779, while Interlaken was visited by Lord Byron (in 1818), Felix Mendelssohn-Bartholdy (for the last time in 1847), and Thomas Cook, whose first Switzerland tour of 1863 included stop overs in Lauterbrunnen, Wengenalp, Grindelwald, and Interlaken.<sup>62</sup>

Interlaken became also known as the site of the first *Unspunnenfest* in 1805.<sup>63</sup> Fueled by the previous Napoleonic occupation (1798–99) and the foundation of the Helvetic Republic (1798–1803), Unspunnen was initiated, among others, by Gottlieb Jakob Kuhn as a celebration of Alpine traditions with musical performances, sport, and animal presentations<sup>64</sup> in order to strengthen national consciousness. Based on the already existing traditional Alpine herder festivals, Unspunnen became an arena where local traditions were displayed to a partly urban, partly bourgeois audience. This event, like the second *Unspunnenfest* in 1808, was also central for the newly emerging tourism. Yodeling, now performed in a stage context, was a significant element here, and the revival of Unspunnen in 1905 was followed by the foundation of the *Eidgenössische Jodlerverband* (“Confederate Yodeling Organization”) in Bern in 1910. This organization, which has strongly dominated the Swiss folk music scene, established clear performance rules in 1943. For example, rules related to the actual yodeling practice, such as only yodeling on “ü”, not on “i”,<sup>65</sup> but also prescribed that performers must appear in traditional-looking gowns, with dresses for women.<sup>66</sup> Each rule thus implemented a specific ideal of nominal yodeling authenticity within this specific and stage-related context. At the same time, the growing nationalism

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<sup>62</sup> Ariane Dévantery, “Schweizerreisen,” in *Historisches Lexikon der Schweiz Online*, ed. Werner Brosshard, 2013, <http://www.hls-dhs-dss.ch/textes/d/D24575.php> (accessed 8 January, 2018).

<sup>63</sup> Hans Peter Treichler, “Nationalspiele der Schweiz,” in *Historisches Lexikon der Schweiz Online*, ed. Werner Brosshard, 2010, <http://www.hls-dhs-dss.ch/textes/d/D16328.php> (accessed 8 January, 2018).

<sup>64</sup> The impact of the Napoleonic occupation (until 1803) had resulted in an increasing search for national identification. The background of Unspunnen is much more complex as it was also a means of mediation between the (at that time legally equal) rural regions and the city of Bern.

<sup>65</sup> And no closing syllables, such as doli, duli, etc. but rather jo, jü, lü.

<sup>66</sup> Historical and performance details can be found on the website of the *Jodlerverband*. <http://www.jodlerverband.ch> (accessed 8 January, 2019).

led to the emergence of numerous folk song collections and publications from the nineteenth century onwards.<sup>67</sup> However, given the national trait, many publications included a vast range of contemporary compositions with romanticized lyrics about the natural surroundings, such as Kuhn's 'Gemsjäger.' This left little space for either the previously discussed darker perception of nature or traditional performance practices that deviated in intonation and performance from the rules of the Yodeling Organization.

Particularly, these elements—the revived, organized, and iconic yodeling tradition as established around 1910 and the composed and/or edited material of the nineteenth century—subsequently shaped the perception of the region, including the positive interconnection of people with the Alpine environment, at least on a public level. This became also apparent in tourism, general product advertising in the modern mass media, and in the corporate construction and design of “Swissness.”<sup>68</sup> First discussed publicly in the late 1990s, the concept of Swissness comprises products, places, and events, including the *Unspunnenfest*, while combining an iconized nature with—likewise iconized—cultural elements, and being employed as a means of national branding, as could be experienced at Zürich airport. Yet, Swissness is also often quoted as a means of identity making in many smaller yodeling clubs.<sup>69</sup> While these publicly iconized cultural images might thus indeed relate to actual performance practices, they not necessarily represent the majority. Rather, they are just one part, and not always the most important one, of a broader jigsaw of cultural activities in a local context, as I will illustrate with the following fieldwork example from the Bernese Oberland.

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<sup>67</sup> Cf. Ringli, *Schweizer Volksmusik*.

<sup>68</sup> See, for example, *Eidgenössisches Institut für Geistiges Eigentum*, “Die Swissness-Gesetzgebung,” <https://www.ige.ch/de/recht-und-politik/immaterialgueterrecht-national/herkunftsangaben/herkunftsangabe-schweiz.html> (accessed 8 January, 2019).

<sup>69</sup> See, for instance, Peter Beerli, “Ein Festkonzert zum Jubiläum.” *Tagblatt* (3 October, 2011). <https://www.tagblatt.ch/ostschweiz/stgallen-gossau-rotschach/ein-festkonzert-zum-jubilaem-ld.558656> (accessed 8 January, 2019).



Figure 2: Irish Dancing at Mürren (photo: Britta Sweers)

### Music and Environmental Awareness in a Modern Context: A Visit to the Lauterbrunnental

It is late April 2010, a Saturday afternoon. I am sitting with Ueli von Allmen, leader of the band Tächa, in the sunny garden of his house in Interlaken. Tächa was named after the regional dialectal expression for the Alpine Chough, a bird that is perfectly adapted for survival in the extreme Alpine environment and has become an icon of the region. While the band has also developed improvisational pieces that interact with natural photographs of the region during concerts,<sup>70</sup> its approach is nevertheless grounded in a modern world, which is expressed in a musical mixture of jazz-folk-fusions. Asking why Interlaken in particular has become such a musical hotbed recently, especially of *Mundart Rock* (i.e., dialect rock), Ueli first offers the pragmatic answer that, traffic-wise, Interlaken has always been a central intersection for the valleys of the Bernese Oberland. Yet, Ueli also points to the extreme natural experiences of the region, which he describes as highly emotional and inevitably leads to the need of musical expression in whatever form.

A few hours later, we spontaneously join Doris, Ueli's sister-in-law on the way to her bio farm, that is perched on the cliff of the village of Gimmelwald (1637m) high above the Lauterbrunnental. With its 72 waterfalls and spectacular location 3000 meters below the peak of the Jungfrau, the valley, or more specifically the 300-meter Staubbachfall, inspired Goethe to conceive of his poem 'Gesang der

<sup>70</sup> Further details can be found on the band's website <http://www.taecha.ch> (accessed 8 January, 2019).

Geister über den Wassern’ on his second Switzerland tour in 1779. Translated as the ‘Song of the Spirits over the Waters,’ the poem takes the falling water that comes from heaven and falls to earth and returns to heaven as a parable of the life of man. It was also a model for J.R.R. Tolkien’s sketch of the elven valley “Rivendell.”<sup>71</sup> On the ride to the lift station, which constitutes the only access from the valley to the village, Ueli sings self-composed children’s songs with Doris’ five year-old daughter, while her six year-old son quite happily starts to yodel along.

Taking the lift to Gimmelwald, we enter a different world. In contrast to Interlaken, spring has not yet arrived here. A thunderstorm growls in the mountain, while the wind has loosened an avalanche waterfall of snow that gushes down between the icy peaks. A glance out of the farm house window at the bleak mountain cliffs indicates that human beings, despite the waves of summer and winter tourism, are still merely tolerated here, even in the twenty-first century. I am reminded of this during later visits when passing the numerous avalanche shelters and when visiting the almost factory-like thundering of the *Trümmelbachfälle* (“Trummelbach Falls”) inside the cliffs below the Jungfrau. Something about the soundscape in Gimmelwald appears confusing, until I realize that it is the absence of car sounds that completely changes my perception of the soundscape. I suddenly start to hear birds and nature sounds with extreme preciseness, while the only occasional muffled sound of the cowbells indicates that the animals are not yet out in the alpine meadows.

The farm house is decorated with a large photo of Doris’s husband and his father singing in a yodeling choir, or “organized music,” as Ueli points out. Zürich-born Doris is trying to “fight” the still conservative rules of the Alpine village world, refusing to keep goats, which have traditionally been womens’ business. In contrast, Ueli’s twenty-two year-old daughter Dana not only throws a big party with *Mundart Rock* that evening, but has, as an advertisement in the nearby and, at that time still sleepy, tourist village of Mürren indicates, started an increasingly popular Irish dancing group there (see also Figure 2). I can thus observe a highly complex natural sound environment and a local music culture that moves between traditional and modern, transnational elements.

The contrast between two (and more) extremes is apparent on other levels as well. Shaped by the experience of being part of an extreme environment that is perceived as highly demanding on humans, the local experience is that of nature threatened by humans, which is not only the result of global climate change, but also of tourism that provides a central means of financial survival. In contrast, further implementing clichéd musical practices and sound elements (particularly cow bells), tourism provides the much-needed audiences for the continued traditional practices, even at a clichéd

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<sup>71</sup> Tolkien had been on a hiking tour through the region in 1911, and his Rivendell illustration from the second impression of the first *The Hobbit* edition (1938) strongly resembles the valley.



“folklore evening” (“Folkloreabend”). And it is often similarly important of providing the needed infrastructure for alternative local activities, ranging from yoga to Irish folk dancing. Yet at the same time, tourism can lead to environmental destruction.<sup>72</sup> This is particularly evident in the highly destructive winter tourism, which negatively effects the protecting grass soil of the mountains, as well as in a stressful soundscape shaped by helicopters transporting base jumpers to the upper parts of the mountains. Yet, given its financial importance, tourism might also become the reason for a strengthened environmental awareness—with an open outcome.

As these observations indicate, sustainability is not so much about so-called pure or authentic performance practices here, but about finding a balance between the different sides and needs on all levels. Music is clearly an indicator of the actual situation here.

### Music and Environmental Activism in Switzerland

Set against the background of the clearly visible alteration of the landscape, such as the melting of the glaciers, mud slides, and aggressive winter tourism, one can observe an increasing environmental activism in Switzerland, in which music plays a focal role. Given the strong emotional connection with the human experience of nature, one should expect that yodeling is similarly part of this activism. And, indeed, yodeler Franz Stadelmann (b. 1942) composed a yodel song entitled ‘Zum Umweltschutz’ (‘About Environmental Protection’) in 1972.

Many traditional cultures have never been static and have integrated a vast range of influences, which is apparent in Sámi, as well as in Inuit and Alpine cultures, and is also reflected musically, e.g., in the emulation of modern forms of musical expression ranging from country/pop to hip hop, and especially electronic sounds. However, such a transformation in yodeling is not so much apparent within the mountain regions, but is more audible in an urban context. Here, yodeling is also part of a gender-related transformation, as it has long been, especially in its organized revived world, as well as in traditional contexts as depicted in Schläpfer’s film *UR-Musig*, a male occupation and pastime. Yet in recent decades, women like Bernese actor and singer Christine Lauterburg (b. 1956) have started to challenge established organizations by combining yodeling with techno.<sup>73</sup> This transformation was intertwined with challenging established rules (in her description of Lauterburg’s yodeling, Toepfer<sup>74</sup> even speaks of a domestication of the yodel through the *Jodlerverband*) and gender stereotypes. For

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<sup>72</sup> See Britta Sweers, “Soundscape Research Put Into Practice: The Exploration of Soundwalks in the City of Bern.” *Musicology (Journal of the Institute of Musicology Sasa)* 22, no. 1 (2017): *Urban Sonic Ecology*, 15–37.

<sup>73</sup> Angelika Hunziker, “Christine Lauterburg,” in *Theaterlexikon der Schweiz* Vol. 2, ed. Andreas Kotte (Zürich: Chronos Verlag, 2005), col. 1087–1088.

<sup>74</sup> Nina Toepfer, “Christine Lauterburg,” *Du* 7 (1994), <http://www.csr-records.ch/219.html> (accessed 1 August, 2018).

example, regarding the latter, Lauterburg performs in trousers, much to the uproar of the *Jodlerverband*. This is interrelated with a similarly mystified perception, as was evident with Zehnder above. As Lauterburg remarked: “Yodel is a strong feeling of longing and something profoundly archaic. I found it important to bring this into the computer world, but also to give emotions the required space. The aim of my yodeling work is . . . to open the heart.”<sup>75</sup>

One could also interpret this new connection between traditional core elements and the modern (outer) music world (e.g., rock/electronic/hip hop/rap music), or of nominal and expressive concepts of musical authentic expressions, as a cultural parallel within the global climate dialogue.<sup>76</sup> While there is no turning back to a traditional-natural life, as was perhaps experienced some decades or centuries ago, there are nevertheless ways to bridge both tradition and modernity and maintain a positive relation to nature. The relations between humans and nature are acknowledged as being interconnected, yet it is different than in the Lauterbrunnental. Nature is something, from which one can always return to a seemingly safer human environment, and which can always be reflected upon from a distance. This was not possible for the Alpine population in the pre-nineteenth century era, and might also provide the ground for broader reflections on the current environmental situation.

The current situation is even reflected in musical environmental activism. While Lauterburg articulates a modern version of musical identity by combining yodeling with techno elements, yodeling has mostly been used as a sound-coloring element in many urban environmental songs, for example in the first Swiss *Anti Littering Contest* in 2009 where the central musical-environmental language was either rock or hip hop. The latter was the case in one of the winning songs by the Bernese rap/hip hop band Churchhill, ‘Mir blase zum Angriff gege de Ghüder’ (‘We Sound the Charge Against the Rubbish’), which called for more awareness of individual waste production,<sup>77</sup> and combined scatted text phrases with Balkan-brass and rounded yodel segments.

Given the above-sketched detachment from yodeling by the—especially urban—teenage generation, a striking or iconic performance style thus does not always appear to be the first choice for

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<sup>75</sup> “Jodel ist eine starke Sehnsucht und etwas zutiefst Archaisches. Mir war es wichtig, das in die Computerwelt hineinzubringen und dem Gefühl den notwendigen Raum zu geben. Ziel bei meiner Art von Jodeln ist ja, selbstverständlich gerade und schmucklos singen zu können, also förmlich das Herz zu öffnen.” The reference to the archaic perception, here taken from Lauterburg’s short biographical sketch as printed on her website [https://static1.squarespace.com/static/56aa41bad82d5e9919edcd78/t/56e01e59d210b80e3b79b434/1457528409819/Christine\\_Lauterburg\\_Bio.pdf](https://static1.squarespace.com/static/56aa41bad82d5e9919edcd78/t/56e01e59d210b80e3b79b434/1457528409819/Christine_Lauterburg_Bio.pdf) (accessed 1 November, 2019) has been repeatedly used for various descriptions of Lauterburg’s yodeling. See also Lauterburg’s website <http://christinelauterburg.ch> (accessed 1 November, 2019).

<sup>76</sup> Britta Sweers, “Towards an Application of Globalization Paradigms to Modern Folk Music Revivals,” in *Oxford Handbook of Music Revivals*, eds. Caroline Bithell and Juniper Hill (New York, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 466–486.

<sup>77</sup> See the full text under <http://www.igsu.ch/files/igsusongtexte.pdf> (accessed 8 January, 2019).

expressing the often emotional concern for environmental activism. Rather, it could also be experimental folk-jazz fusions, as in the case of Tàcha, or especially hip hop, that each seem to convey a stronger experience of contemporary expressive musical authenticity. As my search for environmental songs released in Switzerland in the new millennium showed, rap and hip hop have become the main musical language of environmental activism in the region. These styles represent the musical language of global urban-based youth protest, while the predominant organized yodeling appears mostly completely detached from people's everyday experiences, or is restricted to the local experience. It also seems that these modern text-oriented genres provide enough space to voice concerns that are increasingly apparent in the broader Swiss public, including advertising. One popular example is the single 'On n'a qu'une terre' ('We Have Only One Earth'). Released by Swiss-Estonian rapper Stress for the *Coop*<sup>78</sup> advertising campaign in October 2007, the song dealt with global warming and the scarcity of raw materials. Similarly, the popular Bernese female rapper Steff La Cheffe and the Zürich-based duo Dabu Phantastic donated a song 'Süessi Tropfä' ('Sweet Drops') for a drinking water campaign in 2012. This points to a close interrelation between rap and hip hop with environmental-*political* concerns. Given the strong appropriation of yodeling in festival contexts, as well as the significant impact of tourism and urbanization, popular genres like hip hop are clearly experienced as more "authentic" (Dutton's "expressive authenticity") by a younger generation at present—and more broadly in the context of global-political implications. At yet, these songs are examples of the balance between local and global. In contrast to Lauterburg, this occurs not so much on a purely musical level, but as means of expressing local identity due to the combination of a global musical language with *Mundart* ("dialect"). As is evident here, there are many ways of maintaining the balance between global and local cultural and environmental awareness.

### **Outlook: A Multi-Faceted Musical Interaction with Nature**

While the villagers of Fiesch now perform annual prayers for the growth of the *Aletschgletscher*, and popular TV contains numerous romantic music shows staged around the glacier, the glacier itself maintains its own, darker storyline: In 2012, it released the corpses of three brothers from the neighboring Lötschental, who got lost on the glacier in 1922. It was considered one of the worst

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<sup>78</sup> The cooperative *Coop* was Switzerland's second largest retail company network during the major wave of environmental songs around 2013.

mountain tragedies of the valley at that time,<sup>79</sup> and is also a reminder that the Alpine environment and, thus, nature remains a threatening force here.

Each situation depicted in this article reflects a different perspective and mode of relating the human being to nature (beyond, within, outside, or as a bridge) by means of music and other forms of performance. As has been made evident here, the analytical focus on music and performance provides access to deeper layers of human interaction with nature. Yet, as the shifting prayer ceremonies against and nowadays for the growth of the *Aletschgletscher* indicate, what is at stake here is the transforming characteristic of the human relationship with nature. At the same time, the examples indicate the range of possibilities of maintaining a balance so central for a sustainable future, both culturally and with regard to the environment.

However, there is no denial that there is something about traditional performance styles that ties performers to a strong environmental perception—be it through traditional lore or tales, or through a specific performance style that requires the involvement of the whole body awareness. As the popularity of yodeling experimenters like Christine Lauterburg and Stimmhorn indicate, there are many ways of finding a successful balance between traditional nature-related practices and modern urban and global alliances.<sup>80</sup> These case studies might thus help us to address the complex interconnection between culture and ecological sustainability that becomes particularly apparent in extreme natural environments, such as the North and Alps. Yet, these observations are also a warning not to reduce the awareness of human and environmental sustainability to idealized concepts, be it with regard to a static or romanticized perception of traditional cultures or to the human position inside/outside nature.

The latter includes the contrast between an Alpine and urban context. As my visit at the Lauterbrunnen valley has shown, individual perceptions of nature can shift according to different expressive and perceptive forms. Likewise, while the urban position is automatically more distanced (i.e., the valleys do not allow for major urban agglomerations), this does not necessarily need to be less intensive or emotional, especially in the twenty-first century with its unprecedented means of global interconnectedness. The observations presented here can only constitute a framework for further analyses, while making apparent that a deeper knowledge of human musical interaction with the environment provides a profound understanding of our position within nature. This might also help us to interact with nature in a way that genuinely matters to us and becomes truly sustainable.

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<sup>79</sup> See also the news headlines listed under

<http://www.news.ch/Aletschgletscher+gibt+Gebeine+von+verschollenen+Bruedern+frei/564999/detail.htm> (accessed 8 January, 2019).

<sup>80</sup> See Beverly Diamond, “The Music of Modern Indigeneity: From Identity to Alliance Studies,” *European Meetings in Ethnomusicology* 12 (2007), 169–190, for the concept of “alliances.”