

The Sami yoik as creative wellbeing

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Introduction: the significance of yoik for happiness, wellbeing, and health

The Norwegian teacher and missionary Isaac Olsen (ca. 1680–1730) was one of the first Norwegians to work as a teacher for the Sami in the Northern part of Norway. He also made extensive studies of Sami religion and culture, and in the period 1716–1717, he worked on a manuscript called *Lappernes Vildfarelser og Overtro* [Sami Delusions and Superstition]. In this manuscript, he provides important information about the traditional Sami vocal art, yoik, arguing that Sami children “know the melody and the notes of the rune and yoik songs” before they can “talk or call out for their father and mother in their mother tongue” (Qvigstad, 1910, p. 24; our translation). Moreover, he argues that the Sami perceive yoiking “as contributing to happiness, liveliness and pastime, so they are so lively and happy when they experience it, as if they were out in paradise” (Qvigstad, 1910, p. 24; our translation). Significantly, he suggests that the Sami “cannot live long, keep their good luck, nutrition, health and healing without yoiking” (Qvigstad, 1910, p. 36; our translation). These quotes show how important yoiking has been for the Indigenous people inhabiting the northern parts of the Nordic region. Olsen, like other Norwegian teachers and missionaries at the time, sought to understand Sami culture to be in a better position to critique and suppress it (Pollan, 2002). We should, therefore, be cautious about how we use and interpret these sources. There is, however, little reason to mistrust Olsen’s accounts of the significant role the yoik played in the lives of the Sami people (Graff, 2022). Olsen spoke the North Sami language and lived with Sami people while he was working as a teacher. He was thus in a unique position to gain insights into Sami culture. As Ola Graff argues, it is reason to believe that Olsen’s account serves as an accurate historical document in this regard (Graff, 2022, p. 350). What emerges from this historical account, then, is a culture where music permeates life, and where music is considered one of the most basic and essential aspects in life for prosperity, health, happiness, and healing (Graff, 2022).

With this historical backdrop, it is particularly sinister that the colonial regime consisting of both church and state made it illegal to yoik on account of it being sinful, enforcing the law by threat of death penalty (Graff, 2022). When many Sami resisted the law and continued to yoik, they must have done so because their happiness, wellbeing, and health depended on it. Later, when the death penalty was abolished, the policy persisted, insisting that yoiking was sinful. Many Sami people internalised this belief and contributed to suppress their rich yoiking traditions (Gaski, 2022). Despite external and internal forces seeking to suppress yoiking, this tradition has showed a remarkable resilience. It has been argued that the significance of yoiking for wellbeing, health, and happiness can at least partially explain why this tradition has been protected from extinction (Hanssen, 2011; Hämäläinen et al., 2018).

Research investigating the significance of yoiking for happiness, wellbeing, and health in contemporary contexts is limited. A notable exception is the four qualitative studies by the first author of this chapter, Soile Hämäläinen. Summed up, Hämäläinen's research shows that contemporary yoikers yoik for similar reasons as their ancestors, regarding it as essential for health, wellbeing, and happiness. Hämäläinen's (2023) explanation for this is that yoiking may be interpreted as embodied health knowledge, supporting our need to know and relate to ourselves and others, both humans and non-humans. As such, we argue that there is congruence between yoik as an embodied health practice and creative wellbeing, as defined by the editors of this book (see introduction). The aim of this chapter is thus to explore this congruity, discussing how yoiking might stimulate the creation of something new that promote transcending growth that overreaches the individual. It is our contention that conceptualising yoik as creative wellbeing can help us understand how yoiking might support more sustainable ways of being in the world.

Our motivation for writing this chapter is connected to our scholarly backgrounds as researchers in the field of arts and health. Soile Hämäläinen has studied yoik related to health and wellbeing in qualitative in-depth studies with predominantly Sami participants who have yoiking experience (Hämäläinen et al., 2017; Hämäläinen et al., 2018; Hämäläinen et al., 2020; Hämäläinen et al., 2021). Her Doctoral thesis (Hämäläinen, 2023) addresses in detail ethical considerations related to the study of yoik and Sami culture. Significantly, participants encouraged her to disseminate the research results to contribute to more knowledge about and respect for yoik beyond the community of Sami yoikers. Anita Salamonsen has supervised and co-authored studies about Sami culture and health, and Wenche Torrisen has published broadly on the significance of the arts for health and wellbeing.

In our exploration of yoik as creative wellbeing, we start by describing some central features of yoiking and its functions. We present the main theoretical frameworks of this chapter: *ecopoiesis* and *eudaimonia*, before we present a re-reading of previously published studies on yoik and health and relate this to eudaimonic and creative wellbeing.

Some words about yoik and its functions

Yoik, the traditional vocal art of the Sami, presumably originated in prehistoric times (Arnberg et al., 1969). Yoik traditions vary across areas inhabited by Sami people today, which includes parts of Norway, Sweden, Finland, and Russia. Yoik styles stretch from pentatonic and microtonal syllabic melodies with occasional words, to song-like yoiks with regular lyrics, and storytelling yoiks with creative application of lyrics. Yoiks might incorporate animal and other natural sounds and characteristic movements with the possibility of dramatic elements (Hämäläinen et al., 2021). As expressive precision is the guiding ideal, using the whole of one’s vocal potential is encouraged (Daling, 2014). It is impossible to do justice to this rich vocal tradition in words, so we recommend that the reader listen to recordings of yoik, e.g. by following the QR code below, or by checking out music that can be streamed from the internet such as the music of Nils-Aslak Valkeapää, or the album “Russuoh vuölieb” (Figure 3.1).

Historically, there have probably existed three different categories of yoik: epic yoiks, religious yoiks, and, everyday, worldly yoiks (Graff, 2022, p. 354). It is the last category that we address in this chapter. A central feature in yoik is its’ mimetic character, that is, “miming the world into being” through sonic alignment (Diamond, 2019, p. 255). This sonic alignment is characterised by many yoikers who assert that a yoik is not *about* something, it *is* that something (Gaski, 1996). This refers to the idea of expressive precision in yoik, which allows the yoiker to presence the yoik’s subject so vividly that the possible listeners can feel and sense it (Hilder, 2015).

Yoikers may yoik anything they want to in any situation and context. Common subjects are other people, especially loved ones. Yoiks describing other people are called *personal yoiks*. These yoiks are so inextricably linked to the person being yoiked, that they function as the “musical names” of the yoiked persons (Gaski, 1996; Graff, 2016). In a personal yoik, a yoiker describes with musical means their perception of the innermost character of the person yoiked (Hämäläinen et al., 2018; Hämäläinen et al., 2021).



Figure 3.1 QR code for accessing examples of yoik in youtube, performed by Ánde Somby.

Indeed, the symbolic reference can be so strong and intimate that it has been considered a person's "innermost name" (Graff, 2016). Also, animals and places are yoiked. A common maxim is that yoik is a way of remembering (Turi, 2012). Yoiking other people means that you can "remember" or presence them in social settings together with other people, or on your own in solitude (Hämäläinen et al., 2017; Hämäläinen et al., 2018). It is like saying "I know you", "I remember you", and "You are dear to me", to the yoiked one. This also applies to animals and places dear to the yoiker.

Yoik is so closely connected to the subject being yoiked that originally the yoikers did not consider themselves as "composers" or creators of the yoiks they yoiked, thereby having no copyright to any yoik, except to their own personal yoik(s). Today, however, yoik has also developed as a musical genre fused with different Western musical styles and thus, a merchandise and subject with a composer-owner holding copyright (Hilder, 2015). Nevertheless, yoik is still considered as closely connected to its subject, presencing this subject to the yoiker and possible listeners.

Throughout time, yoik has had several personal and social functions. Yoik has been used to express emotions; share memories; remember the past; communicate with people, nature, and animals; calm the reindeer; build community and to promote health and wellbeing (Gaski, 1996; Hämäläinen, 2023; Torrissen et al., 2022). Many of these functions can be linked to yoiking as an expression of creative wellbeing, a point that we will return to later in this chapter.

Theoretical perspectives: ecopoiesis and eudaimonia

One way of understanding how yoik might support transcending growth that goes beyond the individual is through the concept of *ecopoiesis*. *Poiesis* refers to humans as "shaping animals" who "shape the world around us with accordance to our needs" (Levine, 2022, p. 60). In the process of shaping the world, we also shape ourselves (Levine, 2022). The creative capacity of humans is, however, ambiguous in that we can shape the world, and ultimately ourselves, in ways that are both *pathogenic* (disease promoting) and *salutogenic* (health promoting). *Poiesis* is thus not always conducive of wellbeing, although creating with the aim of beauty often has health and wellbeing effects (Atkins, 2022; McNiff, 2004).

Ecopoiesis adds an ecological perspective to the human creative endeavour. Here, the shaping process combines creativity with the act of taking "care of the environment with the aim of being able to experience and create beauty" (Kopytin, 2022, p. 19). Indeed, as a species, we must acknowledge this causality if we are to live in ways that make sense. According to the principles of ecopoiesis or poietic ecology, in shaping the world, humans have an *aesthetic responsibility*. "Making sense" is here understood both as a cognitive event and as one of our fundamental bodily functions, sensing (Levine, 2022).

Our aesthetic responsibility thus lies in finding ways of responding to the world that make sense bodily, emotionally, and cognitively. According to both Atkins (2022) and Levine (2022), this aesthetic responsibility is linked to our ability to respond to the world in ways that pleases our senses and creates beauty, as an essential part of human happiness and wellbeing. In relation to *ecopoiesis*, aesthetic responsibility most importantly means that we must shape the world in a way that makes ecological sense.

The theoretical frame of eudaimonic wellbeing offers another way of understanding how yoik can support creative wellbeing. Aristotle's philosophical works, particularly his *Nicomachean Ethics*, have been central to the conceptual understanding of eudaimonia as a scientific field of study (Ryff & Singer, 2008; Ryff, 2017). According to Aristotle, wellbeing is linked to virtue and to the activities that express the best that is within us. Accordingly, Ryff and Singer (2008) suggest that eudaimonia can be understood as "personal excellence", where the aim is to get to know our unique capacities and strengths and then find ways of realising them in meaningful ways. Hence, eudaimonia is fundamentally about self-knowledge, sense-making, and growth in all human capacities. Simply put, eudaimonia is becoming who we truly are. Self-expression can also support eudaimonia, which is the classical Greek term for happiness (Ryff & Singer, 2008). Significantly, the focus on virtue, excellence, and meaning suggests that wellbeing cannot be reached by any means. Instead, true happiness is a process that is developed by living in accordance with one's true self, and by doing things that are meaningful and responsible. As such, we argue that eudaimonic wellbeing can be linked to poiesis and processes of shaping ourselves and our world in ways that make sense.

Our motivation to explore yoik in relation to *ecopoiesis* and *eudaimonia* lies in a desire to create cultural interfaces where Indigenous knowledge about sustainable human-nature interactions can be understood within Western academia (Nakata, 2002). In our view, centralising Indigenous knowledge, or indeed re-centring it, is important not only to redress historic colonisation, but also for our survival as a species. Traditional Sami yoik embodies basic knowledge about the foundations for human health (Hämäläinen, 2023). Furthermore, we argue that this knowledge contains an aesthetic acknowledgement of humans' intimate connection to their environment.

Traditional Sami yoik inherently carries both a philosophy and a practice of aesthetic responsibility that are much older than academic concepts such as *ecopoiesis* or eudaimonia. Hence, the knowledge embodied in yoiking can be characterised as "yoik philosophy" (Hämäläinen, 2023, p. 11). The central question becomes whether and how concepts such as *ecopoiesis* and eudaimonia can help us understand the complex connections between yoik, creativity, and wellbeing. We will return to this question, but first we revisit our published studies on yoik and health (Hämäläinen et al., 2017, 2018, 2020, 2021; Hämäläinen, 2023; Torrissen et al., 2022), exploring what they can reveal about the ways in which yoiking contributes to eudaimonic wellbeing and transcending growth.

Yoik and eudaimonic wellbeing: patterns from previous work

Our re-reading shows that yoiking contributes to eudaimonic wellbeing, enabling people to grow and develop as human beings in intimate and ethical relation to their environment. In the following, we provide examples of how people talk about their yoiking experiences, pointing towards how yoiking might be understood in relation to eudaimonia.

Yoik – a language of feelings, identity, and connection

Firstly, yoiking can develop self-knowledge in that it helps people to explore, express, and deal with their emotions. A famous yoiker, Biret Risten Sara, once said that where words become insufficient to express the depth of the *feeling*, that is where yoik begins (Hämäläinen et al., 2018). Some of the participants in the yoik studies commented that yoiking helped them to handle emotions. One said: “Yoik is an expression for feelings, which is a universal need” (Hämäläinen et al., 2021, p. 9). Participants claimed that yoiking could help them express a whole range of emotions, including anger: “When I’m really angry I yoik a special yoik so everybody can hear it and know I’m angry!” (Hämäläinen et al., 2017, p. 5). Participants also characterised yoiking as evoking good feelings and providing emotional relief. We argue that by using yoik to explore, acknowledge, and express one’s feelings, yoiking enables human beings to get to know themselves better.

In Sami culture, yoik is also associated with knowing who you are and where you belong. Traditionally, Sami children could receive a yoik early on, even before birth (Hämäläinen, 2023). This tradition still exists, and *being yoiked* was characterised by the participants as receiving the greatest gift you can ever receive. *Being yoiked* means receiving your own personal yoik, musically describing only you, commonly as a signifier of a deep acknowledgement of you as an individual: “For young people living in Sami areas, it is priceless to get their own yoik”, one participant said, continuing: “You know, today they have access to everything, but it is not personally theirs. The yoik you have, it is yours forever. Even when you pass away, the yoik remains. Yoik is a real treasure” (Hämäläinen et al., 2021, p. 9).

Secondly, yoiking was perceived as a way of connecting with others. Yoiking someone was said to be like having the person right there with you, so you never are alone. In a study of yoik experiences in dementia care, the participants, who were healthcare workers and family members, noticed a clear difference between yoik and other musical activities. According to one participant, “All the elderly wake up, pay attention and attend to their surroundings when we yoik with them”. Moreover, it was said that “they start communicating through it. Yoik is really like nourishment, it truly enlivens you. The whole atmosphere in the room changes when you yoik in a nursing home” (Hämäläinen et al., 2020, p. 30). People affected by dementia may not recognise their family and friends, but, according to the experiences of

the participants, they would recognise the yoiks of these people (Hämäläinen et al., 2020, 2021).

You know they ask me whose daughter I am, but they won't remember the name of the person mentioned. But when I yoik my father's yoik, they know immediately who we are talking about. So, they may forget everything else except the yoik.

(Hämäläinen et al., 2020, p. 30)

In living yoik cultures, it is not uncommon to greet each other by an exchange of personal yoiks (Gaski, 2022). Yoiking the other is also used as a way of saying “You are dear to me”, for example between friends and family. Furthermore, it is a way of attaching people to their community or acknowledging their belonging to the community. In the yoik literature, there is a famous story about a six-year-old boy's pride upon receiving his personal yoik in a community gathering. He shared that he felt like a real person now that he had been yoiked in front of everyone (Graff, 2004). Thus, yoik is a strong marker of identity and belonging, and it is said that “As long as we keep on yoiking, we know who we are” and as long as someone is yoiked, that person belongs to a community (Jones-Bamman, 1993).

A third empirical finding relevant to how we understand yoik as creative wellbeing is that yoiking enables people to connect to something beyond themselves, such as ancestors, land, and nature. A respected traditional yoiker Berit Alette Mienna¹ said: “You know I've been seeing that mountain all my life, but first when I yoiked it I felt I got really close to it”. Explaining this she says: “It's my, and my family's and my ancestors' mountain... we've wandered there for generations... it is ours, it is part of us... I felt a different kind of connection to it when I yoiked it” (Hämäläinen et al., 2017, p. 5). We interpret this quote as an example of yoiking connecting the yoiker with something beyond himself.

Mienna's quote beautifully describes how yoiking a mountain created a connection not only between the mountain and herself, but also with her family and her ancestors. Creating a connection to the land and to ancestors is a common function of yoiking. Indeed, there are yoikers who know yoiks that are more than 200 years old. By yoiking those yoiks, the yoikers maintain their connection with their ancestors, and thus, a connection with something beyond themselves. For people living with dementia, yoiking could presence known places and natural environments, bringing nature into the nursing home as one of the staff said: “So in a way you bring nature into the nursing home when you yoik there. Yoik creates a connection between the patient and the natural environment” (Hämäläinen et al., 2020, p. 30).

As we have seen, it can be argued that yoiking can support eudaimonic wellbeing in three interrelated ways, all important for creating transcending growth: development of self-knowledge; connecting to others; and connecting

people to something beyond ourselves, including ancestors and nature. In the following, we explore how the creative elements of yoiking support transcending growth. We suggest that creative wellbeing is a suitable term to capture the creative engagement that in our interpretation is a prerequisite for transcending growth.

Yoik as creative wellbeing: an attuned way of being in the world

Yoik is characterised by some yoikers as a way of being in the world: “Yoik is a way of structuring time, a way of thinking. Actually, we could say that yoik is a way of being in the world. A mode of existence” (Hämäläinen et al., 2021, p. 9). Others characterise yoik as an organic part of themselves: “Yoik is my life. It is around me all the time, in my work, in my freetime, in my sorrows and my joys... Without yoik, it’s almost like having chopped off an arm” (Hämäläinen et al., 2021, p. 9). In our interpretation, yoik as a way of being in the world and as an organic part of you indicates an integration of body and mind. The necessity of such creative connection and expressivity for our bodily and psychological wellbeing is embodied silent and practical health-promoting knowledge in traditional yoik culture (Hämäläinen, 2023). It is our contention that this integrated attunement can help us understand how yoiking supports transcending growth.

Attunement as creative ecopoietic and eudaimonic potential

Attunement can be seen as a “key in understanding creativity” (Bunt & Stige, 2014, p. 98). The terms attunement and tuning into are terms with musical references. “In tune” refers to pitch accuracy in musical performances (Jacobsen et al., 2019, p. 307) and attunement can be illustrated by two tuning forks vibrating in resonance with each other. Although only one of them is hit, the other starts resonating in the same wavelength, making the same sound. Attunement and tuning into can be evoked metaphorically as a psychological dynamic when people seek to truly understand one another (Bunt & Stige, 2014). In such states, people say they are on the “same wavelength” or “resonate” with each other (Hämäläinen, 2023).

Attunement is a fundamental trait in yoik. Attunement is inaudible and precedes the audible expression of yoik. The yoiker attunes to or tunes into the yoik’s subject, underlining the yoik’s close connection to its’ subject, whatever the subject might be. Importantly, yoik philosophy acknowledges the relational character of our existence since anything can be yoiked or attuned to (Hämäläinen, 2023). Maj-Lis Skaltje, a Sami film director and author has published a book with the North Sami title *Luondu juoiggaha* (2005) translated to Swedish as *Minsta lilla liv har sin joik* (2014). Translated to English,

these titles mean “Nature makes you yoik” and “The tiniest life has its yoik”. The latter suggests that yoik is potentially present in all life forms. One famous yoik, for example, belongs to a mosquito (Somby, 2018). *Luondu juoiggaha* suggests that nature intrinsically inspires attunement, and can be expressed as yoik. In natural environments, anything you attune to might thus evoke that action or response.

We argue that since yoik is a way of being in the world, an existential, organic necessity where attunement with both ourselves and our environment are central traits, yoik philosophy acknowledges the creative potential in our existence, and its significance for our wellbeing. The creative potential lies in attunement, in that musical *feeling into* or *listening into* another being whether human or non-human. Since the tiniest life has its yoik, yoik is inherent in whatever we choose to listen and attune to, holding not yet expressed creative potential (Skaltje, 2014). The famous Sami multi-artist Nils-Aslak Valkeapää expresses this creative potential eloquently in a portrait documentary, where he said: “I don’t distinguish whether it be music or literature or a picture”. It can be argued that for him, the creative process happened in close attunement with his surroundings, and the creative product that emerged was a result of this process: “I just use different techniques to express it... sometimes words suit best, sometimes yoik, and sometimes pictures... Sometimes when I write, I hear a *luohti*² in my heart” (Andersen & Askerøi, 1991; our translation). In our interpretation, creating for Valkeapää was thus a way of expressing attunements between humans and non-humans, providing insight into alternative ways of being in the world. It is this attunement that carries with it potential for transformative growth. Significantly, attunement enables us to create and re-create ourselves in aesthetically responsible ways. To understand how yoiking might support such growth processes, it is, however, necessary to establish how we understand yoiking in relation to Indigenous knowledge and modern ecophilosophy.

Essentially, we apply the term “yoik philosophy” understood as the thought content embodied in yoiking as a life practice (Hämäläinen, 2023, p. 11). It exists only in the writings of scholars and artists who have written about yoik. It has no identifiable “philosopher” or progenitor to whom to credit the philosophy. Rather, yoik philosophy, which profoundly embraces the environmental-relational character of human existence, differs from Western ecophilosophy, such as *ecopoiesis* (Levine, 2022). *Ecopoiesis* refers to humans as “makers” of the world since human actions inevitably impact environments in some way or the other (Levine, 2022). Yoik philosophy, as we have argued above, refers to an attuned and relational existence. Hence, *ecopoiesis* is insufficient to capture the significance of relationality in yoik philosophy. The concept that might better catch the idea of the environmental-relational mutuality in human existence, and between a yoiker and yoik’s subject, is *sympoiesis*, meaning “creating-with” or “making-with” (Atkins, 2022, p. 27). The concept was first introduced by Donna Haraway (2015),

who argued that we must re-create and re-construct the way we understand our place in the world to live well on the planet.

Haraway proposed that we should call the current epoch the Chthulucene, evoking the image of the chthulu (spider) and the spiderweb to propose a new way of “living with” and “creating with” everything around us. According to Haraway, the spider and spiderweb symbolise a way of being and thinking that is relational, non-hierarchical and entangled, and which connects nature, humans, and other-than-human relationships. In Atkins’ words, “this entanglement is like the strands of a web and the legs of the spider with which she feels and senses her environment” (2022, p. 27). We suggest that a yoiker feels and senses their environment equally fine-tuned when a yoik is created. This creative process is a dual process where both the yoiker and the yoiked subject are seen as having agency, as in Skaltje’s “nature makes you yoik”, Mienna yoiking a mountain, and Somby’s yoiking a mosquito. In other words, a mountain or a mosquito is not just inspiration to the yoiker, which is the case in ecopoiesis where man is the “maker” and “shaper” of the natural world. Instead, in the sympoiesis perspective, the mountain and the mosquito are co-creators.

Valkeapää expresses this relationality in poems 560 and 561 in one of his main works, *Beaivi, áhčážan* [*The sun, my father*]:

560. “čuojan/ mun čuojan, munnai/ čuojan/ ja viiddis lea ilbmahat/
humadeame/ healaideame/ Eallima Eatnu/ 561. ja mun čuojan/ go dat
čuojaha mu, mus/ mu váimmu dovdduin, mu váimmus/ beivvii’an jođus/
šuvva/ollašuvva” (Valkeapää, 1988).

The North Sami translation of the poem sounds like this: 560. “I sound/
resound, me too/sounding/and the world is wide/ speaking/confidentially/ The
River of Life”. And 561. “I resound/ when it plays within, inside me/ with
my heart’s feelings, in my heart/ on the journey of my days/ it sings/ is accom-
plished” (Valkeapää, 1997). We interpret Valkeapää’s poem as a description
of attuned interaction between human beings and their environment. Environ-
ment, the wide world, and the “River of Life” are experienced as both exter-
nal and internal phenomena. Expressions of this sounding and resounding,
then, may take various forms, such as yoik. Haraway’s thoughts of relational,
non-hierarchical connectedness in “living with” and “creating with” get closer
to the creative practice that yoiking represents. This is also significant for how
we understand yoik as creative wellbeing, discussed further below.

Yoik, sentient ecology, and aesthetic responsibility

Yoiking as “living with” and “creating with” can best be understood with reference to the relational worldview of Indigenous people worldwide. Human reciprocity with, and responsibility to their environments are inherent and consistent in traditional Indigenous knowledge among global Indigenous communities. Human responsibility can be considered as a natural

consequence of the relational worldview this community shares (Kimmerer, 2003). According to this worldview, also called *sentient ecology*, “all things, rocks, earth, lands, plants, trees, waters, grasses, animals, and insects, are alive” and sentient (Clarke & Yellow Bird, 2020, p. 47). Research in *bioacoustics* has in fact shown that all living organisms down to tiny microbial cells, such as baking yeast, emanate, and detect sonic signals, thus communicating acoustically beyond the range of human perception (Gagliano, 2012). This suggests scientific evidence of communication between beings, acknowledged in Indigenous cultures worldwide where people live in reciprocal communicative relationships with their environments, in a network of countless attunement possibilities (Hämäläinen, 2023).

“Knowledge” in an Indigenous context encompasses feelings and skills that developed both over time in particular environments and living conditions (Clarke & Yellow Bird, 2020; Gaski, 2011; Kimmerer, 2003). Living in a *feeling* and relational coexistence with other sentient beings results in local adaptations, skills, and knowledge necessary to survive, live, and thrive in that environment. This includes sustainable perspectives, i.e., never depleting a resource, but only using what is needed, and in so doing, taking responsibility for future generations. Hence, sentient ecology as attuned, responsible, skilful, and knowledgeable usage of local natural resources can be described as a form of aesthetic responsibility, linking sentient ecology to the creation of beauty and a world that makes more sense ecologically. Adding the aesthetic practice of yoiking to this equation, we can start to conceive how yoiking as creative wellbeing might act as a transformative agent, supporting the reciprocal wellbeing between humans and their environments, where caring for the wellbeing of others (human and non-human) provides personal wellbeing and growth. In the case of the personal yoik, it can be argued that if being yoiked is considered the greatest gift you can receive, then yoiking someone is the greatest gift you can give. Yoiking the beings around you, both humans and non-humans, is a profound act of affiliation and expression of respect for otherness, which is a key ecopoietic principle (Levine, 2022). We further argue that this respectful attunement is a starting point for the creation of something new that promotes transcending growth that goes beyond the individual.

To envision how yoiking might support transcending growth, we reflect on how attunement relates to the eudaimonic growth processes identified above. As we have seen, since attunement is about feelings, one cannot attune, or feel into, unless one feels something (Hämäläinen, 2023). Attunement can thus be described as something we “do” with our feeling capacities. Creative wellbeing then lies in the relational attunement with ourselves, other humans, and non-humans. Attuning to ourselves, we connect with ourselves - (long) including our needs and emotions - (long) and feel and acknowledge who we are. When attuning to other humans, we connect with them in similar manner. We feel into them and acknowledge our shared experience as humans. In

acknowledging the other, we feel and acknowledge where we belong. Finally, attuning to other than human beings, we connect, feel, and acknowledge those other beings, and our existence as a part of something beyond ourselves, be it nature, land, or the universe. We argue that all these ways of attuning can initiate transcending growth that expands us beyond ourselves since tuning truthfully into another being, human or non-human, might provide new perspectives on who we are and who we might aspire to become.

Truthfulness is an aesthetic ideal in yoik, and as such, a yoiker's attunement and expression are expected to be truthful, honest, and accurate. In the ideal, one should truly and authentically *be* what is yoiked, so that one can really *presence* the other, whether human or non-human. The aesthetic idea of creating "beauty", then, equals creating (in) truthfulness and authenticity. We interpret this ideal as an expression of aesthetic responsibility. Through attuning to another being, one becomes bonded with that being. In other words, the yoiker comes to know that other, thereby acknowledging the other as they are. The converse is also true. As one attunes truthfully, one also come to better know oneself. Hence, in such truthful and authentic interaction, attunement functions to fine-tune and acknowledge our connection with ourselves, others, and our environment.

Our argument connecting yoiking to eudaimonic wellbeing is synthesised thus: As we develop our attunement tool, namely our feeling capacities, we move towards greater excellence. By moving towards greater personal excellence, we achieve transcending growth, and a state of eudaimonic wellbeing. We justify this argument by asking whether there is anything more personal than our individual feeling capacities. Feeling others as the living and sentient beings they are, with their necessary place in the wholeness of nature, moves us towards an increasingly sentient ecology, including our capacities to care for the mutual wellbeing of ourselves and others.

Closing remarks: how yoik may contribute to creative wellbeing

In this chapter, we have explored yoik as creative wellbeing through theoretical perspectives of ecopoiesis and eudaimonia. Ultimately, we have identified truthful and authentic attunement as a common universal element in all these three aspects of transcending growth. These universal elements are present in the culturally specific expression of yoiking. We argue that aesthetic responsibility and a requisite respect for otherness must apply to everything we do as "shaping animals". Importantly, this includes cultural production, including cultural signifiers such as the yoik. Significantly, the inaudible aspect of yoik, attunement, is a universal trait in humans and may thus be practised without fear or risk of cultural appropriation. Indeed, since attunement is key to understanding creativity, it is also a necessary component of creative wellbeing. Hence, we understand that living and practising a sentient

ecology means fine-tuning our attuned interaction with each other and our environments. Sentient ecology represents an understanding of what aesthetic responsibility is, and how it is expressed as a component in eudaimonic creative wellbeing. We argue that the ancient Sami creative tradition of yoiking can help us to understand the importance of co-creation for the wellbeing of humans and non-humans, and for a more sustainable future.

Notes

- 1 In the referred publications of Hämäläinen et al., Berit Alette Mienna is quoted anonymously. However, she has given a written request in 2021 to first author Hämäläinen to be quoted with her full name in all subsequent publications.
- 2 *Luobti* is a North-Sami noun for “a yoik”.

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