

# Mountamorphosis



*For as long as I can remember, the TV or other screens have been on to distract adults from winter, and with astonishing frequency these screens show some human or other thundering down some snowy slope. If one of these humans somehow manages to be a micro-fraction faster than the others—this micro-mini-fraction isn't even perceptible to us; somehow, they're always equally fast, but no bugger will admit that—then all or many of the people around me cheer. Part of this is a not-entirely-whispered national pride. “We” = ski people. And this “we” idolizes anyone who lets us feel the pride. “We” = for example, Marco Odermatt, our star Alpine ski racer. But why is that? Let's talk about our national sport.*

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Early March, shitty weather. I take my body off to a ski resort in the heart of Switzerland. Snow? Nope. It's like I'm standing on the beach and someone's pinched the sea. All the runs are shut. I had hoped they would at least roll out the artificial snow carpets over the brown mats. But it's too warm even for that. So I'll just have to give myself that ski-resort feeling on foot.

I walk along the lift masts: the Alpine spine of our identity soaring out of the slipping ground. Yes, today I come from the city, but my gaze doesn't, because half of me is made of mountain. I know the rock folds, the abrupt sunsets. The moraines call to me. I was part of a “We” that could ski down the valley and straight into the living room all winter long. Where I come from, ski school was more important than normal school. My body grew up on the slopes.

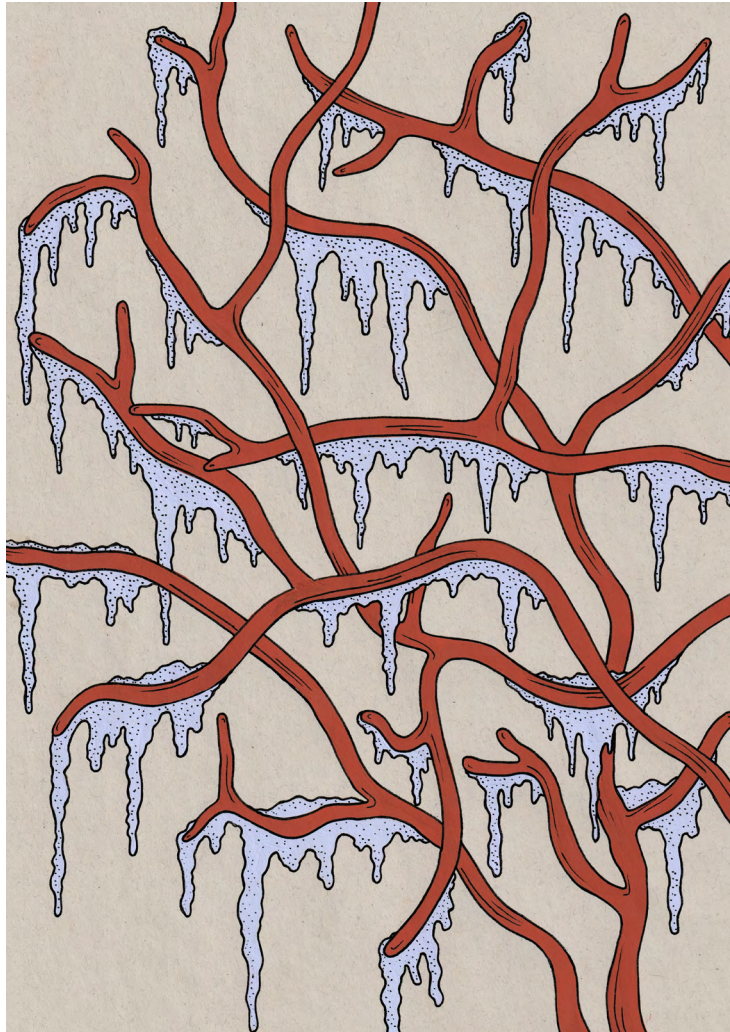
We hurtle down canonized frozen water and text our friends  
NATURE'S SO AMAZING.

Robert Steiger from Innsbruck Uni predicts that if we don't undertake climate protection measures, by 2100 only a third of ski regions will have snow reliability. And yet, beware! Snow reliability includes artificial snow. So we judder our way up the steel masts and hurtle down canonized frozen water and text our friends NATURE'S SO AMAZING. But because this natural fun is hideously expensive, the public purse is helping out with ever-increasing frequency. “With a view to the future,” this “doesn't really make sense.” So why do “We” do it regardless? Why is this dying sport so important to us? Because the people in the Alps are the Alps. Even if we rarely go there, we identify with these stone heaps.



Again: Who is this “We”? Patricia Purtschert fillets us beautifully in “Coloniality and Gender.” Before the modern era, mountains were seen as frightening, dangerous things. Demons lived on them, flung rocks around, and no one would have even contemplated climbing up further than was necessary to reach the cattle. To this day, numerous little chapels and shrines still testify to the intense need for protection.

It was the rich British who not only went in search of the exotic beyond Europe, but also, in the 19th century, named the Alps the “playground of Europe.” Hey, stop! The Swiss Alpine Club (SAC) was founded in order to “recapture the Alps from the



British.” And yet mountaineering wasn’t a sport practiced by mountain folk themselves (who had no “leisure time” in any case), but rather the urban industrial bourgeoisie. Twenty-two of SAC’s 35 founding members came from the cities of Basel, Bern and Zurich, and not a single one was a farmer, hotelier, laborer, or non-male. These men didn’t want to let England, that great colonial force, tame the wildness on their doorstep away from them.

Even the figure of the “mountain guide,” in the spiritual national defense, only became a bearer of national identity/masculinity in 1930. Incidentally, the first ever ski lift, which was powered by



hydraulic energy, didn't come into operation here in Switzerland, but in the Black Forest in 1908. So it wasn't actually that long ago that WE stitched the Alps to ourselves as an important part of our ethnic soul. And now the whole thing, our Matterhorn, our Mont Blanc, is crumbling. Nowadays, it's no longer the ghosts and incubi that threaten US, but mudslides, falling rocks; the consequences of thawing permafrost.

So, my dears. Over the last 150 years, WE have used the mountains to get better at being human: to become fitter, more rested, more resilient, more connected to our roots. The Helvetic body is manufactured on the mountain. Whether we're hiking, skiing, après-skiing, eating cheese, or just telling "the others" about it. And we don't want that to be taken from us over a few mere landslides!

Let's create a new national sport: Mountamorphosis! We no longer want to become fitter humans, but proper Alpine bucks! The city folk will no longer hurtle down the slopes for mindless relaxation, but be whistled over by the mountain folk when they're needed—because in future there'll be more and more work to do. The gofers would get mountain vacations, not for ski school or mountaineering techniques, but for mucking out cattle, building dams against the mudslides, path-making and scything. The unemployed, delivered from employment by artificial intelligence, can repopulate abandoned Alpine villages. And we should turn the ski masts into memorials, into pranking planksters: This is where people once indulged in a stupid hobby, when they weren't yet properly Swiss.

Here's my magic spell:

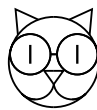
### Alpine prayer call

Oh, Alps! If crumble you must  
 Then crumble! Tumble down on us!  
 Crush our egos and Legos  
 Season your foothills with our Toblerone soul  
 We can no longer conquer you  
 We're supine to your Alpine spine  
 But if our skiing days are over  
 At least offer us shelter  
 From the great wide world  
 And please take us more seriously than we want  
 Transform us from Alpine folk  
 To Alp-filled, Alpified bodies  
 Can you give us that altitude attitude?  
 We want to become you.



## BIO

Kim de l'Horizon was born in 2666 on Gethen, and crash-landed in the 1990s through a pore in time. They have been arriving ever since. They learnt witchcraft from Starhawk and fairy tales. In 2022, Kim won the German and Swiss Book Prizes, among other awards, for their debut novel *Blutbuch*.



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