

Between Memory and Documentation

Journaling as an Archive of Lingering Knowledge

Jaime Belmonte

In my work as a composer and artistic researcher, journaling has become a habitual part of how I reflect, plan, and process ideas. I write regularly, sometimes sketches of textures or timbres, sometimes fragmented thoughts or words that resonate. This practice is meant to document my process and trace my thinking as it unfolds. But over time, I've begun to notice that these journals rarely serve as an archive in the conventional sense. They are not a passive, systematic repository for preserving records, but rather an active and provisional space, at times, almost like a dumpster for the residues and traces of my practice. As a result, my engagement with them is equally fluid; more often than revisiting them, I access knowledge through memory, sometimes fragmentary, sometimes vivid. Sometimes, I return to my journals to confirm a memory, to check if something happened as I recall it, or to compare what was written with what lingers. The record and the remembered coexist, intersect, and sometimes diverge.

The examination of this journaling practice has disrupted my assumptions about what documentation is for, and what it means to “preserve” a process. The questions I began to ask (whether unconsulted material can still be considered archival, or if the act of writing itself, rather than the record, is what allows knowledge to linger) echo the broader re-evaluations found within what scholars term the “archival turn” in the humanities. This “turn” involves “a rethinking of the

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#memory #journaling #documentation #freewriting

Many times I am actually writing about things that have already past. Many times I document memories that have transformed inevitably. But isn't the fact of writing about an event always cursed by this lapse? It is not a photograph that captures the moment, it is like trying to capture a flying bird with a long exposure photo. It is just a blurry reminiscence of what it was. A remembrance.

Figure 1. Journal entry from June 20, 2025. A reflection on the act of writing and the inherent “lapse” between a lived event and its documentation.

materiality and imaginary of collections and of what kind of truth claims lie in documentation” (Stoler [2002] 2006, 562). Moreover, as I engage with the archive not merely as a repository but as a dynamic space of inquiry, my approach reflects what Hal Foster identified as an “archival impulse” in contemporary art—a tendency for artists to critically explore the forms and functions of archives (Foster 2004).

This impulse manifests directly in my own practice, where journaling has become not just an archive, but an active exploration of the archive itself. I use the journal to question its own reliability, to test the relationship between the written record and the living archive of memory, and to hold unresolved questions rather than just storing finished answers. Therefore, in this contribution, I will show how the journal itself functions as a tool of inquiry by considering how ideas live on in different ways: written, remembered, or embodied—and how these modes interact, blur, or contradict each other. In doing so, my exploration inherently values multimodal and embodied ways of knowing, recognising that knowledge extends beyond purely linguistic forms (Anttila, Tuovinen, and Jaakonaho 2024, 126).

Journaling as Artistic Documentation

For the purposes of this study, documentation is understood not as a neutral act of preservation, but as a deliberate practice of translation: the attempt to give form to experience by rendering it into a specific medium like written text or musical notation. While this can include final artefacts like scores or recordings, this inquiry focuses on journaling as my primary method for documenting the creative process. My journaling practice began many years ago as a pragmatic tool. At that time, I often could not compose every day due to other responsibilities, and the journal became a device to help me pick up where I had left off after several days away from a project. Writing allowed me to organise thoughts, keep track of musical structures, and remind myself what needed to happen next. I still use it in this way. When ending a work session, I often purposefully leave something unfinished, noting where to continue the next day. This way, the journal serves as a bridge between moments of activity, allowing continuity across interruptions.

Over time, the journal has expanded in scope. It contains reflections on concerts, notes from conferences, lists, fragments of texts, diagrams, questions, and fleeting impressions—some directly related

to compositional work, others more tangential. Earlier, I used to carry paper journals everywhere. When I began my doctorate, I shifted to using a digital journaling app that allows me to write across multiple devices and to include images, videos, and even voice notes with transcription. I try to journal as regularly as possible, sometimes through freewriting, and sometimes as a structured reflection at the end of a workday. I do not always manage to maintain consistency; there are lapses, and I accept them. The journal is not structured or hierarchical—it is a kind of open container, an accumulation of residues, gestures, and interruptions.

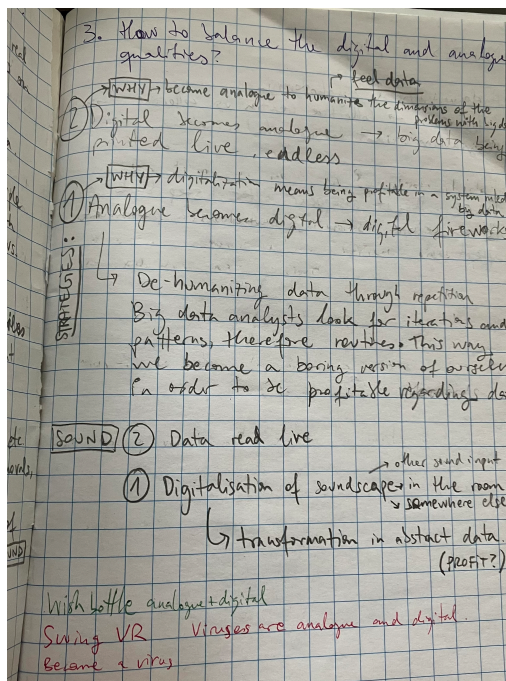


Figure 2. Journal entry from October 16, 2017. This page exemplifies the journal as an “open container”—an unstructured accumulation of questions, diagrams, and gestures. It shows the journal functioning not as a neat repository, but as a space for active and non-linear inquiry.

This process is not purely functional. While it does help me keep track of things, its value lies just as much in the act of writing as in the record it produces. The journal can feel like a conversation with myself,

a space to offload or experiment.¹ Its unstructured nature means that I do not always know what is valuable at the time of writing. Some entries are forgotten entirely, others become important only later. Sometimes, what I write down is never consulted again—and yet it remains present, folded into the way I think and make decisions. This aligns with the understanding that the very process of documenting can be inherently reflective. For instance, in practice-led research, documentation is seen not merely as record-keeping but as a form of “conscious reflection on and in action” (Mäkelä and Nimkulrat 2018, 1). Similarly, Thomson and Holland (2005, 208–9) observed that the act of creating “memory books” served a reflective purpose, encouraging young people to process their experiences.

but the problem is that most of them are in such a preliminary state that it is very difficult to assess if they are going to happen or not. Or to put in words what are they going to be about. It is tricky. Very tricky. And it relates with the attitude that Leena Julin was talking about today in Docmus: you have to have everything ready and carefully planned for your whole doctorate and there's no space for question marks, which makes everything completely frustrating. I mean, how am I going to know what is going to be the result of my research and my conclusions before I even start the research? It is quite ridiculous.

Figure 3. Journal entry from September 1, 2023. An excerpt from a freewriting exercise exploring the challenges of the grant applications and the tension between creative uncertainty and institutional expectations.

When I began my doctoral research, I also viewed journaling as a necessary method for generating data. Written words, after all, are generally accepted as valid research material, while memory is more difficult to substantiate within academic conventions. At that time, I considered journaling the most reliable way to trace and reflect on my compositional process. I thought: If I am to study my own practice, how else could I collect data? Journaling seemed like the most accessible and defensible answer.

Looking back now, I see how that belief shaped the way I framed and valued documentation. It perhaps granted written records more authority than they deserved, leaving less visible forms, like memory or

¹ This reflective and experimental process also forces an interrogation of the “I” who writes. When journaling or writing in the first person, a doubling occurs: there is the subject who speaks, and the subject who is constructed by the language on the page. The slippage between memory and documentation is mirrored in the slippage between these two selves. Acknowledging this gap—the space between the “I” on the page and the “I” writing the words—is crucial. It reminds us that any record is a performance of a self, an act of both declaration and omission.

intuition, in a secondary position. This initial approach was influenced by conventional research methodologies that see data as something generated from within a process but made external, examinable, and seemingly objective. I assumed that only that which could be captured outside oneself could be considered valid—that firstly, one collects, and then one analyses.

But this neat division immediately raises critical questions for an artistic researcher. What happens when the material is embodied, affective, or simply remembered? Can a fragment of thought, carried internally for weeks before being articulated, be considered part of the research process? Artistic research methodologies increasingly embrace such embodied, sensory, and non-discursive forms of knowing and documenting (Anttila et al. 2024, 132–33), yet the impulse to create a stable, external “record” remains strong. This forces a re-evaluation of not just what we document, but why. If my journaling practice was merely creating a static collection of data to be analysed later, it would fail to account for the fluid, open-ended, and non-linear ways in which artistic knowledge actually develops. The very premise of “collecting first, analysing later” may not be suited to a practice where reflection and creation are simultaneous and inseparable.

Memory as a Parallel Archive

Alongside journaling, memory plays an equally active and vital role in my compositional practice. Composition, for me, is not something confined to periods of visible or measurable activity at the studio; it is a process that takes over my whole life, continuing as a background activity that simmers quietly even when I am not actively writing notes on paper or sketching structures. It is in this state of continuous, low-level engagement that memory does its most potent work. Often, ideas reappear not because I have purposefully retrieved them from a written record, but because they have resurfaced internally—intact, transformed, or reframed by the passage of time.

These moments are not deliberate acts of recollection. They emerge slowly, unannounced, an unexpected connection that suddenly “clicks” into place while I am engaged in something else entirely. This resurfacing can manifest as a specific sonic image: a timbre I had been struggling to define, a blurry sonority that suddenly clarifies in my mind, or a particular scale, chord progression, or a rhythmic gesture that now feels like the perfect solution to a current compositional

problem. At other times, the connection is extramusical: a fleeting emotional state that finds its sonic equivalent, a reference to our collective imagery that provides a new conceptual frame for a piece, or a sudden insight into the ritualistic nature of the concert experience that changes how I think about the performance space. These are not bolts of inspiration from nowhere; they are the result of this slow, continuous thinking, a process of the mind connecting dots in new ways until an answer emerges from the lingering knowledge held in memory. It is difficult to say whether these moments are acts of finding a term from a long-established musical vocabulary or of inventing a new term entirely. Perhaps, depending on the context, they are both. This experience, of memory as an active and reconstructive force, resonates deeply with insights from memory work methodologies, which explore how our engagement with the past is a “continuing search for intelligibility” (Thomson and Holland 2005, 203).

To clarify the terms that follow, this inquiry approaches memory not as a static repository for data, but as a dynamic and reconstructive faculty. It is the active process of re-engaging with past experiences—a process that often transforms them in the act of remembering, imbuing them with new affective and sensory detail. Intuition, meanwhile, is understood here as a form of embodied cognition, the tacit knowledge that arises from the hands-on practice of making. It represents those insights that surface as sudden creative leaps or impulses, often preceding and guiding more formal analytical thought.

The notion of the archive has shifted from a passive storehouse to an active site of negotiation and meaning-making, where memory is understood not as something found but as “something that is made, and continually re-made” (Cook and Schwartz 2002, 172). It carries both what has been noted and what has been felt, allowing thoughts to transform rather than freeze, echoing the understanding that reflection is inherently inseparable from emotions and embodied experience (Mälkki 2011, 28). I may later find that something I believe to be new has roots in a forgotten journal entry. Or that a remembered gesture differs from what was actually documented, creating a productive dissonance between recollection and record.

The feeling when rediscovering the note presented in Figure 4 was one of profound uncanniness. It was not simply a matter of correcting a faulty memory; it was a confrontation with a past self who had already solved a problem I was actively struggling with in the present.

In that moment, the two versions of the musical idea—the remembered one and the written one—did not cancel each other out. Instead, they began a silent dialogue in my mind. *Which one is the ‘real’ idea? Does it even matter? Which solution does the piece need now? Has the piece changed, or have I?* I found myself holding both realities at once, comparing their textures, their energies, and the different creative pathways they suggested.

This moment of rediscovery is a clear example of the method at the heart of this inquiry. When a dissonance emerges between the record and the remembered, my practice is not to correct one with the other—not to privilege the ‘truth’ of the journal over the ‘error’ of memory, or vice versa. Instead, the method is to stay with the disagreement. This approach resonates with what sociologist Boaventura de Sousa Santos (2015) calls an “ecology of knowledges,” the idea that different ways of knowing, in this case, the recorded and the remembered, can coexist without hierarchy. I treat the gap between them as a generative space for new questions: Why did my memory transform this idea? What creative potential did the remembered version hold that the written one did not? Navigating this dynamic means treating the dissent itself as research data, allowing this personal ecology of knowledges to reveal insights that neither could offer alone.

Navigating such dissonances is one way the journal functions as a site of inquiry. Another is its capacity to hold latent potential, often in the form of fragmented knowledge that lingers before becoming active. A short, cryptic note from a few years ago is a clear example of this phenomenon: “Multiple sclerosis: to want to and not be able to” (see fig. 5). As I recall, this was a reaction to watching a documentary about the cellist Jacqueline Du Pré, though I did not record the source. The note itself captures the core of that experience. This specific fragment, a piece of lingering, affective knowledge, later became the conceptual foundation for a solo guitar piece, *Las mariposas del recuerdo*,² which explores this very theme. These divergences are not failures of documentation, but a sign of how memory and writing co-construct the archive of my work, a process that can lead to “new meaning-making processes” (Carbone 2020, 260).

² A video performance of the piece for solo guitar is available at <https://www.jaimebelmonte.com/listen-and-watch/las-mariposas-del-recuerdo>. For mobile access, see the QR code in Figure 6.

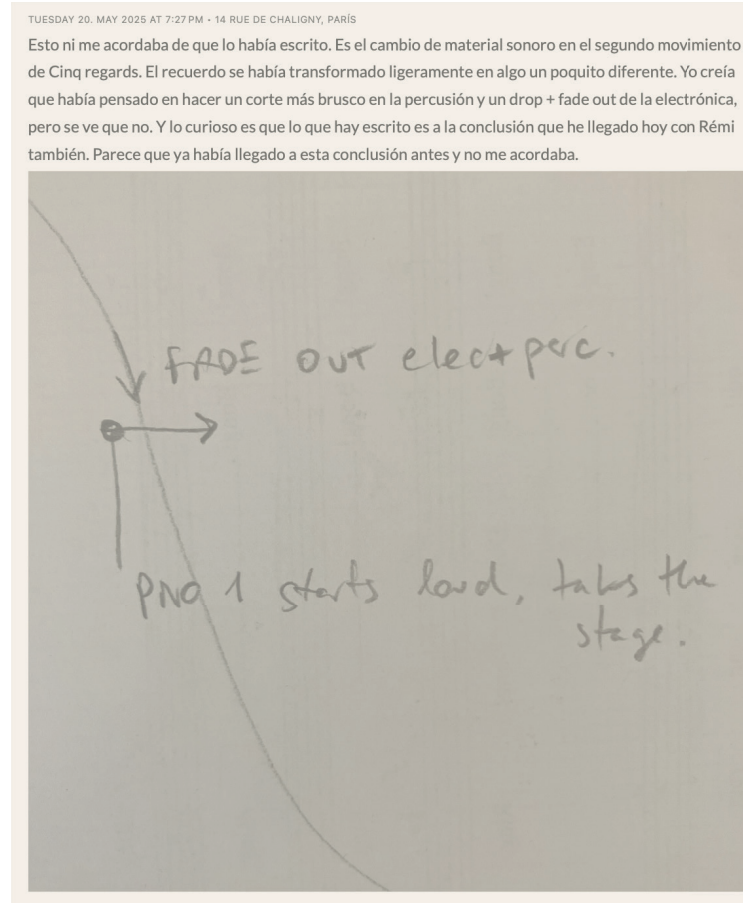


Figure 4. Journal entry from May 20, 2025. A note and reflection on rediscovering a forgotten compositional solution for the piece *Cinq regards*, showing the dissonance between the written record and a transformed memory. Translation: “I didn’t even remember I had written this. It is the change of sound material in the second movement of *Cinq regards*. The memory had morphed slightly into something a little different. I thought I had intended to make a sharper cut in the percussion and a drop + fade out of the electronics, but it turns out not to be the case. And the funny thing is that what is written there is the conclusion I came to today with Rémi as well. It seems that I had already come to this conclusion before, and I didn’t remember.”

This process of a dormant idea blossoming into a compositional concept is not always a simple “seed and harvest.” Sometimes, as with the concept of “resonance,” the journal allows me to trace a long, evolving trajectory of an idea over several years.

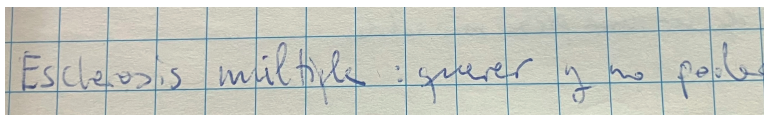


Figure 5. Journal entry from March 7, 2018. A fragmented, affective thought that later became the seed for a composition. This exemplifies “lingering knowledge” that exists detached from its original context.



Fig. 6. QR code linking to a video performance of Jaime Belmonte’s *Las mariposas del recuerdo* for solo guitar, premiered in 2018.

FRIDAY 11. FEB 2022 AT 11:43 AM · ESKOLANTIE 2, HELSINKI

#cocreation

Jascha Rohr (article on Medium)

<https://medium.com/global-cocreation/what-does-it-mean-to-be-a-cocreator-a2e8423dcb>

Very beautiful description of resonance with the world, empathy, connection. He speaks about methodologies but does not unveil them.

Figure 7. Journal entry from February 11, 2022. An initial, abstract encounter with the concept of “resonance” in the context of co-creation, prompted by an online article attributed in the journal to Jascha Rohr (2021).

“Resonance appears as an alternative mode of being in and to the world. This mode characterizes relationships through four elements: affection, emotion, transformation and uncontrollability (non-engineerability). Through these elements, resonance is seen as an open-ended notion”. Hartmut Rosa: “Resonance is about a different mode of being in the world or relating to the world, and the core element of this is listening and answering. I would actually say I believe that modern society is in a crisis of listening, having the capacity to really being in this mode that is a kind of musical mode, and of course one can say that this is a kind of romantic notion, but I believe that this is the primordial way of being in the world which we have to re-discover, and not just re-discover theoretically, I want to move beyond the cognitive frame”.

404

Figure 8. Journal entry from May 31, 2023. A deeper theoretical engagement with “resonance” through a quote attributed in the journal to the philosopher Hartmut Rosa, noted during a webinar accessed in 2023.

FRIDAY 22. SEP 2023 AT 8:14 AM · CALLE DE LA SIERRA DEL MOLINO, 8, MURCIA

Jerome Poutama

The real core of Maori music is the intelligence of nature. We don't have scales as such, but our scale is the sound of the wind recorded every day of our lives. The first sounds that we hear is our mother's heartbeat and the whirling sound of water or amniotic fluid.

Nguru: Instrumento hecho con un diente de ballena. Tiene dos agujeros para diferentes canciones, uno se sopla con la nariz y otro con la boca. En el diente están recogidas todas las canciones que la mamá ballena cantaba a su hijo.

Taonga puoro: taonga is a treasure, something precious. Puoro is the resonance of the sounds of nature.

Figure 9. Journal entry from September 22, 2023. Notes on a talk by Jerome Poutama, broadening the concept of “resonance” through the Māori worldview of Taonga puoro. The entry includes a note in Spanish on the Nguru instrument, made from a whale's tooth, which is said to hold the songs a mother whale sang to her

FRIDAY 30. MAY 2025 AT 12:35 AM · CALLE DE LA SIERRA DE CARRASCOY, 80, MURCIA

Resonance: slave of the rhythmic grid, a way of being chained to the future. The lack of pulse as a liberation from the future and the chance of lingering and being in the moment. Not thinking about the grid, so not thinking about the future or the passing of time.

Figure 10. Journal entry from May 30, 2025. A cryptic, poetic reflection that critically redefines “resonance” in personal compositional terms, contrasting it with the “rhythmic grid” and linking it to the liberation of lingering in the present moment.

This detailed trajectory of a single concept shows how the journal functions as a space for long-term, evolving inquiry. The following section explores a different, but complementary, dynamic: how these internal processes of memory and documentation are challenged and enriched when they enter into dialogue with another person and another knowledge tradition.

Supporting Case: Luohti as a Living Archive

The interplay between memory and documentation took on new resonance in my collaboration with Sámi musician and yoiker Anna Näkkäljärvi-Länsman. In our project *Ráidu*,³ we sought to explore how *luohti*⁴—a Northern Sámi vocal tradition deeply tied to place, memory, and identity (Näkkäljärvi-Länsman 2024, 42, 57)—could enter into dialogue with Western contemporary music practices. Early in the collaboration, Anna remarked that whenever a *luohti* is transcribed into Western notation, it becomes something else entirely: a “skeleton” of a *luohti* melody, rather than the *luohti* itself. This powerful insight from our work on *Ráidu*, highlighting the static nature of a transcribed *luohti* compared to its living form, resonates deeply with Näkkäljärvi-Länsman’s broader scholarly discussion, where she emphasises the limitations of Western notation in capturing the holistic essence of *luohti* and the importance of oral tradition (Näkkäljärvi-Länsman 2024, 51). This insight reframed the way I approached notation and documentation in the project.

With Anna Näkkäljärvi-Länsman I have discovered yoik and incorporated its ontology into my musical thinking. It has been a revelation that has stayed with me and I feel that it is now a big part of who I am now, musically speaking but also as my identity.

Figure 11. Journal entry from September 9, 2023. A reflection on the transformative impact of engaging with the ontology of *luohti* through the collaboration with Anna Näkkäljärvi-Länsman.

³ Video and audio recordings of *Ráidu*, for a yoiker and chamber ensemble, are available at <https://www.jaimbelmonte.com/listen-and-watch/raidu>. For mobile access, see Figure 12.

⁴ The term “*luohti*” is used in this section, following Anna Näkkäljärvi-Länsman (2024, 42), to refer specifically to the North Sámi vocal tradition discussed, as distinct from the more general Finnish term “*joiku*” or the broader English term “yoik.”



Figure 12. QR code linking to recordings of *Ráidu*. The piece, co-created by Anna Näkkäljärvi-Länsman and Jaime Belmonte for a yoiker and chamber ensemble, was premiered in 2023 and portrays the history of stolen Sámi human remains.

A *luohti* is not a fixed object. It is fluid, situated, and often improvised within guiding forms—shaped by personal memory, stylistic tendencies, and cultural practice rather than fixed notation (Näkkäljärvi-Länsman 2024, 43, 64). Described as a “sonic picture” (Aubinet 2020, 17), a *luohti* is not a song about its subject but is meant to be its subject, a sonic portrait that evokes a person’s character and essence through nuances of timbre, rhythm, and phrasing that defy conventional notation (Näkkäljärvi-Länsman 2024, 43). It exists through performance and memory, through the act of yoiking rather than through any external representation (Näkkäljärvi-Länsman 2024, 51). The rich, multi-layered nature of this tradition is best understood by listening to examples directly.⁵

In our project, we worked with a chamber ensemble alongside the yoiker, aiming to create a musical space in which the *luohti* could exist as freely as possible while coexisting with the ensemble musicians. The material I composed for the ensemble was intentionally modular and open, designed to respond to the *luohti* without confining it. I did not compose the *luodit*⁶ themselves; they were created and performed by Anna in accordance with traditional practice—freely and without adherence to fixed notation. A small transcription of the *luodit* was included in the score, not to instruct the yoiker, but rather to inform the ensemble of what would approximately be heard and to provide a

⁵ For examples of *luohti*, see the following recordings from Ánnámáret’s 2025 album *Luodit*: (1) A solo performance of “*Iisku Máhte Biret*” demonstrates the unadorned, personal style of the tradition (Ánnámáret 2025a); (2) the duet “*Máttaráhkku*,” with Petrabiret Magga-Vars, illustrates the conversational and social nature of the practice (Ánnámáret and Magga-Vars 2025); (3) “*Salkko Juhán*” incorporates an archival recording before transitioning to a full band accompaniment (Ánnámáret 2025b), directly highlighting the dialogue between past and present that is central to this article.

reference for inclusion in the score. While this gesture still reflects the conventional idea of the score as an “official document” of the piece, I have come to recognise how that belief—one I still partly hold—can be both useful and limiting, and how it can be challenged and reimaged through collaborative processes.

This approach echoed my reflections on journaling. Just as the written journal can freeze a moment in ways that are both helpful and reductive, transcribing a *luohti* can risk erasing the very qualities that make it meaningful (Näkkäläjärvi-Länsman 2024, 51). The project became a space to experiment with forms of documentation that do not impose closure. It also challenged my assumptions about what it means to preserve or communicate something in an artistic process. In working with a tradition that lives through memory and iteration, I was reminded that not all knowledge wants to be archived in conventional ways—and that some forms of understanding are sustained precisely by their refusal to be pinned down (Näkkäläjärvi-Länsman 2024, 64).

The Living Archive

This inquiry has traced the interplay between two forms of knowing central to my artistic practice: the documented knowledge of the journal and the lingering, transformative knowledge of memory. It began by questioning the conventional role of the archive as a static repository, proposing instead that memory functions as a parallel, “living archive” that co-constructs the creative process.

The dissonances that emerge between the written record and the remembered idea are not failures of documentation but are, in fact, the most generative sites of inquiry. By staying with these disagreements, treating them as an “ecology of knowledges,” the artistic researcher can gain insights that neither the record nor memory could offer alone. This was observed through the collaboration on *Ráidu*, where the Sámi *luohti* tradition, which lives through performance and iteration, powerfully demonstrated the limits of textual preservation and the vitality of embodied knowledge.

Ultimately, this practice suggests a methodological orientation for artistic research that values plurality. By learning to trust intuition, embrace the non-linear evolution of ideas, and treat memory and even forgetting as integral parts of a living archive, we can better account for the ways our practices unfold. This allows us to hold space for

knowledge that is provisional, embodied, and alive—and in doing so, generate forms of understanding that create new meanings rather than merely attempting to mirror reality.

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Ripple Effect ADHD and Diffractive Practice

Darren O'Brien

Walkies

Stuck as I frequently am when trying to put pen to paper, and conscious of the restlessness this brings, I decide to do what comes naturally—I go for a walk with my canine companion and artistic collaborator.¹ Walking opens a new world of possibilities and worldly encounters when shared with a canine companion. As we walk, we generate waves whilst becoming entangled in the ripples of others, humans, animals, insects, flora, fauna, rocks, soil, and so on, developing new and interesting rhythms, cross-rhythms and patterns. Many of our collective walks take place in Leicester (UK) from our home just on the outskirts of the city, close to the remains of the Roman wall. My canine companion often draws me towards a local park or nature reserve. However, as age takes its inevitable toll, our more recent walks are limited to within 1km of our home. Today's walk takes us to Castle Park, a small park in the old town, and the site of an early medieval city defence. For my companion, the park no doubt holds different histories read in the olfactory traces of other canine travellers.

Erin Manning suggests, "What moves as a body returns as a movement of thought. Attention moves the body, activates the force of thought, creating a becoming-body in its passing." (Manning 2001, 24). Here, Manning encompasses the essence of sensory walking practices and goes some way to describing the phenomena of the "walkies" as an

¹ A note on my canine collaborator: I choose not to reveal the name or gender of my collaborator within the context of our practice. This helps to frame the equality of our collaboration. This is a complex position troubled by the very act of human-canine collaboration and speaks of the history and entanglement of humans and animals as techno-bodies shaped by proximity and exploitation. Such questions remain open and unanswered however to acknowledge its complexity is a vital position to any artistic practice that explores posthuman concepts. This said within the convention of art I do attribute all co-authored works as 'O'Brien and O'Brien'.