

Essay

Creative Flow in Musical Composition—How My Studies in Chi Energy Shaped My Creativity as a Composer

Frank Jens-Peter Berger

Inez and Julius Polin Institute of Theological Research, Systematic Theology, Faculty of Human and Social Science, Åbo Akademi University, 20100 Åbo, Finland; frank.berger@abo.fi

Abstract

This article was born from an artistic collaboration between a Sámi textile artist and me as a composer. At the heart of our work, *Spirit Land/Vuoigŋalaš Eanadat*, three woven triptychs inspired by Sámi cosmology, met newly composed music shaped through my engagement with *chi*-based practices of flow and awareness. The creative process unfolded as a spiritual journey; a path of listening, learning, and *standing with* indigenous knowledge while acknowledging my position as a non-Sámi artist. Drawing on decolonial research, autoethnography, and relational methodologies, I describe how embodied practices, attention to breath, body, and energy flow, opened space for creativity and for dialogue. Rather than presenting measurable outcomes, I trace small yet significant shifts in how moments where music, weaving, and improvisation re-coded church spaces marked by colonial inheritance, and where relational gestures carried possibilities of reconciliation. The article contributes to current discussions in artistic research by showing how composition can be both intellectual and corporeal, both personal and political. In doing so, it suggests that creative flow, when rooted in collaboration and relationship with fellow artists and more-than-human entities, can contribute to a decolonial practice. The results are fragile and partial, but filled with resonance and hope.

Keywords: decolonialism; autoethnography; artistic flow; redemption; indigenous knowledge; transdisciplinary research; communal learning practices; theo-artistic intervention; silenced histories; non-archival materials



Academic Editor: Andrew M. Nedd

Received: 15 September 2025

Revised: 29 October 2025

Accepted: 3 November 2025

Published: 14 November 2025

Citation: Berger, Frank Jens-Peter. 2025. Creative Flow in Musical Composition—How My Studies in Chi Energy Shaped My Creativity as a Composer. *Arts* 14: 141. <https://doi.org/10.3390/arts14060141>

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1. Backstory

In February 2023, I met Emma Göransson Almroth at the Faculty of Theology in Oslo, Norway. I attended a symposium called *Praxis of Social Imaginaries*, arranged within the Nordic Summer University. Emma, herself being of Sámi heritage, told me she was a textile artist, was planning an artwork consisting of three big weavings: triptychs symbolising the Underworld (*Vuolleaibmi* in North Sámi), the Earth (*Eana*), and the Heaven (*Albmi*), inspired by Sámi cosmology. Thrilled by her explanations, I asked if I could set her textile artwork to music. To my great joy, she said yes!

In March 2025, our collaborative artwork *Spirit Land/Vuoigŋalaš Eanadat* was performed at Sigtunastiftelsen, in the town of Sigtuna in Sweden ([Sigtunastiftelsen 2025](#)). Eight musicians, myself and Emma included, performed a piece of music, about 40 min in duration, while Emma's massive three-part illuminated textile artwork formed a backdrop behind us. The artwork was performed two more times during 2025, on Kökar on the Åland Islands during the annual Franciskusfesten in July, and in the cathedral of Turku in September 2025 as part of the Aboagora event.

The creative process for Emma and me lasted more than two years. I am not Sámi, and my knowledge of Sámi history and culture prior to our collaboration was limited. Because of this, my creative process was to a high degree a process of learning. The best way for me to describe the process is as a spiritual journey. I use the term “spiritual journey” to describe processes of embodied artistic practice that engage with experiences often marginalised in Western epistemologies, such as intuition, relational awareness, and listening to more-than-human agencies. This is not a universal category, but a heuristic lens that helps me to articulate how my compositional process interacted with practices of indigenous knowledge.

By referring to decolonial gestures, I refer to any artistic or relational action that helps to shift or unsettle colonial power structures. I lean upon thoughts that decolonisation is not a method that can be neatly applied, but rather an ongoing project of lifting up indigenous knowledges and thus challenging colonial frames (Smith 1999; TallBear 2014). The purpose of this article is to explore what might be gained in decolonial artistic research when speaking about artistic collaboration as a form of “spiritual journey”, and to ask how such a figuration can shine light upon the dynamics of listening, learning, and negotiating across indigenous and non-indigenous knowledge practices. How can such an approach develop our understanding of the differences between Western scientific biases and indigenous knowledges? Rather than claiming measurable transformation or redemption through *Spirit Land/Vuoigŋalaš Eanadat*, I focus on small shifts in internalised power structures; something that could be described as micro-acts of relational awareness.

In case you wonder what a Sámi is, IWGIA (the International Work Group for Indigenous Affairs) gives the following description.

The Sámi are the Indigenous people of the northern parts of Norway, Sweden, Finland and the Kola Peninsula in Russia. They have their own languages, cultural practices and livelihoods, and have lived in these areas since time immemorial. Despite the borders of nation-states, Sámi people share a common identity based on language, traditions, kinship, and a deep connection to the land (IWGIA 2025).

This article consists of three intertwined parts. In the first part, I discuss methodology. After that, I give a background to the artwork made in collaboration with Göransson Almroth, and that background ends up in a description of my inner struggle when composing the music.

The second part of the article goes in a completely different direction, where I reflect upon an ongoing spiritual journey in Thailand that had started before I met Göransson Almroth. I will give you the background to that journey, and reveal how all the music to *Spirit Land/Vuoigŋalaš Eanadat* came to me and wanted to be composed in a certain way, in a certain context, and in a setting I had not planned or foreseen. The third part of the article consists of a concluding discussion where I look back at the lessons learned throughout the composing process.

2. Methodology

Spirit Land/Vuoigŋalaš Eanadat is an artwork born from the collaboration of a Sámi artist and a non-Sámi artist, me being the latter. My journey is one of a non-Sámi striving to learn about Sámi cosmology, mythology, and theology, and through that process striving to create platforms for Sámi voices to be heard, both on their own and in dialogue with representatives from the majority population. This might sound easy when put to text in a few sentences, but it is, however, a hugely complex task.

Different people experience the world in different ways. Canonical forms of research are often done and written from white, masculine, heterosexual, middle/upper-classed, Christian, and able-bodied perspectives (Ellis et al. 2011, p. 275). How can I, not being a

member of any indigenous community, approach three pieces of textile artwork sprung from Sámi cosmology, created by a Sámi artist, and set music to the pieces of art, without implementing my assumptions based on privileged majority perspectives shaped by colonisation and inherited biases? This is difficult, even from researchers writing from an inside perspective. Among others, Linda Tuhiwai Smith has written about the huge challenges of indigenous researchers operating in the field of traditional research praxis in her book *Decolonizing Methodologies* (Smith 1999).

By writing this article, I may unintentionally reproduce power structures. Smith argues that from the viewpoint of the colonised, the term “research” is linked to imperialism and colonialism (Smith 1999, p. 1). Therefore, the importance of clarifying my position as a white non-Sámi cannot be stressed enough. I cite, link to, and lift up Sami sources, but I do this within the framework of describing my personal spiritual journey connected to this process.

Another risk with this text is that I may, on a subconscious level, place my understanding of jojk, Sami cosmology, and spirituality within a Western framework. Smith writes that indigenous knowledge has been devalued, ignored, or appropriated, since within academic research it is often filtered through Western interpretational practices, where theoretical and academic ways are seen as superior (Smith 1999, p. 55). This might cause traditional Sámi spiritual practices, such as jojk or drumming, to lose their quality as deep and genuine forms of knowledge. I want to underline that my viewpoint is one interpretation among several possible ones, and not in any way an authoritative one. My task is not to understand nor to explain Sámi cosmology, but to approach it to listen and learn. During the process, I have chosen to be in constant dialogue with Sámi voices. All my composition work has taken place through an ongoing dialogue with Emma Göransson Almroth.

The American indigenous researcher Kim TallBear (Sisseton-Wahpeton Oyate), professor in Native Studies at The University of Alberta, has in her article *Standing With and Speaking as Faith* developed a feministic-indigenous perspective where the researcher not only describes, but takes responsibility for the relationship with the people that the researcher writes about. She suggests that the scholar should “stand with” in loyalty and respect, rather than standing and referring to others from above or outside (TallBear 2014). This approach is closely related to my own wishes. I cannot represent Sámi cosmology, but I can stand with Emma Göransson Almroth in a process where my listening, my limitation, and my learning are in focus.

There is a huge diversity among Sámi people. Emma Göransson Almroth inevitably reflects her own background and experience as a Sámi, which may differ from that of other Sámi individuals. *Standing with* her, therefore, also entails an acknowledgement that her perspective is also one among many.¹ When choosing literature to reference, I have sought out a variety of Sámi scholars representing different communities and regions across Sápmi.

The article draws on concepts such as reconciliation, decolonisation, and micro-acts, which I will return to in more detail in Section 2.2.

2.1. Autoethnography as a Method to Understand Cultural Experiences

I intend to describe my creative process from meeting Göransson Almroth up until performing the music. My methodological approach is using decolonial research as my main theoretical frame. Within that frame, I mostly lean upon the perspective of *standing with*, described by Kim TallBear. *Standing with* includes avoiding looking at relationships as dualistic, where parts in a relationship stand separated by a border between them. Instead, the parts establish a common ground from where they work together (TallBear 2014).

Besides these, I will use the autoethnographic method, described by Carolyn Ellis, Tony E. Adams, and Arthur P. Bochner in their paper *Autoethnography: an overview* (Ellis et al. 2011). Autoethnography describes and systematically analyses one’s personal experiences

in order to understand cultural experiences. The method is used in many different ways. However, I have chosen it for this article as it is also used for research that is political and focuses on socially just and socially conscious acts (Ellis et al. 2011, p. 273).

When working with themes of indigenous knowledge and artistic research practices, research needs an activist dimension, in order for research to be relevant for often marginalised and silenced groups. The term *activistic dimension* here refers to the decolonial nature of the research. It highlights how artistic and autoethnographic work can be part of a practice that challenges colonial and epistemic hierarchies. Making the researcher's position visible is one way of engaging in such activism. Autoethnography gives space to the researcher's own influence and acknowledges that objectivity, impersonality, and neutrality in research are not always tenable (Ellis et al. 2011, p. 273). Autoethnographic writing, according to Ellis et al., is less preoccupied with accuracy and more with producing texts that change us and the world we live in for the better (Ellis et al. 2011, p. 284). When I started my collaboration with Göransson Almroth, I soon realised that my own background, as a non-Sámi and educated within Western art music, would affect how I interpret her art. Recognising this becomes a part of the research process itself. *Spirit Land* is a collaboration where Sámi and non-Sámi voices are supposed to meet and mix. I cannot separate myself from my non-Sámi inheritance, nor will I strive to do so in my artistic work. The usage of autoethnography shows how my choices and experiences are woven into the final artwork, rather than pretending that I stand outside, writing from an objective viewpoint.

I will in this article analyse my creative process when composing the music to *Spirit Land*, constantly mirroring that from a relational perspective of *standing with*, and through an autoethnographic lens. Self-reflective analysis will be integrated with a literature review, drawing on academic sources to contextualise and critically engage with my experiences. When considering my position, I find that using an autoethnographic approach is not only a methodological decision but an ethical one. As a non-Sámi artist engaging with Sámi cosmology and aesthetics, my responsibility is not to represent Sámi knowledge, but to relate to it. I do my utmost to approach it with respect, humility, attentiveness, and awareness of my own limitations. By framing this work as a personal, spiritual, and creative process, I seek to avoid speaking about Sámi traditions. Instead, I describe how I, as a listener and learner, am being affected and transformed in the relationship and dialogue with Sámi voices, especially through the ongoing collaboration with Emma Göransson Almroth.

In this text, I shift between “I” and “we.” “I” refers to my personal, autoethnographic perspective as a non-Sámi composer. “We” refers primarily to the collaboration between myself and Emma Göransson Almroth, unless otherwise specified. Making this distinction explicit is part of the autoethnographic method. It clarifies when I speak from my own situated position and when I describe the process of working together.

My point of departure is that I am a gay man and a Swedish-speaking Finn, which means that I possess embodied knowledge of what it means to belong to both a sexual and a linguistic minority. The autoethnographer uses personal experiences to illustrate facets of cultural experiences (Ellis et al. 2011, p. 276). Representatives from the LGBTQ+ community have often been excluded from the dominating heteronormative culture, as have indigenous groups. Not being able to speak my mother tongue in society, but switching to another language, usually Finnish, is an everyday experience for me. Many indigenous groups, including the Sámi communities, speak ancestral languages other than the majority language. According to Ellis, Adams, and Bochner, the autoethnographer tries to make sense of their own cultural experiences, and furthermore considers ways others might experience similar issues. Autoethnographers recognise the numerous ways personal experiences interact with the research process (Ellis et al. 2011, p. 274). One huge difference here, though, that is of uttermost importance for me to be aware of, is that Swedish is

a nationally recognised language in Finland, while the Sámis have experienced state-led assimilation programs that actively sought to suppress their languages and cultural expressions. Even if similarities may occur, awareness of my own cultural privileges is of huge importance!

When discussing this collaboration with Emma Göransson Almroth, we wanted *Spirit Land/Vuoigŋalaš Eanadat* to be an act of reconciliation. The Sámi theologian Tore Johnsen writes that reconciliation happens in a situation where two parties who are alienated from each other, or divided due to conflict, are united and reestablish broken relationships. This takes place both on the outside, through social interactions, and on the inside, through our inner processes of self-knowledge, healing, and reorientation (Johnsen 2017, p. 103). This relates to what TallBear writes about *standing with*, since reconciliation requires a relationship.

Matthias Smalbrugge argues that protestant theology, since it was born, has turned away from images, culture, and art, and from symbolic and multilayered readings of the world. It became dogmatic, modernistic, rational, and text-focused, focused on moral discourses, and lost its capacity to see beyond the walls of the church (Smalbrugge 2019). Bredal-Tomren writes that Sámi priests within the Norwegian Lutheran church tend to focus on the connection between nature, humanity, and the divine, with a more ecotheological approach to environmental ethics compared to non-Sámi theological voices (Bredal-Tomren 2023, pp. 244–45). The historical development described by Smalbrugge has limited the church's capacity to embrace artistic and embodied modes of knowing, while Bredal-Tomren points out the need for Sámi voices in church and theology. It is against this background that the performances of *Spirit Land* in churches or church like settings gain significance.

2.2. My Position of Power

The Maori scholar Linda Tuhiwai Smith claims that Western knowledge and science are “beneficiaries” of the colonisation of indigenous peoples. The Western Enlightenment came to be through a promotion of individual autonomy and self-interest. This led to the development of scientific thought through exploration and discovery of non-European worlds and through the establishment of colonies. Indigenous peoples were classified alongside plants, animals, and natural resources (Smith 1999, pp. 59–60). This led to an academic tradition of systemising knowledge implicated in colonialism (Smith 1999, p. 65).

The feminist scholar Sara Ahmed writes that colonialism shapes a white world, ready for certain kinds of bodies (Ahmed 2010, p. 54). A white person will not notice anything when entering a white coded room. A black body stepping into a white coded room will feel uncomfortable, exposed, different, and visible (Ahmed 2010, p. 58). Rooms adapt to the bodies occupying them. Whiteness functions as a creator of social comfort since it allows bodies adapted to its shape to take up its space, and a source of social discomfort and exclusion to those bodies that are not adapted to its shape (Ahmed 2010, p. 59). Ahmed writes that she gets stopped all the time at border controls, even if she's got a British passport and was born in Britain. The reason is her muslim name and non-European appearance. Passport controls within the West are white coded rooms, and when a black body enters, people notice it (Ahmed 2010, pp. 63–64). Changing or re-orienting room codes is both slow and complex, and overly hasty attempts to implement changes might even strengthen institutionalised habits. Decolonisation demands that we recognise habits, and ourselves being stuck in old habits (Ahmed 2010, pp. 66–67).

Since I am a white European male, I went to school within a system that, according to Tuhiwai Smith, is based on a colonial thought structure. I also grew up within a white coded room, as Ahmed describes it. A Western church can, with Ahmed's argumentation in mind, be seen as a white oriented room where certain gestures and sounds are given frictionless passage, while others are met with resistance. I will in this paper discuss how an

artistic co-creation together with Göransson Almroth contributed to a shift from established Western-shaped forms into a room of listening and improvisation.

From my perspective, a person can never be simply privileged or simply marginalised. Privilege and vulnerability intersect in complex ways. One may hold advantages in certain areas of life while being disadvantaged in others. I myself occupy a privileged position as a white Western cis man. At the same time, I occupy marginalised positions as a gay man in a heteronormative society and as a Swedish-speaking Finn with a local dialect in a predominantly Finnish-speaking country. This interplay of overlapping positions is often described as intersectionality (Eriksson and Göthlund 2017, p. 83). I and Emma Göransson Almroth both have white skin, but whiteness can also be seen as cultural and not merely racial. Ahmed argues that whiteness goes beyond the colour of skin (Ahmed 2010, p. 60). Using Ahmed's viewpoints of coded rooms, bearing in mind that power hierarchies are intertwined in a complex intersectional weave, this article will, in the coming chapters, describe how certain rooms can be seen as coded for non-Sámi bodies and that decolonial micro-acts are available through artistic collaboration.

Walter Dignolo states that terms such as "art" and "artist" are Western epistemological constructions, often linked to what is considered "civilised" or "aesthetic". One way of moving away from this idea of historical heritage is to work within complex interrelations, where Western agents acknowledge that they are Westerners, but work from within to widen and reshape that heritage from the inside. One way to do this is through collaborating with indigenous epistemologies. Decolonial artistic work happens from the outside and the inside simultaneously. It is impossible to leave the established systems, but possible to work within them in a way that makes resistance and widens the way one can function as an artist (Gaztambide-Fernández 2019).

Dignolo's viewpoints rhyme well with TallBear's approach of *standing with*. I acknowledge my own standing point as a non-Sámi, operating within my cultural inheritance, but striving towards co-working with a Sámi artist in order to make our artwork a micro-act of decolonisation.

This article explores an artistic co-operation, where both participants simultaneously occupy both privileged and marginalised positions, as all people do. The artwork is born within an interesting, but complex and entangled weave of hierarchical positions. Marginalised people also often internalise the power of the majority perspective into themselves (Virdi Kroik 2022, p. 94). Power is rarely interested in looking at itself critically (Lindberg 2002, p. 7). For this reason, I think that every representative of a majority who comes in contact with indigenous groups or other minorities should strive towards self-reflection. Such work requires striving to recognise unconscious colonial behaviours and thought patterns, dismantling them, and seeking to build sustainable relational practices. If such a process succeeds when creating art, even partially, fragments of colonial inheritance may be meaningfully deconstructed.

In this article, I use the terms *reconciliation*, *decolonisation*, and *micro-acts* in related but distinct ways. By *reconciliation*, I primarily refer to a theological category, as described by Tore Johnsen, where broken relationships can be healed both externally and internally. By *decolonisation*, I refer to an ongoing political and ethical project that challenges colonial power structures, following Tuhiwai Smith and TallBear. Finally, I use the term *micro-acts* to describe small-scale embodied gestures within artistic collaboration that, while not in themselves dismantling colonial systems, can contribute to relational awareness and to processes of both reconciliation and decolonial thinking. Thus, while overlapping, the terms point to different dimensions: reconciliation as theological, decolonisation as socio-political, and micro-acts as artistic-practical.

Methodologically, I approach artistic co-creation not as a neutral or universal practice, but as a space where embodied vulnerabilities meet, and where colonial inheritances continue to shape encounters. Through relationship building, autoethnographic self-observance, and *standing with*, a non-Sámi and a Sámi artist creating art together might contribute to re-coding and re-orientating coded rooms. The usage of embodied memories of being marginalised may serve as a meeting ground for these encounters. Such an approach hopefully makes this text interesting for both non-Sámis and Sámis to read.

My situation as a white non-Sámi was not merely an obstacle. Göransson Almroth and I wanted *Spirit Land/Vuoiŋŋalaš Eanadat* to be performed mainly outside Sápmi, mainly for non-Sámis. Our collaboration took place within the transdisciplinary research project *Praxis of Social Imaginaries*, led by Laura Hellsten. Through the professional and artistic network of *Praxis of Social Imaginaries*, it was fairly easy for us to get access to the cathedral of Turku, Finland's national cathedral, where *Spirit Land/Vuoiŋŋalaš Eanadat* was performed in September 2025 as part of the Aboagora event. Our professional network also made it easy for us to get permission for *Spirit Land/Vuoiŋŋalaš Eanadat* to be performed at Franciskusfesten on Kökar on the Åland Islands, where it was performed in the local church in July 2025 with bishops and other non-Sámi Christian leaders present in the audience. *Praxis of Social Imaginaries* has focused on building relationships with agents on the cross-section of academic research and art, as an outspoken decolonial praxis. This relationship-building with local agencies, such as the congregations of Turku, made it fairly easy for us to get access to these platforms.

Through existing contacts within the Swedish-speaking branch of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Finland, it became possible to reach out to Christian media platforms and offer reflections on *Spirit Land/Vuoiŋŋalaš Eanadat*. As a result, two articles were published, one in an online magazine and one in a printed Christian magazine (Berger 2025a, 2025b). This illustrates how my position within majority networks opened doors to places where Sámi artists, without similar connections, possibly might have struggled more to get permission to perform.

During the writing process of this article, I have regularly discussed the content with Göransson Almroth, as well as with Laura Hellsten, who is the leader of the transdisciplinary research project *Praxis of Social Imaginaries*, within which *Spirit Land/Vuoiŋŋalaš Eanadat* was born. I have also discussed the content with other Sámi voices, who wish to remain anonymous. At times, I have used the AI tool ChatGPT (ChatGPT-5) as a research assistant, asking it to search for relevant sources, to suggest suitable English terminology, and to navigate academic writing practices. I have used the AI tool Grammarly as an advanced spell check. The text itself, however, is my own.

3. The First Building Blocks and Ethical Considerations

During the first phase of our artistic collaboration, Göransson Almroth explained to me the weavings she was about to create; three triptychs about 1.5 × 3 m. The first one symbolises the Underworld (*Vuolleaibmi* in North Sámi), the second one the Earth (*Eana*), and the third one Heaven (*Albmi*).

I immediately knew I wanted to incorporate jojk into the music I was about to compose. The jojk is the traditional Sámi way of chanting. Krister Stoor writes in his doctoral thesis *Juoganmuitalusat—jokberättelser* that the jojk is more of a tale than a song, and that it might have been told from mouth to mouth for generations. The jojk is more than what westerners refer to with the words “song” or “music”. It is a language (Stoor 2007, p. 169).

Joking has been practiced since ancient times as a part of everyday life in all Sámi inhabited areas. The traditions vary between regions and even between families. Some similarities are common across Sápmi: an expressive vocal ideal that may include sounds

of nature and animals; use of melodic themes that enable and invite improvisation; and the jojk's linkage to a specific subject. A common expression describing jojk is that the jojker jojks someone or something, rather than joking about it. A person's personal jojk is that person's musical name. The term can refer to both a noun and a verb. In earlier times, joking was abundantly practised in many forms, in groups or alone, but was effectively silenced through assimilation and colonisation. (Hämäläinen et al. 2020).

From being seen as the “devil's work” and only practised privately, jojk has since the late 1960s gone through a revival and become an increasingly accepted public practice. Contemporary jojk is often mixed with new music styles and performed with instruments that were rarely used before. Jojk has become an expression for an audible Sámi presence in the public room. Alongside the increasing public use of jojk during the last decade, the growing use of *gákti*, the traditional Sámi dress, as well as other traditional Sámi handicrafts, called *duodji*, have become popular (Hämäläinen et al. 2020).

Kjellström, Ternhag & Rydving describe that joking traditionally took place both alone and in community with others. Often it was spontaneous and said to “come” to the jojker, although some jojks that were transmitted from person to person. All strong emotional expressions can be jojked instead of spoken about (Kjellström et al. 1988, pp. 13–15).

Historically, the jojk has been seen as primitive among non-Sámis. The reasons for this are that the text and meaning-bearing words within the jojks are few. However, the jojk carries with it a collective collection of inherited knowledge. It requires a deep knowledge of the local jojk traditions, an advanced ability of improvisation, which demands a complex and long learning process. Places, history, people, animals, and strong emotions can all be expressed through the jojk. Jojk is a way of communicating, a way of remembering and re-telling history, and a way of expressing spirituality and religion (Kjellström et al. 1988, pp. 10–20).

The jojk in itself is a diverse practice, and it differs in different parts of Sápmi. According to Soile Hämäläinen, who wrote her doctoral thesis on the subject of healing aspects of joking, the Sámi communities are divided into ten subgroups, where the criteria are linguistic and cultural features, as well as geographical origin. The ten subgroups are South, Ume, Pite, Lule, North, Inari, Skolt, Kildin, Ter, and Akkala Sámi. They vary not only in cultural and linguistic features. The jojk traditions also vary between the subgroups (Hämäläinen 2023, p. 15). Emma Göransson Almroth, with whom I have collaborated, identifies as South Sámi. The South Sámi jojks are often characterised by a limited vocal range, usually within a fifth, and they consist of short melodic motifs repeated many times. North Sámi jojks, in comparison, are often more poetic to their characters, contain less improvised parts, usually use a pentatonic scale and big intervals between the tones (Kjellström et al. 1988, pp. 94–97). With this said, the joking traditions are under constant development, and the different regions in Sápmi often adapt inspirations from each other. There is a huge overlap in joking, and any attempt to define it in Western music traditions, like musical scales, will not give it justice (Kjellström et al. 1988, p. 77).

Listening to jojks, I realised that it is a beautiful language I enjoy listening to. I do not understand it, other than knowing it touches my heart. I do not know how to compose a jojk any more than I could write a book in a language I do not speak. I cannot perform a jojk. Not any more than I could speak up and say something in a setting where I do not speak the same language as the other speakers in the room.

I can, though, relate to languages and use my experiences of being and operating in bilingual spaces. My mother tongue is Swedish, although I was born and grew up in Finland. Historically, Swedish has been a dominant language both in relation to Sámi languages in Sweden and to the Finnish language in Finland, since Finland was a part of the Swedish empire until 1809. Today, Swedish is not the dominant language in Finland.

Both Swedish and Finnish are official languages in Finland, but Swedish is the minority language spoken by roughly 5% of the population.

I was born and raised in the small village of Purmo in Ostrobothnia in the middle of Western Finland. I grew up speaking the local Swedish dialect of the area. It differs remarkably from standard Swedish. When I was seven and started school, we were at first allowed to answer the teacher speaking our local dialect. But after a few months, during the second semester, we had to speak only standard Swedish when communicating with the teacher. Purmo dialect is never used as a written language, otherwise than perhaps in very informal settings like a text message to a family member or childhood friend from the same village. My whole body remembers what it was like to learn that my language was not OK in a formal school setting, and what it was like to, from a very young age, learn a “proper” way of speaking and writing in the public room. I want to accentuate that my situation is not equal to what a native Sámi speaker experiences, living in a society that oppresses their native languages. I mention my linguistic background because I sense it has guided me in the spiritual journey that my encounter with Sámi cosmology took me on.

I might learn a foreign language, at least to some degree, but if I do that as a grown-up and not as a small child, I will always have a foreign accent when using that language. I met a Sámi theologian during a symposium in Sigtuna (Sweden). The two of us had a long discussion about the nature of a jojk. TallBear writes that it is helpful to look at any research process not as simple data gathering, but as a relationship-building process and an opportunity for conversation and sharing of knowledge (TallBear 2014). The Sámi theologian explained to me that if one looks at the jojk through a wide lens, a non-Sámi like me could perform a jojk. This is because a jojk comes to the jojker, and the jojk itself decides who to come to. But they also explained that in every group of people, there are individuals with a very strict lens, also among Sámis. If I would learn the basics of the jojk language, I could stand up in front of an audience and perform a jojk, and those with a wide lens would consider it a proper jojk. Others, with a strict lens, would never accept it, since I was not born and raised with the jojk language.

After contemplating our conversation, I stood by my initial gut feeling that I cannot compose nor perform a jojk. The idea of me jojking made my shoulders and solar plexus tense. I sensed the same bodily reactions as when entering a room where the language spoken was not mine.

I asked myself if I am capable of, through an ongoing dialogue with Sámi voices, gaining enough knowledge to that degree that I can provide a unique musical framework in which a jojk can be performed by a native jojk speaker. During discussions with Göransson Almroth, she pointed out the jojk *Gulahallat Eatnamiin: We Speak Earth* to me; a jojk that came to the Sámi singer Sara Marielle Gaup Beaska when she was contemplating climate change and how global warming is affecting the way of life of her people. The jojk is published on YouTube on 14 October 2015, where Gaup Beaska encourages jojkers to jojk their own version of the jojk (Gaup Beaska 2015). When listening to *We Speak Earth*, I decided to use it in the musical composition of the *Underworld*. Every cell in my body resonated well with that thought.

Tore Johnsen writes that acts of reconciliation involve steps that take both parties to a new ground (Johnsen 2017, p. 117). Would it be possible for me to compose a musical framework for a jojk that would make the musical whole greater than the sum of its parts? Would I be able to do that without re-telling indigenous stories in a way that would silence the indigenous voice and lift up my own splendiddness? This is a risk several scholars have warned could occur when attempting to create decolonial projects (Hellsten 2025).

The idea made me shiver. Dare I undertake such a huge task? Together with the sense of being highly insecure, the thought filled me with awe and longing. My grown-up self

is a composer and musician trained in Western art music. But inside, I carry with me the small boy who was told that his dialect was not appropriate for public speech. Inside, I also carry with me the confused teenage boy who does not know what to make of his awakening sexuality in a conservative Christian countryside community. Can I approach the Sámi *Underworld* with every aspect of myself, all my embodied memories, and see what they will bring me? Falling back on Ahmed's description of coded rooms, incorporating the jojk into a church reshapes and refurnishes the room (Ahmed 2010, p. 65). TallBear writes that a researcher *standing with* a community of subjects is willing to be altered and to revise their stakes in the knowledge produced (TallBear 2014). By incorporating the jojk not only into the room, but also into music composed by me, a non-Sámi, will the jojk also change me, a body shaped by the room it grew up in?

3.1. The Underworld

According to the Sámi scholar Inga-Maria Mulk, in an article she has written together with the British scholar Tim Bayliss-Smith, Sámi cosmology can be interpreted as three layers of reality. In their article, they explain how they have investigated Sámi cultural landscapes through archaeological and anthropological lenses. For instance, we can today catch glimpses of the female deity *Máttaráhkkhá* in how space within the tent was divided (into male and female areas), and how token sacrifices of food and drink were carried out (Mulk and Bayliss-Smith 2007, p. 99). Since *Máttaráhkkhá*, alongside other similar deities, belongs to an early Sámi cosmology that predates extensive written records, much of the evidence about her role derives from archaeological sources (such as rock art and drums), making the details fragmentary and open to interpretation. (Mulk and Bayliss-Smith 2007; Kraft 2020).

Mulk & Bayliss-Smith compare Proto-Uralic worldviews and worldviews from other indigenous traditions to archeological finds in Sápmi. They argue that it is likely that the Sámi cosmology, before the Roman Catholic mission began and assimilation politics later silenced the Sámi voices, was divided into three realms: *the Upper World*, *the Middle* (human) *World*, and *the Lower World* (Mulk and Bayliss-Smith 2007, p. 107). Traces of this worldview can be traced through traditional Sámi drums that are covered with symbols of these three realms². This gives us indications that drums were used to travel between the realms (Mulk and Bayliss-Smith 2007, p. 116). The ancient Sámi cosmology is also described as relational and cyclical rather than linear (Mulk and Bayliss-Smith 2007, p. 95). Mountains, rivers, caves, and other features of the landscape are seen as sacred and dwelling places of spiritual beings (Mulk and Bayliss-Smith 2007, p. 98).

Göransson Almroth explained to me that in the *Underworld*, the heartbeats of the Earth can be heard, causing me to immediately sense the relevance of the drums as a musical motif. Göransson Almroth also writes that the Sámi drum is a tool for orientation that helps us find the way (Göransson 2017, p. 232). In Sámi cosmology, the *Underworld* is not seen as a dark or dangerous realm. It's a natural part of the cosmos where spirits and the souls of the dead dwell. It's a part of the reality that exists in harmony with the living world (Mulk and Bayliss-Smith 2007, p. 98). When discussing the matter with Göransson Almroth, we decided together that we need a Sámi vocalist to jojk *We Speak Earth* during the performances of *Spirit Land* (see Figure 1), alongside the usage of drums.

Göransson Almroth further explained that the *Underworld* is also where the foremothers and forefathers dwell. The waving she was making consisted of many layers, like archeological layers of dirt when excavating in the ground. During the creative process, Göransson Almroth sent photos to me of the textile artwork she was creating. The weave of the *Underworld* was dark with soil-like colours, and she had woven tree roots and old bones into the artwork. When first looking at the photos, and later at the weave itself, I sensed

the creative waves bringing me sensations of how low-pitched instruments (like basses, cellos, big drums) resonate in my body when played in a slow, rhythmical pattern. The thought of composing the movement with music to the *Underworld*, consisting of musical layers laid on top of each other, came to me.



Figure 1. Photo from the performance of *Spirit Land/Vuoigŋalaš Eanadat* in Turku Cathedral on the 11th of September 2025. The triptych of the *Underworld* is to the left, *Earth* is in the center, and *Heaven* is to the right. Photo by Pekko Vasantola. Reproduced with permission from the photographer.

When I use the term “came to me”, I refer to what Rick Rubin describes as waves of creativity. Rick Rubin is considered one of the most influential music producers over the last 20 years. According to Rubin, art arrives in movements that behave like waves. We all have antennae for creative thought, even if some people’s antennae are sensitively tuned and others are not. When the wave hits you, you might choose to swim with the wave or against it (Rubin 2023).

Rubin describes the creative flow as a spiritual process. While composing the music to *Spirit Land/Vuoigŋalaš Eanadat*, I had a strong sensation that greater forces than I can access through my rationally schooled intellect were active. Rubin’s explanations gave me words for what was going on inside of me during my collaboration with Göransson Almroth, and they helped me in my task of describing my impressions through an autoethnographic approach. When contemplating the *Underworld* and all the other parts of Göransson Almroth’s artwork, and getting into a state of creative awareness, I could sense the waves. I swam with the ones that appealed to me. Others I left for someone else to swim with.

3.2. The Earth

I studied theology up to Master’s level before becoming a full-time artist, composer, and musician. The testimonies of the Nordic Lutheran churches’ oppression of Sámi cultural expressions have unsettled me when reading about them. I get the same gnawing sensation inside as when thinking of all the times I have heard Christians claim that homosexuality is a sin, and that queer people will end up in hell. I can still recall the anger arising in me when reading the news in 2014, when several European church leaders publicly claimed that a flood in the Balkans that killed more than 50 people was a punishment from God after the Austrian drag artist Conchita Wurst won the Eurovision Song Contest (Gander 2014). Again, I am aware that not all oppressions are alike, and without claiming that I can

portray the suffering of colonial wounds, I still do carry with me an embodied felt sense of what it means when a dominant Christian narrative is given privilege in the name of heritage and doctrine instead of acknowledging the lived experiences of people.

Archeology tells us that the Sámi populations have been exposed to Christian influences before we have written sources. Christian spirituality and Sámi spirituality have co-existed throughout several centuries (Lundmark 2016, pp. 222–32). From the 16th century onward, the Nordic countries underwent significant changes. Missionary activities resulted in forced education in the majority languages. Schools and churches were built, while joiking and drumming were banned, as the church perceived them as demonic and evil practices (Bråkenhielm 2017, p. 150). The development of the Nordic churches from the Reformation onward has been characterised by conformity and an intellectualisation of faith at the expense of bodily and physical expressions of spirituality. The South Sámi theologian Åsa Virði Kroik writes in her doctoral thesis that the church, together with the government, punished Sámis who owned and used drums. There are even historical examples of death penalties caused by drum usage (Virði Kroik 2022, p. 136). The implementation of Christianity in Sápmi led to a culture of silence, where one is not supposed to talk about spiritual matters (Virði Kroik 2022, p. 198). Göransson Almroth also writes about the church banning drum usage among Sámis (Göransson 2017, p. 232).

As Europe began colonising the rest of the world to exploit other cultures' raw materials and labor, theology was modified into a rhetorical tool used to justify the subjugation of others (Norlin 2017, pp. 51–52). It can be difficult for Finns and Fenno-Swedes to recognise their own colonial history. Finland sees itself as a virtuous and incorruptible state that has been oppressed by both Sweden and Russia throughout history. We view our nation as one shaped by democracy and human rights (Nyyssönen 2013). However, as is often the case, the truth is rarely black and white. Even though Finland never had overseas colonies, colonisation took place in Sápmi (Fur 2017, p. 244). Eve Tuck and K. Wayne Yang write in their article *Decolonization is not a Metaphor* that settler colonialism, an internal colonialism that happens within the domestic borders of a nation, is a way of pushing away the indigenous groups to get permanent access to their land (Tuck and Yang 2012, pp. 4–5). Decolonisation, in their opinion, needs to involve concrete consequences (such as returning occupied land) and cannot simply be reduced to rhetoric or didactical discussions (Tuck and Yang 2012, p. 23).

Colonisation in Sápmi took place both on an inner and an outer level, according to Tore Johnsen. On the outer level, the Sámis languages and the Sámi culture were vandalised and their autonomy was undermined. On an inner level, the Sámis were forced to look down upon their own culture, causing cognitive dissonance. One of the biggest agents was the Lutheran churches, since the actions of the governments were authorised with divine mandate. The churches' redemption work is of utmost importance, and the churches need to acknowledge their own role in the colonisation process of Sápmi (Johnsen 2017, pp. 101–2).

In Sweden, the former Lutheran archbishop Antje Jackelén asked the Sámi peoples for forgiveness during a church service in Uppsala in 2021 and later in Luleå in 2022 for all the abuses towards the Sámis, committed by the Lutheran Church throughout history. During these services, the hymn *Härlig är Jorden* was sung in Lule Sámi, South Sámi, North Sámi and Swedish (Svenska Kyrkans Ursäkt Till det Samiska Folket n.d.). I wanted to incorporate a hymn or a traditional choral melody into my composition in one way or another. Emma Göransson Almroth told me, during our conversations, that *Härlig är Jorden* is often sung among Sámis in church contexts. Emma's explanation about this specific hymn touched my artistic intuition, especially after watching the service online when the archbishop apologised and everybody sang this hymn together. I made a decision to use *Härlig är Jorden* in the second movement, about the Earth³.

The Sámi theologian Lovisa Mienna Sjöberg has written her doctoral thesis about *sividnit* as religious praxis. The Sámi word *sividnit* can be described as a blessing of a sort. It is common in the whole of Sápmi. One thinks or speaks out a few words, often in combination with a sign of the cross or other gesture or deed (Sjöberg 2018, p. 7). Although the main focus of her thesis is not about the singing of hymns, her argumentation in several of the chapters shows us that the singing of hymns is an important part of Sámi spirituality, both historically and today (Sjöberg 2018, pp. 73, 101, 102, 108). Sjöberg mentions both jojk and hymns as important, connected to *sivdnidit*, especially linked to travelling and orienting in the wilderness (Sjöberg 2018, p. 117).

Also, the final report from the project *Sámis in the Church*, published by the Finnish Evangelical Lutheran Church of Finland, mentions the importance of singing Christian songs and hymns in Sápmi. It is written by Mari Valjakka, a Skolt Sámi working as a Lutheran priest. In Finland, there are Lutheran hymn books in Inari and North Sámi, and even if there are hardly any hymns in Skolt Sámi, there is a booklet with Christmas hymns in Skolt Sámi (Valjakka 2025, p. 27). The vision with the Finnish project *Sámis in the Church* has been to begin a redemption process between the Sámi groups and the majority population (Valjakka 2025, p. 2). Valjakka underlines the importance of hymn singing in the redemption work (Valjakka 2025, p. 28). The report portrays the jojk as intertwined with natural phenomena and the full breadth of life, while the Sámi hymn tradition, more narrowly shaped, offers sung interpretations of the Christian faith through a Sámi lens. Yet both find their rightful place within the sacred space of the church. The jojk becomes a vessel for self-expression and emotion; a living, breathing part of how the human spirit gives voice to belief (Valjakka 2025, p. 44).

The wave that came told me to incorporate the hymn *Härlig är jorden* into *Spirit Land/Vuoigŋalaš Eanadat*. It is a well-known hymn that I have known since childhood. Emma Göransson Almroth sang it to me in South Sámi, and to hear it sung in her language gave me chills. Since Sápmi is located in both Norway (Kirken i Norge n.d.), Sweden (Svenska kyrkan n.d.), and Finland (Finlands Evangelisk-Lutherska Kyrka n.d.), I wanted to incorporate these three languages into the second movement, together with one of the Sámi languages. This very hymn was sung during the redemption service held by the Swedish archbishop in 2021, and I sensed that that was an important first step on the road of redemption of which Tore Johnsen and Mari Valjakka speak. But it cannot end there. We need to keep on singing together.

3.3. The Heaven

When Emma Göransson Almroth and I met at Sigtunastiftelsen in late November 2023, we sat together in the small chapel at the premises. She explained to me that she was moved by the beautiful little chapel, and she opened her mouth and jojked a jojk that came to her in that very moment. I sat next to her when she was joking, and it made me see whirling colours like in the northern sky at sunset. She recorded it on her mobile phone and sent it to me. I knew that I wanted to use her jojk in my upcoming composition. I told her I want her to jojk it during the upcoming performances. She agreed, although somewhat hesitantly at first, since she had never jojked publicly before an audience.

Emma's spontaneous jojk reminded me that joking is not a rehearsed way of singing, but a way of being in and committing to sound. In Sámi tradition, a jojk often arises in the moment. It comes to the jojker, rather than being consciously composed. Sometimes it is inherited, passed from one person to another, carrying memory like breath through generations. Sometimes it is born in the instant, like the wind blowing on your skin, making you aware of its presence. There are people known for their gift of joking, but the practice itself belongs to the whole community, to anyone who listens deeply enough to the land

and lets voice emerge. To jojk is not to perform, but to participate in the world's ongoing resonance (Kjellström et al. 1988; Hämäläinen et al. 2020; Stoor 2007).

I sensed an urge to incorporate the overtone flute into the movement symbolising *Heaven*. The overtone flute has a breathy sound, and it thrills my imagination, associating the sound with breath, wind, and spirit. In the biblical languages Hebrew and Greek, the same word is used for breath, wind, and spirit.

Besides the overtone flute, I wanted electronic soundscapes and a synthesiser. The eroticised and exoticised portrayal of Sámi culture is often problematically one-dimensional, bordering on cultural appropriation and cultural imperialism (Hagelin 2023). The idea behind the use of the synthesiser, with its contemporary sound, is to emphasise that Sámi culture—though deeply rooted in a rich historical heritage—is alive, developing, and present today.

3.4. The Way Forward

I also planned a fourth movement of music that would incorporate elements from all three of the previous ones. There are three weavings by Göransson Almroth in *Spirit Land/Vuoigŋyalaš Eanadat*. The fourth movement is us; you and me, and everyone who gets in touch with the artwork. The idea behind a final fourth movement of music is that when the viewer or listener is open to all dimensions of reality—when the *Underworld*, the *Earth*, and the *Heaven* sound simultaneously—something new and unique may emerge; a deeper way of experiencing reality. The three worlds can function as lenses through which we interpret and understand the world. Looking through only one lens offers a singular perspective. In this fourth movement, I wanted to investigate what happens when all three lenses are layered, and we gaze through them all at once. What new insights about the world might arise from a multi-faceted gaze, compared to a limited, single-faceted view?

In the article *Double perspective in the Colonial present* the authors claim that indigenous people adapt to looking at the world through multiple lenses. A jojk may be easy to understand for most listeners, but simultaneously, the jojk carries layers of implied meaning that are hidden to those not familiar with Sámi culture. In the same way, an indigenous person might live in a colonial culture by its laws and customs, but simultaneously in a parallel world, understood only by other indigenous members (Svalastog et al. 2021, pp. 225–26). I was thrilled by this stroke of Sámi wisdom and wished to invite non-Sámi listeners, starting with myself, to learn to see the world through different lenses at the same time.

My initial vision was to compose the first three movements in fixed form, enabling them to be performed simultaneously, thereby generating a new sonic reality. I soon realised, however, that this approach would likely be too complex as a compositional practice. Instead, I chose to reintegrate selected fragments from the earlier movements, allowing echoes of the previous material to converge into a new musical whole, and also to integrate new music.

If I describe this process through Rick Rubin's words, I sensed a wave of creativity, I allowed myself to be swept away with it for a moment, appreciating the direction it took me in, ie, three movements performed simultaneously (Rubin 2023). But I realised that if I follow the wave all the way, it will lead me to the wrong place, making life too complicated. Therefore, I thanked the wave for making me aware of the creative idea of composing three movements in a fixed form, but I stepped away from its flow halfway. I chose to leave that wave, to tweak and use some of the insights the wave had given me, and open myself to a new wave of creativity, not knowing where I might end up, or if such a wave would even come to me or not.

3.5. The Struggle

Throughout the first part of the artistic process, when I met and discussed with Göransson Almroth and she showed me her textile artwork, when she joked to me in the small chapel, some initial waves came to me with the ideas that I have listed above. Among them, how I wanted to incorporate the jojk *We Speak Earth* into the first movement, the hymn *Härlig är Jorden* into the second, and Göransson Almroth's own jojk into the third movement. I got these building blocks. But when I wanted to create the actual music and write something down in my sheet music writing software, I got completely stuck. I sat down to start the work, and nothing came. It was like I got the overall big picture, the first brief sketch. But when I sat down to colourise the sketch and fill in the details, I did not get anything.

Days and weeks went by as the autumn of 2023 turned into winter. I was stuck in my head and in my intellect, focusing on musical keys, themes, and instrumentation. Every idea I could come up with did not resonate well with me, and I did not sense the waves. I bit my jaw together from frustration, starting to get nervous. The first musical rehearsal was planned in February of 2024, so I was not in any hurry. Nevertheless, I started to get worried. What if the music would not come to me?

The jojk is a spiritual praxis. Singing hymns is a spiritual praxis. During my struggle in the autumn of 2023, I did not yet understand or realise that the musical framework I had decided to compose needed to serve as an invitation to enter a spiritual journey. My music needs to invite both the performers and the audience into the three realms of Sámi cosmology, allow us to dwell there and see the world through them, and finally take us into the fourth invisible weave, into something new and yet unseen. Jon Henrik Fjällgren, a South Sámi jojker, writes that making music is like when Jesus' disciple Peter tried to walk on water. Walking on water worked as long as Peter believed it was possible ([Fjällgren 2020](#)). Fjällgren argues, through this parable, that joking and everything connected to music is understood through a spiritual surrender. I cannot be in my own head, analysing the composition work through my intellect. I need to walk on water.

Rick Rubin writes that artistic inspiration is spiritual. It is the immediate influence of the Divine. The artist's inspiration is a breath of creative power from a source outside of us, entering our small selves. He writes that inspiration lies outside of human control and can occasionally be hard to find. When that happens, we cannot just wait, but we need to make an effort to invite the epiphanies. That can be done by varying one's inputs, breaking habits, and looking for something different ([Rubin 2023](#)). For a person like me who makes a living out of being creative, I am familiar with the fact that you need to tune into something new when you get stuck. But it turned out I needed to re-learn the lesson.

4. The Composing Process

In this chapter, I will describe how I found a place where the creative waves hit me again. When that eventually happened, they were stronger than I had ever felt them before.

A few years back, I had some severe problems with my health. Western medicine could not help me, and I started to search out alternative ways of self-healing. One step of that journey took me to Chiang Mai in northern Thailand in 2019, to study traditional Thai massage at the *Old Medicine Hospital Thai Massage School Shivagakomarpaj* ([An Official Website of Old Medicine Hospital Thai Massage School Shivagakomarpaj n.d.](#)). I longed for relief from my physical problems, and I was hoping that Thai Traditional Medicine (TTM) would help me. The TTM did, in fact, offer me improved health, together with a lot of other things, and when I am writing this text in 2025, I am almost symptom-free. My journey of self-healing was to a high degree a spiritual one, since I was searching through commitment to spiritual practices outside a Western, academic theoretical discourse of what is considered proper medical treatments. Among these practices lies my involvement in TTM. I will, however, not

go into more details about my journey of self-healing, but I need to mention this much to give a backstory to why I ended up in northern Thailand in 2019.

In December of 2023, I returned to Chiang Mai for more studies. Even if my health was a lot better, I did not abandon the practice, but sensed that my ongoing spiritual journey needed me to dive deeper into the mysteries I had started to investigate. First, I studied for one week at my old school, and after that, I studied with a private guru, Ajahn Timmy ([Timmy's Massage Training Center n.d.](#)), for a few days. *Ajahn* is an honorific title given to respected teachers, and is usually translated as “Master” in English ([Thai Massage School Shivagakomarpaj n.d.](#), p. 10).

After taking courses in Thai massage and Thai medicine for about two weeks, I attended a week-long yoga and meditation retreat at a homestay north of Chiang Mai. During that week, we got up before sunrise, did a yoga pass for one hour, and then meditated for one hour. After the morning yoga and meditation, there was breakfast, and after that, many hours of free time until the next yoga and meditation session before dinner. The other participants did all kinds of activities during their free time. I did not join them, but opened my laptop and my sheet music writing software. During that week, I finished all four movements of music for *Spirit Land/Vuoiŋyalaš Eanadat*. I cannot recall that I have ever felt the waves of creativity as strongly as I did on the yoga retreat.

4.1. TTM—Thai Traditional Medicine

One explanation for why I experienced this huge creative flow during that specific time might be found in the philosophy of the Thai Traditional Medicine (TTM). The tradition is complex, speculative, and the explanation of it varies depending on who you ask. During my own studies and practice of TTM in Chiang Mai, I constantly heard my teachers talk about the words “flow” and “circulation”. If the body is sore, there is not enough “flow”. If that is the case, we massage to increase the “flow”, and that will help the body’s own healing process.

I will be referring to the training manuals I received during my courses, and to the book *Traditional Thai Medicine* by C. Pierce Salguero, which I bought in Chiang Mai. Salguero is a professor of Buddhism, a transdisciplinary scholar of health humanities with a Ph.D. in History of Medicine. He studied TTM at the same school as myself. My teachers explained TTM as a development from several traditions like Theravada, Ayurveda, yoga, Chinese medicine, and others, that together shape a medical system referred to as TTM. The principal figure in the lore about TTM is Shivagakomarpaj. He was Buddha’s own healer. The wisdom from his teaching developed into Ayurveda and yoga in India, into Chinese medicine and acupuncture in China, and into TTM and Thai massage in what today is referred to as Thailand ([Salguero 2007](#), pp. 21–23).

My teachers talked about “doctor Shivaga”, or “father Shivagakomarpaj”, all the time. The day started with an invocation, standing or kneeling at a small shrine devoted to Shivagakomarpaj. In our manual, the invocation was printed in both Thai and Western alphabet, and labelled “Prayer to Invite the Spirit of Shivagakomarpaj”, so that everyone could join in regardless of if we could read the Thai alphabet or not ([Thai Massage School Shivagakomarpaj n.d.](#), p. 3).

My teachers explained that massage is a spiritual exercise, although not limited to Buddhist spirituality. They themselves, being Theravada Buddhists (and therefore non-theistic), said that the invocation in the morning is there to honour the spiritual tradition, and not as a prayer to any god. If a student is Christian, they are welcome to pray to Jesus through the invocation. If they are muslims, they can pray to Allah. If they are an atheist, they can, through chanting the invocation, show honour to the ancient TTM tradition and to the mystic parts of reality that we cannot grasp or understand with our intellect. A

massage therapist always gives their client a massage in a state of meditation. It is a holistic treatment, not merely a bodily one. My training manuals for my courses at *Thai Massage School Shivagakomarpaj* (Old Medicine Hospital) state that Thai Massage is an energy-work rather than body-work, following the ten biggest meridians (or *sen*) of the intricate network of 72,000 energy meridians, rather than focusing on anatomical structures or physiological principles ([Thai Massage School Shivagakomarpaj n.d.](#), p. 15).

During my courses, I was told that the body is a universe in miniature. It serves as a channel for the spiritual powers flowing through the universe. Different physical positions of the body affect the energy flow within, as do stimulation of certain body parts. The energy, called *prana* in Indian Ayurvedic tradition, is referred to as *chi* or *lom* in TTM. It flows mainly through ten non-anatomical energetic pathways in the body, named *sen* lines. The intangible, invisible *chi* force can be manipulated through pressure. A full-body treatment of all ten *sen* on a regular basis is believed to promote health and well-being ([Salguero 2007](#), pp. 56–60).

Thai massage is, to a huge degree, a diverse practice. The regional traditions vary a lot. Some schools are under a strong Chinese influence. The *sen* channels show a great similarity to the Chinese acupuncture meridians. Other schools draw more inspiration from Indian sources. This can be seen in the usage of Sanskrit terminology and names, and through a massage therapeutic approach that focuses on stretches and manipulating the body into certain positions to increase the *chi* flow along the *sen* lines. Salguero states that TTM is highly influenced by the Indian Ayurvedic and yogic traditions, as well as traditional Chinese medicine ([Salguero 2007](#), pp. 62–63). The training manuals that I got from the schools where I studied say that the art of Thai Massage taught is an art that has been passed down from master to master for centuries, tracing back all the way to Shivaga himself ([Salguero 2007](#), pp. 62–63). TTM is recognised by UNESCO as an immaterial cultural inheritance, describing it as a folk wisdom-based medicine ([UNESCO 2019](#)).

TTM could perhaps be looked upon as a form of indigenous knowledge, if you use a very wide definition of the term, since it is non-Western and locally anchored. But since Thailand is a national state with many ethnic groups, a better term for describing TTM would be *traditional medicine*. There are, however, similarities between indigenous knowledge and traditional medicine ([UNESCO 2019](#)).

4.2. Flow in Creativity

Just before arriving at the yoga retreat, I had filled my days for almost three weeks with learning advanced massage techniques. As TTM students, we practised on each other's bodies. Before attending the retreat, the *sen* channels in my body were more open than usual after weeks of daily massage practice, and the daily yoga at the retreat opened them even more. It was like I stretched not just my muscles, but my awareness. During the three weeks of studying, I had focused on learning how to manipulate the *sen* lines in the human body, I had focused on learning to chant invocations to doctor Shivaga in ancient Thai, getting my vocal organs to produce sounds unknown to me, and thus messing with my familiar behavioural patterns. All of these are, according to my teachers in TTM, highly spiritual activities. Without thinking about it, I did what Rick Rubin says we should do when we cannot find the creative flow, namely, to change focus and habits.

Rubin writes that we as human beings tend to actively choose our agendas and develop certain strategies to achieve our goals. He says that what we need to do in order to sense and become aware of the wave of creativity is to let go of our involvement and become aware of the eternal now. This awareness is beyond bodily sensations, thoughts and feelings, sounds or visual stimuli, smells, and tastes. “The universe is only as large as our perception of it. When we cultivate our awareness, we are expanding the universe”

(Rubin 2023). I surrendered to the mindfulness and meditation practices during the retreat, where thoughts and sensations could come to me and I could acknowledge them, and let them go. I enjoyed the tasty coffee and the wonderful homemade vegetarian Thai food served at the retreat, made from organic, locally grown crops. I was no longer at a desk in Finland, obsessing over musical intervals or instrumentation. I was on a yoga mat listening to my breath.

During my yoga and meditation retreat north of Chiang Mai, the waves of creativity that Rubin explains that he has relied on throughout his whole creative career came within my grasp. I forgot all my everyday chores, all the musts, work tasks, and to-do lists at home. After getting up in the morning, I focused on the yoga movements and what they did to open the flow of *chi/prana/lom* within me. The stillness within was not a void, but a vibrating space, full of music.

This enabled me to, as Rubin puts it, restore a childlike reception, preventing my inner filter from tuning out from the immense sum of thoughts, feelings, dreams, and experiences in the world. When we open ourselves to the flow and let it circulate into our creative work, we can train ourselves to radically expand our inner vessel's ability to receive what the universe is showing us. The act of creation is a portal to an unseen world. Rick Rubin describes artistic creation as "an attempt to enter a mysterious realm. . . a longing to transcend." He further states that when an artist works on a project, coincidences appear, and it is like someone else's hand is guiding you into certain directions (Rubin 2023).

This correlates with my experience with *Spirit Land/Vuoigŋalaš Eanadat*. It was like the music composed itself. The stillness within, alongside the sensation of chi flowing through my *sen*, was probably what I needed to approach Sámi cosmology without trying to translate it to my familiar Western, Lutheran, and conservatoire-trained structures. My spiritual journey for self-healing, which had led me to northern Thailand, got me to a place where I opened up my laptop and my software for writing sheet music, and I heard the music in my head. The first wave came to me with a detail. As soon as I had written that detail into the musical score, the next wave with the next detail came to me. I had not planned to compose music during the retreat. My plans were to rest, learn yoga and TTM, two practices that had helped me during my journey of self-healing, and to be on vacation. *Spirit Land*, however, wanted to be composed during my trip to Thailand. The moment was not just a personal high point, but I arrived at a site where embodied practice and cross-cultural listening could meet, leading to a process of re-orientation.

When reflecting upon these experiences, it becomes clear to me that TTM's focus on flow is not in opposition to, but rather shines light upon, certain aspects of Sámi cosmology. In both traditions, the body is understood as a vessel through which more-than-human entities may act. *Chi* moves along the *sen* lines, while the *jojk* or the drum enables journeys across different realms of reality. Both are rooted in knowledge that cannot be fully grasped through Western theorisation, but must instead be felt and lived through the body, listening, and relationships. For me, surrendering to the spiritual practices of TTM became a preparation for approaching Sámi knowledge, not by equating the two, but through realising that my Western, intellectually trained listening needed to evolve in order to commit to relational listening.

4.2.1. Composing the Underworld

When the waves hit me, I sensed *chi* energy flowing in my body along the *sen* lines I had recently studied and explored with my thumbs and fingers. Now these fingers seemed linked to the growing musical score on my computer screen. The hurdy-gurdy should start the music of the *Underworld* by playing a simple tune on a C drone (Figure 2)⁴. Some

low-pitched percussion then joins in (Figure 3), and then the jojk *We speak Earth* starts to accompany the two.

Figure 2 shows a musical score excerpt for the composition *Underworld*. It includes staves for Jojk, Vevlira, Violin, Violoncell, and Trumma. The tempo is marked as quarter note = 60. The key signature has two flats (B-flat and E-flat), and the time signature is 4/4. The Jojk staff has a whole rest. The Vevlira staff has a half note followed by a melodic line. The Violin and Violoncell staves have whole rests. The Trumma staff has a half note followed by a melodic line. The Vevlira staff has a 'Repris x ggr' marking above it.

Figure 2. Excerpt from the composition of the *Underworld*, when the hurdy-gurdy starts on a C drone.

Figure 3 shows a musical score excerpt for the composition *Underworld*. It includes staves for Vevlira and Trumma. The Vevlira staff has a half note followed by a melodic line. The Trumma staff has a half note followed by a melodic line. The Vevlira staff has a 'Repris x ggr' marking above it.

Figure 3. Excerpt from the composition of the *Underworld*, when percussion joins in together with the hurdy-gurdy.

After presenting the jojk, a segment of the movement comes where the instruments, one at a time, start creating a loop. The drums/percussion, serving as the deepest fundament of the layers, symbolising the heartbeats of Mother Earth herself, that Göransson Almroth says can be sensed in the *Underworld*, begin the loop with a solo for eight bars. When we have heard the drum solo, the cello joins in on top of the drums for eight more bars, then the violin, then the hurdy-gurdy, and finally the jojk on top of everything. See Figure 4 for a visualisation of how the instruments create the musical layering together with the jojk. The different characters of the instruments shape musical layers on top of each other in the loop, like archeological layers in the ground, creating a framework for the jojk. Göransson Almroth writes that there are layers in the human psyche, in the same way as there are layers in the earth. You travel through these layers by using the drum (Göransson 2017, p. 231).

I was aware of the paradox that I was constructing a framework for a tradition I cannot fully grasp or inhabit. From an autoethnographical point of view, I was balancing on a thin line, honouring the integrity of a jojk while, through musical composing, creating a space for it, and struggling to resist any conscious or subconscious urge to mould it into my own image. Rubin's description of "swimming with the wave" is a suitable way of describing my work process when I am urged to follow the energy flowing in my body without forcing its shape (Rubin 2023). Åsa Viridi Kroik writes that indigenous epistemology is relational to its character (Viridi Kroik 2022, p. 56). My ongoing discussions with Göransson Almroth served as an important compass during this delicate navigation. Kim TallBear writes that she through her work of *standing with* became personally interested and involved in the people she worked with, since she started to care for them (TallBear 2014). Alongside every

tone I wrote into the sheet music, I was thinking about how to explain it to Göransson Almroth later. I felt like she was sitting next to me during the process, nodding, asking questions, and commenting.



Figure 4. Excerpt from The Composition of the Underworld. Here, all the instruments create musical layers that the joik can join on top of.

4.2.2. Composing the Earth

After finishing the *Underworld*, the next wave welled in and sent the chills down my sen lines. It told me that the *Earth* needs a folk-music-inspired theme as a counterpoint to the melody of the hymn *Härlig är jorden*. This theme, played on the violin (Figure 5), came to me, resonating in finest detail in my head, making my body shiver like during an effective manipulation of the energy lines during a successful Thai massage. I began to weave the theme together with the melody of the hymn *Härlig är jorden* into a musical weave. Looking at Göransson Almroth's photos of the weave of the *Earth*, I heard the music in my head resonating in harmony with the photos of her artwork. I asked myself if I sensed a genuine resonance when two traditions meet, or if I might be sensing my own aesthetic preferences seeking confirmation. Constant holding of that question in my head, I could keep my creative work in a form of listening—looking at photos of Emma's weave, formulating questions to ask her later, and sensing my embodied responses while pondering on the question.



Figure 5. Excerpt from the composition of the *Earth*. These are the first two bars of the folk-music-inspired theme that came to me.

Practitioners of autoethnography, according to Ellis et al., act as if they have been invited into someone else's world and there think about how the experience of the other connects to their own lives (Ellis et al. 2011, p. 283). I felt like I was inside Emma's weave, touching the green grass and verdant leaves of the luxuriant Earth, constantly connecting it to my own childhood experiences of listening to the local fiddlers playing folk music tunes

during hot summer days, or singing familiar hymns at outdoor summer Sunday services at my home village, Purmo.

I wrote the second movement for violin, hurdy-gurdy, cello, a few short phrases of the overtone flute, and myself as a vocalist. I wanted to save the overtone flute mostly for the third heavenly movement, but I wanted glimpses of *Heaven* to shine into the realm of *Earth*, as a reminder that the different layers of reality might sometimes overlap and leak into each other. I chose to sing the hymn in Finnish, Swedish, Norwegian, and one of the Sámi languages. I later asked Göransson Almroth for help, and she coached me with the pronunciation of South Sámi. By choosing to sing the vocal parts of the *Earth* myself, I thought that it would create a mix of Sámi jojk voices and my own non-Sámi conservatoire-trained voice. This underlines the meeting of a Sámi artist and a non-Sámi, where two different ways of chanting mix in the same piece of art.

I sensed a strong backbeat pumping along the *sen* lines in my body when looking at the photos of the weave. Because of this, during a minor part of the movement, I had the cello play a backbeat either the whole time or alternating between backbeat and other voices. During one part where I sang, both the violin and the cello played the backbeat (Figure 6).

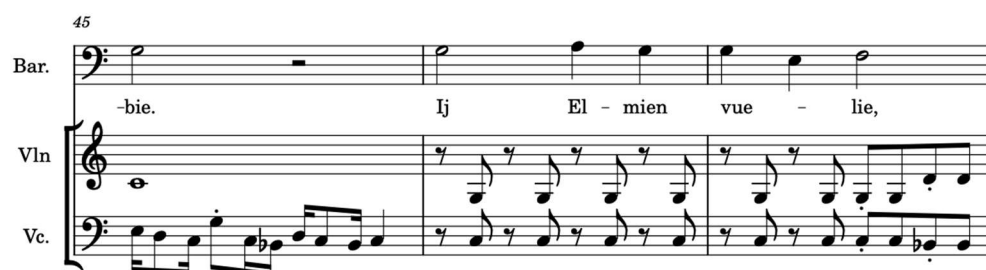


Figure 6. Excerpt from the composition of the Earth. Example of the backbeat, played by violin and cello in bars 46 and forward. The complete text in South Sámi is found online ([Svenska Kyrkans Ursäkt Till det Samiska Folket n.d.](#)).

Time and space ceased to exist when I was in this flow.

4.2.3. Composing the Heaven

When continuing with the *Heaven*, I first transcribed Göransson Almroth's recording of the jojk that came to her in Sigtuna in November 2023. I sketched down a few ideas about how the jojk and the overtone flute can be in dialogue on top of a C drone, played on the keyboard (see Figure 7). After that, the flow stopped. When contemplating this, the idea popped into my consciousness that the third movement needs to be improvised, and that is why I will not get any more musical material.

Krister Stoor writes that the jojk can be improvised, or it can be in a fixed form, especially if many jojkers jojk together (Stoor 2007, pp. 59, 84). I checked with Göransson Almroth, and she agreed that we should keep this movement improvised and not composed in a fixed form. In Rubin's words, the wave had taken me as far as it could. I realised I need to find a keyboardist who is good at improvising and creating electronic soundscapes with the instrument to allow the jojk and the flute to join in and begin talking with and to each other. Also, the flute player should be a person who is good at improvising, which is not too difficult on an instrument like the overtone flute. By leaving this movement open, I felt peace inside that my decision would help the improvisatory spirit of the jojk. The decision to leave the music of Heaven open for improvisation became a shift of power. A majority-coded room can reorient into a platform where the jojk can lead both musicians and audience, and where my place is to listen more than to compose.



cold North became alive in my body and transported itself through my fingers into sheet music on my laptop.

After letting *the Underworld*, the *Earth*, and the *Heaven* be in dialogue for a while, I created a section of eight bars where I let all three worlds sound simultaneously, played on top of each other in a rather chaotic way. Also, that was fairly easy, but after composing that part, I got stuck again. The flow stopped, and I had to ask myself why. The *Fourth Movement* was yet to become the most challenging one, and it took me the longest time to create.

My vision was to create new music, not yet heard in the first three movements. When one looks at the world through all three Sámi cosmological lenses, one will see the world in a new way, allowing the viewer to see something new that until that point had been hidden. One will get new insights. Maybe hints of the future? Through creating multiple horizons, a mono-perspective can give place to a multilayered understanding. After contemplating why I got stuck, I realised I was lost in my head. There were so many voices in me saying that I cannot go where the *fourth movement* wants to take me. How can I, as a non-Sámi, claim to see the world through a multi-perspective Sámi cosmology lens, and through that view glimpse something new that no one else has seen? What will people say when they hear that music? Will they accuse me of cultural appropriation? Will they think me arrogant? Or silly?

I took a break and surrendered to the yoga positions and the meditations, again sensing the energy flow through my body, which, due to my ongoing spiritual journey of self-healing, felt healthier than ever, and younger than in fifteen years. Memories came floating back to me from when I attended a course in Transgender studies through the Open University at Åbo Akademi University, during the autumn of 2023. Our teacher wanted us to read poems and analyse street art from transgender artists, and write about what bodily sensations we got from it. I asked the teacher how I can do that, since I identify as a cis man. They answered that the trans community (including the teacher themselves being a transgender person) needs to open up to the cis community and share their embodied experience of what it means to have a trans body in a cis-coded society. Some transgender individuals will hesitate to do so, claiming that letting cis people analyse their poetry and their art will destroy it, claiming that cis people cannot relate. Our teacher said that there should be moments when transgender people consume transgender art and share their experiences with each other and no one else. But there is also a time and a place when they should let others in. The space where cis meets trans, and the cis person tries their best to relate to trans testimonies as empathically as they can, is where trans allies (hopefully) are born. The teacher told us cis people to approach that space with an open and respectful mind, and told the trans people to dare to let the cis people in, as much as they dare and can.

I pondered upon this memory, wringing it back and forth in my memory, while meditating and committing to the yoga stretches. I remembered reading poems about anxiety springing from being born in the wrong body, and texts about the huge relief that corrective genital surgery can offer. These were not my experiences within my body, but I remember using every ounce of empathy I could find in my own life. I have never experienced gender dysphoria, but I have experienced how heterosexual coded rooms can make my homosexual body feel completely wrong. I used those experiences when writing my essays in the course, very aware that we do not share the same experiences. But if we both choose to act out of respect, love, and empathy, we can establish ground where we can meet as fellow humans and share experiences. Not a single transgender person during the Transgender Studies course blamed me or accused me of anything when reading my reflections on transgender poetry. Instead, they were happy that I was on the course, willing to listen to their stories and relate them to my own life.

The memory made me realise that maybe I could use my experiences from that course in my composition work of *Spirit Land/Vuoiŋŋalaš Eanadat?* Perhaps I need to stop worrying about the risk of making a fool out of myself or offending someone? I had asked Emma Göransson Almroth if she would let me put her textile work to music. She had happily said yes, and thus invited me in so we could learn and explore together. I decided to do my best and check with her what she thinks. If I do not succeed, I trust she will tell me that. In that case, I will have learned a valuable lesson, she will point out where I did wrong, and I can make a new attempt. I re-chose a standpoint of *standing with* (TallBear 2014). I told myself I am making this piece of art, not as a white non-Sámi looking at Sámi cosmology alone from outside, but in close collaboration and dialogue with a Sámi artist.

When pondering this memory, other memories popped into my mind. I remembered when I was a teenager or young man, listening to white, straight, married male church leaders teaching about what homosexuality is and how it is supposed to be dealt with. I have heard them say things like that those who “suffer from” homosexuality must live in lifelong celibacy to be accepted in the eyes of God. Or that those who are gay are sick and must be cured from mental illness, since their sinful, godless deeds are poisoning society. They always spoke like there were no sexual minorities present in the room, like gays were some kind of exotic species located far away from the safe church room, yet somehow still a threat to it. Luckily, the times have changed since I was a teenager, but my memories remain.

Those situations silenced my younger self. It made me want to behave and speak in a certain way, not to draw attention to myself. Why? Because I was told I was wrong in the eyes of God. Space and voice were taken from me, motivated by theological rhetoric. I am convinced the preachers thought they were doing good. But blinded by power, they ended up causing damage. Göransson Almroth writes in her book *Postnomadiska landskap* about the assimilation process, where her ancestors were forced into silence, into giving up their traditional ways of dressing, chanting, and living in the landscape where they had dwelled since before written history. All their protests were silenced, and the protests got gradually weaker. She describes it as her people being silenced to death (Göransson 2017, pp. 116–22).

After being reminded of my inner struggles, I got the idea that I could compose struggle. If we look through the three lenses of *Underworld*, *Earth*, and *Heaven* and get a glimpse of something new and unseen—maybe that unsettles us? Maybe will will see these harmful power constructions incorporated in our community, causing so much harm, shame, and silence? This thought opened me up to the flow of waves again. It was like a blockage in my body where the *chi* did not flow, and a powerful Thai massage, given by a skilled masseuse, opened up the sore area with sensitive thumbs, and I could sense relaxation and life-giving energy flush through my body again.

I took my collective experiences of struggle, and I let them become music, continuing where I got stuck in writing the musical score. I used the struggle born from getting stuck in my composition work, the hesitation, daring to speak about experiences unknown to me that I sensed within during the course in Transgender studies (since I am not transgender myself), and every bodily memory of being silenced into shame by church leaders in a position of power. With all this in my body, I allowed triplets to disrupt the steady four-quarter pulse in the musical score, and let the instruments drift into bold harmonies that loosened the sense of a tonal foundation (See Figure 8).

After nine bars of struggle, I allowed everything to calm down and wrote into the score that the keyboardist can improvise a soft soundscape on a C drone. On top of that soundscape, the two jojkers with Sámi drums in their hands can improvise the ending. I realised that I can contribute with a composed struggle ending up in a loose framework

where the jojkers are allowed to freely speak about what comes next, or whatever the spirit of the jojk will give the jojkers in the moment.

The image shows a musical score excerpt from the Fourth Movement, measures 47 to 50. The score is written for four instruments: Synt. (Synthesizer), Vln (Violin), Vc. (Violoncello), and Bt. (Bass Trombone). Measures 47-49 feature triplets in all parts, indicated by a '3' and a bracket. Measure 50 is marked 'molto rit.' and features a bold harmonic structure with sustained notes in the Synt. and Vln parts. The key signature is B-flat major (two flats), and the time signature is 4/4.

Figure 8. Excerpt from the composition of the *Fourth Movement*. I am letting triplets and bold harmonies loosen the sense of tonal foundation.

In adulthood, when stepping into an unfamiliar church setting, I sometimes get a feeling that I need to behave, talk, and dress in a way that will not draw attention to me. At least until I know if this is a safe space or not. Quite often, nowadays, I choose to do the opposite and put on rainbow coloured pride socks, or something like that. I do this as a spiritual exercise where my adult self tells my teenage self that everything is OK, and that I hereby claim my right to be in this room on the same premises as everyone else. I tell the voices in my head that silenced my teenage self that they were wrong, and they need to step back. Sara Ahmed wrote about being black in a white coded room ([Ahmed 2010](#), p. 63). I do not have embodied knowledge about that, but I know what it is like to be gay in a heteronormatively coded room.

I sensed it is not my task to speculate about how the world looks seen through all the layers of Sámi cosmology, after fighting through the struggle of facing our own internalised power positions, but I will create a musical space where the Sámi voices can speak about what they see there. In this context, I am the one higher up in the hierarchy of power, being a representative for the majority population. I did not want to do what my heterosexual church leaders did to me when I was young, talking over my head and silencing me. What if those men, instead of loudly proclaiming what they were so sure was the ultimate truth, had admitted they had no embodied knowledge on the matter, invited someone with an inside perspective to share their story, and, after that, stepped down from the church podium to listen and be quiet?

I wished to create space for the jojk to sound, and thus a space for all majority voices to listen, myself being the first one to do so. Åsa Viridi Kroik writes that the indigenous voice is a gift to the majority narrative ([Viridi Kroik 2022](#), p. 49). Göransson Almroth writes that we, through drumming, can travel to a transpersonal dimension where the voice of the ego is removed from the centre of attention. There we can glimpse the future, find answers to our questions, and find keys to change ([Göransson 2017](#), p. 232). What a gift! And what an opportunity for me to listen!

The jojk bears the power to re-code a room. The Swedish South Sámi jojker Jon Henrik Fjällgren writes in his biography that when his manager had booked him to jojk in a church, many of the locals were sceptical. They sat with arms crossed and even loudly expressed

their doubts about the jojk, calling it a heathen music style, not suitable in the church. But when he started to jojk, it transformed the listeners and the room. The facial expressions of the members of the audience changed, some were moved to tears, and the atmosphere changed from dark and threatening to light and alive (Fjällgren 2020). Hämäläinen argues that the jojk carries healing qualities, containing embodied knowledge about belonging to and connection to something beyond oneself, a very fundamental human psychobiological need. The jojk is a musical embodied tool to create a relational and sensible world between humans and between other-than-human entities (Hämäläinen 2023, pp. 105–6). By stepping back and creating space for the jojk, its healing qualities may be what is needed to re-code the room, to heal embodied memories of colonisation, and to create bridges between Sámis and non-Sámis in the re-coded room.

Structural power hierarchies are difficult, though, since the person being high up in the hierarchy is blind to the suppressive mechanisms of power. Even if my intentions may be good, I might still end up silencing, disrupting, exoticising, or in other ways disturbing the Sámi voices. My way of double-checking that this would not happen was my ongoing dialogue with Göransson Almroth. This has also been the case while writing this article. I have discussed the contents with her and with other Sámi voices.

When I packed my bag to leave the retreat in early January 2024, the composition was saved on my laptop's hard drive. The work was done, and I have changed almost nothing in the score after the yoga retreat.

5. Lessons Learned

In this concluding part, I wish to reflect on what I learned during the process. Can my spiritual journey that took place during my composition work of *Spirit Land/Vuoiŋŋalaš Eanadat* in any way contribute to decolonial conversations? Is there any knowledge, theological or other, that has developed and deepened due to our work?

A central insight for me has been that knowledge does not arise in isolation, but in relations. I could have sat alone at my desk at home, reading countless articles and gaining a lot of theoretical knowledge about Sámi customs, artistic traditions, cosmology, and music. But it was the creative process, performed in collaboration with another fellow human, that made the word become flesh, and that resulted in the collaborative art project *Spirit Land/Vuoiŋŋalaš Eanadat*. It was in dialogue and collaboration that I came to experience what TallBear (2014) describes as *standing with* rather than speaking about. This perspective shifts the position of composer and musician (and researcher) from detached observer to responsible participant. To stand with, in my case, means that I acknowledge my white non-Sámi position. I refrain from any claim to represent, and I allow myself to be shaped and transformed by the encounter.

At first, my journey in Thailand and my exploration of Sámi cosmology did not seem connected. Later, I came to understand that both served as invitations to *standing with*. TTM became a school for sensing creativity as flow through commitment to spiritual practices, which made me more receptive to what occurs when a jojk “comes to” a jojker, or when a piece of music seems to compose itself. That said, it remains crucial to emphasise the differences. TTM is a recognised tradition, whereas Sámi knowledge carries a history of marginalisation and colonial oppression. I find it important not to erase the imbalance of power between the two. Instead, I regard TTM as a mirror that taught me humility, an experience that helped me tune in more attentively to Sámi voices. In such a space, where two embodied practices meet, a platform may open for the artist to step into a creative flow and fine-tune their spiritual antennae in order to sense the creative waves (Rubin 2023) and to hear the voices of more-than-human entities, which might contribute to the birth of micro-acts of decolonisation.

Sound, music, and art are embodied practices and a natural part of a spiritual journey. They go beyond what words can carry. In Western tradition, wisdom and knowledge are seen as theoretical and intellectual mastery. My experience is that wisdom is embodied and lived. In Sámi cosmology, knowledge is described as inseparable from place, spirit, and community, and it cannot be abstracted into Western universal categories. Knowledge is the cultivation of attentiveness, humility, and relational accountability. Knowledge and wisdom are an art of listening and responding. *Spirit Land/Vuoiŋŋalaš Eanadat* embodies an act of decolonial practice since it privileges art and empowered knowledge over theory. Sámi traditions were not treated as objects of study. The project made space for them to be encountered, felt, and responded to. This process started with me as the composer, but it was a journey that the audience was later invited into.

Spirit Land/Vuoiŋŋalaš Eanadat could be described as a micro-act of decolonisation, since the role of the composer and researcher shifted from observer to participant. It created space in the music for Sámi artistic voices and more-than-human entities to speak on their own terms through the language of jojk and drumming, and invited me and other non-Sámis into a position of listening and transformation.

We performed *Spirit Land/Vuoiŋŋalaš Eanadat* on three occasions during 2025, each time in a church or a church-like setting. Each performance became a decolonial micro-gesture where the church became a shared space wherein Sámi cosmology could resonate in a room dedicated to Christian liturgy; a room where colonisation practices and rhetorics have taken place. According to [Smalbrugge \(2019\)](#), theology since the Renaissance has increasingly shifted into a text-centred and dogmatically oriented discipline. In this process, theology lost much of its capacity to interpret reality through multi-layered meanings. Others have similarly highlighted how theological discourses have reinforced colonial hierarchies ([Norlin 2017](#); [Virdi Kroik 2022](#)). Bearing this in mind, performing *Spirit Land/Vuoiŋŋalaš Eanadat* in the church can be understood as a statement for an alternative kind of theology that recognises indigenous and relational knowledge as wisdom, springing forward where majority voices listen and respond to minority voices.

Following [Johnsen \(2017\)](#), reconciliation involves both external and internal processes of reorientation. During the creative process of *Spirit Land*, reconciliation was not an achieved state but enacted in dialogue, and present in the act of listening across difference. The micro-acts of decolonisation that I have hinted at touch on the theme of reconciliation since the artistic process allowed for small yet meaningful openings where broken relationships between church, Sámi traditions, and majority culture could be acknowledged, if not resolved.

If I simply learned a lot of theory, it would soon fade from my memory. Incorporating the knowledge, through artistic work, into my lifelong spiritual seeking, into my own embodied knowledge and memories of what it means to live in this world as a member of several minorities, has transformed my viewpoint on Sámis. The Sámi theologian Åsa Virdi Kroik writes in her doctoral thesis that much of the Sámi knowledge is *silent knowledge*. Silent knowledge is skills communicated without words or with few words, but through gestures, facial expressions, posture, or in other ways ([Virdi Kroik 2022](#), p. 91). I know in my body what it feels like to live as a gay person in a heteronormative society. It is a knowledge felt in gestures, silences, interactions, and actions. In certain rooms, I sometimes avoid certain gestures, clothing, and certain words, even if I am working on changing this embodied behavioural pattern.

Through the relational working process with *Spirit Land/Vuoiŋŋalaš Eanadat*, I learned, to a higher degree, that a decolonial embodied approach is also felt in posture, fear, and hesitation in occupying spaces. Kroik's descriptions of silent knowledge enlighten how the improvised parts of the music of *Spirit Land/Vuoiŋŋalaš Eanadat* changed the looks, gestures, and timing of the musicians during the performance from looking at the sheet music (a

typical Western way of performing music), to looking at each other, and into breathing together and listening together. The learning process changed the performers of the music. Re-coding of a coded room took place as embodied practice within the performers, guided by the welcoming of the jojk's improvisational spirit into the music.

Emma Göransson Almroth told me, in the dialogue session after *Spirit Land/Vuoigŋalaš Eanadat* on Kökar in July 2025, that her collaboration with me helped her to discover more of her voice and gave her courage to use it when jojking. I felt tears burning behind my eyelids when she told me that. I am the first to acknowledge that I have a lot more to learn. Nevertheless, I sense that Emma and I, through our collaboration, took a micro-step forward on a pathway of learning decolonisation and redemption. The collaboration, leading up to the performance of our work, served as an activist micro-act of decolonisation.

I dare to hope that *Spirit Land/Vuoigŋalaš Eanadat* extends beyond an example of an artistic work with Sámi representation. I hope it might serve as an invitation to recognise both fragility and resilience of any body who has been marginalised. Any ethical, spiritual, and artistic lessons I might have learned are linked with a struggle for a more just and inclusive society. I have written this article in the belief that *Spirit Land/Vuoigŋalaš Eanadat* serves as an invitation to you, the reader, to build communities both within and outside church settings, in which bodies, voices, and spirits of all orientations, identities, languages, and cultures might be accepted, respected, and celebrated.

Funding: The symposia where this research was initiated were financed through collaboration with the Nordic Summer University, who received Nordplus funding from the Nordic Council of Ministers for the arrangement of study circles. The main part of this research was conducted within the research project Praxis of Social Imaginaries—a Theo-artistic Intervention for Transdisciplinary Knowledge, which was funded by the following: Inez and Julius Polin Institute of Theological Research at Åbo Akademi Foundation, and additional support from: Otto Malm: Culture and Education; Svenska Kulturfonden i Finland: travel grants; Sigtuna Foundation: cultural collaboration; Gustaf Packaléns Minnesfond and Jubileumsfonden at Stiftelsen för Åbo Akademi for travel in the Nordic region. The performances of *Spirit Land/Vuoigŋalaš Eanadat* were funded by Svenska Kulturfonden and Letterstedtska föreningen.

Institutional Review Board Statement: The study was conducted in accordance with the Declaration of Helsinki, and the guidelines of the Finnish National Board on Research Integrity (TENK). According to the latest guidelines from 2019, the kind of research that this article is built upon does not require an ethical review.

Informed Consent Statement: Informed consent was obtained from all subjects involved in the study.

Data Availability Statement: Data are contained within the article.

Acknowledgments: I wish to thank Emma Göransson Almroth for her artistic collaboration in *Spirit Land/Vuoigŋalaš Eanadat*, as well as my colleagues at Åbo Akademi University, and more specifically the research group Praxis of Social Imaginaries, for their support. I am especially grateful to Laura Hellsten for her great feedback and to Åsa Viridi Kroik for her generous comments. I also wish to thank the musicians who performed in *Spirit Land/Vuoigŋalaš Eanadat* for their dedication and artistry, which were essential for the realisation of the work. Finally, I wish to thank my partner for patience, encouragement, love, and support.

Conflicts of Interest: The author declares no conflicts of interest.

Notes

- ¹ Emma Göransson Almroth is likewise preparing an article on *Spirit Land/Vuoigŋalaš Eanadat*, entitled Weaving the Spirit of Indigenous Feminism (Göransson forthcoming).

- ² Photos or images of such symbols are rarely published. Sámi filmmaker Suvi West made a film in 2024 about Sámi objects from the collections of the National Museum of Finland that were returned to Sápmi. The film emphasises that the Sámi themselves hold the right to interpret their cultural objects, and West conveys that the ancestors are present in the everyday items that were once stolen or purchased and removed from Sápmi by collectors. The drums are considered especially sacred, functioning as a unique link to the ancestors, and in the film *West* and her cameraman decided not to film old Sámi drums in European museums (West and Kömi 2024). I have not found any photographs or images of the symbols referred to by Mulk and Bayliss-Smith, which I interpret as an act of respect. For this reason, I have likewise chosen not to include any images of ancient Sámi symbols in this paper.
- ³ The hymn *Härlig är jorden* is included in the Finnish, Finland-Swedish, Norwegian, and Swedish Lutheran hymnbooks, all available online through the churches' official websites: Finnish (Maa on niin kaunis) <https://virsikirja.fi/virsi-30-maa-on-niin-kaunis/> (Finlands Evangelisk-Lutherska Kyrka n.d.); Norwegian (Deilig er jorden) <https://www.kirken.no/globalassets/kirken.no/om-kirken/kulturliv/salmer-og-kirkemusikk/deilig%20er%20jorden%20n13%2048.pdf> (Kirken i Norge n.d.); Swedish (*Härlig är jorden*), found in both the Swedish and the Fenno-Swedish hymnbooks, <https://www.svenskakyrkan.se/psalmboken/kanda-psalmer> (Svenska kyrkan n.d.) <https://psalmbok.fi/psalm-31-harlig-ar-jorden/> (Finlands Evangelisk-Lutherska Kyrka n.d.); and in South Sámi translation (Eatneme tjaebpies) within the Agenda for the Service of Reconciliation (Svenska Kyrkans *Ursäkt Till det Samiska Folket* n.d.). (All accessed on 31 August 2025).
- ⁴ The hurdy-gurdy is a drone-based instrument. Mine is tuned in C and G, so I can use either of those as the tonal base.

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